

Zazen Zoom - Saturday 10 Sept 2022

In his "*Advice for Practice*", Master Wanshi begins his talk with a reflection to which he gives the title: *The brilliant, limitless field*. It is thus - right from the very first words - a matter of *emptiness*, the ultimate truth of all that is. Isn't that what we want to know all about?

Thusness, the summit of reality, Great Wisdom, nirvana, the absolute dimension, Mind-only, buddha-nature, the unborn ... all these words are synonymous with limitless emptiness.

It is to the understanding of emptiness that zazen leads us. Zazen which is nothing other than directly seeing the empty nature of things. When we sit in front of the wall, it is *This* that we come back to in freeing ourselves from time and space. We settle ourselves in our own mind, which is neither body nor mind, for it is in *It* that these two impermanent constructs appear as magical illusions, incense smoke.

We are aware of everything that exists: this is the relative truth, dear to Nagarjuna; but we also know intuitively that in absolute truth, nothing exists. It is our own practice that reveals to us that which has no form, colour or characteristics - and thus enables us to realise the essence of things. Things appear in our mind. They come to us. The practice is just to look effortlessly at this movement of appearance-disappearance, holding fast in the midst of what comes and goes, the place where they disappear as they appear. This is what leads us to see and understand that the essence of things is never born and that in reality things do not exist even though they appear.

In our meditation we see that all things occur in the mind, but that it *itself* has no appearance.

Master Wanshi states:

*"The field of boundless emptiness is what exists from the very beginning. You must purify, cure, grind down, or brush away all the tendencies you have fabricated into apparent habits."*¹

¹ from: 'Practise Instructions', *Cultivating the Empty Field*, Taigen Dan Leighton, (Tuttle, 2000)

Which Master Dogen sums up with this basic advice:

"Study the self, and in that way you can forget it."

This is the work. It happens naturally during zazen. We can see our conditioning and how it determines our emotions, our behaviour, our relationships with the world and with others. These conditionings, ways of thinking and reacting, are what the Lankavatara Sutra calls *support* [in the sense of a foundation, basis or under-pinning]. This is the erroneous, flawed foundation on which we base our false and misguided view of the world and of existence. It is all our attachments, fears and false beliefs. To overthrow this *foundation* is liberation.

To purify, to heal, to pulverise, to discard all tendencies, all conditioning, means to see these things as constructs in the mind, and to abandon discriminating opinions about the self and about things. To see things as they are!

"Those who manage to discover this, overturn the 'support' [foundation] and are the children of the Buddha, those who fulfil the true Dharma."

And Master Wanshi puts it this way:

*"Then you can reside in the clear circle of brightness."*²

And he continues:

*"Absolute emptiness does not include any images. True realisation does not rely on anything. Grow and illuminate the original truth within you without concern for external conditions. Also realise that nothing really exists. In this field of emptiness, birth and death do not appear."*³

For, as the Lankavatara reminds us, :

"Can anything be said to be born if it just disappears on appearing?"

² *ibid*

³ *ibid*