

Zazen Zoom - Saturday, 19 Nov, 2022

In order to reach or regain the stability of our nature, Master Wanshi told us last week that we must be like the mountain that does not know the steepness of its own slope and that *"this is how home-leaving must be practised."*

Leaving home is called *Shukke* in Japanese, a term that also implies "to become a monk," one who devotes himself entirely to the Way. This is the title of a chapter of the *Shōbōgenzō* that Master Dogen delivered in 1244, the first year he moved to Eihei-ji with his disciples.

The opposite of *Shukke* is *Zaiki*, the layman who stays at home to care for his family. In worldly as well as monastic reality, the boundary between *Shukke* and *Zaiki* was blurred in the Mahayana tradition, long before the 12th century of Master Wanshi, if we refer to the Vimalakirti Sutra which dates from approximately the 2nd century A.D. and which praises a layman who is more enlightened than the Buddha's own disciples.

So whether one is a monk or a layman, Master Dogen writes:

"The state of Awakening as it is realised from beginningless times consists of leaving home (implying: to become a monk)."

"*Leaving home*" actually means leaving a house that's based on the conditionings of the self, its attachments, the false securities with which it constantly entangles itself, and the objects with which it greedily surrounds itself, inventing itself a false reality.

Our Buddhist practice is the Way and zazen is our treasure, even if we are not really aware of it. It means sitting down and leaving behind time, the vortex of karma; unmasking the actions of the ego and urgently engaging in the Way so that not a single second of our life is spent in vain.

Master Dogen adds:

"If someone asks you, 'What merit is acquired if one leaves home to become a monk,' then tell them, 'That which goes over one's head.'"

What goes over our heads is that in which we have no interest and by which we will obtain no merit at all.

"*No merit*," replied Bodhidharma to Emperor Wu, who was proud of having built many temples. The practice without merit is that which attains the highest dimension in this deluded, profit-obsessed world. It goes straight to the heart of things. *Mushotoku*.

For there is nothing to be gained by simply finding again what we have never lost.

Whatever we do, we can see the illusory essential nature of any practice. It is simply thus, as it is, *Nyoze*.

The mountain knows not the steepness of its slopes, and the rock has no idea of the purity of the jade it contains.

In his next paragraph, Master Wanshi addresses his monks, but we clearly sense that his recommendations are more broadly addressed to all beings who seek the Way:

"Those who wear the kesa develop a sincere, fresh mind by staying away from the nauseating fumes of all our conditioning. You must clean and cultivate your square of field. Also, cut down firmly all the weeds that have flourished."

Master Dogen makes the same recommendation in the *Genjokoan*, when he asks us to study ourselves in order to forget the self and its conditioning.

And as to the method of cultivation that lets us forget this illusory self and put it back in its place, it's simple: weed with the precepts and sow with the *pāramitās*.

"Then," concludes Master Wanshi, "you will reach the limit in every direction without defiling even a single atom."
