

Zoom Zazen - Saturday 25 Feb 2023

Last week, Master Wanshi advised us to face up to our responsibilities, insisting that when we forget any idea or wish about acquiring merit, we finally return to our true place.

To be in the very place where we are and not to leave it means to remain in tranquillity. It is not, of course, related to any particular place other than *here*, or to any special time apart from *now*. So it's just remaining in your own mind. Master Dogen calls this *maintained practice*, that which is settled into Great Wisdom, into creative non-action, into the simple contemplation of life, without seeking to control or change it. Facing up to our own responsibility implies being sincere and determined in our daily practice, for this is the place where the Way is actualised.

It's presumptuous to believe that we'll be able to embed the truth of Great Wisdom - *Maka Hannya* - in our daily lives on our own without practising diligently and studying with reverent fervour the teachings of the Buddha and the words of our Masters. Practising and studying oneself - there is no other way to return to the truth before birth.

Before awakening to reality, Master Yoka, who later wrote the *Shodoka*, humbly acknowledged:

"Now I see that until now, as a wandering monk, I have practised in vain. And for many years I have wandered on wrong paths. My [true] nature being no more than a little clear, I made mistakes and didn't understand. Thus I could not access the true teaching of the Buddha."

Not to recognise our true place is to keep the Wheel of Samsara turning and to keep our inner frustration alive. To understand that wherever we are is the place of our true abode is to awaken and realise unity with the nature of all things.

Kyogen had studied a lot and he always answered his master Isan by pretentiously quoting from books he had read and accumulated. One day Isan asked him:

"You're always very good at quoting facts and answering questions with comments from books. But I'd like to know if you can tell me anything about the time when you were too young to know the difference between East and West."

Distraught at not being able to answer, Kyogen thus decided to burn all his books. Then he went to Mount Buto, where he built himself a hut on the spot where an old master had once lived. He spent long hours sitting [in meditation] there. One day, while he was vigorously sweeping the path, a pebble struck the base of a bamboo fence with a clear, resounding sound. Kyogen was shocked and immediately awakened.

He then composed this poem:

*The pebble hit the bamboo and my consciousness collapsed.
I was no longer concerned with perfecting my body and mind.
I had become like the ancient Patriarchs.
Never again will my mind be clouded.
Without leaving a trace of my passage, I go beyond sound and form.
Throughout the land, those who have realised Buddhahood will praise me as one who has realised the Supreme Way.*

Later, on reading Kyogen's poem, Master Isan said:

"This child has become an adult!"

Is an adult not someone who takes his own responsibilities, faces up to everything that comes to him, keeps his place in all humility and fits harmoniously into the current of the world?

Is there any other reason for practising Zen than to become that true adult, detached from the past, who sees their own mind as the only reality?

So know with humility how to occupy the place where you are, where you are living. It is exactly here and now. There is no *elsewhere*, there is no *over there*. Everything is mind.

Master Wanshi finishes his passage on "To forget about merit is achievement" with this sentence:

"Transcendent, solitary and radiant, know without doubt that to transmit is merit, but that having transmitted is not your own merit."
