

Zoom Zazen, Saturday 23 September 2023

"How to observe Buddha" was the theme suggested by Maître Wanshi last week.

It's an essential theme for those of us who are aware of the importance of the Buddha's teachings on the suffering that permeates our lives. And it was in response to this that we one day entered a dojo. We can observe Buddha at every moment and realise that it is Buddha who, within ourselves, observes and sees himself¹ in the multiplicity of forms. To know Buddha is therefore to know oneself, and this knowledge is revealed in the heart of zazen.

To observe Buddha is to study ourselves and to see ourselves in our own relative and impermanent truth as well as in our limitless grandeur. We look closely at our ways of thinking, speaking, feeling and acting. We can discern what is in accord with the truth of impermanence. We can see what opposes it, what is conditioned and lifeless, mechanical.

It takes a great deal of honesty and perseverance not to adhere to, and not to allow ourselves to be seduced by, the habits of the conditioned 'me' [self], obsessed with power, control and possession.

It also takes a great deal of humility to accept all aspects of ourselves, our dark sides, our intolerance, our continual judgements. And yet, this acceptance gives us opportunity for self-examination and for the renunciation that frees us.

To see the unity of darkness and light is to see the Buddha and to realise what our essence is in a profound intuition that lies beyond words.

Subhuti asked: "What is Buddha?"

The Buddha replied: "Buddha is reality. The person who completely understands all the causes of existence is a Buddha."

We must, then, understand what birth and death are, in our own bodies. This is the teaching about what emptiness is, in the *Hannya Shingyo* sutra.

A disciple asked Master Obaku: "What is the Buddha?"

He replied:

"The mind is the Buddha.

"As soon as you stop raising concepts and thinking in terms of existing and non-existing, long and short, other and self, active and passive and any other such duality, you spontaneously find that your mind is intrinsically the Buddha, that the Buddha is intrinsically your mind, and that mind is intrinsically emptiness."

During zazen, we experience this form which is ourselves, without allowing ourselves to be distracted or caught up by illusions and mirages. We neither reject what we don't like, nor try to latch onto what attracts us. We go beyond all ideas and opinions. We go beyond the conceptual and the incessant fiction that the discriminating mind produces. We learn to forget ourselves in what we observe, realising our unity with that which is contemplated. Everything and every existence has the same source.

In Buddha's observation, there is no longer any person. There is nothing other than vision.

"If you can experience yourself without falling prey to distractions," says Master Wanshi, "you can overcome all biases and go beyond all concepts.

"Monks and nuns who wear the kesa advance silently and remain peaceful, their minds empty, marvellously penetrating, exactly as supreme emptiness spans billions of years of dust."

We have to restore our faith in ourselves. We are not just blind ignoramuses, bound by passions. We are - each and every one of us - Buddhas.

¹ or, of course, *herself*