

Zoom Zazen - Saturday 7th October 2023

"Since the beginning of time, the clouds have been serenely dispensing the rain that washes away the obstacles of the past.

"Nature's spontaneous teaching is pure and constant and nothing can alter it. Without allowing memories of the past to affect you, proclaim this teaching very clearly."

This is how Master Wanshi ends the passage in his teachings about observing Buddha, observing our Buddhahood-vacuity [emptiness].

It is therefore an invitation to practise in order to "return to the Source and enter into the service of the Patriarchs", which is the title of the following passage.

Returning to the Source can only mean returning to emptiness, that is, to the elusive Presence that expects nothing and holds nothing back. There is no beginning or end to either Presence or Emptiness.

The source is that moment at the heart of Presence when things appear, arise and vanish immediately. This is the now that we experience, without being able either to retain it, make it last or get rid of it. This is the truth of impermanence, which occurs immutably within Presence.

Master Dogen speaks of it in this way, in the *Shobogenzo* chapter *Zenki*:

*"In the past, the whole of nature disappeared in its appearing, but that doesn't stop the whole of nature also disappearing in its appearing **now**. This is how each instant is always the very first."*

The Source can't be anything other than this fleeting, ungraspable present moment. So too are the things that arise from the Source: spontaneous, fleeting, indefinable, and therefore empty.

"Birth and death fill the infinite void," says Master Engo Kokugon¹, "Mind always born anew, moment after moment."

Drawing inspiration from this Master, Dogen Zenji adds:

"The event par excellence is that spontaneous opening where birth and death are completely accomplished without obstructing one another."

It is this truth that zazen reveals to us when we dwell in Presence.

To remain open to welcoming birth and death, sitting still without moving, without grasping, is the teaching of Zen and that of the Patriarchs. We enter the flow and let ourselves be carried along in serene acceptance, without clinging to conditioned things, without leaning on the illusory self.

So as not to stray from the path, we put our trust in the Patriarchs and their teachings. That's what's meant by '*putting ourselves at their service*'. By studying their teachings and putting them into practice, we will be able to go directly to [our] home.

Let's listen to Master Wanshi:

*"Those who produce a line of descendants are called Patriarchs. The place where the current flows is called the Source. When you have seen the Source and recognised the Patriarchs, before your Awakening can dissipate, be steadfast and attach yourself neither to birth nor to death, nor to the conditioning of the past. If you do not lose your focus, then all beings will reveal to you what **wholeness** is."*

Let's end this kusen with some advice from the Buddha:

"You must be attentive today, because waiting until tomorrow is too late. Death can come and take you by surprise. Who can say otherwise?"

"He who knows how to live attentively, night and day, knows the best way to be free of birth and death."

¹ In Chinese, *Yuanwu Keqin of Mount Jia (1063–1135)* - compiler of the *Blue Cliff Record*