

Zoom Zazen - Saturday 21 Oct 2023

*"To build a fire,
the autumn wind brings me
autumn leaves"*

With these words, Master Ryokan celebrates life in all its simplicity, and the *non-doing* of Zen. Zen teaches that, in nature, everything is in its place and nothing gets in the way, and that such is the authentic practice of the Buddhas and Patriarchs.

Master Ryokan's *haiku* is a fitting introduction to what Master Wanshi has to say next:

"The vault of heaven, in the clear autumn, is the place of silent illumination and appeasement. It shines effortlessly, resplendent in both light and darkness. It is at the point of its emergence that the sublime totality springs forth freely."

Nature makes no mistakes, because it emanates from the original, undivided Source. Our body and mind are the perfume of this source. In the autumn sky, the whole of nature awakens without interruption and appears spontaneously, without fuss. The wind sweeps away the dead leaves. And it will be the same in the winter sky, which will cover the mountains with snow. So let's be confident and not wait for winter or spring to light the fire of our attention with the autumn leaves. In the *now* of our own presence, we realise our unity with the whole of nature.

"It is in our mind that the source shines," continues Master Wanshi. "The Way is wide and activity is always alive. Everything is clearly visible in this original light. The heart is recognised and celebrated. All situations are fulfilled in the balance of yin and yang, and the ten thousand manifestations of life are unified."

Our bodies may well experience varied or strange situations and even illness; in our minds may readily appear dark or clear thoughts - and even madness; but the Mind itself is unaffected. It is like unlimited space where, turn and turn about, the birth of a child or the death of an elder are celebrated, without the sky being in the least disturbed.

"Let life be," recommends Master Dogen.

This teaches us to stop trying to control everything, to stop opposing ourselves to the course of things, to stop obstinately following the illusion of the 'me' [self]. We welcome the wind of impermanence. We accept ourselves as we are, dark and light at one and the same time. Under the vault of heaven, silent illumination shines forth effortlessly as much in the light as in darkness.

Master Wanshi's statements remind us of the *Hannya Shingyo* sutra, which teaches us that, like the dazzling light of time, the totality of phenomena emerges at every moment from and within emptiness, in all its original radiance.

Master Wanshi concludes:

"Calm and still, and eternally peaceful, from north to south, from east to west, the sky is always the sky. Hence beings are always beings, busying themselves with their bodies, manifesting in forms, preaching the Dharma. This capacity manifests without ceasing, removing forever every obstacle."

During zazen, in the heart of presence, heaven and earth are unified, and everything is in its place. We *are* Awakening coming into being as Presence. Do not doubt it.
