

Zoom Zazen, Saturday 18 November 2023

Master Wanshi now turns to the theme of transmission, so crucial for Zen practitioners:

"The Way is not what the Ancestors have transmitted," he says. "Even before any Patriarch appeared, the Way always permeated the whole of space."

In the tradition of Soto Zen Buddhism, we refer to an unbroken lineage of Masters and Patriarchs, from Shakyamuni Buddha onwards, to guarantee the authenticity of what is practised, taught and realised in our school. The Ancestors protect and transmit the essence, the Treasure of the True Law (the Shobogenzo).

But nothing that is the truth can be transmitted, because the truth, the Way, is self-sufficient, independent of all causes and conditions. Is it possible to transmit that which is not subject to birth and death, which is beyond words and rests in the silence that has neither beginning nor end?

The transmission of the Masters, embodied in a *ketsumyaku*, signifies the unity of Master and disciple: something has been fully shared and recognised in a relationship that is beyond language. Each Master awaits the disciple with whom he can enter into this intimacy and this relationship without words. The Ancestors do not transmit the Way, but they see its understanding in the disciple who has realised it, and they can certify it.

Master Wanshi continues:

"Emptiness in itself has no characteristics. The true spiritual nature of things cannot be imitated. Enlightenment arises by itself, and transcends causes and conditions."

"We call Ancestors those who establish themselves above the surface of appearances. This can only be transmitted by a mutual certification. It cannot be passed on from hand to hand. This is what all the Buddhas arrive at, and this is what they consider to be the ultimate point."

In his *Song of Silent Illumination*¹, Master Wanshi ends with this sentence:

"When silent light touches the ultimate point, I perpetuate the original transmission of my school."

It is indeed an intimate realisation that takes place in the mind, an understanding of that which cannot be described in words, but which words can certify.

Master Isan Reiyu asked Kyozan Ejaku:

"How do you understand the pure, clear and brilliant mind?"

"Mountains, rivers, the earth, the sun, the moon and the stars?" replied Ejaku.

*"Is **that** all you have?" retorted Isan*

"Master, what did you just ask me?" continued Ejaku.

"The pure, clear and brilliant Mind. Do you understand that?"

*Kyozan then asked: "Can we call it **that**?"*

*Master Isan exclaimed: "**That's** it, **that's** it!*

*Well, "**that**" is the heart of zazen: we abandon body and mind, there's no longer anyone, there is only "**that**".*

We are no more than a gaze that gives birth to that which is gazed at. Our Mind and the world are born at one and the same time.

How do we transmit "that"?

¹ *Mokushōka*