

Zoom Zazen, Saturday 2 December 2023

Master Wanshi gives us some new advice:

"Be clear to your very depths, totally silent. Return, empty and full of energy, to the brilliant, open and luminous Source. Even if you have examined yourself minutely, and no echo or shadow gets in the way, if you look more closely you will see that you are still measuring the merits of your hundreds of activities. You must therefore take a backward step and return directly to the centre of the circle from which the light springs."

These recommendations from Master Wanshi directly concern the way we should practise and guide us towards the heart of zazen: always returning *directly to the middle of the circle from which the light springs*. To return to the pure awareness of our own silent presence, with nothing else. This is none other than the limitless space of our own mind, the source of all phenomena, the very place of our immediate perception. We serenely accept that we are nothing more than a gaze that clings to nothing, a breathing presence that delights in the now without seeking to project itself elsewhere. We abandon the world of physicality, while understanding that it supports our meditation. We forget the world of thoughts and dreams because we understand that nothing in them is real. In the words of all our masters, it is when our mind ceases to rest on anything whatsoever that we come to an understanding of the true path of Zen.

"And finally, remember," says Master Obaku, "that from the beginning to the end, not the slightest speck of anything that could be grasped exists and never will."

But even if our practice is genuinely profound, let's look even more closely into our minds. We can still see traces of attachment, memories of desires, anticipated rewards, unfulfilled hopes. Thus we continue to measure the merit of our hundreds of activities ... This is what distances us from the centre of ourselves, but it is also this distance that gives rise to the whisper that vibrates in our minds that we don't always attend to: *"Come back to where all is calm, where your own light shines."* Come back to the circle of your own Presence.

Sometimes we practise zazen like sleepwalkers. We believe that we are *here* and we see Buddha *over there*. And we foolishly wait without moving until he comes to us. Paradoxically, let us take a backward step and decide to go towards him. And let us plunge into the middle of the circle from which the light springs - this light is Buddha. There is no distance between ourselves and Buddha. It therefore requires no effort to cross this apparent distance. We experience the same Presence together with all the Buddhas, and that is how it has always been.

"Because this is so," says Master Dogen in Uji, "nevertheless, continue to study. You will eventually understand that tens of thousands of forms, hundreds of thousands of grasses exist in the universe, and that in each of these forms, in each of these blades of grass, there is the whole universe. It's when you realise this unity that your practice truly begins."

We can understand what Master Dogen means, when we take this backward step and return *directly to the centre of the circle from which the light springs*. Zazen is this backward step that releases us from our unhealthy involvement in the three worlds of desire.

If we take a backward step, it's to stop projecting ourselves into the dualistic illusion that produces attachment to desire and, ultimately, suffering. With this backward step we return *directly to the centre of the circle from which springs this light*, which is Presence.

So, let us stop looking elsewhere for what is only within ourselves.
