

Zoom Zazen, 14 September 2024

Master Wanshi asked us, last Saturday, to be helpful and benevolent without expecting any merit whatsoever.

We often believe that we have to make an effort to be considerate and kind to those around us, in other words, to be good bodhisattvas. But if we practise a behaviour that we don't feel deeply in our hearts, this amounts to pretending to be a virtuous person who will please others. This is quite simply hypocrisy, which is one of the strategies of the 'me' [self] to ease its own conscience.

The Buddha tells us:

'In order to help others, we must not be trapped in the idea of oneself. A glow-worm, or a firefly, does not think that its light is going to illuminate the continent of India or even that it simply radiates its surroundings.

In the same way, the sun, when it rises, spreads its light indiscriminately over all things and all beings.

When the disciple is awakened to his true loving nature, he leads all beings to liberation, without even consciously trying to do so.'

We must first find within ourselves the root of this 'me' [self] that dresses itself in virtues it does not have, and learn to foil all its plans. Zazen guides us in this introspection of our mistaken and unconscious conditioning. We absolutely must understand how we manipulate ourselves and others. Humility is the virtue that will help us.

The Buddha teaches us the path to follow:

'If you do not look clearly and directly into yourself, you will remain trapped in time and space, unable to free yourself from opinions, from ideas and from the image of yourself. How will you, in that case, be able to be kind to others and to guide them to nirvana?'

Being helpful and benevolent becomes natural for those who have recognised within themselves the roots of selfishness, and the way in which the three poisons of ignorance, greed and anger influence their intentions and produce their actions. To free ourselves from all dependency is the work that zazen does within us, without our even being aware of it.

'The right behaviour of people of the Way,' Master Wanshi tells us, 'is like the clouds that pass by without clinging to anything whatsoever, and like the full moon that is reflected in the ten thousand things without being limited in any way.'

It's a matter of personifying *Mushotoku* in our body-mind, not just talking about it. It's a matter of making a commitment to Enlightenment, not just yearning for it. To become the example itself of loving attention and spontaneous benevolence will illuminate our companions in life. This light can only shine if it is free from any idea of effort.

I conclude this kusen by quoting Shantideva, a monk and philosopher from 8th century India:

'Now that I have found, as if by chance, the practice of the Buddhas (zazen) that is so difficult to find, If, in full consciousness, I find myself in the same [old] hells, It's because I've quite simply lost my mind, And I still ignore what's got me so befuddled. What's really going on deep down inside me?'

To get to the very bottom of oneself is to see the source of Awakening, and to understand that the illusion of the 'me' [self] is vainly trying to turn us away from its dazzling light.
