

宏智禪師

GUIDEPOST OF SILENT ILLUMINATION



Hongzhi Zhengjue

Silent and serene, forgetting words, bright clarity appears before you.
When you reflect it you become vast, where you embody it you are spiritually uplifted.

Spiritually solitary and shining, inner illumination restores wonder,
Dew in the moonlight, a river of stars, snow-covered pines,
clouds enveloping the peak.

In darkness it is most bright, while hidden it is all the more manifest.

The crane dreams in the wintry mist. The autumn waters flow far in the distance.
Endless kalpas are totally empty, all things completely the same.
When wonder exists in serenity, all achievement is forgotten in illumination.

What is this wonder? Alertly seeing through confusion
Is the way of silent illumination and the origin of subtle radiance.
Vision penetrating into subtle radiance is weaving gold on a jade loom.

Upright and inclined yield to each other, light and dark are interdependent.
Not depending on sense faculty and object, at the right time they interact.
Drink the medicine of good views. Beat the poison-smeared drum.
When they interact, killing and giving life are up to you.

Through the gate the self emerges and the branches bear fruit.
Only silence is the supreme speech, only illumination the universal response.
Responding without falling into achievement, speaking without involving listeners.

The ten thousand forms majestically glisten and expound the dharma.
All objects certify it, every one in dialogue.
Dialoguing and certifying, they respond appropriately to each other.

But if illumination neglects serenity then aggressiveness appears.
Certifying and dialoguing, they respond to each other appropriately.
But if serenity neglects illumination, murkiness leads to wasted dharma.

When silent illumination is fulfilled, the lotus blossoms, the dreamer awakens,
A hundred streams flow into the ocean, a thousand ranges face the highest peak.
Like geese preferring milk, like bees gathering nectar,
When silent illumination reaches the ultimate, I offer my teaching.

The teaching of silent illumination penetrates from the highest down to the foundation.
The body being *shunyata*, the arms in *mudra*;
From beginning to end, the changing appearances and ten thousand
differences have one pattern.

Mr. Ho offered jade, Xiangru pointed to its flaws.
Facing changes has its principles, the great function is without striving.
The ruler stays in the kingdom, the general goes beyond the frontiers.
Our school's affairs hit the mark straight and true.
Transmit it to all directions without desiring to gain credit.

- *Translated by Taigen Dan Leighton & Yi Wu*

Hongzhi Zhengjue (Wanshi Zenshi in Japanese) provides us with a magnificently clear, provisionally stimulating exposition on the very heart of being true to Buddha Dharma. His work entitled "Silent Illumination" is a voyage to the very center of the matter, starting and beginning from that very center. Master Hongzhi doesn't waste time with "going here's" and "coming from there's." Instead, he strikes right to the central issue, that is "Silent Illumination." His declaration is heavily influenced from the *Shikan* (or stopping and viewing) meditation methods of the Chinese T'ien-t'ai sect (precursor to the Japanese Tendai sect) and has served as a guidepost of sorts for aspirants down through the ages.

When I first read this very striking work, I stopped after the very first sentence: **Silent and serene, forgetting words, bright clarity appears before you.** The Master had encapsulated in those few words the essence of the stopping and viewing meditation method. Silence referred not merely to a silence of sounds but a refrain from the chatter of the mind, the volume of existence. Enveloping this silence a calm abiding too light to reveal the bright clarity of "just what it is." Not needing to designate, not having to compare,

clarity and purposeful awareness shine through.

The entire verse of “Silent Illumination” is provided above but for today, let’s concentrate on but the opening stanza, those first two lines. If we understand the entire work of Master Hongzhi, we know that they symbolize what follows. If we fail to understand his work, as well they symbolize what follows. Understanding or not understanding isn’t the issue for this work. We can’t utilize intellectual cognition to “make sense of it all,” nor can we put the mind to rest upon a particular facet of the wisdom in order to merge with it. But we can follow the advice of the second line, we obtain complete freedom and enter the chamber of ancestors...

How to reflect? How to embody? The method of merely sitting and being *Shikan* isn’t even a method to “practice.” We ARE as much *Shikan* as we “practice” it. There is no differentiation in readily-understood sense of reflection. No mirror, no face before the mirror to reflect. We are merely reflecting the truth of this body and mind, being nothing, going nowhere, having no goal to obtain. Embodying the Dharma needn’t imply a possession or “having” anything at all.

When we sit as Dharma, we manifest as Dharma. Being true to our pure nature is little more than recognizing, moment after moment, the truth of the present. Having no conflict to resolve, no battle to wage, nowhere indeed to get to, this is freedom.

We often confuse ourselves in our own sitting. I was asked by one of my Dharma teachers, “who is it that sits?” This angered me at first as I considered myself some type of “advanced practitioner “ when in fact, I had very little clue as to what true sitting was. I sat too hard, I sat with too many goals, I hadn’t learned to be sitting, rather I “sat.” I continued to struggle with this question and kept myself from falling victim to what I thought the true trap of the matter was: ME! It had to be an esoteric, mysterious hint that I was missing, so I thus sat even “harder” until I was simply exhausted (and looked it!). Where was the serenity and calm repose that one hears of? Why indeed was Jion flattening his cushion so strongly?

Time wasn’t enough for me as it fluttered by with no apparent changes at all to either my comprehension of seated meditation, nor my repose within seated meditation. I could wait this one out... I began to turn the question inside out, truly digesting it until I could play with words no more. “Sitting is who?” “Is it sitting?” I tried them all and abandoned them all.

Several time I imagined I had come to crux of the matter! I'd solved the dilemma! In truth, I had only replaced one riddle with another.

So our sitting can be a puzzle of sorts or it can be a liberating and stabilizing factor that is the Dharma we seek. In each of us, there are of course certain karmic ingredients which will influence the manner in which we approach this parable of truth that Master Hongzhi speaks of, but we needn't worry that we aren't prepared well enough, aren't educated enough or aren't experienced enough. It's all perfect waiting to be seen as imperfect. Views, opinions, stances, enlightenments, they all dissolve into the serene emptiness of Dharma dewdrops dancing on petals.

May the blessings be Yours...