

On Silent Illumination

Hongzhi Zhengue
(1091-1157)

I
Wide and far-reaching without limit,
pure and clean, it emits light.
Its spiritual potency is unobscured.
Although it is bright, there are no objects of illumination.
It can be said to be empty,
yet this emptiness is [full of] luminosity.
It illumines in self-purity,
beyond the working of causes and conditions,
apart from subject and object.
Its wondrousness and subtleties are ever present,
its luminosity is also vast and open.
Moreover, this is not something that can be conceived of
as existence or nonexistence.
Nor can it be deliberated about with words and analogies.
Right here—at this pivotal axle,
opening the swinging gate and clearing the way—
it is able to respond effortlessly to circumstances;
the great function is free from hindrances.
At all places, turning and turning about,
it does not follow conditions, nor can it be trapped in models.
In the midst of everything it settles securely.
With “that,” it is identical to what “that” is;
with “this,” it is identical to what “this” is.
“This and that” interfuse and merge without distinction.
Therefore it is said:

“Like the earth that holds up a mountain,
unaware of its steepness and loftiness;
like the stone that contains jade,
unaware of the flawlessness of the jade.”
If one can be thus, this is truly leaving home.
People who have left home must get hold of the essence in this way.

Patch-robed monks should wither away and freeze
the [deluded] thoughts of the mind
and rest from remnant conditioning.
Single-mindedly restore and cultivate this field.
Directly cut down all the overgrown grass
throughout the boundary of the four directions.
Do not allow a single speck of dust to defile [this field].

Spiritually potent, it is bright, vast, and removed; it is transparent.
Thoroughly illumine that which comes before the [principal] essence,
until you reach a state where the light becomes naked and pure—
where not a single speck of dust can be attached to.
When you tug and pull back this ox[-mind] by the nose,
it will naturally come alive and be imposing.
Being quite unusual and outstanding,
it mingles with others along the pathway
without damaging people's sprouts and grain.
Thriving and dynamic, the ox effortlessly responds to circumstances.

Responding to circumstances without artificiality,
it thrives and is free flowing.
Not fixed to any set place, it is free from fetters—
this is the place where the ox plows through the field of the empty kalpa.

Proceeding in such a way,
all things appear vividly, without obscurity;
everywhere, all things manifest as they are,
[maintaining] one thought for ten thousand years.
Fundamentally, this is non-abiding in appearances.
It is said: "The mind-ground contains every seed.
The rain will universally cause them to sprout.
When the meaning of the blossoming
of the flower of enlightenment is understood,
the fruit of bodhi will ripen of its own accord."

II

Being empty, it leaves no trace;
in illumination there are no dusts of emotion.
When the light penetrates, stillness is profound;
mysteriously it severs all defects and defilement.
When you can thus understand your "self," you can thus resolve your "self."
Clear and pure, wondrous and bright—this field is intrinsically yours.
Many lifetimes of inability to resolve [this matter of self grasping]
only come from obscuring doubts and hovering delusions.
All these are but self-created obstructions and blocks.
Openly, wisdom freely roams; internally, one forgets merits and rewards.
Just directly relinquish this burden [of the self].
Turn around and resume your position!
Put your feet firmly on the Path.
In this spontaneous responsiveness and wondrous function,
all things encountered are reality.
Here, there is not a single thing, from the tiniest hair
to a speck of dust outside yourself!

From *The Method of No-Method: The Chan Practice of Silent Illumination*, by Sheng Yen. Shambala, 2008,