

The Imprint of Silent Illumination

Silent and serene, one forgets all words:
Clear and vivid, it appears before you.
When one realizes, time has no limits.
When felt deeply, life becomes vibrant.
Singularly illuminating is this bright awareness;
Full of wonder is the pure illumination:
Dew in the moonlight, a river of stars,
Snow-covered pines, clouds hovering on mountain peaks.

In darkness, it glows with brightness;
In shadows, it shines with a splendid light.
Like the dream of a crane flying in the frosty mist,
Like the clear water reaching the autumn sky,
Endless eons dissolve into nothingness,
Each indistinguishable from the other.
In this brightness all striving is forgotten.

What is this wonder? Alertly seeing through confusion
Is the way of silent illumination and the origin of subtle radiance.
Vision penetrating into radiance is weaving gold on a jade loom.
Subject and object influence each other.
Light and darkness are mutually dependent.
There is neither mind nor world to rely on,
Yet the two mutually interact.

Drink the medicine of correct views,
Beat the poison-smear drum.
When they interact silence and illumination are complete;
Killing and bringing to life is a choice to make.
At last, through the gate, one emerges.
The fruit has ripened on the branch.
Only this Silence is the ultimate teaching;
Only this Illumination, the universal response.
The teaching is not heard with the ears,
And the response appears without effort.

Throughout the universe all things glisten,
And each expounds the Dharma.
They attest to each other,
And accord in dialog responding in perfect harmony.
But when illumination is without stillness,
Then distinctions will be seen and harshness will arrive.
If within stillness brightness is lost,
All will become wasteful and dull.

When Silent Illumination is complete,
The lotus will blossom, the dreamer will awaken.
The hundred streams flow to the ocean,
The thousand mountains face the highest peak.
Like geese preferring milk to water,
Like bees gathering the choicest pollen,
When Silent Illumination reaches the ultimate,
It penetrates from the most subtle to the greatest.

I embody the original tradition of my lineage:
The body, sunyata and the arms, mudra.
From the beginningless to endless, only one task,
though expressed in 10,000 shapes and forms.
The basic matter of our line
hits the mark straight and true.
Pass this on in all directions
without a wish for gain.

This is the practice called Silent Illumination.

— By Hongzhi Zhengjue; translated by Sheng Yen; adapted by Mountain Lamp