
Beyond obstacles

Kusen by Roland Yuno Rech – Pégomas, January 2012

When go for a *sesshin* we leave our house, our family. We leave on a trip to get to the place of the *sesshin*. And this place, as soon as we put up the *dojo* and practise the Way, becomes a monastery. At that place each one who practises experiences the life of a monk, at least during the time of the *sesshin*. We become *shukke*, away from home, from our family, we become like a monk or a nun, that's to say One with the Way, focusing totally on the practice of each moment, forgetting the past and not expecting the future. We can contact the real life of here and now, life without separation, life beyond our mental formings which we drop at each outbreath.

In the *Koshoji koroku* Master Dogen says : « *To practise the Way in the temple of Kuanin or at the temple of Shanglan - there are both temples where Master Joshu had been shusso - is to be a travelling mendicant monk.* ».

And he adds « *It is also true of visiting famous temples or Zen masters so often that we wear off our straw-sandals. What is a travelling mendicant monk? It the cast away body and mind: datsu raku.* »

In the teaching of Zen even though it is often a question of elder monks, elder masters, temples in the depths of China 1500 years ago, in actuality it is still about ourselves here and now, because we are all travelling mendicant monks. Our life itself is a journey, not only between birth and death, but also between death and rebirth, forever.

To go on a trip it is beyond coming and going on earth. What is called *henzan*, is like going on a pilgrimage. It is to harmonize with the Way, with the fact that the whole universe is nothing but the Body of the *Buddha-Dharma*, that's to say the profound reality as it is.

By going on a trip we are going to meet such reality, dropping our mental habits, our egotistic attachments. Our mind is open to experience the reality of each moment. This opening takes place in what Dogen calls « *body and mind cast away* »— *shin jin datsu raku*.

This requires practising with the greatest energy and focusing on the practice of each moment. If in *zazen* we only brood over our daily concerns, if we practice with tepidity, limply, hesitantly, that it is very far from true *henzan*. If we receive fervently the teaching and if we put all our energy to practise it, focusing on each thing at every moment, with one mind, then we become intimate with the essence of the Way. That is the meaning of *henzan*. The meaning of this journey is to realize the true way that is independent of any place, independent of going or coming here or there. The Way is always realized here and now. To become one with this is *zazen*.

The Way is beneath our feet. It consists in returning to the true reality of our life, beyond our dreams and conditionings.

Master Nyojo said: « *Sanzen - i.e. the profound practice of Zen - is the body and mind cast away. You needn't burn incense, recite prayers or mantras, do self-mortifications, or recite sutras. It is only about sitting with one mind, shikantaza.* »

And as Dogen asked him: « *But what is body and mind dropped off?* »
Nyajo answered: « *It is zazen.* »

In other words there is no other zazen than the zazen where we totally drop off body and mind. If such dropping off doesn't occur, it is not true zazen. But when it happens then it is the realization of the awakening, at the very moment of letting go.

Letting go what of? Of our illusory lusts for possessions, sex, food, fame even sleep. It doesn't mean that we do not need food, sleep, sexuality, but these needs should not turn into illusory desires. That's to say to indulge in believing that the meaning of life is to fulfil them, that there is nothing beyond, thinking like the majority of people in this materialistic society of today. Only money, power, pleasure. It is not that these things are bad in themselves but to become attached to them drifts you away from a much deeper realization: a life in harmony with the Dharma, with the profound reality. And without this harmony there is no real and steady happiness in this life.

As long as we don't harmonize with the true nature of our existence we are never satisfied and we always seek something else. We are literally alienated. We become other than ourselves, prisoners of objects and beings that are reduced to the state of object.

On the contrary, if we practise zazen with *shin jin datsu raku*, then all obstacles of our life are removed at once, all which that obscures our mind: greed, anger, laziness, sensitiveness and doubt. Those obstacles never leave us in peace and impede our realization of the Way, our reconciliation with our true nature. And this can't be realized by our personal consciousness, by our ego, by our willpower, but only in letting go, leaving it up totally to the practice of the Way. Body and mind in unity. This practice literally takes us beyond ourselves, beyond the limits of our little ego. That is the meaning of the Way.