
Deconditioning old habits

Kusen by Roland Yuno Rech - Pégomas, October 2015

When we practice zazen we practice the same meditation as Shakyamuni. Zazen is meditation through which he awakened to the profound reality of life, not just his own but that of all existence and existences. Buddha understood the impermanence of life and we can experience this, just like him, at every moment.

In the practice of zazen, from one moment to the next, body and mind are transformed. And if we observe the phenomena of our life, we see that no fixed abode, everything goes, for better and for worse. If we deeply observe this reality of impermanence, we learn to let go of our mental coagulations. Impermanence is not systematically translated into a loss. Zazen frees us from our conditioning, helps us to repent of past mistakes, renew our life and begin to live on a basis, in accordance with the Dharma, the reality to which we awake.

When we see clearly that our ego is without substance, we cannot be selfish. We don't have to make a big effort to do to abandon the ego, just clearly see delusion and regularly renew this clear vision, while trying not to forget it in daily life. Because this experience is so liberating we naturally feel great gratitude to the Buddha who transmitted it: allowing us, with confidence, to take refuge in him. He becomes our original teacher. We study his teaching as the expression of this awakening. In following his recommendations for life in the sutras we check the validity of his teachings against our own experience in practice.

As part of the bodhisattva ordination we take refuge in the Dharma. This is the teaching of Buddha that will subsequently guide our life and our practice. And we also join with the community of those who share the same confidence and thus help each other to deepen the teaching. The Buddha, Dharma and Sangha are what are called the Three Treasures, which become precious in our lives. When we vow to take refuge in the Buddha, we say we are making this vow with all sentient beings. This is not only a personal matter - because as we personally vow we also vow together with all sentient beings to help all sentient beings, share with them the happy experience of this realisation.

We say realisation because it is not sufficient to understand only with the mind, the spirit, we must feel it with the entire body. If mind understands the truth but the body does not, then one experiences a painful contradiction and that means that one does not really understand. That's why as soon as one receives instruction must immediately practice with the body, with all his being, impregnate your life with it, how it works in us. Sesshin is the best time for this.

What we do with all our body is what we call "tai do." The term is "tai get daido": "Tai" - the body - "ge" - understand "Daido" - the Great Way. "Do" is both The Way as a way forward but it is also the ultimate reality, the Tao. Following the Path, really practicing with all our body and mind naturally aligns us with the Tao, the Way, with ultimate reality and awakens us to this reality. It is the foundation of the teaching of our school, the Soto Zen, Master Dogen's teaching of non-separation between practice and realization.

Shusho ichinyo: when the practice is right, when the body is in the right posture and the mind is working in *hishiryō* - that is to say without stagnating on anything, so, in this moment, practice is awakening. From this we operate in harmony with ultimate reality. The total abandoning of all our illusions. But of course like everything else, this immediate awakening is also impermanent. That is why we must constantly practice what is called "gyōji", every day, day by day, moment by moment. Otherwise our bad old habits take over again and we forget the awakening of zazen.

There is often talk about progressive practice and immediate enlightenment- thinking that if we practice we will gradually progress towards something – the achievement of enlightenment in a particular time. That is not our practice at all, Soto Zen is the opposite. In Soto Zen we practice immediate enlightenment in the instant of zazen: but, after, we must continue the progressive practice of daily life, the practice that harmonizes our daily activity with the awakening we experience in zazen. We de-condition to our old habits. And, again, the sesshin is the best time and the best place to work on that.