
The Unlimited Way

Kusen by Roland Yuno Rech- Nice, November 2008

When we practice zazen, there is of course a certain way to sit and to concentrate on the posture. I often remind you of it. Tip the pelvis forward pressing the knees firmly against the ground, stretch the back bone and the back of the neck by pushing the sky with the top of the head, relax the stomach and let all of the body weight press on the zafu as well as the knees against the ground. Left hand in the right hand, thumbs horizontal, the side of the hands in contact with the lower abdomen, breathing in and out deeply through the nose and letting thoughts go by.

By « thoughts » this doesn't only mean thoughts. It also means emotions, perceptions, desires, memories, and different states of consciousness. In zazen they can be observed for a moment, and once we become conscious of them, we let them go by, we don't become attached to them, no importance is given to them, no particular energy is attributed to them. As such, all phenomena which arises in the mind appears in its true nature which is without substance, impermanent and therefore it stops attaching us. That's the point when the practice of zazen is no longer a technique. Instead, it becomes the practice of the Way itself.

That is what Buddha Shakyamuni taught from the beginning. He didn't teach a technique for meditation, relaxation or well-being. He taught the Way, *do, bodai*, which includes both practice and awakening.

The Way is the path which is walked on, the direction which is taken, and the process in which the path is taken. In other words, we don't walk on the Way, the way we walk is practicing the Way. In this sense, the Way is not limited to a place, like the *dojo*, even though it is a special place : the Way exists everywhere; in everything we encounter night and day there is an opportunity to practice. First, by clearly recognizing the nature of what we encounter, as being impermanent and insubstantial, like ourselves, and then by not being attached to it : said otherwise, understanding is also realizing.

There are people who fully well understand or think they understand vacuity, « all this is without substance, everything is interdependent », but once they encounter a particular phenomenon, it is no longer applicable. They become attached to the phenomena, the situation, or on the contrary reject it with hostility, and so they stray very far from the practice of the Way itself.

Since the time of Bodhidharma in the sixth century in China, there has been word of a special Zen transmission « outside of the Texts », it is above all Rinzai Zen which defends the expression of « special transmission outside of the Texts ». In fact, the Zen way is a person to person transmission and in this transmission from person to person, it's a transmission of Buddha to Buddha. In other words, the master or teacher transmits through the practice, through experience, not through books: they transmit 'where they are' in their essential experience of zazen.

Even if words, explanations, and sutra need to be understood, at least the ones we chant, we must not depend on words. Rather, one must directly understand one's own mind and

functioning.

Not depending on words means not closing the Practice of the Way into categories produced by the mind. On the contrary, we must enable the practice itself to reveal the infinite dimension of the Way.

If the Way directly addresses the deep mind, without depending on words, that means it's a practice with the body and therefore in Zen, understanding, realizing, means practicing with the body. Out of ten things, it's better to understand only one, out of ten teachings, it's better to understand only one, and to really practice it instead of accumulating knowledge and not practicing any of the knowledge learned. On this subject, when we receive teaching, one must immediately ask oneself « how can put this into practice ? Can I practice this ? »

The teaching of Zen, the teaching of Buddhism, is not the product of philosophical speculations. Rather, it's the expression of experience, the experience of the practice. It's an experience of stripping away from oneself everything which blocks our receptivity, which blocks the truth which is manifest everywhere, the Way which exists everywhere: it is often said « under our feet » but not necessarily under our feet, in our own body as well, in our mind and all phenomena which we encounter, whether it be material or spiritual.

This is why Master Dogen said we end up just encountering the Way, no matter which way we turn. He called this « being obstructed by the Way ». This word might not be the best chosen one because the Way is liberating. It is neither a block nor blocking. What he meant was that when we are truly engaged in the practice, all phenomena which we encounter is an occasion for practice and awakening.