
Clear vision, shoken

Kusen of Roland Yuno Rech - La Gendronnière, May 2010

In Zen teaching, we insist a lot on concentration, especially concentration on the body posture and the breathing. This concentration creates the necessary conditions to awaken. But these conditions are not sufficient.

Concentration on the body posture and on breathing help us to detach ourselves from our thoughts, from our mental fabrications. It clarifies the mind, allows us to let all agitation settle down and allows the mind to become clear and change its mode of functioning and stop pursuing anything and rejecting anything. This is what allows the consciousness to become *hishiryo*: beyond all thought, beyond all mental fabrications, by letting go of it all.

This is what allows the mind to become luminous, "*sho*" in *shoken*. "*Sho*" means "to enlighten", "to illuminate". But "*ken*" is just as important. "*Ken*" means "to see". So *shoken* means "to see clearly". It is only when our vision really becomes *shoken*, a clear vision, that our practice of zazen becomes a practice of awakening.

It is being attached to misconceptions about the practice that can prevent us from seeing clearly. This is in fact what Master Menzan constantly denounces: illusions about the practice which prevent us from realizing Buddha's true awakening, and which make possible for people to practice for many years while remaining on the sidelines of the true practice.

One of these illusions is to think that one can - and must - completely eliminate the "Three poisons": greed, hatred and ignorance. But Menzan tells us that it is impossible.

Moreover, if you think that this is what must be achieved, then you are preventing yourself from truly achieving awakening. This may seem strange, almost revolting, because we usually say that *nirvana* is the extinction of these Three poisons of greed, hatred and ignorance ... and that the salvation taught and proposed by the Buddha is precisely that.

But abandoning the Three poisons does not necessarily mean eliminating them: it simply means making them totally harmless. Wanting to abandon them creates a new attachment, through the dualistic attitude that consists in constantly fighting what one considers to be a poison. For the mind who fight is poisoned by this dualistic attitude and attached itself to certain ideas of purity, as emptiness, nothingness, or absence: absence of phenomena, absence of thoughts, and absence of emotions.

It would be like wanting to become "a marble Buddha". This is obviously not the meaning of our practice. We have to make the Three poisons harmless without necessarily separating from them, because - in any case - we vow to remain in this world where human passions exist. By being in contact with them, we must practice *shoken*, the clear vision: the vision of the emptiness of what constitutes these Three poisons, the emptiness of the ego that produces them and the emptiness of the objects that it pursues or rejects.

This is exactly what we constantly sing while reciting the *Hannya Shingyo*, sutra whose profound meaning we do not necessarily understand.

If we really practice *shoken*, the right observation, (which Master Deshimaru said was just as indispensable as concentration), then we can constantly enlighten our own illusions. This is what Dogen called the awakening of a Buddha: to enlighten the illusion, because when it is enlightened, it becomes harmless and it can no longer bind us, lead us, condition our mind, lead our action. It appears, it is seen for what it is, and we let it pass.

This is how the mind becomes truly liberated, liberated precisely from the hatred of illusion, of impurity, of poisons, since it no longer embraces them and no longer rejects them either.

That is why Master Menzan says things that may seem completely paradoxical, when he says for example that the Three poisons are not different from the body of Buddha's Dharma. This obviously does not mean that being a Buddha would mean being led by these Three poisons, but that a Buddha completely understand their emptiness.

This is what makes it possible to return to the world of *samsara*, which for us is often going back to our families, our professional activities, the social world, but without being too affected by the difficulties we encounter there. Without hating the illusions of the world, without being seduced by them either, but by acting with compassion and wisdom, to introduce some of this clarity of mind achieved in zazen, and therefore help all beings who struggle with the difficulties linked to their attachments.

This is what all Bodhisattvas vow to practice and to realize. It is also what I wish for each of us to continue to live, to actualize, without creating any separation between our zazen practice and our life.