

The first two aspects of the Awakening

2 Kusen by Roland Yuno Rech - Grube Louise, January 2017

The First Aspect of Awakening

During zazen, whatever your motivation for coming and practice, forget all aim. Simply let yourself be absorbed, by concentrating on the posture of the body and follow your breathing rather than your thoughts. This is the best way to free yourself from the mind which discriminates, which creates dualities, separations. It is the best way to regain our native harmony with our Buddha Nature, in other words to awaken, to become like Buddha, to find a free and peaceful mind. Not only for yourself, because this freedom and peace radiate around you.

Shortly before his death, Shakyamuni Buddha described the Eight Aspects of this Enlightenment, and Dogen also took up this teaching towards the end of his life. This means that it is very important for us, not only because it expresses the characteristics of Enlightenment, but also because it makes possible to realize it and actualize it. The Way is not only the way to realize the Awakening, but the art of walking in an awakened way. This is the fundamental principle of Master Dogen's Zen: practice and realization are unity. And this is the reason why it is necessary to put all one's attention in the right practice and not to be attached to the Awakening, but to let it be realized naturally in the practice, without thinking about it.

The first aspect of Awakening is to be free of all greed. Dogen said: "It is to abandon the five desires". These are not the objects corresponding to the objects of our five senses (which are in fact six), but they are the greedy desires to possess objects, the sexual obsession, the greed for food, for sleep and finally for honours or power.

The question here is not to abandon all desires, because desires often corresponds to a natural need. One can be hungry and want to eat, thirsty and want to drink, be tired and want to sleep; one can love somebody deeply and want to make love with this person, and one can also want to reach Awakening. And in all cases, desire allows you to concentrate your energy. Dogen said for example: "If you practice with a very great energy, like the one deployed by someone who is in love with a woman of high society, you will not fail to achieve Awakening". In other words, desire is not always negative, it is even what animates and gives meaning to our life. People who no longer desire anything fall into depression.

But the problem in today's world is that very few people are really awakened. We live in a very materialistic world. Without thinking about it, we pursue all sorts of objects of satisfaction. Desires multiply infinitely, without ever really satisfying us, because we haven't discovered our true and deepest desire. So, we pursue "ersatz", like someone who is thirsty for love and becomes an alcoholic. He simply got the wrong object. The object of his desire was true love, but because he couldn't find it, he consoles himself with alcohol, as others do with food, money, power or honours. All these objects of desire are simply the sign of a lack of enlightenment.

Master Deshimaru told us that the Bodhisattva has only one great desire: "to be able to awaken for the good of all beings, to be able to help them awaken in their turn". When we have this desire and we concentrate on the practice that allows us to realize it, all the other desires become much less important. One can be content with a simple life, desire healthy things that contribute to the health of body and mind, and do not create suffering or illness. And this is because deep down, our mind is truly satisfied to have found the Way and to walk on the Right Way.

Then our life takes on its true meaning and that is what human beings need most, especially young people today. Because what society offers them does not satisfy their desire for meaning. There is a lack of spiritual dimension in our society, and sometimes some people exploit this lack by proposing fanatical beliefs. The two greatest dangers in today's society are materialism and spiritual fanaticism, which is a completely wrong answer to the lack of spirituality.

Practicing zazen, practicing sesshin and concentrating on the Way is important, not only for oneself, but to help all beings and to be able to give them real spiritual help. To be a true Bodhisattva.

The Second Aspect of Awakening

The second Aspect of Awakening is satisfaction: being satisfied with what we have. Buddha said: "If you wish to escape suffering, you must have a satisfied mind". To be satisfied means to have a happy and peaceful mind. A satisfied person is happy, even if he or she has to sleep on the floor; an unsatisfied person, even if he or she sleeps in a palace, will be unhappy. Even if he is rich, he is actually poor, while the former is actually rich.

This was the case of Master Ryokan, who lived poorly in a hermitage deep in the forest. He was content with doing zazen, reading and writing poems. In one of his poems he says: "As long as the sun remains in the sky, I mend my worn-out clothes; in the moonlight, I read aloud the sutras for myself..." And he adds: "To those who share my Faith, let me give you this little piece of advice: to enjoy infinite life, you don't need many things".

When you look at your own life, you realize that you are often in search of "something else": another job, another companion, another place to live, another meditation or another Way ... When we are not satisfied, our desires multiply, and the more desires we have, the less satisfied we are, because the true satisfaction is to be in harmony with the true Nature of our existence. This is what we sometimes express when we say "that we wish to "be ourselves"". This desire is at the origin of the spirit of Awakening, *bodaishin*.

In the past, the monks used to go on pilgrimage, and when they met a master, the master would ask:

"What do you come looking for here?"

"I want to become Buddha!"

"But you are already Buddha! When are you going to stop wandering? »

We are already ourselves, *immo*, since this is our true nature. So, why should we worry about that? It is probably because we are not able to be truly One with ourselves. Our mind is always divided, not satisfied with what we are.

It is true that it is impossible to identify with our small ego, when this self is limited by our mental constructions, when we form an idea of ourselves, of what we call "our identity", which makes us special, different from others... and therefore, someone limited who has built himself up by rejecting everything he considers not to be "him". The ego is built in opposition to the non-self and it starts when the child starts to say "no", to be in denial. We think that this is the affirmation of his freedom, but true freedom does not lie in the "no", in some opposition, but on the contrary in the "big yes", in the recognition and acceptance of what we are in reality, deep down, that is to say One with the whole universe, connected with all beings. Then the shell, the armour of our ego dissolves, and we can move freely, spontaneously.

The real satisfaction does not lie in the field of «having, but in the quality of being. Zazen makes us realize this quality of being by allowing us to abandon all our attachments, all our mental fabrications, and realize that we are simply "that".