

# Our life becomes the practice

**Kusen by Roland Yuno Rech - Nice, 4 December 2013**

Getting up every morning to come and do zazen in the dojo when winter comes, when it is still dark, is not easy. So, some people tend to reduce their practice when winter arrives. Master Deshimaru, who had already noticed this phenomenon, used to say: „They are seasonal-vegetable monks ": they blossom in spring and summer, then they disappear in autumn and winter.

In fact, starting the practice of zazen is an attractive thing, and many people receive an initiation to this practice. But as Master Deshimaru used to say, what is more difficult is to continue constantly. In Zen, this is what we call *gyoji*: "*gyo*"- the practice, "*ji*"- continuous. Because to continue regularly implies making the clear choice to give priority to the practice over all our other occupations. Not that we want to eliminate any other occupation, of course, but that the practice becomes as a source for all our other activities. Then these other activities, moreover, are enriched by this and become a form, an expression of the practice of the Way, like the practice of zazen in the dojo itself.

And so, it becomes indeed a *gyoji*, i.e. a constant practice. Not only because we practice every day, but because we practice 24 hours a day. There is no longer any difference between practicing and living: our life becomes practice. In the same way that - without knowing it - we are always immersed in the Way, the Way being the reality as it is.

It is obvious that we are this reality as it is. What distances us from it are our mental constructions, the fact that our dualistic brain is taking over our way of thinking, that more and more separation and duality is being created in our lives - especially between oneself and others (with an exacerbation of individualism, of egocentricity), but also between practice and realization.

In other words, it is “the mind of technique”, as the philosopher Heidegger pointed out, that prevails. The mind that seeks to appropriate all things, to use all things (and particularly the nature) for its own benefit, by manipulating it.

Transposed into the practice of Zen, it becomes: “I do zazen for my ego, I use zazen when it suits me, when it does me good, when I feel the need”. At that moment, it means that it is the ego which leads our life.

This ego is obviously not always bad, not always negative, since it is the ego which feels the suffering that comes from this way of functioning ... And precisely because of that, one day we tell ourselves that perhaps there is another way of being, another possible way in life, and that it is looking for a practice like zazen.

So, we almost always start practicing because our own ego wants to, and expects benefits for itself. And - in fact - these benefits are real. But as long as we continue to practice with this

egocentric motivation, the true benefit of zazen cannot be realized, because we remain enclosed within the limits of our egocentrism.

Master Dogen had already underlined this point in chapter 7 of "*Gakudo Yojinshu*", saying: "Sometimes it is the Self - the ego - which drags the Dharma, the practice, the Way - and sometimes it is the Dharma, the Way, the Tao, which drags the ego beyond itself". And he added: "When it is the ego that drags the Dharma, the practice, the ego is strong and the practice, the Dharma, is weak. Conversely, when it is the Dharma, the practice that drives the ego, it is the Dharma that is strong and the ego that is weak".

And he concluded by saying: "The secret of our Zen school is that - in reality - these two aspects always coexist, and must coexist". That is to say that sometimes the practice is voluntary, driven by the ego, with the disadvantage that at that moment it remains limited and does not allow a true liberation, and sometimes the practice is natural, as if it were self-evident, a part of our life. And then, *gyoji*, the constant practice, becomes like the fact of breathing. At that moment, the ego is weak, that is to say that it is no longer in control, it puts itself at the service of the Way, it follows the movement. At that moment, the practice becomes easy, natural and truly liberating, because it makes us function in harmony with the Dharma.

This is how it is possible to have a real practice of *gyoji*, a constant practice, not only by coming daily to do zazen, but by living every day and night as an actualization of what is realized in zazen, that is to say a life open to the infinite, to the unlimited, stripped of the limits imposed by our egocentrism.

To realize this is the true meaning of Buddha's Dharma, of Zen practice,

*Transcript of the recording available as podcast on the website of the Nice Zen dojo: <http://zen-nice.org/gyobutsuji/1434/dharma-fort-ego-faible-ego-fort-dharma-faible/>*