
Achieving peace of mind

Kusen of Roland Yuno Rech - Nice, August 2018

During the first minutes of zazen, we try to concentrate consciously, remembering the important points of the practice: the right posture, the back well upright, the shoulders relaxed, the belly relaxed and the breathing. We inhale and exhale calmly through the nose, just trying to go to the end of each exhalation and not holding our breath. The breathing must be fluid, like the mind in zazen which does not stagnate on any thought.

Finding peace of mind is one of the great merits of zazen. But this peace of mind is not achieved by fighting thoughts, even illusory thoughts, attachments, *bonnos*, emotions.

Some people want to quickly reach a state free of all forms of attachment, of illusion, and start fighting these attachments and illusions, so that – in zazen - the mind becomes a real battlefield. The illusions which arise and the ego which wants to eliminate them are the protagonists of this fight. But this is not the right way to practice zazen, that is to say that it is not the practice which liberates us and brings the true peace of mind.

In zazen, we stop wanting to grasp or reject anything: this is the basic practice of zazen. If we don't worry about the thoughts which arise, that is to say if we don't pay too much attention to them, if we don't invest them, they vanish by themselves. But grasping them or fighting them reinforces them.

Even if the peace of the mind is one of the essential goals of zazen, it is realized when we stop trying to pacify our mind. When concentration is established naturally, when we stop wanting to do anything and when we are satisfied by simply being sitting, then concentration established itself naturally.

Because the important thing in zazen is not the content of the thoughts, emotions, or feelings which appear, but rather the process by which they appear and then disappear naturally if we do not intervene.

But sometimes during zazen, we are caught up by a process of attachment to our thoughts, and we start thinking consciously about something which preoccupies us. In this case, we should go back to a conscious concentration, bring back our attention to the body posture and to the breathing, inhale and exhale through the nose during several breaths, until our mind can let go of what was bothering it.

This learning of letting go is a real exercise in mind relaxation, which, when one is used to practicing it, is then carried out naturally and quickly. Because one no longer tends to stagnate on anything, on any mental object. This does not prevent us from being aware of what is happening, but we do not become attached to it. We always come back to what Master Deshimaru called the “zero point”: “beyond thinking and non-thinking”.