

Staying Zen

Kusen by Roland Yuno Rech - Godinne, July 2022

Nowadays, we often hear the expression "staying Zen". The word "Zen" is also used in advertising to praise the quality of certain products. There are "Zen" cars. And when the word "Zen" is used in social life, it generally refers to an attitude in which you remain calm under all circumstances, stay in a good mood, equanimous, in adversity as well as in happy situations.

In fact, equanimity is one of the paths to enlightenment. In Zen practice, it is the result of Master Sosan's recommendation, when he says at the beginning of the *Shinjinmei*: "Entering the way is not difficult, but there must be no greed, no hatred, no choice, no rejection". This means to start by accepting the reality of the here and now, as it is. When it's hot, you are completely hot, when it's cold, you are completely cold. You can't change the situation. So, in order to remain equanimous, you have to start with accepting the situation. That's the way it is!

This doesn't mean that you can't try to change it, for example by putting in a more efficient heater when it's cold. But you can only transform a situation once you have penetrated it deeply. We can only transform our *bonno*, our illusions, after having penetrated their nature deeply. This is what the practice of zazen allows, by making us more and more deeply intimate with ourselves.

On the subject of equanimity, Master Dogen quoted one saying of Master Sosan. He said: "Whatever I say, don't accept it". In other words: "Don't accept it without checking by yourself the validity of what I am teaching you". In other words, trust your own experience.

The practice of *gyoji*, that is to say the regular repetition of the practice according to the transmitted teaching, is what allows us to digest this teaching and to make it our own flesh by assimilating it. This is a part of equanimity. If we adhere to a teaching without deeply digesting it, we find ourselves in duality with that teaching. There is an opposition between what we feel and what we are told we should feel. This creates guilt, inner tension: "I should be Zen in this situation, but I'm not". So, we can't be equanimous.

To be truly equanimous, we need to become not only intimate with our usual way of being, that is knowing ourselves on a relative level, but becoming intimate with our deep nature, our Buddha nature. This is what allows us not to be disturbed by the waves that agitate the surface of our life.

When we swim on the surface of the ocean, we are very often caught by the waves. But it is enough to dive a few meters below the surface to find some calm again. Practising zazen helps us not to stay on the surface of things, but to develop a deep vision which allows us not to be disturbed by the agitation of the world. This does not mean to be indifferent, but to be undisturbed and therefore better able to find the appropriate response to the situation. In other words, to develop wisdom.