

# A practice of liberation

**Kusen by Roland Yuno Rech – L'Arche, September 2019**

From the beginning of zazen, concentrate totally on your posture. Tilt the pelvis forward and press the knees on the ground. From the waist up, stretch the spine upwards and stretch also the nape of the neck, as if you wanted to touch the sky with the top of your head. The chin is tucked in, the shoulders and the stomach relaxed. Breathe in and out deeply through the nose. The face is also relaxed, the gaze directed just in front of you towards the ground, without focusing on any particular point.

It is not necessary to close the eyes to be concentrated, even if sometimes we need to close them for a few moments at the beginning of zazen. In fact, you should keep the eyes half closed, gazing downwards to a point just in front of your knees. In reality, we turn the gaze towards ourselves, meaning that we observe our body. We relax the body zones that are tensed, we always stretch the spine upwards and take care to tuck the chin in.

And we don't let our head tilt forward. This "leaning forward" of the head is like being subjected to the weight of our thoughts, as they were so heavy that the head falls forward. If you tuck the chin in and straighten your neck, you will see that you can quickly concentrate and that you won't be disturbed by your thoughts, which will become fewer and fewer and pass more quickly. All the more so because by observing them, you will be able to see that they are totally impermanent and without substance, as is their object. Thus, all our preoccupations dissolve, for they have nothing to do with our life here and now.

In this posture, in this dojo, in this sangha, you constantly come back to your real life here and now, in your body, and you let go of all disturbing thoughts. This does not mean that you will be without thoughts, but you will be without attachment to them. At that stage, they are no longer disturbing, they flow like the water current. Then the mind, freed from the flow of thoughts, can realize its true nature, which is elusive because it is extremely vast. The true mind, which is not identifiable with any object, embraces all things and becomes vast while remaining on nothing.

As you know, the famous phrase from the Diamond Sutra: "when the mind dwells on nothing, the true mind appears" was the phrase that awakened Master Eno (the sixth patriarch) and made him decide to enter the way of Zen. You have already entered this way, but if you want to deepen it, concentrate on this teaching: "when the mind dwells on nothing, the true mind appears".

The expression "true mind" does not mean that there is a "false mind" and "true mind", but points to a false way of functioning and a true way of functioning. The false way is to coagulate our mind on our thoughts, by clinging to them. The true way is to be immediately aware of what appears, to see immediately its real nature and let it pass, to constantly find a mind that is open and, above all, capable of perceiving what appears without adding the coloring of mental projections. This is what is called "seeing things as they are". And if the mind adds its coloring,

immediately see this coloring appearing and let it pass. In other words, be fully aware of what is happening, while letting it go.

This is why Master Deshimaru said that zazen is not a meditation, because we do not meditate on thoughts, we do not take hold of them. We intuitively see immediately their emptiness. This is how zazen is a practice of liberation of the mind and the realization of the true nature of our existence, with nothing separate, nothing autonomous, and therefore nothing graspable. So, letting go is the only right attitude we can adopt. And this is what we practice during a sesshin, not only during zazen, but also in the daily life.

The meaning of a sesshin is to make of every moment of the day a moment of practice: during the ceremony, when we walk, when we eat the *genmai*, during *samu*. They are so many opportunities to concentrate here and now, body and mind in unity with what we are doing. And at the same time, to remain attentive to others and to our environment.

Concentration in zazen and in daily life is not “gazing at our navel”, it is not being always turned inwards and ignoring what is happening around us. On the contrary, concentration in zazen frees us from all mental clutter and develop our capacity to be open to others.