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## Bringing harmony and peace

### **Mondo with Roland Yuno Rech - Godinne, November 2015**

**Question:** *Venerable Master, I am a monk of the Theravada tradition. I am very happy to be here and to have been able to approach the techniques and traditions of Zen Buddhism. I would like to thank Master Roland and also all those who organized (this sesshin) and who put all their efforts to deliver the message of Shakyamuni Buddha and to practice it in daily life.*

*Yesterday morning and this morning, I learnt from the monk Jacques some data about the Zen Buddhism, and he explained many useful things for our center of Waterloo. I still have many questions, but I just would like to ask a very important one. I heard about the life of the great Master Deshimaru, about his work and about his responsibility in France, in Europe and in Japan. He was a kind of pioneer, who planted the seed in the ground of Europe. Nowadays, Buddhism (and Zen Buddhism in particular) quickly develops in Europe, supervised by you, Master Roland, and by other Masters. I would like to know more about Master Deshimaru's life, as he was considered as the Bodhidharma of modern times, and to know more about his work and his mission : in Japan, in France and in Europe especially ... and also how Buddhism (and particularly Zen) contribute to bring peace and harmony in family life and social life.*

**Roland Yuno Rech:** The first part of your question is related to the mission of Master Deshimaru and his work. If he was considered as the Bodhidharma of modern times, it is because - as Bodhidharma – he had faith, an extremely clear trust in the fact that the essence of the Buddha's Dharma abides in the practice of meditation. Therefore he arrived in Europe with his zafu - its cushion to do zazen - and his great trust in the practice of zazen. And he taught it every day, starting from the practice of zazen and saying: «Zazen itself is the awakening of Buddha. If you sit in zazen and if you practice with the right posture, the right breathing, the right state of mind, you are similar to Buddha. »

From this teaching of zazen, of meditation, he also transmitted the ordination, thus he transmitted the precepts, which are very important as you know it. He taught them in a modern way, which - for the Westerners – gave a deep meaning to these great values of Buddhism, values which express themselves in the precepts.

In the West, since almost one and a half century, because the traditional religions are not really followed any more, there is a crisis which we call the crisis of nihilism, meaning that the Westerners do not find any more a base to live their life following the precepts, following the ethics. The practice of zazen teaches that, from the practice of meditation; all the great precepts of Buddhism and all the religions find their foundation in the experience of the awakening of zazen.

For example, the respect for life and the non-violence is the first rule: "Do not kill". Nevertheless, all around the world there are wars and a lot of violence. How to make this precept "Do not to kill" really living? It cannot be only: "You should not kill". It is necessary to reach a point where we cannot kill anymore. It is not possible anymore, because when I am facing somebody else, I am completely in unity with this other person, I become the other person ... and this is possible thanks to the practice of meditation. If we abandon our

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attachment to our small ego, we can feel a total compassion for the others. At then, it is not possible anymore to make somebody else suffer, to hurt somebody and even less to kill him. In other words, a fundamental value which is the respect for life and the ban to kill finds his deep meaning through the experience of the awakening.

It is the same thing with the rule "Do not steal". In our society, there is a lot of stealing, even if stealing is not always the kind of stealing condemned by the law. To exploit the others is also stealing. In fact, our society works on the basis of greediness, stimulates greediness.

How can the practice of Buddhist meditation (and in particular of Zen), remedy to this greediness? It is not enough to tell people "You should not be greedy", or "You should not kill", or "You should not steal". It is necessary to realize that – in fact - we cannot possess anything. Therefore, to steal something to possess it, to take something for oneself, does not mean anything, it does not make sense. Because deeply, everybody is similar to you, everybody is a monk, because everybody was born without possessing anything and when we are going to die, we shall take nothing with us. It means that, in reality, we cannot possess anything. We can just borrow something and we can only share it. This understanding is the great remedy against the greediness: I cannot possess anything.

In addition to that, if we awaken to our real Buddha's nature, we realize our real inner wealth and we do not need many things to be happy. Shakyamuni Buddha was the happiest man of the world! He possessed nothing, only a bowl and a kesa. And it this is an extraordinary example.

A lot of people are afraid of losing their employment, their wealth, their situation. It is normal, because a lot of people have family, social responsibilities, but fundamentally, when we see the example of Buddha and of the Buddhist monks, we understand that we do not need to possess many things to be happy. I believe that it is a very deep teaching for our world. Thanks to the practice of meditation, we understand the first two rules "Do not to kill" and "Do not steal" in a very positive way and it gives a deep meaning to our life.

I believe that one of the causes of suffering - nowadays – for the human beings is the lack of meaning of life. People work and have many activities, but they do not really believe in what they are doing. The practice of the meditation restores a meaning to the fundamental values of all the religions and it is what we need to find a deep meaning to our life, through the inner experience of meditation. I could explain all the other precepts in the same way. Thus, the precepts give a meaning to life. They are not only prohibitions, but also they are positive values.

**Question:** *And how can the various schools of Buddhism cooperate to create harmony and bring peace in the world?*

**R.Y.R.:** I thought a lot about these questions with the Buddhist Union of France (of which I was one of the founders). At the beginning, we made many conferences together. There was a Buddhist Theravada, a Zen Buddhist, a Tibetan Buddhist and each spoke about Dharma in his own way and it gave a good impression to the public, it was very nice. But at the end, I believe that it is better that each school concentrates completely to teach Dharma with its own style, in its own way and concentrates especially to teach the essence of its own tradition...as made Master Deshimaru made it with Zen.

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For the West in particular, it is important that the Buddhism should not be presented under a too "oriental" angle, with ceremonies, with the connotation of an "oriental rite ". Master Deshimaru always taught very simple forms and always originating from zazen, from meditation.

Obviously we can organize again meetings, conferences with several masters, monks, nuns, of various schools ... I suppose that - here in Belgium- there is a Belgian Buddhist Union which can make it, and thus it is good to participate, it is good to show a united front, because often religions are in competition and want to show that they are better than the others; thus it is very important. It was the very teaching of Shakyamuni to say: "It is completely necessary to respect the religion of others". If we criticize the religion of others, it is very bad for our own religion. The members of a religious order have often a kind of arrogance: they believe that their own practice, their own way, their own religion is superior, is the best. "Zen is the best!" If we say that, it is not good! It is completely necessary to respect all other ways and to understand what each can bring.

I like very much studying the sutra of Theravada. Theravada and Zen are close, because they are very simple, pure. Not too many rites, not too many forms. They concentrate on the main point. What is very important is not creating separations between the monks and the laymen. For example, in Thailand, I was impressed by the fact that a lot of people become monks during one or two years, even people who have a very good job, doctors, lawyers. They stop and during one year, two years, they become monks. In this way, the monks and the laymen can have many exchanges. In Europe, the Zen monks are not very different from laymen. They have to work (Master Deshimaru wished that the monks work in the social world) but he wished also that they give priority to the Dharma. It is difficult. It is always necessary to try and find the best compromise. But it is very strong, because it means that there is an exchange between the practice of Dharma and the social world. In Asia, for example, the laymen help the monks to eat, by giving fuse, by giving alms, and the monks teach the Dharma, it is an exchange. In Europe, it is a little bit different. Of course, the monks have to teach the Dharma, but the monks do not depend on laymen to eat. They have to work, what means that they share the same difficulties in the social life than the laymen. But they work with another state of mind, not with the ambition to succeed, to become rich, to have a superior position, but only to do a service to the society through their work. And that is a difference. I think that it is interesting to think about all these aspects. The Theravada monks really show the most traditional and authentic image of what was the Buddha, through the precept of poverty, of possessing nothing. And this is a very good example for the Westerners, who are very materialistic.

**Question:** *Thank you very much to you, Master Roland, to Master Deshimaru, thanks also to honourable Jacques, thanks to you all who organized this sesshin, thanks to Brother Olivier who allowed me to come here. In the future, I will inform the people so that they practice the opening of the heart and of the mind, and will understand our brothers and sisters who are working for the Dharma, more and more.*