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# Important doubts

## **Mondo with Roland Yuno Rech - Grube Louise, September 2018**

**Question:** *Yesterday, you were talking about the necessity to ask questions when in doubts. I wondered how we can know which doubt has to be clarified or not. Wouldn't it be right to have some doubts, because it means we keep an open mind? To what extent could conviction be a form of habitual thinking that could lock us up? On the other hand, which are the important doubts that could poison our practice?*

**Roland Yuno Rech:** For example, doubts about the way of practicing and the state of mind in zazen. If it is not clear in which direction we should concentrate during zazen, it completely poisons the practice. We can practice for 20 years without ever finding peace of mind in zazen, because we have the impression that it is not right for thoughts to appear during zazen and then we fight against these thoughts. One can experience a "fighting- zazen" for years, and this is not at all the meaning of the practice of zazen. There are important doubts: we must ask ourselves if we practice well, because there is a right way to practice.

But there may also be people who do the opposite. They think that, in zazen, it is good to have extraordinary experiences and they wait for enlightenment, or they look for special states of mind. In the past, some hippies smoked joints before doing zazen. They hoped to enter a modified state of consciousness that was – for them - interesting. In this case, one must doubt. Is it right to do that? Or is it wrong?

And it is also very important to doubt your own ego. Our ego exists, it is a mental construction. But often it exceeds its function excessively. Instead of simply being a reference point for our identity in human relations with others, it sometimes becomes for us the center of the world. We become very egocentric and that is a mistake. Questioning this function of the ego as the center of the world is important, because it is only the center of "our own little world". But it is also a gateway to awakening.

If we encounter illusions, we must doubt about them, because if we take our illusions for reality, we cannot evolve. In this case, doubt can be very salutary. You have to observe your mind and ask yourself: "Am I deluding myself or not?" For example, we can believe that we have reached the awakening and - in fact - be deluded about being awoken. We must then question this feeling: "Have I really achieved enlightenment, or is it just an illusion?" I believe that here doubt is necessary. Someone who seeks the truth must question the traps he encounters. And this is why I have written a book on "Traps on the Way".

Therefore, it is true that doubts have a purifying, cleansing function, they cleanse the mind of all the illusory beliefs that clutter it and prevent it to reach a real awakening.

There are all sorts of attachments which can arise when we practice Zen, for example in the relationship with the Master. One must look at one's attachments and question them, to be able to abandon them.

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But there are also very harmful doubts: if we doubt the teaching, or if we doubt the practice. Then, we no longer have any desire to make any effort to practice. Or if we doubt that it is important to awaken to the deep dimension of our life and we think it is just better to enjoy life and all the pleasures imaginable ... Then we should really question these kinds of doubts.

One day, a man was practicing zazen in the dojo of La Gendronnière and Master Deshimaru was doing a kusen on *mushotoku*. The Master said that there was nothing to obtain in Zen. And the man suddenly stood up, went out of the dojo and ran away: "If there is nothing to obtain, I have no reason to stay here. So, I'm leaving!". He came back a few days later, but at that time, he had a deep doubt ... but it was a bad doubt.

There are also doubts that prevent us from practicing. For example, if we have doubts about the sangha, about what's the point of going to the dojo or to a sesshin, or if we doubt things that are fundamental to the practice. Also, if we have doubts about the *gyoji*, that is to say that zazen should not be just a few moments spent in the dojo, but our whole life, a constant practice in daily life. Or if one has doubts about the teaching, it is also impossible to practice.

It's a vicious circle, because - as we then don't practice anymore - the practice is "reduced to a small cherry tomato", as Kodo Sawaki used to say: it doesn't shine in our lives and becomes then something very limited. At that moment, we don't feel the benefits of the practice, and after a while we stop, because "zazen is nothing at all". We have to be careful with this kind of vicious circle, with all doubts which prevent us from practicing really, deeply, forcefully, because they maintain doubt.

All doubts which prevent us from deepening the practice are stupid. But the doubts that question our false beliefs and illusions about our practice and our ego are right.

In other words, we need to be able to discern what is "good doubt" and what is "bad doubt". And if you are not sure, you can talk to your Master or a more experienced disciple: "I have a problem, I have a doubt. What do you think about it?"

And this is where the sangha can also be of great help and give advice, the advice of the Elders.