
Which attitude to adopt when facing war and fear?

Mondo with Marc Chigen Estéban - Godinne, March 2022

Question: *I wanted your opinion, as a Zen master, on the current situation, which is very worrying (editor's note: the person refers to the war in Ukraine). How can we understand it? How can we deal with the fear we may feel about the deterioration of the situation in Europe?*

Marc Chigen Estéban : As a Zen master and as an individual, I'm worried too; I'm not worried about Zen practitioners of course, but about people who behave badly in the world! I think we all feel some kind of fear or anxiety about the current situation and this fear manifests itself more or less clearly, but it is real and justified.

I think that the best remedy against fear and anxiety is action. Because if you let yourself be completely overwhelmed by anxiety, it freezes you, and that's worse than anything.

It seems to me that, for us, there are two main ways to act.

The first is to keep faith, trust in the practice and to continue to practice by dedicating the merits of this practice to suffering beings, and also to keep faith in the fact that we do not practice in vain. We cannot save the world alone, but we can help the world. This is the first type of action.

The second type of action is, of course, to act and directly help the people who are suffering, to act in our daily life. This can take many forms: the form of a fuse, donation of money or necessities, and collections in this sense are currently being organized to help people who are in the middle of a war. This is a way of acting quickly. Sometimes acting is also demonstrating, to show your disapproval if it can be useful, but the basic condition for this is to demonstrate peacefully. Acting can also mean talking to people who are deeply distressed, to help them move from distress to action! And there are still many ways to act in our daily life to help peace in the world. But I think the first thing to do at the moment is to give, especially through the structures that already exist and that organize and channel this aid in wartime. Another action that is starting now (and will probably last) is welcoming. I think that people who have a deep and committed spiritual practice here have a direct or indirect role to play. They may have a direct role in welcoming people in distress, but they also have a long-term role. Because we have seen that when people are expelled from their country by conflicts, there can be a great movement of solidarity that manifests itself quickly, and this is really very good. But sometimes things get complicated when this situation becomes a long-term situation. It seems to me that the action of people committed to a spiritual path is not only to be in the emotion of the moment, but also to be prepared to help in the long term, and to keep a calm discourse in the long term. It seems to me that here we also have a role to play.

Unfortunately, we can't save everyone alone. But we really need to have faith in the fact that the practice of zazen is beneficial, including for world peace. I will quote Master Niwa Zenji. For those who don't know him, he was the head of the *Sotoshu*, the "Zen pope", so to speak. He came to France to certify Master Deshimaru's teaching after his death, and it was him who -

among other things - gave the transmission, the *shiho*, to Roland. Doing so, he certified the lineage of Master Deshimaru, who had not had time enough to do so before he died.

I was told that a journalist interviewed him on that occasion and asked him this question: "What could Zen be used for?"

And he said, I believe: "To establish world peace".

The reporter asked: "How?" and Niwa Zenji replied: "If all human beings did thirty minutes of zazen every morning, I'm convinced that all the wars in the world would stop right away."

Unfortunately, not all human beings do thirty minutes of zazen each morning, but we do it and we must continue. It's a small drop in an ocean of compassion. And it's also important to keep in mind that we don't practice for ourselves, but to relieve the suffering of all beings. The fact of simply thinking about it, even for a few seconds after having done zazen at home for example, it influences our mind ... In addition to the practice of zazen it also influences our posture in daily life. And even if we can't measure this fact, it helps us and it helps others.

This is what I think... and I also think that we should not get too angry. This is also one of the roles of the practitioners of the Way. That doesn't mean not to be offended, not to be indignant, but not letting yourself be carried away, overwhelmed by anger, anger against the situation that is happening at the moment, and also anger, hatred, against those who are at the origin of this situation. And that is difficult. But one of the ways to exemplify a bodhisattva life is not to get angry, not to be guided by anger, because - as you know - anger is a poison. So, against the worst kind of human beings, you have to act, but try not to let yourself be invaded by anger and not generate hatred.