
The relationship between master and disciple

Mondo with Roland Yuno Rech - Godinne, November 2021

Question: *Could you tell us what the master-disciple relationship is for you?*

Roland Yuno Rech: Its aim is to try to deepen together the practice of zazen. I think that, in the master-disciple relationship, it is necessary to avoid too much emotional attachment. What fundamentally constitutes the relationship between a master and his disciple is really this aspect of sharing together the practice of zazen and the deepening the Dharma.

We should avoid too much veneration; we should also avoid idealizing the master. We should consider that we are all “companions on the Way”. The master, of course, has more experience, but through the questions of the disciple, he is also helped by the relationship. They exchange together and the disciple also stimulates the master's practice with his questions.

There is also the question of the plurality of masters in the sangha, and people often wonder how to choose a master. And is it really necessary in fact to follow a master? Many questions arise.

The importance of following a master is that you get to know yourself better and that you are then able to avoid following your own self too much. People who want to practice alone or practice without a master may run the risk of deluding themselves about their own practice and their own realization, and consequently of stagnating in a kind of self-satisfaction.

On the other hand, another problem with not following a master is that you remain prisoner of your doubts. Doubt has some beneficial effect, which is the ability to question oneself (it is important to be able to doubt), but on the other hand it is also a formidable brake in the progression on the Way. If one does not have confidence in the practice or in the teaching, one tends to hesitate and not invest enough. And without investing oneself sufficiently because of the doubts, one maintains these doubts, develops them, and therefore prevents oneself from being stimulated.

There is therefore a happy medium to be found between belief and faith. Belief is something that should be questioned in order to verify its validity, and the validity of a belief is what is verified in practice and which allows to reach the right faith.

At the beginning, we tend to be more in a kind of belief, believing that zazen is good because we received explanations about its different aspects, about the merits of zazen. We believe in zazen because it stimulates us to practice.

The relationship with a master allows us to go from this stage of belief to the stage of faith. Faith is what results from a practice that is right: we could and still can experience its benefits, and not only because we trust the master, because we believe what he says and that it helps us to practice.