
The Middle Way

Mondo with Roland Yuno Rech - Grube Louise, January 2013

Question: *Could you please explain the notion of "Middle Way"? For me, it means that I move between two things, but if we talk about "the middle", it means that we exclude the extremes.*

Roland Yuno Rech: Oh no, not at all!

Question: *But then, what does "Middle Way" mean?*

R.Y.R.: It is the way that embraces the extremes, that realizes that the extremes do not exist separately from each other, that they have no existence of their own, that they only exist together. Therefore, one cannot choose one side only, because one side does not exist without the other side. So, the Middle Way is the way that encompasses all dualities.

More precisely, what the Buddha called "the Middle Way" meant for him two things.

Firstly, what is more commonly called "the Middle Way" (i.e. what he talked about at the Benares Sermon) is the middle between two extremes, which are : excessive asceticism, mortification, (which does not lead to liberation), and the other extreme, the search for all sensual pleasures, a very materialistic life, (which does not give true happiness either). So, in his first teachings, the Buddha said: "I teach the Middle Way: neither asceticism nor mortification. An equilibrium..."

But very quickly afterwards, he deepened his teaching by explaining that the Middle Way was neither nihilism, nor eternalism. When he lived, there were two kinds of beliefs: there were people who believed - as some still do today - that at death everything disappears, that there is nothing left, except nothingness, or annihilation. The Buddha always refused this nihilistic vision of existence.

On the other hand, people who did not believe in nihilism believed that there was an eternal *atman* that continued after death. In other words, the body dies, but the soul survives eternally, always the same, identical. And this was for the Buddha another extreme, equally false and harmful.

What he called "the Middle Way" is the understanding of interdependence, that is to say, of causality. "This exists, therefore that will exist". Nothing exists without a cause and therefore there is a constant transformation, a constant evolution ... There is nothing fixed, nothing eternally fixed, and - at the same time - nothing that absolutely disappears. In other words, at the moment of death, one does not return to nothingness, but there is simply a transformation of life. In other words, the Middle Way is neither the extreme of nihilism, nor the extreme of eternalism.

Question: *When somebody talks to me about the Middle Way, I have the impression that first, I have to take the extremes into consideration ...*

R.Y.R.: Yes, of course! But “the middle” does not exist without “the extremes”. It exists in relation to the fact that there are extremes. And even one extreme does not exist without the other extreme. For example, night does not exist without day, death does not exist without life. Therefore, everything that exists, exists only in relations of interdependence, and the environment itself exists only in relation to extremes. In other words, the Middle Way is to recognize that nothing exists on its own, independently of the rest.

Everything that exists, especially life, is only relationships. And currently, all the most advanced sciences confirm this fact ... For example, absolute vacuum does not exist: quantum physics has fully understood that what we called "the vacuum" is ultimately energy. And energy is relationship. So, everything that exists is relation.

The illusion is to believe that there is something separate. We have never seen anything separate, in reality. This is the great Law of existence. And when we speak of emptiness, we simply mean that there is nothing separate. Therefore, we speak of the emptiness of the illusion of believing that ourselves, our ego, exists independently of the rest.