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# On the Way with Master Deshimaru

## Speech for the 40th anniversary of Master Deshimaru's death, by Roland Yuno Rech – La Gendronnière, April 2022

In 1971, disappointed by politics and the Catholic religion, I left Europe in search of a Way that would allow me to realize the meaning of my existence. The Christianity of my childhood was based on beliefs, but did not offer me a path to realize the values it proposed. Heaven after death still doesn't appeal to me. Politics, polluted by the attachment to the ego and power of its leaders, always ends up betraying its promises. So, I only choose the lesser evil.

When I discovered the practice of zazen at Antaiji, my question about the meaning of life disappeared, replaced by a joyful confidence in the Way that was opening up before me... As I did not wish to continue practicing in a Japanese temple, when I learned that there was a great Zen master in Paris, and that he was very strong and very funny, I immediately decided to go and find him.

After an interminable trip on the Trans-Siberian Railway, I finally met Master Deshimaru who was leading a week of Zen practice in Zinal. My first contact with him was his knee on my back and his hands pulling back my shoulders to straighten my posture.

My first zazen at Antaiji had plunged me into a great whirlpool of emotions, from which I emerged from bottom up: it was the experience of a here and now where nothing was missing or in excess, except the risk of becoming attached to it.

My first zazen with Sensei was more down-to-earth: a return to the normal conditions of body and mind, or as he constantly taught us: nothing special. But this "nothing" - when we accept it - is the source of a deep peace of mind which allowed me to go through these 50 years of practice with the sangha with a certain serenity. However, thinking of Ryokan, who said about his own experience: "*Yesterday a silly monk, today nothing new*" I'm working above all to continue to clear up my illusions while continuing zazen with confidence.

Thinking about the ten merits of zazen that Sensei often talked about, I sometimes ask myself what I have achieved from them and I consider them as stimulating questions:

- Which illusions are dissipated?
- Has the mind of attachment weakened?
- Have influences lost their power?
- Has fear vanished?
- Has the spirit of compassion flourished?
- Has my patience increased?
- Is wisdom manifesting itself?

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My faith has really deepened, but not to the exclusion of all doubts, as all these question marks above still show it. These questions are an opportunity to examine my practice and to repent of its inadequacies. But it is rather stimulating, as is for me this meeting.

Master Deshimaru had the art of disturbing us in what could have been a kind of quietism. He shared with us his concern about the crisis of our civilization, and his confidence in the fact that the practice of zazen is its fundamental remedy, because it has the power to "heal the mind". This was the title of the colloquium organized by the AZI after the one on "No-fear" which followed Sensei's death.

This death had sown doubts in some people about the continuation of his mission. As I had left my job in the industry to better follow him, my availability allowed me to help in the creation of many new dojos in Europe. This activity helped me also to mourn his death, which was one of the most painful events of my life. The continuation of the *gyoji* that he taught during his last summer camp still allows me to feel him alive in my heart 40 years later. And for that, I am infinitely grateful.

I did not feel the need to create a monastery, which is certainly a place conducive to teaching, but I feel that the monastery is wherever I practice the Way, as the most important activity of my life, without needing to ritualize it.

Today I live in Nice where I practice and teach the Way of Zen daily, which I also continue to transmit during sesshins, organized in particular at La Gendronnière by the AZI and by the ABZE, in France and in neighbouring countries.

During these last years, I have transmitted the *shiho* I received from Niwa Zenji to several monks and nuns, whom I believe have the capacity to keep alive the zazen that Sensei transmitted to us during 15 years, the zazen he asked us "to continue eternally", according to the very last words he said to us 40 years ago.

Thank you for your attention and my best wishes for your practice.