
Gyoji at Buchenwald

Teisho of Inès Stegewartze at Buchenwald (October 2017).

When I decided to make a teisho here in Buchenwald, it was clear for me that its subject had to be why it is so important to practice in this specific place.

In 2001, Heinz-Jürgen and I launched this practice here to Buchenwald. This practice constantly evolved over a period of 16 years, through our own growing experience, through the experiences of the participants, through the meeting with people who survived after the camp and with people who work in this place. But from the start, it is zazen which is the source of our practice. The other forms of practice here were adapted over the years, but they were always and are today still inseparable of zazen.

The practice of zazen already existed before Buddha Shakyamuni; it was transmitted to us by our Dharma predecessors and it will still exist after us.

To practice here in Buchenwald enormously widened my way of really following the Buddha's way and to really incarnate the Bodhisattva's vows.

This teisho is going to deal with the gyoji of the practice, which realizes itself in an infinite ways in space and time.

I suggest you to listen to this teisho as being the current state of my understanding of the Buddha's Dharma and as my current vision of reality. Reality cannot be expressed, we can just experience it.

What is Gyoji?

Master Dogen brought the way of Zen, which we practice today in Europe, from China to Japan in the first half of the XIIIth century. His main work, the Shobogenzo, gathers theoretical speeches and instructions for practice, written mainly for monks. He dedicated two chapters to gyoji.

In the Shobogenzo, gyoji is translated by the expression "preservation of the pure practice". Gyo is the pure practice, the pure way of doing, the pure way of acting. Ji means protecting or maintaining: therefore "the preservation of the pure practice". Master Deshimaru, who brought the way of Zen we practice from Japan to Europe 50 years ago, translated gyoji by the expression "to repeat the practice" or "to keep practicing".

Gyoji is also described as "the circle of the way" which is made by the preservation of the pure practice of Buddha and the patriarchs and continues without neither beginning nor end. This circle, this practice of the way without beginning or end, means that there is no separation between our practice and our action; we do not practice to awake, it is our practice which is the expression of our awakening. Practice and action interpenetrate and are the expression of the pure practice.

Master Dogen says in Shobogenzo Gyoji: "*the main part is that, when I practice, the whole earth and the whole sky are united with my action, in every ten directions and in a perfect way.*"

It means that our "experience-practice" today, here and now, is possible for us only by the transmission of this practice, by its preservation and by the repetition of Buddha's and the patriarchs' practice. And in the reverse, the practice of Buddha and the patriarchs is actualized by us here, today and now. This is what the circle of the way, the circle of the practice means. The practice without any interruption.

So, our practice here in Buchenwald is a part as well of this circle, because we actualize here, moment after moment, the pure practice of Buddha and the patriarchs.

What are we practicing?

In his teachings, Master Dogen always gave the greatest value and an essential importance to the experience of zazen. But he valued also the action in daily life a lot. He saw these two points as definitely linked.

In what follows, I would like to explain the essential points of our zazen practice, but also to connect them each time with our action, with our action here to Buchenwald.

Shikantaza

Shikan means "only", "completely" or - as Heinz-Jürgen says - "without residue". Za means "sitting". Thus shikantaza means "to be only sitting", "to sit completely", or "to sit without residue".

When we sit in zazen, we always go back to the concentration on our posture and the perception of our breathing. We are aware of the thoughts and feelings which emerge, but we do not follow them. We are one with each moment, we are wide-awake, completely attentive. We are content with being completely this moment, without adding anything, without rejecting anything. When we practice with such attention, no word, no thought or painful action can be created. In such a place as Buchenwald, where so many pains were produced by words, thoughts and actions, shikantaza is a practice of a great help.

But they are also the fact of taking the meals together, the ceremonies, the recitation, the prostrations, the work on the commemorative path and in the restoration workshop, the listening to others in the circle where we share our experiences, the reading of the names of the victims... All this becomes shikan: *shikanmeal, shikanrecitation, shikansamu, shikanbeing ...* **only that**. During the sesshin in Buchenwald, we practice **that** all the time, together and in harmony with the other participants. All the phenomena which come to us during these days are opportunities to practice **only that**, without attachment, or without rejection.

Mushotoku

Mushotoku means that we don't practice to reach a personal goal, a personal benefit or a personal aim. To practice zazen means letting go of any form of will related to the ego. We do not use zazen to realize our wishes or our personal ideas. The pure experience of zazen exceeds

all wishes, all personal ideas. As we do not contaminate zazen with our personal intentions, it becomes vast, open, and universal.

Of course, there are reasons and personal motives, maybe also wishes, which pushed us to participate to this sesshin. They are all right: they brought each of us to take part to this sesshin, to practice zazen, to realize the Bodhisattva vows. But during the practice itself, at each moment, we let go of all this. Then zazen is really zazen; then, each action here in this place is only this action.

No will; only being one with what is, with what we do and with those with whom we do it. At each moment of the sesshin. Always here and now.

Hishiryō

Hishiryō means "beyond thought and non-thought", "to think from the inmost depths of the non-thought".

In our teachings, we always say: "let your thoughts go by", or "do not think ". Yet our brain produces constantly thoughts, when we are awake or asleep, in the same way our body constantly produces cells or rejects them. Thus it is impossible to voluntarily not think, because the wish to not think would be a thought. Thus what does hishiryō involve?

By not following our thoughts consciously, we create space in our mind. In this free space, thoughts can rise from the bottom of our inmost depths. But even those, we don't follow them; on the contrary, we go back to the concentration on our body and the perception of our breathing. When we don't neither "cling" to our thoughts, nor reject them, when we don't simply follow them, when we allow to let them go by as clouds in the sky, the mind becomes vast and open. Available for what is, without greed, without aversion. Integrating each moment such as it is.

It is exactly in a place as this one, which is not a neutral place or a protective place as a dojo, that it is important, during zazen and all the other practices, not to be taken by our thoughts or feelings. This doesn't mean that no thought or emotion will emerge in this place. We are aware of them, but we do not cling to them.

And as here in Buchenwald more thoughts and strong feelings can arise than during other sesshins, we have every evening a special gathering, a "meeting to listen". It is clear that this exchange is especially necessary in this place.

But even during these meetings, we practice mushotoku and hishiryō. We practice the practice of the pure listening.

The Bodhisattva vows

In our practice here, the idea is also the realization of the Bodhisattva vows. In the Mahayana tradition, are called Bodhisattva the beings which have reached the awakening of a Buddha (or try hard to reach it), but who give up entering nirvana as long as they have not helped all the sentient beings to liberate themselves from the circle of suffering, the samsara.

In our tradition, there is a bodhisattva ceremony. During this ceremony, we receive 10 precepts for our life and we promise to practice the Bodhisattva vows for the good of all beings. But we can also practice these vows without having taking part to this ceremony.

Morning and evening, we recite these four great vows:

- *Innumerable are the living beings. I make the vow to free them all.*
- *Inexhaustible are the illusions which create suffering. I make the vow to transform them.*
- *Immeasurable are the Dharma doors. I make the vow to penetrate them completely.*
- *Unlimited is Buddha's way. I make the vow to realize it completely.*

To make comments on these vows would exceed the frame of this teisho. But the vows show clearly that our practice has a very vast dimension, a dimension which goes beyond us and which has as focus the liberation of all beings, by practicing with empathy and wisdom.

If zazen is the source of our practice and action the realization of our practice, then the vows are the food and the way to make them work. And this for the good of all beings, without any separation, or any difference. This was already the practice of the Buddha and the patriarchs.

Buchenwald as dojo, the world as monastery

Most of us are used to practice in the silence and the concentration of a dojo. In the dojo, we are the least possible distracted from our practice. We make the proper gestures, we follow the dojo's rules and we abandon ourselves to zazen on our zafu. Then, we chant, do samu or study maybe some sutras together. We practice all the time in a nearly monastic structure shikantaza, mushotoku and hishiryō, as visitor, disciple and teacher.

But when we practice in the dojo, we are not separated from what takes place outside the dojo: we come influenced by our daily life and we go back to this daily life influenced by the spirit of zazen.

However, numerous practitioners have difficulties to keep the Zen mind and the Zen practice in their daily life, and therefore in preserving the gyoji. In my opinion, it is because they make a big difference between the practice in the dojo and the practice in the daily life. Of course, it is difficult to pursue the Zen practice within the frame of social relationships and in the environment which is based on differences, illusions and search for profit. But it is exactly there that our practice is the most useful. It is where suffering arise that we have to find the appropriate ways to act against it.

It is with the energy of a regular zazen practice in the dojo that we can achieve this. Both elements are interdependent and it is only together that they can be of use for the good of all being. The practice cannot depend on a place or time. If we really want to preserve a pure practice, then we have to practice independently of the place or the time. Everything is a field for practice and all the phenomena are Dharma doors we have to penetrate, as it is expressed in the third Bodhisattva vow.

So, Buchenwald became the place of our practice.

Bernie Glassman, an American Zen master, started to practice in places of great suffering as Auschwitz-Birkenau or in the street. In these places, the cure is possible only if we go beyond all differences, if we see the other in ourselves and ourselves the other. In a place of suffering, we put ourselves in situations which go beyond our imagination. We can only let go of our concepts and our ideas to be completely there. In this experience of non-separation, beyond the categories, there is neither "me", nor "the other one" anymore. This experience of the unity, of non-separation, influences our way of acting in words, actions and thoughts.

Master Deshimaru said, in his comment of Shobogenzo Gyoji: *"the real wisdom cannot be locked into categories. The person with great wisdom lives in the street, the person with limited vision take refuge in the mountain "*.

Buddha Shakyamuni also left his palace. He knew of old age, disease and death, and it overtook his imagination. He decided to find a way to go beyond suffering. Without this very practical contact with the world of the suffering, he would not have set off.

In our practice here in Buchenwald, we leave temporarily our protected space, the dojo where we usually go, but also our habits and our pattern of thoughts, of words and actions. Our protected space becomes a free space which allow us to look at reality as it is, at each moment. In unity, curative actions and in peace.

Buchenwald is for four days our dojo, the practice place where the gyoji of Buddha and the patriarchs is continued. But every place can be a practice place. The whole world can be our monastery.

The fourth Bodhisattva vow says: *" Unlimited is Buddha's way. I make the vow to realize it completely. "*

Buddha's way is infinite in time and in space. Our practice is infinite. We practice the circle of the way through and with Buddha and the patriarchs. And our practice in Buchenwald is part of the nowadays practice which should be protected.

I thank all the participants to this gyoji of the sesshin in Buchenwald, all the past, present (yourselves) and future participants, all the employees of the camp of Buchenwald, all the Buddha's and the Dharma patriarchs ... And in particular:

- Bernie Glassman Roshi, without whom this kind of practice in Buchenwald would not exist.
- The Zen master Roland Yuno Rech, who dedicates his whole life to the practice and to the teaching of zazen.
- The Zen master Heinz-Jürgen Metzger, whose practice integrates for me both the conservation of the tradition and the development and practice of new forms, in which he allows me to take part.

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- And, last but not least, the Buddha-Weg-Sangha, which realizes with me the gyoji of the practice.

That our practice here to Buchenwald be of use to the liberation of all beings, everywhere and any times.