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# Immersing oneself in the suffering of the world

**By Isolde Schnorbach of the Trier Dojo (Germany)**

Since November 1, 2019, I have been living in a new residential complex of 40 apartments. I had been looking for an affordable and age-appropriate apartment in Trier for a long time. Because of the proximity to Luxembourg, a wealthy country, it is difficult, as often, to find an affordable rental for a senior citizen. The housing cooperatives have long lists of applicants, but I was lucky enough to be accepted anyway, after applying as a member of one of these cooperatives. So, I got a new place to live, with lifetime tenancy rights and in a project that aims to offer a life in an intergenerational neighborhood.

One third of the inhabitants who moved into the complex in November 2019 and February 2020 came from the north side of Trier, a neighborhood that has the reputation of being the "Bronx" of Trier and therefore is a "problem area". One third of the inhabitants are immigrants and one third come from other parts of Trier or other parts of the country. The integrative and intergenerational approach is also reflected in the age of the inhabitants: 16 children and young people live under the roof equipped with solar panels, as well as 17 senior citizens over the age of 65. In some of the dwellings, all of which have been adapted for them, 20 disabled persons have found a home. There is also a café in the building, designated as the residents meeting place. In addition to the obvious advantages for myself, I was attracted by an "immersion" in a project which aims at the well-being of disadvantaged people and at the harmonious cohabitation between neighbors.

A few months later and under the conditions imposed by Covid-19, it became clear that residential projects, despite all good intentions, can nevertheless pose many problems for their inhabitants. I thought I could be a "bridge" for many people in the house, with the help of my Zazen practice and maturity. But in the first few months, I had to realize that I had immersed myself in a "lake of suffering" ... and that I had to be careful not to sink myself into this "lake of suffering" by becoming dissatisfied, frustrated like many of us by this or that which proves to be inadequate.

As they say in the Bodhisattva Vows: "Inexhaustible are the painful illusions". Here I am really learning what could be the meaning of these Vows.

After overcoming a period of disillusionment, I regained my optimism and I maintain the contact with the people who are doing their best to make this residential project a success. It is probably my high expectations of this project and also my arrogance, which made me doubt for a while ...

Shundo Aoyama says in 'Pflaumenblüten im Schnee' (1) ('Plum blossoms in the snow'): "We must take off our robes and go to the middle of the world. We must cry, suffer and laugh with people. This is how they will gradually become aware of the Dharma, the 'True Path', and how they will feel attracted by it".

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And of course, in reality, I too am constantly receiving help to cross that "bridge" over that "lake of suffering"...

*(1) Shundo Aoyama (2002) - Pflaumenblüten im Schnee – Aufzeichnungen einer japanischen Zen-Meisterin - Theseus-Verlag.*