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# Shikantaza - Mushotoku - Hishiryo

**By Heinz-Jürgen Metzger**

Looking back to the history of Zen, we can see five important Masters who created the causes for the development of Zazen from a Buddhist practice in a part of what is today India to a practice that exists now in most parts of the world:

- Bodhidharma brought the practice of sitting facing the wall from India to China,
- Eihei Dogen brought shikantaza, mushotoku and hishiryo from China to Japan,
- Taisen Deshimaru spread the practice of Zazen in Europe,
- Shunryu Suzuki and Taizan Maezumi did the same in the US.

But these Masters created only the causes, without continuous practice over centuries and teachings that spoke to those practicing, that dissemination would not have happened.

What causes shall we today create for the further development of Zen in Europe? To answer this question, I think it's important to take a more detailed look into what Master Deshimaru taught:

Master Deshimaru's basic teaching was about Zazen. He taught Zazen to Europeans who were not monastics, but people living professional lives in a civil society. Knowing that in Japan the practice of Zazen got almost lost due to the overwhelming importance of ceremonies in the monasteries, Master Deshimaru reduced the ceremonies to a minimum and didn't found a monastery (in contrast to Dogen, Suzuki and Maezumi), instead he built (together with his disciples) La Gendronnière as a temporary practice place for hundreds of his disciples from all over Europe.

In a time in which nationalistic tendencies grow all over Europe, the existence of an international sangha is a legacy more important than ever. The monasterizing and japanizing of the practice at La Gendronnière is a deplorable deviation from the vision of Master Deshimaru that also endangers the continuous existence of an international sangha whose main reason for existence is the shared practice of Zazen, not the participation in sophisticated rituals performed by specialised monastics.

Inseparable from the practice of Zazen is the Bodhisattva-ideal: We practice not to perfection ourselves (also it's a most welcome side-effect), but our practice is part of a much larger vision, that

is expressed in the Bodhisattva-vows. The life of a Bodhisattva is based on the realization that we have no separate existence, but are a changing part of a web of ever changing relations. By speaking of 'Bodhisattva-ceremony' instead of using the Japanese term jukai, Master Deshimaru pointed directly to the Bodhisattva-ideal. The importance of this ideal for Master Deshimaru is underlined by the fact, that the Four Vows, the Heart-Sutra and a dedication were the only texts recited regularly after the morning- and the evening-zazen. The precepts given and received during the Bodhisattva-ceremony are concrete guidelines how to realize the vows in the present moment.

In a time in which egotism and materialism risk to destroy not only human societies, but endanger all life on the planet Earth, acting as a Bodhisattva is of utmost importance. The

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Bodhisattva-ceremony gives every practitioner the chance to publicly commit himself or herself to this way of acting. The monthly Ryaku fusatsu offers the possibility to renew this commitment.

Zazen is a spiritual practice, not a means to reduce stress and live in a more relaxed way (this is only another most welcome side-effect of the practice of Zazen). The spiritual dimension of Zazen becomes visible in wearing the Kesa in its form of 5, 7 or 9 bands. The transmission of the Kesa and the teaching of the way to sew it, is a merit of Master Deshimaru.

In a time in which the spiritual orientation in industrialized and post-industrialized societies is fading away, wearing the Kesa is an important visible sign that there is a dimension that goes far beyond the limits of our individual personalities.

I see the practice of Zazen in a non-monastic and multi-national Sangha, the Bodhisattva-ideal and the Kesa as the most important parts of Master Deshimaru's legacy. We have to protect this legacy in our individual practice and in our practice as sangha. If one of these elements gets lost, our practice risks to lose (at least parts of) its liberating effect.

But to perpetuate the teaching of Master Deshimaru is not enough, we have to set the causes for further developments.

Let's be realistic: The practice and teaching of Zazen has no visible impact in any of today's societies. If we want the impact to grow, additional steps are necessary.

Most important seems to me the authorization of many (!) more women as teachers. The teaching of the dharma will stay incomplete as long as reality is only seen through male eyes and female experiences are not integrated.

At Master Deshimaru's death the disciples who became his successors were in their mid-thirties to mid-forties. To recommence the authorization of teachers in this age-group is necessary: Without confidence in the younger generation, in its capacity to practice and to teach, Zen in Europe risks to die of sclerosis.

Practicing Zazen, we study with and through our bodies. But at a time, where different approaches to Buddhism coexist, it is important for teachers to also have a sound knowledge of Buddhism, and as Zen-teachers especially of Zen-Buddhism. Humans are beings capable of asking questions. If Zen-teachers are not able to answer based on the dharma, people will turn to Buddhist schools and teachers able to answer their questions. Therefore qualified studies on different subjects need to be offered.

For a multinational sangha, it is important to unite not only in the silence of Zazen, but also in the shared practice of ceremonies. The lingua franca for the texts recited during ceremonies has to be Sino-Japanese. But for the traditional texts to really touch the hearts and minds of practitioners it is important to create translations that can be recited and to recite them on the local and national level.

Solidarity and commitment to social justice on all levels of society and in international relations seems to me a consequence of the Bodhisattva-ideal and the precepts. The sangha should support existing activities and create, if necessary, own activities to realize a juster society, without losing the concentration on its foundation: Zazen.

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Master Deshimaru taught shikantaza, mushotoku and hishiryo. He put all his energy in the practice of Zazen and in laying the basis for the development of Zen in Europe, without being attached to the success of his mission. Not being attached allows, to be open to what comes up at a certain moment and work with it. We may have ideas about what will be helpful for the further development of Zen in Europe, we may try to set causes for further developments, but let's not forget shikantaza, mushotoku and hishiryo!