
20th anniversary of the Brugge Dojo

By Jackie Butaye, head of the Brugge dojo (Belgium)

The history of the Dojo of Brugge

In 1996, I asked M. Roland Rech to be ordained nun, because I saw the necessity of starting a Zen dojo in my neighbourhood. I had been then practising the Zen meditation for 6 years in the dojo of Ghent and had been ordained Bodhisattva 2 years before.

In 1998, I found a space suited to practice twice a week. I knew this place, because I followed there a class of African dancing. It was a room of the parish of Brugge, in the street Jan Bonin, nice but where we had to install then dismantle our dojo every time.

I lived then 25 km away from the dojo and I travelled twice a week to Brugge.

At the beginning, Anne Dierckx helped me: she was the Responsible of the dojo of Koksijde and of Ghent, and she came to practice with us.

I had asked to my sister to sew some zafu and to fill them with the kapok of old cushions. I made a small altar with a statuette of Buddha, some incense and candles. I had a small wooden piece and a stick to accompany the Hannya Shingyo. As a "bell" for the beginning and the end of zazen, I knocked on a champagne glass.

Three people came to the first zazen; among them was Jan Vernieuwe, a friend of my African dancing class, with one of his friends and Peter Albrecht. Jan and Peter were faithful followers. Jan was ordained monk later. Peter is responsible for the zazen of Friday evening.

In the meantime, I moved to Brugge and it was easier for me to go to the dojo.

In 1999, M. Roland Rech visited our dojo and directed there a zazen day.

After that, since January 2001, we rented our own small premises in a former property of the parish. We practiced there until February 2016, 4 times a week. At least once a year, we organized a zazen day, directed by Flemish Zen monks. Later, we also organized weekends of zazen in the buildings of the Fathers of the Carmel.

During the transition towards our current location, we were able to practice at the Carmel: the Fathers left at our disposal their own meditation space (in the attic) until our own premises were renovated.

Thus, since the beginning of the dojo of Brugge in 1998, we occupy now our fourth location: the basement of a house at number 60 Magdalen Street. The owners (who live in the upper floors of the house, above the dojo), were so kind to rent us a part of their house.

We have been there now since May the 8th 2016 and we have - in the meantime - celebrated the inauguration of this new dojo. We hope to be able to stay there for a long time.

During all these years, the number of followers remained more or less stable. We are now a dozen and we have the possibility to practice 4 times a week. There are 4 Bodhisattva and one nun.

At the moment, Peter Albrecht leads the Friday evening meditation, Ivo Librecht the Monday evening zazen and myself the Sunday morning. There would be also a possibility to practice in the dojo on the Thursday evening, but we have not found yet somebody to lead this meditation.

There are approximately 6 people in our group who follow regularly sesshins in Godinne, with M. Roland Yuno Rech.

In the future, we hope to be able to organize more than zazen days, even sesshins and also to attract new followers.