
The legacy of Master Deshimaru

By P-O Kyōsei Reynaud

The celebrations of the fiftieth anniversary of the presence of Zen Soto in Europe, which took place at the Gendronniere from 12th to 14th May 2017, give me the opportunity to testify on the establishment of Zen Buddhism, and on the transmission of Master Deshimaru.

In zazen one does nothing in particular, one is completely present to the body and to the breathing. One simply lets the mind settle down by not following the thoughts that appear constantly. In zazen, one no longer seeks anything. This is really important, because zazen, sitting meditation, is not a way to achieve or to get something that we are lacking..

Zazen does not create anything

This is precisely what Mr. Deshimaru transmitted. This is what is called Shikantaza "just sitting". It's exactly like Master Dogen when he says he did not bring anything back from China, and that he came back to Japan empty-handed. Shikantaza is the practice of "being simply sitting," nothing exists apart from the reality of this sitting. You should simply surrender to this at every moment.

With Shikantaza, what Master Deshimaru also transmitted is Mushotoku, a practice without greed, without seeking to get something in return. This means being able to free ourselves from all our expectations. It is the art of freeing oneself precisely from what prevents us from being truly present to the reality of our existence instead of continuing to live in the narrow world of our representations, our beliefs.

Finally, what Deshimaru transmitted is Hishiryō "thinking from the depths of non-thought". That is to be able to abandon ordinary consciousness which is based solely on shiryō : the thinking mind, without seeking or taking refuge in fushiryō - non-thought. It is Hishiryō which arises spontaneously from correct practice. It is Hishiryō that transcends both thought and non-thought.

Master Deshimaru exactly transmitted Dogen's zen

Shikantaza, mushotoku, Hishiryō is zazen. It is zazen as it was transmitted not only by Master Deshimaru but by all the Masters of transmission. Zazen is practice-realization. The practice where nothing is missing. It is this practice that has been transmitted to us and that is being made real here and now when we sit in front of the wall with others.

During my first three-month retreat (Ango) in Japan, through this immersion in Zen and Japanese culture I realized Master Deshimaru's wisdom, in the way he adapted these traditional teachings to the mentality of Western practice.

Obviously Master Deshimaru was not the only one to transmit, share and teach this way in Europe. Other masters belonging to other lines were, and are still, very active.

I started practicing in 1984, two years after Master Deshimaru's death. At the Gendronniere, in the castle, on his grave, in the park and through his disciples, his presence was palpable then and still is now.

Roland Yuno Rech is my master, but I feel through him, like some sort of "grandson" of Master Deshimaru. Even though I did not know him physically, I grew up and am still growing up, nourished by zazen and the three treasures that he passed down and which his disciples in turn transmit.

Master Deshimaru did not pass on a dogma or beliefs, but a living and universal practice with the hope of helping westerners by reminding them of the vital necessity of realizing the spiritual dimension of their existence.

For this, after his arrival in Paris in 1967, Master Deshimaru developed and organized with his disciples, not only the practice of Zen meditation, zazen, but also that of the sewing of the kesa, the transmission of the precepts with the ordinations of Bodhisattvas and of monks and nuns, and finally the teaching of the main texts and sutras of Zen Soto Buddhism. He continued to do that until his death in 1982.

At present, the future of Zen continues to be actualized every day in the many places of practice with men and women who sit silently, with the teachers and masters who accompany them daily and through the various lines of transmission that have developed and that express the richness of this path.

Today, my anchor point, and what I share with others, is this living practice that is renewed daily, my fidelity to this essential foundation of my existence and my gratitude to the Buddha, the Patriarchs and the Masters who preceded me.

Wishing with all my heart that this is for the good of all beings.