
Being zen from morning to night

Par Silvia Leyer, workshop during Godinne's summer camp

In general we practise zen in the dojo and during sesshins. In our workshop we therefore started to think about what we do when we practise zazen or do samu in the dojo. We concentrate on our body posture, on our breathing, we pay attention to the gestures we make, to our words, to our mind. We try to fully experience the present moment.

Then, we asked ourselves why we do it. What is our motivation for going to the dojo and following the rules? Buddha Shakyamuni's motivation was to free himself from suffering. We used his motivation as an example to continue our reflection. We asked ourselves why we suffer, what we need to free ourselves from suffering, and , especially, what prevents us from freeing ourselves from suffering in our daily lives?

Often it's caused by daily routine, old habits, family or professional demands. And because we suffer as everyone else does, and it's always been that way, we think we can't change anything.

In our daily lives, we therefore need to always remind ourselves of our motivation for practising zazen. If this motivation is not only used for going to the dojo and registering for a sesshin, but is also there throughout the day, we're then more able to adapt what we do in the dojo to our daily lives, and to return constantly to the present moment. There are many moments when we can concentrate on our breathing, straighten our body posture : in the bus, when we're in a queue etc. Daily tasks, the moments when we eat, for example, can become an exercise to remind us of the unity of all things. When we prepare meals, we can remember the samu in sesshins and pay attention to being concentrated on what we're doing.

Then we considered several daily actions : What happens when we get up too early in the morning, when we're impatient, when we get angry? What are the consequences for me and for my environment? What do I need to change? Sometimes when we see clearly what is really happening, we don't even need to make a great effort to change our habits.

In zazen practice as in social life, effort is important. But when we constantly make too much effort, when we are too voluntaristic, we get exhausted. Effort is good to get practice started, but at some point the practice needs to support itself. So sometimes it's good to remind ourselves of Buddha Shakyamuni's teaching about the middle way : neither forcing ourselves, nor being negligent.

During the workshop the participants wrote thoughts, ideas, remarks on some cards. We posted them on the wall and considered them together. Often when we find ourselves in a difficult situation, we can ask ourselves the question: What is really important? What is really important, not from the ego or the ordinary mind's point of view, but from that of the clear mind of zazen. And it's this mind that we can develop more and more outside the dojo, from morning to night.