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# Leave home

**By Konrad Kosan Maquestieau**

## **What is an “Ango”?**

The Japanese word “*ango*” means *to dwell in tranquility* : 安 an = peace; 居 go = to dwell. However this peace is not what one would assume it is.

There are several types of angos : in Japan, traditionally it is period of three months where young monks withdraw from the world in order to get a training to become future head of temples. In Europe, within the AZI, Master Deshimaru introduced the ango as we know it to this day: nine weeks of intensive practice (split into six sessions) during the summer months at the Gendronnière. Recently the temples of Ruymonji and Kanshoji have started to organize their own angos that last from one up to three months, which are quite similar to the Japanese ones. A one-week ango is planned at the Gendronnière in 2013.

The main thing is that each time we completely leave our family life, social life, the work and all the ties that bind us to our daily routine, usual way of handling things, our organization, our habits, our karma. Already in his time, Buddha introduced this retreat during the monsoon season that made the roads impassable and travels impossible. He retired with his disciples in the forest, he stopped his travels, stopped begging for food, stopped teaching people in the villages and cities. There, far from the world and its bustle, his disciples gathered around him in order to deepen his teaching, memorizing the sutras, practicing zazen, the samus and *living in community*.

## **Follow 24/24/90**

The Japanese form has over-emphasised this aspect: over there the complete daily life of the ango takes place within the community. Personal space is reduced to the minimum: the monk does zazen, eats and sleeps on his 2m<sup>2</sup> tatami in a place called “Sodo”. In the “Shuryo”, the common space, separated from the Sodo, practitioners store their few personal belongings and withdraw there to study. The day is roughly organized in zazen times (morning and evenings), samus, meals, ceremony rehearsals and learning all the functions of the temple. Thus personal time is reduced to the minimum: about an hour each afternoon.

This was for me the most telling aspect of my experience of an ango. To my own surprise it wasn't the most difficult one. Living together all aspects of life (even the daily evening hot baths are taken together), to do zazen, eat, study, rest, all those “activities of the Way” created harmony and peace of mind among us, “unconsciously, naturally and automatically”. No effort was necessary, all it only took was: to follow the others, follow the sounds, follow the teaching of the godos, follow the ceremonies, follow zazen... *follow, follow, follow...* the Cosmic Order. It is all there is. But what a liberating force of awakening emerges from this experience!

## **What is the difference with our sesshin?**

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Almost nothing! I didn't learn or practise anything I didn't already know from our sesshins. Obviously the way of doing things is different: other food, other customs, other spaces, other forms in the ceremonies, other faces, other languages... But that is not essential. What Master Deshimaru, and after him, Roland Yuno Rech taught us is the truly complete practice. There is no need to go Japon to discover that.

The only difference is the length of the ango period and that we are really far away from home. In the chapter of the "*Shobogenzo Ango*", Dogen speaks about the ango as a "way to meet the buddhas and the patriarchs". This is only possible if we truly leave home. They can't be met in our self-centred cosy "cocoon", one must really *get out from there*.

And in the midst of that "getting out" one can find "the peace" in which it is possible to dwell.