
A voice

By François Loiseau

My meeting with Master Deshimaru was first of all a meeting with a voice, in 1975.

At this time I was living in Valenciennes in the North, and a friend brought me to the Pernety Dojo in Paris. I remember a place with many people at the morning zazen, with quite a lot of agitation before the bell was struck, and the difficulty of finding a space for yourself. All the more so as those who had certain habits seemed reluctant to change them. I think this phenomenon still exists a little.....

I had managed to find myself a place in a corner, and I was trying to cope with this posture I had discovered a short time before. A posture that I thought was fantastic, but difficult to hold for a long time.

I was there with my efforts with my knees and my lower back, dealing with my impatience, when suddenly I heard a deep cavernous voice, coming up from the hara and filling the entire space of the dojo. This sound completely captivated me, even though I understood nothing of what was said.....French, English, Japanese ? What was this voice talking about ?

Mouchotocou, ichirio ?

But the sound gripped me and accompanied me, guided me whilst the zazen seemed to drag.....

At the end of zazen everyone turned round for the ceremony and I saw Master Deshimaru other than in a photo : second shock ! A quiet force, imposing, even disturbing, and at the same time, a gentle expression, kind and full of humour.

There was that first ceremony, the expression of the brute force of zazen, free of liturgical artifice, but which seemed to me to transmit all the depth of a very old tradition.

After zazen, we met up at « Chez Tonton » the café on the other side of the street. I was sitting next to him, and I said to myself that it was like being next to a radiator when it's cold outside, and that it was really good to be simply sitting there.

Afterwards, every time that I met him, at sesshins, at summer camps, or in private meetings, he had the same quiet force, the frightening and kind force that I saw in him. But also, the humour. I remember that we laughed a lot at that time and Sensei wasn't the last to laugh. And yet, everything was serious, zazen, samu, but it was also light and natural.

Now it seems we have a little forgotten this aspect of Sensei's Zen, as if Zen had become blocked in its theatricalness to the detriment of creative spontaneity. But, and I insist on this, this spontaneity didn't mean that that we could do whatever we liked, and people who tried were severely reprimanded.

I have a few small memories, my little treasures : The noise of his scissors cutting the last lock of hair, the delicate scent of his green kesa when he passed behind us during zazen, his

expressions and his Zenglish, the imposing mass of his body moving with ease and control in the dojo and at the bar. And his look of profound and infinite compassion when you abandoned yourself to it.

Sensei ? A Rabelaisian warrior of the Way, and so deep, so deep.....