
Arrival of Master Deshimaru

By Patrick Parnien

I found the proposition interesting to bear witness to what Master Deshimaru represents to me, but at the same time it's a difficult thing to do. Because how can you talk about a person you never knew directly ? I don't think I can truly give a testimony but share a few impressions that have accompanied me in my meeting with the Zen Way and on my path on this Way.

In the arrival of Deshimaru in Europe there is first of all the undeniable reality that he transmitted the practice of Zen to Europe and allowed it to become firmly established here. And we discovered this Way thanks to that.

For my part, Master Deshimaru resonates, amongst other things with freedom. A freedom of style, a freedom of language, while at the same time transmitting the essence of Zen teaching. Master Deshimaru also resonates with intelligence, that is, the capacity that he had to « adapt » the Way, which had several centuries of history and « habits » and to extract from it, and transmit, its essence, so that it could be practicable for Western minds.

I think that he really understood the way the Western mind functions, and he understood the religious past, from which some of us have suffered, so he brought in the physical dimension, the body, which was necessary to integration of the Way – not just philosophical understanding.

And that shows to what extent he was free, inside I mean, and that he had an open-minded spiritual vision....

In any case, this is what allowed me to deeply discover this Way and to remain. And for that I am grateful to him.

I think he embodied a contemporary Zen ; and from testimonies of people who knew him and his teachings directly , I felt his desire to transmit a universal spiritual practice.

Besides the fact that zazen practice touched my heart, this vision that I felt, or more exactly that I sensed, in his teaching, nourished my spiritual search.

I don't know why, but very young I had an unreasoned attraction to meditation, and my meeting with Zen practice was a decisive factor on my spiritual path. And the way in which Master Deshimaru transmitted it, the way he knew how to simplify the form whilst keeping the main axes, allowed me to approach a spiritual Way which puts meditation at the center through tradition.

It's very likely that if he had brought the practice of the Way in its original Japanese form, even whilst being deeply touched by zazen, I wouldn't have been able to commit myself so strongly to this Way. And I am also very grateful to him for this.

What I found inspiring in him, always through his teachings, is the force, which he seemed to emit, to transmit his unshakeable faith in zazen practice.

At the beginning of my discovery of Zen, what also struck me was his emphasis not only on zazen practice, but on a practice which is embodied in daily life. On the fact that the spiritual Way is expressed in the smallest of gestures, in the smallest of actions. I very quickly grasped this teaching because intuitively I felt its truth and that accompanied me and still accompanies me now.

To finish, I would simply say that we have all met with Zen practice thanks to his arrival in Europe and all the energy that he dedicated to transmitting it. And that is an undeniable fact which shouldn't be forgotten and calls for a profound.