
Vast emptiness and nothing holy

By Roland Yuno Rech, Jodo for Kessei Ango, 2009

“What is the holy truth of Buddhism?”

“Kakunen mushō, vast emptiness and nothing holy.”

Kakunen, the vast emptiness, the ultimate reality, is beyond all possible grasping, beyond the holy and the profane. Master Joshu replied more soberly with “mu”.

What is truly holy is that which liberates us from all our mental fabrications and discovers kakunen, the mind vast as the sky which is not bothered by the passing of clouds.

But isn't that already saying too much?

If one believes one understands the holy truth, one falls into error. If one doesn't understand, one merits thirty kyosaku blows. However, there is a not-knowing which is beyond understanding and not understanding and which is the great liberation. Tosan did not preoccupy himself with the Four Noble Truths. This did not prevent him from being joyous like someone who's found a brilliant pearl on a heap of garbage.

As soon as one creates a difference, as minute as it might be, an unlimited distance separates the sky and the earth. Then, one makes much effort to bridge the gap that one created by oneself. Some even leave on a pilgrimage.

Abandoning all desire of grasping is simpler: Not only will one thus be freed from being fooled by others, but one will realize that the place where the Way exists is here. When I went to Niwa Zenji's temple, I asked one of his close disciples: “What did master Niwa transmit to you?”

He answered: “Concerning the Dharma, master Niwa did not teach me anything and I'm infinitely grateful to him for that. Arigatai koto desu.”

These words impress me now as much as they did then and remind me of master Tosan who respected master Ungan a lot for the same reason. When he took leave of him, he said: “When later someone asks me what your teaching was, what am I to answer?”

Master Ungan said: “Reply: it is simply this.”

We are never separated from this. This is what master Obaku called the marvelous silent coincidence. Our practice allows us to realize it by abandoning what creates obstacles to realization.

And at the end, one can see that there is nothing to be abandoned, because nothing has been grasped. That is what the hands placed in *hokkaijo-in* mean. By placing one's mind there, comes the moment where as Niwa Zenji says, in this dojo:

“*Zazen no takini, Otokewa Otokewo miru*”: during zazen, it is Buddha who looks at Buddha.

In that way, the *I shin den shin* transmission is realized. And I make the vow that it will continue to take place and make us live Dogen's awakening in this poem:

*“Walking in this illusory world similar to a dream,
Not even looking at the traces I may have left,
A cuckoo's song invites me to go home.
Hearing it, I tilt my head to see who asks me to come back.
But don't ask me where I am heading,
Because I travel in this limitless world
Where each of my steps is my home”.*