
A call to awaken...

By Michel Jigen Fabra, Poitiers (France)

Here is the configuration and state of mind of the Poitiers Zen Dojo experienced during this lockdown. Confined with a few monks and nuns, we wished to further intensify the practice to help soothe the suffering.

This period is, to say the least, astonishing in many ways, beyond its dramatic character. It seems to me that it calls for awakening, as so many times life has suggested to us, and that it is an invitation to plunge into the present moment.

All the aspects are there, both visible and invisible, in economic, health, and social fields ... In addition to the evidences that this crisis brings to light, I cannot help but establish religious and spiritual parallels.

For Christians, the confinement coincided with the observance of Lent: diminish our needs, diminish our greed, diminish our arrogance. For us Buddhists, it is the possibility to switch from the Three Poisons to the Three Treasures. It is – for all - a movement towards communion.

On March the 25th, the Christians celebrated the Annunciation. Master Dogen wrote a chapter in the Shobogenzo called Juki, "the Annunciation". What if it was for us the announced moment? The announcement of our awakening, of our duty to awaken. "Annunciation is none other, says Dogen, than the smile on the awakened face of Mahakasyapa". Annunciation is none other than births and deaths, the "passing and coming".

And then, on April 12th, it was Easter Sunday. Easter means the passage, to pass over. It is Jesus' passage from death to life. I feel in the depths of my heart this need to move, to move from the absence of self to the presence of self, from selfishness to altruism. To go from here to here, from now to now.

Remaining confined, staying at home, not moving ... For us Zen practitioners, it is almost a signal, a stimulus to persevere on this Way that is ours. With this imposed rule not to go out, not to disperse ourselves, this period of confinement offers us an unprecedented possibility of recollection.

Blaise Pascal said: "For men, all misery comes from one thing, which is not knowing how to remain at rest in a room". Well, we know how to do this: sit on our black cushion, go back to our cell and abandon all our luggage, let all our burdens dissolve, like phoenixes rising from our ashes.

Let's stay at home, let's make the revolution, the inner revolution! This possibility is now given to us. Let us put an end to absurdity and grow in wisdom and compassion. Let us, we practitioners of Buddha's Zen, participate and cooperate in his work. This time to stop everything is precious: let us use it to think deeply, to grow, to mature, to awaken.

We have been given an extraordinary opportunity to go back home, to find ourselves deep inside ourselves.

Let us continue zazen together.

Gasshō: