
The New Year's opportunity

By Roland Yuno Rech, Nice, January 2018

One day, two monks went on pilgrimage. They reached the bank of a flooded river, but there was no raft to cross it. So, they decided to find the river ford, to find a place where they could cross on foot. And there they met a young girl who didn't dare to cross the river alone. She asked the monks for help and one of them agreed to carry her on his back. They entered the ford and were able to cross. When they arrived on the other side, on the other bank, the monk put the girl down and she thanked him ... Then they continued their pilgrimage.

But the other monk was remaining silent. After a while, he said: "You should never have carried this girl on your back, because a monk is not allowed to touch a woman. You have committed a serious breach of the Precepts". The other monk replied: "I put the girl on the shore, but you are still carrying her in your head".

Very often, we carry in our heads all sorts of things relating to the past which no longer have any relevance, but which clutter our mental and prevent us from being present to the new life of each moment. So, on the occasion of the New Year, it is time to concentrate on truly renewing our lives.

Of course, there are some good habits that we must keep (or even create), because habits make life easier. You don't have to think constantly about what you should do, or how you should do it. But habits should not become routine. The beginning of a year is an opportunity to observe one's life - especially from the practice of zazen - and to notice all our obsolete habits, to find a fresh and new mind.

The zazen mind is the mind which is capable of letting go at any moment of all its mental fabrications. Thanks to the concentration on the body, we are always perfectly " here " and on the other hand, the breathing to which we are attentive brings us back to the " now " of our real life. Practicing zazen means constantly finding a new mind, aware of the always new reality.

But zazen should not be limited to the time we spend in the dojo. Inspired by zazen, we can continue in our daily life to go back periodically to the concentration on the body, and not only when we sit in zazen, but also when we walk, when we eat, when we work.

Go back to your body, go back to your breathing, go back to the here and now... Drop what has nothing to do with the actual real life and thus, be able to be creative in your life. Let routine drop and invent new ways of functioning, more in harmony with what zazen teaches us ... That is to say a life in unity with our environment, a life where we fully assume our interdependence with all beings, and therefore a more responsible life, more meaningful, fuller of a true meaning: the sense of harmony with all beings.

This is the meaning of the practice of the Way, and all the phenomena of our daily life are opportunities to practice it. Thus, "everywhere" is a dojo, "always" is the time of practice. All

phenomena are a *koan* that reveal the truth to us, as long as our mind remains open and receptive to welcome it. This is what the regular practice of zazen each morning allows.

And since it is the period of the end-of-year wishes, I wish each of you to continue this morning practice and to continue it throughout the day, to be able then to radiate the spirit of zazen around you, for the good of all beings. A spirit of peace, joy and freedom.

With my best wishes for the New Year.