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# Responsibilities during a sesshin

**With Roland Yuno Rech, Godinne, November 2015**

*Q: During the organization of this camp and even now, right in the middle of a sesshin, we have come up against various difficulties in the distribution of responsibilities vis a vis Fixed Samu – and, if that wasn't all, we've also had to cope with cancellations at the last moment or people who left the Sesshin early. All in all, it means there's been a lot of "holes" in the organigram. Of course one can understand, at a personal level, that people have to cope with all kinds of problems – health difficulties, too much work etc. Other times it's harder to understand that people don't want to take a responsibility, because they "wish to concentrate on Zazen." The good news is that, this time, we managed to solve all of the problems that have arisen. Rest assured – you can sleep and eat. The worst that's happened is that people have had to double up on responsibilities, work in smaller teams and sometimes forego zazen. My question is: should we "promote" these samu and, if so, how? The samus are necessary to the smooth running of a Sesshin, but, do we have to start to adapt ourselves to a smaller number of people willing to take part?*

R: I think the most important point is that you should do a fixed Samu if asked, so that everyone assumes some kind of responsibility during the Sesshin, for the Sesshin. There's no contradiction there as regards zazen or opportunities to practice. Master Deshimaru taught Zazen and Samu together and it's this teaching that makes the Sangha strong and continues to make it strong fifty years later.

In the beginning a lot of people thought practising "Zazen only" was exactly that and that Zazen only was sufficient: they didn't understand Zazen is also and must be expressed through our daily actions and that spirit is of primordial importance for helping others practice. This is the vow of the Bodhisattva. To have a Fixed Samu during a Sesshin – to be involved in the kitchen, in the service, to be involved in a samu – is to practice wholeheartedly. Sometimes people say: "I cannot find my place here." But if you take part in a team, you will, automatically, find your place. Be that service, the welcoming team, the kitchen – all samu is an opportunity to practice and deepen practice – it is never something that stops us practicing, on the contrary, it is the practice itself, it is an opportunity to serve the Sangha, to serve the Three Treasures and to find one's place.

It always reminds me of what Dogen said about the spirit of the Tenzo. One of the three spirits of the Tenzo is the joyful spirit. And why is it that the Tenzo a joyful spirit? Because he says he has a lot of opportunity to serve the three treasures! His Samu is to feed the community putting the teachings of Buddha to practice! Everyone here has to think about this in the future and, when you receive a leaflet to enrol in a Sesshin, when you see the Samu responsibilities there, think about how these are really practical! Everyone should have at heart the spirit of Samu when they enrol in a Sesshin. Everyone should join in. So that, I hope, next time we will have the opposite problem – enthusiastic people wanting to be in the kitchen, in the welcoming team, in the service! So much so that we ask ourselves: "how we are going to accommodate them all?" If there are so many people wanting to sign up for Samu that means the load becomes lighter for all. Everything unrolls, just that much more easily. If there are a lot of

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people in the kitchen, everyone working there can make every possible Zazen. If the Samu in general is well organised, if everyone is helping, everyone can participate in all the Zazens. That goes for every Samu. If there are three or four people for a job instead of one or two, newer people learn and have the opportunity to share their energy, their wisdom, their concentration to aid the practice of others. That way everyone is happy !

We can see the risk - and, unfortunately we see this a lot in the West – that Zen practice falls foul of a sort of spiritual materialism, whereby people reap the benefits of the teaching with an eager spirit, practice for themselves, and end up giving nothing of themselves back! People start to believe that, because they have paid a hundred euros for the Sesshin, it entitles them just to enjoy it – that Sesshin somehow owes them something. Zen practice is not like that. I ask you to imagine a situation where we have “employees” doing all the work, the necessary tasks – then a Sesshin would cost three or four hundred euros. If a Sesshin is cheap - it is cheaper to do a Sesshin for three days than, for example, to rent a chalet – and that is not including the teaching and the practice itself - if a Sesshin is cheap, it is thanks to a few dedicated practitioners and their dedication to Samu and its spirit. Unfortunately, when these dedicated individuals are not numerous enough, we have a problem.

I really insist, please, each of you, think about the next Sesshin! Have the wish to cooperate, in some way, in the organization of the Sesshin – just like it was part of your practice, not just an economic expediency. In any case, thank you everybody! For all the work you do, with others, all you do, dedicatedly, for the organisation, the smooth déroulement - of the Sesshin!