
Suffering, absence of suffering and experience

By Claude Emon Cannizzo, March 2020

In the Four Noble Truths, Buddha teaches us that the source of pain and misery (in other words, *Dukkha*), applies to all phenomena without exception. According to Buddha's teaching, birth is suffering, life is suffering and death is suffering. This implies that there is no place free of pain in this world. So, the only alternative to pain is to generate its absence. In other words, to no longer produce any pain ...

To begin with, we must already agree with the first of the Four Noble Truths: 'Life is suffering!' And to do this, let's take a good look at the world we live in, where there are mainly three things that are sources of pain:

- First of all, there is the adherence to beliefs: religious, political or simply materialistic ...
- There are also sufferings generated by desire, envy, or the need to satisfy a lack (the idea here is to replace a suffering by a pleasure).
- And finally, Poisons which are a deep source of suffering in this world: anger and hatred, the two Poisons which are at the origin of conflicts - big or small - and above all, at the origin of wars ...

The mind of every human being is constantly poisoned by these three things. We live almost constantly jostled by them, by attachment to religious or political currents, by the race for the pleasures of the senses, or by the almost daily expression of jealousy, anger or hatred. Obviously, we can only escape suffering by not letting it reappear... Letting go...

The best way is to cut off the power that feeds it. As if to switch off a light, the only way to do this is to cut off the energy source that feeds the light, 'no longer to bring electricity to the bulb'. In the same way, no longer to bring 'energy' to the pains and misery we experience every day. This energy is the attachment to our views, beliefs and convictions, in other words, to a vision of our life that passes through the narrow and limited vision of our little ego.

To achieve this, no need to follow rites, say prayers or do other devotions, because practicing this would still be the fruit of a belief. Nor is there any need to express a kind of exacerbated beatitude of universal love, because this too is linked to desire, in one way or another. Of course, there is no need either to encourage conflicts that are only related to hatred, anger and jealousy.

Zen teaching is not a teaching that encourages us to do something in particular, but on the contrary, to 'stop doing'. Or, if it is a question of doing: doing what is right. Practicing zazen encourages us to stop doing everything that sustains us in our beliefs, our illusions, that is to say in our miserable fundamental ignorance of daily reality. But we must be careful not to replace beliefs by a 'so-called knowledge' or an 'apparent wisdom'. Replacing one belief with another is simply replacing ignorance by ignorance.

Zen is not about adopting a particular behavior which would become - in turn - a new form of illusion. Neither does Zen encourage us to flee, or to reject phenomena we don't like.

The Buddha's Dharma aims at the abandonment of erroneous views, beliefs, convictions or personal opinions. The Dharma, if we follow it, invites us to 'say yes' to a logical, realistic and simple view of the things of life, neither optimistic nor pessimistic. And to abandon the greedy race to the illusory pleasures of the senses, which ultimately have only a short life span, because like all phenomena, they too are impermanent.

Abandoning the blind race to satisfy our illusions is made possible by the right practice of zazen and by learning to 'master the senses'. Abandoning the attitude which aims to grasp or to reject. This becomes possible as soon as we adopt the rules of life suggested to us by the Buddha's Dharma: realizing the Precepts, the Eightfold Path, the paramita... We must also refrain from committing harmful acts that generate suffering, both through our body and our words. For ourselves and for others ...

The teaching of Zen is based on the abstention from behaviors and attitudes that keep humanity in a spiral that produces misery, sadness, violence and pain. We do not seek to acquire sterile knowledge, but rather to stop maintaining ourselves in the 'illusion that we know', or at least, that we believe we are 'in the knowledge'. Because this is only a conviction and a personal idea! All these people who claim to know, what do they really know? 'I know, I know, I know ...', sang Jean Gabin! But what do we really know?

We have inherited the Dharma, from Buddha, from the Ancients, the Masters and the Patriarchs who transmitted it to us. But we must make the effort to make the Buddha's teaching our own. This is what we call 'realizing the Dharma'. In our turn, we must root it in us through the practice of zazen. This is the meaning of 'understanding or acquiring', as in the third Vow that says:

As many as the Dharma are, I vow to acquire them all.

Because otherwise we will simply be the tenants of knowledge that is not ours, and it will simply be a legacy of beliefs and ideas that do not belong to us and are not rooted in our own experience.