---

# Buddha – Superman?

**Roland Yuno Rech, Grube Louise, October 2021** (Germany)

Question: How can I not be in awe of the Buddha's Awakening? When you read stories about him, you get the impression that he was almost like Superman.

R.Y.R.: In all religions, the founder tends to be a completely idealized being. Except in Zen, because in Zen we tend to be much more realistic. You must understand that the Buddha became enlightened through the power of zazen. He was not 'born awaken' at all. He was a spoilt child, certainly full of illusions, because he had been protected from any awareness of impermanence. Eventually it was the realization that life ends with old age, illness and death that became for him a great *koan*, a great question which he forced himself to solve by seeking the Way. But there's nothing extraordinary about that.

All of us put ourselves the question of the meaning of life when we realize that it will probably end with illness, or in any case certainly with our death. The difference with most of us is that we try to forget about the problem and not think about it, by developing all kinds of distractions. Often, these distractions involve spending money on trips, buying pleasurable objects... This keeps the economic machine turning. And so, the whole society tries to maintain this illusion that we can compensate for the problem of having to die one day by forgetting about it, by acquiring all sorts of pleasurable objects or enjoying pleasurable activities.
We are all caught up in this kind of phenomenon, but for the Buddha, the thought of death became unbearable, and he could not forget about it. This is the big difference between the Buddha and us. But it is not an insurmountable difference.

As for his Awakening, it is nothing extraordinary.
He simply realized that his ego was an illusion, that the true meaning of his life was to live the reality we all live and - as Master Dogen often repeated - that we are totally One with all beings. That is the Buddha's Awakening, there is nothing extraordinary about it, it is just the reality.

What is more difficult is to live in harmony with all this and to be happy about it, in other words, by truly letting go. Nobody can achieve this only by his own will and that is the difficulty. On the other hand, zazen makes us realize it, and this is certainly what the Buddha himself achieved. So, when we enter the dojo and concentrate on practicing zazen, we can all become Buddha and because of that, we do not need to be too impressed by him.

Master Deshimaru always said: "Enlightenment, that is to say the Buddha's state, is to go back to our true normal condition." There is nothing extraordinary about that. There is no need to be impressed by that. What impresses me is that most of the time we cannot achieve it because we are prisoners of our mental habits.
What is important for us is to give very high priority to the practice of zazen in our lives. And that is why the Buddha is so impressive, because he gave up everything, just to practice. But this should give us a good feeling and have a good influence on us, especially as it led the

---

Buddha to lead a happy life. All the artists who depicted the Buddha have always shown him with a smiling face, as someone profoundly happy.

But is this really so impressive? It is in fact pretty normal, isn't it?
And that is what I hope we can all achieve.