

Zazen Zoom, Saturday 4 June 2022

In the *Zazen Yojinki*, Master Keizan continues his teachings with some recommendations on *Kontin*, the state of drowsiness, one of the major obstacles to concentration during zazen.

I quote exactly what he says:

"If you are seized by sleepiness or torpor during zazen, move your body and open your eyes wide. Put your mind between your eyebrows. If this is not enough, rub your eyes and body. If that isn't enough to wake you up either, stand up and walk, turning to the right. By the time you have walked a hundred steps or so, your sleepiness will definitely have disappeared. The way to walk is to take half a step on each breath: you walk without walking, so slowly that you seem to be motionless."

These recommendations can be practised if you are alone in the dojo or at home. You can get up and practice *Kin hin*. But this is not possible during a group practice in the dojo, because we follow the rule of not moving or disturbing others. In the dojo, it is the *kyosaku* who comes and strikes your shoulders and this is one of the most powerful ways to wake up. But sometimes we are so sleepy that we don't even have enough presence of mind to ask for the *kyosaku*!

To sleep during zazen is not really different from dreaming: there is no longer any awareness either of presence, or of the chance that's offered us to live in the present moment as it is, or of looking and feeling what is happening in the unlimited field of the mind. And yet, paradoxically, this absence flows in Presence. Really, there are no mistakes other [greater?] than that of losing the present moment, which will not return!

On the other hand, if this drowsiness returns from zazen to zazen, we need to change something in the rhythm of our life and learn to rest sufficiently before we sit down or come to the dojo.

This requires us to be careful to regulate our activity, our food, our tiredness and our nights so that we never lose the awareness of living. To learn, again and again, to remain on the Middle Way taught by the Buddha.

"The realisation of the Middle Way, the Eightfold Path, is only possible, the Buddha teaches, through the deep inner vision (vipassana) of impermanence, of the nature of suffering (dukkha), of the false belief in a personal self, of the entire phenomenal process of existence. This deep inner vision can only be attained through the practice of right concentration, which must be present in all states of consciousness, accompanied by right thoughts, right effort, right attention."

If we sleep, what can we learn?

Our life is a *koan* whose meaning can only be known if we fix our mind on a single object. It is the practice of zazen which must be the anchor point of our attention, of our concerns and of our activity. We learn not to lose or waste the present moment in thoughtlessness, carelessness and the pursuit of pleasures. We will then come to understand that our ephemeral existence is sublime and extraordinary even in the ordinary.

O disciples," says the Buddha, "what I urge you to penetrate, you must preserve well, guard well, so that this holy life may take its course and endure through the ages, for the good and happiness of the multitudes, for the consolation of the world, for the joy, the well-being and the happiness of beings."

Do not spend the time of zazen sleeping or dreaming. Put all your inner strength into practising, moment by moment, until you get back perpetually to the simplicity of being.
