

Tenborin Zoom 13 June 2026

It is said that Bodhidharma spent nine years in a cave, practising zazen without ceasing. This practice of facing the wall was called *Menpeki*. This also refers to the state of consciousness into which the meditator, wishing to progress along the Zen path, must merge until reaching Samadhi, where there is no longer any sense of self.

But in fact, facing the wall during zazen, we feel as though we are deprived of all support and sustenance, without fully understanding what it is we are meant to attain. Our discriminating mind finds itself deprived of arguments to establish its sovereignty over our lives and consolidate the false illusion of the self. Either, filled with frustration, we capitulate and return to the virtual world of our imagination, or we shatter the wall in the deepest part of our heart, realising that it never existed.

One might think that, as a result of his practice, Bodhidharma had acquired the knowledge and discernment to answer the Emperor's question: *'What is the ultimate truth?'* His reply: *'An immense emptiness, nothing sacred'* left the Emperor taken aback, and that is why he asked a second question:

'Who, then, is the one answering me?'

'I do not know!' replied Bodhidharma.

It is clear that the Emperor did not understand Bodhidharma's second reply. Yet his question is nonetheless the one we ourselves must answer: *'Who am I?'*

That is why, every time the wooden block sounds at the entrance to the dojo, we follow the assembly of dragons and elephants to sit on the Dharma seat, this very zafu, and access the ultimate truth.

But can the ultimate truth be seen or understood by the mind?

Master Tennō Dōgo, who lived in the 8th century and was a disciple of Sekito Kissen, replies:

"Simply put an end to your dualistic vision and your ordinary perception of things. There is nothing sacred to understand."

How does the mind become free and unhindered?

How do we attain this knowledge that puts an end to our doubts and our wandering?

How can we put an end to our ordinary perception of things?

Simply by remaining open, moment by moment, to the immediate perception of things without wasting time labelling or analysing them. Seeing and listening to the present moment.

The Surangama Sutra, the Sutra of the Heroic Path, warns us:

'Beware! If you come to understand what the sacred truth is, you will be prone to all manner of errors.'

Fundamentally, everything that comes and goes, everything that is born and dies, is simply the true buddha-nature. It is the marvellous and eternal impermanence, the unchanging, omnipresent reality. To understand this takes no effort.'

In our lives, we must face the paradox of accepting that there is nothing to be found, whilst at the same time being in absolute need of finding out who we are.

Can we stop flowers from wilting? Can we add frost to snow? Can we go a metre above the top of the flagpole?

'Simply put an end to your dualistic view and your ordinary perception of things. There is nothing sacred to understand.'

This is what the practice of zazen, facing the wall, teaches us.

Every one of our steps is the heroic pathway that has no destination. A journey that is, with every step, the ultimate truth, the unknowable that rests - unchanging - in the heart of our heart, exactly where we walk, where we sit at this precise moment, with the elephants and the dragons.

"Who, then, is the one answering me?" asked the Emperor.

"I do not know!" replied Bodhidharma.

"It is simply the one light which is emptiness," concludes Koun Ejo.
