



## ABOUT EUROPEAN ANGO

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The beginning of this first European training monastery and my participation on it were decided shortly before it actually started. This is to say that my teacher asked me to participate at this ango the moment when the commemoration ceremonies and symposium of 40 years of Zen in Europe at the Gendronnière were held. I first declined but agreed to it when he asked me again. I first declined because a lot of things to do for Zen were planned and a short time notice like this is not so evident to manage, since we are actively participating in social society (work, bills to pay, etc.). And my 72-year old father was just diagnosed with a spread out colon-cancer. So bad timing (as such things usually are)! Cancelling my commitments and/ or finding somebody to do them for me was in a way already the beginning of ango. Going to see my father who was dying and say goodbye was the next thing to do. We had a few talks, wished him a good death and went on my way to the Gendronnière. The next day, this is the first day of ango, he died. My sister gave a hard time afterwards and still is resentful to me for not having attended to the funerals.

All along I faced my commitment I took some 18 years ago when being ordained monk. What does it mean to me to give free way to bodhaishin to be realised. What is the importance in this existence of this monastic ordination, of shukke? What importance do I really give to my greatest desire of simply living a religious life, and when and how is this deep desire obscured, pushed away in a far away corner by some idealistic or romantic desires that disperse my attention and bring along so many suffering and frustration in this live, in this society.

I consider it as a great honour and privilege to have been able to participate at this historical event which was this first official soto-zen trainingmonastry outside Japan. It brought around a great religious experience. There is a great gratitude towards all those in Japan and in Europe who made this possible. Thanks to their continuous practice of the Way, we (the 11 participants) were now able to experiment the joy of the Way in a training monastic setting. Through the vows of the Bodhisattva we took already so many years ago to help all sentient beings, a re-enforced and growing gratitude is experienced towards all the ancestors in near and far away past time, for knowing about the practice of buddhadharma and that it can be practiced for the benefit of all. The importance of this event for the practice of further generations of sentient beings is big. The final success of it will hopefully make it possible to install a

permanent, and not only a virtual, training monastery on the different continents of the Earth. Our small number, the fact that we were not to leave the monastery and all the other regulations, brought along, that there was no merchandising possible. The initial desire of bodhaishin was continuously and all the way long stimulated and made one look into the more obscure parts of this existence, which improved a great deal the spiritual quality of this training period. A good balance between restrictions and permissions was continuously created by the Abbott, which prevented one of getting lost in a harsh ascetic environment, which wants to break the body and the mind. A delicate equilibrium that unified bodymind, that permits to leave aside, in a gentle and smooth way, all the obstacles to the practice-realisation of the Way which are our old habits. Those two aspects are the basis for a more vast development of compassion and wisdom towards oneself and towards the others. Delicate and highly necessary qualities in ones live as a human being, as a monk.

The setting of the Gendronnière, which is an extremely beautiful place, of course, contributed a lot in the appreciation of live during this ango. Beyond general marvel or enchantment was the immense joy of live and nature.

At the same time participating and observing the way of establishing the rules to follow in this temporally training monastery has been of an extreme value to me, for making understand the why of some rules, their inherent flexibility and subtlety and the openness of mind they require. Studying with other teachers and being in entirely other roles as used to, brings the beginners mind to live in a whole other colour composition, suppressing the “certainties”, the habits in ones practice.

The whole ango was deeply rooted in the old tradition of the Japanese monasteries and temples, but already a great deal was done to adapt to our western habits. It made the universality of Zen practice and monastic live come to evidence. The universality of the basic rules of Dogen Zenji, when one is not attached to the phrases itself, but with the open, flexible mind that characterise so well the Buddhadharma. It showed so well that it would be useless and dangerous for a lasting development of authentic Zen practice if we should claim to transfer as a whole entity the corps of rules and settings from Japan to Europe, or on the contrary wanting to change them according to our own appreciation and convenience. In mutual consultation with those who were born and bred in this tradition evaluating how to adapt and make changes with a deep understanding that often goes beyond intellectual thinking. It means dropping the arrogance of wanting to do it on our own; or blindly following rigid, conservative minds that cannot see the bridges between cultures in order to transmit the essentials. The general feeling amongst us was one of being impressed by the profoundness of the foreign traditions and still being at ease, as if moving in your own usual habitat. All of a sudden I did not regret anymore not to have had the possibilities of going to Japan. Japan came to here! Now I don't feel the urge anymore (that is if the training monastery were to be permanent) to go

and practice in Japan, but then again, I don't see any reason also to stay here. The initial wish of Rev. Otagawa, expressed on the first evening of angu, to realize "wago; harmony together" felt true. Not only the participants of this Angu were one single body going forth, but also oneness of "western" and "Japanese" Zen-practice.

A great effort considering the teachings by inviting several teachers from Japan, America, and Europe has been made. The translations were sometimes hardship on each side of the phenomena (teacher, translator, and student) and the number of lectures (50) was slightly to important. The teachings of Abbott Imamura Roshi were clear and mostly far beyond common words. An intimate communication of his practice to our practice! Without saying a word he could touch the most profound fibre of our practice. The most impressive teaching was his acceptance of what he didn't really approved. This brought us to a change of sense in our practice from within ourselves, more in accordance with the fundamentals of the tradition. The dharma of peace and happiness manifested itself more and more, and surely will contribute to a consolidation of further practice and spreading of Zen on this continent. Based on the Japanese tradition, with its adjustments to the characteristics of European countries, authentic Zen practice will influence the many future generations of people to come and bring along a recognised globalization of the buddhadharma, the Soto Zen practice installed by Dogen Zenji and Keizan Zenji.

I made a choice «to do something that didn't suited me very much in my agenda (filled with "plenty useful and urgent things to do for the Dharma" and socio-family circumstances) and of which many people in my environment said that it was an absolute waste of time. I observe the evolution, the letting go, the movements towards the centre, seeing the spiritual and religious benefits. Leaving aside the words and their inherent dualism! There is the trust, the confidence in the Roshi, my co-disciples; it gave a total freedom.

In short one could say of Angu the same thing as about live: its long, sometimes very difficult, etc. But it's marvellous and it goes by way to fast! One can feel it a nuisance, but one can also chose to practice the Way during those 3 months. What is the meaning of three months of practice in a span of 30 years? They do not represent much on a timescale, but they permit to go and draw from the very profoundness of one, not finding anything substantial there. This is a basic religious experience which will nourish the next 30 years to come.

It's letting burst into pieces the myths and the mythical.

Remains; here and now.

Gassho

Sengyo

