

A problem and how I am finding the way through

More than 20 years ago, at the age of about forty, I noticed that Christianity was not the right thing for me anymore. (I was born in Bavaria, Germany, where most of the children were baptized Catholic). Visiting different groups, a friend introduced me to a Zen Buddhist group.

I liked the Dharma because of its clarity and logic. It's not necessary to believe in a god or anything else; everything could be experienced. And I experienced for the first time that I was personally responsible for who I was and where I was going.

First I couldn't sit at all, but after a while it became easier. After going to a group in Munich for a while I began to participate in retreats at their temple, 90 km. from Munich. I was there monthly for weekends and twice a year for longer retreats, when the Japanese master visited. I also took part in summer and winter intensive retreats. I was a member of the board for fifteen years and spent a lot of time, energy, and money supporting the group. I started practicing tea ceremony and *Ikebana*. In addition, I opened my own little Dojo at home, where people came for Zazen.

Through these activities I felt better. I made some progress, but at a certain point it didn't go any further. I thought it must be my fault because I was not practicing enough, so I tried to do more. But I was not the only person who felt that something was missing, something was wrong. Then last year I learned that my teacher was a criminal, arrested and jailed for repeatedly abusing children. There was no doubt about the basic facts.

When I first heard about it, I could not believe it. It took several months to realize what happened and that I could not go to that temple anymore. Going there felt bad, both physically and mentally. Some members of the group wanted to continue with the retreats, tea ceremony and *Ikebana*, and the master back in Japan did too. But I could not go back to that temple.

What should I do now? Sitting alone at home was not enough; there was this urgent wish to practice in a good group and to find a real teacher who could help me work through this terrible tragedy. I searched and found a group near my home. I phoned the head of the group and went to the morning Zazen. I was the only other participant, but the atmosphere was good, and the quiet attentiveness of the leader was a balm for my soul. So I went there regularly, and also participated in their intensive *Rôhatsu* retreat and started to feel better. But something was still missing.

Later I heard about a retreat with Jeff Shore. I didn't know anything about him. But I signed up, trusting Christopher, the head of the group I visited the last few months. I took part in the retreat without expectations, just to see. In this way my life found a new direction.

In my first email to Jeff Shore I explained my situation and he answered very directly. Although I did not know him, this touched me. At our first encounter I considered asking if he would accept me as his disciple. But he said: "Now make a new beginning." And I understood that my request was not necessary. I am unable to express in words what happened to me during this encounter and the following retreat. I have never experienced anything like it. All the burdens that had piled up broke down, and I was inspired to go forward again.

The result for me is that I found a real teacher and two groups where I go several times a week, also sitting at home much more than before. Feeling new energy, I am able to talk with people who are hurt by this tragedy and try to support them. I know I have to work even more, but now I am looking forward to what's coming. I am grateful to everyone who is helping me.

Barbara R.