



## “The Culture of Dialogue”

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First of all, thank you for the opportunity offered to me to be here along with you, in a moment of dialogue and sharing, it comes with a particular relief, because it involves young people, students who are and will be the new citizen of Scandicci, Florence, Italy, Europe and of the Mediterranean.

Places in movement, in multi-ethnic expansion and with plural religions, that offer a new reality, compared to the generations like mine that lived in different conditions.

In the impermanence, using a Buddhist term, or rather, in the continuous changing of the reality in which we live, we much respond with our point of view, our evaluation, a corrective rationale, an adjustment that aligns us and makes up capable to offer “other” answers to the new themes that life itself asks us to confront.

This project is fundamental which presupposes the growth of you, the students who will be the new adults, through the “politics” of dialogue and confrontation, more or less of closure, war or ostracizing.

I’m here to represent the Tradition of Zen Buddhism, as a monk, but what is Zen?

Just a few words to explain what is represented. Surly all of your have heard of the Zen armchair, Zen garden, Zen shower gel, a Zen outfit, a Zen bank account.

This little word has become common in everyday language here in the West. It is an adjective, and attribute, a noun that determines and identifies the core of Buddhism, the most essential Tradition, reduced in om minimal terms as a ritual, a superstructure, beginning in Japan in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, after arriving from China and India before then, where in the 6<sup>th</sup> century A.D. its first Founder, Siddharta Gautama, also known as The Buddha, The Awakened One emerges.

I'm saying this to emphasize how Zen is a Religion, not intended in the same terms as the three monotheistic Religions, which surly encompasses 90-95% of the Mediterranean population. I'm talking about Religion, with acceptance of the western term, is more based on a Philosophy, a lifestyle, a way of being, in that it doesn't involve religion as a human to God relationship, as in Christianity. This is the reason why we say that it is possible to practice Zen Buddhism coming from your own religious faith and orientations.

What brings us all together, each one of us represents and expresses a different belief, a different way of interpreting and living their own faith?

There are universal values in human beings that overcome every difference, as they are called in common language "people of goodwill".

Coming from these universal values we know that it is possible to walk in peace and prosperity which offers us a belong and benefit of all beings.

Values that can be shared and confirmed through common dialogue as represented and lived through your school, your teachers, your parents and the representatives of the diverse faiths present here today.

The ethnic behavior, or way of reacting, of being, of living your own existence by observing the universal laws of respect of all beings in their diversity, of animals, nature, of our planet that supports and nurtures us.

Tolerance, a word that I don't really love, because it me it subtly implies superiority and grandiosity.

I prefer to connect it with welcoming terms, that welcomes what doesn't belong to us, of what seems fare away from us and is so different but in reality, it isn't because every living being on this earth aspires for serenity, peace, harmony, to avoid pain, war and suffering.

Here I would like to mention, but at the same time emphasize, the theme of fear: we must educate ourselves, not only you young people, but above all, us adults elderly, we are deeply rooted in our opinions, convictions and points of view to not have fear of diversity.

Fear implies refusal, closure, denial of what is "other", an unsustained judgement, without the needed knowledge.

If we open our hearts and minds to the possibility of dialogue, to a deep listening, to an encounter, going beyond fear of what we will meet, it will truly be the first step toward building a better society that will be more human, more responsible.

Peace that can grow and prosper human dignity and express itself socially, ethically, politically and religiously.

The value of life, and therefore respect for this existence that has been given to us to use our potential for good of all beings that have arrived along our path, we must reply with even more value.

Unity that recognizes humankind under one sky, that we walk upon the same soil.

Confrontation is like a moment to widen your horizons: if we encounter and confront each other, we can understand how taking a Path with a pure heart brings us together, walking on a common ground of solidarity, respect, reciprocal support, deep listening, and therefore, in a welcoming spirit that is exactly the different of verbal, mental and physical violence.

Opening up toward one another, toward diversity, that teaches us to respect plurality of thought and faith in various ethnicities that become an element of growth, widening our views and change our vision of the world.

It is in the acceptance that our thoughts embrace other realities, it is in acceptance, in being open, that we can then be amazed to meet points in common or food for thought.

It is said in Zen that every Master brings a part of his or herself, so I can not bring you here if not my personal experience of life and faith.

Telling my story is certainly not superiority or wanting to indicate a way to pursue, but to witness the possibility each of you to write and live your own history, now, in the current historical moment.

This means that everyone can, in respect and acceptance of the other, of diversity, maintain and strengthen their identity and express their deepest expression.

Opening and welcoming the other does not correspond to confusing or tempering one's own identity, but rather reinforcing it and reconfirming it in the light of confrontation with something different, giving itself a chance to increase knowledge.

The moment I humbly asked my Teacher to receive the monastic vows, my first request, my first words were those of not wanting to abjure my original Christian religion.

Personally, my current choice of faith manifests itself as an integration between faith in the Way indicated by the Buddha and my Christian faith.

A common path of respect and unity leads to a path of peace, where everyone can freely express their beliefs, their profession, without incurring degenerations of violence or imposition in disavowing the identity of others.

It is therefore a growth as witnesses of one's own identity, bearers of peace, without a spirit of oppression.

All this, which seems so obvious, so easy to apply, currently and as always, in the centuries of our human history, is truly an ethical and cultural challenge and a commitment to a continuous exercise to which we must recall, we "men of good will". In the journey of our existence, taking care to educate the young generations in this approach to social and human life, building a dialogue that is based on respect for each other, preserving each one's own identity, honoring and preserving it in every action and expression of everyday life.

The hope, which I address to you young students, is to treasure this experience of dialogue, to nourish it in your growth and deepen it in your life experiences, so as to become bearers of a message of peace, respect, welcome and unity.

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