

# Try Mind Never Ends

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Nowadays there are all kinds of initiatives encouraging people to take care of our environment. The European Tree of the Year is one of those. The winner of this contest is the tree with the most beautiful story. The Belgian candidate this year is a tree from Ypres. This city faced a dramatic period during the First World War. Mustard gas, the most dangerous gas developed for war purposes, is also called yperite after this city. It was indeed here that it was used for the first time. A few months after the start of the war, the mobile war gave way to the trench war. The Germans were looking for an efficient means of clearing the Allies from their trenches, given that classical artillery was having little impact. That is the reason why yperite was developed. However, the artillery didn't stop and destroyed the whole city.

Just to give an idea how bad it was: When my great-grandfather returned to the city after the war, he tried to find the tomb of his wife, who had died a few years before WWI. He could not find it. Even more, he was not even able to locate the cemetery.

It therefore seems logical that no tree in the city survived the four years of war. And yet about ten trees defied the violence of war, thanks to their position on the inside of the ramparts of this old medieval city. The ramparts protected the trees from the incessant shelling. All of the trees were, without exception, heavily damaged or destroyed, but the stumps of these ten trees survived.



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YPRES, PANORAMA EN 1919  
PRÈS DE LA PORTE DE NÉLON

From the stumps, the trees managed to recover spontaneously and grow out again. However, these survivors were again oppressed during the Second World War. Only one of them, pictured in the photos above and below, survived both world wars and is still standing firmly.



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This story points to the fact that nature never gives up, although everything in our world does perish. This is also true for human beings. Nobody can escape death, but this is not the end of the story.

The question of life and death is a vast topic. But in Zen, we make it simple:

When you are alive, what?

When you are dead, what?

I have a story about Oleg Śuk JDPSN that gives a good hint. Unfortunately, our good friend and teacher left us this year after a long illness. Our sangha was invited to participate in the forty-nine-day practice that is traditionally held after the passing of the deceased. Traditionally, this is seen as the period between two lifetimes. According to Buddhist teaching, the bodhisattva Ji Jang Bosal helps the deceased during those forty-nine days.

The night before the end of the forty-nine-day period, I woke up to chant Ji Jang Bosal. Although I tried hard, it was difficult to not fall asleep. My head felt heavy and I was not able to keep my body straight. I started a mental conversation. "Come on, Oleg! You need to keep clear! Tomorrow there is a ceremony for you. You need to be ready. Let's practice together!" I admit that I was encouraging myself more than Oleg. It didn't help very much though, and my head kept falling down. So, I tried again: "Oleg, we must keep trying. Let's keep clear!" Then, suddenly my back slowly became straight, my head found its correct position, and my mind became clear.

I have some experience with night practice, but this I never felt before. I did not straighten my back myself! It just happened by itself! Was it Oleg who tried to help me? I don't know, but we can already do one thing. Let's decide to keep trying for ten thousand years nonstop. The bodhisattva way never ends.

When alive: how can I help you?

When dead: how can I help you?

Try, try, try for ten thousand years nonstop. Attain enlightenment and save all beings from suffering. ♦