

# CENTRE DURCKHEIM

*The way of action ... for wisdom in practice*

## *D'instant en instant*

*(Letter of encouragement to the practice of zazen)*

Letter N° 92 – Spring 2021

### ***Zazen is different from meditation!***

In spite of, or maybe because of the pandemic, the words *zazen* and *meditation* awaken in many a mysterious force of attraction. These words seem to act as a counterweight to the unhappiness caused by an underground fear and its associated states: inner agitation, latent anxiety, stress, insomnia, depression, burn out.

**Meditation!** Which method to follow? There are many choices. Here are a few examples selected in the list of the twenty-three techniques currently used in the Western hemisphere: Buddhist meditation... Christian meditation... Secular meditation... Transcendental meditation... Taoist meditation... and the trendy meditation, Mindfulness meditation.

**Zen?** Japanese phonetic translation of the Chinese word Chan, which itself is a translation of the Sanskrit word Dhyana. To translate these designations by the word *meditation* distorts their meaning. Zen is a kanji which implies an attitude of *reception*, in other words this approach of reality which is contemplation (not to be mistaken with concentration).

Contemplate? SEE, HEAR, FEEL what is seen, heard, felt without examination; that is, without a mental representation of what is seen, heard and felt. There is nothing mysterious or extraordinary. All new-borns approach reality through their sensorial conscious, *their conscience WITHOUT*; what Graf Dürckheim calls the pure act of seeing, the pure act of hearing, the pure act of feeling. Example: the mother carrying her baby hears “a bird singing”; her baby does not hear a bird singing, *he hears!* In Japan, in the tradition of Kyudo, one says “*the archery master does not know he is shooting an arrow... he shoots!*”.

**Zazen?** Numerous are those who think the word *zazen* is an offspring of the word *zen*. In reality the word *zen* is a derivative of the word *zazen*. Is it so important? Yes, because the meaning of a zen text remains hidden to the purely theoretical curiosity. A zen text will mean something only to the person engaged *on a path of exercise and experience*.

Which exercise? For example, the simplest of all: ZAZEN.

“One does not practice zazen with the mind” reminds Hirano Katsufumi Rôshi during each stay at the Centre. And he adds: “*There are thousands of ways to meditate but there is only one way to practice zazen*”.

### **Zazen is different from meditation.**

There is a free choice to make between two methods or two levels of action which will induce different answers to the questions: “what?”, “how?”, and “why?”.

A free choice made difficult nowadays because of the numerous authors, teachers and students who amalgamate zazen and meditation.

To the current discourses and theses skilfully elaborated about meditation, the Zen master prefers the exercise of silent contemplation in a receiving attitude.

Contemplate what? Receive what? Here is the explanation given by Buddha, Siddhartha Gautama (which was not Buddhist) to those who ask him what he does when retiring in the forest to exercise?

Answer: « Aña Paña Sati »!

« Aña Paña Sati »? This aphorism precisely means: exercise in full attention {Sati} on the *fact... which is undoable*, that at the moment *I breath in* {Aña} and on the *fact... which is undoable*, that at the moment *I breath out* {Paña}.

Is that all? Yes. And that is sufficient and satisfying; and can be discovered during practice. During a stay in Japan, practicing regularly beside an experienced Zen monk, Graf Dürckheim asks him “You have been practicing zazen for over fifty years; what do you do during this exercise after so many years of practice?”.

Having a good knowledge of his Western neighbor and unsurprised by this type of question which characterizes the Western Man well, he smiles and answers “Ah, I must say it is difficult. I do my best to do nothing and to let my breath come and go on its own (Aña Paña Sati) and when I succeed... all in me becomes calm!”.

Another time, at the end of an exercise, the old monk exclaims “What a miracle! What a mystery!... I breath!”.

To those who would see in these confidences’ subjectivism, imagination, sentimentalism, irrationalism, I suggest the following exercise: “Stop breathing!”.

### **All in me becomes calm!**

The word CALM, which is not a word but a way of being in this world as a being, is recurrent in the indications proposed by Zen monks.

During the 6<sup>th</sup> Century, Chan master Hui-Neng described his teachings with these words: “*My method is calm and wisdom. Where there is calm, there is wisdom; where there is wisdom, there is calm*”.

During the 13<sup>th</sup> Century, to Zen monks practicing Zazen, Master Dogen (founder of the Soto-Zen school) regularly asked this question: “If you do not find calm here and now, where will you find it? and when will you find it?”

In 1950, in his first book – The Japanese Cult of Tranquility- Graf Dürckheim writes: “The Western man has perhaps never aspired to calm with such nostalgia”.

We need not to have studied sociology, psychology or be specialized in the science of the human mind to observe that what the present-day man lacks most is inner calm, confidence and simple joy of being. We simply need to observe ourselves, with no self-deceit, to diagnose that we have created a distance with our essential well-being, whose qualities are the symptoms.

“When practicing zazen, the body takes the shape of CALM!” (Hirano Katsufumi Rôshi)

### **Zazen is different than meditation**

When in 1967, having practiced zazen for a few months, I ask Graf Dürckheim if he can give me one good reason to practice zazen daily, he answers: “Yes, because it’s time!”

This straightforward answer (which did not satisfy me immediately), definitely inscribes the fact that the exercise called zazen is practiced WITHOUT a goal. Again, the old sage from the Black Forest tells me that “if someone asks “what is the goal of zazen?”, answer: there is NONE... None for the ego!”.

Do not practice zazen with the desire to acquire or perform something. Zazen has only one goal: “The awakening of Man to his true Nature as a human being, to what I call his essential being; the true nature of the human being is not his ego”.

It is important to differentiate our mundane I from our true nature. Then there is the question of unifying these two poles of our humanity.

### **Practice zazen WITHOUT a goal!**

I am fascinated by the list of the ONE HUNDRED benefits promised to the ones who will engage in Mindfulness Meditation. In this promise, which has the taste of advertisements true to our consumer society, there is enough to awaken our ego, always eager to *have* more, to *know* more, to *empower* more.

“We do not practice zazen to cure THE I that is suffering, but to cure FROM the I which is the cause of the suffering specific to the human being” (K.G. Dürckheim).

So! Physically practice zazen; without waiting to understand how to practice zazen.” Who will allow me to understand how to practice zazen? Who will let me know what good zazen will bring me?” These questions, it is true, betray the western man’s mentality. When you practice an exercise like zazen, archery, tea ceremony, calligraphy, aikido, the master of the art (not to be confused with a coach) will invite you, at the beginning of the training, to replace the word - understand- by the word ... SWALLOW. Because it is not a question of understanding an exercise in order to do it. It is a question of integrating it. All children around one year old, begin to walk. The child does not wait to *understand* how to take a step, to take a step; he does what he was not capable of doing until then. The child (we have all been) learns to walk by walking! We learn zazen by practicing zazen.

So? Do it! Without waiting to understand how or why. Once sitting, physically integrate this action which engages the entire body in its globality and unity. Contemplate the act of breathing; this undoable gesture- signature of life which allows us to live- “At the moment, for this moment *I breath in...* and I have nothing to do with it! At the moment, for this moment *I breath out...* and I have nothing to do with it”.

I wish you a good training!

### **Next letters**

You have been practicing for a few weeks, a few months or a few years, it will be useful for you to ask yourself: “Is the way I have been practicing zazen, for a few weeks, a few months, or a few years... REALLY ZAZEN?”.

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