

CENTRE DURCKHEIM

The way of action ... for wisdom in practice

D'Instant en instant

(quarterly newsletter of encouragement to the practice of zazen)

April 2020

Covid-19

The scientific thought would like for the definition: “*the coronavirus is an infectious agent requiring a host, usually a cell, which metabolism it uses to replicate itself*” to amplify our objective approach of reality. However, faced with this mental, rational representation there is a subjective experience that is undoubtably real: the *host* is not something, a cell; the host is someone, a human being. As to the *infectious agent*, it is alike the human being, a living being.

So, we have been, for the past weeks, endangered by this *living being* which is entirely part OF Nature. And the human being, yet endowed with reason, is powerless. Faced with what he considers a predator, the inventor of the atomic bomb currently has no other weapon than the *mask*, and on a strategic level, no other choice than *confinement*.

Since the Genesis, then Descartes and for the past years, by a prideful search for the creation of a Super Man, humans have asserted themselves different than the animal kind and the plant kingdom. They absolutely despise that they are, as every living being, part OF Nature; even thinking that they own Nature. Thus, allowing themselves to exploit the earth, the forests, vegetation and animals; they pollute the air and contaminate the water; they languish in the wastes they produce; which volumes are as large as their egocentric consumer needs of objects produced by our consumer society.

And here comes a *tiny living being*, invisible to the eye, spreading chaos worldwide including in the most powerful economic countries.

Within only a few weeks, this minuscule living being disorganizes mankind's quest engaged in the verbs HAVE (always more), KNOW (always more), EMPOWER (always more).

By confronting the human being (each human being) to the laws of impermanency, and thus to its own end, our friend Corona, brings to our attention the importance of the verb “BEING”, to the simple *act of being*.

Being is a verb of action.

Which action? “I am!”! Indication that the act of being is only true at the present moment. Here and now: “I Am”. Needing words to refer to what is an experience, I suggest to write “I Am” without an interval between the subject and the verb.

“I Am” indicates there is no distance nor time laps between what I name “I” and what I name” Am”. No duality subject-object.

When was the last time you said “I Am”? Often and unconsciously we'll add a designation, a qualification, a title, an attribute, a know-how. An addition which will give an identity. We easily say I am I; and will even think *I am what I think I am*.

And from one day to the next our Mundane I is confined! Two days, why not? But four weeks, maybe six? Or more!

What to do?

I discover, with surprise, the English word for confinement is a synonym for delivery (childbirth).

Stay at home!

I would voluntarily add to this governmental injunction the wish of a Zen Master: Stay at home and take advantage of the situation to “Find your way home!”. Yes, let’s enjoy this confinement to, step by step, deliver our true human nature – “IAm”- from its imprisonment of an illusory identity contained in the tonic personal pronoun: I

What are we to do during this confinement?

Here is the answer that Graf Dürckheim would have given us:

“To slip from understanding to sensitivity. Without rest, to feel in contact with our own essence, our true human nature. This essential reality, that we are ourselves, is in radical opposition with the reality of our ego, of our mundane I. This mundane I overcomes and conceives our life in this world owing to our conscience OF (the conscience of things). If we pay attention to our essential being, we need to dismantle its impediments and foster what favours it.

What impedes it is primarily what determines our mundane I which needs to maintain itself in our world; this “I am what I am and want to stay as is” which always feels threatened and, on the lookout, and is forever tense.

Practice Zazen! Unwind. Relax. Zazen is an inextricably corporal and spiritual exercise for metamorphosis. This movement of transformation of the entire living body which we are, is experienced through breathing. Breathing is more than supplying Man with oxygen. The act of breathing is an absolute vital action.

What touches me when re-reading this lesson from *Graf Dürckheim* dating from the 1970’s, is the importance given to what we designate as breathing, “this gesture of life which makes us live”. Companies are currently in a frantic sprint to produce... respiratory systems. If you are fortunate enough to have no need for one, abandon yourself to this action of the entire living being in its globality and unity.

“What mystery... what miracle... I breathe” exclaims a Zen monk while practicing Zazen. The experience “IAm” is integrated in a space broader than the ordinary world in which we exist on a daily basis.

And Graf Dürckheim adds:

“During the practice of Zazen, it so happens we can feel a whisper of the presence of our own essence. We feel a -force- uncommon with the force of the I, expressed in a creative -plenitude-. We can experience that our own existence has -meaning- precisely where the ego confronts us with nonsense, to the absurd. We experience a reality which is our essential being through this inner experience based on the sense of -unity-. The experience of inner calm in the midst of the world’s agitation. Our responsibility is to familiarise with this sensory contact of our true nature.

How? By repeating again and again the practice of Zazen”.

Jacques Castermane

Translation from French : Céline Jouenne