

CENTRE DURCKHEIM

The way of action ... for wisdom in practice

D'instant en instant

(Letter of encouragement to the practice of zazen)

Letter N° 90 – January 2021

« *Trust zazen* »

Upon his return from Japan, Karlfried Graf Dürckheim initiates the Western Man to what he calls the “Way of action”. It is the beginning of the realization of Zen.

Graf Dürckheim does not see Zen as a historical Asian cultural phenomenon. He sees Zen as being a source of Universal human experiences.

The *sobriety* in the practice of Zazen, the attention brought to the *body man IS (IchLeib)*, seems to him as being particularly beneficial to the Westerner.

His first work, *The Japanese Cult of Tranquillity* (1), published in 1947, meets a surprising success, since Germany, as most European states, is just emerging from World War II with great difficulty. In this work, which relates his Japanese experience, the expression *inner silence* recalls a condition *freed* from a state of preoccupation, of an underground fear that governed the lives of millions of human beings all along this conflict.

If today I evoke this tragedy, it is because the worldwide pandemic is affecting thousands of people in the same way. Today, the kanji “Zen” has found its way in most dictionaries (which was far from being the case in the 1950's).

The exercise named Zazen should not be heard as replacing the pragmatic therapies which goals are to cure THE I that is suffering. However, Zazen is an exercise which has one goal, curing us FROM our I, from the identification of the only state of being of the EGO, which is the cause of many physical or mental pains, such as anguish. The central aim of Zen is the empirical discovery of our true nature as human beings, our essential nature, which is not our ego. Our true nature is calm, inner silence, inner peace, who's representatives in schools of wisdom from the Middle East, the Far East as well as in the western hemisphere, consider as the greatest benefit Man can achieve.

As Epictetus during the first century of our era, Zen masters added that “*to achieve this greater good, Man must strive*”.

In order to assume, the best we can, what today troubles our souls, we are invited to an endeavor; for example, to the daily ascetic practice of Zazen. It is what Graf Dürckheim invited us to do. It is what Zen Master Hirano Katsufumi Roshi, who has honored us these past years with his presence at the Center, invites us to do: “*Trust Zazen*”.

One of today’s difficulties is the amalgam made between Zazen and meditation. Zazen is different from what we usually comprehend as meditation.

Thus, “*The are thousands of ways to meditate, but there is only one way to practice Zazen!*”

When you have the chance to observe a Zen Master practice, the mental questioning – how am I supposed to meditate – leaves place to the answer which is a testimony. The master of the exercise, becomes the model of a path each needs to draw, through the way he is there, sitting; for zazen is not a path to follow but a path to draw corporally (Leiblich).

“*When you practice Zazen, the body takes the shape of calm*”.

An additional difficulty of the Western Man is his identification to the idea... I believe I am, what I think I am... and to learn that “*One does not practice Zazen mentally!*” and that “*Zazen is a corporal exercise!*”

In his *Philosophical dictionary* (2) André Compte-Sponville describes the exercise named Zazen as being “*To play the body (we are) against the Ego, breath against thought, immobility against agitation, attention against frenzy*”.

It is a good abstract of what the Center has been offering for the past forty years.

To assume with greater calm and peace the events that present themselves to us, is not an escape from reality, but contributes to the process of maturity of our life as human beings.

Jacques Castermane

(1) *The Japanese Cult of Tranquillity* – K.G. Dürckheim – Ed. Le courrier du livre

(2) *Philosophical dictionary* – A. Comte-Sponville – Ed. Puf ; page 620

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***N.B. Due to current health situation, the activities of the Center
are suspended until further notice.***

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