

CENTRE DURCKHEIM

The way of action ... for wisdom in practice

D'instant en instant

(quarterly newsletter of encouragement to the daily practice of meditation of full attention)

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The exercise named Zazen

Hirano Katsufumi Rôshi was Master for Novices at Eihei-ji (775 years old temple) in Japan for over 20 years. He currently guides intensive meditation sessions in the US, in Ecuador, Switzerland and France¹.

Since 2011, we have had the privilege, joy and honour to welcome him at the Centre. A few days ago, he was back for the sixth time, to join us for a sesshin.

Here after are the answers he gave to two fundamental questions:

- Hirano Roshi, can you tell us what the kanji « za » and what the kanji « zen » signify when put together in the expression « zazen »?

Answer: « Za means « **to sit** », Zen means « **calm** » ».

- What are we to do when practicing zazen?

Answer: « **Nothing!** »

CALM ?

During the 13th century, Master **Dôgen**, founder of the Sôto Zen School, would regularly ask this question to the monks who practiced zazen: « If you do not find **calm** here at this very moment, where will you find it, and when? »

During the 7th century, **Hui Neng** presents Ch'an by saying: « my method is **calmness** and wisdom! Where there is **calm**, there is wisdom; where there is wisdom, there is **calm** ».

In his first publication, "The Japanese Cult of Tranquillity"², in 1950, Graf Dürckheim writes: "*Our present lifestyle would seem to be the very antithesis of a cult of tranquillity; yet perhaps at no time more than today are we (westerners) so filled with longing for **stillness**, and so ready to yield to it, if we could only know where to find it.*"

Calm is not the contrary of agitation, impatience, anxiety or other symptoms which are at the source of ceaseless mental activity. Calm is a quality of being, a manner of being, which has its source in this part of our self which zen masters designate as *the true nature of the human being*; what Dürckheim calls our *essential being*.

The I cannot make calm exist using exercises! Nevertheless, a rupture with our ego, which is centred on mental activity, necessitates a training that we cannot discount.

This training is called zazen.

What are we to do while practicing zazen? Answer: "Nothing!"

¹ For Paris, see website : www.tenchijin-zen-kai.fr (Jocelyne Derudder)

² Karlfried **Graf Von DÜRCKHEIM** : Japan und die Kultur der Stille. München- Planegg: O.W. Barth 1950. 126 S.

NOTHING!

Hirano Roshi's answer is surprising to our westerners' ears. For if I do nothing... nothing will happen? And yet! I invite you to sit (on a chair or on a zafu), upright (avoiding being tense or slump) and, for a few minutes, to practice absolute immobility. You will soon discover and contemplate³ *that you have nothing to do to breath, that you have nothing to do for your heart to beat, that you have nothing to do to live, to be!*

Likewise, there is nothing to do, to return to our original condition: *inner calm*. Do not look for great calm, let yourself be found by this quality of being!

PITFALL!

Conflating inappropriately zazen with meditation.

Meditation is a goal-related practice. For example, well-being or good health. I invite those who doubt of this postulate to continue the list of the one *hundred* benefits for the ego promised to those who practice mindfulness meditation.

Zazen is practiced *without* a goal. At the beginning of the path of awakening to our true nature, we must make the necessary efforts to engage a rupture with our I-conscience, with the desires of the I, the ambitions of the I, the attachments of the I.⁴

It is when the identifications of the I are silenced that our essential being communicates with us through a bespoken-event: *The Unconditional Great Calm*.

Jacques Castermane

³ Contemplate ? To see what is to be seen without analysis of what is being seen; to feel what is felt without transferring what is felt in mental representations.

⁴ Zen Master, Shohaku Okumura, proposes an instructive image of zazen: « *In zazen we take off all of our clothing and become the naked self* ».

Here is the full text :

Zazen: To let our naked self be revealed

« *We wear the clothing of occupations such as doctor, lawyer, mechanic, priest, student, teacher. But when we sit facing the wall and let go of thought, including comparing ourselves with others, we take off all this clothing. In zazen I am not a Japanese Buddhist priest; I am neither Japanese nor American. In zazen we are neither rich nor poor, neither Buddhist nor Christian. The terms "Japanese," "American," "Buddhist," "Christian," "man," and "woman" are only relevant when we compare ourselves with others. When I compare myself with Americans, I am Japanese, but before I knew of people who weren't Japanese, I didn't know that I was Japanese. When we just sit facing the wall in zazen, we are neither deluded living beings nor enlightened buddhas; we are neither alive nor dead; we are just as we are. That's it. In zazen we take off all of our clothing and become the naked self.* »

(Shohaku Okumura)

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Learning to recognize ourself in our essential nature

We all know this proverb wrongly attributed to many philosophers: “become such as you are” and should acknowledge its true author: Pindare (5th century BC) without omitting to mention what he himself added: “... Having learned what that is.”

It is indeed a learning process in which we must engage: to recognize what we are deeply, to recognize what we ignore of our human nature, which is whole, united and in order.

Engaging on the path of zen, we are invited to reintegrate the forgotten part of our self, ignored, neglected, yet not missing. We deprived ourselves from it because of our objectifying conscience which separates, fragments and divides.

So, what are we to learn? That we already are what we are searching for? Certainly... Yet, how are we to learn it? We should enable ourselves to have faith in the living body's emanation, which, completely silent and still, reveals our self to ourselves, outside of all singularity and identity. Meditation – the body in meditation – creates the conditions to think differently, that is, from a principle of unity of opposites. We must learn to let the body “emanate” and teach us from what it proceeds, let it develop its aptitude to manifest itself.

To learn to let be: here resides the task in which we must engage with the greatest perseverance. Let the living body work... we cannot persist in thinking that “we are”, we must learn to let the living body reveal what we are.

We have the chance to sit each day and to feel being pushed, in spite of ourselves and in an irrepressible way, by the breath which imposes itself and compels us. A thrust into our future which coincides with the stance of “being-here”. The immediate experience that being and becoming are not contradictory, opens another understanding of ourselves.

The rigour of a demanding discipline which takes shape in the stance (“takes shape” is not a metaphor) and verticality, of someone who entirely accepts at the present moment his being-here and the situation as it presents itself. Associated to the acceptance of a process of transformation which reveals itself flowing, flexible, transparent, it gives way to a phenomenal experience (sensorial) of united opposites.

Action and non-action, firmness and surrender, appear as “one” in the experience and gives us to feel what the mental can neither reunite nor express. We need to learn to identify this and consider the fact that we are this experience. To learn to think and live from it, in order to stop limiting ourselves to the attachments of our objectifying conscience.

The body teaches us. We need to let it teach us the Whole other (according to Dürckheim's expression), our selves – the Whole other: not something, nor nothing, so what exactly? A feeling that emanates from the body we are.

Learn to let things create themselves because there is nothing to do.

Life thus becomes an artistic work, result of a long study (learning process) and a liberty (let be) free of all desire. The activity of acknowledgment of what we are is precisely the one we need to learn, and sits in every exercise on the Way, inseparable from the act of being.

An artist's word will engage us on this path:

“To achieve to “be unwilling”, can seem effortless, but in fact, requires an intense activity.”
(Fabienne Verdier – “Interview with Charles Juliet”)

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