

CENTRE DURCKHEIM

The way of action ... for wisdom in practice

D'Instant en instant

(quarterly newsletter of encouragement to the practice of zazen)

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Zazen? The Cult of tranquillity!

What does the expression zazen mean in Japanese?

Hirano Katsufumi Roshi answers: « **Za** means: **sitting**; **Zen** means: **calm** ».

The translation of the kanji zen by the word calm is rarely used. The commonly known translation of this ideogram is the concept of « meditation ». It so happens that a word misses its target, it seems to be the case when we associate zen and meditation.

When Hirano Roshi suggested this translation – zen signifies calm – it was obvious it wasn't a figurative interpretation... on the contrary the word calm is a concrete answer to what the Japanese ideogram “Zen” conveys.

During the 7th century, when Hui-Neng is asked what is his method, he answers: « *My method is calm and wisdom* ». He adds: « *Where there is calm there is wisdom; where there is wisdom there is calm; they are not different* ».

During the 13th century, the founder of the Soto Zen School, Eihei Dogen, asks his fellow monks who practice zazen: “*If you do not find calm here and now, where will you find it? When will you find it?*”

When Graf Dürckheim lead zazen sessions, he would often say: « *Zazen! To be here, sitting, perfectly still, embracing calmly what comes through sensation, moment after moment* ».

Zen Master Ryokan brings to our attention the fact that « *Zazen is not a way; zazen is the proof!* ».

Here is a clarification to avoid the current confusion between the exercise called zazen and the exercise called meditation.

Meditation is a directed activity; it has a goal.

As truth of the matter asserted, the list of the **one hundred** (100) benefits promised to those who practice modern meditation: mindfulness meditation. We meditate on something or about something. The word meditation suggests a mental activity (mind). Co-opted by modern studies lead by brain specialists, the potential effects of meditation are measured quantitatively (scanner, MRI).

Zazen is an undirected activity, free from any purpose.

Zazen is an inextricably corporal and spiritual exercise during which mental activity is momentarily offside. The practice named zazen is lead **without** a goal. Which does not mean it is without effect. Which effects? As an example: **calm**, the great calm, symptom of the fundamental health state of the human being.

It is not calm after tempest, this relative calm perceived as the opposite of agitation. This external tranquillity can be observed when living along the ocean. Zen is the *calm* that exists in depth. Those who have dived below the waves have experienced this. There is no longer an external tranquillity but a deep calm felt from the inside. An experienced diver once said: “*There is no longer myself and something else called calm... I am calm. There is no longer myself and something else called silence... I am silence!*”

This experience elevates Man above his so-called power of the ego. The ego, mental representation that we have of ourselves, is not our true bearing point in existence. Our true bearing point is our true nature says a Zen Master; our true bearing point is our essential being, says Dürckheim.

What is our true nature? What is our essential being? I-don't-know!

What I know is that, when I am seized, swathed, moved by deep *calm*, I no longer ask myself this question: because at that moment... *I am the answer.*

Jacques Castermane

Neither distance... nor difference in time... *

To practice zazen only to practice zazen, with no itinerary. This assertion, both narrows and enlarges the field of action, for we need to explore the absence of distance between our self and the practice. There is only zazen, just zazen, that is, total unity between the subject, the action and the objective of the action. We are then separated from all possibility of spreading over time, of thinking we will achieve something with great effort. In other words, it is a major barrier to procrastination. What is to be done has to be made immediately.

There's no place for half-heartedness or half-measures, it's now.

We switch to an unexpected and unexplored domain for the I, which will by habit project itself forward, in future realisations, expected acquisitions. Our difficulty: to maintain ourselves in this narrow scope of action; as if we had to maintain our self on a peak. Here we are, in relation with the simplicity of the sitting which becomes all at once, way, path and goal. In this injunction to be looked for in the very narrow, where there is nothing to see, nothing to become, will be revealed an unexpected and unknown vigour, which will maintain us in the instantness of the gesture: to be sitting. This gesture reveals our self to ourselves, moment after moment.

This absence of distance creates a fusion with verticality, immobility, we no longer tip forward or backward, on the left or the right. We cannot say if our verticality is the result of a necessity or if verticality generates a particular efficiency that enlightens us from the inside. Whatever the cause, or the effect, we do not really know who controls what. The cause is an effect, and the effect is a cause. To maintain at this point of interrogation is a setback for our ordinary way of thinking. It is no longer a question of taking position on an established fact which gives us the illusion of maintaining a truth; there is only this uncertain and vertiginous crest that keeps us on hold in this instant.

Sitting, zazen, immerses us in a kind of indistinction between what we call the way and what we call the proof. Zazen is not acquiring a technique which will allow us to bring to light an evidence. Zazen is the evidence, it is proof, precisely when the meditating individual is not content to sit passively, but when he reduces this distance moment after moment, he shows that zazen is the proof and the proof is zazen. Enough to impose a necessity which needs no future. As long as the distance remains, there is no zazen, there is a similitude with zazen. There cannot be a lukewarm zazen. It is, or it is not. We must cease longing for vague projects of a future realisation, there is an activity which must be done right now, which we should never let go of. It is at this only condition that the I can pretend to be released of its conditioning. It is not the path that is long, it is the ego that persists in its attachments which gives an illusion of a long path. Our realisation is immediate when there is only zazen and when the I accepts to abandon its expectations.

Conjunctly, the I abandons ownership of the body he thinks he possesses. The lack of distance no longer authorizes void between the one acting and the action itself. The only thing that persists is: being body, being zazen. To do zazen only for zazen implies an abandonment of the “body tool”, the body object, the body we have.

When no distance exists between the subject and the action, a disruption takes place, not only because everything happens in an immediate occurrence, but also because notions such as usage and utility are changed. The attention is reoriented toward the useless and the invisible, which annuls all forms of enslavement of a practice for personal purposes.

Dominique Durand

* Some will have recognized Jacques Castermane’s statement, frequently repeated during the introduction of the sitting. To come-back, and come-back again on words heard one thousand times that we thought were « understood »... And strive to go beyond the words, and let the practice reveal the true meaning, this is when the teaching will grow in value.