

CENTRE DURCKHEIM

D'instant en instant

Letter of encouragement to the practice of zazen

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Zazen! Yes, but to what effects?

Legitimate question. What good is zazen, kin-hin (feeling every step walk), Leibtherapy?

Answer: For the effects one discovers when practicing these exercises, which have no other goal than the awakening of Man to his true nature.

It would thus be absurd to present a list of the one hundred benefits of Zazen. A list all the more inconsistent since zazen has been specified to be practiced without a goal for the past twenty-five centuries.

Nonetheless, I can affirm that the exercises I've practiced for the last fifty years and teach (with the collaboration of a few students whom are still deepening their understanding of the teachings they've been receiving at the Centre for many years) contribute to having an effect. But which one? I can only repeat myself: the effect we discover ourselves, while practicing these exercises.

Rather than providing promises, I prefer listening to those whom are on the Way of action.

I asked a few participants who were finishing a retreat to take some time to remember a potential **EFFECT** of an exercise practiced during the week? An effect! This unusual moment which suddenly moves us, touches us, surprises us and even sometimes stirs us unusually?

Here are a few answers:

L*: *“The exercise named Gazen (Zen lying down) surprised me, because I believed only Zazen (Zen sitting) existed. The attention given to the gesture TO BE relaxed, during the entire act of breathing out, entirely submerged me in an ocean of calm... Nothing could disturb or trouble me, the feeling of inner peace being so vast and good”.*

S*: *“When we exercised the gestures which are at the origin of all babies' corporal activity, the “choreography of babies” as you name it, I felt genuinely alive! I didn't understand but I really felt what is, passing from – I-am-I – (imprisonment in our ego) to -IAM- (this part of ourselves which transcends the ego)! This experience, which opened to a simple joy of being, persuades me to continue to practice zazen every day.”*

M*: *“During a very slow and long meditation walk engaging the full attention to each step, I was surprised to experience this feeling of great calm; calm which is not conditioned by such and such favorable circumstance. It was absolutely clear, the inner calm is rooted in the body we are, not in the mind. During this exercise I felt it. When you said: “This step, never has been before and never will be again!” all of a sudden, I felt what we call eternity, or eternal calm.”*

V*: *“During an individual Leibtherapy session I experienced what Graf Dürckheim calls -Leib-, the living body in its entirety and unity. This sensation of breathing everywhere freed me from the need to move (that I usually cannot control) and I stayed absolutely immobile during the half hour that followed the session! Such appeasement!”*

J*: *“Your proposal, when we practice zazen, to slip into the full attention of this action of the living body “IBreatheIn” (in one word) ... “IBreatheOut” (in one word) and to discover that the - I- is not responsible, plunged me into an embracing calm.”*

M*: *“When you say that – what unites us, is that each of us, in this instant, breathes In... breaths Out... breathes In... and that we are not responsible for it-, I felt a significant inner change. While remaining in contact with what you call the gesture of Life, tears came to my eyes, as I realized my daughter breathes... my grand-daughter breathes... and my neighbor, whom I sometimes find annoying.... Breathes. I have the impression, not of understanding, but rather, of experiencing what we call compassion!”*

D*: *“When during zazen, you reminded us of what Hirano Rôshi said – “Breathing is the signature of life” – this exercise I have been practicing for many years, instantly changed levels! It’s amazing! The simple attention to the coming and going of the breath fills me with confidence and joy.”*

Well! What interests me in these testimonies is not that they represent a list of potential benefits in a near or distant future, which would imply that we could construct them with exercises. It is a question of a momentary experience (felt in the present moment) which is rooted in the deepest of ourselves, in our true human nature. During the exercise, something happens which connects us to a reality that we are right at the beginning of our existence. I practice zazen, this absolute “do nothing”, and all of a sudden, the veil is torn. From one moment to another it so happens we see ourself, we feel other, that is, a little more our Self.

What Graf Dürckheim proposes to the Westerner upon his return from Japan where he has immersed in the world of Zen for over ten years, is that the verb BEING, the act of being, is a matter of body, the body we are (Leib).

We are trapped in the desire and concern of control; the exercise zazen consists in letting-go of this mental obsession and giving the living body, in its entirety and unity, the place it should have: the first place.

To those who have agreed to pass on their experience, I yet have to say that “What you have felt is a good reason to resume the practice of zazen tomorrow. The Way is the technique; the technique is the Way”.

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