

CENTRE DURCKHEIM

D'instant en instant

Letter of encouragement to the practice of zazen

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When we practice zazen, the body takes the shape of calm !

CALM!

A way of being which makes man a human being.

A way of being which is nowadays repressed to the profit of affective and mental reactions such as aggressiveness, outbursts, irascibility, provocation, insults or worse, a punch.

During a question-answer session, I quote the answer given by a Zen master to whom someone asks to describe his method. He answers: “*My method is calm and wisdom! Where there is calm there is wisdom; where there is wisdom there is calm*”.

This Chinese wiseman (seventh century) speaks of the -great calm- which is the symptom of our fundamental state of health. During the first century of our era, Epictetus considered *ataraxia*, as the greatest good man can achieve during his existence. The *great calm* should not be confused with a relative calm, each of us can recognize from time to time; this impression of respite after an effort or in a satisfying situation for the ego.

It so happens I hear people who fear this quest for calm should actually be an escape from reality, or the refusal of engaging in the unavoidable social combat which must be lead today.

During the eighth century in Japan, the samurais underlined the importance of interiority in the training of martial arts. To attain inner calm and maintain it in all circumstances, allowed greater efficiency during combat. During the thirteenth century, the arrival of firearms is a game-changer. From then on, and to this day, the practice of martial arts does not aim at overcoming an external enemy, but to experiencing inner calm, serenity, self-confidence.

The signification of the kanji ZEN, which is a phonetic transcript of the Sanskrit word *jhān* signifies: *calm reflection, calm contemplation*.

Upon his return from Japan (1947), the Way of Zen, proposed by Graf Dürckheim to the westerner is: the *culture of calm*, sometimes expressed as, the *culture of silence*.

What distinguishes and characterizes Graf Dürckheim, amongst the -few- westerners whom found interest in Zen at the end of the nineteenth century, is the importance and implication of the BODY, of *the body we are*, on this path of experience and exercise. He writes that: “By the way of being as body, each testifies of how he is calm or agitated, confident or suspicious, peaceful or worried.

In order to attain this greater good, inner calm, man must strive, said Epictetus.

Zen Master *Hirano Katsufumi Rôshi*, whom we welcomed at the Centre these past ten years, often drew our attention to the fact that:

- “When we practice **zazen**, the **body** takes the shape of **calm**” –

I would like to understand! Legitimate desire. But the meaning of this indication remains hidden to a purely theoretical curiosity. The meaning of this indication is revealed only to those whom explore it. The practice of zazen, as well as the practice of a martial art is an introspective journey which is not experienced through the mind, through analysis but through *action, sensation and feeling*.

During a trip in Japan, an Aikido master said to me “*it is difficult to teach Aikido to westerners, particularly to... French people*”. Why? “*Because they always want to **understand** Aikido, they want to **understand** how to perform this or that technique. My colleague invited them to stop using the verb understand and to replace it by the verb **swallow**! Adding that, what we **swallow** is **digested**, and what we **digest**, **transforms** us*”.

The exercise practiced at Dürckheim Centre is **ZAZEN**.

The amalgamation made by some between mindfulness meditation and zazen is untruth. Even if the same position is used to practice zazen and to meditate, the way of practicing is very different if we meditate or if we practice zazen. “*There are one thousand ways to meditate, but there is only one way to practice zazen*” (Hirano Roshi)

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