

## CENTRE DURCKHEIM

### *D'instant en instant*

*Letter of encouragement to the practice of zazen*

Lettre N° 112 – March 2023

#### **In the world as it is today, is there still room for... *Inner calm, inner peace, simple joy of being?***

Alike a never-ending drizzle that soaks to the bones, medias preoccupy our inner lives on a daily basis with an underlying anxiety which can insidiously give way to distress or depression. It is undeniable that we are passing through difficult times.

But how have things been in the past?

Epidemics, earthquakes, floods, famines, volcanic eruptions, and other natural disasters have marked the past centuries and millenniums.

It so happens that, since Man occupies the Earth, he adjoins his own deadly creations to natural disasters. The most ancient is probably armed conflict. War! “*The killing of individuals unknown to each other, to the profit of people who know each other but don't assassinate one another*” Paul Valéry wrote.

Today we should add the products of the differences between the animal -being of nature- and Man -being of reason-.

It is senseless to project on mother nature ecological problems emanating from the pretentious idea that we live -IN- nature, which provokes the feeling nature is a stranger to us. When will we recognize that, as all animals, we live – FROM- nature? And it would be swell that what we call I, started to serve its laws.

When I lived in Haute-Savoie, having left the Black Forest to open the first meditation Centre, the *farmer* who harvested the wheat he had sowed around the centre, *cropped it with his scythe!*

I was fascinated by the elegance of his gesture. Master of his tool, he served the rhythm as naturally as the beating of the heart. I enjoyed exchanging a few words with this peaceful man, who always took the time to pause a while for a chat.

What a difference with the *commercial farmer* whom, nowadays, drives his three-ton tractor around our home in the Drome. He gives the impression of being enslaved by his machine. Sometimes when I wave hello, I feel I am disturbing him, so he seems subdued to the need of productivity.

I recall seeing our farmer of the Savoy region, taking the time to interrupt his action to listen to a bird singing. The *commercial farmer* wears a hearing protection device, to take shelter from his tractor's noise.

Happy is the one who's work is “handmade”. Handmade products transform the person who accomplishes the work!

It would be absurd and stupid to think we need to backtrack and adopt ancient ways of life and being. Perhaps have we, once and for all, moved from the scythe to the tractor, from humus to chemical fertilizers. Like we have moved from the sword to the machine gun, and from the arc to intercontinental rockets.

## BUT WHAT ABOUT THE *HUMAN BEING* WE ARE?

Being is becoming; becoming is being. For millennia, the human being has initiated his becoming during a nine-month gestation. Whatever his colour, family background, philosophical, religious, spiritual preferences of the adults around, the new-born takes the time to wait for life to invite him, to sit... a few months later, to stand... and over a year after his physiological birth... to walk. "No hurry!" would say Graf Dürckheim during my first stay in Rütte. "From now on, do everything you do, a little slower!"

One of the baby's great virtues, Christian Bobin<sup>1</sup> writes, *is to not be blinded by knowledge. They see the world without moral, without philosophy, without religion or precaution.*

Michiki Nojiri San, master in the traditional art of Tea Ceremony (Chado) practiced and taught the exercise named zazen. Regularly her introduction was limited to this indication: "Zazen? *Is to be sitting (ZA) like the baby is lying in his crib.*"

Zazen is described by people who practice this exercise, as being the culture of *silence*, the culture of *calm*, the culture of *inner peace*.

By people who practice! Not by people who think, or try to understand which benefits they can expect from this curious exercise. Exercise consisting in doing nothing. "Do nothing, but completely" would say André Comte-Sponville after a few hours of exercise. In his philosophical dictionary (PUF Ed.) he adds: "Zazen is playing the "body" against the ego, "breathing" against "thinking", "immobility" against agitation, "attention" against outbursts".

### **ZAZEN? Passing from conceptual truth to real truth!**

I am; therefore I breathe! I breathe; therefore I am! Obvious? No! It is truth within the concept. But the act of breathing is not due to the fact that it is thought, conceptualized. The real truth is that in this moment IBreatheIn (I am not breathing out) and thought is not involved! The real truth is that in this moment IBreatheOut (I am not breathing in) and thought is not involved!

And curiously, when I feel the vital coming and going of breath, without mentally taking part, everything in me becomes calm.

Yes, in the world as it is, we still are allowed to feel driven by these essential values which are inner calm, inner peace, and simple joy of being. But for that, I would like to quote Christian Bobin anew "There is a time during which each and every one of us has to comprehend through another channel than analytical understanding. Perhaps it should be done with the back of the head, or by the eyes, or through the child we were once. But above all, certainly not to understand through the adult we think we need to be."<sup>2</sup>

Koan! Mentally, by the repeated use of the mind repeat: the being .... the being ... the being ....!  
To then take the time to say: be ... be ... be...!

Hoping to meet you or seeing you again at the Centre.

Jacques Castermane

Translation from French: *Céline Jouenne*

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<sup>1 and 2</sup> Christian Bobin — *Le plâtrier siffleur*— POESIS (Habiter poétiquement le monde)