

CENTRE DURCKHEIM

D'instant en instant

Letter of encouragement to the practice of zazen

Lettre N° 113 – April 2023

Faster...Faster... Always faster!

One question! Was I born to *quickly* get up, to *quickly* have breakfast, to *quickly* drive the children to school, to *quickly* get to work where *quickly* I will have to do this and that, to *quickly* go home... to make diner... put the children to bed... and, after an agitated night, *quickly* catch-up with, not the course of my life, but with this incomprehensible pace, which will only make sense of having once and for all, an infinite amount of time in a conceptualized, imagined or disputed future and space.

Why am I born? I do not know!

Why must I die? I do not know!

Why must I live? I do not know!

I discovered when following the Way drawn by Graf Dürckheim, that the answer to this question could well be another question: “Since I am alive, *how can I live well* this moment during which I live?”

This moment during which I live? The present moment! This temporality, different from time thought, which connects me to a past which never will be again and ties me to a future which will possibly be.

The present moment, this moment during which I walk from the parking where the car is parked; this moment during which I am queuing at the supermarket; this moment during which I am peeling carrots; this moment during which I am washing the dishes; this moment during which I am writing... “during which”.

I cannot erase from my memory what Graf Dürckheim said at the end of our first encounter, my first lesson: “*Since your intention appears to be to give your life meaning, I invite you to seriously practice – an initial exercise -: from now on, do everything you do sensibly slower!*”.

I did! And I was right in doing so! Half a century later of renewing every day the exercise, all the while knowing the Zen maxim: “Following the path is falling seven times and standing up eight”.

In fact, I do not perceive this injunction as being an exercise, but I see it as being a ritual. That is, an opportunity of passing from the ordinary to the extraordinary. When Zen master Yuho Seki rôshi, who taught us the slow walk named Kinhin, said “*To take a step is ordinary. To take a step well is a sacred gesture*” (sacred in the sense of dignified, honourable).

Exercising the momentariness of an action is a way of drawing our attention on the value and the beauty of the undoable actions that makes us alive; among which the most immediate and intimate, is certainly the *act of breathing*.

Taking a step sensibly slower has led me farther than the number of steps necessary for a ten-kilometre athletic race. Farther? No. Closer to what resides in our deepest self. What the Zen master designates as being our true nature, what Graf Dürckheim names our essential being.

By answering the requirement of “doing everything sensibly slower”, you draw a path which reconnects with the Self, the true Self. This path has a name: Zen.

Upon his return from Japan where, for over ten years he immersed in the world of Zen, Graf Dürckheim offered the Westerner “*What Zen conceals of universally human*”.

To do everything sensibly slower, opens a door on this invigorating ascesis named zazen. Zazen, is the exercise that you will be offered to practice upon your arrival at Dürckheim Centre.

Today, the amalgamation with the exercise named zazen by numerous *meditation* coaches, requires clarification.

To the question asked when he was at Dürckheim Centre: “*Is there a difference between what we call meditation and what we call zazen*”, Zen master Hirano Katsufumi Rôshi answers: “*there are one thousand ways to meditate, but there is only one way of practicing zazen!*”. He adds: “*We do not practice zazen with the mind*”.

To the question: In order to break with this habit of thinking all the time, conceptualising everything, is *meditation* the key?” Zen master Jinen San answers: “*It is the reason for meditation. But when we say MEDITATION it would be fairer to say ZAZEN. When we say meditation, it is a practice through a concept; ZAZEN is out of concept. We use the same sitting position for zazen and meditation, but the way of practicing is very different if we meditate or if we practice zazen.*”

It is difficult to imagine that this action which consists *in doing everything sensibly slower* could lead to an unusual way of being as a man in his entirety. The most important difference seems to be the loss of our mental activity’s domination on our exterior life and inner experience. In doing so, we recover the way of being belonging to every child at birth; all along the gestation period and during the year following physiological birth. Period during which we are immersed in plenitude, this *force* which is life in action (Chi or Ki), inducing a becoming subdued to a *natural* order (Tao or Do), and in contact with everything that is sensorially perceived without transferring this approach of reality in representations that the mind will later make. Period of our life during which peace of body, peace of soul, peace of mind - already annoyed from time to time - is the foundation of our being from moment to moment.

“*To do everything sensibly slower*” is to engage on the way of *transformation* of oneself. To recover contact with the One we are profoundly, engages a process which is none other than the release of our identification to our ego. “Modern man does not suffer from a lack; he suffers from ignoring what is not lacking” (Graf Dürckheim).

The way of transformation is not to be mistaken with the various *training programs* whose goal is the conquest of the I we idealize mentally. I think that I am, what I think that I am!

The super-Icarian point of view of space *exploration* makes me smile.

However, propositions like the access to a version of an *augmented* man, or the development of *artificial* intelligence worries me.

When I asked Graf Dürckheim for advice on the time left for me to live he said, “*On the way we will always need to shed... the excess*”.

Jacques Castermane

Translation from French: *Céline Jouenne*

CENTRE DURCKHEIM

1015, rte des Reys de Saulce - 26270 Mirmande - Tel : (+ 33) 04 75 63 06 60

contact@centre-durckheim.com - <http://www.centre-durckheim.com>