

CENTRE DURCKHEIM

D'instant en instant

Letter of encouragement to the practice of zazen

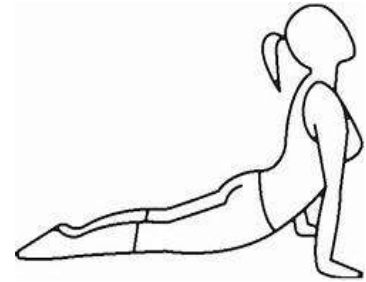
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TAI-CHI-CHUAN



ZEN



YOGA

“Has Yoga lost its senses?” in response to Télérama’s magazine cover ¹

Yoga, Tai-Chi-Chuan, Zen, Kyudo, Kendo, Chado, Shodo, Aïkido ... !

All of this is discussed, dwelled upon, or distorted, particularly when these different Ways of wisdom are presented as being accessible and assimilable by the mind. What can be revealed only through the practice of an exercise, suddenly becomes an object of theoretical reflexion and scientific studies, nowadays subject to *quantitative measures* by specialists in neurosciences.

Buddha, Patanjali, Tchouang-Tseu, Dogen and other pillars of wisdom were quite unlucky. In their times it was not possible to verify what they claimed by submitting them to an MRI, scans, or electroencephalograms.

Yoga... Zen... Tai-Chi-Chuan... we intoxicate ourselves with abstract formulas and grand theories without suspecting how these very concrete qualitative experiences are accessible to every human being and how they can transform our way of being.

Zen, Yoga, Tai-Chi-Chuan, Chado, Shodo, Aïkido are ways of wisdom threatened by the interests of a misunderstanding which makes them very attractive. Apparently different, they ultimately have the same goal: *the discovery by man himself, of his true nature and his true destiny*. This spiritual project, when reaching the western shores, is often reduced to what we call personal development, and takes its place in the wellness industry. A very lucrative market, as Marion Rousset appropriately reminds in the article making the headline of Telerama under the title: **HAS YOGA LOST ITS SENSES?**

This question urges me to ask myself another question: ***Has Yoga conquered too much space in the Western mind?***

Yoga, Tai-Chi, as well as artistic, handcrafts and martial disciplines specific to Japanese traditions, are *corporal* practices. We do not practice zazen using the mind, thought or reasoning. When the *Ways to wisdom* are perverted towards the paths of knowledge, they lose their essential substance and the endeavour which is none other than transformation of the person practicing.

¹ Télérama n° 3835, du 15 au 21 juillet 2023

It is important when engaging on the path to wisdom to engage what Graf Dürckheim designates as being: **THE BODY WE ARE** (“Leib” in German).

Rather than assembling Sanskrit, Chinese, or Japanese texts, which could give the impression of wanting to oppose the Western and Eastern spirits, here are a few anecdotes which speak for themselves:

— Maurice Béjart, dancer and choreographer, relates what he experienced during a voyage in India in the 1950’s.

He is presented to an *authentic Yoga master* who asks an embarrassing question: “*What is your dance?*”. (Implying, which exercise do you practice, to nourish your spiritual quest?)

Having observed Maurice Béjart practice at the *barre* (daily renewed exercises in the world of dance) this Yoga master tells him: “*If your mind is free and your body straight and without tension, if you let the exercise guide you and not the opposite, if you desire nothing else than the exercise for its beauty and truth of the exercise, you have your yoga, do not search elsewhere.*”

Maurice Béjart testifies that from then on and forever, the *barre exercises* were never again linked to a style, to a certain form of dance. Henceforth, he saw this fundamental exercise as a *ritual* which meant *transformation* of any person dedicating his/her life to dancing, to any form of dancing.

The *scale* in music is the equivalent of the *barre* in dance.

— In the 1950’s, Graf Dürckheim is in contact with the Romanian pianist *Dinu Lipatti*.

The old sage from the Black Forest recounts: “*For a full year, he renounced signing contracts which would make him travel throughout the world, to dedicate his time to only one exercise: scales! He told me that during this entire year dedicated to this fundamental exercise, he had acquired a touch from which an unpredictable sound would arise. I allowed myself to say that it seemed that the access to this touch was not the fruit of what we call the technique, but rather the expression and the testimony of a man – transformed by the technique.*”

— Graf Dürckheim recounts:

Kyoto 1941. A Japanese friend organized an encounter with master Hayashi, Abbot from a Zen temple. When the time for farewell comes, the master says “*I would like to offer you something. A painting.*”

With placidity and great prodigality in his gestures, as if he disposed of an infinite amount of time -and a master always has an infinite amount of inner time- the Abbot started preparing the ink himself. His hand kept coming and going, until the water became black. I was surprised the master did this work himself and asked why he was not unloaded of this task. His answer says a lot: “*By the peaceful backward and forward movement of the hand, we become our self completely calm. All becomes silence.*”

At last, he was ready. Sitting on his heels, forehead calm, loose shoulders, straight and relaxed bust, animated by this vital tonus which characterizes a person centered in his vital center (Hara), in one incomparable gesture, both calm and fluid, the master seized the paintbrush and, giving the impression of being his true self, without being obstructed by the fear of failure, nor the urgent desire of success, he painted the goddess Kannon, goddess of compassion. It is for me an unforgettable moment.

When master Hayashi handed me the paper, I thanked him with this question: “*How do we become a master?*”

He answered with a mischievous smile “*Simply, let the inner master reveal himself. Yes – Simply let it reveal...*”.



What we can deduct from these three testimonies, which concern Arts of different natures, is the unity and conformity of the requirements of masters of the exercise, the technique.

Among these:

- The non-participation of the mind, the use of thought, the objective conscience.
- The way of being as body! For example, sitting, bust straight and relaxed, forehead serene, shoulders loose; letting the body live in its globality and unity animated by the ebb and flow of the breath. As a person, it is a matter of being rightly centered, in our vital center, HARA.
- Practice without a goal. Let our practice direct us and not the other way around, until we feel freed from the desire to succeed, which is accompanied by the fear of failure.
- The renewal of simple and fundamental gestures (alike the peaceful backward and forward movement of the hand, the renewal of a few notes of the scale). Passing from the spirit of gain or performance to the spirit of creation.
- The rhythm, which gives gesture life. Where there is life there is rhythm, where there is rhythm there is life.
- The fact that action – beauty in gestures and their accomplishment – be the expression and testimony of the *transformation* of the person on the Way.

People coming to Dürckheim Centre, are not subjected to a large number of exercises. What counts is to discover the PRINCIPLE at the root of each exercise: our true nature, our essential being. Because only the person in contact with his/her own essence can consider travelling through the world as it is (without expecting for it to change) in a feeling of safety.

Since it is a question of a Path of transformation of the being, it will make sense if it influences our daily life. There is also the barre or the scale exercise in our daily lives! May our exercise be rooted in India, China, Japan or elsewhere, at all times in our daily lives, there is a way of sitting, standing, walking or lying that we should feel responsible for. Consider these “four dignified attitudes” (Dogen) like the barre or scale exercises that prepare the conditions which allow the liberation of a true inner stability to calmly live the present moment; this moment which is the only one during which we really live.

Our body, our way of being as body (IchLeib), always becomes a field of experience and realization of the true self.

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