

**CENTRE DURCKHEIM**  
*A Path step by step*  
*Encouragement for daily practice*

Lettre N°4 - November 2023

## **The meaning of exercise**

In October's letter, Jacques mentions "the mystery, the miracle: I Breathe!" And asks: "What can I do to remain in contact with this part of myself too often ignored? Answer... an exercise!"

An exercise to know that I am breathing?

Isn't that boring?... Everyone breathes!

I know that I am breathing, that I am sitting (zazen), that I am walking (kin-hin).

As everyone does! Haven't you got anything else to offer?

Is Zen only interested in these kinds of down to earth considerations?

These ordinary questions, which any practicing individual will ask himself in the shorter or longer run, are signs of an ego centered practice.

These questions mentally cover in a haughty way the different experiences of walking, sitting, and breathing, considered as being commonplace and uninteresting for the I, which remembers the goal to attain: calm, an idealized wisdom, obviously grand.

Knowledge disconnects the person, tied to concepts, from the true value of the exercise.

This capacity man has of premeditating a result, which should meet his expectations, places him in a state of inner tension: opposition, comparison, desire, and refusal, maintaining him in certain idea about the exercise and leads him to a dead end: a practice led by the mind, for the mind.

Practicing this way, man maintains himself at the surface of his own self, and oscillates between success and failure: pleasant, enjoyable or nice experiences, if they fit the expectations, he awaits from the practice; or rather bleak, unpleasant or disruptive, if not fitting his hopes.

That is how one can go in circles, when relying on knowledge and expectations of the ordinary, rational conscience when practicing an exercise.

*"If the Western Man sees the dead end in which the mind has led him, he will recognize it is vain to try and free himself from it by the same means that have created it"* K. G. Dürckheim.

So, how are we to get in contact with "this part of ourselves so often ignored"?

By placing ourselves out of the ordinary conscience.

And for this, and much to discontent the Ego, we need to come back to simple exercises (not simplistic) such as, I breathe, I walk (kin-hin), I am sitting (zazen), and engaging in them through a center that is other than the mind, the intellect.

This other fulcrum is the rediscovery of the vital center of man, Hara: rebirth of a primitive conscience, pre-mental, which has nothing to do with our physical or mental capacities, but that is to recover from our origins, our "bowels". Instantaneous, physical, sensitive, sensorial knowledge of one's self, which immerses us in a world of feeling, of the living body (Leib in German).

To participate and act according to what we feel, swept away by this vital momentum of our entire being: this conscience was the only one we knew at the beginning of our existence (foetus, baby, child); it was our only way of being to the world.

Our corporal conscience precedes the birth of mankind's consciousness, and his extraordinary capacities for reflection, organization, control, and development... and destruction! If to define this human conscience, pillar of our societies, Dürckheim only speaks of the ordinary conscience, and even of "routine conscience", doubtless are we missing out on a less ordinary conscience: what a mystery!

By taking up all of the inner and outer space, this rational way of being makes us forget we are living beings before thinking beings.

*"Man centered on the I, endangers his connection to the original life he still is... The development of hara, corporal and sensitive conscience represents the original relation of man and the superpowers of Life. This conscience is the link not yet broken with nature"* K. G. Dürckheim

The true reason for the exercise is to recover, at an adult age, "this connection to the original force of life" that we still are, "this connection to nature".

Whatever our age may be, our life conditions, our existential difficulties, our health, the exercises on the Way will always bring us back to feeling, tasting, and participating in this gesture of the entire living body, the burst of a gesture from our essence, of our belonging to the living.

To take contact with this part of our Self too often ignored, is practicing Za-zen, Kin-hin or any other exercise in accordance with this principle: to free the original, simple gesture wanted by life, such as breathing, walking, sitting...

The exercise, fully mastered and endlessly practiced without a goal (without the will of acquiring knowledge or a supplementary faculty), is truly feeling "only" I breathe, I walk, I sit... Feeling I am taking part in an event that is bigger than I, and that the I "has nothing to do with it!".

Thus, perhaps, each one of us may one day cry out "What a miracle, I am breathing!"

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