

CENTRE DURCKHEIM

D'instant en instant

Letter of encouragement to the practice of zazen

Letter N°119 — December 2023

— Zen, Yoga, Tai-Chi-Chuan, Aïkido —

— **Are not about teaching a know-how; but rather of sharing an awareness.**



That is why I absolutely refuse to teach the Way paved by Graf Durckheim *remotely*.

Why? Because the virtual face-to-face allowed by screens, does not permit a good *handshake*...!

Is it reasonable?

What is unreasonable is to imagine or think, that during a distant and virtual exchange, permitted by what we call progress in the field of communication, one can really be in contact with someone else.

The image of these two hands palpably exchanging, revives a souvenir both appalling and stimulating.

Rutte 1969 – I step into Graf Durckheim’s office. It must be our third encounter. He stands and reaches out to shake hands. Our hands meet and as soon as contact is made, he says: “*Jacques, do not move! Feel what we mean by shaking one’s hand. Do you feel? We could place a pigeon’s egg between your hand and mine. Which means you are lacking contact; you are lacking human contact*”.

All the while holding my hand in his own, Graf Durckheim invites me to make the gesture evolve, to free it from what prevents true human contact.

“*There! Do you feel the difference? The hand is not something; the hand, is Man in its entirety and unity. A hand is Man giving, and Man receiving. In the work we are undertaking, and which has for meaning the awakening of Man to his true nature, the passing from the idea of “Man has a body, to the experience of the body Man IS” (“Leib in German) is inevitable*”.

I did not interpret this remark – *you are lacking human contact* – as being a judgment but as being the implacable diagnosis of a way of being to the world that it is possible to engage in the process of transformation.

It is by being in contact with the master, who offers a way of experience and exercise, that I was able to, not understand, but make the phenomenal experience of the body man IS. *Leib*, the living body, is more than the sum of its parts, of which, the hand. *Leib*, the living body that we are, is a set of gestures by which each of us presents himself, becomes who he is profoundly or misses out.

Would such an experience be possible during an exchange with a master via Face Time or Skype?

From the experience to the exercise, from the exercise to the experience!

“Do not shoot, let it shoot...”

In the 1970's Graf Durckheim invites me to propose to those residing in Rutte, a few fundamental exercises in Aikido and Shotokan Karate. I could compare these to the barre exercises done by each dancer in the world of classical dance. The condition imposed by Graf Durckheim was to teach not a know-how, but to share an awareness acquired throughout the years of training in these Ways, together artistic, artisanal, and martial.

In parallel, I started Kyudo practice, traditional archery. Between the internships directed by master Satoshi Sagino, a daily training is necessary and consists in renewing two shots each morning. The shot is a ritual composed of a sequence of 8 gestures which allows to first draw the arrow, and then to the release the arrow.

When we practice kyudo, it is frequent to hear the archery master remind us: *“Do not shoot the arrow, let it be shot!”*. Frustrating injunction (if I do not shoot the arrow, the bow will not do it for me). Irritating, exasperating and provocative injunction.

“Do not shoot the arrow, let it be shot!”.

Taking part in a Kyudo internship I am about to shoot. Master Sagino approaches, takes the bow by placing his hands just below mine. Unexpected experience: *a four-hand shot!* This face-to-face - which resembles a couple dancing a waltz – gives birth to a succession of gestures, in such a way that it becomes difficult for me to say which of us leads, and which follows?

Strange sensation of perfect unity.

How am I to conceptualize what I feel?

The concept of *contact* imposes itself. It is something other than a simple touch, a closeness or a getting together. It is this “non-duality” that I feel and experience when I practice zazen and that I feel when I breathe in. No, if I conceptualize what I really feel I should write IBREATHEIN in one word, for there is no distance nor time lapse between what I call “I” and what I call “Breathe In”.

During this four-hand shot, the conciliated action with the master of the technique frees me from the ego which usually does things, and thinks that if it doesn't do them, nothing can get done. And without my knowing... it shot! Master Sagino walked away without a word, leaving me to digest what I had just swallowed, which was beginning the transformation so often wished for: great inner calm, a singular way of being and a feeling of being in contact through my senses with everything around me.

The following two-hand shots tasted quite different!

The union with the master became the unification with the technique.

Would such an experience be possible during an exchange with a master of the technique, a master of an art, through Face Time or Skype?

I am thankful that you do not to expect virtual teaching.

I am looking forward to soon being able to shake hands with you.

Jacques Castermane