

CENTRE DURCKHEIM

## *D'instant en instant*

*Letter of encouragement to the practice of zazen*

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### **Form must be consistent with depth!**

This injunction should unsettle or at least trouble anyone practicing and teaching an artistic, hand-crafted, or martial discipline rooted in the world of Zen. Form must be consistent with depth!

*Form?* It's the body we are, our way of being as a living body in its globality and unity.

*Depth?* It's our own essence, which allows what is ... to be! It is our true nature as a human being which Okumura Roshi designates as the naked self, which Graf Dürckheim calls our essential nature.

Hirano Roshi: "*When you practice zazen the body takes the shape of calm!*"

Zazen does not aim at improving the shape in order to improve ourselves. Zazen must be considered in terms of BECOMING and not in terms of acquisition of such or such state of being. The technique -Za- is not an end, it is a means. We must resume the exercise until the time comes where the means becomes a proof.

A proof? Yes. For example, the experience of "*The body takes the shape of calm!*" is an internal experience, an inner existence, a feeling accompanied by a sensation.

We need to cease imagining or thinking that it is possible by means of exercises, to produce a better "well-being". When we are motivated by this idea, we develop a sense of acquisition and/or a sense for performance which is at the heart of what is called personal development, but which prevents our becoming as a person.

Calm, great calm is a reality, which attempts to realize itself by itself and to take shape in the body we are. Calm, serenity, confidence, simple joy of being, are potentialities of our own essence, which do not need exercise to be realized.

On the other hand, exercise is inescapable in order to prevent remaining fixed in our EGO, which places a veil on these qualities of being that are sorely lacking in contemporary man.

All it takes is for this veil to lift and, instantly, a *great calm* invades our innermost being. Who has not experienced these privileged moments during which, without really knowing why or how, our existence suddenly makes sense?

All it takes...! Yes, nothing simpler. But as the ego complicates all that is simple, it makes the exercise unavoidable.

*What* is the ego? Although this question is at the origin of countless works that attempt to broaden our knowledge of how we function (psychoanalysis, cognitive sciences), it is a false question. It would be fairer to ask ourselves "*who* is the ego?"

*What*, referring to something, can be captured in the nets of our ordinary consciousness: the *consciousness OF*, which is at the source of our mental activity.

*Who*, referring to someone, can only be discovered by this someone. The quest for knowledge / learning (*savoirs*) about oneself gives place here to self-awareness (*connaissance*).

That is why it is important to underline that when we practice *zazen* we do nothing else than *face ourselves*.

Hirano Roshi reminds us that: “*There are thousands of ways to meditate but only one way of practicing zazen*”.

This letter gives me the opportunity to focus on an example:

In most meditation methods we are invited to *concentrate* on something: our breathing.

The Zen master will avoid this proposition and will rather invite you to exercise full *attention* to a sensitive experience : in this moment “I breathe in” ... in this moment “I breathe out”.

During my stay in Rütte in the Black Forest, it so happened I asked a question about the breath. Immediately Graf Dürckheim would stamp his fists on the table and say (with a loud voice): “*Jacques, when will you realize that what we call breath does not exist? Someone breathes!*”

Someone breathes! Here is how we pass from the question “what” to the interrogation “who”; how we pass from a knowledge about ourself to self-awareness.

Consequences? Transforming inner experiences.

The first one, fundamental, obliges you to write “IBreatheIn” in one word! Because I make the experience that there is no distance, nor time laps between what I call “I” and what I name “BreatheIn”. No duality subject/object; no opposition I/That.

An experience that leads to an evidence, a real truth: “IBreatheIn and “I” has nothing to do with it”.

Sensitive, tangible discovery of this part of ourselves which is the UNDOABLE. And it is by giving myself to what is given to me, that little by little, I can pass from agitation to great calm, from latent anxiety to confidence.

And experience that the existential form is in accordance with the depth, the essential.

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Translation from french: *Céline Jouenne*