

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

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## **Zen: The Way of Action?**

What a strange formulation to designate the Way of Zen, which seems a bit off with the idea we have of it, often associated to Buddha (or any other person practicing), sitting in meditation, calm, serene and perfectly immobile.

An action, an attitude which seems quite passive?

However, this designation “The Way of Action” is entirely justified, and concerns all levels of comprehension and practice which, although quite different, are intimately linked. Zen:

- 1 A way of action in the regular practice of a specific exercise
- 2 A way of action in our daily life
- 3 A way of action in the liberation of the undoable act of being.

### **1 “We can understand what Zen is if we practice an exercise...”**

This is what K. G. Durckheim often heard during his stay in Japan, manifesting a certain interest in Zen. Without saying, was implied “put aside your books, your knowledge, your intellectual need to understand, and practice an exercise with a master”!

Traditionally, exercises on the Way are abundant, may they be artistic, from the arts and crafts domain, martial, or originating from our daily life. To understand what Zen is, the student must choose and practice a specific exercise, always the same one, and regularly practice, to penetrate the world of zen.

This can be archery, aikido, the tea ceremony, calligraphy... or simply za-zen (sitting), and kin-hin (walking meditation). Za-zen and kin-hin are two fundamental exercises practiced at Durckheim Centre during retreats and sesshins.

Learning an exercise, is repeating a gesture, or a series of gestures, mastering the technique, perfectly mastering this technique... and renewing the same exercise anew.

This ceaselessly renewed action requires discipline, courage, perseverance and with time, forges stability and inner force which allow us to tirelessly continue to practice the exercise which maintains us on the Way.

It is the price to be paid to discover, on the one-hand, that a specific exercise can “impact” our daily life, and on the other-hand, is able to reveal another level of action, which transcends the effort and willingness used to maintain the practice itself.

*“By means of the exercise, man is able to free himself from the withdrawal into oneself and self-protection, originating from a lack of self-confidence, and is able to stabilise a strong self, allowing him to accept the world as it is, and remain open for the Greater Life to feed the smaller life”* K. G. Durckheim

### **2 “... And the more you practice this exercise, the more will the areas of your life be nourished by this depth”** D. T. Suzuki to Durckheim during a conversation in Japan.

Choose a regular and specific exercise, for example, sitting every morning at dawn. This exercise can nourish and be prolonged in our daily life only if it opens on a rupture with our usual way of being and doing.

It is therefore important to ask ourselves a few questions as to our way of practicing za-zen, or any other specific exercise on the Way.

Do I consider this practice as an additional activity I should insert in my filled day planning?

In this case, the exercise becomes a trivialized activity, drowned in the “list of things to do”, and is apprehended as useful, performant, and fruitful by making me more efficient.

There is no rupture with my usual way of doing and my need of doing something.

Am I practicing a timeless parenthesis having no link with my usual way of being?

In this case, there is an opposition, separation between essence and existence, between a so-called spiritual practice, out of time, and my daily business; it is a dead-end.

Daily life is a practice of every moment, for which indications such as:

- To do everything a little bit slower – Full attention to this step, this gesture – To start afresh – have their full meaning: “Slow down” in order to experience self-restraint, non-dispersion of the action, to taste a finer energy, a deeper strength; “Full attention” to prevent from falling into the trap of our habits, being attentive to the unhabitual; “Perseverance and attentiveness” to renew the right shape, rhythm, and stance, consonant with the depth, and the Whole.

In the daily flow, the only possible change resides in the action engaged in this moment, for this moment. For example, if I feel I am in a hurry, a rush: I slow down. Change is immediate, as well as its inner and outer repercussions.

I am leaving my usual way of doing, made of mechanical reactions, imperatives, beliefs imposed by the mind, to discover another way of being and acting.

The immediate modification of my way of being, my gesture, is a radical path for healing, to be renewed always and exercised.

According to Master Dogen, it is the practice of zazen and the four dignified attitudes – standing, sitting, lying and walking – which constitute the heart of zen.

These attitudes concern all our actions, our relation to the world and to ourselves, in all places and circumstances; they reveal our way of being, of assuming our existence with dignity, and show us our mechanisms, zones of resistance and fears.

### **3 “Perfectly master an exercise means to liberate the vital action of the undoable, specific to the living body, which is conditioned, hindered and constrained by the I” J. Castermane**

To ceaselessly practice the same exercise or practice the vigilance to all of our daily actions and gestures is to open to another level of action that is named “undoable”.

This opening, this rediscovery of the vital centre of man, Hara, is, and by the upkeep and development of the attention to this centre, subdued to the laws of the living before being enslaved by our mind, and allows rediscovery of our natural belonging to the Great Life.

These two practices – the specific exercise or daily life as a field of exercise – nourish one another.

This most particular moment of the specific exercise allows us to accustom ourselves to our true nature, fleeting moments of the “touch of the being”, or the recognition of what separates us from it. Without this discipline in the practice, the recognition of our true nature would flee, would remain unconscious. The practice of the four dignified attitudes in our daily life is the execution in our existence of this recognition.

*“The knowledge and practice of this relation essence/existence is a key to progress on the Way”* K. G. Durkheim says.

This “undoable” connexion, without which essence and existence oppose themselves, cannot be made or obtained through the practice of exercises, kept or refused, rejected.

All these actions are already present, right at the beginning of our existence, they have their own life, they are animated by the Tao, the order of things, “the universally human”.  
This conscient contact with what cannot be done, the I, allows me to be in contact with the essence of being alive itself, of being breathed, shaped, actioned by Life itself.

Actions exist right from our fertilization: “that” (cells, embryo, foetus) transforms, is shaped and breathe... constantly and without being mentalized. Actions are carried on as a baby, and small child: crawl, sit, stand, see, hear... the laws of life are at work, without what we will later call, the Will.  
When on the Way, these actions are rediscovered and revealed anew, in a specific practice: form, stance, breath; see, hear, feel... undoable actions which are already present.

The action of Being exists before thought; it is from this elementary action that all others originate.  
To act, is being attentive to what enlivens me, which is beneath the compulsive need “to do”.  
For example, being present to the gesture of breathing, which gives a fair shape from the inside – out, stance and rhythm ... only because in connection with the laws of the living, far different from the laws of the mind.  
To act, is, to feel the gesture of this living being that I am in all my actions, taking part in an event larger than “I”, event subject to the laws of change, impermanence and interdependence.  
To act is to participate in the gesture, to be carried by the gesture.  
To act in relation to the undoable, is to accept what appears and disappears, what breathes, what naturally transforms, to be one with the gesture of incessant transformation of the living.  
Life forces us to action, presence, participation, always.  
To act is an answer to this obligation.

So, za-zen: an action?

Tchouang Tseu’s answer: “Perfect immobility is an action superior to all others”.

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