

CENTRE DURCKHEIM
A Path step by step
Encouragement for daily practice

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A correct use of the conscience

“The importance given to hara represents the original relation between man and the powers of Life. This conscience is the link not yet broken with nature. Hara is the original gift made to man. On the Way of Zen, we have the responsibility to relate, consciously this time, to the great forces of Life; we have the obligation to reconquer our true centre.” K.G. Dürckheim

These few words – *consciously this time* – are fundamental; man is familiar with this state of being. We began our existence as such, unconsciously bathing in our fate, without will or mind, simply carried by our vital, primary, corporal and sensorial conscience. So, conscience or unconsciousness?

From a certain point of view, we could say that from the very fertilization, we are on the Way. The body is an incessant living process as medical intrauterine images can show. We are submitted to the laws of nature: no mind for the cell’s multiplication, from the ‘bean’ to the embryo, from the embryo to the foetus...

Passing from one form to another: all is action, a transforming living gesture.

As foetus I feel, hear, taste... Then, passing from the matrix to the outside generates transformations, other actions: another breathing, and then all the gesture innate to the baby after a few months: lying on the back, on the stomach, on the side... crawling, sitting, standing and then the very first steps... I am living body, put into shape by the gestures of Life.

These gestures are well known by all participants of Dürckheim Centre!

May it be during our intrauterine life, during the very first moments, “IT” never ceases to transform, and then, as a baby “IT” acts, takes shape; form wanted by life itself, form carried by vital actions. In the zen tradition, the archery master will say: “Do not shoot, let IT shoot!”

“Hara – centred” (pelvis, belly), that is how we began our existence, carried by the vital energy, the Tao – the order of things – as the small animal (etymologically, a being gifted with life) that we are, sensorially open to everything.

This vital unconsciousness, made of force and vulnerability, of dependence and innocence, of simplicity and abandonment, is “this original gift made to man”, source of our terrestrial existence.

“Vital unconsciousness” fascinates and frightens the adults we have become. But can we speak of unconsciousness for children?

“The child does not know he is living, he lives!”

As adults we fear this unconsciousness, for we have fallen into another form of conscience, specific to the human being: the objectifying, rational, illustrative conscience, with an endless need to understand and control our existence at all costs.

We grow to become thinking beings, ego centred, that is, centred in our heads and no longer in our vital belly, pelvis.

Little by little, “I think therefor I am” replaces and hides “I breathe therefor I am”.

This form of conscience cannot accept, or with great difficulty, this state of abandonment facing the incomprehensible, the unexpected, or the renewal of life.

But, as adults (and that is our luck!) we remain fascinated by this state of innocence and abandonment linked to childhood, nostalgic of this state that we have known.

As adults, having become beings of reason, we can rediscover, “consciously this time” what we have always known: our belonging to this vital, pre-mental conscience, source of all life. It is not a question of denying the human’s intelligence and its extraordinary capacities, but rather of returning to a freer form of conscience, larger, more inclusive: a corporal, sensitive conscience which links us to our vital intelligence.

“Replacing his foundation unconscious natural forces by the strength of his rational mind and will, the human being becomes a conscious and independent I; but in doing so, forgets where he is from”. K. G. Dürckheim.

All of these actions carry and transform us from the very beginning and are still there today, for each and every one of us, whatever age, activity and rational intelligence. The relief expressed after a retreat through the testimony hereafter reminds us that this first oceanic conscience is never forgotten, but merely put aside.

“After this retreat, relief is certainly the feeling that most moved me.

At the end of my studies, after all these years spent using my brain and reasoning, subject to answering my personal injunctions of always doing more and better, anxiety started taking more space, placing at a distance the moments of sensitivity and connexion with myself and the world around me. “No time to take time”, “no time to stop, even for a moment”, “no time to contemplate, to do nothing” ... Always doing more, going further, faster and better.

So, I am moved and relieved by this reminder that the essential is not what I thought, on the contrary. Moved and relieved to have felt that the connexion to what is essential is real and is still there. Moved and relieved because there is indeed a way of being, or rather of letting it be, that reveals senses and give the possibility to live true, sensitive and soothing moments.”

A way of being, different than our habit of approaching things with the mind, that the exercise on the Way of Zen, reveals to us. We already are, still, always, what we are seeking.

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