

CENTRE DURCKHEIM

## *D'instant en instant*

*Letter of encouragement to the practice of zazen*

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### **All human beings are drawn towards two realities**

*“Man is drawn towards two realities: **his existential reality**, during which he feels threatened – throughout his entire existence in this world – by chaos and exterior events AND **his essential reality**, which is none other than his true nature, what I call his essential being.” (K.G. Dürckheim)*

“Man feels threatened – throughout his existence – in this world”!

It has always been so, and still is.

Today, like yesterday, the threat emanates from mother nature’s power. Somewhere an earthquake; elsewhere a tsunami. Here a draught; over there a flood.

Today, even more so than yesterday, danger emanates from mankind’s pretentiousness. For instance: identified to his ego, man’s vanity is such that he thinks he lives – **among** – nature and can dominate it and constrain what he is faced with. However, as all beings, man lives – **from** – nature.

The true nature of the human being, *his essential nature*, is of same Nature as Nature itself. To free himself from the threat, man’s responsibility is to put himself at the service of Nature’s laws. I fear that the obsession with Artificial Intelligence will draw him away further from Nature.

When at the start of my sojourn in Rutte (1967), I told Graf Dürckheim I did not understand the relation between what he designated as our *essential nature* and what he called our *existential being*, he smiled and said “*I understand! Because it is difficult to understand this relation. But you could start by reading a short story which seems to be a key to the understanding of our suffering as human beings. This story brings our attention on the relation between the wave and the ocean*”. Which story?

The next morning, under my door had been slipped the metaphor which is the answer to the question: “Who am I?”

### **THE WAVE AND THE OCEAN**

*“The wave is not detached from the Ocean, different from the Ocean. The feeling that animates the wave all along its journey at the surface of what we call the world, is a feeling of security.*

*Security! How so? Because the wave feels ONE with the Ocean.*

*If the wave differentiates itself from the Ocean by thinking there is me and beneath me there is something, the Ocean, its journey on the surface is animated with anguish and the states that accompany it.”*

This metaphor resumes all that is shared by most Ways of wisdom rooted in the East and Far East.

Any instructor in Yoga, Tai Chi, Kyudo (archery), Chado (tea ceremony), Kendo (art of the sword) and Shodo (calligraphy), should read and re-read what is the key to the comprehension of the foundations of these practices, which are both different and identical.

The affirmation - common to all teachings - is that deeply, at the heart of his essence, man is truly free, calm and confident. Alike the wave, I can contemplate a way through life in absolute... security.

The Ocean is the matrix for each wave. The Ocean is extracted from each wave. Each wave is none other than the Ocean itself. It would be pretentious to say, "I am the Ocean...!" But I am allowed to say "I am a packet of Ocean!"

In the 1930's, Graf Dürckheim had been practicing an exercise named zazen and archery (Kyudo) for a few months. To D.T. Suzuki, who advised him to approach Zen not only through his philosophical understanding, but also through the practice of an exercise, he said "*If I understand correctly, Zen opens on the experience of being like a fish in water?*"

The immediate response from Suzuki: "*No, Zen opens on the experience of being like water... in water*".

The Way paved by Graf Dürckheim - Zen in what it conceals of universally human - frees me from the illusion that Life is – *in* – the living, frees me from the illusion that the Being is – *in* – the being.

Life, *the living body that I am* (Leib, IchLeib) "*IS*" life which from moment to moment becomes its own existential shape.

The body is not the container for a content... the Ocean.

There is no separation, no duality, no opposition between the wave and the Ocean, between the existential I and our essential reality.

The suffering proper to the human being – mental suffering - is suffering created by the idea of separation. Thus, this suffering has no concrete cause but our mental representation of reality. Representations that I create, or representations that I am invited to believe (the credo) or that I am obligated to believe (the dogma).

The wave which thinks it is detached from the Ocean, the man who believes he is separated from his own essence *suffers*; man suffers from a *lack*.

No. He suffers from the impression of a lack.

*"I do not suffer from a lack; I suffer from ignoring what is not lacking."* K.G. Dürckheim

To be freed from our ignorance, the Zen master invites us to set forth of the Way. The Way is the technique, the technique is the Way. A Way of experience and exercise.

You are currently on vacation on the Ocean's shores. Take advantage of the moment to lie on the water's surface and be carried by the Ocean's movement, the ebb and flow of the tide. Just as, when practicing zazen, when you give yourself to the ebb and flow of the vital breath. Do nothing, absolutely nothing. And the living body that we are takes the shape of calm.

*"Muddy water is best cleared by leaving it alone"* Alan Watts

Jacques Castermane

Translation from French: *Céline Jouenne*