

D'Instant en instant

Letter of encouragement to the practice of zazen

Letter N°124 — October 2024

Practice of the Way in our daily life?

“When you practice zazen, the body takes the shape of calm” (Hirano Rôshi)

It is not a question of dogma. It is up to each of us to see if this is true. How? I see only one way: by thoroughly practicing zazen.

A practice described in the previous *Letters d'Instant en Instant*.

If it so happens that during this exercise we accomplish during the day, away from our daily occupations, if it so happens that you feel this *calm*, which is not the opposite of agitation but the absence of agitation, a question arises: can this inner calm radiate on my everyday life?

The exercise makes sense, only to the extent that this way of being which reveals that I am in contact with my true nature, permeates my way of being in this world in general.

If the Zen master is there to teach us how to practice zazen, he is also there to draw our attention on the proper behaviour to adopt at all moments in our daily life, designated in Japanese as *Shiigi* and understood as being the four dignified attitudes: *walking* (gyô), *standing* (jû), *sitting* (za), *lying* (ga).¹

In his book *der Alltag als Übung* (daily life as exercise)² from 1960, Graf Dürckheim underlines the importance of our way of being as living body (Leib): *“Everything we do in the world, we do with a certain corporal attitude. The object of our doing belongs to the world, but in his attitude, in his way of doing, Man expresses him self!”*

And he takes the example of a daily activity that almost belongs to the past: to post a letter in the mailbox.

“To post a letter in a mailbox situated about a hundred steps away from where we are, means one hundred wasted steps if this action is given the only meaning of posting the letter. However, if a man on the Way, then even the shortest distance will give him the opportunity to place himself in order internally, to renew contact to his essential nature, provided he walks this distance in the right attitude. As it will be the same for all daily life activities.”

Graf Dürckheim in the 60's; Hirano Rôshi during the past ten years when he animated sesshin at the Centre, and likewise Dôgen Zenji³ during the 13th century, invite us to distinguish an *action* from an *activity*.

Each day *I walk* for about ten minutes to get to my workplace. Walking is subsequently an *activity* in relation with an external goal, an existential necessity. Subject to certain circumstances, for example being on-time for an appointment, I will walk more or less quickly.

At the Dojo, I exercise *slow walking* called Kin-Hin. During this exercise I am attentive to the right *stance* (nor tense, nor slouched), attentive to the *rhythm* thanks to which the passing from one foot to another is done in perfect balance. Walking is thus an **action** which both expresses and imprints what we can call the intentions of the being.

The intentions of the being? As well as the act of breathing – this vital action – the act of walking is innate. The innate precedes our genetical heritage or acquired conditionings. Breathe, walk; these undoable actions do not emanate from the I but express and reveal the dynamic presence of our own essence. It is the same for inner calm, this value too often ignored. “*I do not suffer from a lack; I suffer from ignoring what is not lacking*” (Graf Dürckheim).

Action and activity. The undoable and the doing.

It is not a question of opposing these two modes of doing. It is a question of harmonising, of weaving, until their interaction becomes our natural way of living, our way of being to the world. Intertwining of the existential I, the mundane I, and our essential being.

Chuang Tzu⁴ spoke of the relation between the *sky and the human*.

To the question – What do you mean by the sky? – the Chinese wiseman replies: “*the horses and buffalos have four legs: that is what I call the sky*”.

To the question – What do you mean by *human*? – he answers: “*place a halter on the horse, pierce the buffalo’s muzzle: that is what I call human*.”

And he adds: “*Be attentive that the Human in you does not destroy the Celest in you*”.

Be attentive! Attention is the word that most rightly translates the kanji -Zen-

Zazen? Be attentive not to disturb the undoable by what you do!

Kin-Hin? Be attentive not to disturb the undoable by what you do!

The daily exercise? “There is nothing special in what I do every day. I am content of being in harmony with all things. (...) supranatural powers and work that could provoke admiration are nothing else than looking for water and collecting wood”.

Whatever it is you do, be attentive not to disturb the undoable with what you do!

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¹ Hirano Katsufumi Rôshi - *ENSEIGNEMENTS* - p. 29 - Compilation par J. Derudder – éd. Unicité

² Pratique de la Voie intérieure – Le quotidien comme exercice – K.G. Dürckheim – éd. Le Courrier du Livre

³ Dôgen Zenji (12^{ème} Siècle) *Fukanzazengi : Règles et méthodes pour la pratique de zazen*

⁴ *Leçons sur Tchouang-Tseu* - J.-F. Billeter - p. 47-48 – éd. Allia