

CENTRE DURCKHEIM
A Path step by step
Encouragement for daily practice

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The practice of “un-becoming”



Recently, during a walk in the mountains, I found myself face to face with this tree and had no choice but to stop. Curiously, I had been walking for an hour in this autumn forest in the middle of an abundance of living trees, and it is this one that stopped my progression!

This monumental shape that I came across in the bend of a path spoke to me and said: “Where are you at, in your ability to let go?”

Had I well prepared my itinerary, defined a schedule and planned my route, but this encounter and what it generated caught me off guard, disrupted my plans, made me question the expected, opening the path to another way of being.

Quite simply the tree stopped me and said:

“Where are you running to like that, so predictable and so sure of yourself? Take time to settle down, to look around you, to feel and meet what is truly here”.

This contact is favoured by paying attention to the gesture of breathing out: settling down, relaxing, listening, retiring from the need of doing, controlling, managing the situation, the state of mind in which I was in, at that moment.

Needless to say my initial objectives were abandoned, and the rest of the walk was transformed into a more natural rhythm, an openness in the way that I saw things, a truer contact with nature that I suddenly felt I was a part of; the context had changed from a simple sports activity in the mountains to a place infinitely more lively and welcoming, a place of exchanges and interactions.

In a more subtle way, if the presence of this dead tree in the middle of living ones touched me so much at that moment, it is because a phrase I had recently heard during a retreat imposed itself and took all its sense: “dare to breathe out, dare to un-become!”

During an intensive practice of za-zen, placing your attention to your breathing is in the foreground and this renewed gesture of breathing in/breathing out is an incessant passing from un-becoming to becoming.

Sitting in za-zen, perfectly immobile, is not wanting anything else than to be carried by the coming and going of breath: to die to be reborn at every moment, to open up, to give all, to live all and lose everything the moment after.

“Healthy breathing places an emphasis on the duration of the act of breathing out, on the abandonment, and therefore naturally gives place to a true inspiration” ... “To give oneself, to abandon oneself, to retire during the expiration and to find oneself regenerated during the inspiration. Such is the fundamental formula for the transformation of Oneself” says Dürckheim. Vital formulation which he also names in his work the great law of “Dying to Become”, or “the Wheel of Transformation”.

This indication “Dare to un-become!” is thus precious in our actual existences, in which everything drives us to acquire, to hold on to what we care for, to fix what matches our aspirations, our plans for life. This way of living favours breathing in, a gain, an accumulation: but what is done with everything over the years, with all these things?

“The ego is like a snowball rolling in time and space never ceasing from growing” says a Zen master.

Practicing the Path of Zen is not a quantitative accumulation of progress or pleasant experiences, considered good for the I, or for me to think that life corresponds to MY wishes.

Jacques often reminds us of this danger and the will we have to transform: “Transformation, is often a halt in the process of becoming, a voluntary and wished stop by the I.”

However, the wheel of transformation turns without a halt, tied and in constant contact with the ebb and flow of breathing.

Do our gestures, our way of being, arise from this link to Essence, are they generated from it or are they etched in stone by our habits, our postures or beliefs? Are we available to feel that “BEING”, our true nature, is life in its perpetual movement of regeneration and its creative force of transformation?”

It is the un-becoming, being attentive to breathing out which can help us clear ourselves, help us free ourselves from accumulation, and thus, allow the true gesture of renewal to happen, which is inspiration.

Learning to un-become is to feel a pause is possible, that non-action is possible, that a union of oneself to depth is possible. Far from leading to a passive and uninteresting “nothing”, this attitude opens us to a perpetual transformation called, asked, and wanted by life itself.

During these times of passing from one year to another, maybe is it good to feel that true change does not happen with good resolutions which tend to lock us up in postures and expectations, but in the rediscovery of this very simple and forever renewed gesture: breathing out, un-becoming, letting go of excess...

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