

CENTRE DURCKHEIM
A Path step by step
Encouragement for daily practice

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A consciousness ungraspable by the mind

“Zen teaches us: when man lets go of the ordinary I — and it is possible — what remains is not nothing. On the contrary, life itself comes forward as never before. Man is no longer a subject perceiving life as a multitude of separate objects, but he becomes a subject in which life reveals itself directly, beyond the duality of opposites. This new vision requires an expansion of consciousness.”

Inevitably, in spiritual teaching, when speaking of a change in the level of consciousness, while remaining within our ordinary awareness, we tend to imagine it in terms of acquiring superior abilities that are gratifying to the ego: “At last, I will increase my knowledge and abilities!” But, this consciousness is accessible, on the one hand, only if the I releases its control, and, on the other hand, this expansion of consciousness is much easier and more natural than the mind can ever imagine or believe. It is not about gaining or accumulating anything, but about returning to the primordial consciousness: unitive, inclusive, the essential core of who we truly are, which we are already familiar with, since we have experienced it at some point (cf. Letter, August 2025 – *The Essential is where we left it!*).

D.T. Suzuki speaks of *satori*, a fleeting and momentary experience of our true nature, felt as “a new and old experience.” New, because the experience of Being is constantly fresh and forever renewable. And at the same time, old, because this taste of the true Self recalls the oceanic consciousness in which we began our existence, bathing in a vital unconsciousness governed only by the laws of life. This oceanic sense of unity, of belonging to something greater, can now be rediscovered “*but this time consciously*” Durckheim insists, during adulthood. This is the meaning of practice, of our commitment to the Way.

This opportunity, part of the greatness and richness that Buddhists call “our precious human life” opens us to “the Great Life” — which lies beyond the ordinary rational consciousness through which we navigate in our daily lives. Durckheim calls it our sensitive consciousness, or our natural consciousness.

The rediscovery of this sensitive consciousness, “*elusive to thought but not unknowable*,” is often experienced by our rational adult mind as a regression. For this rational consciousness, which presumes to know everything, to manage everything, and to control everything, believes it will always do so, more and more.

But to rely on intellectual comprehension alone leads to a dead end in Zen. The quest is not intellectual. To the question “Who am I?” the answer is not intellectual, it is a bodily experience of another question: “What am I?”

“The will to preserve the I is proof of man’s lack of transparency to his essential nature; it is a refusal to surrender to the natural forces of life, to the cycle of transformation that is Life itself. It is precisely this refusal that suffocates the authentic life within him.”

To practice Zen is to move from seeking an ideal — a false mental representation of reality — to a direct, concrete and lived experience of the body.

“The truth is a sensorial quality independent of our will or our mind,” Jacques Castermane reminds us. So instead of striving to acquire more abilities, the task is to let go of everything that veils our depth, in order to serve “*the life that is intimately present*” which animates us. What we know, what we hear, what we hope for are ideas, concepts, the “contents” of our ordinary consciousness. We must abandon this constant habit of conceptualizing the world if we want to taste what our living body has to teach us: *Leib*, a living and sensitive experience.

We constantly oppose body and mind, all the more so when following a spiritual path: on the one hand, the uninteresting material baseness, and fortunately, on the other, the spiritual mind that can elevate us.

“It is a mistake to think that the spiritual exercise consists in concentrating on some transcendental content, an effort to identify with a transcendent image. This identification may be experienced as a beautiful moment, but it is a complete illusion to believe that the presence of a transcendent content, which remains conceptual, can change a man. For man, the meaning of the Way lies in transformation itself, not filling himself with sacred content. The spiritual exercise is to become another, for it is only in becoming another that he can see things differently.”

By engaging the body in learning a technique, in a regular exercise (called a specific exercise on the Way), or by bringing attentive presence to the simplest daily actions (daily life as a field of exercise), we can change. Sustained attention allows us to renew, moment after moment, the living gesture of Being. “Do everything a little slower! Take care of each gesture! Bring more fluidity and dignity to your movements!” These instructions, repeated time and again during practice, help to “*place some being in each action.*”

Zen brings us back to sensory experience, to subjectivity, to the intimate feeling of being, an experience that does not rely on theories, dogmas, or ideas, but on truly immediate bodily experiences lived by the practitioner. The technique is renewed again and again; it shows us how to reconnect with our depth by drawing on forces we have often forgotten in favour of the mind’s power alone.

Opening to the “*resources of the body*” means the sacred return to our lower abdomen, the belly, the feet, during the practice of even the simplest exercise: to recover and free the power in our vital centre, the *Hara*, which sustains and accompanies man in his relation to universal Life. The body, “*field of sensation, field of action, field of consciousness,*” increasingly freed from physical, emotional, and mental tensions, connects us to vital intelligence.

The body guides us back to our roots, to its original consciousness, and leads us to the fullness of our Being human. The only true source of healing?

And if the recognition and liberation of the vital point, *Hara*, were the key to discovering a clear, peaceful mind and an open confident heart?

The answers to these questions can only be exercised, tasted, and continually renewed.

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All texts or expressions written *in italics* are from K.G. Durckheim

Books: “Le Centre de l’être” – “Méditer, pourquoi, comment?”

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