

D'instant en instant

Letter of encouragement to the practice of zazen

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The Essential is where we left it!

If we didn't already know the tragedies unique to the human condition, all we need do is listen—between two advertisements—to the endlessly repeated news reports offered by the media. Enough to nourish our anxiety and the states related to it for the rest of the day. It is enough to make one wonder whether our existence has any meaning at all? To this question, Graf Dürckheim responds: *“Beyond the human tragedies of the past, present, or future that move us, there are many people today who have the intuition, or sense, of a secret core that exists beyond space and time.*

A secret core that can give our existence meaning in the world as it is, without waiting for it to change.

*This secret core is what the Zen master calls our true nature, and what I call our **essential being**.*”

The essential! But what is that, exactly? The answers differ greatly, depending on whether they come from a philosopher, a psychoanalyst, a scientist, or a member of the clergy.

If the essential is *invisible*, I will never see it; if it is *unspeakable, incommunicable*, why bother trying to describe it; if it is *metaphysical, transcendent*, and thus abstracted from the real, it will take its place in a belief that anyone is free to reject.

...So where do we find our essential being?

“Exactly where we left it... where it is waiting for us,” answers Graf Dürckheim.

The path that prepares the conditions which allow and encourage the *discovery* of our essential being is a path of experience and *exercise*. The exercise offered at the Dürckheim Centre is called “*zazen*”.

Zazen is waiting... without waiting for anything... for that which, in reality, is waiting for us!

It is through the practice of zazen that, one day, sitting in absolute stillness and doing nothing but facing what confronts me, an inescapable truth reveals itself: *I inhale, and I have nothing to do with it. I exhale, and I have nothing to do with it.*

An undeniable fact bursts before my eyes: I *am* and I have nothing to do with it!

The essential reveals itself in the presence of the *UN-DOABLE*.

The un-doable? It is not a conceptual truth; it is truth itself.

The un-doable offers itself to *sensation*—just as real as when, by mistake, one plunges a hand into boiling water. No one can tell you that what you feel is merely subjective. It is an experience that imposes itself upon you, as you are the subject.

I realized that it is by slipping from the logic of the *intellect* into the logic of the *senses* that man awakens to the foundations of his own being: his own essence.

What moved me deeply was that, at the very moment I embraced the un-doable, my way of being to the world was instantly transformed.

“If you truly practice zazen, the body takes the shape of calm.”

Calm! Not a calm that is simply the opposite of agitation, but the great inner calm that bears witness to, and confirms, the absence of the slightest agitation.

This great calm is the symptom of our fundamental state of health.

Where to find this soothing great calm? Exactly where we left it... where it is waiting for us. In the body that we *are* from that mysterious moment of conception, and which we become throughout gestation and during the first months following our physiological birth.

“The metaphysics of babies is the only one that betrays neither earth nor sky,” writes Christian Bobin. And he adds: *“Babies are the great sages. True knowledge is in their eyes... It is the very face of wisdom—which is not a face of knowledge... One of their great virtues is not to be blinded by knowledge. They look without morality, without philosophy, without religion, without any precaution. There is no distance between their eyes and God or the angels. Or the atoms of the air, if one does not believe in God or angels. Babies are separated from the truth by nothing more than a sheet of rice paper.”*

Michiko Nojiri, a master of the tea ceremony, always began her lessons with the practice of zazen. Her introduction was always the same: *“To practice zazen is to sit as a baby lies in its cradle.”*

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