

D'instant en instant

Letter of encouragement to the practice of zazen

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Before “doing”, listen to “the undoable”!

When a Westerner decides to engage in the practice of Yoga, Tai Chi or in an art or craft, whether artistic or martial and rooted in Japan, he expects to “do” an *exercise*. Hence my surprise when I hear the old sage from the Black Forest say that on the Way he proposes, it is not a question of “doing” something right away, of accomplishing an exercise invented by man.

*Before doing, it is important to listen,
to allow the “undoable” to emerge.*

To listen to the undoable?

It is important to distinguish between *two forces*. The first is one that we develop, that we “do”, and the other, one that cannot be done at all. Thus, we cannot make our heart beat, and it is a force we must accept. Likewise, it is important for the Westerner to distinguish between *two levels of actions*. Consequently, I cannot “do” this vital action which is “breathing”; this is an undoable action that I must simply accept.

What is not about “doing” but which we need to accept, reveals what is universally human in man. It is an important first step on the way to recognizing this part of ourselves which is beyond ourselves.

That said, one needs to realize that the character of reality which transcends what a human being can do depends on our vision of reality itself, and not on an exterior cause. Hence the absolute necessity when we are on the Way, is to distinguish two approaches to reality.

Graf Dürckheim distinguishes between what he calls the Western spirit on the one hand and the Oriental spirit on the other.

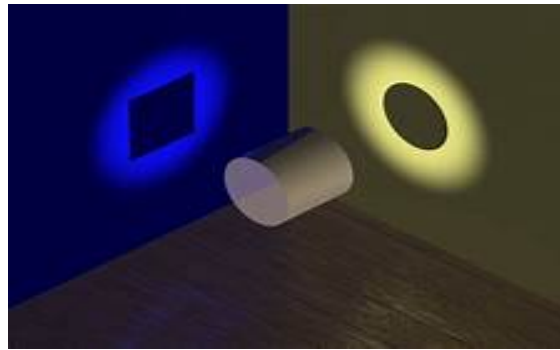
*The Western mind THINKS of reality as being an ensemble of objects.
The Oriental mind SEES reality as an ensemble of processes.*

He sees two uses of what we call “consciousness”: the consciousness OF and the consciousness WITHOUT. “An attunement implies the use of the consciousness WITHOUT. It is very important when we practice an exercise. Indeed, the use of the consciousness OF leads me to -think- that “I have a body”; the use of the consciousness WITHOUT leads me to -see- that “body I am”.

I don’t understand! The body we “have” VS the body we “are”? The consciousness OF VS the consciousness WITHOUT?

Better than words through which we are led to understand, an image can often help us see... what is, not to be understood.

See this cylinder!



The light that makes the object visible projects its shape onto two screens, which leads us to consider the cylinder as *circular* or *rectangular*.

The above image seems to demonstrate that a *cylinder* has the same properties as a *rectangle* or a *circle*. This incompatibility results not from the object itself but from our way of conceptualizing it, from our way of comprehending it.

For many years, in *traditional* physics, scientists asserted that light was a *wave* phenomenon, while others proclaimed that light was a *particle* phenomenon.

Until one day *quantum* physics considered these two phenomena as *coexistent*. Depending on the experimental context, an electron can present itself either as *particle* or as *wave*.

Come on! Is light made of *waves* or *particles*? A Zen master will answer: “*Both together!*”.

Both together!

This exclamation is unbearable for any thinking human being. All the more so when it associates opposites that are manifest: body (*and*) mind... health (*and*) illness... good (*and*) bad... inhaling (*and*) exhaling... calm (*and*) agitation... life (*and*) death...

Whenever it is possible to use the consciousness WITHOUT (previously experienced during the entire time of gestation) you can now “practice” zazen! That is, to do... nothing at all! Except listen (zen) to what presents itself while you are sitting (za) perfectly immobile.

Thanks to a regular and renewed practice, the expression “*both together*” is seen not only as a foundational principle of our existence but also as the source of this state of being which, sadly, is lacking in Western man: inner CALM. This great calm which is not the opposite of agitation (duality) but the absence of agitation (symptomatic of our true nature).

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