

At the source of our humanity

“When what distinguishes us from the animal asserts itself, it also becomes what separates us from God.” (K. G. Durckheim – *Le maître intérieur*)

Another book, another proposition: *“If man is destined to become a thinking being, in doing so he forgets where he comes from”*. These words invite us to reflect on the meaning we give to our existence, our intelligence, our humanity.

Every living being has two ways of approaching reality: the first through the mind, the second through sensation. Two approaches which, for the adult, are not complementary oppose or dividing; as rational thought suppresses the sensitive conscience.

We begin our existence in a sensorial exchange with the world.

From our first impressions in our mother’s womb until our early years of childhood, we are bathed in a consciousness in direct contact with reality:

No words to name what we smell, see, hear, or do...

No comparisons, no oppositions between this or that.

I was recently struck by the quality of my 18-month-old granddaughter’s yeses and noes; no “yes but...” to please or conform, nor “noes” of permanent rejection or reaction. Only responses free of rigidity or preconception, clear and unified in her being; answers which, in the moment, oppose nothing to anything and can evolve with the circumstances.

This direct and sensorial approach to reality does not yet pass through the filter of our analytical or discursive mind. It belongs to man as much as to animal, for we are all originally “beings endowed with life”, the etymological sense of the word animal.

When the human being leaves these early years of existence, he is led to develop another approach to reality: through thought and conceptual intelligence. A most understandable and justified evolution, necessary to integrate into society and to master our existence.

Yet, this approach to reality ends up “imposing itself”, everywhere and at all times, cutting us from our roots, from the link that makes us human beings, universally alive.

To recover this link is the very purpose of Zen.

What we accumulate, fix, experience, through our conceptual consciousness cuts us off from the gesture of being, from this feeling of belonging “to the Greater Life”.

It is then “that we separate from God” or, in other words, from the elusive essence of our humanity.

The Way reminds us that our legitimate aspiration to a controlled and certain existence, if we are not vigilant, ends up placing us in opposition to the truth that *“All that lives only lives by becoming”* and then *“protected by the shell of the I that imprisons him, Man closes himself to the vital impulse that transforms his essential being.”* K. G. Durckheim.

Our true essence can be revealed only if we renounce living our entire life through the prism of thought and are able to open ourselves to a direct and sensorial relationship with reality. It is a relearning of being, of the simple joy of being, capable of illuminating us in a given moment, giving us that fleeting sense of reality: “How good it is to feel alive!”

Zen is a return to the fundamentals of a natural wisdom, that man still possesses, whatever his degree of intellectual evolution, the size of his bank account, or his profession in the world.

What a paradox! To regain this human completeness again, we must abandon what we have learned to put forward our distinction from the animal: the conceptual mind.

For example, we share with the animal world the same faculty of attention: seeing, tasting, hearing, smelling... without analysing what is seen, tasted, heard, or felt. We have lost this original quality of presence. Expressions such as “full attention!”, “vigilance!” are often misunderstood along the Way, as if they meant to work hard on oneself: “I must be attentive all the time!” But attentive to what?

So that rational consciousness does not take up all the space and frees our full sensoriality, our natural capacity for full attention, inherent to the living body.

This state of presence to oneself and to the world, to be open, permeable, is our natural state of attention, which reappears when it is no longer hidden by the dominance of thought: we can then be surprised to truly feel again, see again, hear again what we thought we already knew, simply because we could name or classify it.

This supposes we take seriously once more the pre-mental world, that we truly consider “doing everything a little slower”.

Thus, in full attention to the vital gesture, source of all action, let us allow ourselves to be surprised and transformed by these inhabited moments which touch and seize us in our daily frenzy of efficiency and accumulation.

These expressions of our true nature, the “touches of the being”, forever question very concretely our humanity through our very way of being in the world.

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