

CENTRE DURCKHEIM

D'instant en instant

Letter of encouragement to the practice of zazen

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Man Walking !



It is Giacometti's vision of man in quest of meaning.

The act of walking is constant for the human being. Emphasizing its importance when we are on a quest toward the essential can seem superficial to our Western mind.

In the Zen tradition, the master of the technique is there to make you realize that "walking" is part of what Dôgen (founder of Soto Zen) designates as one of *–the Four dignified attitudes –: Lying... sitting... standing... and walking.*

These elementary actions, which characterise the development of every newborn from the day of birth until their first birthday, seem banal. And we think, all along our life, that these elementary actions are done according to our choices, our will.

I admit my surprise when I heard Graf Dürckheim say: "*By the way he walks, by the way he sits, man reveals how he remains in contact with his true nature or how he has lost contact with his essential being*".

My surprise was reiterated when, during the slow walking exercise he said: "*Do not walk, let it walk!*".

An injunction found in the book *Zen in the Art of Archery* (E. Herrigel). His master, Awa Kenzo says: "*Do not shoot. Let it shoot!*". Enough to unsettle the Westerner who thinks that if he does not do things, nothing will be done.

For a long time, I practiced Kin-Hin thinking I had to *make* each step. Until one day, who knows why or when, the sensation imposed itself: each step is a *creation*. Just as breathing is not made. Nor are the heart's beats.

I discovered this essential component of the living body, until then ignored: the **UNDOABLE**.

Do not breathe Do not shoot Do not walk ...!

These injunctions contain an instinctive, ancestral, universal, innate truth.

During a retreat at the Centre, a part of each day is dedicated to the practice of slow walking called *Kin-Hin*.

The singularity of this walk is its *slowness*. Slowness allows us to return to ourselves. In his book *The Great Life*, Christian Bobin writes: “*The world has slew slowness. It does not remember where it has buried it*”.

The practice of the exercise *Kin-Hin* takes us back where we have left slowness. Thus, the passing from this *crazy speed* (the true neurosis of contemporary man) to slowness.

Kin-Hin contributes to stress reduction. To those who come to participate in a retreat and who complain of always being “burdened” in their daily life, I would argue that this slow walk frees serenity without requiring us to sacrifice our precious time.

Kin-Hin is described as taking part in the *culture of impermanence*.

During a sesshin, Yuho Seki Roshi asks me, “*what does “impermanence” mean to you?*”.

I answer: “*It seems to me that the word impermanence means that every living thing has an end*”. With a soothing smile he says “*Surprising. When I hear the word impermanence, it says that all living beings change all the time*”.

What is important when we practice an exercise, is not the exercise itself; it is where it takes us: toward the transformation of ourselves.

Wisdom, contrary to what is often said, does not appear with age, it is not *downstream*.

Wisdom? It is waiting for us, it lies *upstream*.

Kin-Hin? It is a stepping back, a return to the source...

Jacques Castermane

Translation from French : *Céline Jouenne*