

D'instant en instant

Letter of encouragement to the practice of zazen

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For the person on the Way, all begins with an experience!

In the Zen tradition, this particular experience is called *Satori*.

The meaning of its kanji is: *comprehension*.

It is not an intellectual comprehension. It is a “*direct comprehension*” which does not arise from the intellect or intellectual reflection.

D.T. Suzuki says: “Satori can be defined as an intuitive comprehension of the nature of things as opposed to an analytical comprehension.” To further complicate things, or perhaps simplify them, the master refers to this other way of comprehension with another kanji: ***Kensho!***

Kensho ... Satori?

When confronted with these notions, Westerners tend to idealise this experience, all the more so because it is presented as something ... *spiritual* while at the same time being a deeply ... *physical* experience.

Recently, Joël Paul reminded us that Sensei Deshimaru used to criticise the French who claimed to be interested in Zen for: “*imagining that satori was like... Versailles*”.

To Graf Dürckheim for whom he had written the preface to his book “True Zen”, master Deshimaru answered: *Satori is the natural state of the human being*.

It seems important to share the answer that was given to me:

*Observe a child who, as he approaches his first birthday, is suddenly animated by a powerful inner intention: to do what he has never done before: **to walk**.*

After many attempts, the child stands... finds his balance ... takes a few steps and falls.

Kensho! *Why? Because in these actions, however hesitant, the presence of the nature of Buddha manifests itself in every human being (whether born in the East or in the West).*

*Then, through constant and repeated effort, the child discovers he can always walk maintaining perfect balance. **Satori!** Why? Because from that moment on, through his way of walking, the child bears witness to his permanent contact with his true nature.*

This does not mean that it is a definitive acquisition. Throughout our existence, every step is both the fruit and the expression of a process called **creation**.

The walking known as Kin-Hin is not a construction or a fabrication. Its slowness gives meaning to every step: to free ourselves from what hinders the process that cannot be accomplished by the ego, even though the I is capable of doing thousands of things.

When he lived in Japan, Graf Dürckheim regularly practiced the exercise called zazen in a Zendo, sitting alongside a monk twice his age. And, all of a sudden, at the end of the exercise the old monk exclaimed: What a mystery... *what a miracle... I breathe!*

Perhaps it is the right moment to hear that, when we are on the Way:

To be amazed is to never become accustomed!

Kensho ... Satori?

It is also the experience of saying: « in this very moment I breathe in, and I am not responsible for anything! »

It is the experience of the undoable – the vital breath – thanks to which at this very moment, eight billion human beings are alive.

What mystery... what miracle...!

To be amazed is to never become accustomed!

What the Zen master Ryokan says is not a wish. It is an injunction addressed to all who say they are on the Way. He points to a danger: practicing as usual, practicing as one always has.

It is not a question of wanting to learn to be amazed. It is a matter of learning that, when I walk, for example, “**this step**” never existed before, and never will again!

Upon his return from Japan in 1947, Graf Dürckheim became aware of the difficulties Westerners encountered when initiated to Eastern wisdom traditions.

Christian Bobin, the poet of the humane wisdom observes the same misunderstanding as the old sage from the Black Forest: “the West, drained, and on the verge of consuming itself, has for some years been stealing, what it thinks is oriental WISDOM. In doing so, it distorts it, transforms it, and reduces it to what it UNDERSTANDS: that is, to techniques, recipes and know-how.”

In this moment for this moment “I breathe in” and I am not responsible for anything!

It is not a theory. It is an experience, a feeling. It is a *corporal, physical* experience.

For the man on the Way all begins with an experience.

Experience cannot be objectified!

Our language, and all the more so when it follows contemporary trends: Artificial Intelligence is based on objectivation. A coach (another fashionable figure) trained in meditation over a few weeks can undoubtedly share his knowledge and know-how while promising one hundred benefits.

Hirano Roshi, who animated sesshins at the Dürckheim Centre for more than ten years wrote: to learn the training and therefore the ascetism of Zazen *one must practice with a true and authentic master*. Graf Dürckheim speaking of his relation to what we call the master and the one we call the disciple would say to me: “*The Zen master does not offer a knowledge or a know-how. The Zen master shares his awareness.*” The same seems to be true of a master teaching Yoga, Tai Chi, dance or music.

The master is not a source of stability. For the person on the Way, anyone seeking tranquillity, security, or harmony may well be disappointed, for it sometimes happens that the master will pull the carpet from under the disciple’s feet. Because on the Way what is important is to WALK, not to *settle*.

Whether this be your first stay at the Dürckheim Centre, or your hundredth, take the opportunity to be amazed! It happens that, during zazen a bird may suddenly begin to sing... when you arrive at the Centre early in the morning, the roses, tulips are opening ... and by the evening they have closed again.... In the distance, a dog barks Beside the path, one can hear a stream murmuring...

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