

CENTRE DURCKHEIM
A Path step by step
Encouragement for daily practice

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“One”

« One day someone told me that having practiced meditation for months, he could now count his breaths from one to one hundred without getting mixed up.

I therefore proposed a much more difficult exercise: When you breathe in, you breathe in. When you breathe out, you breathe out ... and you say « One » at the end of each cycle. And you start again: breathe in, breathe out, « one »... breathe in, breathe out, « one »...

This mischievous story as recounted by Jacques Castermene, questions the very reason for our practice: am I practicing with an objective, a sense of performance or with a sense free from any form of self-recuperation? Am I centred on my mind or slightly freed from it?

And Jacques continues: *“One, is the full attention to a unique, global, whole-body gesture, carried by the cycle of breathing in and breathing out, in the language of the person sitting at this very moment, for this very moment. A gesture that does not need to be inscribed in a cause-and-effect relationship, nor be prepared in any way. A baby is not prepared to live what he lives, he simply lives it. Counting one’s breaths in preparation for zazen is useless. One, one, and one is truly Zazen.”*

It is difficult and very destabilizing to change our usual way of relying on the efficiency that characterizes our ordinary consciousness, as well as to abandon the need to do things in order to obtain something. With this attention to the “One” constantly renewed, the mind is immediately put out-of-play: no linear progression, no search for performance, no goal to attain.

To practice on the Path of Zen is to learn not to remain in our usual mode of thinking in order to rediscover and favour this other form of consciousness: the pre-mental consciousness, given to the baby or the young child. This primary, sensory consciousness is lived through sensation, allowing the natural vital impulse to be given its full importance, as well as the whole bodily gesture of the Person. For an adult, this approach is revealed through the rediscovery and practice of Hara, the vital centre of Man.

To “come down” into Hara, is to leave the intellectual centre of reasoning and mental injunctions, and to open oneself to the ocean of “ki” (“Chi” in Chinese), the primitive force that has animated us since the very first moments of life.

It is an awakening to a dynamic vital process, independent of our will, and a recognition of our natural bodily intelligence, carried by the great laws of Life. To open oneself to these laws is to “*pass from the mind to the vital*”.

Universal laws such as the law of difference, impermanence, interdependence, which connect us to the incessant flow of Life.

Everything changes all the time, everything transforms. Any contact, whether it is with an inner or outer event, concerns me, moves me and transforms me.

To become increasingly open and sensitive to these laws, to the vital actions of the body subject to natural laws, is an attitude that runs counter to our ordinary way of apprehending everything through the mind.

Opposed to this opening, the traps of the mind— desires for resemblance, permanence or independence – maintain us in the illusion that one day we will be able to attain a perfect and peaceful state of security. A static state that is “good for me”, but inaccessible because it is forever disrupted and questioned by the events of Life.

This egocentric will for fixity causes us to evolve most of the time in an agitated, anxious or anguished state, cutting us off from our vital and transforming roots in Hara.

To relax, to come down into Hara, is to plunge into this sensory, oceanic consciousness that bathed us during our very first months of Life.

To refine this sensory contact with reality is the gateway to Zen, it is to learn to be “One” with what presents itself, without the filter of the mind.

To practice, is to corporally feel that a sensation is real only in the present moment. That every sensation is an action, that every sensation/action is a connection, and that every sensation/action transforms us.

When practicing an exercise, the question is not to understand, discuss, oppose or try to modify what happens; the normal automatic reaction of the mind to an exercise, but rather to accompany a transformation desired by and carried by Life.

To practice absolute immobility during zazen, or the natural gesture, is to exercise non-intervention, to disturb as little as possible the natural rhythm and subtle equilibrium of the living body. Thus, in every exercise, we discover that stance, form and breathing are innate actions that do not need the intervention of my will in order to happen and unfold. It is not a question of producing a superficial posture and maintaining it or fabricating an artificial calmness for a certain length of time, but rather of liberating the vital creation of every instant in order to taste and submit to this undoable transformation: the act of being.

Jacques Castermane reminds us *“that a Path of transformation is not a Path made of training and courses, it is the passing from one state to another, from one end to the other, from one contradiction to another, a passage that is seen, accepted and favoured, and which is the source of unity and Great Calm”*.

Disconnecting from wanting to do, from personal ambition or conscious control is a regression for the Ego, a fallback: very difficult to let the undoable do! The undoable?

A listening of oneself at the service of the intentions of the living body, or the *“intentions of the Being”*.

The full power of our rational consciousness always drives us to practice with a hidden objective: to build something, to form an idealized image of oneself, always moving in one direction, towards well-being. A state that I will attain later, thanks to repeated efforts?

Nothing is less certain!

The practice of the “One” is a gesture of constant, instantaneous renewal, without a goal.

A renewal of the gesture, a creation of every instant that plunges us into the vital process, which is the act of being, a never-ending Path of natural transformation with immediate effect.

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