

## *D'instant en instant*

*Letter of encouragement to the practice of zazen*

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### **The body, the raw material used for the work proposed during a retreat**

Why give five days of my life to participate in a retreat at the Dürckheim Centre?

*To come home!*

A sibylline and mysterious answer.

Why practice Yoga? *To come home!* Why practice Tai-Chi? *To come home!* Why practice art, arts and crafts or martial arts rooted in the Japanese tradition? *To come home!*

During my stay in Rütte, where I lived for five years, I asked Graf Dürckheim about the meaning of this assertion “*We practice zazen with one goal, to come home*”. He smiled and asked me: “*When was the last time you had a mystical experience?*”

I was lost. I must admit that, confronted with these enigmas, I wondered if I had been wise to leave Belgium to move to Rütte and follow the teachings of the man onto whom I had projected my desire – I eventually had to admit - to find meaning in my existence.

What is a mystical experience? Before packing my bags, I took the time to consult dictionaries and find a few writings on the subject.

In short, the term “*mystical*” is used to describe that which belongs to mystery, what is hidden or secret. Approaching this mystery through philosophy, theology and psychology only left me more confused. The Hindu, Buddhist, Taoist and Christian approaches led to a greater confusion. These conceptual-words did not find their place in my understanding. What enchanted me, although rarely mentioned, was to read that an experience qualified as spiritual is accessible to believers and non-believers alike.

A proverb says that it often happens when you least expect it.

A few months after my arrival in Rütte. During zazen, suddenly an inner feeling overwhelms me. An experience of an unusual quality of being, and a rupture in my ordinary way of being in life. The content of this experience was, to my surprise, sensorial, without any mental intervention: “**What a miracle! I breathe!**”

The miracle is that, in this moment, I breathe in, and the “I” is responsible for nothing.

Eugen Herrigel (Zen in the Art of Archery) recounts that the goal of archery is summed up in this endlessly repeated injunction by the master: “*Do no shoot, let **IT** shoot*”

And here I am, having experienced something similar: *I let **IT** breathe!*

An experience that, without knowing why or how, immediately generates *great inner calm*. A sudden accession to *absolute confidence*. A sudden access to the *simple joy of being*.

This way of being in the world, which I had been nostalgic for, suddenly overwhelmed me. This? To conceptualise what I had felt a word imposed itself: **UNDOABLE**

On the way proposed by Graf Dürckheim – the tradition of Zen in what it conceals of universally human – what is important is the contact made with the *undoable*, secretly present in everything we do.

To become familiar with this discreet listening to our own essence, necessitates the practice of an exercise. Often, I would hear Graf Dürckheim remind us that the Way he proposed was a path of **experience and exercise**. This definition had become so banal that I myself would utter it indiscriminately.

Until one day, approximately fifteen years ago, I read a book on self-development. The author proposed a path of **exercise and experience**. This inversion of the words rendered obsolete the amalgam between personal development and ZEN.

Graf Dürckheim is very clear: *“For the man on the Way to his true nature, all begins with an experience. Having lived this experience it is understandable that he asks himself what he could do to remain in contact with what, within him is the source of an existence lived in security, serenity and simple joy of being. The answer is: an **exercise**”*.

The idea of personal development is a temptation for the EGO which thinks it needs or can build itself through exercises.

The goal of my sojourn in the Black Forest was thus specified by Graf Dürckheim after my arrival: “You are not here to build a future. You are here to stop fleeing from the essential. What I call essential is not an abstract concept, the product of a pious imagination or a metaphysical speculation. The organ through which we “feel” our essential being is this field of consciousness that I name - The body we are-. Principally the set of gestures and attitudes by which man presents himself, becomes what he is.... or misses himself.

The body! Often criticized when speaking of the spiritual path.

Taking my first steps on the Path proposed by Graf Dürckheim, I ask him what place he gave the body on this way to become oneself. His answer was immediate: **“the first”**.

Immediately I felt reassured and comforted. Having a degree in physical education and physiotherapy after six years at the University of Brussels, proved that I knew what a body was.

My confidence did not last long. *“You seem to have an extensive knowledge on what we **call the body man** “HAS”; however, I must say you still know nothing about what I call **the body man** “IS”*.

I had the chance to follow the classes of eminent *professors* in various disciplines: physics, chemistry, the body-object (anatomy and physiology, pathology and therapeutics).

A professor teaches **knowledge** (conferences, books and various networks of communication).

I was lucky enough to have been accompanied by an Aikido *master*, a karate *master*, a Kyudo *master*, a Chado *master* (tea ceremony) and three Zen *masters*: Yuho Seki Rôshi, Hirano Rôshi and.... Graf Dürckheim.

A master does not share knowledge; he shares his **awareness**. This sharing is realised through the encounter of two beings: the master and his disciple. The source of awareness is in you. The master’s role is to accompany you and allow it to spring forth.

Enough to make us reflect until the next letter, centred on this theme.

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