CENTRE DURCKHEIM

D'instant en instant

Letter of encouragement to the practice of zazen

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Prior to artificial intelligence, there is natural intelligence

Rütte – 1967

Having practiced the exercise known as zazen for a few months, Graf Dürckheim draws my attention to the difference between "*the consciousness of*" and "*the consciousness without*". Admitting that I do not understand what the consciousness -without- could be, he asks me: "*Have you heard of Heindrich von Kleist?*"

No! "Then, I suggest you read this surprising story: The duel with the bear. I have translated it into French. We shall continue our discussion after you have read it.

THE DUEL WITH A BEAR

Heinrich von Kleist recounts a friend's adventure:

"While traveling in Russia, I came upon the country estate of Herr von G., a Livonian nobleman, whose sons were at that time seriously engaged in learning to fence. The oldest boy, who had just returned from university, considered himself somewhat of a virtuoso. One morning, while in his room he offered me a foil. We fenced, but as it turned out, I was superior to him. His mounting anger further added to his confusion. Almost every blow I struck was successful and finally his foil was knocked into a corner of the room. As he picked up the foil he admitted, half-jokingly, half angrily, that he had met his master; but everything in this world meets its master and thereupon he proposed to conduct me to mine. The brothers laughed loudly and cried: Let's be off! Let's go! Down to the lumber yard! And with that they led the way to a bear that their father, Herr von G., was having trained in the open yard.

When, amazed, I stood facing the bear, to my astonishment he rose on his hind legs, his back leaning against a stake to which he was chained, with his right paw raised ready for combat, and looked me in the eye: this was his fencing position. It seemed to me that I was dreaming when I first faced this adversary; but—strike! strike! —cried the brothers and see if you can score a hit! Having recovered somewhat from my amazement, I went at him with my foil; the bear made a slight movement of his paw and parried the blow. I tried to throw him off guard by feints—the bear did not stir. I went at him again with a renewed burst of energy; without a doubt I would have struck a man's chest. The bear made a slight movement of his paw and again parried the blow.

At that moment, I was almost in the same situation as Herr von G's firstborn. The bear's gravity made me lose my composure, my attacks and feints alternated; sweat was running down my entire body completely in vain.

> Not only was the bear able to parry all my blows like some world champion fencer, but all the feints I attempted—and this no fencer in the world could duplicate—went unnoticed by the bear. Eye to eye, as if he could see into my very soul, he stood there, his paw raised ready for combat, and whenever my thrusts were not intended as strikes, he simply did not move. Moreover, the animal acted with grace and sovereign calm.

A few days later Graf Dürckheim asked me: "*So, this morning, did you practice zazen as the fencer or as the bear?*"
This question continued to leave me in a state of confusion.

The difference between the bear's way of being in the world and the fencer's way of being in the world is striking. The fencer is driven by the desire to win and reveals his fear of failure. The bear is free of all desires. The fencer is attached to the past, applying the skills he has acquired to his feints. The bear lives in the present moment, without attachment to the past or the future.
A feint! An assertion which leaves the bear without reacting. The bear is in a sensory contact with what truly is, without being preoccupied with what should be. Hence his Olympian calm which irritates the fencer.

The consciousness *without*? I don't know! I am obsessed with this question until, one day, practicing the Way of Tea (Chado), Michiko Nojiri begins her teaching with zazen, introducing it as follows: "*Zazen, is to sit as a baby lies in its crib*".
Eureka! All babies are like the bear, in a hedonistic state of innocence.
As Christian Bobin writes "Babies are great sages. These very young beings possess multiple virtues. One of their great virtues is not to be blinded by knowledge. They see us without morality, without philosophy, without religion, without any precautions."
The baby does not know he is breathing… he breathes. The bear does not know he is walking… he walks. The archery master does not know he is shooting… he shoots.
You practise zazen, Yoga, Tai Chi, Chi Gong, Aikido…
"*What you have learned by listening to others, you will soon forget; what you have learned through your entire body – this field of action, this field of consciousness (consciousness without), this field of experience – you will remember for the rest of your life*".

Jacques Castermane

Translation from French : *Céline Jouenne & Lucy*