

ZEN-JOU I

Silence – Prayer – Posture

The life impulse found at the core of the human being is grounded in a dynamic relationship between movement and stillness. Should this balance be disturbed the life impulse loses its dynamism, its effectiveness. The obsessive drive leading us to believe that we gain mastery over our lives and find our mainstay in striving after external sources, is largely illusory. The more our consciousness is dominated by such a fixation, the greater its repression and the less effective our life-impulse will be; the more distracted and restless we become, the more likely that we reach a stage where this lack of balance is no longer noticed. This exterior-orientated-life is the cause of our dissipation and, we are disquieted. The necessary restorative for this is no longer perceptible; in extreme cases this faculty can become void.

For this corrective, of balancing our abilities, we construct a great scheme – whereby external encounter and inner peace are both sought – thus blinding and binding ourselves in a dualistic world-view, in which the solution to the aforementioned conflict cannot be found. The dynamic unity of movement and stillness meets without contradiction in the dynamic source of life: in *Life-Itself*. This inner relation within *Life-Itself* must be analogically actualised in our daily lives. This is the key to transcend the dualistic schema. In so far as we touch the authentic moment, our consciousness perceives that our inner stillness and external activity must be linked. This is the required disposition for correct forms of silence, prayer and posture.

Dynamic movement includes the factor of stillness, in rest dynamic movement prevails. Absolute stillness includes maximal dynamism, in acute dynamism of *Life-Itself* there is absolute concentration. Our conditioned dualistic consciousness views this as paradox, and, this perception is resolved through *Shugyō*: exercise and renunciation. In this present goal-directed process (acting as an antidote to the dualistic consciousness), there is growing concentration on the fact of the unity between high-level activity and stillness, that can authentically be caught sight of. In other words: only when the empirical pattern of our self-centred wilfulness no longer enslaves, can we encounter and know authentic stillness. In a similar way we can only apprehend the authenticity of dynamic in so far that our intentionality is dis-identified with any object that means, with any purpose. In so far as contradiction is stored in our empirical pattern, neither stillness nor authentic activity is possible. The dynamic relationship between prayer and posture is brought into unity when we practice Exercise and Renunciation. That means: in inactivity being active and in true stillness there is intensified dynamic.

Silence

We compensate for a deficiency in our identity and, this alienates us further from our own life impulses, causing incorrect behaviour and suffering. Lack of awareness of both the deficiency and its causes, is not a problem to be underestimated. Erroneously, we search for balance in a source that is external to us. Because one's own true identification is damaged, in many ways we fall into identification with the contemporary collective spirit, without resistance: to endorse the common understanding of life is everything. We have fallen prey, forced by the contemporary world of the media, to seek for a surrogate; this in turn, the illusion of illusions, promises that we will encounter our true selves. In this game, played in this illusory world, we are unconsciously searching for our identity; in reality we scatter and diminish the gifts of life

and time. Instead of recognising the *Message of Life*, being receptive to it in silence and surrendering to its demands, we destroy the *Message* by self-admiring discussion; in this way we dissipate the strength required to discover and be united with its directives. It may seem ironic that a Chinese proverb states, 'There is nothing in this world that requires more human strength than this type of discourse.' This proverb is for us quite unintelligible. Not infrequently ideologically charged talking saps the internal energy, which is that power that might bring us back to our original life dynamic. Only that word spoken from our true identity bears life, whereas the word spoken from inner fragmentation (even when one is sure that this is not the case) – while seeming to be true is not life-giving – this word is still-born, even if dazzling. Silence is to be understood as more than an absence of speaking, but rather the stillness and calm to which it gives rise has to penetrate our whole human being. Just as the bottom of a clean, calm and clear lake can be seen, so does our consciousness become transparent by means of stillness. In the case of a stillness penetrating our interior, its long unknown dimensions are disclosed. In order to achieve this kind of stillness our instrumental consciousness – the five senses, the discursive abilities, our imagination, and the field of our affectivity –, (which generally are outwardly directed), must become motionless. In silence, prayer and posture can never be separated; there they find their natural habitat.

Prayer

When left to ourselves we do not know how to pray. But not only this: if we try to pray many distractions hinder us from doing so. If we would like to find access, we must endure this situation of suffering, often over a lengthy period, until the inner door opens itself to us. If this kind of stillness is growing deeply, the Spirit, residing at the tireless source of Life, rises up and prays in us. Nevertheless, we must begin with active prayer, a prayer connected with our instrumental consciousness. But we may not remain there; otherwise our prayer would not be linked to and grounded in its source. Through continuous prayer, such as the 'Jesus-prayer', our senses and our mental faculty slowly become quiet, in so far as they are purified from every disturbing influence. Repeated prayer in the form of a mantra penetrates the person ever more deeply and is rooted – through internalisation – in the ground of our being. Then it becomes a prayer rooted in the identity of the *Kernel-F*, in awareness of dependence on *Life-Itself*: this kind of prayer is no longer exclusive, but integrates the whole of life. Without exception, every being can participate.

The sitting posture

The 'lotus position' maintains the body in a posture which frees human beings from distractions and thereby they calm down, a state which is attained through practice of ZEN-JOU – exercise and renunciation –. Our minds, which are habitually restless, need to quieten down.

Only then, can we gain accurate perception into the morally good and evil dimensions of our thoughts, speech and actions. To the extent that human consciousness, memory, intellect and will – through the correct form of breathing – or one's whole being is integrated in the present moment, man is awakened from within himself. Purification is the path to this awakening. This involves confronting those interiorized dangerous paradigms and negative dispositions which block and even blind the [positive] powers within us, even binding them in negativity. Seated in the 'lotus position' we can encounter the interior laws of life imprinted within us: our reason and our will can be freed from their erroneous ways and these faculties can be integrated into the Will at the ground of Being. In the patient enduring of his own self, the

practitioner discovers all that hitherto disabled his life and being is opening out to a wider horizon; he discovers he is linked with and united to the wider cosmos, but also – and foundationally – he is linked and united with that which grounds and supports us: *Life-Itself*.

“The term ZEN comes from the Sanskrit ‘dhyāna’, which in translation means to perceive everything in the Divine Light, that is, my daily-life and the path to Life is disclosed by the Divine Breathing taking place in me. This is true for all Religions, but seen specifically in the Buddhist context ZEN means ignorance, even prejudice.

Should one say, ‘ZA-ZEN’, the view-point of the one in seated posture is added, which harmonises naturally with ‘dhyāna’. A central aspect of Zen is now applicable: the human view-point is united with the Divine and the human breathing is one with the Divine Breathing. [...]. This is a point on which Hinduism and Judaism hold the same understanding. From ancient Rome we learn that the eremites (Essenes) reached union with the Divine by means of concentrated attention to their breathing. The significance of the sitting posture, which is in harmony with ‘dhyāna’ cannot be found in the history of European Christianity.” (Fr. Oshida).

Nevertheless, two branches holding a specific and deep understanding of *Shugyō* –exercise and renunciation – require mention here: The synthesis of practice of the Essenes and Celtic influences, when combined with early Christianity, proved to be very fertile. Moreover, the point is to understand: the ‘lotus position’ is inborn in every human being, regardless of race or origin. This is the reason why – at all times – communities or hermits consciously practised this posture. This posture is given to us by nature we did not need to invent it. Furthermore, it offered itself to human beings, who are in danger of straying in the labyrinth of their consciousness.

The path of ZEN – originally adopted by monks – is one of the best forms of exercise given to human beings. Admittedly following this path is very difficult. In order to mature into the clarity derived from silence – because only there, the Life impulse can be authentically received –, the practitioner must push himself to the edge, in his self-confrontation with the contradictions to Life stored within him. Because there are many hidden deceptions lying in wait on this path, I must give up all connections to objects and decisively relinquish myself. Only this kind of self-emptying can permit Life- Itself to penetrate us and thereby free us from all self-seeking. The path known as ZEN, is in our Sesshins – the exercises – integrated into the Eucharist. In the struggle between light and darkness, we may not succumb. For this reason we are invited, even challenged to die in order to live (John 11:25).

We can only travel this path in so far as we practise the exercises together. It is a question of awakening to our responsibility to support and promote our lives. These kinds of exercises and their effects enable us to escape the life of deadening isolation. Without taking responsibility for our being in the world we will never gain freedom, that is the authentic freedom grounded in our being.