

# PRACTICAL ZEN

MEDITATION AND BEYOND

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*Julian Daizan Skinner*

*Foreword by Shinzan Miyamae*

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SINGING  
DRAGON

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understanding, not theories or intellectual stuff. If you can do that, on the cushion, you do what you like.

Some people say you don't need the *koan*, but show me a good Zen master these days who didn't practise with the *koan* – I haven't seen one.

Put the *koan* in your *hara* – grow, grow, grow like a mama grows a child. Soon a new baby comes.

Even Bankei Zenji started with a question, a *koan* – 'What is bright virtue?' Later he didn't need, but first he worked very, very hard. The most important *koan* is, 'Who am I?' Everything comes from that.

Why do we have many *koans*? We have to come back again and again – get the truth then throw it away many times. That we, we pile up, pile up understanding.

When sweeping, who sweeps? When weeding, who weeds? Practise like this, not just *zazen* – sitting Zen, but also *do-zen* – moving Zen or Zen in action. Make every day a *sesshin*.

## NIGHT BOAT CONVERSATION BY HAKUIN ZENJI<sup>4</sup>

*Translation by Akane Moindron and Julian Daizan Skinner*

In the spring of the seventh year of Horeki (1757), a man named Ogawa, proprietor of a bookstore in Kyoto, sent a letter to Master Hakuin's attendants at Shoinji Temple. He wrote the following:

I have heard that the venerable teacher has a manuscript called 'Yasenkana' which describes the divine elixir of life and the secrets of achieving longevity by training the spirit, nourishing the essence and improving the blood circulation. Seekers would value such a work considering it moisture in a drought. I've heard that parts have been privately transcribed by Zen monks. I believe keeping such a book secretly locked away is like locking away the sources of rain. Therefore, I would like to quench the people's thirst and bring healing to them by publishing this book. I know that your venerable

master always enjoys serving the people. How could he begrudge us such a helpful work?

When the content of the letter was passed on by his students, the old master smiled.

Thereupon, the students withdrew the manuscript from the chest containing papers, but half of it had been eaten by moths. They worked together to amend and copy the text, which soon became 50 pages long. Finally it was ready to be sent to Kyoto. I was asked to write the preface because I happened to be senior among the students.

It has been almost 40 years since our old reverend Hakuin came to Shoinji Temple. Since then, there have been many Zen students coming to endure the severe training for even 10 or 20 years. Never thinking to flee, they were even willing to end up becoming dust beneath the temple pines. All of them were superior practitioners, courageous spiritual heroes.

For miles around the temple, the monks lived in ruins or in decaying temples and shrines. Starving in the daytime and freezing at night, they passed their days eating leaves and bran, yelled at and struck by the master. People who saw them furrowed their brows; those who heard about them sweated with fear. I'm sure even demons and monsters would shed tears and put their palms together to pray for them if they saw their situation. When they first came here, they all looked attractive and healthy, but before long they all lost weight to the point where they were worn down with exhausted facial expressions. If it were not for their brave and strong aspiration to search for the true self, what motive would there be to stay in such a place?

Due to over-zealous training, some of these monks developed lung problems and suffered from hard-to-cure diseases such as colic and pain in their loins. The old master was extremely concerned about their suffering, lowered his gaze and poured out the mother's milk of compassion by sharing the secrets of *naikan*<sup>5</sup> practice.

He said, 'During Zen training, if the heart becomes over-heated, we become drained in both body and mind. The five internal organs

thus fall out of harmony with each other. This is a disease that no treatment or medicine can cure. Even great doctors of the past could not cure you.

‘I know a secret method for restoring the elixir to its source in the *tanden*.<sup>6</sup> If you practise this, you’ll be surprised with its amazing effect – like the sun bursting through cloud. In order to conduct this training, you need to put aside your Zen training and have a very deep sleep. But first, lie down on your back and close your eyes without falling into sleep. Extend your legs out strongly together and draw down the energy of your body to fill the navel, the stomach, the *tanden*, the loins and legs down to the arches of your feet. While doing this imagine the following.

‘This stomach and *tanden*, loins and legs, is in truth my original face.<sup>7</sup> How can this original face have nostrils?

‘This stomach and *tanden*, loins and legs, is in truth my original home. What news from this original home of mine?

‘This stomach and *tanden*, loins and legs, is the Pure Land<sup>8</sup> of my own heart. How is this Pure Land adorned?

‘This stomach and *tanden*, loins and legs, is the Amida<sup>9</sup> of myself. What does this Amida of myself preach?

‘If you imagine like this over and over again, the energy of your body will fill your loins and legs, and the space below your navel will swell like a gourd and soon becomes full like an inflated leather ball. After meditating like this for a week or three weeks, the disharmony of your internal organs, the depletion of your heart and energy, and your physical exhaustion will all be completely cured. If not, you may cut off this old reverend’s head.’

When the students heard this, they were all filled with joy, thanked the master and each one privately carried out this secret training and experienced marvellous results. Although there were some differences in how quickly the effects were felt, depending on the exactness of their performance of the training, more than half of the students were entirely cured and sung the praises of this practice.

The master said, 'My friends, do not be satisfied even with the complete cure of your heart-sickness. The fuller the recovery, the more the need to advance your Zen training. The deeper your penetration of the way, the more you need to press forward.

'When I was young, I suffered from an illness which was very difficult to cure. The pain was ten times greater than any of you have suffered. It became impossible for me to move, and I used to think it would be better to be dead and rid of this skin-bag. But fortunately, I was informed of the secret *naikan* training and was cured completely like you are now. My teacher said: "This is the divine art of long life and immortality. With this, even those with lower-than-average ability can live at least up to 300 years. No one can guess how a superior man might fare." With unrestrained joy, I faithfully performed the training for about three years. My heart and body became more and more healthy. My vitality restored, I gradually grew stronger.

'Then I thought, even if I live as long as Tobosaku<sup>10</sup> thanks to this training, if I only let life pass by without doing anything, wouldn't it be as if I am a dull and ignorant ghost protecting a corpse? Wouldn't it be like an old raccoon dog sleeping in his hole?

'No matter how long I may live, I will die at the end. Even those great hermits like Kakko, Tekkai, Choka and Hicho<sup>11</sup> are no longer alive. They lived long, but died. It would be better, I thought, to aspire to Buddhahood through planting the Four Great Vows, to teach the truths of Buddhism, and to fulfil the truly strong and indestructible *dharma*-body, which neither arises nor ceases nor decays.

'When I came to Shoinji Temple, I was followed by two or three practitioners of ability. For the past 30 years I've practised this *naikan* training along with Zen meditation. Over this time the number of practitioners here has increased one by one to a total of about 200. To those who exhausted themselves through over-zealous training or even approached derangement through over-heating of the heart, I taught the secrets of *naikan* training. Soon they were healed and able to penetrate yet deeper in their practice.

'I am over 70 years old yet without a trace of illness. My teeth have not fallen out, my eyes and ears are clearer than ever to the



point where I often forget my reading glasses. I never omit my teaching of the *dharma* twice a month. In response to requests from the regions, I have held 50 or 60 meetings of three or five hundred people, lecturing on the sutras and Zen records for 50 to 70 days. I have never missed a day. I am totally healthy in body and mind, and my energy level is superior to when I was 20 or 30 years old. I know this is all thanks to the *naikan* training.'

After listening to the old master talk, everyone bowed with tears in their eyes and asked, 'Please master Hakuin, write down the main points of this *naikan*. Write it so as to preserve it and to save future sufferers from the conditions caused by Zen training.'

The old reverend nodded with agreement. This is how the manuscript was immediately written. And what is taught in this document?

The main secret of nourishing life and achieving longevity is training the body. The main secret of training the body is to concentrate the mind in the *tanden* within the *kikai* below the navel.<sup>12</sup> If the mind is focused there, energy concentrates in that place. If the energy is concentrated, the elixir of life is made. When the elixir of life is made, the body becomes firm. When the body becomes firm, the life force is complete. If the life force is complete, we achieve longevity. This is the secret of the nine cycles of the elixir of the sages. It must be understood that this elixir is not external to yourself.

It is important to only concentrate on making the heart-fire descend to fill the *tanden* in the *kikai*. Dear friends, if you truly practise this main secret without neglect, you will not only cure any health problems from your Zen training and recover from spiritual exhaustion, but you will also finally find an excellent solution to your long-lasting spiritual block, and will be clapping your hands and laughing with joy. Why?

As the moon ascends, the wall-shadow is gone. (Keng Wei, 8th century)<sup>13</sup>

On the 25th of the first month of spring in the seventh year of the Horei era, the master of poverty hermitage, Hunger and Cold, wrote this with incense burning and head bowed.

*YASENKANA (NIGHT BOAT CONVERSATION) BY HAKUIN ZENJI*

*Translation by Akane Moindron and Julian Daizan Skinner*

When I embarked on my spiritual quest, I established the resolve to pursue it to the end. I spent two or three years training to the utmost when, one night, suddenly, everything released. Like ice, all of my doubts completely melted from the root. The primal source of all the suffering of life and death vanished like a bubble. 'Ah, the way is not far away from men,' I concluded. 'I have heard that the ancients suffered many years to realise it. These tales must be a deception.'

For months I danced with delight. Allowing my arms to fly and my feet to stamp.

But after that, as I reflected on my daily life, I observed that the spheres of activity and meditation were completely out of harmony. There was always something bothering me and getting in the way.

So I decided to throw myself back into serious practice, even at the cost of my life. I set my teeth and focused my eyes for meditation, forgoing sleep and food.

Before a month had passed, my heart over-heated and scorched my lungs. My legs felt as cold as icy snow. I constantly heard noises in the ears as if I was walking along through a river valley. My liver felt weak; I was afraid of everything. My spirit was distressed and weary. Whether sleeping or awake, I saw illusions and visions. My armpits were constantly drenched with sweat and my eyes continually filled with tears. I searched out famous doctors and Zen teachers in every part of the country, but found no relief.

At that time someone told me:

'I have heard there is a man called Hakuyushi living on the cliffs in the mountains of Shirakawa in Yamashiro. He is said to be between 180 and 240 years old. He lives in the mountains miles away from human habitation. He doesn't like to meet



people and will always run away if someone approaches. No one knows if he is a sage or just a fool. The people of the villages consider him wise. It is rumoured that he was formerly a teacher of Ishikawa Jozan<sup>14</sup> and an expert astronomer and also skilled in medicine. To those who are polite and respectful enough when asking him, he will sometimes answer questions. And if you think over those teachings later, sometimes they are highly useful.'

After hearing this, in the first month of the seventh year of Horei, I packed for the road and left eastern Mino Province where I'd been staying in a temple.

I arrived in Kyoto, crossed over Kurodani, and soon came to the village of Shirakawa. There I deposited my bundle at a teahouse and made enquiries about the location of the hermit Hakuyushi. A villager pointed over towards a mountain river.

I trekked into the mountain following the sound of the flowing water. Soon, after several miles, I reached the source of the river. There was no path beyond. I was lost. I sat on a stone and chanted a sutra. Just then a woodcutter happened by. He pointed to a spot far away up in the cloud. There I could see a yellow patch not much more than an inch square. This little object was sometimes visible and sometimes lost from view, depending on the shifting mountain mists. I was told that this was the rush curtain that Hakuyushi had hung at the entrance of his cave.

I tucked up my robes to the waist and began to climb, stamping up the rocks and pushing the grasses aside. Icy snow bit through my straw sandals and the damp mists wetted my clothes. I was sweating when at last I reached the rush curtain. The view was of exquisite purity, the place, far above, worldly dusts. My heart and soul started to tremble and my skin felt a shiver. I sat on a rock and calmed myself by counting my breath up to several hundred. I gathered all my courage, shook the dust off my robes, straightened out my collar, and hesitatingly and timidly rolled up the rush curtain.

There I was able to dimly see hermit Hakuyushi sitting up straight with his eyes closed. His white hair reached to his knees, but his

face was ruddy and clear. He was draped in a rough cloth and sat on a straw mat. The cave itself was barely five or six feet square. There was absolutely nothing to eat. On a low desk were placed Confucius' *Doctrine of the Mean*, *Lao-Tzu* and *The Diamond Sutra*.<sup>15</sup> I made the most respectful greetings, told him the symptoms of my illness, and asked him for help.

After a while, the hermit opened his eyes and looked at me carefully. He spoke slowly: 'I'm only a useless old man withering away in the mountains. I live by gathering chestnuts for food and sleeping beside mountain deer – a complete ignoramus. I am so sorry that the time a distinguished monk would expend in hoping to meet a sage should be so wasted.'

Again and again I earnestly repeated my request for aid. Finally he took my hand to take my pulse and examine the condition of my internal organs. I noticed his nails were about 1.5cm long. He furrowed his brow and with an expression of pity said: 'The situation is serious. Your illness arises because you over-strained in your Zen meditation. A Zen sickness like this cannot be treated with medical methods. If the sages of medicine gave you acupuncture, moxa and herbs, their efforts would be fruitless. Since you became ill because of *rikan*,<sup>16</sup> the only way left for the cure is *naikan*.<sup>17</sup> There is a saying: "If you fall on the ground, from the ground you must stand."

'Please teach me the essential secrets of *naikan*,' I said. 'I will practise it along with my Zen study.'

The hermit adopted the expression and posture of solemnity and began speaking slowly. 'You are a true seeker. Well then, I will tell you a little of what I have learned in the past. This is the secret of preserving life and few know it. Diligently master this method and you will experience marvellous effects. Also your life will be extended.'

'Now, the great way, the source of all things, is divided into the two principles of Yin and Yang. When these two harmoniously come together, humans and all things are created. There is an innate vitality in humans flowing through the human body. Thanks to this

the internal organs function well. The energy and the blood mutually rise and fall to circulate about 50 times each day and night.

‘The lungs are feminine organs embodying the metal element, and sit above the diaphragm. The liver is a male organ, the wood element, and has its seat below. The heart, the fire element, is the Sun Great Yang,<sup>18</sup> placed on high. The kidneys embodying the water element are great Yin, and rule below. In the five organs<sup>19</sup> there are seven sublime forces, the spleen and kidneys both having two.

‘The exhalation comes out of the heart and lungs, and the inhalation enters the liver and kidneys. Each exhalation causes a movement of the blood and energy of about three inches, and with each inhalation there is a movement of the blood and energy of about three inches. There are about 13,500 full breaths during a full day and night, causing this circulation 50 times. Fire is light and therefore always goes upward, and water is heavy and therefore always flows downwards. If a person does not understand this and exceeds the appropriate measure of meditation, or thinks too much, the heart will over-heat and the lungs burn out. When the lungs that are the metal mother are over-loaded, the kidneys, the water children, are weakened. Mother and child are both damaged and the internal organs thus fall out of harmony. This causes the four elements of the body, earth, water, fire and wind, to lose their mutual balance and create innumerable illnesses. Once this happens, no treatment or physician can prevail.

‘The maintenance of life may be compared to defending a country. An enlightened ruler always gives his devotion to the people, but the unenlightened ruler always pays attention to the upper classes. If the ruler only attends to the upper classes, they become too arrogant in their authority and will lose consideration for the poverty and sufferings of the people. The people then weaken, the land sees famine and death fills the streets. The virtuous and wise hide. Resentment burns amidst the masses. Local nobles isolate themselves and foment rebellion. Barbarians attack the borders. The suffering of the people reaches a peak and the country dies.

‘But contrary to this, if the ruler pays his attention principally to the people, the upper classes and officials restrain their ambitions and consider always the hard labours of the people. Then the farmers produce abundant grain, the women produce abundant cloth. The virtuous and wise willingly serve the ruler. The local nobles show respect and obedience. The people become prosperous and the country strong. No one will disobey the law, no enemies threaten the frontier, and there will be no tumult of war. The people will forget weaponry.

‘The human body is just like this. A man who perfectly masters the way always attends to the lower, filling the lower body with his heart energy. If the heart energy fills the lower body, the seven ills cannot operate, nor can the four evils invade. The circulation of energy and blood will be sufficient to make heart and mind vigorous. The mouth will not taste medicines, the body will not experience the distress of needle and moxa.

‘But the unenlightened person does the contrary and allows their heart energy to flare upwards. The heart-fire on the left side thus scorches the lung-metal on the right. The five senses are dimmed and the six auxiliary organs fall into disharmony. The Chinese sage Shitsuen<sup>20</sup> thus counsels, “The true man always breathes from the heels; the ordinary man always breathes from the throat.” Kyoshun<sup>21</sup> teaches, “When energy fills the lower body, the breath is long; when energy fills the upper body, the breath is short.” Jyoshi<sup>22</sup> says, “In man the energy is unified. When it descends to the lower body, that is the arising of single Yang.<sup>23</sup> When Yin reaches completion and returns to single Yang, the evidence is the feeling of heat in the *tanden*.” The general principle for the nourishment of the health is that the upper body should always be cool and the lower body cool.

‘There are 12 energy channels in the body [meridians]. The channels are 12-branched and correspond to the 12 months and the 12 hours of the day. They also relate to the six lines of each hexagram that change through 64 permutations over the course of the 12 months of the year.

‘When there are five Yin lines above and one Yang line at the bottom, we call it the hexagram of “Earth thunder returns”.<sup>24</sup> This corresponds to the winter solstice and indicates that the true man breathes with his heels.

‘When there are three Yang lines at the bottom and three Yin lines on top, we call it the hexagram of “Heaven and earth in harmony”<sup>25</sup> and it corresponds to the season of new year. In this season, everything is filled with the energy of growth and hundreds of flowers receive the blessing of spring. This is the configuration of the true man who fills his lower body with energy. If a man achieves this, his energy and blood will be replenished and become doughty and vigorous.

‘When there are five Yin lines at the bottom and one Yang line on top, we call it “mountain and earth riven”<sup>26</sup> and the season is autumn. In this season, trees in the forests wither and hundreds of flowers wither and fall. This expresses the ordinary man who breathes with the throat. If a man is in this condition, his body will weaken and wither and his teeth will fall out. It is said in the *Yojo-sho*,<sup>27</sup> “When the six Yang lines are all exhausted and become Yin, man will die.”<sup>28</sup> Therefore you should know that the most important point in maintaining life is to fill the lower body with energy.

‘In ancient times, when Tokeisho purified himself and visited Master Sekidai<sup>29</sup> to ask for the main secret of the elixir of life, the master said, “I possess the main secret of the elixir but it can only be told to one of great capacity. This secret is what Kokeishi transmitted to the Yellow Emperor.”<sup>30</sup> The Emperor is said to have performed purification practices for 21 days before he received it.

‘The great way is nothing other than this elixir; and this elixir is nothing other than the great way. There is a teaching called the elimination of leaking from the five sense organs. When a man abandons his six desires and each of his five sense organs forgets its function, the harmonious essential true energy will accumulate before his eyes. This is what the famous Taoist Taihaku<sup>31</sup> referred to when he said, “the heavenly within me united with the heaven which is its source”, and what Mencius<sup>32</sup> referred to as “the vast flowing

energy". A man needs to draw this energy down and store it in the space below the navel, in the *kikai tanden*. If he maintains this for months and years without distraction, one morning, the elixir furnace will turn over and everywhere, within and without, will become one great circulating elixir. He will realise that he himself is older than heaven and earth, deathless as space. This is true alchemy. It is not a trivial method for flying in the sky on the wind and mists, or walking on the water. The true immortal can churn the ocean into cream and transform earth into gold. A wise man amongst the ancients said, "The elixir is the place below the navel. One circulates the blood of the lungs, the liquid gold, down into the *tanden* so this golden fluid can be sublimated into the elixir."

After hearing this I said to the hermit, 'I have listened with awed attention to all you have said. From now, I will discontinue my Zen meditation for a while and practise this method to cure my sickness. But I have one doubt. I wonder if the method you have taught me would not over-cool my heart, which the physician Rishisai<sup>33</sup> warned about. Also, if I fix my mind to one place, won't it stagnate the circulation of energy and blood?'

The hermit smiled and said, 'No. Rishisai also said, "The nature of fire<sup>34</sup> is to burn upwards, so it must be brought downwards. In contrast, the nature of water<sup>35</sup> is to go down and so it must be raised upwards. When the water is brought up to the fire moving down, the meeting is called 'intercourse'. When such intercourse occurs it is said to be Fulfilment,<sup>36</sup> and when the intercourse doesn't occur it is said to be Unfulfilment.<sup>37</sup> The former is the symbol of life and the latter is the symbol of death." When Rishisai warns of over-cooling, it was to save people falling into the one-sided error of Tankei.<sup>38</sup> An ancient says, "When there is illness in the body, the ministerial fire, the fire of the liver and kidneys, tends to rise up. In this case one must use water to control the fire."

'There are two kinds of fire, lordly fire and ministerial fire. The lordly fire is above and rules stillness, while the ministerial fire is below and rules motion. The lordly fire is the master of the heart, and the ministerial fire is like a minister supporting him. This ministerial



fire has two parts, the kidneys and liver. The liver corresponds to thunder and the kidneys correspond to the dragon. Therefore it is said, “If one returns the dragon to the bottom of the sea, there will certainly be no sudden thunder, and if one stores the thunder in the marsh, there will be no dragon flying wild. The ocean and marsh are both water.” This expression indicates the means by which the fire is kept from ascending.

‘It is also said that when the heart is exhausted, its energy is depleted and it over-heats. In order to restore the heart energy, one must draw it down and bring it together with the kidneys. This is called restoration, the method of fulfilment, the intercourse of water and fire. In your case, you developed this illness because your heart-fire has been blazing upwards; there is no other way to cure but bring this fire into the lower body.

‘In addition, even though my method is similar to that of the Taoists, you should not think that this is different to Buddhism. This is Zen. One day you will realise, remember these words and smile.

‘True meditation is non-meditation. False meditation is drifting and unfocused. You have been engaged in drifting meditation and developed this illness; now you should rely on the method of non-meditation. If you lower the heart-fire and place it in the *tanden* and down to the soles of your feet, your chest will naturally feel cool and there will be no discrimination or troubling illusions. This is true meditation, pure meditation.

‘You said that you would drop your Zen meditation for a while, but this is not good. The Buddhist sutras say, “If you fix your attention on the soles of your feet, every illness is cured”, and in the teaching of the *Agama Sutras*,<sup>39</sup> there is a method of contemplation which uses cream that is very effective in curing fatigue of the heart.

‘In *The Great Cessation and Contemplation* of Master Tendai Chigi,<sup>40</sup> several Zen illnesses are described, and the cure for each is explained in extreme detail. There is a method to cure different diseases by 12 different ways of breathing, and a method to concentrate the heart and energy into the navel through visualising a bean there. But the key point of all the methods is to lower the heart-



fire to the place below the navel and down as far as the soles of your feet. These methods not only cure diseases, but are also very helpful in Zen meditation.

‘There are two kinds of cessation, cessation in the context of true emptiness and cessation in the context of things. The former is contemplation of the true reality of all things, and the latter emphasises lowering the heart-energy in the navel – *kikai* and *tanden*. If a student practises these methods, he will certainly experience a huge effect.

‘Long ago, Dogen,<sup>41</sup> founder of Eihei-ji Temple, travelled to China and consulted with Zen master Nyojo of Tendo Mountain. Upon Dogen’s entrance and prostration, Nyojo taught, “When one meditates, the attention must be placed on the palm of your left hand”, and this is basically the method by which master Chigi saved the life of his dying brother. It is described in detail in *The Lesser Cessation and Contemplation*.

‘Also, the master Hakuin<sup>42</sup> said, “I always make my heart-energy fill my abdomen. Every day I train students, meet with guests and teach, and this method is most effective to a point where I believe it becomes more effective as I get older.” These true words must be based on the quotation from the Somo medical classic: “If one is peaceful, unstrained and free from greed, and the heart is kept empty, the true energy will follow. If one guards the spirit inside, illness cannot enter.” The main meaning of “guarding the spirit inside” is to fill the whole body, all 360 joints and 84,000 pores, with the original energy. This is also the true way of nourishing life.

‘Hoso<sup>43</sup> says, “The method of keeping the spirit peaceful, of filling the body with energy and of calming the heart is like this: first, close the door of the room, prepare a bed, warm the sheets and have a pillow two-and-a-half inches high. Lie down there, close your eyes and hold the heart-energy in the breast. When you exhale from the nose, do it very slowly to an extent that even if you have a feather on the tip of your nose, it would not move at all. If you continue breathing like this for about 300 times, you will hear nothing and see nothing. When you reach this point, heat and cold cannot invade

you; bees and scorpions cannot poison you. You will live up to 360 years old and approach the state of the true man.”

‘Also, poet Sotoba<sup>44</sup> teaches a method of *naikan* like this: “Eat when you are hungry but stop eating before you are full. Take a walk. Once your stomach is empty enter a quiet room, sit down in the correct posture and count your inhalations and exhalations. Count from one to ten; from ten to one hundred; from one hundred to one thousand. Soon your body will be still and peaceful as a rock; your heart will be calm and open as the empty sky. If you maintain this for a long time, your breathing will cease; there are neither inhalations nor exhalations. The breath will then seep out of your 84,000 pores and rise like a mist. The source of all your illnesses from unremembered times will be gone. It is like a blind person suddenly receives his sight. You no longer have to ask people the way. All you need to do is reduce talking and preserve and nourish your original energy. This is the reason why it is said, ‘Always close your eyes if you want to nurture your eyes, stop listening and close your ears if you want to nurture your ears and always remain silent if you want to nurture your heart-energy.’”

Then, when I asked, ‘Would you please teach me the method of the *naikan* using soft ointment?’, Hakuyushi said the following.

‘If the student of Zen practice finds the condition of body and mind approaches exhaustion and the four elements fall into disharmony, it is good to gather the spirit and imagine the following.

‘First of all, imagine a ball of soft healing ointment with pure colour and scent and the size of a duck’s egg. Place this ball on top of your head. Experience it melting. Its delicate touch sinks through the bones and moistens and soothes the inside and outside of your head. The exquisite feeling will then sink deeper and go down to the shoulders and arms, the chest, the diaphragm, the lungs, the liver and intestines, the stomach, till at last it reaches the bottom of the spine and the buttocks. As it washes downwards like this, the disharmonies and excess energy of the internal organs accumulated in the chest, together with the pain caused by this accumulation, will all descend with a sound just like flowing water. The ointment will

sink down through the whole body, warming and moistening the legs, then reach down to stop at the soles of the feet.

‘Then imagine this flow, which has gone down through the body, then accumulates to warm and fill the lower body until you feel as if you are internally bathed in a decoction of fragrant herbs that have been mixed and heated together by a expert physician, warming and healing everything below the navel. Since everything is just a reflection of your mind, if you imagine like this, you will actually become aware of a rare scent, and your body will feel exquisite sensations. Body and mind will harmonise, and you will have more vitality than when you were 20 or 30 years old. Blocks and accumulations in the body dissolve. Your digestive organs will function perfectly. Before noticing it, your skin is bright and shining.

‘If you continue this practice without laziness, what diseases cannot be cured? What virtue cannot be acquired? What wisdom cannot be achieved? What practice cannot be accomplished? The results simply depend on your application.

‘When I was young I suffered from frequent illnesses ten times worse than you. I visited all kinds of doctors and tried hundreds of treatments only to find there was no cure. Thereupon I prayed to the deities and implored the help of the heavenly immortals until I was blessed to receive this wonderful soft ointment method. Filled with joy, I practised the method without intermission and within a month most of my diseases disappeared.

‘Since then, body and mind are both in their best condition, working marvellously. From that time nothing bothers me. The year and month are not my concern. Worldly thoughts have been slowly vanishing, and human desires are gone. I have lost track of my age.

‘I wandered in the mountains in Wakasu province for about 30 years. Nobody knew me. Looking back on that time, it seems like the dream of Koryan.<sup>45</sup> Now I live in this uninhabited mountain of Shirakawa with two or three cotton cloths on this old body, yet I never get sick, even in the hardest winter. Even when stocks of food run down, sometimes for months, I don’t feel frozen or starved.

‘This is all thanks to the *naikan*. Now I have presented to you secrets that cannot be exhausted even over the course of the longest life. There’s nothing more for me to say.’

He finished talking, closed his eyes and remained sitting in silence.

With grateful tears in my eyes, I thanked him and left the cave.

I slowly descended from the cave entrance; the sun was setting on the trees. I heard the sound of wooden clogs echoing in the mountain valley. In awe and wonder I anxiously looked around. Hakuyushi the hermit had come out of the cave to guide my way. As he approached he said, ‘No one enters these mountains. There’s no path, so it is easy to become lost. To spare you this trouble I will guide you down for some way.’

He was wearing high wooden clogs and carried a thin stick. He walked ahead of me down the rocky way while chatting and laughing as easily as if he was walking on a flat field. After descending a few miles, we reached the stream. The hermit said, ‘Follow this stream and you will reach Shirakawa village.’ He turned and went back.

I was sad to be parted from him and stood awhile following his return with my eyes. His pace was strong and swift, as if he was flying to a mountain retreat to escape from the world. I looked up at him in admiration and respect, knowing that this must be the last time I would meet and learn from such a man.

I came back to Suruga and secretly immersed myself in the *naikan* method taught by the hermit. Before three years had passed all of my former illnesses had disappeared without receiving herbs, moxa or the needle.<sup>46</sup> Not only was I cured, but also many difficult-to-handle, difficult-to-follow, difficult-to-understand, difficult-to-enter *koans*, which previously I could find no footing, no handhold, no place to bite, clarified, and I experienced the great joy of enlightenment at least six or seven times without counting countless small joys, my body rapturously dancing. I realised that the words of Zen master Daie,<sup>47</sup> who said, ‘Eighteen huge enlightenments and countless small enlightenments’, were actually the truth.

Previously, I used to put on two or three pairs of socks and still felt icy-cold in the soles of my feet, but now I don't wear socks or use a heater even in the middle of a severe winter. I am over 70 years old with no illnesses; this is all thanks to this *naikan*.

Now, readers, don't think that doddering old Hakuin has spewed out a mass of drivel trying to deceive good people. I did not write this for intelligent people with superior natures who can reach the goal at one stroke from the master. I want dullards like me who are suffering from severe illnesses to read it. If they study this carefully and practise the meditation, I can guarantee it will help. I only fear that others might clap their hands and laugh at me. Why?

The horse that chews the dried-up winnow disturbs the man's afternoon nap. (Huang T'ing-chien, 1045–1105)<sup>48</sup>

## FROM HAKUIN'S ROHATSU<sup>49</sup> RETREAT INSTRUCTIONS

*Translated by Matt Shinkai Kane and Julian Daizan Skinner*

Prepare a thick cushion and sit in a cross-legged position. Wear your clothes loose, straighten the spine, settle the body, and begin counting the breath. This practice of counting the breath is the best way to enter into *samadhi*. At this point, fill the *hara* with energy and then bring complete focus to your *koan*. You should resolve with all of your being to maintain this concentration.

Those who continue this sole, unrelenting focus on their *koan* for a period of time will without a doubt experience *kensho*. Those who exert themselves in this way without becoming lazy will achieve it as surely as one who attempts to strike the ground does in fact do so. Therefore exert yourself! Strive on!



There are six great methods within the practice of counting the breath: counting, following, stopping, observing, returning to the source, and purification. Through counting the breath, one enters into *samadhi*; this is called *su*. When this practice ripens, simply

follow the natural flow of the breath and enter into *samadhi*. This is known as ‘following the breath’.

In total there are 16 excellent practices but they all boil down to two: *shi*, to count the breath, and *zui*, to follow the breath. Therefore the first ancestor, Bodhidharma, said, ‘Let go of external things, keep the mind free from internal grasping, and, with the mind like a great wall, enter the Way.’

With the mind free from internal grasping, you ground in the source. With the mind like a great wall you progress directly forward. There is deep meaning in these words. I therefore urge you to listen deeply, make your mind like a great wall, and continue to progress in your practice! If you follow these instructions, you will achieve *kensho* even more surely than one who attempts to strike the ground does so. Exert yourself in your practice! Strive on!

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- 1 A *bhikkhu* is a monastic follower of the Buddha.
  - 2 The ending of suffering, the highest goal in Buddhism.
  - 3 And similarly for ‘feelings in the feelings’, ‘consciousness in consciousness’ and ‘mental objects in mental objects’.
  - 4 Here Hakuin writes under the pseudonym of ‘Hunger and Cold’, the master of poverty hermitage.
  - 5 *Naikan* (literally, ‘inner contemplation’). Hakuin’s preferred term for the practices are detailed in *Yasenkana*.
  - 6 The energy centre about three fingers’ width below the navel in the centre of the body.
  - 7 Another term for ‘my true nature’.
  - 8 ‘Pure Land’ is a place particularly suitable for realising enlightenment. Hakuin is internalising what is traditionally considered an external location.
  - 9 Amida, the Buddha of Infinite Light, is said to come to the deathbed of a devotee to conduct them forward. Again, Hakuin is internalising what is popularly conceived of as external.
  - 10 P’eng Tsu, the Chinese exemplar of longevity, believed to have prolonged his lifespan beyond 800 years through his mastery of vitality.
  - 11 Taoist immortals.
  - 12 The *tanden* within the *kikai* refers to the energy centre in the centre of the body. *Tanden* translates as ‘field of elixir’, *kikai* as ‘ocean of energy’.
  - 13 Quotation from a T’ang dynasty Chinese poem by Keng Wei.
  - 14 A *samurai* patron of the arts and Chinese learning whose Shisendo (Hall of the Poetry Immortals) can still be visited in the north-eastern outskirts of Kyoto. It



seems that Hakuyushi was more likely Ishikawa's student than his teacher.

15 Key texts of the Confucian, Taoist and Buddhist traditions.

16 *Rikan*: contemplation of reality – meditation practices to realise the truth of things.

17 *Naikan*: inner contemplation – practices to strengthen, energise and re-balance the body.

18 Referring to noon when the sun is at its hottest.

19 The spleen, the earth element, has not been mentioned; most likely it was simply overlooked.

20 The great Taoist Chuang Tzu.

21 Hsu Chun, an eminent Korean master of medicine.

22 Shang Yang, a Chinese doctor from the Yuan dynasty (1271–1368), considered an authority on the arts of longevity.

23 Referring to the Chinese *I Ching* (*Ekikyo*, in Japanese), *The Classic of Changes*, a divination text, the most ancient of the Chinese classics. Its comments on 64 hexagrams – combinations of six Yin and Yang lines – have been used to track the flow of change in life and situations.

24 

25 

26 

27 A text on prolonging and nourishing life.

28 

29 Unknown figure.

30 The legendary Yellow Emperor gives his name to the source text of Chinese medicine. A dialogue between Kuang Ch'eng and the Emperor similar to the above is found in the *Chuang Tzu*.


31 T'ai-pai Tao-jen; not known.


32 Mencius (372–289 bc), the most famous Confucian philosopher.

33 Li Shih-ts'ai, a noted Ming-dynasty Chinese doctor.

34  – the trigram entitled 'Fire'.

35  – the trigram entitled 'Water'.

36  – water over fire (the cooking pot over the stove).

37  – fire over water: fire tending to rise up and water to sink; dissolution and separation.

38 The *Tan-his* school of medicine that presumably emphasised developing the Yin or cooling energies of the body.

39 *Agama Sutras*, the Chinese versions of the Buddha's earliest teachings. This contemplation method has not been discovered in these sutras, but the *Kuan Fo San Mei Hai Ching* (*Scripture on Contemplating the Ocean of Buddhas*), a later sutra, contains a markedly similar method.

40 Chigi (538–597), founder of the Chinese Tien T'ai tradition and author of this monumental work on Buddhist meditation practice.



- 41 Dogen (1200–1253) received the *dharma* transmission from Chinese Zen master Tendo Nyojo and introduced the Soto Zen tradition to Japan.
- 42 Po-yun, Chinese Zen master.
- 43 P'eng Tsu, Chinese philosopher.
- 44 Sotoba (1037–1101), eminent Chinese poet and Zen practitioner.
- 45 Who, during the duration of his supper cooking, dreamed a whole career of success in the administration, and as he awoke, realised the pointlessness of ambition.
- 46 Methods of acupuncture.
- 47 Daiye Soko (1089–1163), Sung-dynasty Chinese Zen master, one of Hakuin's major influences.
- 48 Line from a Chinese poem by Huang T'ing-chien, meaning superior seekers might be disturbed from their serenity by these words as the sleeper is disturbed by the horse.
- 49 December the 8th is the day Japanese Buddhists celebrate the enlightenment of the Buddha. In Zen temples the previous seven days are occupied by the most intensive retreat of the year – the *Rohatsu* retreat.