

# *Universal Recommendations for Zazen*

Fukan-zazengi | 普勸坐禪儀

by Zen Master Eihei Dogen, Daiosho

<https://oneriverzen.org/fukan-zazengi>

*Translated by Taizan Maezumi, Daiosho*

*Introduction & commentary by Sensei Michael Brunner*

## **Introduction:**

*Fukan zazengi is a concise text written by the Japanese Zen master Dogen Zenji, who lived in 13th century Japan. It is a seminal work on the practice of zazen, the core training of Zen Buddhism. The title "Fukan zazengi" can be translated as "Universal Promotion of the Principles of Sitting Meditation" or "The Way of Zazen in Universal Respect."*

*In Fukan zazengi, Dogen Zenji provides practical instructions for approaching the practice of zazen, emphasizing the importance of proper posture, breathing, and intentions. He emphasizes that zazen is not a means to attain enlightenment but rather an expression of the awakened state already present in all beings. Dogen expresses the importance of the direct experience of reality through zazen rather than relying on intellectual understanding or conceptual thinking.*

*Thus, Fukan zazengi emphasizes the importance of mindfulness and awareness in everyday life and the unity of practice and realization. Dogen encourages practitioners to fully engage in zazen as a way of embodying the truth of the present moment, and to let go of attachment to thoughts, concepts, and desires.*

*Fukan zazengi is a foundational text in the Soto Zen tradition, one of the major schools of Zen Buddhism.*

**-Sensei Michael Brunner** [Kogen Shikan 虎眼志観]

## **Text:**

Originally, The Way is complete and universal. How can we distinguish practice from enlightenment? The Vehicle of Reality is in the Self. Why should we waste our efforts trying to attain it? Still more, the Whole Body is free from dust. Why should we believe in a means to sweep it away? The Way is never separated from where we are now. Why should we wander here and there to practice?

Yet, if there is the slightest deviation, you will be as far from the Way as heaven is from earth. If adverse or favorable conditions arise to even a small degree, you will lose your mind in confusion. Even if you are proud of your understanding, are enlightened in abundance, and obtain the power of wisdom to glimpse the ground of buddhahood; even if you gain the Way,

clarify the mind, resolve to pierce heaven, that is only strolling on the border of the Buddha Way.

You are still, almost always, lacking the vivid way of emancipation. Moreover, consider Shakyamuni Buddha who was enlightened from birth; to this day you can see the traces of his sitting in the straight posture for six years. And Bodhidharma who transmitted the mind seal; even now you can hear of the fame of his facing the wall for nine years. These ancient sages practiced in this way. How can people of today refrain from practice?

Therefore, cease studying words and following letters. Learn to step back, turning the light inwards, illuminating the Self. Doing so, your body and mind will drop off naturally, and Original Self will manifest. If you wish to attain suchness, practice suchness immediately.

Now, for zazen a quiet room is best. Eat and drink moderately. Let go of all associations, and put all affairs aside. Do not think of either good or evil. Do not be concerned with either right or wrong. Put aside the operation of your intellect, volition, and consciousness. Stop considering things with memory, imagination and contemplation. Do not seek to become Buddha. To be Buddha has nothing to do with the forms of sitting or lying down.

Usually a thick zabutan is put on the floor where you sit, and a zafu placed on it. You may sit full lotus or half lotus. Your clothing should be loose but neat. Then put your right palm up on your left foot and your left palm up on your right palm. The tips of your thumbs should be lightly touching. Sit upright, leaning neither to the left nor right, neither forward nor backward. Your ears should be in line with your shoulders; your nose should be in line with your navel. Place your tongue against the roof of your mouth. Close your lips and jaw. Always keep your eyes open. Breathe quietly through your nose. After having regulated your posture, exhale completely and take a breath. Sway your body from left to right a few times. Sit stably in samadhi. Think of not-thinking.

How do you think of not-thinking? Beyond thinking. This is the essential way of zazen. The zazen which I am talking about is not step-by-step meditation. It is simply the dharma gate of peace and comfort. It is the practice-enlightenment of the ultimate Way. In doing zazen, the Koan manifests itself; it cannot be ensnared. When you grasp this, you are like a dragon with water, or a tiger in the mountains. You must know that true dharma manifests itself in zazen, and that dullness and distraction drop away.

When you rise from sitting, move your body slowly and stand up calmly. Do not move abruptly. You should see that to transcend both ordinary people and sages and to die sitting or standing, depends upon the power of zazen. Moreover, your discriminating mind cannot understand how buddhas and patriarchs taught their students with a finger, a pole, a needle, or a mallet, or how they transmitted the Way with a hossu, a fist, a staff, or by shouting. Needless to say, these actions cannot be understood by practicing to attain superhuman powers. These actions come from the practice which is prior to discriminating mind.

Therefore, do not consider whether you are clever or stupid, and do not think of whether you are superior or inferior. When you practice wholeheartedly, it is truly the practice of the Way. Practice – enlightenment cannot be defiled. Making the effort to obtain the Way, is itself, the manifestation of the Way in your daily life. The Buddhas and sages, both in this world and other worlds, in India and China, preserved the buddha-seal in the same way and expressed

the Way freely. They just practiced sitting and were protected by zazen. Although their characters were diverse, each of them practiced the Way of zazen wholeheartedly.

There is no reason to leave your own seat at home and take a meaningless trip to the dusty places of other countries. If you make a false step, then you will miss the way, even though it is before your eyes. You have already been given a human body which is vital, so do not spend your time wastefully. Since you are endowed with the essential functioning of the Buddha Way, why pursue worthless pleasures that are like sparks from a flint?

Furthermore, your body is like a drop of dew on a blade of grass, your life is like a flash of lightning. Your body will disappear soon, your life will be lost in an instant. You, honored practitioner, after learning in a partial way like the blind people who touched various parts of the elephant, please do not be scared by the real dragon. Devote yourself to the Way which indicates Reality directly. Respect those who realize their Self and no longer seek anything outside. Be in accord with the buddhas' bodhi. Succeed to the sages' samadhi. If you practice suchness continuously, you will be suchness.

The treasure house will open of itself, and you will be able to use it at will.

## **Fukan-zazengi**

Written by Sensei Michael Shikan Brunner

***Originally, The Way is complete and universal. How can we distinguish practice from enlightenment? The Vehicle of Reality is in the Self. Why should we waste our efforts trying to attain it? Still more, the Whole Body is free from dust. Why should we believe in a means to sweep it away? The Way is never separated from where we are now. Why should we wander here and there to practice?***

When we open to original mind, we experience every moment as new and novel - because that is what it *is*. This is our practice, and this is enlightenment. There is no division between them. Sitting, lying down, daydreaming, and paying attention are, in and of themselves, complete. Yet, we make distinctions and call things 'good' and 'bad'. Sometimes we identify with the labeler, sometimes we identify with the labeled. Yet, we are both and none.

Dust is often a metaphor for delusive thoughts, and infers the need to keep something 'clean'. But, everything is included in practice-enlightenment. If you take a step back, and open to it all, you can see this clearly. If you attach to something and don't see it, it is still right at hand. After all, where else would it be?

This is not a practice of sweeping away - there is nowhere to else to place it. It is a practice of opening to everything. It is a practice of acceptance. Yet, if it is not accepted, it still *is*.

Where does this leave us? Who are you?

***Yet, if there is the slightest deviation, you will be as far from the Way as heaven is from earth. If adverse or favorable conditions arise to even a small degree, you will lose your mind in confusion. Even if you are proud of your understanding, are enlightened in***

***abundance, and obtain the power of wisdom to glimpse the ground of buddhahood; even if you gain the Way, clarify the mind, and resolve to pierce heaven, that is only strolling on the border of the Buddha Way.***

Whenever we are caught up in the story woven by our storehouse consciousness stirred up by the reflection in it of our lived experience rather than facing our lived experience directly and unflinchingly, we don't dwell in the Way. Likewise, when our lives fail to meet up to our expectations, we are confounded by the difference. If you believe you have penetrated the Great Enlightenment and have clarified the Great Matter of Birth and Death, the 'you' is extra. Let that go and what is left! Show me...

***You are still, almost always, lacking the vivid way of emancipation. Moreover, consider Shakyamuni Buddha who was enlightened from birth; to this day you can see the traces of his sitting in the straight posture for six years. And Bodhidharma who transmitted the mind seal; even now you can hear of the fame of his facing the wall for nine years. These ancient sages practiced in this way. How can people of today refrain from practice?***

We are all gems reflecting in the great net of interconnectedness - the practice we have inherited through the ages and multiple names and forms we have held is the same in this very moment: we sit, all at once, undifferentiated, and awaken. This is not a path to enlightenment - this is the very activity of enlightenment: of practice-enlightenment. It is the Way of the Original Self - present through all of space-time.

***Therefore, cease studying words and following letters. Learn to step back, turning the light inwards, illuminating the Self. Doing so, your body and mind will drop off naturally, and Original Self will manifest. If you wish to attain suchness, practice suchness immediately.***

All of the sutras, verses, and commentaries are intrinsically empty. Look through the colon in this proposition and penetrate where it points to: the very place the King of the Dharma stands right now! Stop and bow to the one present throughout all of the ages, present before the birth of all of the Buddhas.

***Now, for zazen a quiet room is best. Eat and drink moderately. Let go of all associations, and put all affairs aside. Do not think of either good or evil. Do not be concerned with either right or wrong. Put aside the operation of your intellect, volition, and consciousness. Stop considering things with memory, imagination and contemplation. Do not seek to become Buddha. To be Buddha has nothing to do with the forms of sitting or lying down.***

We open by setting the stage for comfortable sitting. Setting aside distractions, we place the endless lists of actions aside. Letting go of our judgments and our reason, we can see them for what they are. When memories and fantasies emerge, we let them pass without latching on to them. Realize that the entire practice is here - there is no need to look elsewhere for guidance. This is it.

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***Always keep your eyes open. Breathe quietly through your nose. After having regulated your posture, exhale completely and take a breath. Sway your body from left to right a few times. Sit stably in samadhi. Think of not-thinking.***

Place yourself comfortably erect. Put everything in its place so it is stable and you can relax into your posture. Take a deep breath to open the chest and sit proudly and open. Sway to find your balance. Then sit.

***How do you think of not-thinking? Beyond thinking. This is the essential way of zazen. The zazen which I am talking about is not step-by-step meditation. It is simply the dharma gate of peace and comfort. It is the practice-enlightenment of the ultimate Way. In doing zazen, the Koan manifests itself; it cannot be ensnared. When you grasp this, you are like a dragon with water, or a tiger in the mountains. You must know that true dharma manifests itself in zazen, and that dullness and distraction drop away.***

We place our attention beyond the realm of discursive thought. We don't use our thinking to visualize a path to samadhi - we open directly to our essential nature when we sit and open to all while clinging to nothing. This is the greatest Koan of all - the koan of our life, of practice-enlightenment. Here we are the master of all realms, and the Truth is present beyond all labels or knowing. Manifesting freely, we are entirely present.

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Each evening as we go to bed, the number of our days is reduced by one. Don't get lost in trying to figure out what it is all about - the answer is present in every breath. Follow where every step leads, don't dwell elsewhere. Lose yourself in the suffering that presents itself so all can be released. When you see this recognition reflected in the eyes of your fellow practitioners, bow deeply. Thus all inherit the Buddha's great awakening and flawlessly dance in this wonderful samadhi.

***The treasure house will open of itself, and you will be able to use it at will.***

Appreciate your life.

***"Have good trust in yourself,  
not in the One that you think you should be,  
but in the One that you are."***

-Maezumi-roshi