



**2013 FALL PRACTICE PERIOD READER ON  
SHIKANTAZA**

LED BY SHINZAN PALMA AND JOSHIN BRIAN BYRNES

*“All Buddhas and every Ancestor without exception arrive at this refuge  
where the three times cease and the ten thousand changes are silent.*

*Not one single atom opposes us.*

*Behold the gleaming arising from the single mind.”*

Hongzhi

**PART I: Zen Master Hongzhi Zhengjue (A.D.1091-1157)  
and Silent Illumination**

**PART II: Talks by Zen Masters Uchiyama, Okumura, Loori, Shen-yen**

**PART III: Zen Master Dogen Reader on Shikantaza**

*Fall Practice Period*  
*Upaya Zen Center*  
*Santa Fe*

Dear Friends,

It is of questionable value to ask you to read these venerable texts about something that is “beyond thinking.” But I have compiled this reader for those of us who enjoy the encouragement and discoveries of great practitioners.

Bodhidharma “discovered” shikantaza as he sat for nine years facing the wall of his cave at the back of abandoned Shaolin Monastery. Zen Masters Hongzhi and Dogen established shikantaza firmly in our lineage eight hundred years ago. Since then millions have practiced “just sitting”, but who has realized this subtle and wonderful practice?

Shikantaza, or just sitting, is the most direct of practices in all of Buddhism. It is the method of no-method, and invites us to just sit in stillness and openness, perceiving things simply and directly as they are, without engaging in thought, including thoughts of motivation. An approach that requires no mediation of technique, shikantaza is a fully embodied and wholehearted practice that is direct, intimate, and uncontrived.

Great teachers have expounded richly on shikantaza, but in the end and in the beginning, it is really up to you and to me to “just sit.” The words, both written and thought, have to drop away sooner or later.

As we move through this practice period, you are invited to relax and be unselfish in your practice. These readings are a resource. They are not the source. You may realize the source if you “just sit.”

Upaya and its residents welcome you to this month of the practice of no-practice.

Two hands together,  
Roshi Joan

**PART I:**

**Zen Master Hongzhi Zhengjue (A.D.1091-1157)  
and Silent Illumination**

## **Master Hongzhi Zhengjue (A.D.1091-1157)**

Biographical information:

Hongzhi Zhengjue (Japanese: Wanshi Zenji, 1091–1157) was a Chinese Chán Buddhist monk who authored or compiled several influential Buddhist texts. Hongzhi's conception of "silent illumination" is of particular importance to the Chinese Caodong and Japanese Soto zen schools; however, Hongzhi was also the author of an important collection of koans, although koans are now usually associated with the Linji or Japanese Rinzai schools).

According to the account given in Dan Leighton's *Cultivating the Empty Field*, Hongzhi was born to a family named Li in Xizhou, present-day Shangxi province. He left home at the age of 11 to become a monk, studying under Caodong master Kumu Faqeng, among others, including Yuanwu Keqin, author of the famous koan collection, the *Blue Cliff Record*.

In 1129, Hongzhi began teaching at the Jingde monastery on Mount Tiantong, where he remained for nearly thirty years, until shortly before his death in 1157, when he ventured down the mountain to bid farewell to his supporters.

Hongzhi is the author or compiler of several texts important to the development of Chán Buddhism. One of these is the k<sub>a</sub>n collection known in English as *The Book of Equanimity*, *The Book of Serenity*, or *The Book of Composure* (Chinese: Ts'ung-jung lu; Japanese: Shoyuroku). A collection of Hongzhi's philosophical texts has also been translated by Dan Leighton.

Hongzhi often referred to as an exponent of Silent Illumination Chán ( Japanese: Mokusho Zen).

Further biographical and legendary information:

His father and ancestors all converted to Zen. When he was born, it was said that there was light outside the house, and his right arm was curled up like ring.

He studied Confucianism and Five Classics at the age of seven. At his father's request, he went to Jingming Temple at age 11, and took priest vows from Master Zhiqiong of Cixue Temple of Jinzhou at age 14. When he was 18 years old, he traveled around for learning and said "I will not come back without any achievement!" to his teacher on departure.

After then, he practiced in Ruzhou Xiangshan Temple, Dahong Temple, Yuantong Temple, Sizhou Puzhao Temple, Shuzhou Taiping Temple, Jiangsu Nengren Temple and Zhenzhou Changlu Temple.

In 1129, he reached Mingzhou and was invited to be the abbot of Tiantong Temple. At that time, Jin attacked Mingzhou and most temples were ransacked and the monks scattered, but only Tiantong withstood the attacks.

The master was strict with himself and others and his works were shining. He was not greedy and was generous in benefaction. During famine times, he saved tens of thousand people. Monks in the temple increased from less than 200 to over 1000 after he reached here. During his time of being the abbot of Tiantong Temple, all palaces and halls there were rebuilt, and the temple owned fields covering area of 13,000 mu.

In 1157, he was sent to Lingyin Temple, but he returned to Tiantong less than one month later. On the next day, he took a bath and changed clothes and wrote a parting message to the public and Dahui respectively, then he passed away at the age of 60. He was titled Master Hongzhi in 1158 and honored as the ancestor of Tiantong's resurgence and a famous master of Zen in the South Song Dynasty.

### **Guidepost of Silent Illumination by Hongzhi Zhengjue**

Silent and serene, forgetting words, bright clarity appears before you.  
 When you reflect it you become vast, where you embody it you are spiritually uplifted.  
 Spiritually solitary and shining, inner illumination restores wonder,  
 Dew in the moonlight, a river of stars, snow-covered pines, clouds enveloping the peaks.  
 In darkness it is most bright, while hidden all the more manifest.  
 The crane dreams in the wintery mists. The autumn waters flow far in the distance.  
 Endless kalpas are totally empty, all things are completely the same.  
 When wonder exists in serenity, all achievement is forgotten in illumination.  
 What is this wonder? Alertly seeing through confusion  
 Is the way of silent illumination and the origin of subtle radiance.  
 Vision penetrating into subtle radiance is weaving gold on a jade loom.  
 Upright and inclined yield to each other; light and dark are interdependent.  
 Not depending on sense faculty and object, at the right time they interact.  
 Drink the medicine of good views. Beat the poison-smeared drum.  
 When they interact, killing and giving life are up to you.  
 Through the gate the self emerges and the branches bear fruit.  
 Only silence is the supreme speech, only illumination the universal response.  
 Responding without falling into achievement, speaking without involving listeners.  
 The ten thousand forms majestically glisten and expound the dharma.  
 All objects certify it, every one in dialogue.  
 Dialoguing and certifying, they respond appropriately to each other;  
 But if illumination neglects serenity then aggressiveness appears.  
 Certifying and dialoguing, they respond to to oeach other appropriately;  
 But if serenity neglects illumination, murkiness leads to wasted dharma.  
 Whe silent illumination is fulfilled, the lotus blossoms, the dreamer awakens,  
 A hundred streams flow into the ocean, a thousand ranges face the highest peak.  
 Like geese preferring milk, like bees gathering nectar,  
 When silent illumination reaches the ultimate, I offer my teaching.  
 The teaching of silent illumination penetrates from the highest down to the foundation.  
 The body being shunyata, the arms in mudra,  
 From beginning to end the changing appearances and then thousand differences share one  
 pattern.  
 Mr. Ho offered jade [to the Emperor]; [Minister] Xiangru pointed to its flaws.  
 Facing changes has its principles, the great function is without striving.  
 The ruler stays in the kingdom, the general goes beyond the frontiers.  
 Our school's affair hits the mark straight and true.  
 Transmit it to all directions without desiring to gain credit.

**Preface to The Art of Just Sitting:  
Hongzhi, Dogen and the Background of Shikan taza**

Taigen Dan Leighton

Preface to the book, *The Art of Just Sitting*, edited by Daido Looi, Wisdom Publications, 2002.

One way to categorize the meditation practice of shikan taza, or "just sitting," is as an objectless meditation. This is a definition in terms of what it is not. One just sits, not concentrating on any particular object of awareness, unlike most traditional meditation practices, Buddhist and non-Buddhist, that involve intent focus on a particular object. Such objects traditionally have included colored disks, candle flames, various aspects of breath, incantations, ambient sound, physical sensations or postures, spiritual figures, mandalas including geometric arrangements of such figures, or of symbols representing them, teaching stories, or key phrases from such stories. Some of these concentration practices are in the background of the shikan taza practice tradition, or have been included with shikan taza in its actual lived experience by practitioners.

But objectless meditation focuses on clear, non-judgmental, panoramic attention to all of the myriad arising phenomena in the present experience. Such objectless meditation is a potential universally available to conscious beings, and has been expressed at various times in history. This just sitting is not a meditation technique or practice, or any thing at all. "Just sitting" is a verb rather than a noun, the dynamic activity of being fully present.

The specific practice experience of shikan taza was first articulated in the Soto Zen lineage (Caodong in Chinese) by the Chinese master Hongzhi Zhengjue (1091-1157; Wanshi Shogaku in Japanese), and further elaborated by the Japanese Soto founder Eihei Dogen (1200-1253). But prior to their expressions of this experience, there are hints of this practice in some of the earlier teachers of the tradition. The founding teachers of this lineage run from Shitou Xiqian (700-790; Sekito Kisen in Japanese), two generations after the Chinese Sixth Ancestor, through three generations to Dongshan Liangjie (807-869; Tozan Ryokai in Japanese), the usually recognized founder of the Caodong, or Soto, lineage in China. I will briefly mention a couple of these early practice intimations in their Soto lineage context before discussing the expressions of Hongzhi and Dogen.

Shitou/ Sekito is most noted for his teaching poem Sandokai, "Harmony of Difference and Sameness," still frequently chanted in Soto Zen. Sandokai presents the fundamental dialectic between the polarity of the universal ultimate and the phenomenal particulars. This dialectic, derived by Shitou from Chinese Huayan thought based on the "Flower Ornament" Avatamsaka Sutra, combined with some use of Daoist imagery, became the philosophical background of Soto, as expressed by Dongshan in the five ranks teachings, and later elucidated by various Soto thinkers. But Shitou wrote another teaching poem, Soanka, "Song of the Grass Hut," which presents more of a practice model for how to develop the space that fosters just sitting. Therein Shitou says, "Just sitting with head

covered all things are at rest. Thus this mountain monk does not understand at all." [1] So just sitting does not involve reaching some understanding. It is the subtle activity of allowing all things to be completely at rest just as they are, not poking one's head into the workings of the world.

Shitou also says in *Soanka*, "Turn around the light to shine within, then just return. . . . Let go of hundreds of years and relax completely. Open your hands and walk, innocent." According to Shitou, the fundamental orientation of turning within, also later described by Hongzhi and Dogen, is simply in order to return to the world, and to our original quality. Letting go of conditioning while steeped in completely relaxed awareness, one is able to act effectively, innocent of grasping and attachments. So the context of this just sitting suggested by Shitou is the possibility of aware and responsive presence that is simple, open-hearted, and straightforward.

When discussing *zazen*, Dogen regularly quotes a saying by Shitou's successor, Yaoshan Weiyuan (745-828; *Yakusan Igen* in Japanese). A monk asked Yaoshan what he thought of while sitting so still and steadfastly. Yaoshan replied that he thought of not-thinking, or that he thought of that which does not think. When the monk asked how Yaoshan did that, he responded, "Beyond -thinking," or, "Non-thinking." This is a state of awareness that can include both cognition and the absence of thought, and is not caught up in either. Dogen calls this, "The essential art of *zazen*." [2]

These early accounts would indicate that there was already a context of Caodong/ Soto practitioners "just sitting" well before Hongzhi and Dogen. The Soto lineage almost died out in China a century before Hongzhi, but was revived by Touzi Yiqing (1032-1083; *Tosu Gisei* in Japanese), who brought a background in Huayan studies to enliven Soto philosophy. Touzi's successor, Furong Daokai (1043-1118; *Fuyo Dokai* in Japanese) was a model of integrity who solidified and developed the forms for the Soto monastic community. It remained for Hongzhi, two generations after Furong Daokai, to fully express Soto praxis. Hongzhi, easily the most prominent Soto teacher in the twelfth century, was a literary giant, a highly prolific, elegant, and evocative writer who comprehensively articulated this meditation practice for the first time.

Hongzhi does not use the actual term, "just sitting," which Dogen quotes instead from his own Soto lineage teacher Tiantong Rujing (1163-1228; *Tendo Nyojo* in Japanese). But Tiantong Monastery, where Dogen studied with Rujing in 1227, was the same temple where Hongzhi had been abbot for almost thirty years up to his death in 1157. Dogen refers to Hongzhi as an "Ancient Buddha," and frequently quotes him, especially from his poetic writings on meditative experience. Clearly the meditative awareness that Hongzhi writes about was closely related to Dogen's meditation, although Dogen developed its dynamic orientation in his own writings about just sitting.



Hongzhi's meditation teaching is usually referred to as "silent, or serene, illumination," although Hongzhi actually uses this term only a few times in his voluminous writings. In his long poem, "Silent Illumination," Hongzhi emphasizes the necessity for balance between serenity and illumination, which echoes the traditional Buddhist meditation practice of shamatha-vipashyana, or stopping and insight. This was called zhiguan in the Chinese Tiantai meditation system expounded by the great Chinese Buddhist synthesizer Zhiyi (538-597). Hongzhi emphasizes the necessity for active insight as well as calm in "Silent Illumination" when he says, "If illumination neglects serenity then aggressiveness appears. . . . If serenity neglects illumination, murkiness leads to wasted dharma." [3] So Hongzhi's meditation values the balancing of both stopping, or settling the mind, and its active illuminating functioning.

In his prose writings, Hongzhi frequently uses nature metaphors to express the natural simplicity of the lived experience of silent illumination or just sitting. (I am generally using these terms interchangeably, except when discussing differences in their usages by Hongzhi or Dogen.) An example of Hongzhi's nature writing is,

A person of the Way fundamentally does not dwell anywhere. The white clouds are fascinated with the green mountain's foundation. The bright moon cherishes being carried along with the flowing water. The clouds part and the mountains appear. The moon sets and the water is cool. Each bit of autumn contains vast interpenetration without bounds.[4]

Hongzhi here highlights the ease of this awareness and its function. Like the flow of water and clouds, the mind can move smoothly to flow in harmony with its environment. "Accord and respond without laboring and accomplish without hindrance. Everywhere turn around freely, not following conditions, not falling into classifications." [5]

In many places, Hongzhi provides specific instructions about how to manage one's sense perceptions so as to allow the vital presence of just sitting. "Respond unencumbered to each speck of dust without becoming its partner. The subtlety of seeing and hearing transcends mere colors and sounds." [6] Again he suggests, "Casually mount the sounds and straddle the colors while you transcend listening and surpass watching." [7] This does not indicate a presence that is oblivious to the surrounding sense world. But while the practitioner remains aware, sense phenomena do not become objects of attachment, or objectified at all.

Another aspect of Hongzhi's practice is that it is objectless not only in terms of letting go of concentration objects, but also objectless in the sense of avoiding any specific, limited goals or objectives. As Hongzhi says at the end of "Silent Illumination," "Transmit it to all directions without desiring to gain credit." [8] This serene illumination, or just sitting, is not a technique, or a means to some resulting higher state of consciousness, or any particular state of being. Just sitting, one simply meets the immediate present. Desiring

some flashy experience, or anything more or other than "this" is mere worldly vanity and craving. Again invoking empty nature, Hongzhi says, "Fully appreciate the emptiness of all dharmas. Then all minds are free and all dusts evaporate in the original brilliance shining everywhere. . . . Clear and desireless, the wind in the pines and the moon in the water are content in their elements." [9]

This non-seeking quality of Hongzhi's meditation eventually helped make it controversial. The leading contemporary teacher in the much more prominent Linji lineage (Japanese Rinzai) was Dahui Zonggao (1089-1163; Daie Soko in Japanese). A popular historical stereotype is that Dahui and Hongzhi were rivals, debating over silent illumination meditation as opposed to Dahui's Koan Introspection meditation teaching. Historians have now established that Hongzhi and Dahui were actually good friends, or at least had high mutual esteem, and sent students to each other. There was no such debate, at least until future generations of their successors, although Dahui did severely critique "silent illumination" practice as being quietistic and damaging to Zen. However, Dahui clearly was not criticizing Hongzhi himself, but rather, some of his followers, and possibly Hongzhi's Dharma brother, Changlu Qingliao (1089-1151; Choryo Seiryō in Japanese), from whom Dogen's lineage descends. [10]

Dahui's criticism of silent illumination was partly valid, based on the legitimate danger of practitioners misunderstanding this approach as quietistic or passive. Dahui's critique was echoed centuries later by Japanese Rinzai critics of just sitting, such as Hakuin in the seventeenth century. Just sitting can indeed sometimes degenerate into dull attachment to inner bliss states, with no responsiveness to the suffering of the surrounding world. Hongzhi clarifies that this is not the intention of his practice, for example when he says, "In wonder return to the journey, avail yourself of the path and walk ahead. . . . With the hundred grass tips in the busy marketplace graciously share yourself." [11] The meditation advocated by both Hongzhi and Dogen is firmly rooted in the bodhisattva path and its liberative purpose of assisting and awakening beings. Mere idle indulgence in peacefulness and bliss is not the point.

The other aspect of Dahui's criticism related to his own advocacy of meditation focusing on koans as meditation objects, explicitly aimed at generating flashy opening experiences. Such experiences may occur in just sitting practice as well, but generally have been less valued in the Soto tradition. The purpose of Buddhist practice is universal awakening, not dramatic experiences of opening any more than passive states of serenity. But contrary to another erroneous stereotype, use of koans has been widespread in Soto teaching as well as Rinzai.

Hongzhi himself created two collections of koans with his comments, one of which was the basis for the important anthology, the *Book of Serenity*. Dogen also created koan collections, and (ironically, considering his reputation as champion of just sitting meditation) far more of his voluminous writing, including the essays of his masterwork

Shobogenzo, "True Dharma Eye Treasury," is devoted to commentary on koans than to discussion of meditation. Dogen was actually instrumental in introducing the koan literature to Japan, and his writings demonstrate a truly amazing mastery of the depths and breadth of the range of that literature in China. Steven Heine's modern work, *Dogen and the Koan Tradition*, clearly demonstrates how Dogen actually developed koan practice in new expansive modes that differed from Dahui's concentrated approach.[12] Although Hongzhi and Dogen, and most of the traditional Soto tradition, did not develop a formal koan meditation curriculum as did Dahui, Hakuin, and much of the Rinzai tradition, the koan stories have remained a prominent context for Soto teaching. Conversely, just sitting has often been part of Rinzai practice, such that some Soto monks in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries went to Rinzai masters for training in just sitting.

Although a great deal of Dogen's writing focuses on commentary on koans and sutras, and on monastic practice expressions, the practice of just sitting is clearly in the background throughout his teaching career. Dogen builds on the descriptions of Hongzhi to emphasize the dynamic function of just sitting.

In one of his first essays, *Bendowa*, "Talk on Wholehearted Practice of the Way," written in 1231 a few years after his return from training in China, Dogen describes this meditation as the samadhi of self-fulfillment (or enjoyment), and elaborates the inner meaning of this practice. Simply just sitting is expressed as concentration on the self in its most delightful wholeness, in total inclusive interconnection with all of phenomena. Dogen makes remarkably radical claims for this simple experience. "When one displays the buddha mudra with one's whole body and mind, sitting upright in this samadhi for even a short time, everything in the entire dharma world becomes buddha mudra, and all space in the universe completely becomes enlightenment." [13] Proclaiming that when one just sits all of space itself becomes enlightenment is an inconceivable statement, deeply challenging our usual sense of the nature of reality, whether we take Dogen's words literally or metaphorically. Dogen places this activity of just sitting far beyond our usual sense of personal self or agency. He goes on to say that, "Even if only one person sits for a short time, because this zazen is one with all existence and completely permeates all times, it performs everlasting buddha guidance" throughout space and time.[14] At least in Dogen's faith in the spiritual or "theological" implications of the activity of just sitting, this is clearly a dynamically liberating practice, not mere blissful serenity.

Through his writings, Dogen gives ample indication as to how to engage this just sitting. In another noted early writing, *Genjokoan*, "Actualizing the Fundamental Point," from 1233, Dogen gives a clear description of the existential stance of just sitting, "To carry yourself forward and experience myriad things is delusion. That myriad things come forth and experience themselves is awakening." [15] That we are conditioned to project our own conceptions onto the world as a dead object-screen is the cause of suffering.

When all of phenomena (including what we usually think of as "ours") join in mutual self-experience and expression, the awakened awareness that Hongzhi described through nature metaphors is present, doing buddha's work, as Dogen says.

Some modern Dogen scholars have emphasized the shift in his later teaching to the importance of strict monastic practice, and supposedly away from the universal applicability of shikan taza practice. In 1243 Dogen moved his community far from the capital of Kyoto to the snowy north coast mountains, where he established his monastery, Eihei-ji. His teaching thereafter, until his death in 1253, was mostly in the form of often brief talks to his monks, presented in Eihei Koroku, "Dogen's Extensive Record." These are certainly focused on training a core of dedicated monks to preserve his practice tradition, a mission he fulfilled with extraordinary success. But through his later work as well as the early, instructions and encouragements to just sit appear regularly.

In 1251 Dogen was still proclaiming,

The family style of all buddhas and ancestors is to engage the way in zazen. My late teacher Tiantong [Rujing] said, "Cross-legged sitting is the dharma of ancient buddhas. . . . In just sitting it is finally accomplished." . . . We should engage the way in zazen as if extinguishing flames from our heads. Buddhas and ancestors, generation after generation, face to face transmit the primacy of zazen.[16]

In 1249 he exhorted his monks, "We should know that zazen is the decorous activity of practice after realization. Realization is simply just sitting zazen. . . . Brothers on this mountain, you should straightforwardly, single-mindedly focus on zazen." (319) For Dogen, all of enlightenment is fully expressed in the ongoing practice of just sitting. That same year, he gave a straightforward instruction for just sitting:

Great assembly, do you want to hear the reality of just sitting, which is the Zen practice that is dropping off body and mind?

After a pause [Dogen] said: Mind cannot objectify it; thinking cannot describe it. Just step back and carry on, and avoid offending anyone you face. At the ancient dock, the wind and moon are cold and clear. At night the boat floats peacefully in the land of lapis lazuli. (337)

The concluding two sentences of this talk are quoted from a poem by Hongzhi, further revealing the continuity of their practice teachings. Dogen also frequently describes this just sitting as "dropping away body and mind," *shinjin datsuraku* in Japanese, a phrase traditionally associated with Dogen's awakening experience in China.[17]

For Dogen this "dropping off body and mind" is the true nature both of just sitting and of complete enlightenment, and is the ultimate letting go of self, directly meeting the cold, clear wind and moon. After turning within while just sitting, it is carried on in all activity, and throughout ongoing engagement with the world. Although just sitting now has been maintained for 750 years since Dogen, the teachings of Hongzhi and Dogen remain as primary guideposts to its practice.

## Endnotes:

1. Shitou does not use the words for "shikan taza," but the reference to the iconic image of Bodhidharma just sitting, or "wall-gazing" in his cold cave with quilt over his head is unquestionable. For "Soanka" see Taigen Dan Leighton, with Yi Wu, trans., *Cultivating the Empty Field: The Silent Illumination of Zen Master Hongzhi*, revised, expanded edition (Boston: Tuttle Publishing, 2000), pp. 72-73.
2. In Dogen's *Fukanzazengi*; see Kazuaki Tanahashi, editor, *Enlightenment Unfolds: The Essential Teachings of Zen Master Dogen* (Boston: Shambhala, 1999), p. 55; or the groundbreaking translation by Norman Waddell and Masao Abe later in this book.
3. Leighton, *Cultivating the Empty Field*, pp. 67-68 (reprinted in this book). For more on Hongzhi and his meditation teaching, see also Morton Schlutter, "Silent Illumination, Kung-an Introspection, and the Competition for Lay Patronage in Sung Dynasty Ch'an" in Peter Gregory and Daniel Getz, editors, *Buddhism in the Sung* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999), pp. 109-147.
4. Leighton, *Cultivating the Empty Field*, pp. 41-42.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 31.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 30
7. *Ibid.*, p. 55.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 68.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 43.
10. Schlutter, "Silent Illumination, Kung-an Introspection" in Gregory and Getz, *Buddhism in the Sung*, pp. 109-110.
11. Leighton, *Cultivating the Empty Field*, p. 55.
12. Steven Heine, *Dogen and the Koan Tradition: A Tale of Two Shobogenzo Texts* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994).
13. Shohaku Okumura and Taigen Dan Leighton, trans. *The Wholehearted Way: A Translation of Eihei Dogen's Bendowa with Commentary by Kosho Uchiyama Roshi* (Boston: Tuttle Publishing, 1997), p. 22.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 23.
15. Kazuaki Tanahashi, editor, *Moon in a Dewdrop: Writings of Zen Master Dogen* (New York: North Point Press, division of Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1985), p. 69.
16. Eihei Koroku, *Dharma Discourse 432*, from Taigen Dan Leighton and Shohaku Okumura, trans. *Dogen's Extensive Record: A Translation of Eihei Koroku* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, forthcoming). All later quotes from Eihei Koroku in this preface are from this translation, identified in the text after the quote by Dharma Discourse number.
17. See Leighton, *Cultivating the Empty Field*, pp. 20-23; reprinted later in this book.

From:

**In the Spirit of Ch'an: An Introduction to Ch'an Buddhism**

Master Sheng-yen

The term Silent Illumination, or Mozhao, is associated with the Song dynasty master Hongzhi Zhengjue (1091-1157), although the practice itself can be traced back at least as far as Bodhidharma and his concept of entry through principle. Five generations later, the great master Yongjia (665-713) wrote about "clarity and quiescence" in his Song of Enlightenment. Quiescence refers to the practice of silencing the mind, and clarity refers to contemplation, illuminating the mind with the light of awareness.

Hongzhi himself described the "silent sitting" as thus: "your body sits silently; your mind is quiescent, unmoving. This is genuine effort in practice. Body and mind are at complete rest. The mouth is so still that moss grows around it. Grass sprouts from the tongue. Do this without ceasing, cleansing the mind until it gains the clarity of an autumn pool, bright as the moon illuminating the evening sky."

In another place, Hongzhi said, "In the silent sitting, whatever realm may appear, the mind is very clear to all the details, yet everything is where it originally is, in its own place. The mind stays on one thought for ten thousand years, yet does not dwell on any form, inside or outside."

To understand Silent Illumination C'han, it is important to understand that while there are no thoughts, the mind is still very clear, very aware. Both the silence and the illumination must be there. According to Hongzhi, when there is nothing going on in one's mind, one is aware that nothing is happening. If one is not aware, this is just Ch'an sickness, not the state of Ch'an. So in this state, the mind is transparent. In a sense, it is not completely accurate to say that there is nothing present, because the transparent mind is there. But it is accurate in the sense that nothing can become an attachment or obstruction. In this state, the mind is without form or feature. Power is present, but its function is to fill the mind with illumination, like the sun shining everywhere. Hence, silent illumination is the practice in which there is nothing moving, but the mind is bright and illuminating.

**Excerpts from Practice Instructions: Dharma Words of Monk Hongzhi Zhengjue of Mount Tiantong in Ming Province,**  
Compiled with a Preface by Monk Puqung

[from the compiler of Hongzhi's teachings:]

Hongzhi made vast and empty the bright mirror and saw through it and reflected without neglect. He manifested the mysterious pivot of subtle change, then trusted his fortune and certainly found the core. Only one who had the true eye and deep flowing eloquence could have mastered this! My teacher lived below Taipai Peak. Dragons and elephants tromped around. The hammer and chisel [of the teaching] chipped away. The meaning of his words spread widely but still conveyed the essence. Sometimes scholars and laypeople who trusted the Way asked for his directions; sometimes mendicant monks requested his instructions. They spread out paper and wrote down his responses. He spoke up and answered their questions, producing appropriate dharma talks. I have selected a few of these and arranged them in order. Ah, the emptiness of the great blue sky, the flowing of the vast ocean. I have not yet attained these utmost depths, so please excuse my attempt to record his talks. I must await the ones who mysteriously accord with spiritual awakening to pound out the rhythm of his words and appreciate their tones.

*The Bright, Boundless Field*

The field of boundless emptiness is what exists from the very beginning. You must purify, cure, grind down, or brush away all the tendencies you have fabricated into apparent habits. Then you can reside in the clear circle of brightness. Utter emptiness has no image, upright independence does not rely on anything. Just expand and illuminate the original truth unconcerned by external conditions. Accordingly we are told to realize that not a single thing exists. In this field birth and death do not appear. The deep source, transparent down to the bottom, can radiantly shine and can respond unencumbered to each speck of dust without becoming its partner. The subtlety of seeing and hearing transcends mere colors and sounds. The whole affair functions without leaving traces, and mirrors without obscurations. Very naturally mind and dharmas emerge and harmonize. An Ancient said that non-mind embodies and fulfills the way of non-mind. Embodying and fulfilling the way of non-mind, finally you can rest. Proceeding you are able to guide the assembly. With thoughts clear, sitting silently, wander into the center of the circle of wonder. This is how you must penetrate and study.

*Contemplating the Ten Thousand Years*

Patch-robed monks make their thinking dry and cool and rest from the remnants of conditioning. Persistently brush up and sharpen this bit of the field. Directly cut through all the overgrown grass. Reach the limit in all directions without defiling even one atom. Spiritual and bright, vast and lustrous, illuminating fully what is before you, directly attain the shining light and clarity that cannot attach to a single defilement. Immediately tug and pull back the ox's nose. Of course his horns are imposing and he stomps around like a beast, yet he never damages people's sprouts or grain. Wandering around, accept

how it goes. Accepting how it goes, wander around. Do not be bounded by or settle into any place. Then the plough will break open the ground in the field of the empty kalpa. Proceeding in this manner, each event will be unobscured, each realm will appear complete. One contemplation of the ten thousand years is beginning not to dwell in appearances. Thus it is said that the mind-ground contains every seed and the universal rain makes them all sprout. When awakening blossoms, desires fade, and Bodhi's fruit is perfected self.

*The Ancient Ferryboat in Bright Moonlight*

A patch-robed monk's authentic task is to practice the essence, in each minute event carefully discerning the shining source, radiant without discrimination, one color unstained. You must keep turning inwards, then [the source] is apprehended. This is called being able to continue the family business. Do not wear the changing fashions, transcend the duality of light and shadow. Accordingly the ancestors' single trail is marvelously embodied. The residual debris of the world departs, its influence ended. This worldly knowledge does not compare to returning to the primary and obtaining confirmation. Observing beyond your skull, the core finally can be fulfilled and you can emerge from the transitory. The reeds blossom under the bright moon; the ancient ferryboat begins its passage; the jade thread fits into the golden needle. Then the opportunity arises to turn around, enter the world, and respond to conditions. All the dusts are entirely yours; all the dharmas are not someone else's. Follow the current and paddle along, naturally unobstructed!

*How to Contemplate Buddha*

Contemplating your own authentic form is how to contemplate Buddha. If you can experience yourself without distractions, simply surpass partiality and go beyond conceptualizing. All buddhas and all minds reach the essential without duality. Patch-robed monks silently wander and tranquilly dwell in the empty spirit, wondrously penetrating, just as the supreme emptiness permeates this dusty kalpa. Dignified without relying on others and radiant beyond doubt, maintaining this as primary, the energy turns around and transforms all estrangement. Passing through the world responding to situations, illumination is without striving and functions without leaving traces. From the beginning the clouds leisurely release their rain, drifting past obstacles. The direct teaching is very pure and steady. Nothing can budge it. Immediately, without allowing past conditions to turn you, genuinely embody it.

*The Clouds' Fascination and the Moon's Cherishing*

A person of the Way fundamentally does not dwell anywhere. The white clouds are fascinated with the green mountain's foundation. The bright moon cherishes being carried along with the flowing water. The clouds part and the mountain appears. The moon sets and the water is cool. Each bit of autumn contains vast interpenetration without bounds. Every dust is whole without reaching me; the ten thousand changes are stilled without shaking me. If you can sit here with stability, then you can freely step across and engage



the world with energy. There is an excellent saying that the six sense doors are not veiled, the highways in all directions have no footprints. Always arriving everywhere without being confused, gentle without hesitation, the perfected person knows where to go.

*Noninterference in the Matter of Oneness*

The matter of oneness cannot be learned at all. The essence is to empty and open out body and mind, as expansive as the great emptiness of space. Naturally in the entire territory all is satisfied. This strong spirit cannot be deterred; in event after event it cannot be confused. The moon accompanies the flowing water, the rain pursues the drifting clouds. Settled, without a [grasping] mind, such intensity may be accomplished. Only do not let yourself interfere with things, and certainly nothing will interfere with you. Body and mind are one suchness; outside this body there is nothing else. The same substance and the same function, one nature and one form, all faculties and all object-dusts are instantly transcendent. So it is said, the sage is without self and yet nothing is not himself. Whatever appears is instantly understood, and you know how to gather it up or how to let it go. Be a white ox in the open field. Whatever happens, nothing can drive him away.

*The Resting of the Streams and Tides*

Just resting is like the great ocean accepting hundreds of streams, all absorbed into one flavor. Freely going ahead is like the great surging tides riding on the wind, all coming onto this shore together. How could they not reach into the genuine source? How could they not realize the great function that appears before us? A patch-robed monk follows movement and responds to changes in total harmony. Moreover, haven't you yourself established the mind that thinks up all the illusory conditions? This insight must be perfectly incorporated.

*Graciously Share Yourself*

In the great rest and great halting the lips become moldy and mountains of grass grow on your tongue. Moving straight ahead [beyond this state], totally let go, washed clean and ground to a fine polish. Respond with brilliant light to such unfathomable depths as the waters of autumn or the moon stamped in the sky. Then you must know there is a path on which to turn yourself around. When you do turn yourself around you have no different face that can be recognized. Even if you do not recognize [your face] still nothing can hide it. This is penetrating from the topmost all the way down to the bottom. When you have thoroughly investigated your roots back to their ultimate source, a thousand or ten thousand sages are no more than footprints on the trail. In wonder return to the journey, avail yourself of the path and walk ahead. In light there is darkness; where it operates no traces remain. With the hundred grass tips in the busy marketplace graciously share yourself. Wide open and accessible, walking along, casually mount the sounds and straddle the colors while you transcend listening and surpass watching. Perfectly unifying in this manner is simply a patch-robed monk's appropriate activity.

**PART II**

**GENERAL READER ON SHIKANTAZA**

**ZEN MASTERS:**

**UCHIYAMA**

**OKUMURA**

**LOORI SHEN-**

**YEN**

**Uchiyama Kôshô Rôshi: To you who are still dissatisfied with your zazen...**

Translated from Japanese by Jesse Haasch and Muhô as part of the book "To you".

Dôgen Zenji's practice of shikantaza is exactly what my late teacher Sawaki Kôdô Rôshi called the zazen of just sitting. So for me too, true zazen naturally means shikantaza – just sitting. That is to say that we do not practice zazen to have satori experiences, to solve a lot of koans or receive a transmission certificate. Zazen just means to sit.

On the other hand, it is a fact that even among the practitioners of the Japanese Sôtô School, which goes back to its founder Dôgen Zenji, many have had doubts about this zazen. To make their point, they quote passages like these:

I have not visited many Zen monasteries. I simply, with my master Tendo, quietly verified that the eyes are horizontal and the nose is vertical. I cannot be misled by anyone anymore. I have returned home empty-handed. [Eihei Kôroku]

I travelled in Sung China and visited Zen masters in all parts of the country, studying the five houses of Zen. Finally I met my master Nyojo on Taihaku peak, and the great matter of lifelong practice became clear. The great task of a lifetime of practice came to an end. [Shôbôgenzô Bendôwa]

So that's why they say, "Didn't even Dôgen Zenji say that he realized that the eyes are horizontal and the nose vertical, and that the great matter of lifelong practice became clear? What sense could there be when an ordinary person without a trace of satori just sits?"

I remember well carrying around such doubts myself. And I wasn't the only one, a significant number of the Zen practitioners who flocked around Sawaki Rôshi abandoned the zazen of just-sitting in order to try out kenshô Zen or kôan Zen. So I understand this doubt well.

We must know that Sawaki Rôshi had a Zen master's character – just as you might imagine it. He was also so charismatic that many, as soon as they first met him, were attracted to him like iron shavings to a magnet. So when Rôshi said, "Zazen is good for absolutely nothing" (this was Sawaki Rôshi's expression for the zazen which is "beyond gain and beyond satori" [mushotoku-mushogo], then they thought he was just saying that. They thought that their zazen practice would at some point actually be good for something or another. I think that goes for many who practiced with Sawaki Rôshi.

Perhaps those who lived outside and who just came to the temple for zazen or for a sesshin from time to time might not have had these doubts. But those who resolved to give up their former life to become monks and practice the day-to-day, intensive zazen

life in the sangha around Sawaki Rôshi, these people sooner or later began to doubt shikantaza.

The reason for this is that no matter how much you sit, you are never fully satisfied with your zazen. “Not fully satisfied” means that it does not feel the way your stomach does after a big meal. So many young people who had dedicated themselves, body and soul, to the practice of zazen began at some point to wonder if they weren’t wasting their youth with this zazen that does not fill them up at all. And many finally left, saying: “Aren’t even the older disciples, who have already been practicing this zazen for years, at bottom just ordinary people? I need satori!”

This is why many people gave up practicing. This doubt brought me almost to the breaking point as well, yet in the end I followed Sawaki Rôshi for twenty-four years until his death. So I do understand those who entertain this doubt, but I have also finally understood the meaning of the shikantaza of which Dôgen Zenji and Sawaki Rôshi speak. That is why I would now like to try to play the role of a sort of interpreter between the two standpoints.

When I say “interpreter”, that doesn’t mean only that many Zen practitioners don’t understand the words of Dôgen Zenji or Sawaki Rôshi. I also mean that although Dôgen Zenji and Sawaki Rôshi do understand the deep doubts and problems of those who try to practice shikantaza, their words don’t always reach far enough to truly soothe the root of our doubts and problems. That is why I permit myself to attempt here to present and comment on the following words of Dôgen Zenji and Sawaki Rôshi in my own way.

What does that mean in practice? Let’s take for example the passage from Dôgen Zenji’s Eihei Kôroku:

I simply, with my master Tendô Nyojô, quietly verified that the eyes are horizontal and the nose is vertical. From now on, I cannot be misled by anyone. I have returned home empty-handed.

How would it be to read it like this: “Taking this breath at this moment, I verify that I am alive.”

The reason why I can interpret it like this is because I don’t read the Shôbôgenzô as a Buddhist scholar who is only concerned with bringing order to the labyrinth of Chinese characters. Nor do I read it as a sectarian to whom every single word is so holy that he puts it on a pedestal, like a tin of canned food that will never be opened, and throw himself to the ground before it. Instead, I read it with the eyes of a person who seeks the Way, who is concerned with getting to the bottom of an entirely new way of life. And I believe that is exactly what is meant by “seeing the mind in light of the ancient teachings” or “studying the Buddha Way means studying the self.”

If we read this passage from Dôgen Zenji as an expression of our own, entirely new life, we will not get stuck in a flat and static interpretation. Instead we will realize that “the eyes are horizontal, the nose is vertical” is an expression of this fresh life we are living, breathing this breath in this moment. When we read like this, we see that Dôgen Zenji isn’t talking about some mystical state you might experience during zazen once you get “satori”. He is talking about the most obvious fact – this life right here.

That is why it is also written at the beginning of Dôgen’s Fukanzazengi, “The Way is omnipresent and complete. How can we distinguish practice from certification? The truth reveals itself by itself in every place, why make a special effort to grasp it?”

In the same spirit, what does the following passage mean? “A difference, even the breadth of a hair, separates heaven from Earth. If you make a distinction between favorable and unfavorable conditions, your mind will be lost in confusion.”

Life is this moment is fresh, raw and new. But when we think about this essential fact as an idea in our heads, we get stuck, wondering about what we can understand and what we can force into our categories. When we think about “the freshness of life”, it isn’t fresh anymore, it isn’t alive. Freshness of life means opening the hand of thought. Only when we do so can life be fresh. Zazen is this “opening this hand of thought”. It is the posture of letting go.

Now I have to say a word about the actual practice of shikantaza. Sitting in zazen does not mean that we do not have any thoughts. All kinds of arise. Yet when you follow these thoughts, it can’t be called zazen anymore. You are simply thinking in the posture of zazen. So you have to realize that right now you are practicing zazen and it is not the time for thinking. This is correcting your attitude, correcting your posture, letting the thoughts go and returning to zazen. This is called “awakening from distraction and confusion.”

Another time you might be tired. Then you have to remind yourself that you are practicing zazen right now, and it is not the time for sleeping. This is correcting your attitude, correcting your posture, really opening the eyes and returning to zazen. This is called “Awakening from dullness and fatigue.”

Zazen means awakening from distraction and confusion and from dullness and fatigue, awakening to zazen billions of times. The zazen of living out this fresh and raw life means awakening the mind, certifying through practice billions of times. This is shikantaza.

It’s said that Dôgen Zenji achieved satori through dropping off body and mind [shin jin datsu raku], but what is this dropping off body and mind really? In his Hôkyôki we read,

The abbot said: “The practice of zazen means dropping off body and mind. That means shikantaza – not burning incense, doing prostrations, nembutsu, repentance or sutra reading.”

I bowed and asked, “What is dropping off body and mind?” The abbot answered, “Dropping off body and mind is zazen. If you simply practice zazen, at that moment you are freed from the five desires and the five obstructions disappear.” (Footnote: the five desires are the desires for the objects of the five sense objects, the five obstructions are greed, anger, indolence, agitation and doubt)

So dropping off body and mind means opening the hand of thought and returning to zazen a billion times. Dropping off body and mind is not some sort of special mysterious experience.

Only this sort of zazen actualizes “the entire, unsurpassable buddha-dharma”. It is also called the “main gate to the buddha-dharma” [both expressions are from Bendôwa].

I would like to compare our life to sitting behind the wheel of an automobile. When we drive, it is dangerous to fall asleep at the wheel or to drive drunk. It is also risky to think about other things while driving or to be nervous and tense. That goes as well for sitting behind the wheel of our life. The fundamental approach to driving our life has to consist in waking up from the haze of sleepiness and drunkenness and from the distractions of thinking and nervousness.

Zazen means actually putting these basics of life into practice. That is why it can be called “seeing the whole of the buddha-dharma” or “the main gate of the buddha-dharma”. That is also the reason why Dôgen Zenji wrote “A Universal Recommendation for Zazen” [Fukanzazengi], in which he clarifies the practice of zazen.

The body and mind of the Buddha way is grasses and trees, stones and tiles, wind and rain, fire and water. Observing this and recognizing everything as the Buddha way is what is meant by awakening bodhi-mind. Take hold of emptiness and use it to build pagodas and buddhas. Scoop out the water of the valley and use it to build buddhas and pagodas. That is what it means to arouse the awakened mind of unsurpassable, complete wisdom, and what it means to repeat this one single awakening billions of times. This is practicing realization. [Shôbôgenzô Hotsumujôshin]. It would be a big mistake to interpret this as a mere warning for all not-yet-awakened Zen practitioners to not neglect their practice. The billion-fold awakening of awakened mind does not mean anything more than the living breath of vigorous life.

Some people begin with the practice of shikantaza and then give it up quickly because it does not give them that feeling of fullness or because it bores them. They do so because they only understand this awakening a billion times in their heads. That’s why they think,

“Oh no! I have to awaken the mind a billion times? What I need is satori! If I hurry up and get one big satori, I can wrap up this billion-times business in a single stroke!”

It is exactly as if we were told as babies, “From now on you will have to breathe, your whole life long, this very breath, again and again, every single moment. You will breathe in and breathe out billions of times.” What baby would say, “Oh no! I’ve got to find some way to take care of these billion breaths once and for all, with one really big breath...”?

Even if we tried, we would not succeed.

That is why it continues in Hotsumujôshin further: “Some people believe that practice is indeed endless but awakening happens only once and that afterwards there is no awakening of the mind. Such a person does not hear the buddha-dharma, does not know the buddha-dharma and has never met the buddha-dharma.”

People who try to get one big satori do not accept that they must live their life with all of its freshness and vigor. Even in strictly biological terms, we can only live by taking this breath in this moment. Living means breathing this breath right now. When it is a matter of living this fresh life, it is of course not enough to simply think about your life in your head. Instead we have got to accept it as the vigorous life that it is. Only like this will we discover an attitude and posture which is fresh and vigorous.

That is what is meant by, “The great matter of lifelong practice has now come to an end.” And at the same time this is where the real practice of shikantaza begins. This is called “the unity of practice and realization” or “practice on the basis of realization”.

That is why Sawaki Rôshi always repeated, “Satori has no beginning. Practice has no end!”

## **Just Sitting: The Spiritual Legacy of Dogen Zenji** **Shohaku Okumura**

Opening lecture of the "Practice on the Prairie" series  
Given on August 20, 2002 at MZMC City Practice Center

Good evening, everyone. I'm very happy to be here this evening and very honored to be asked to give a talk as a part of the series of lectures for the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the Minnesota Zen Meditation Center. This center was established 1972 by Katagiri Dainin Roshi and his students. I was really happy because I could be a part of this history of 30 years, even though I stayed here only three years as head teacher and one more year as a part time teacher.

Today [lecture series organizer] Cal [Appleby] asked me to talk about "Just Sitting," and the subtitle is "The Spiritual Legacy of Dogen Zenji" - big title! Just sitting is our legacy of Dogen Zenji. "Just sitting" is an English translation for the Japanese expression: shikantaza. Shikan means "just, simply" and taza means "sitting". So just sitting is shikantaza. The original person who used this expression shikantaza was a Chinese Zen master whose name was Tendo Nyojo, who was Dogen's teacher in China. Dogen was born in Kyoto in Japan 1200. We celebrated his 800th anniversary of his birth two years ago. At the time of Dogen, Zen was something very new in the history of Japanese Buddhism. Before Dogen, Japanese Buddhism had already a history of 600 years. Still, Zen was not introduced. Zen was first introduced to Japan by a Rinzai master whose name was Eisai. And some traditionally said Dogen met Eisai and practiced for a few years but these dates cast doubt about it.

Anyway, he practiced Zen with Eisai's disciple, whose name was Myozen. They practiced together at Kenninji monastery for several years, 6 years, since Dogen was 18 years old till 23. Dogen and his teacher Myozen thought they should go to China to practice Zen with an authentic Chinese Zen master, so they went together. They stayed at Tien-t'sung monastery and unfortunately Myozen, Dogen's teacher, died there. He was about 42 or 43 years old when he died in China, and Dogen brought his ash from China to Japan --he wrote about carrying the ash of his teacher. Fortunately for Dogen, he could find a true teacher: that was Nyojo. Dogen Zenji recorded his question and answer with his teacher and the record is still there; it's written in Chinese, so he could speak and write Chinese freely.

One section of question and answer Nyojo said, "Zazen is shinjindatsuraku." Shinjindatsuraku is dropping off body and mind. This expression shinjindatsuraku is a kind of unusual expression in the history of Zen, so Dogen didn't understand what this means, dropping off body and mind. Shin is body and jin is mind and datsu is like to take off, like to take off your clothing, and raku is to fall down. So your body and mind somehow take off something and drop off. This is Nyojo's expression of being released



from karmic self. But at that time Dogen was 25 and he didn't understand. He asked, "What is shinjindatsuraku? What is dropping off body and mind?"

Then Nyojo said, and this answer is very interesting, "Dropping off body and mind is zazen." Usually we think zazen is a kind of a method to attain dropping off body and mind or some kind of revelation or enlightenment. But Nyojo said "Zazen is dropping off body and mind," and yet he said "Dropping off body and mind is zazen." Just sitting. And he recommended Dogen just sit. This is the origin of this legacy of just sitting. And Dogen transmitted that just sitting to Japan.

He went back to Japan when he was 27, so as a Zen master he was very young, only 27 years old. First thing he did after went back to Japan was writing manual of zazen, and the title of that manual is Fukanzazengi, that is in English, Universal Recommendation of Zazen. Later he founded his own monastery, named Koshoji, in Uji, that was 1233, so Dogen was 33 years old, still he was very young. He practiced together with his own small group of practitioners, and he practiced there for ten years in Kyoto; at that time it was not inside of Kyoto but outside of Kyoto. Somehow after 10 years he left Kyoto -it was the capital and the biggest city in Japan at that time, but somehow he left and moved to the countryside in presently Fukui prefecture and he established another monastery named Eihei-ji. Eihei-ji is still there and still served as a true main temple or monastery of Soto Zen in Japan. But Dogen's monastery or sangha was still very small, maybe they had 20 or 30 people, that's all, even when he died.

So his life was very simple. He started to practice Zen when he was 18; before that he studied and practiced Tendai school. He went to China to study what is Zen and he received dharma transmission and introduced that tradition to Japan, and just devoted his entire life to introduce this just sitting. It's a very simple practice. Really just sitting. His practice has been transmitted for nearly 800 years. He died 1253. Even when he died he was still young as a Zen master, but somehow he died when he was 53. It was kind of a shock to me. Now I'm 54. [laughter] I'm one year older than Dogen when he died, but still I don't understand.

He really focused on just sitting. He wrote many writings, and all of his writings are very unique and profound and difficult to understand. For more than 750 years we have been studying Dogen and practicing this just sitting following Dogen's teaching. This tradition of just sitting was transmitted to this country by several Japanese teachers such as Suzuki Shunryu Roshi, who was the founder of San Francisco Zen Center. Suzuki Roshi came to serve as a minister at Shogoji in San Francisco. Shogoji was a temple for Japanese American community. I think Suzuki Roshi came in 1959, more than 40 years ago, and somehow young American people came to sit and practice this just sitting with him, and they become a Zen Center. Katagiri Roshi came to this country in 1963 or 4. First he served [as] a minister in the Zenshuji temple in Los Angeles, but somehow he didn't like it and he moved to San Francisco and helped Suzuki Roshi to teach. Suzuki Roshi died in

December, 1971 and after Suzuki Roshi died, Katagiri Roshi moved to Minneapolis and established this community. Since Cal has asked me to talk about just sitting and legacy of Dogen as a part of the 30th anniversary of MZMC, I tried to read Katagiri Roshi's book again, "Returning to Silence." I think you are familiar with this book. I read almost all book, and I found that all of Katagiri Roshi's teaching was based on Dogen's teaching. Of course his expression was kind of unique, and I think he had a hard time to explain and express Dogen's teaching and make it understandable for American people. I think at that time not many of Dogen's writings were translated, so resource was very limited. These days there are many books on Buddhism and Zen, so American people understand better and have a lot of knowledge about Buddhism, Zen, and Dogen's teachings. But 30 years ago I think no one knew who is Dogen. Not only Katagiri Roshi and Suzuki Roshi but other teachers, so-called first generation Zen teachers, had a very difficult time. Somehow they tried to transmit this legacy of Dogen, just sitting. Not only just sitting, but there are many other things, but all other practice, such as chanting sutras or doing ceremonies or oryoki meals and many other forms are really based on this simple practice of just sitting. I really appreciate those pioneers' effort to transmit this simple practice from Japan to this country.

At San Francisco Zen Center they published a small book that is a collection of experiences of Suzuki Roshi's students, a collection of anecdotes. I think the title was "Shining Outer Corner" or something like that. There are many interesting stories in that book. One of the interesting stories was recorded by Sojun Mel Weitsman. Sojun Mel Weitsman was a former abbot of San Francisco Zen Center and he is still the abbot of Berkeley Zen Center, so he was a student of Suzuki Roshi from the very beginning and he practiced with Suzuki Roshi at Shogoji - the Zen Center and Shogoji, the Japanese temple, share that same place. I think it was in early 60s, according to Mel's story. They sat every morning and they chant robe chant. But they chanted in Japanese -- after morning zazen they chanted this strange verse in Japanese, so no American understood what this means. Katagiri Roshi was there at that time. Mel Weitsman asked, "What is this chanting after morning zazen?" Mel said Katagiri Roshi started to find a translation of this robe chant but somehow he couldn't, so probably they didn't have even an English translation of the robe chant. Mel said Suzuki Roshi came to him and pointed his heart and said, "love." Mel was really impressed with this answer. It was really wonderful, heart and love.

In 1999 we had our Dogen Zenji symposium at Stanford University as a kind of an event for the 800th anniversary of Dogen's birth. At the period of question and answer Mel Weitsman talked about this story at the symposium. It was nice. But after we finished that period Carl Bielefeld -- a professor at Stanford University and he wrote Dogen's Manual of Zazen - he is an expert of Dogen study in this country. Carl Bielefeld started to practice with Suzuki Roshi about the same time, early 60s, and right before Suzuki Roshi died he translated Shobogenzo Sansuikyo or the Mountains and Waters Sutra, with the help of Suzuki Roshi. So Carl Bielefeld knew Suzuki Roshi very well. And during the

symposium, after the period of question and answer, Carl asked me, "How do Japanese people pronounce "robe"?" Do you understand what I mean? Robe is R-O-B-E and love is L-O-V-E. [laughter] In Japanese we have no distinction between L sound and R sound, and B sound and V sound. So for us Japanese to pronounce "robe" and "love" is very difficult. I still cannot do it in the correct way. Carl's guess - I think this is a guess - that Suzuki Roshi pointed his rakusu and said "robe." [laughter] I think this is a very interesting story!

I introduce this story at the end of my series of lectures - I had gone to a sesshin at San Francisco Zen Center last March. I gave two lectures a day; one lecture was one and a half hours, so I talked three hours a day for seven days. I talked on Carl Bielefeld's new translation of the Mountains and Waters Sutra. I talked more than 20 hours in seven days! At the end of my lectures on the final day I introduced this story, and I thought that I talked 20 hours and I thought it was interesting many people took note of my lectures and if collect all the note and compare, it must be really interesting. [laughter] There must be something like "robe" and "love."

It's kind of very difficult to translate or transmit something very important and difficult and subtle and deep from one culture to another culture. People had and still have difficulties how to transmit or transplant one kind of spiritual tradition to another culture, a culture with a completely different tradition. People had many difficulties and also many mistakes - there are very good positive mistakes or misunderstandings. I'm not sure whether this is a misunderstanding or not - this is just Carl's guess. Maybe Suzuki Roshi really said "love." But that's OK. It's kind of very positive and creative misunderstanding, even if it was misunderstanding, because it was a heart to heart transmission and so I think it's very wonderful.

But there are another kind of misunderstanding, so we have to be very careful. There is something we can misunderstand and it doesn't care, doesn't mind. Some part of the culture or the tradition can be misunderstand or interpreted in different ways. That is what Dogen did when he transplanted this simple practice of just sitting from China to Japan. He followed the Chinese traditions but his teachings [and] his writing are not really Chinese and also not really Japanese. It's really very uniquely Dogen. He's very ingenious and I think we need a person like Dogen in this country to really grasp the heart, the essence of teaching or tradition and really experience it and express it through his or her own expression and style of life.

So what I want to talk this evening is this one point which should not be misunderstanding -- only one point when we study and practice of this simple practice of just sitting. That point is, according to my own understanding, this is a really important essential point of our practice, just sitting. To me, that is the essence of my teacher's teaching, and Katagiri Roshi said the same thing. And that is a problem. It is really a problem, to make my mission to share this just sitting practice with many American

people. So we have to really awake to the difficulties and importance and discipline. This is a really important kind of koan for us, to try to follow Dogen Zenji's tradition if we would like to succeed in Katagiri Roshi's teaching or my teacher's teaching. That is what one point I'd like to introduce from Katagiri Roshi's teaching. This is from the section entitled "Casting a Pebble into the Ocean," from "Returning to Silence." In this section he is talking about the meaning of day-to-day formal practice. I read one paragraph: Some Zen teachers tell us how helpful it is for us to do zazen. But zazen is useless. At an international yoga conference in Chicago sometime ago, I was asked to talk about Zen life, so I explained Zen life and zazen. In yoga meditation, meditation must be useful, physically, mentally, psychologically. But I said just the opposite: zazen is useless. No one was interested. [Laughter] But remember this, in the place where no one is interested, there is something that you have to be interested in, and that is life and death. And he says almost same thing [in] another section, "Understanding Life and Death." Here he is discussing about life and death and he said when he was young, when he just became a monk, he didn't like to do funeral ceremonies. He didn't like to face death. When he started to practice at the monastery, because at the monastery they don't do funeral service, he thought he could escape from death. But he found [that] the wood block in the zendo said, "The important matter of life and death -- everything is impermanent." It is written on the han. So he found that he couldn't escape from life and death as far as he practice zazen. Our zazen has something to do with life and death. Katagiri Roshi said: In "Shushogi," by Dogen Zenji, which talks about the meaning of practice-enlightenment, the first sentence says, "The thorough clarification of the meaning of birth and death -- this is the most important problem of all for Buddhists." Boom! That's it. A big shock. We don't see our life including death. We just see birth and living and we ignore death. For instance, if Zen centers were to offer lots of things that are good for human happiness and health, such as yoga exercises, vegetarian food, macrobiotics, I Ching, astrology and various kind of meditation, then maybe Zen centers would develop pretty well. [Laughter] Many people would probably come to them because people want these things in order to be happy and healthy. But where are we heading? Of course he is saying we are heading to death. Whether we are young or aged, we are always heading to death and yet we don't think of death. We don't want to think about our death because we don't know what is death. Death is never [our] own personal experience until we really die, and when we die we can't experience it because there is no I, no us. Death is something we never experience. We know death through other people's death, other people dying. It's always about other people. People who were here somehow disappear, and we don't like it - we have fear. So we try not to see that reality that we will die 100%. It's really a very clear reality that we are going to die - we are heading to death, but we don't see it. We try to ignore it and we try to be happy during the time between our birth and death. We only see this range, from birth to death. We want to be happy, healthy, rich, wise, or whatever we feel is nice. Whatever we feel happy [about] we try to get it and whatever we don't like we try to escape from it. This attitude toward life, to chasing after something we want, something we like, something positive, something valuable, and try to escape from something we don't like or we don't think valuable or we don't think positive or we don't

think healthy, this attitude toward life of chasing after something and escaping from something creates samsara. Even though we chase after something we want, we think valuable, healthy, happiness - sometimes we can be successful and we feel happy and we feel life is worth to live, and we feel "I'm great!"

But more often we don't feel so successful and we feel there is something wrong, something is missing, something is strained, something is crooked. So we start to find our right path. We want to become healthy and we start to practice something spiritual, or we start to study some spiritual teaching, or we start to read many books, or we start to look for teachers. But within this aspiration to study something better than this way of life within samsara, we still create samsara. I don't like this way of life and I want to find a better way of life, and I don't like samsara, so I want to enter nirvana. Or I want to become enlightened. I want to be free from desire. Still we chase after something, something spiritual, something higher, something more lofty or noble, and we try to escape from samsara or our day to day busy material life. When we start this kind of spiritual trip, the same thing is happening actually inside of ourselves by chasing after something spiritual, something like enlightenment, we try to get this and we try to escape from where we are.

This creates another kind of samsara and sometimes we can be successful and we feel like we are enlightened, so life is great. But more often we suffer - even sitting in the zendo, we suffer. We feel our pain or our busyness of mind or sleepiness or sometimes we're just bored - sitting is very boring; nothing exciting. So within our spiritual practice we create samsara in that way, by seeking after something we want - like nirvana or enlightenment -- or we try to escape from delusion, or delusive way of life. What not only Katagiri Roshi but Sawaki Roshi, my teacher's teacher, said "Zazen is good for nothing." I think Katagiri Roshi's expression, "Zazen is useless," and Sawaki Roshi's expression, "Zazen is good for nothing," are originally the same Japanese expression, that is, *Annie mo nara nai* - Katagiri Roshi used "useless," and I translated it as "good for nothing." *Nani mo nara nai* means it produce nothing, no good result - not only good result, but no bad result either. So *nani mo nara nai* or good for nothing.

I like the English expression "good for nothing" more than "useless" because of my own experience in Massachusetts. I lived in Massachusetts for 5 years, from '75 to '81. We started to build a small zendo, but we had no financial support, so we had to work to get some income. The first job we found was blueberry picking. There were blueberry farms, and the blueberry fields were really beautiful, especially in the morning -- each blueberry was covered with dew and in the sunrise it was very like gems. It was really beautiful. But picking blueberries terrible work! [Laughter] Blueberry bush was very low, and we pick with a scoop, like a dustpan but the bottom is metal [tines]. Anyway, we keep [working] this way all day long. I had a pain in my back. Blueberries are beautiful but all over my body it stick and start to smell during the daytime. At that time I was 26 or 27 years old, so I was still young and healthy and strong so I could do that. Within the

blueberry field there are some places where they have another kind of berries, and those berries are not edible. They called those berries as dogberries. Picking blueberries is not a job for an actual worker, so almost all workers were like high school students; they don't pick so carefully. They don't mind to make money. The owner of the farm always shouting to those young people to clean them all, clean them clean, and when they are picking in the area where there are many dogberries the owner said, "Don't pick those good-for-nothing berries." That was the first time I heard this expression "good for nothing." I liked it! [Laughter] I really liked it. Good for nothing. I found that that was the way I want to be - good for nothing. I became my teacher's student or disciple because of this Sawaki Roshi expression, "Zazen is good for nothing." Those good for nothing berries really are not good for nothing. They are beautiful, but they are not edible, so there's no market value. Market value is only within human beings, the human community. The dogberries don't care whether they are valuable or not. But they are beautiful and they grow just the same as blueberries but only because we human beings can eat blueberries - blueberries taste good - blueberries have positive market value and those berries don't. Same idea appeared in the History of Chuang Tsu, the Chinese Taoist philosopher. He talked about example where big huge tree which is good for nothing, which cannot be used as a timber or anything, it's too weak and too crooked, really good for nothing. But because good for nothing, no human beings cut the trees so it could grow huge and could give shade for people. That tree is good for nothing, but that is good enough. I felt I wanted to live in that way and practice zazen is like these dogberries. We don't need to be good for something, but zazen is good, and that's enough. Our zazen does not need to be good for something else. Zazen is good, period. That is, to me, the meaning of "zazen is good for nothing." Zazen is good, but for nothing. That means zazen is good as it is, of itself.

I wanted to live in that way. I don't think I need to be good for something else. If my life is good, that's enough. We don't need to chase after some kind of invitation from other people or even by ourselves. Just be who I am and just live. In another expression of Katagiri Roshi, and Uchiyama Roshi, my teacher, used the same expression, just burning the fire of life force. Just purely burning the fire or flame of life force. We don't need to burn anything. Just be burning itself, or like the title of the book of Suzuki Roshi anecdotes "Shining at a Corner - just be shining, even at a tiny small corner. That's enough. We don't need to be like a sun; we can be just a small candle or even small incense. That's enough.

I think this is really important point in our zazen - zazen is good for nothing. We just sit. We don't need to find any market value. We don't need to add any value in our zazen. It's very simple, very peaceful. But this is a problem, I think. I knew and I had a faith in practice in this way. But I had a question. I was still young and I had a lot of energy. I came from Japan to practice with American people, but when I lived in the mountains in New England, no one came. When we came to this country, my teacher, Uchiyama Roshi, encouraging us not to make advertisements, not collect number of people, not

collect money, but just practice, just quietly practice at least for ten years. We really honestly followed his encouragement. We didn't make any advertisement. We didn't do any fundraising activities. So we had to have other odd jobs like picking blueberries or helping with potato harvesting or those things or we worked at a tofu factory. [Laughter] We had many different jobs. We tried to just keep sitting quietly, good for nothing zazen. No one came. Even some American came, they didn't stay long time. That was my question, why I'm here, why I have to practice in this way, in this country. I could practice in Japan. [Laughter] I don't need to do blueberry picking. In Japan I could support my practice with begging and I didn't need to speak English. [Laughter] It was a very difficult thing. It was a problem for me. If I came to practice with American people, why I practice in that way? How can we share the dharma or this simple practice with more people? That was another koan to me.

So it seems these two are kind of contradicted. If we cling to one side, we may lose the life of our practice. If we cling good for nothing side, then we can just practice by ourselves - we don't need to practice with other people. But if we put too much emphasis on practice with many people or make dharma accessible to many people, then we might forget about good for nothing side of our practice. In order to collect people, often many people are here and we have to speak why we are here, what is the good point of this practice. It is very difficult and actually I haven't yet resolved this contradiction and I don't think I can in this lifetime. I have been working for establishing another Zen practice center. We are going to build a zendo from scratch. I did the same thing 25 years ago in Massachusetts, so I think this is my karma [Laughter], to start something from scratch.

But when we practice as a bodhisattva, we cannot neglect other people. How we can share this dharma, this simple practice, with other people? It's a very important point of our practice. If we are not careful, we try to make a kind of a commercial product from this simple good for nothing practice. If we want, we can make a commercial effort from this practice. What I wanted to talk this evening is just point out this point. There are many Buddhist sanghas or Soto Zen sanghas in this country, but somehow we need to find the middle path, the middle way to share the practice with other people, but still keep our practice good for nothing. How can we do it? This is our koan, for each one of us and also a koan as a sangha. So that is the point: even in the different tradition or culture or society we need to really transmit without misunderstanding or misinterpretation. If this point trying to find the middle path, and the middle path is always moving. Middle path is not one fixed path, it's really moving, changing, depending upon extreme two side. Middle path is not one fixed point. If we cling to one fixed point, we make a mistake. Somehow we have to be careful and we have to be alert each time, each moment, in each situation. That's why I think Dogen Zenji said our practice is endless. We cannot say if we practice in this way we are safe, we are good forever. We have to be careful each moment -- otherwise we miss the middle path or middle way. A very essential point.

I think I'm really lucky from the very beginning -- even before I was interested in Zen or Buddhism or whatever spiritual practice, first I encounter my teacher's teaching. Through my teacher Uchiyama Roshi, the first teaching from Buddhism or Zen to me was "zazen is good for nothing." So I was really lucky -- from the very beginning I knew zazen was good for nothing, and that means, according to Dogen, we should not practice with some desire to attain certain good result or desirable result. I really understood, even though I knew nothing about Zen or Buddhism, even though I was just 17 years old. I really felt that is the way I wanted to live. Somehow I wanted to be my teacher's disciple. I went to Komazawa University to study Buddhism and Dogen's teaching. Through studying Buddha's teaching and the history of Buddhism, Dogen's teaching and the history of Soto Zen, and I also studied my teacher's teaching, I really found this is the way I wanted to live. I was ordained as a Soto Zen priest when I was 22--I was a university student. So as a kind of idea I knew this teaching from very beginning. I know many people who encounter different approaches and for those people, it's very difficult to accept this attitude good for nothing. If it's good for nothing, it's really good for nothing.

But although I have practiced based on this teaching of good for nothing, still I was looking for something. One big kind of a point for me was I practiced in Massachusetts for 5 years in that way and we had nothing but the land. So we cut the trees and clear the land and take the stumps out, and I dug a well with a shovel. I dug about 10 feet, and we had water. Anyway, I practiced zazen and working in that way and in my 20s it was OK.. I thought the more I use my body, the stronger my body become. But when I became 30, it didn't work in that way. I had a problem with my body. I had a pain in my neck, shoulders, elbows, back, knees, everywhere. I had to leave. I went back to Japan. My body was half broken. I couldn't practice in that way any more. We had a 5 day sesshin every month, 12 sesshin a year. During 5 day sesshin we just sat one period of 50 minutes and 10 minutes kinhin -- we just did it 14 times a day for 5 days. We did nothing but sitting. It was really powerful practice. I thought I was practicing this zazen with no desire, no expectation. I thought I knew zazen is good for nothing. I really devoted my entire life into that practice for 5 years at Antaiji in Kyoto and next 5 years in Massachusetts so I practiced in that way for 10 years. All my 20s were really focused on that practice.

When I was 31, I couldn't practice in that way any more because of pain of my body. I went back to Japan and Uchiyama Roshi asked me to work on translation -- because I couldn't work with my body, I should work with my head. So, I started to work on translation since then. But before I found some way of practice I was really in trouble, because I had nothing. My body was half broken, I didn't have job, I didn't have place to practice, I didn't have sangha, I didn't have nothing. I stayed at my brother's apartment for several months because I didn't have money, I didn't have job. I did takuhatsu [begging] for my treatment. I had a treatment by a kind of a Japanese chiropractor and that person said when we do takuhatsu we hang our bag from our neck, and I had a pain in my neck. He said, "If you practice takuhatsu your neck never get better." So I had to make a choice



to stop both takuhatsu and treatment, because I didn't have money to have a treatment, so I did. I really gave up everything. I did takuhatsu only for food, enough food for one month. That means a few times a month and that was enough. Maybe 150 dollars in this country.

It was difficult, not only physically but mentally - I was kind of puzzled. I thought, why this is a problem, if zazen is good for nothing and I didn't expect anything? Now I can't do this anymore; if that was good for nothing, then why I have a problem? That was a good question to me, and very difficult question to ask. This is questioning Dogen's teaching, and my teacher's teaching, and my own personal belief. I found that even though I practiced in that way and I thought I had no expectation, still I was really relying on that way of practice, that way of life. I felt because I lived and I practiced in that way, my life is OK or my life is better than other peoples", or this is a kind of a lofty, noble, high way of practice or life, even among Buddhist community. I felt it was the highest practice and others are not so good. I found a kind of an illness based on my own faith that this is highest practice and because I practice in this way I live in the highest way, so my life is OK. That was a problem, but why, when I couldn't practice in that way, I felt my life was good for nothing any more?

This is really terrible thing and I had to face to that problem because I lived by myself. Before, I lived with the sangha. I could explain using some Buddhist philosophy. But I have only myself. I cannot deceive, so I have to be really honest I was really alone and I had no reason to practice, no reason to sit, and I couldn't sit. I had so many reasons not to practice, but somehow one evening I found myself on a cushion. I didn't want and I didn't need to. Somehow I found a kind of a very profound peace. I found this is what Dogen Zenji said and this is what Sawaki Roshi said: good for nothing. Before that I thought I practiced with my personal understanding of that practice what is good for nothing and I thought that is highest practice but I found I don't need to say so. I don't need to compare with other people. I don't need to practice in such a difficult or strict way. I don't need to sit 5 day sesshin every month. I could sit just for this moment, and that is enough. I don't need to say this is highest practice or discipline and I am a good Buddhist. I don't need to be a good Buddhist. That was really a kind of a turning point in my practice and I found that I first understood what Dogen said, what Sawaki Roshi said, what Uchiyama Roshi said: zazen is good for nothing.

That is kind of a liberation from our own belief, our own grasping, our own understanding. No matter how noble or lofty, if we cling to this and rely on that kind of a system of value, still our practice is good for something. We are looking for something. We cling to or we desire something else. That is one point but even before or after that experience I have many different questions. Each moment I try to find an answer, and next moment I have different questions and I find different answer. So this is a kind of ongoing thing, but basically my faith in this good for nothing practice doesn't change. In a sense, because I was lucky, I knew the answer from the beginning, but my experience

and my understanding and my question didn't really reach the depths of the teaching or the answer. I think in a sense from the time of Shakyamuni Buddha, 2500 years ago, as a Buddhist the answer is really clear, but our practice, our understanding, our faith is not really deep enough. That is why we have to practice moment by moment, probably until the end of our life.

## John Daido Looi, Roshi: Thinking Non-Thinking

John Daido Looi, Roshi explains why non-thinking is right thought in this commentary on Dogen's 300 Koan Shobogenzo,

Case 129: "Yoashan's Non-Thinking"

The Main Case

When Priest Yaoshan was sitting in meditation<sup>1</sup> a monk asked,<sup>2</sup>

"What do you think about, sitting in steadfast composure?"<sup>3</sup>

Yaoshan said, "I think not thinking."<sup>4</sup>

The monk said, "How do you think not thinking?"<sup>5</sup>

Yaoshan said, "Non-thinking."<sup>6</sup>

The Commentary

Abide in neither thinking nor not thinking. Thinking is linear and sequential, a separation from the reality that is the subject of thought, and thus is an abstraction rather than the reality itself. Not thinking is suppressive. It cuts away thoughts the moment they arise, making the mind into a great impenetrable mountain-dead, unresponsive. Non-thinking has no such edges. It is the boundless mind of samadhi that neither holds on to, nor lets go of, thoughts. It is the manifestation of the buddha mind, in which the dualism of self and other, thinking and not thinking, dissolves. This is the dharma of thusness that is the right thought of all the buddhas in the ten directions.

The Capping Verse

When the dharma wheel turns  
it always goes in both directions.  
The still point is its hub, and from here,  
all of our myriad activities emerge.  
Rather than give solace to the body,  
give solace to the mind.  
When both body and mind are at peace,  
all things appear as they are:  
perfect, complete, lacking nothing.

The Footnotes

1 What is he doing? Even Kasho Buddha didn't attain it with hundreds of kalpas of zazen.

2 Why doesn't he leave the old man alone?

3 Huh? What are you thinking, venerable monk, in asking such a question?

4 He's much too kind. It really can't be explained; he's just setting the monk to thinking.

5 Now they're both in the same hole. Just shut up and sit.

6 How kind. But say, what does it mean?

There are many kinds of meditation, and in Buddhism different schools use various forms to develop concentration and insight: the breath, visual images, sounds or gestures. In Zen Buddhism, the form we use to see directly into the nature of the self is zazen, sitting meditation.

Here at Zen Mountain Monastery we engage two methods of zazen: koan study and shikantaza. Though the processes are different, both forms address the same thing: the study and realization of the true nature of the self.

Koan introspection is a directed and focused kind of meditation. Students use joriki, the power of concentration developed in zazen, to penetrate the koan which is the object of attention during meditation. Shikantaza, just sitting, is less pointed than koan study. It is zazen based fundamentally on faith—faith in the Buddha's enlightenment, faith in one's own buddhanature, faith in the process of practice itself. Most students in the Soto lineage of Zen sit shikantaza.

The Japanese word Zen—which derives from the Sanskrit dhyana—means meditation, and yet it's remarkable that in all the literature on Zen, there is very little about how to actually do zazen. I remember when I first started sitting I couldn't find any specific instructions. Everybody talked about how wonderful zazen was and how important it was and how everybody should do it, but there was very little to be found on how to actually do it.

Among those masters who did write about shikantaza, the first one to focus on it in his writings was the twelfth-century Chinese master Hongzhi, author of *Cultivating the Empty Field*. In the thirteenth century, Zen Master Dogen used much of Hongzhi's beautiful, poetic descriptions of silent illumination—as he called shikantaza—to elaborate on this form of sitting. Unfortunately, for many years after that shikantaza became identified exclusively with the Soto school, while koans were thought to be used only by those in the Rinzai school of Zen. This simplistic view, however, can be easily refuted by the fact that Hongzhi was also the compiler of the *Book of Equanimity*, a collection of one hundred koans used for training in the Soto lineage, while Dogen himself collected three hundred koans in his Chinese *Shobogenzo*. His successor, Keizan Zenji, not only wrote the *Zazen Yojinki*, a manual for zazen, but also put together the *Transmission of the Light*, a volume of koans based on the enlightenment experiences of teachers in the Soto lineage. Furthermore, after students finish koan study, they take up the practice of shikantaza. So it is obvious that practitioners in either one of these schools make use of both sitting techniques during the course of their training.

Whether students are working with koans or the silent illumination that Hongzhi wrote about, the ultimate purpose of both is realization. But that realization can't be separated from our own inherent being, our immediate, moment-to-moment awareness. As Dogen points out over and over again, practice and enlightenment are one reality. On one hand, koans harness doubt so we can smash through our conditioned way of thinking. On the other hand, shikantaza is based on our own faith that practice and enlightenment are one. Koans can be seen and passed through, but shikantaza cannot be gauged by any standard. Students who do shikantaza and ask, "Where am I? How far am I from realization?" miss the vital point of shikantaza.

In a sangha like ours, where some people work on shikantaza and others sit with koans, people inevitably compare themselves with others. For students working on koans, breakthrough is pivotal. I need to speak about kensho to let them know that it's possible, to encourage them. But when I mention breakthrough, all the shikantaza people say, "When am I going to see it?" Shikantaza can't be measured the same way, but this doesn't mean that one technique is better than the other.

As with anything else, both approaches have their shortcomings. Koan practitioners get stuck with results and accomplishments. Passing koans becomes some sort of race, and the process is forgotten. In shikantaza it is very easy for students to get lulled into a state of complacency, believing that, "Since I'm already enlightened, I don't have to do anything." People who think this end up sitting with no awareness and no effort, never appreciating what no-effort in shikantaza really is. What is the effort of no-effort?

When I was a kid, Charles Atlas came up with a form of exercising and bodybuilding he called "dynamic tension." His advertisements showed him beating up bullies on a beach. He was a skinny weakling who, through this method of working out, developed an impressive physique and a worldwide following. Interestingly, the method did not depend on the use of weights. It simply relied on generating and maintaining effort against effort, muscle group against muscle group—just resisting yourself. Evidently it worked, and it developed a unique kind of body type. It wasn't a bulky form with huge muscles, but a nicely toned body with remarkable strength.

When you're doing shikantaza you don't try to focus on anything specifically, or to make thoughts go away. You simply allow everything to be just the way it is. Thoughts come, thoughts go, and you simply watch them; you keep your awareness on them. It takes a lot of energy and persistence to sit shikantaza, to not get caught up in daydreaming. But little by little, thoughts begin to slow down, and finally they cease to arise. When the thought disappears, the thinker disappears. This is the samadhi of falling away of body and mind. Whether we work on the breath, a koan, or with shikantaza, zazen eventually leads to samadhi. The first indication is usually an off-sensation of the body. This happens most frequently during sesshin because of the long periods of sitting. When you sit for a while

without moving the body, it stops receiving information about its edges through the senses, such as the friction of your clothing or an itch on your leg. So although you know the body is there, you don't feel it. Some people get frightened at this point and involuntarily their body twitches and defines its edges. Then they slowly move to that place again, and gradually they learn to trust it and they begin to go a little bit further each time. Next comes the off-sensation of the mind. The mind is dependent upon thoughts, but when the thoughts disappear the mind disappears; the self disappears. That constant reflex action that says, "I'm here, I'm here, I'm here," is the ego manifesting itself. This is when we realize that we are constantly recreating ourselves.

Sometimes during sitting people have what we call makyo, a vision or hallucination. Other times it's smells or sounds. Students often think this means they're enlightened-particularly if the image is related to Zen, like the Buddha sitting on a golden lotus-and they immediately run off to dokusan to get it confirmed. The teacher will usually listen and then say something like, "Maybe you're not sitting straight. Sit straight. Don't worry, it will go away." It doesn't matter whether we attach to a regular thought or to the thought of enlightenment. Whatever it is, it is still attachment.

There's a famous koan of an ancient master who was a hermit. He had been practicing many, many years, living isolated in the mountains. One day he was cooking soup, and in the steam Manjushri Bodhisattva appeared and in a deep, resonant voice proclaimed the dharma to him. The old hermit immediately picked up the ladle and started beating him with it. "Get out of here!" he said. "Get out of here!" In other words, don't put another head on top of the one you already have. Anything that we hold on to along the way-anything-is a dead end, because the minute we attach we create two things: the "attachee" and the "attachor." That is not the intimacy of samadhi; it is not the intimacy of shikantaza.

One of Dogen's fascicles concerned with shikantaza is titled Zazenshin. It is usually translated as "Admonishments for Zazen" but Carl Bielefeldt translated it as "Lancet of Seated Meditation," which is a beautiful image for shikantaza. A lancet is a scalpel, a precise, very sharp surgical instrument that is used to cut away all the extra. That is what happens in shikantaza. We cut away all the stuff that we hold on to. Thoughts continuously arise but our attention dissolves them.

In his fascicle called Learning Through the Body and Mind, Dogen says, "The stage of non-thinking is beyond egocentric cognition. If you reach the state of non-thinking you will realize the true luminous nature of mind. Non-thinking must become the eye through which you view phenomena. The activity of every buddha is based on non-thinking." So what is this non-thinking? In The Thirty-Seven Conditions Favorable to Enlightenment, Dogen quotes: "An ancient buddha (Yaoshan) said, 'Think non-thinking. How? By using non-thinking.' This is right thought; sitting until the cushion is worn away is also right

thought." He very clearly distinguishes non-thinking from not thinking. So what is Dogen referring to when he talks about right thought?

In this koan it says, "When Priest Yaoshan was sitting in meditation..." Yaoshan was a successor of Shitou and the teacher of Yunyan, who in turn was the teacher of Dongshan, one of the founders of the Soto school. Yaoshan's practice of sitting in steadfast composure is the tradition of Buddhism correctly transmitted to him down through thirty-six generations beginning with Shakyamuni Buddha. But what does it mean to sit in steadfast composure? I added some footnotes to clarify the koan. The first footnote says, "What is he doing? Even Kasho Buddha didn't attain it with hundreds of kalpas of zazen." And the next line says, "A monk asked..." and the footnote says, "Why doesn't he leave the old man alone?"

And the case continues, "What do you think about sitting in steadfast composure?" The footnote says, "Huh? What are you thinking, venerable monk, in asking such a question?" The next sentence in the case says, "Yaoshan said, 'I think not thinking.'" The footnote says, "He's much too kind. It really can't be explained, he's just setting the monk to thinking."

That's what happens with koans. Students read the question and when they don't immediately understand it, they begin to think about it because that's the way we've all been taught to solve problems. That's the way we've earned our little gold stars in elementary school and our A's in college-through good old linear, sequential thought. But thinking doesn't help in seeing a koan. A whole other aspect of consciousness needs to open up. We need to exhaust that process of linear thinking, and when the mind finally stops functioning, out of the blue the realization of the koan appears. It is like a quantum leap. It's a very different way of using the mind. It is non-thinking that is neither intellectual nor based on the subconscious.

In the next line the monk asks, "How do you think not thinking?" The footnote says, "Now they're both in the same hole. Just shut up and sit."

That's ultimately what you're going to be left with-just sitting. There is no handbook that tells you how to go beyond thinking and not thinking. You just have to sit, and it's through the process of sitting that you will realize Yaoshan's non-thinking. The final line is, "Yaoshan said, 'Non-thinking.'" The footnote says, "How kind. But say, what does it mean?"

Indeed, what does it mean?

In the commentary it says, "Abide in neither thinking nor not thinking." Thinking is one side. It's linear, sequential. On the other side you have not thinking, which is blank consciousness. We call this state "eyes staring out of the coffin" or "making a living in a

ghost cave" or "being stuck on top of the mountain." Dogen's Zen and Yaoshan's Zen and the Zen of the great masters wasn't about leaving the world, it was about manifesting the dharma in our everyday activities. Thinking falls on one side, not thinking falls on the other side. How do we leap clear of these two extremes? Yaoshan says: by non-thinking. Non-thinking has no such edges. It's the boundless mind of samadhi that neither holds on to, nor lets go of, thoughts. But this doesn't mean suppressing thoughts either.

In my years of practice I've seen a lot of Western students trying to forcibly quiet the mind by making it a big barrier that keeps things out. I've run into students who have been working on mu for ten or more years who are like boilers ready to explode because they've been suppressing stuff that needs to come up and be let go of. There's no way that you're going to see mu if you're suppressing or holding on to anything. The mind must be truly emptied out before you can be mu. When the mind is finally empty, all the dualistic ways of looking at things disappear: thinking, not thinking; holding on, letting go; being, non-being; existence, non-existence. All gone. This is the dharma of the Middle Way; it is the practice of just sitting.

I remember when I went to my very first dokusan with Soen Nakagawa Roshi and I said to him, "Please teach me." He said, "Have you sat before?" I said, "No." I had actually been sitting for a number of years, but I wanted to get his instruction as a total beginner. I was doing a mixture of all kinds of things. I had no idea what meditation was really about. He said to me, "Put your mind in the hara." And he took his long stick, the kyosaku, and poked me in the hara at a spot two inches below the navel. Then he said, "Put your mind in the hara and chant." He had a deep, guttural, beautiful chanting voice. He went first, "Namu dai bosa. Do you understand?"

I said, "Yes."

He said, "Now you do it."

And in a squeaky voice I said, "Namu dai bosa."

He said, "No, no, no. Hara." Poked again. "Namu dai bosa."

I chanted, "Namu dai bosa."

He said, "Ah, good enough. Day and night, namu dai bosa," and he rang the bell. I took it literally and chanted namu dai bosa day and night. I would wake up in the morning, go to sleep: namu dai bosa. In the beginning I had no idea what it meant to put your mind in the hara, but I worked on it. Years of sitting went by and then it began: a feeling of warmth in a spot two inches below the navel, a feeling of buoyancy. That's when my sitting began to change. It went much, much deeper. I began to recognize from my own experience that



the hara was the spiritual center of the body, and later I found proof of it being the physical center as well.

Recently I read a very interesting article in The New York Times with the headline, "Complex and Hidden Brain in the Gut Makes Stomachaches and Butterflies." It said, "The gut has a mind of its own-the enteric nervous system-just like the larger brain in the head, researchers say. This system sends and receives impulses, records experiences, responds to emotions; its nerve cells are influenced by the same neurotransmitter. The gut can upset the brain just as the brain can upset the gut." They said, "It's considered a single entity; it's a network of neurons, neurotransmitters and proteins that zap messages between neuron support cells like those found in the brain. The brain proper and complex circuitry enable it to act independently, learn, remember, and as the saying goes, 'produce gut feelings.' The brain and the gut play a major role in human happiness and misery. But few people know that it exists." Included in the article was a picture of the gut, and lo and behold! It was the hara. Yet you don't need scientific proof to experience the fact that by simply putting your attention in the hara your body becomes settled and your mind quiets down.

The capping verse: "When the dharma wheel turns it always goes in both directions. The still point is its hub, and from here, all of our myriad activities emerge." The turning of the dharma wheel in both directions simultaneously is the merging of the differences: good/bad, thinking/not thinking, up/down, self/other, on the mountain/in the world, monk practice/lay practice, and on and on. Our minds are dualistic and our tendency is always to look at things in terms of that dualism. In the Sandokai, (The Identity of Relative and Absolute), we chant, "The absolute and the relative fit like a box and its lid...it's like the foot before and the foot behind in walking. Within darkness there is light, but do not look for that light. Within light there is darkness, but do not try to understand that darkness." These are concepts that are hard to understand, but that can be experienced once the mind stops moving. "When the dharma wheel turns it always goes in both directions" refers to the Fifth Rank of Master Dongshan, where unity is finally attained, where absolute and relative, self and other, this and that, thinking and non-thinking become unified.

"Rather than give solace to the body, give solace to the mind. When both body and mind are at peace all things appear as they are: perfect, complete, lacking nothing." If we can get out of the way and trust things as they are, the dharma of thusness is manifested. A person who is sitting deeply, whether they are working on koans or shikantaza, always manifests this reality. It shows in the way they interact with others; it shows in the way they live their lives. Ultimately, it all boils down to zazen, just sitting.

Please take up this practice of zazen. You don't need any special props to do it. You don't need complex instructions or monasteries and teachers. You just need a quiet corner to settle your body, settle your mind and taste your breath. Then just let the breath breathe itself. Think of non-thinking. This is the dharma of thusness that is the right thought of all

the buddhas in the ten directions. It is Shakyamuni's realization at the moment of his enlightenment: all sentient beings are perfect and complete, lacking nothing. You are perfect and complete, lacking nothing. Trust that. Trust the process of zazen. If you were to live for 100,000 years, you would never find in this life anything more powerful, more healing, more empowering than the simple practice of zazen. Please don't take it lightly. It's an incredible gift.

### **Shikantaza and Silent Illumination**

Lecture given by master Sheng-yen during the Dec. 1993 Ch'an retreat, edited by Linda Peer and Harry Miller

The Japanese term "shikantaza" literally means "just sitting." Its original Chinese name, mo-chao, means "silent illumination." "Silent" refers to not using any specific method of meditation and having no thoughts in your mind. "Illumination" means clarity. You are very clear about the state of your body and mind.

When the method of silent illumination was taken to Japan it was changed somewhat. The name given to it, "just sitting", means just paying attention to sitting or just keeping the physical posture of sitting, and this was the new emphasis. The word "silent" was removed from the name of the method and the understanding that the mind should be clear and have no thoughts was not emphasized. In silent illumination, "just sitting" is only the first step. While you maintain the sitting posture, you should also try to establish the "silent" state of the mind. Eventually you reach a point where the mind does not move and yet is very clear. That unmoving mind is "silent," and that clarity of mind is "illumination." This is the meaning of "silent illumination."

Faith in Mind, a poem attributed to the Third Patriarch of Ch'an, Seng-Ts'an (d. 606), begins with something like this: "The highest path is not difficult, so long as you are free of discriminations." "Discriminations" can also be translated as "choices," "selections" or "preferences." The highest path is not difficult, if you are free from choosing, selecting or preferring. You must keep the mind free from discrimination and attachment. The method in which the mind is kept free from discrimination and attachment is what is called "silence" here. But "silent" does not mean the mind is blank and cannot function. The mind is free from attachment, clear, and yet it still functions.

We also read in Faith in Mind that, "This principle is neither hurried nor slow. One thought for ten thousand years." "This principle" is the mind of wisdom, and from its perspective time does not pass quickly or slowly. When we meditate or work, we may fall into a worldly samadhi state and feel that time passes very quickly. In an ordinary state we may feel that time passes quickly or slowly. However, in the mind of wisdom there is no such thing as slow or hurried time. If we can say there is thought in the mind of wisdom, it is an endless thought which never changes. This unchanging thought is no longer thought as we usually understand it. It is the unmoving mind of wisdom.

In the Song of Samatha of Master Yung-chia Hsuan-chueh (665 - 713, also the author of the Song of Enlightenment), two Chinese terms are used which can be translated as "quiescence" and "clarity." Master Yung-chia uses them in two phrases, "quiescence and clarity," and "clarity and quiescence." They describe a person whose mind is both clear and unmoving. When an ordinary person's mind is clear and alert, it is usually also active and full of scattered thoughts. Quiescence of mind is difficult to maintain. When the mind

is quiet, it usually is not clear, even in a samadhi state. But Yung-chia describes these two states, quiescence and clarity as well as clarity and quiescence, as goals.

Master Hung-chi Chen-chueh (1091-1157), who invented the term "silent illumination" in his poem the Song of Silent Illumination, said this

In silence, words are forgotten.

In utter clarity, things appear.

"Words are forgotten" means you experience no words, no language, no ideas, and no thought. There is no discrimination. This in combination with the second phrase, "In utter clarity everything appears," means that although words, language and discrimination do not function, everything is still seen, heard, tasted and so on.

Someone told me that when he uses the Silent Illumination method, he eventually gets to a point where there is nothing there and he rests. That is not true Silent Illumination. In Silent Illumination everything is there, but the mind is not moving. A person may think he has no thoughts because the coarser wandering thoughts are absent, but there will be fine, subtle wandering thoughts of which he is unaware. He may think there is nothing there and so stop practicing. In Chinese this is called "Being on the dark side of a mountain in a cave inhabited by ghosts." The mountain is dark, so there is nothing to see, and in the cave of ghosts, what can one accomplish?

Now I would like to explain how to use the method of shikantaza. First, your posture should be upright. Do not lean in any direction. Be clear about your posture, because if you practice shikantaza, just sitting, at the very least you should be conscientious about sitting. It is also important to remain relaxed.

Next, be aware of your body, but do not think of it as yourself. Regard your body as a car you drive. You have to handle the car well, but it is not you. If you think of your body as yourself, you will be bothered by pain, itchiness and other vexations. Just take care of the body and be aware of it. The Chinese name for this method can be translated as "just take care of sitting." You have to be mindful of your body as the driver must be mindful of the car, but the car is not the driver.

After a period of time, the body will sit naturally and cause no problems. Now you can begin to pay attention to the mind. If you were eating, your mind should be the "mind of eating," and you would pay attention to that mind. When you are sitting, your mind should be the "mind of sitting." You watch this sitting mind. Two different thoughts alternate: the mind of sitting and the mind, or thought, that watches the mind of sitting. First you watch the body sitting with little attention to the mind. When the body drops away, watch the mind. What is the mind? It is the mind of sitting! When your attention dissipates, you will lose awareness of this sitting mind and the sensations of the body will

return. Then you should again watch the body sitting. Another possibility is that while you watch the mind you fall into a dull state, like "Being on the dark side of the mountain in a cave inhabited by ghosts." When you become aware of this situation, your bodily sensations return, and you should go back to watching them. Thus these two objects of attention, the body and the mind, are also used alternately.

In the state where you watch the mind, are you aware of the external environment, sound for example? If you want to hear sound, you will, and if you do not want to hear sound, you won't. At this point, you primarily pay attention to your own mind. Although you may hear sounds, they do not create discriminations.

There are three stages in this practice. You should start at the beginning and progress to deeper levels. First be mindful of your body. Then be mindful of your mind, and of the two thoughts alternating in it. The third stage is enlightenment. The mind is clear and, as the poem quoted said, "In silence, words are forgotten. In utter clarity, things appear." When you first practice, you will probably be in the first or second level. If you use this method correctly you will not enter into samadhi.

This last point needs clarification. It depends on how we use the term "samadhi." In Buddhadharma, samadhi has many meanings. For instance, Sakyamuni Buddha was always in samadhi. His mind was not moving, yet he still continued to function. This is wisdom. Sakyamuni Buddha's samadhi is great samadhi and this is the same as wisdom. When I said that in the practice of Silent Illumination, you should not enter samadhi, I meant worldly samadhi where you forget about space and time and are oblivious to the environment. The deeper kind of samadhi, which is the same as wisdom, is in fact the goal of Silent Illumination.

What good is this explanation of Silent Illumination for people who are not using this method? If you are using another method of practice and you reach a point where it is impossible to continue, you can switch to Silent Illumination and watch your body and mind. For instance, if you use the method of reciting Buddha's name with counting and you can no longer count, switch to Silent Illumination. If you use the hua-t'ou method, but find that rather than generating great doubt, you are simply repeating your hua-tou, you may reach a point where you can no longer recite it. You can then switch to Silent Illumination and watch your body and mind. Eventually, you will be able to use your own method again. Silent Illumination can provide a continuum for you in this in-between state so that you do not waste time.

I was just asked whether the enlightenment that comes from Silent Illumination is sudden or gradual. Enlightenment is always instantaneous. It is the practice that is gradual. As I mentioned earlier, the third level of Silent Illumination is enlightenment. But how does one get there? As you practice, your attachments, discriminations, and wandering thoughts gradually subside. Eventually, you simply have no discriminations, but this

change is instantaneous. When the change happens, you are in the state Hung-chi Cheng-chueh described as, "In silence, words are forgotten. In utter clarity, everything appears.

After you have some experience practicing, the sentiments and vexations you ordinarily experience may not arise during practice. It does not mean that they are gone. It just means that when you practice they do not arise. When you use Silent Illumination, this may happen, especially at the second level, but that is not enlightenment. Practice is not like trying to clear thoughts from your mind and vexations from your life as if they were dust on a mirror. You cannot wipe the dust away and make yourself enlightened. It is not like that. Whether you use the methods of the Lin-chi or Tsao-tung sects within the Ch'an tradition, once enlightened, you realize that enlightenment has nothing to do with the practice that brought you there.

So why bother to practice? Practice is like a bridge that can lead to enlightenment, even though enlightenment has nothing to do with practice.

**PART III:**

**ZEN MASTER EIHEI DOGEN: READER ON SHIKANTAZA**

**“POINT OF ZAZEN”**

**“A GENERAL RECOMMENDED WAY OF SITTING”**

**“BENDOWA”**

**“KING OF SAMADHIS”**

*From: Kazuaki Tanahashi*  
*The Point of Zazen*

Yaoshan, Great Master Hongdao, was sitting.  
 A monk asked him, "In steadfast sitting, what do you think?"  
 Yaoshan said, "Think not thinking."  
 "How do you think not thinking?"  
 Yaoshan replied, "Beyond thinking."

Realizing these words of Yaoshan, you should investigate and receive the authentic transmission of steadfast sitting. This is the thorough study of steadfast sitting transmitted in the buddha way.

Yaoshan is not the only one who spoke of thinking in steadfast sitting. His words, however, were extraordinary. *Think not thinking* is the skin, flesh, bones, and marrow of thinking and the skin, flesh, bones, and marrow of not thinking.

The monk said, *How do you think not thinking?* However ancient not thinking is, still we are asked how to think it. Is there not thinking in steadfast sitting? How can going beyond steadfast sitting not be understood? One who is not shallow and foolish can ask and think about steadfast sitting.

Yaoshan said, *Beyond thinking*. The activity of beyond thinking is crystal clear. In order to think not thinking, beyond thinking is always used. In beyond thinking, there is somebody that sustains you. Even if it is you who are sitting steadfast, you are not only thinking but are upholding steadfast sitting. When sitting steadfast, how can steadfast sitting think steadfast sitting? Thus, sitting steadfast is not buddha thought, dharma thought, enlightenment thought, or realization thought.

This teaching was directly transmitted person to person from Shakyamuni Buddha to Yaoshan through thirty-six generations of ancestors. That means if you go beyond thirty-six generations from Yaoshan, you go back to Shakyamuni Buddha. What was authentically transmitted thus was *think not thinking*.

However, careless students in recent times say, "The endeavor of zazen is completed when your heart is quiescent, as zazen is a place of calmness." Such a view does not even reach that of students of the Lesser Vehicles, and is inferior to the teachings of human and deva vehicles. How can we call them students of buddha dharma? In present-day Song China, there are many practitioners who hold such views. The decline of the ancestral path is truly lamentable.

There are also people who say, "Practicing zazen is essential for those who are beginners or those who have started studying recently, but it is not necessarily the activity of buddha ancestors. Activity in daily life is Zen, and sitting is Zen. In speaking and in silence, in motion and stillness, your body should be tranquil. Do not be concerned only with the practice of zazen." Many of those who call themselves descendants of Linji hold such a view. They say so because they have not received the transmission of the right livelihood of buddha dharma.



Who are beginners? Are there any who are not beginners? When do you leave the beginner's mind? Know that in the definitive study of the buddha dharma, you engage in zazen and endeavor in the way. At the heart of the teaching is a practicing buddha who does not seek to become a buddha. As a practicing buddha does not become a buddha, the fundamental point is realized.

The embodiment of buddha is not becoming a buddha. When you break through the snares and cages [of words and concepts], a sitting buddha does not hinder becoming a buddha. Right now, you have the ability to enter the realm of buddha and enter the realms of demons throughout the ages. Going forward and going backward, you personally have the freedom of overflowing ditches, overflowing valleys.

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Mazu, Zen Master Daji of Jiangxi, studied with Nanyue, Zen Master Dahui. After intimately receiving Nanyue's mind seal, Mazu was continuously engaged in zazen.

One day Nanyue went up to him and said, "Virtuous one, what's your intention in doing zazen?"

Quietly ponder this question. Was Nanyue asking if Mazu had the intention of going beyond zazen, if he had an intention outside of zazen, or if he had no intention at all? Was Nanyue asking what kind of intention emerges while doing zazen? Investigate this thoroughly.

Love a true dragon instead of loving a carved one. However, know that both carved and true dragons have the ability to produce clouds and rain. Do not treasure or belittle what is far away, but be intimate with it. Do not treasure or belittle what is near, but be intimate with it. Do not make light or a big deal of what you see with your eyes. Do not make light or a big deal of what you hear with your ears. Rather, illuminate your eyes and ears.

Mazu said, "My intention is to become a buddha."

Clarify these words. What is the meaning of *become a buddha*? Does *become a buddha* mean being made buddha by another buddha, or buddha making oneself buddha? Is this the emergence of one or two buddhas? Is the intention to become buddha dropping off, or is dropping off the intention to become buddha? Does this mean that however many ways there are to become buddha, to be immersed in this intention to become a buddha is the intention to become buddha?

Know that Mazu meant that zazen is inevitably the intention to become buddha, and that zazen is inevitably becoming buddha with intention. Intention is prior to becoming a buddha and after becoming a buddha. Intention is the very moment of becoming buddha.

I ask you: How much of becoming buddha is being immersed in intention? This immersion is immersed in immersion. Immersion is always a direct expression of totally becoming buddha, every bit of completely intending to become buddha. Do not avoid even a bit of intention. If you avoid it, you lose your body and miss your life. When you lose your body and miss your life, this too is immersion in intention.

Nanyue picked up a tile and started to polish it on a rock.

Mazu said, “What are you doing?”

Indeed, who does not see this as polishing a tile? Who can see this as polishing a tile? So Mazu asked, *What are you doing?*

*What are you doing?* is no other than polishing a tile. Whether in this world or in another world, polishing a tile has never ceased. Do not regard your view as the only view. In any activity, there is always this question.

Those who see buddha without knowing and understanding buddha see water without understanding water, and see mountains without knowing mountains. To hastily conclude that what’s happening in front of you is a dead end is not a study of buddha.

Nanyue said, “I am polishing this tile to make a mirror.”

Clarify these words. Polishing a tile to make a mirror has a deep meaning; it is not a false statement, but actualizes the fundamental point. Although a tile is a tile and a mirror is a mirror, there are many ways to investigate the meaning of polishing. An ancient bright mirror, a bright mirror, comes from polishing a tile. Without knowing that all mirrors come from polishing tiles, you will not see or hear the words, mouth, or breath of buddha ancestors.

Mazu said, “How can you make a mirror by polishing a tile?”

Indeed, by polishing a tile and doing nothing else, an iron-willed practitioner does not make a mirror. Even if making a mirror is not polishing a tile, a mirror is immediately there.

Nanyue said, “How can you become a buddha by doing zazen?”

Be clear that zazen is not working toward becoming a buddha. The teaching that becoming a buddha has nothing to do with zazen is evident.

Mazu said, “Then, how so?”

These words may seem to be asking one thing but in fact are asking another. It is like close friends meeting; each is intimate with the other. *How so?* addresses both zazen and becoming a buddha at the same time.

Nanyue said, “When driving a cart, if it stops moving, do you whip the cart or the ox?”

In regard to *driving a cart*, what is moving and what is stopping? Does it mean that water flowing is the cart moving and water not flowing is the cart moving? You can also say that flowing is water not moving. There is a time when water’s moving is not flowing. Thus, when you investigate the cart not moving, there is stopping and not stopping; it depends on time. The word *stopping* does not merely mean not moving.

In regards to Nanyue’s words *Do you whip the cart or the ox*, is it that you sometimes hit the cart and sometimes hit the ox? Is hitting the cart the same or not the same as hitting the ox? In the secular world, there is no custom of hitting the cart. Although there is no custom of common people hitting the cart, in the buddha way there is the practice of hitting the cart; this is the eye of study. Even if you realize the practice of hitting the cart, it is not the same as hitting the ox. Study this thoroughly.

Although hitting the ox is commonly practiced, you should investigate hitting the ox in the buddha way. Is it hitting a living buffalo, an iron ox, or a clay ox? Is it hitting

with a whip, with the entire world, or with the whole mind? Is it hitting the marrow, hitting with the fist? How about fist hitting fist, and ox hitting ox?

Mazu was silent.

Do not ignore this silence. This is hurling a tile to attract a jewel, turning the head and turning the face. This silence cannot be taken away.

Nanyue then instructed: "If you practice sitting Zen, you practice sitting buddha."

Investigate this statement and understand the pivotal point of the ancestral school. Those who miss the essential meaning of the practice of sitting Zen may say that it is the practice of sitting buddha. But how can those who are not authentic descendants be sure that the practice of sitting Zen is the practice of sitting buddha? Know that the zazen of beginner's mind is the beginning of zazen. The beginning of zazen is the beginning of sitting buddha.

Nanyue continued: "If you practice sitting Zen, [you will know that] Zen is not about sitting or lying down."

What Nanyue meant is that zazen is zazen, and it is not limited to sitting or lying down. This teaching has been transmitted person to person; thus boundless sitting and lying down are the self [beyond self]. When you reflect on your life activities, are they intimate with zazen, or remote from it? Is there enlightenment in zazen or is there delusion? Is there one whose wisdom penetrates zazen?

Nanyue said further, "In the practice of sitting buddha, the buddha has no fixed form."

Nanyue spoke the words in this way. The reason why sitting buddha is neither singular nor plural is that the sitting buddha is adorned with no fixed form. To speak of no fixed form is to speak of buddha's form. As buddha has no fixed form, there is no escape from sitting buddha. Adorned with buddha's no fixed form, the practice of zazen is itself sitting buddha. In the dharma of no abiding, who can discriminate buddha from not buddha? Falling away before discrimination, sitting buddha is sitting buddha.

Nanyue said, "If you sit buddha, you kill [go beyond] buddha."

When you study sitting buddha further in this way, it has an aspect of *kill buddha*. At the very moment of sitting buddha there is killing buddha. If you want to find the extraordinary luminosity of killing buddha, always sit buddha. *Kill* may be an ordinary word that people commonly use, but its meaning here is totally different. Study the deep meaning behind the statement that sitting buddha is killing buddha. Investigate the fact that the buddha is itself *killing buddha*. Study killing and not killing a true person.

Nanyue said, "If you are identified with the sitting form, you have not reached the heart of the matter."

*Identified with the sitting form*, spoken of here, is to let go of and to touch the sitting form. The reason is that when one is sitting buddha, it is impossible not to be identified with the sitting form. However clear the sitting form is, the heart of the matter

cannot be reached, because it is impossible not to be one with the sitting form. To penetrate this is called “letting go of body and mind.”

Those who have not practiced sitting do not reach the heart of the matter. The heart of the matter is sitting time, sitting person, sitting buddha, and the practice of sitting buddha.

The sitting of mere sitting and mere lying down is not sitting buddha. Although usual sitting looks like sitting buddha or buddha sitting, it is not so. A person becomes buddha, becoming a buddha person. However, all people do not become buddhas. Buddhas are not all people, because buddhas are not limited to people. An ordinary person is not necessarily buddha, buddha is not necessarily an ordinary person. Sitting buddha is like this.

In this way Nanyue was a profound teacher and Mazu was a thorough student. Mazu realized sitting buddha as becoming buddha, and Nanyue taught becoming buddha as sitting buddha. At Nanyue’s assembly there was this kind of investigation, and at Yaoshan’s assembly there was that dialogue. Know that what buddhas and ancestors have regarded as the pivotal point is sitting buddha. Those who are buddha ancestors employ this pivotal point. Those who aren’t have never dreamed of it.

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Transmission of buddha dharma in the west and east [India and China] is no other than transmission of sitting buddha. This is the pivotal point. Where buddha dharma is not transmitted, zazen is not transmitted. What has been passed on person to person is the essential teaching of zazen alone. Those who have not intimately received this teaching are not buddha ancestors.

Without clarifying this single matter, you cannot clarify myriad matters and practices. Without clarifying them, you cannot be regarded as one who has attained the way with clear eye and cannot join buddha ancestors of the past and present. Thus, buddha ancestors unfailingly receive and transmit zazen person to person.

To be illuminated by buddha ancestors is to endeavor in the thorough practice of zazen. Those who are ignorant mistakenly think that buddha light is like sunlight, moonlight, or the glowing of a jewel. But sunlight, moonlight, or the glowing of a jewel is merely a physical manifestation in the transmigration through the six paths, and cannot be compared with buddha light. Buddha light is to receive and listen to one phrase of teaching, to maintain and guard one dharma, and to transmit zazen person to person. Without being illuminated by such light, accepting and maintaining zazen is not possible.

Since ancient times few have understood zazen as it is. Even the heads of famous monasteries in China nowadays do not know and study the meaning of zazen. There are only a few who clearly understand it. Monasteries have schedules for zazen, the abbots and resident monks keep the practice of zazen as essential, and encourage students to practice zazen. But few of them seem to understand the meaning of what they are doing.

Some masters have written texts titled “Essentials of Zazen.” A few others have written “Rules for Zazen,” and a few more have written “The Point of Zazen.” Among

these texts none of those titled “Essentials of Zazen” are worthwhile. No version of “Rules for Zazen” clarifies the practice. They were written by those who did not know zazen as they had not received the transmission of zazen person to person. “The Point of Zazen” included in the *Jingde Record of Transmission of the Lamp* and “Essentials of Zazen” included in the *Jiatai Record of the Universal Lamp* are also like this.

What a pity! They visited and abided in monasteries of the ten directions and practiced all their lives, but they did not make a thorough effort even for one sitting. Sitting had not immersed in them and endeavor had not encountered them. It is not that zazen avoided them, but that they were carelessly intoxicated. They did not aspire to a genuine effort.

Their texts merely aim to return to the source and origin, trying to cease thinking and to be still. That does not even come up to taking the steps of visualization, purification, nurturing, and attainment, or the view of the bodhisattvas’ last ten stages approaching buddha’s enlightenment. How could they have received and transmitted the buddha ancestors’ zazen? The Song Dynasty compilers of Zen texts included these writings by mistake. Those who study now should not pay attention to such writings.

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“The Point of Zazen, “ written by Zhengjue, Zen Master Hongzhi of the Tiantong Jingde Monastery, Mt. Taibo, Qingyuan Prefecture, China, alone is a work of a buddha ancestor. It is a true point of zazen, with penetrating words. It is the only light that illuminates the inside and outside of the world of phenomena; it is buddha ancestor among buddha ancestors of past and present. Earlier buddhas and later buddhas have been led to zazen by this teaching. Present buddhas and past buddhas are actualized by this “The Point of Zazen.” The text is as follows:

The hub of buddhas’ activity,  
the turning of the ancestors’ hub,  
is known free of forms,  
illuminated beyond conditions.

As it is known free of forms  
the knowledge is subtle.  
As it is illuminated beyond conditions  
the illumination is wondrous.

When the knowledge is subtle  
there is no thought of discrimination.  
When the illumination is wondrous  
there is not the slightest hint.

Where there is no thought of discrimination

the knowledge is extraordinary with no comparison.  
 Where there is not the slightest hint  
 the illumination has nothing to grasp.

The water is clear to the bottom  
 where the fish swims without moving.  
 The sky is vast and boundless  
 where the bird flies away and disappears.

The *point* presented here is the manifestation of great function, the awesome presence beyond sound and form, bamboo knots and wood grains [standards] before the parents were born. It is joyously not slandering buddha ancestors, not avoiding the death of body and mind. It is as extraordinary as having a head that is three feet tall and a neck that is two inches short.

*The hub of buddhas' activity:* Buddhas do not fail to make buddhas the hub. This hub is manifested. That is zazen.

*The turning of the ancestors' hub:* One's late master spoke beyond words. This understanding is the basis of ancestors, of transmitting dharma, and of transmitting the robe. Turning heads and exchanging faces is the hub of buddhas' activity. Turning faces and exchanging heads is the turning of the ancestors' hub.

*Is known free of forms:* This knowing is not, of course, conscious knowing. Conscious knowing is small. This knowing is not comprehension. Comprehension is created. Thus, this knowing is free of forms. Being free of forms is this knowing. Don't regard it as all-inclusive knowledge. Don't limit it to self-knowledge. Being free of forms is "When brightness [duality] comes, meet it with brightness. When darkness [nonduality] comes, meet it with darkness, " "Sit through the skin you were born with."

*Illuminated beyond conditions:* This illumination is not illuminating everything or illuminating with brilliance. Being beyond condition is this illumination. Illumination does not turn to conditions, as conditions are already illumination. *Beyond* means the entire world is not hidden, a broken world does not appear. It is subtle and wondrous. It is interchangeable and not interchangeable.

*When the knowledge is subtle there is no thought of discrimination:* Thought as knowledge does not depend on other power???. Knowledge is a shape, and a shape is mountains and rivers. The mountains and rivers are subtle. Subtle is wondrous. When you utilize it, it is lively. When you create a dragon, it is not limited inside or outside of the dragon gate. To utilize a bit of this knowledge is to know by bringing forth mountains and rivers of the entire world with all their force. If you don't have knowledge by being intimate with mountains and rivers, there is not a shred or scrap of knowledge. Do not grieve that discernment and discrimination come slowly. Buddhas who have already discerned are already being actualized. *There is no thought of discrimination* means there is already merging. There is already merging is actualization. Thus, *there is no thought of discrimination* is not meeting even one person.

*When the illumination is wondrous there is not the slightest hint: The slightest is the entire world.* The illumination is naturally wondrous and luminous. Thus, it looks as if it hadn't arrived. Do not doubt your eyes. Do not believe your ears. To directly clarify the source beyond words and not to grasp theories through words is illumination. This being so, illumination is not comparing, not grasping. To maintain illumination is extraordinary and to accept it as complete is no other than doubling it thoroughly.

*The water is clear to the bottom where the fish swims without moving.* Water hanging in the sky does not get to the bottom. Furthermore, water that fills a vessel is not as clear as the water mentioned here. Water that is boundless is described as *clear to the bottom*. When the fish swims in this water, it is not motionless. It goes for myriad miles. There is no way to measure it and there is no shore to limit it. There is no sky for the fish to fly in and no bottom to get to, and there is no shore where someone sees the fish. In fact, there is no one who sees the fish. If you speak of recognizing the fish, there is merely water clear to the bottom. The activity of zazen is just like the fish swimming. Who can measure how many thousands and myriads of miles there is in zazen? Its journey is the entire body going on the path where no bird flies.

*The sky is vast and boundless where the bird flies away and disappears:* The vast sky does not hang above. What hangs above is not called the vast sky. Furthermore, what encompasses all space is not called vast sky. What is neither revealed nor hidden, neither inside nor outside is called vast sky. If the bird flies in this sky, it just flies in the sky. The activity of flying in the sky is immeasurable. Flying in the sky is the entire world; it is the entire world flying in the sky. Although we don't know how far the flying goes, we say it beyond saying—we say *flies away*. It is “Go away with no string on your straw sandals.” When the sky flies away, the bird flies away. When the bird flies away, the sky flies away. When you speak about the investigation of flying, it is right here. This is the point of steadfast sitting. Even if you go myriad miles, it is right here.

This is “The Point of Zazen” by Zhengjue. Among the old masters throughout time, no one has written “The Point of Zazen” like this. If the stinky skin bags here and there would try to say something like this, they might not be able to do so in one or more life times. There is no text like Zhengjue's. Rujing, my late master, would refer to him on his teaching seat as Old Buddha Hongzhi and would not refer to other teachers as Old Buddha. One who has the eye to see a true person recognizes the voice of buddha ancestors. Thus, we know that there is a buddha ancestor in the lineage of Dongshan.

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More than eighty years have passed since the time of Zhengjue. After his text, I have written my version of “The Point of Zazen.” It is the eighteenth day, the third month, the third year of the Ninji Era [1242]. It has been eighty-five years since Zhengjue passed away on the eighth day, the tenth month, the twenty-seventh year of the Shaoxing Era [1157]. This is my text:

The Point of Zazen

The hub of buddhas' activity,  
 the turning of the ancestors' hub,  
 moves along with beyond thinking  
 and is completed in the realm of beyond merging.

As it moves along with beyond thinking  
 its appearing is immediate.  
 As it is completed in the realm of beyond merging  
 completeness itself is realization.

When its appearing is intimate  
 you have no illusion.  
 When completeness reveals itself  
 it is neither real nor apparent.

When you have immediacy without illusion  
 immediacy is "dropping away" with no obstacles.  
 Realization, beyond real or apparent,  
 is effort without expectation.

Clear water all the way to the earth;  
 a fish swims like a fish.  
 Vast sky transparent throughout;  
 a bird flies like a bird.

Although Zhengjue's text is not incomplete, zazen may be spoken of in this way.  
 All descendants of buddha ancestors should practice zazen as the single great matter. It is  
 the authentic seal transmitted from person to person.

*Written at the Kosho Horin Monastery on the eighteenth day, the third month, the  
 third year of the Ninji Era [1242].*

*Presented to the assembly at the Yoshimine Temple, Yoshida County, Echizen Province,  
 in the eleventh month of the fourth year of the Ninji Era*



## **A General Recommended Way of Sitting Meditation**

By Dogen Zenji

The Way is fundamentally complete and perfect, all-pervasive, how could it depend upon cultivation and realization?

The vehicle of the source is free; why expend effort? The whole being is utterly beyond defiling dust; who would believe in a method of wiping it clean? The great whole is not apart from here; why go someplace to practice? Nevertheless, the slightest discrepancy is as the distance between sky and earth: as soon as aversion and attraction arise, you lose your mind in confusion. Even though you may boast of comprehension and wallow in understanding, having gotten a glimpse of insight, and though you find the Way and understand the mind, though you may roam freely within the bounds of initial entry, you are still somewhat lacking in a living road of emancipation.

Even Gautama Buddha, who had innate knowledge, at upright for six years; this is a noteworthy example. When referring to the transmission of the mind seal at Shaolin, the fame of nine years facing a wall is still mentioned. Since the ancients did so, why should people today not do so? Therefore you should stop the intellectual activity of pursuing words and chasing sayings, and should learn the stepping back of turning the light around and looking back. Body and mind will naturally be shed, and the original countenance will become manifest. If you want to attain something, you should set right about working on it. For intensive Zen meditation, a quiet room is appropriate. Food and drink are to be moderate. Letting go of all mental objects, taking a respite from all concerns, not thinking of good or evil, not being concerned with right or wrong, halt the operations of mind, intellect, and consciousness, stop assessment by thought, imagination, and view. Do not aim to become a Buddha; and how could it be limited to sitting or reclining? Spread a thick sitting mat where you usually sit, and use a cushion on top of this. You may sit in the full-lotus posture, or in the half-lotus posture. For the full-lotus posture, first place the right foot on the left thigh, then the left foot on the right thigh. For the half-lotus posture, just place the left foot on the right thigh. Wear loose clothing, and keep it orderly. Next place the right hand on the left leg, and the left hand on the right hand, with palms facing upward. The two thumbs face each other and hold each other up. Now sit upright, with your body straight. Do not lean to the left or tilt to the right, bend forward or lean backward. Align the ears with the shoulders, and the nose with the navel. The tongue should rest on the upper palate, the teeth and lips should be closed. The eyes should always be open. The breathing passes subtly through the nose. Once the physical form is in order, exhale fully through the mouth once, sway left and right, then settle into sitting perfectly still. Think of what does not think. How do you think of what does not think? It is not thinking. This is the essential art of sitting Zen meditation. What I call sitting Zen meditation is not practice of dhyana. It is just a method of comfort, a practical way of experiencing thoroughgoing investigation of enlightenment: objective reality becomes manifest, beyond any trap. If you can get the meaning of this, you will be like

dragons taking to the water, like tigers in the mountains. You will know that the truth has spontaneously become evident, while oblivion and distraction will already have been overcome. When you are going to rise from sitting, move your body gradually, getting up gently. Do not be hasty or careless.

We have seen stories of transcending the ordinary and going beyond the holy, shedding the mortal coil while sitting or passing away while standing upright: all of these depend on the power in this.

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And how about the transformations of state upon the lifting of a finger, a pole, a needle, a hammer? How about the realizations of accord on the raising of a whisk, a fist, a cane, a shout? They have never been susceptible to understanding but thought and conceptualizations; how could they be known by cultivated realization of supernatural powers? It could be called dignified behavior beyond sound and form; is it not a guiding example prior to knowledge and views? Being such, it is not an issue whether one has more or less intelligence, making no distinction between the quick and the slow. Focused, unified concentration is what constitutes work on the Way. The practice and realizations are spontaneously undefiled; the process of heading for the aim, furthermore, is being normal. Whatever they are, one's own world and the realms of others; West and East, they equally hold the seal of Buddha, based as one on the way of the source. Just work on sitting, remaining in an immobile state. Even though it seems there are myriad differences and a thousand distinctions, just attend to intensive meditation to master the Way. Why abandon a seat in your own house to idly roam in the dusty realms of alien countries? Take a single misstep, and you blunder past what's right in front of you. Having gotten the key to the human body, do not pass time uselessly: preserve and uphold the essential potential of the Buddha Way. Who has the folly to look forward to what lasts but a moment? Add to this consideration the fact that the physical body is like a dewdrop on the grass, a lifetime is like a lightning flash: all of a sudden they are void, in an instant they are gone. May those high-minded people who participate in this study and have long learned to feel an elephant by hand not be suspicious of a real dragon. Proceed energetically on the straightforward path of direct pointing, and honor people who have transcended learning and gone beyond effort. Join in the enlightenment of the Buddhas, inherit the state of mind of the Zen founders. Having long been thus, we should be thus. The treasury opens of itself, to be used at will.

## **Bendowa**

By Dogen

The various Buddhas and Tathagatas have a most enlightened way of realizing superior wisdom and transmitting the supreme law. When transmitted from Buddha to Buddha, its mark is self-joyous meditation. To enter this meditation naturally, right sitting is the true gate. Though each man has Buddha-nature in abundance, he cannot make it appear without practice or live it without enlightenment. If you let it go, it fills your hand; it transcends the one and many. If you talk about it, it fills your mouth; it is beyond measurement by height and width. All Buddhas eternally have their abode here without becoming attached to one-sided recognition. All beings are working here without attachment to sides in each recognition. The devices and training that I teach now manifest all things in original enlightenment and express unity in action. And when you thoroughly understand, why cling to such trifles as these?

On awakening of the desire to seek the way, I visited Buddhist masters in all parts of the country. Finally I met Zenko (Myozen, disciple of Eisai) at Kennin temple. The nine years that I served as his follower passed quickly. From him I heard about the Rinzai style. Zenko, as the leading disciple of Eisai, truly transmitted the highest Buddhism. Other disciples could not compare with him. I also went to China, visited Zen masters of both Cheh-chiang (Chekiang, formerly divided into east and west), and heard about the styles of the five schools. Finally I studied with Zen master Ju-sting (Nyojo) on Ta-p'ein (Taihaku) peak. In this was I completed the valuable training for my life. After that at the beginning of the Shotei period (1227), I returned to Japan. Because I had the idea of spreading the Law and saving all beings, I was like a man carrying a heavy burden. Then I thought of abandoning this idea of spreading the Law and wait for a more propitious time. I wandered here and there for some time sincerely trying to teach the style of the former Zen master. There are true trainees who deliberately shun fame and profit and concentrate on the search for the way. But unfortunately they are misled by false masters, so real understanding is veiled and the trainees uselessly become drunk with self-madness and drown for long years in the world of delusion. How can the right seed of wisdom sprout and the chance for enlightenment be grasped? I am now wandering here and there like a cloud or water grass - what mountain or river shall I visit? Because I sympathize with such seekers, I went to China, saw the form and style of the monasteries, and received the essence of the Zen teaching. Gathering and recording all this, I am leaving it for the trainees so that they may be helped toward knowing the essence of Buddhism. Isn't this the core of Zen? Buddha Sakyamuni transmitted the right law to Mahakasyapa on Grdhrakuta Mountain, and a long line of patriarchs handed it down to Bodhidharma. And Bodhidharma went to China and transmitted the right law to Hui-k'o (Eka).

This started the transmission of Zen Buddhism to the East. Transmitted thus in its essential purity, it came down by a natural route to the Sixth Patriarch, Hui-neng. At this

time true Buddhism was transmitted to China, and it expressed a meaning free from trivialities. The Sixth Patriarch had two outstanding disciples- Nan-yueh Huai-jang and Ch'ing-yuan Hsing-ssu. Together they transmitted the Buddha seal; they were leaders of man and heaven. These two schools spread, and five styles of Zen appeared. They were the schools of Fa-yen, Wei-yang, Ts'ao-tung, Yun-men, and Lin-chi. In present-day China only the Lin-chi (Rinzai) school is flourishing. Although the five schools differ, they are all based on the single seal of the Buddha Mind. From the later Han period to the present in China, the scriptures of the other teachings were propagated, but it was impossible to determine which was best. With the coming of Bodhidharma from India the root of the conflict was abruptly cut, and pure Buddhism spread. We must also try to do the same in our country. All the Buddhas and patriarchs who transmitted Buddhism considered sitting and practicing self-joyous meditation the true way of enlightenment. The enlightened ones in both the East and West followed this style. This is because the masters and their disciples correctly transmitted this superior method from person to person and received the uncorrupted truth.

1. Q: I have heard of the superior merits of zazen. But an ordinary person will have doubts and say there are many gates in Buddhism. Why do you urge only zazen?

A: Because it is the right gate to Buddhism - this is my answer to him.

2. Q: Why is it the only right gate?

A: The great teacher Sakyamuni handed down this unexcelled method of enlightenment. And the Tathagatas of the past, present, and future were similarly enlightened by zazen. They, too, transmitted it as the right gate. The patriarchs in India and China were also enlightened by zazen. For this reason, I now indicate the right gate for human beings and heaven.

3 Q: Such reasons as correct transmission by the unexcelled method of the Tathagatas and following in the footsteps of the patriarchs are beyond common sense. To ordinary people, reading the sutra and saying the Nembutsu are the natural means to enlightenment. You just sit cross-legged and do nothing. How is this a means to enlightenment?

A: You look on the meditation of the Buddhas and the supreme law as just sitting and doing nothing. You disparage Mahayana Buddhism. Your delusion is deep; you are like someone in the middle of the ocean crying out for water. Fortunately we are already sitting at ease in the self-joyous meditation of the Buddhas. Isn't this a great boon? What a pity that your true-eye remains shut-that your mind remains drunk. The world of the Buddhas eludes ordinary thinking and consciousness. It cannot be known by disbelief and inferior knowledge. To enter one must have right belief. The disbeliever, even if taught, has trouble grasping it. For example, when the Buddha was preaching at Grdhrakuta, the

disbelieves were allowed to go away. To bring out the right belief in your mind you must train and study. If you cannot do this, you should quit for awhile, regretting that you lack the influence of the law from a former beneficial relation. What good are such actions as reading the sutras and saying the Nembutsu. How futile to think that Buddhist merits accrue from merely moving the tongue and raising the voice. If you think this covers Buddhism, you are far from the truth. Your only purpose in reading the sutras should be to learn thoroughly that the Buddha taught the rules of gradual and sudden training and that by practicing his teachings you can obtain enlightenment. You should not read the sutras merely to pretend to wisdom through vain intellections. To strive for the goal of Buddhism by reading many sutras is like pointing the hill to the north and heading south. It is like putting a square peg in a round hole. While you look at words and phrases, the path of your training remains dark. This is as worthless as a doctor who forgets his prescription. Constant repetition of the Nembutsu is also worthless-like a frog in a spring field croaking night and day. Those deluded by fame and fortune, find it especially difficult to abandon the nembutsu. Bound by deep roots to a profit-seeking mind, they existed in ages past, and they exist today. They are to be pitied. Understand only this: if enlightened Zen masters and their earnest disciples correctly transmit the supreme law of the seven Buddhas, its essence emerges, and it can be experienced. Those who merely study the letters of the sutras cannot know this. So put a stop to this doubt and delusion. Follow the teachings of a real master and, by zazen; attain to the self-joyous samadhi of the Buddhas.

4. Q: The Tendai school and Kegon teachings have both come across to this country; they represent the cream of Buddhism. In the Shingon school-transmitted directly from Vairocana Tathagata to Vajrasattva - there is no stain between master and disciple. This school maintains that "this mind is the Buddha", and that "this mind becomes the Buddha"; it does not advocate long step-by-step training. It teaches the simultaneous enlightenment of the five Buddhas. It is unexcelled in Buddhism. In view of all this what superiority does zazen have that you recommend it alone and exclude the other teachings?

A: You must understand that in Buddhism the stress falls on the truth or falsity of the training-not on the excellence or mediocrity of the teaching or the depth or shallowness of the principle. In times past, men were drawn to Buddhism by grass, flowers, mountains, and water. Some received the Buddha seal by grasping dirt, stones, sand, and pebbles. The dimensionless letters overflow all forms, and we can hear the sermon now in a speck of dust. "This mind is the Buddha" - these words are like a moon reflected in water; and the meaning of the words: "sitting cross-legged is itself Buddhism"? Like a figure in the mirror. Do not be victimized by clever manipulation of words. When I recommend the training of immediate enlightenment, I want to make you a true human being by indicating the superior path transmitted by the Buddhas and patriarchs. To transmit the Buddha law you should always make the enlightened person your Zen master. Don't follow a scholar who counts the letters of the scripture. This would be like

the blind leading the blind. In the teachings directly transmitted from the Buddhas and patriarchs, the Buddha law is sustained by respect for the enlightened person. When the Gods of darkness and light reject the Zen masters and when the enlightened Arhats ask the path, they provide the means of opening the Buddha Mind. In the other teachings we could not endure it. The followers of Buddhism only have to study the Buddha law. You must understand that we do not lack the highest wisdom. Though we enjoy it eternally, we do not always harmonize with it. This is because we meet setbacks on the Great Way through clinging to individual opinion and chasing after material things. Through individual opinions various phantoms arise. For example, there are countless views on the 12 chains of transmigration, the 25 worlds, the three vehicles, the five vehicles, the Buddha, and the non-Buddha. Training in the true path does not require learning these opinions. So when we sit cross-legged, depending on the Buddha sign and abandoning all things, we can enjoy great wisdom. We enter at once the superior field beyond delusion and enlightenment - a field without distinction between sage and commoner. How can one who clings to verbal tools rise up to this?

5. Q: Samadhi dwells in the three training, and dhyana-paramita (means of meditation) in the six means of enlightenment. All Bodhisattvas study them from the beginning. They train without discriminating cleverness and stupidity. Even this zazen may be a part of them. Why do you say that the true law is gathered in zazen?

A: This question comes from giving the name "Zen sect" to the treasury of the essence of the true law, and to the unexcelled doctrine-the most important teachings of the Buddha. You must understand that the name "Zen sect" emerged from China and the East; it was not heard in India. When Bodhidharma stayed at Shao-Lin ssu in Sung-shan, gazing at the wall for nine years, the priests and laymen did not understand the true law of the Buddha; they called him a Brahmana who emphasized sitting cross-legged. Afterward every patriarch devoted himself to sitting cross-legged. Unenlightened laymen who saw them carelessly referred to them as the zazen sect without understanding the truth. Today the "Za" has been dropped, and the followers of this practice are known as members of the Zen sect. This is clear in the manuscripts of the patriarchs. You must not equate zazen with the meditation in the six means and the three training. The spirit of transmission in Buddhism is clear in the career of the Buddha. To Mahakasyapa alone on Grdhrakuta Mountain the Buddha transmitted the eye and treasury of the true law, the superior mind of enlightenment and supreme doctrine, and some gods in heaven saw it. Don't doubt this. The gods of heaven protect Buddhism eternally. This is still a living fact. You must understand that zazen is the full way of Buddhism. It is incomparable.

6. Q: Why does Buddhism advocate meditation and enlightenment through cross-legged sitting alone (of the four actions)?

A: I do not analyze the way of training and enlightenment followed by the various Buddhas. If you ask why, I say simply that it is the way used in Buddhism. You should

not seek no further. But the patriarchs praised cross-legged sitting, calling it the comfortable way. I know this sitting is the most comfortable of the four actions. It is not only the training of one Buddha or two Buddhas but of all Buddhas and patriarchs.

7. Q: Those who do not know Buddhism have to attain enlightenment by zazen and training. What use is zazen to those who have clearly obtained enlightenment?

A: Though I do not talk about last night's dream and cannot give a paddle to a woodcutter, I have something to teach you. The view that training and enlightenment are not one is heretical. In Buddhism these two are the same. Because this is training enfolding enlightenment, the training even at the outset is all of original enlightenment. So the Zen master, when giving advice to his disciples, tells them not to seek enlightenment without training because training itself points directly to original enlightenment. Because it is already enlightenment of training, there is no end to enlightenment. Because it is training of enlightenment, there is no beginning to training. Sakyamuni Tathagata and Mahakasyapa, therefore, were both used by training based on enlightenment. Training, based on enlightenment similarly moved both Bodhidharma and Hui-neng. This is typical of all traces of transmission in Buddhism. Already there is training that is inseparable from enlightenment. Because training even at the outset transmits a part of superior training, we fortunately gain a part of original enlightenment in this natural way. You must understand that the Buddhas and patriarchs emphasized the need for intensive training so as not to stain the enlightenment that is self-identical with training. If you throw away superior training, original enlightenment fills your hand. If you abandon original enlightenment, superior training permeates your body. In China I saw Zen monasteries in many districts, each with a meditation hall where 500 to 1,200 monks lived and practiced zazen day and night. When I asked the Zen masters who have been entrusted with the Buddha seal, "What is the essence of Buddhism?" they answered: "Training and enlightenment are not two but one." So they urged disciples to follow the footsteps of the Zen masters in accordance with the teachings of the Buddhas and patriarchs. They recommended zazen not only to their disciples, but to all those who seek the true way, to those who yearn for true Buddhism, regardless of whether one is a beginner or an advanced student, a commoner or a sage. As a patriarch (Nangaku) has said:

"It is not true that there is no training and enlightenment, but do not stain them by clinging to them." Another patriarch has said: "He who sees the way trains the way." You must, therefore, train within enlightenment.

8. Q: Why did Japanese patriarchs of the past, who went to China and returned to propagate Buddhism, transmit other teachings besides this Zen?

A: The patriarchs of the past did not transmit this Zen because the time was not ripe.

9. Q: Did the patriarchs of the past understand this Zen?

A: If they had understood, they would have propagated it.

10. Q: Someone has said, "Don't throw away delusion (birth and death). There is an easy shortcut to freedom from birth and death. This is because the spirit is eternal." The meaning here is that even if this body is born, it will eventually come to nothing, but this spirit does not perish. If this Spirit that is not subject to rising and ceasing resides in my body, this is the original spirit. Because of this, the body takes temporal form and remains unfixed, for it dies here and arises there. This spirit is eternal and does not change in past, present, and future. To know this is to free oneself from birth and death. For those who know this, the birth and death they have known up to now disappear, and they enter into an ocean of the spirit. When you embrace this ocean, superior virtue will be complete like the Buddhas. Even if you know this, because this body is the result of former delusive actions, you differ from the sages. Those who do not know this transmigrate eternally. So know only the eternity of the spirit. If you sit in vain and waste your whole life, what can you possibly hope for? Does this view conform to the way of the Buddhas and patriarchs?

A: Your view is not Buddhism. It is the Srenika heresy. This heretical view says: "In our body there is a spiritual knowledge. Through the knowledge we recognize like and dislike, right and wrong, pain and titillation, and suffering and pleasure. This spiritual knowledge, when the body deteriorates, is released here and is born anew elsewhere. Therefore, though it seems to die here, it is born there. It never dies; it continues eternally." This is the heretical view. If you absorb this and think it is Buddhism, it is more foolish than holding roof tiles and pebbles and thinking they are the golden treasures. This foolish delusion is shameful. It is beyond serious consideration. National master Hui-Chung of the Tang dynasty issued a sharp warning against this view. Those who hold this delusive view think that the mind is eternal and that appearance is transitory and equate this with the superior training of the Buddhas; they create the cause of transmigration and think that they have broken free from transmigration. Isn't this false? In deed, it is pathetic. This is nothing but delusive heresy. Don't listen to it. Although I hesitate to say it, I will correct your delusion with sympathy. In Buddhism you have to know this: the body and mind are one; essence and form are one. Make no mistake- this is known also in India and China. In a teaching that talks about eternity, all things become eternal. Don't separate body and mind. In a teaching that talks about cessation, all things are ceasing. Don't separate essence and form. Why do you say that the body ceases while the mind is eternal? Isn't this against the right law? You must realize that life-death itself is nirvana. We cannot talk about nirvana without life-death. You think erroneously that this is the Buddha wisdom free from life and death. Your mind, which understands and perceives, arises and perishes; it is not eternal. Understands this thoroughly: the unity of body and mind is always upheld in Buddhism. In the light of this, why is the mind only released from the body to become free from arising and perishing while the body arises and perishes? If you assert that body and mind are one



now and that they are not one at another time, you becloud the Buddha's teachings. To think that birth and death are things to be avoided is a sin against Buddhism. They are truly the tools of Buddhism. In Buddhism, especially in the Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana, the great teaching of the Tathagata-garba embraces the Dharma-dhatu. It does not divide suchness and appearance, nor discuss arising and perishing. Even enlightenment and nirvana are nothing but the Tathagata-garba. It is self-identical with all things and appearances and contains them. These various teachings are all based on One Mind. There is no mistake about this. This is understanding of the Mind of Buddhism. How can you divide this into body and mind and delusion and nirvana. You are already the son of Buddha. Do not listen to madmen who preach heretical views.

11. Q: Does one who seriously practices zazen have to observe the precepts strictly and purify his body and mind?

A: Observing the precepts and living purely are rules of Zen Buddhism and practices handed down by the Buddhas and patriarchs. Those who have not received the precepts should receive them; those who violate the precepts should repent. They shall then absorb the Buddha's wisdom.

12. Q: Is there any objection to a serious student of zazen practicing the mantra of the Shingon sect and the Samathavipa'syana (calm and insight) of the Tendai sect together?

A: When I was in China and heard the gist of Buddhism from the Zen masters, they said they had never heard of any patriarchs who truly transmitted the Buddha seal, now and in the past, undertaking such simultaneous training. Unless we earnestly concentrate on one thing, we cannot gain one wisdom.

13. Q: Can a layman practice this zazen or is it limited to priests?

A: The patriarchs have said that to understand Buddhism there should be no distinction between man and woman and between rich and poor.

14. Q: The priests are free from myriad relations; for them there is no obstruction to zazen training. How can the busy layman attain enlightenment by earnest training?

A: Through their boundless love the Buddhas and patriarchs have flung the vast gates of compassion for all beings- whether Human beings or Deva. We many examples in past and present: Tan-tsung and Sung-tsung, though very busy with state affairs practiced zazen and understood the great way of the Buddhas and patriarchs. Prime ministers Li and Fang were close advisers to the emperors, and they too practiced zazen and were enlightened in the great way of the Buddhas and patriarchs. It simply depends on the will. It has nothing to do with being either a priest or a lay man. Those who can discern excellence and inferiority will believe Buddhism naturally. Those who think that worldly

tasks hinder Buddhism know only that there is no Buddhism in the world; they do not know that there is nothing that can be set apart as worldly tasks in Buddhism. In the great Sung dynasty a Prime Minister named P'ing mastered the way of the patriarchs and wrote a poem about himself: "Away from state affairs I practiced zazen, hardly ever laying on my side in bed and sleeping; although I am the prime minister, my fame as a Zen master spread throughout the world." Official business kept P'ing busy, but because he had the will to train earnestly, he gained enlightenment. Consider yourself through these cases (persons); look at the present through the past. At this moment, in the great Sung dynasty, emperors, ministers, soldiers and commoners, and men and women take interest in the way of the patriarchs. Warriors and intellectuals have the will to train, and many of them will eventually experience enlightenment. All this tells us that worldly tasks do not hinder Buddhism. If true Buddhism spreads in the state, the Buddhas and heavenly beings always protect that state, and the world becomes peaceful. If the world becomes peaceful, Buddhism acquires strength. In the age of the Buddha, even misguided criminals were enlightened through his teachings. Under the patriarchs, even hunters and woodcutters were enlightened. And others will gain enlightenment. All you have to do is to receive instructions from a real teacher.

15. Q: Can one gain enlightenment by this zazen, even if one trains in this degenerate age and evil world?

A: Other teachings argue about the name and form of the doctrines. The true teaching does not differentiate the three periods of Sho, Zo and Matsu. Anybody who trains will inevitably gain enlightenment. In the correctly transmitted right law, you can always enjoy the rare treasure of your own house. Those who train know whether enlightenment has been obtained, just as one who drinks water knows personally whether it is cold or warm.

16. Q: Some people say that to know Buddhism you only have to understand the meaning of "this mind itself is the Buddha"; you do not have to chant the sutras or train the body in Buddhism. Understand only that Buddhism is inherent in your self - this is full enlightenment. There is no need for seeking anything from others. So is there any use going to the trouble of practicing zazen?

A: That is a most grievous error. If what you say is true - even though the sages teach this ("this mind itself is the Buddha") - you cannot understand it. To study Buddhism you have to transcend the viewpoint of self and others. If you become enlightened by knowing that the self itself is the Buddha, Sakyamuni long ago would not have tried so hard to teach the way. This is evident in the high standards of the ancient Zen masters. Long ago there was a monk named Tse-kung Chien-yuan under Zen master Fa-yen. Fa-yen asked him: "Tse-kung, how long have you been in this monastery?" Tse-kung answered: "I have been here three years." Fa-yen: "You are younger than me. Why don't you ever ask me about Buddhism?" Tse-kung: "I will not lie. While studying under Zen

master Ch'ing-feng, I understood the serenity of Buddhism." Fa-yen: "By what words did you gain this understanding?" Tse-kung: "I asked Ch'ing-feng, What is the real self of the trainee? He answered, The God of Fire calls for fire." Fa-yen: "That's a fine expression. But you probably did not understand it." Tse-kung: "The God of Fire belongs to fire. Fire needs fire. It is like saying that the self needs the self. This is how I understood it." Fa-yen: "I see clearly that you did not understand. If Buddhism is like that, it would not have continued until now." This disturbed Tse-kung deeply, and he left there. On the way home he thought: "Fa-yen is an excellent Zen master and the leader of 500 disciples. He has pointed out my fault. There must be a valuable point in his words." Tse-kung then returned to Fa-yen's monastery. Repenting and giving his salutation, he asked: "What is the real self of the trainee?" Fa-yen answered: "The God of Fire calls for fire." On hearing this, Tse-kung was fully enlightened about Buddhism. Obviously one does not know Buddhism by merely understanding that this self is the Buddha. If this is Buddhism, Fa-yen could not have guided Tse-kung in the manner described above, nor would he have given the advice he did. On first visiting a Zen master, you should ask for the rules of training. Only practice zazen earnestly and avoid cluttering your mind with superficial knowledge. The unexcelled method of Buddhism will then bear fruit.

17. Q: In India and China-from ancient times to now-some Zen masters were enlightened by the sound of a stone striking bamboo, and others had their minds cleared by seeing the color of plum blossoms. Even the great teacher Sakyamuni was enlightened by seeing the morning star. The venerable Ananda saw the truth in a stick falling. In addition after the sixth patriarch many Zen masters of the five schools were enlightened by a single word. Did all of these persons practice zazen?

A: From ancient times until now all those who have been enlightened by seeing color or hearing sound practiced zazen without zazen and immediately became unexcelled.

18. Q: In India and China men had inner integrity, and because culture was widespread, trainees were able to understand Buddhism when it was taught to them. In our country, from ancient times, many people have lacked superior intellect; it has been difficult to store the right seeds of wisdom. This comes from the barbaric current. It is very regrettable. Again the priests in this country are inferior to laymen in other countries. Everybody in Japan is foolish and narrow-minded. People cling tightly to worldly merit and hunger for the superficial good. Can such people quickly attain enlightenment about Buddhism even if they practice zazen?

A: It is as you say. The people in this country have neither knowledge nor integrity. Even if they are shown the true law, they change its sweet taste to poison. They tend to seek fame and profit and find it difficult to free themselves from attachments. But to become enlightened about Buddhism, we cannot rely on the worldly knowledge of human beings and heaven. Even during the time of the Buddha, those who enlightened the four results (includes the Arhats) by handball and those who enlightened the great path by the kesa

were foolish and crazy. But they found the way to free themselves from delusion by the help of right faith. Again a woman trainee who waited with a prepared meal was enlightened by seeing the silent sitting of a foolish old priest. None of these cases depend on knowledge. They do not rely on scholarship, words, or speech. They all underline help through right faith. In the some 2,000 years since the birth of Buddhism, it spread to various countries. Its appeal was not limited to highly cultured nations or to people who were clever and wealthy. The true law of the Buddha, with its indeterminate power for good, will spread throughout the world when the right chance comes. All who train with right faith will be enlightened equally with no gap between the wise and foolish. Don't imagine that because Japan is not a highly cultured country and because its people lack knowledge, it is not ready for Buddhism. You must realize that all human beings have the seed of wisdom in abundance. Only there is little recognition of this fact. People do not train with right faith because they do not adequately recognize the essence of Buddhism and lack experience in practical application.

These questions and answers seem unwarranted. But I have tried to help those with poor eyesight to see a flower where nothing appeared before. For in this country the gist of zazen training has not been transmitted, and those who want to know about it are made sorrowful. Therefore, gathering what I saw and heard in China and recording the essence of the Zen masters, I would like to guide those who seek training. I would also like to teach the rules of the Zen monasteries and the rituals of the temples, but I have no time. These things cannot be described simply. Though our country is east of the sea and far from India, the Buddhism of the west was transmitted here about the time of the emperors Kinmei and Yomei. This was our good fortune. But because names, forms, things, and relations become tangled, we lose direction in training.

Now I will take my simple robe and bowl and make my abode among the reed-wrapped rocks of blue and white. Here, while I sit and train true Zen Buddhism - Buddhism transcending the Buddha manifests itself, and with this the object of training it fulfilled. This is the teaching of the Buddha and the style left behind by Mahakasyapa. The rules for this zazen depends on Fukanzazengi, which was transcribed during the Karoku period. To spread Buddhism within a country one must get the permission of the king. But in the light of the Buddha's transmission at Grdhrakuta there emerged kings and nobles and ministers and generals, who appeared in various countries, who gratefully received the guidance of the Buddha, and who did not forget the original spirit that preserved the Buddhism of former ages. All places where the teaching has spread are the Buddha's land. So to spread the way of the Buddhas and patriarchs there is no point in selecting the place or awaiting good conditions. Do not think that today is the beginning. I have, therefore, gathered this record and left it for the superior seeker of Buddhism and for serious trainees who wander here and there in search for the way.

Time-Mid-autumn, 1231

Dogen, Transmitter of the Law

**From: Kazuaki Tanahashi**  
**King of Samadhis**

To transcend the world directly, to manifest the magnificence of the buddha ancestors' house—this is sitting in the meditation posture. To leap over the heads of outsiders and demons, and become a true person inside the buddha ancestors' room—this is sitting in the meditation posture. To sit in the meditation posture is to transcend the deepest and most intimate teaching of buddha ancestors. Thus, buddha ancestors practice this way without needing to do anything else.

Know that the world of sitting practice is far different from other worlds. Clarify this for yourself, then activate the aspiration, practice, enlightenment, and nirvana of the buddha ancestors. Study the world at the very moment of sitting. Is it vertical or horizontal? At the very moment of sitting, what is sitting? Is it an acrobat's graceful somersault or the rapid darting of a fish? Is it thinking or not thinking? Is it doing or not doing? Is it sitting within sitting? Is it sitting within body-mind? Is it sitting letting go of sitting within sitting, or letting go of sitting within body-mind? Investigate this in every possible way. Sit in the body's meditation posture. Sit in the mind's meditation posture. Sit in the meditation posture of letting go of body-mind.

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Rujing, my late master, Old Buddha, said, "Practicing Zen is letting go of body and mind. It can only be done by wholehearted sitting; incense offering, bowing, chanting Buddha's name, repentance, and sutra reading are not pivotal."

Rujing is the only one in four or five hundred years who has plucked out the eye of the buddha ancestors, and sat down inside that eye. There are few in China who can stand shoulder to shoulder with him. Perhaps there are some who have understood that sitting is buddha dharma and buddha dharma is sitting. And perhaps there are some who have personally experienced that sitting is buddha dharma. But there is no one else who has personally experienced that sitting is sitting, and so there is no one else who upholds buddha dharma as buddha dharma.

Thus, there is sitting with the mind, which is not the same as sitting with the body. There is sitting with the body, which is not the same as sitting with the mind. There is sitting letting go of body-mind, which is not the same as sitting letting go of body-mind. To experience this is to merge the practice and understanding of the buddha ancestors. Maintain this insight. Investigate this awareness.

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Shakyamuni Buddha said to the assembly, "When you sit in the meditation posture, you realize samadhi in body and mind, and give rise to an awesome virtue that people respect. Like the sun illuminating and refreshing the world, this sitting removes

obscurities from the mind and lightens the body so that exhaustion is set aside. Enlightenment becomes as natural as a dragon curled up at rest. A demon is frightened even by a picture of someone sitting in the meditation posture; how much more so by a living person who realizes the way sitting motionless and at ease.”

As the Buddha said, a demon is startled and frightened by even a picture of someone sitting in the meditation posture and even more frightened by a living person sitting that way. So we know that the merit of such sitting is immeasurable. This ordinary everyday sitting is itself boundless joy.

Shakyamuni Buddha continued speaking to the assembly, “Therefore, you should sit in the meditation posture.”

Then the Tathagata, the World-honored One, taught his disciples how to sit and said to them:

Some outsiders try to practice by standing on tiptoes, others by standing continuously, and still others by adopting the yoga posture of hooking their feet over their shoulders. These people develop unbalanced minds that founder in an ocean of delusion because their postures are unnatural. Why do I teach my disciples to sit up straight in the meditation posture? Because it is easy to regulate the mind when the body is upright. If the body is straight, the mind is not dull. Instead, the mind is forthright, the intention is true, and mindfulness is present. If the mind scatters or the body leans, gather together your body-mind and resume the upright posture. If you want to manifest samadhi and enter it, you should gather together all distracted thought and scattered mind within this posture. Practice in this way and you will manifest and intimately enter the king of samadhis.

Thus, we clearly know that sitting in the meditation posture is itself the king of samadhis. It is itself entering realization. All other samadhis serve the king of samadhis.

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Sitting in the meditation posture is a forthright body, a forthright mind, a forthright body-mind, a forthright buddha ancestor, a forthright practice-realization, a forthright top of the head, and a forthright life stream.

When you sit in the meditation posture, the skin, flesh, bones, and marrow of a human being are immediately vivid in the king of samadhis. The World-honored One always sat in this meditation posture, and all his disciples authentically transmitted it. The World-honored One taught humans and devas how to sit in this meditation posture. It is the mind seal authentically transmitted by the Seven Original Buddhas.

Shakyamuni Buddha sat in this meditation posture under the bodhi tree for fifty small eons, sixty great eons, and innumerable unclassifiable eons. Perhaps he sat for three weeks, or maybe only for a few hours. In any case, the Buddha’s zazen is the turning of the wondrous wheel of dharma; his lifetime guidance is contained within it . Nothing is

lacking. The yellow scrolls and red rolls of the sutras are all here. In this moment of sitting, buddha sees buddha and all beings attain buddhahood.

Soon after Bodhidharma, the First Chinese Ancestor, arrived from India, he sat zazen facing the wall in the meditation posture for nine years at the Shaolin Temple, Shaoshi Peak of Mt. Song. Since then the head and eyeball of his practice have prevailed all over China. Bodhidharma's life stream is just this sitting in the meditation posture. Before he came from India, people in China had not truly known sitting in the meditation posture. But after he arrived they came to know it. Thus, for one lifetime, for myriad lifetimes, from head to toe, without leaving the monastery and without concern for other activities, wholeheartedly sit in the meditation posture day and night—this is the king of samadhis.

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