ZEN A MANUAL FOR WESTERNERS

by Shindai Sekiguchi

At the core of Zen Buddhism is zazen meditation, which for centuries has brought deep spiritual understanding to countless men and women. Surprisingly enough, however, little has been written about it. Possibly textual material on the subject is scarce because of the common, but entirely mistaken, idea that one can only participate in zazen at a temple or monastery. Fortunately, in clearly presenting the basic knowledge by which one can attain fundamental insights, this book dispels that misconception and proves that meaningful zazen is possible anywhere and under almost any conditions.

This book contains hundreds of illustrations and thorough explanations that help the reader in achieving true zazen meditation even when the benefit of further guidance is unavailable.

The author, a Buddhist priest and university professor, whose many works, published in Japanese, have encouraged large numbers of people to follow the zazen way, is the leading authority on the Tendai Shoshikan, the sutra generally considered the basic source of all zazen knowledge.

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Preface

Zen has become a popular topic of conversation in the past few years, but, unlike the weather, you can both talk and do something about Zen. I have written this book for those who wish to do something about it.

Many people feel that, though it has much to offer, Zen is beyond them. Others say that it has little to do with the everyday, nine-to-five, race-with-your-neighbor lives most of us lead. The general image of Zen is that of a complicated, esoteric paradoxical philosophy tied in many minds to difficult *satori* or enlightenment. The general belief is that Zen meditation cannot be accomplished without assuming muscle-twisting, bone-wrenching positions and remaining in them for hours on end. In fact, however, nothing could be farther from the truth; and in this book I hope to refute this kind of thinking.

Another mistaken idea commonly held is that Zen, or zazen, requires quiet surroundings, where one must squat uncomfortably while thinking nothing. But, in truth, Zen is everywhere in everything and everyone. It is our individual lives and all society as well. It is, or should be, the basic energy that animates all things. Naturally, the quiet meditation of zazen is a part of the total, but it is only a part. There are several kinds of active or dynamic Zen, which I will explain in this book. As you may know, there is even a zazen in which one does not sit in one spot but walks about instead, either indoors or

outdoors. I also want to give you some of the basic thoughts and ideas which are to be found in Zen and which I hope you will find help you in your everyday activities.

Finally I want to correct a misconception about the mental mechanics of zazen and the way it helps one attain *satori* or enlightenment. The common idea is that in order to reach this state one must empty the mind of all thoughts and ideas. This is in fact true, but the desired end cannot be achieved by consciously attempting to think about nothing. We are all more or less like children who would not dream of doing some particular thing until told that we must not. Once that thing is forbidden, refraining from doing it becomes nearly impossible. Similarly, if I tell a friend not to think of a red monkey or a yellow hippopotamus, that animal immediately leaps into his mind to prove my point. Zazen is a discipline that helps us enter the realm of no thought. It is the effort that assists in rediscovering one's true self.

July, 1970

SHINDAI SEKIGUCHI

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Introduction

This book is a manual, a handbook; it is, therefore, intended to guide those who know little or perhaps nothing about Zen Buddhism. In addition, it is a manual for Westerners, who cannot be presumed to know the traditional and historical setting of the Buddhist faith. Obviously dealing in depth with a fund of knowledge as vast as that surrounding Buddhism is impossible in a work of this scope, but without some understanding of its origins and teachings, the reader is unlikely to grasp the meaning of Zen and the importance it can have in daily life. Consequently, in this introduction I intend to do the following things: sketch the basic doctrines of Buddhism, relate them to Zen meditation, and then deal in some detail with the mental approach and physical effects of zazen, seated Zen meditation. I shall follow these introductory remarks with instructions for effective zazen and for dynamic meditation, or meditation in action; and I shall conclude the volume with examples of the significance of Zen in everyday life and with a brief treatment of enlightenment (*satori*), the ultimate goal of all Zen discipline.

An Indian religion, or religious philosophy, first expounded by the historic Buddha, Sakyamuni, who lived in the sixth century B.C., Buddhism teaches that all things are one and interdependent and that worldly life is transitory and filled with sorrow and unhappiness. This unhappiness springs from

desire; consequently, it can only be eradicated by the elimination of desire. The way to accomplish this is to follow the Noble Eightfold Path, rules for righteous living, and to lead a life rich in concentration and meditation. The death of the individual does not bring release from sorrow for the soul—although the term soul as used in the West is not entirely applicable, I use it for convenience in explanation—must be reborn into this world until it attains enlightenment; that is, until it intuitively perceives the truth. The soul, as it manifests itself in each rebirth, is conditioned by its actions and conditions in previous existences because of the all-pervasive law of cause and effect (*karma*). When the soul is free of all worldly desire and of attachments to the things of human life, it is free of the law of cause and effect and is thus liberated from the repetitive cycle of birth, life, death, and rebirth. When this state has been achieved, the soul enters joyous Nirvana, the peaceful merging of the one with the all-encompassing One.

This set of basic beliefs was not codified or written down until centuries after the death of Sakyamuni, but as the philosophy spread, it was accompanied by tremendous scholarly research and literary activity until the quantity of its textual material grew enormous, subtle, and highly complicated. Nevertheless, there was a way to Nirvana available even to the unlettered: meditation.

The Upanishads, ancient Indian treatises on the nature of man and the universe, tell of holy men who meditated upon the human condition as they sat for long periods under trees. The Buddha himself meditated long under the famous Bo tree in search of ultimate meaning, but his was intellectual meditation devoted to concrete thoughts. He finally found that such meditation alone did not lead to the goal he sought. One can meditate either on something or on nothing. In the light of the Buddhist striving for complete freedom, the latter approach is more fruitful.

Ch'an, or Zen in its Japanese pronunciation, means meditation. It is said that Bodhidharma, the First Patriarch, introduced Zen from India into China in the sixth century. As I have shown, meditation as such is by no means peculiar to Zen, but the Zen approach to it is distinctive. A fundamentally non-bookish religious practice, Zen teaches the importance of direct contact with the soul and of intuitive non-intellectual enlightenment, which may be either gradual or sudden depending on the capacity of the individual. Throughout its long history in China, Zen underwent many changes and alterations. It developed schools, some of which survived while others desiccated and died. It passed into Japan fairly early and gained great popularity during the Kamakura period (1185–1333), an age of rule by a warrior class who found direct, intellectually uncluttered Zen ideas especially compatible. Its influence on the culture of the entire Far East has been powerful, and today it flourishes most vigorously in Japan, although in recent years it has gained a wide following in Europe and the United States. In spite of the many vicissitudes it has seen, however, Zen remains fundamentally true to the concept of discipline and enlightenment gained through meditation.

Its discipline seems strict to the uninitiated, but as I shall explain later, it is admonitory, not prohibitive. A part of the regimen Zen monks must follow, however, is unlike anything one is apt to encounter outside the Zen realm: the *koan*, or "public case". The koan are paradoxical problems, most of which defy logic. They are intended to jolt the individual out of reliance on logic and thus to clear the path for enlightenment derived solely from intuition. I shall talk in greater detail about the study of the koan in the final section of the book.

I devote much of this text to seated meditation, and indeed zazen is of the greatest value, but the point that I must press most strongly is this: Zen is like the air around us; for it to be

The gate to Enkakuji Temple in Kamakura.

useful we need only take advantage of it. Nevertheless, the beginner must know a number of basic things about the nature of meditation and its effects. These things are the subject of the following paragraphs.

Zen is ultimately a human rediscovery of humanity, but, like all abstract things, it is subject to various interpretations. For example, some of its many followers in Europe and the United States tend to think of Zen as a mystic oriental tranquilizer. Even before the present popularity of Zen, what interest there was in it was confined mainly to the fields of psychology and physiological therapy; and in Japan today Zen is often studied for its effects in healing the spirit and settling the mind. Certainly it is true that Zen can be an effective mental and spiritual treatment. Its use as a therapy for neuroses is well known, and tuberculosis sanatoriums sometimes apply its methods with amazingly good results. But these two aspects of Zen do not exhaust its benefits.

In order to plumb the deep meanings of Zen, we follow a number of disciplines; but these are only means to an end. For instance, as the Japanese saying has it, "If you sit in the zazen position for one second, you become a Buddha." This simply means that zazen is a way to enter a higher state. It does not mean that seated meditation is the only way, and it certainly does not imply that the sitting must be done in a temple or, for that matter, even in a chair. To meditate effectively one may sit or stand anywhere and at any time. One may even carry out meaningful Zen meditation while walking, transacting business, or eating.

As I have said, since it is abstract, Zen is liable to misinterpretation. It cannot be picked up, looked at, or explained in words; therefore, anyone is free to call Zen whatever he likes. The resulting confusion is not hard to understand when one considers how different even concrete objects appear to different observers. In order to avoid misinterpretations, a

certain Zen priest named Tendai once divided Zen into ten sections and each of these sections into ten parts. His divisions correspond to the spiritual states and changes and to some problems encountered during the practice of zazen. Unfortunately, however, although his system safely skirts many dangers of wrong interpretation, it can itself become an absorbing, thus distracting, roadblock in the path to true Zen if one fails to remember that it is no more than a tool.

The reader must not misunderstand me, however. Although zazen is a tool, it is so important that even an attempt to do it correctly is extremely beneficial because it helps one to see oneself more clearly. Zen temples and monasteries set aside several weeks each year for intensive week-long seated meditation sessions called *sesshin,* or profound penetrations of the heart. The human heart is one: all thoughts, both good and bad, spring from one source. Furthermore, these thoughts flow constantly in an uninterrupted stream and consequently, the torrent of ideas often overwhelms the individual and makes it impossible for him to examine their source. The week of *sesshin,* however, provides the rare opportunity to look at oneself clearly; in fact, those weeks are usually so structured that there is nothing else to do. After a few days of meditation, the outer layers of confused thinking drop away leaving only the core. Then one sees that neither work nor other people, but something very different and infinitely more important controls human life. Zazen, then, can be of enormous help in progressing toward self-understanding, but the path may not be always smooth and it may not lead constantly upward: there may be plateaus.

The Zen term *choda* (literally a fall up) refers to the often experienced spiritual condition in which one seems to make no progress beyond a certain point. It is as if one had reached a pinnacle from which there is no path but the downward one. In Zen this is not the case: one reaches plateaus and may spend some time on them; however, in the end, there is no way to go

but up.

In other words, instead of becoming totally absorbed in the difficult question of entering the mental realm of no thoughts and no ideas, one must relate the problem to the body as well as to the spirit. Before one can grasp the meaning of zazen, or of Zen itself, one must know with his body what it means to be without thoughts and ideas. The correct way to do this is first to concentrate on the physical aspects of discipline. The many people who regard the realm of no ideas and no thoughts as purely spiritual and ignore its physical facets might easily achieve their incomplete end by getting drunk or falling into a deep dreamless sleep. In both conditions, the mind is wiped clean of thoughts and ideas, but the state of the body robs both kinds of trance of all meaning.

Perhaps I can make my meaning clearer if I resort to some homely examples. One rarely thinks about the teeth until a toothache starts. Then the ailing organ and often its sound neighbors become an obsession. How often does a person give conscious thought to the act of walking unless a crippling leg injury makes it painful? I can carry this same line of analogy into the world of mental reactions. There are those who complain, "I have done my best to be kind to them, and they never think of me," or "Here I sacrifice myself for his sake, and he does not care." The truth is that, if the complainer had truly done his best or had sacrificed himself in the highest sense of the word, he would never entertain thoughts of this ignoble kind. Similarly, when one is totally engrossed in a piece of work, one is so much a part of the job that there is no time to give thought to the act of work.

In a closely analogous way this fact of human nature is tied to the Zen conception of enlightenment, or *satori.* The best way to taste true Zen and thus to attain *satori* is to put the body into a state of perfect balance and equilibrium so that its ordered running removes its very existence from the mind just

The gate to Eiheiji Temple, the head temple of the Soto Zen sec

as the teeth remain unnoticed when they are healthy and a friend with a truly sacrificing nature never notices his sacrifices. To achieve this balanced state, we follow a definite physical regimen: first develop correct posture, next regulate the breathing, and finally compose the mind.

These three simple steps, not limited to Zen application alone, can assist in work or any other activity. There is a best position or posture for any job. After it has been assumed and breathing has been regulated, one can devote full energy to the task at hand and thus achieve excellent results.

In zazen sessions it is important to free the mind of thought and ideas. This is, of course, not an easy thing to do, for, no matter how perfect the body posture, breathing, and hand position, unless something is done to curb its actions, the mind may run completely out of control. The method commonly used, in fact a system for encouraging spiritual unity, is useful only to an extent; but the beginner invariably finds it helpful. This method is counting breaths. The procedure is simple: considering exhalation and inhalation separetely or the two together as one full breath, count breaths from one to ten. That is all there is to it, but you will find that it takes some time to be able to accomplish a complete series (to ten) successfully. It took me two or three years to master it for a reason that the following satiric poem illustrates:

During zazen
I recall
the money I borrowed last year.

This kind of thing often happens. In the quiet hall where nothing distracts the attention, one finds that thoughts and memories of all descriptions crowd the mind. Things pleasant and unpleasant, things impossible to reveal to others in spoken word or print, ideas colored with embarrassment or even shame, roll in and out of the brain.

The torrent can be checked, however, if one does not struggle

A view of the grounds of Eiheiji Temple.

too fiercely against it. Perhaps my own experience in dealing with thoughts in a passive way will be of assistance to an understanding of how this process works.

Once, during zazen training, I decided to allow my mind to wander where it would. I made no attempt to guide or control my thoughts because I felt that my brain would eventually tire of endless jumping from thought to thought and would soon become calm. But the very opposite occurred. After two or three days of twelve or thirteen-hour zazen sessions, my mind showed no sign of settling down. On the contrary, each thought brought with it other more attractive ones. I began to be amazed at the depth of my memory as I entertained ideas of which I had never even dreamed before. After four or five days, I made some interesting discoveries. First of all, I noticed that certain thoughts recurred many times and that my mind slowly became occupied with only these repeating ideas. All others seemed to fall away. The obsessing ideas appeared in no fixed order, but gradually they decreased in number, until for a brief moment they stopped completely: for an instant I entered the state of no ideas and no thoughts. These periods never lasted long, however, and the jumble of images and thoughts invariably returned to clog my mind.

The second fascinating phenomenon that I experienced during these sessions involved a sense of increasing size. I imagined that I grew as large as Mount Fuji. Clouds seemed to encircle my waist, and my upper body seemed to rise above them as a giant peak. From my lofty vantage point, the hodgpodge of confused ideas that had distracted my mind earlier seemed far beneath the clouds. Perhaps they were rumbling about in the lower regions of the mountain that was my body, but they were unrelated to the true me.

Of course to recount my personal experiences is all very well, but the novice wants to know how to reach the state of serene mindlessness. The path is superficially simple, though reaching

the destination takes time. Let me explain it in essence.

Zazen is fundamentally the establishing of a harmony among the body, the breath, and the mind; therefore, correct posture, controlled breathing, and an ordinary frame of mind are the three components that, when blended, become the entity that is zazen. Though the traditional zazen posture is the full lotus—or something close to it—zazen can be part of all activities. The key to successfully applying it to the maximum is always selecting the correct posture for the activity of the moment. When one begins a job or other pursuit, one must first consider the optimum body position and breathing method, establishing a state of mind is the final consideration.

From this it follows that zazen can be effective only after one has assumed the correct posture and controlled one's breath. In short, the most frequent reason for failure to free the mind from all thoughts is failure to train the body. As I have said, determined attempts to empty the mind of distracting ideas often produce an undesirable effect. This does not occur, however, if the body is first freed of all unnecessary things. For example, when one is constipated—clogged with unneeded material—it is impossible to practice zazen worthy of the name. Moreover, any activity attempted during seizures of constipation is certain to suffer. One of the importances of deep breathing derives from this consideration, because exhalation dissolves pains, discomforts, and distractions. This is why all zazen sessions must begin with several deep, quiet breaths.

Zazen and its Benefits

A number of studies of the effects of zazen have been made in the past few years; but since as far as I know, none of them has been translated into English, I should like to mention two of

People from all walks of life participate in zazen here at Zenkoji Temple in Tokyo.

these works. The first is a psychological study by Dr. Koji Sato. In summarizing the findings of his study, he states the following:

1. As a result of zazen various physical illness can be cured.
2. Various neuroses are resolved.
3. Patience is increased.
4. Will is strengthened.
5. Efficiency improves.
6. Thought ability improves.
7. Fuller personality integration is achieved.
8. Enlightenment (*satori* or spiritual insights) can be reached.
9. A sense of stability is gained.
10. Spiritual possibilities increase.

In the second work Dr. Usaburo Hasegawa examines the

physical results of zazen practice and states that the following disorders can be cured:

1. Neuroses
2. Hyperacidity of the intestinal tract and stomach
3. Flatulence
4. Tuberculosis
5. Insomnia
6. Indigestion
7. Chronic gastroenteric catarrh
8. Atonic stomach and intestines
9. Chronic constipation
10. Diarrhea
11. Gall stones
12. High blood pressure

Both of these researchers are highly qualified men whose findings deserve further development.

As is well known, the human body contains cerebral nerves and spinal nerves. The two kinds are divided between the cerebral nervous system and the autonomous nervous system. It is the function of the cerebral nerves to carry out the commands of the brain concerning motion and intelligence functions. This system controls our relationships and interactions with the external world. On the other hand, the autonomous nervous system requires no stimulation from the brain to regulate body temperature, blood circulation, breathing, digestion, disposal of wastes, and reproduction. The autonomous nervous system is sub-divided into the smaller sympathetic and the para-sympathetic nervous systems. These two often function in opposition to each other, as they do in the heart: the sympathetic nerves strengthen heartbeats, whereas para-sympathetic nerves weaken them. In other words, the systems balance each other much as two reins guide a horse. Naturally, imbalance can result in a number of disorders or in general poor health.

Zazen

This motionless zen is the kind that most people associate with Zen Buddhism and because of the centuries of tradition behind it a large number of rules have been formed. Some of them appear in the following section. Of course, you can follow these suggestions as much or as little as you wish but many people in the past have found them useful. Make whatever adaptations seen necessary but in the beginning it is imperative to gain a solid foundation.

Precautions before Zazen

Food

a. Proper zazen is difficult if your stomach is either too full or too empty.

b. Zazen is difficult if you have a stomachache, diarrhea, or other ailment.

c. Avoid strong foods.

d. Do not attempt zazen directly after eating.

e. Relieve yourself before starting zazen.

Sleep

a. Just as with food, too much or too little sleep hinders you.

b. Dozing is forbidden during zazen.

Clothing

a. Loosen all clothing, especially that around the waist.

b. Clothing must be neat.

c. You must be barefoot while meditating, even in winter.

Movement

a. Move about moderately before zazen and during the rest periods. Rapid or violent action makes it difficult to control breathing and heart beat.

b. While in the meditation hall, walk with hands pressed together and against your chest.

Preliminary Exercises

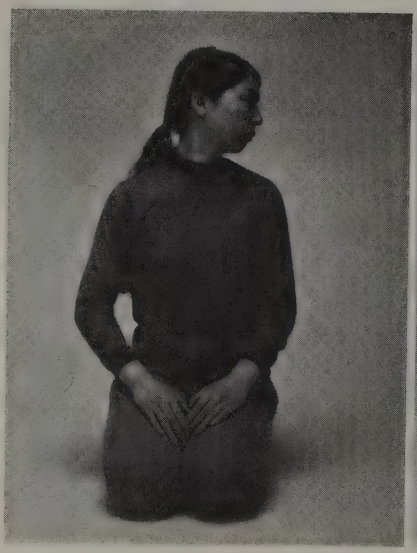
It is recommended that you do the following exercises before starting each zazen secession. First assume the position you use during meditation.

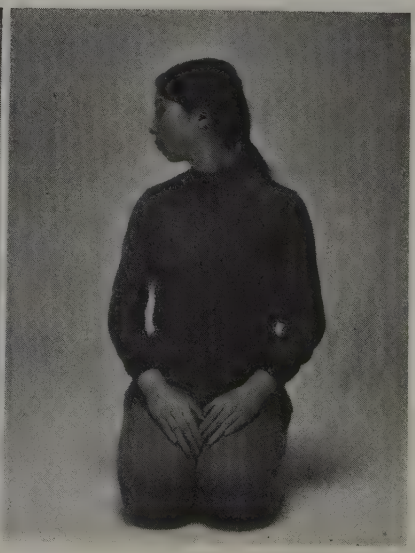
1. **Turning the head from side to side.**

a. Turn your head to the left as far as possible.

b. Next turn it to the right as far as possible.

c. Repeat the exercises three times in each direction.





2. **Tilting the head from side to side.**

a. First tilt your head to the left side slowly until you feel the neck muscles and tendons stretch.

b. Repeat the exercise to the right.

c. Execute this exercise three times in each direction.

3. **Tilting the torso from side to side.**

a. Leaving your hands in your lap, tilt your torso to the left. If you are sitting on your heels (*seiza*), keep your feet and legs in contract with the mat or floor. Tilt your torso until you

feel the muscles in your waist and neck stretch.
b. Tilt your torso to the right.
c. Repeat this exercise three times in each direction.

4. Bending the torso toward your toes.

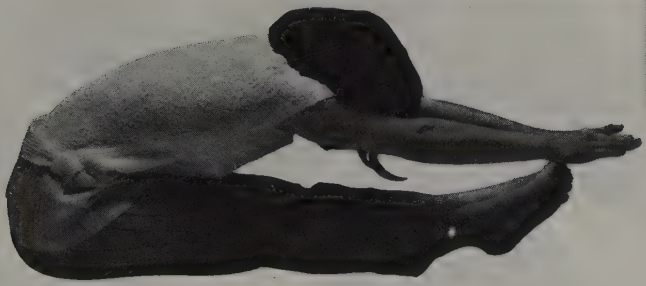
a. Sit on the mat or floor with your feet outstretched straight forward and with knees straight.

b. Extend your arms and tap your toes with your fingertips. Repeat two or three times.

c. Next tap your toes with your palms. Repeat two or three times.

d. Bend your torso until your wrists tough your toes.

e. Now bend your torso until your forehead touches your kneecaps. Keep your knees from bending by pressing them with your hands.



f. As you execute exercises 4 a, b, c, d, and e, gradually open your legs—first to thirty degrees, then sixty, ninety, and finally to about one hundred.

5. **Bending backward.**

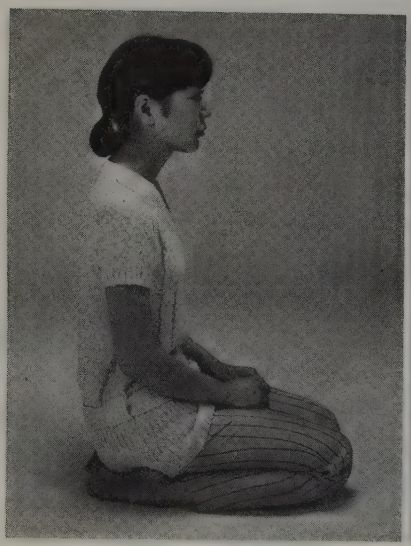
a. Arching your back, throw your shoulders to the rear as you might in a giant yawn.

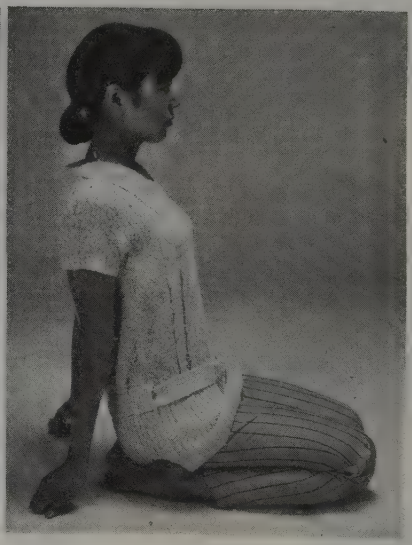
b. Throw your arms and shoulders back as far as you can.

c. Project your chest and stomach as far forwards as possible.

d. Holding this position, open your mouth and exhale all unnecessary things.

e. Repeat this exercise two or three times.





6. **Lying supine with your legs folded back.**

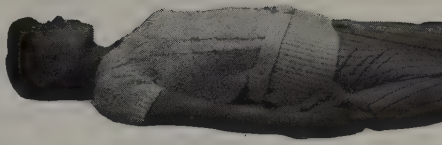
a. This exercises requires practice. With your legs folded, ease your torso back until you are lying flat.

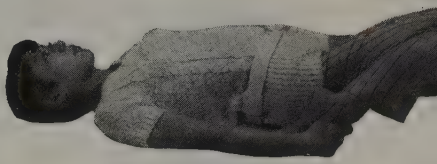
b. Try to keep your knees on the mat or floor.

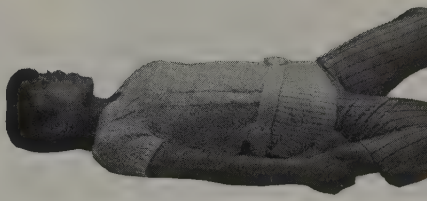
7. **Tapping the floor with the knees**

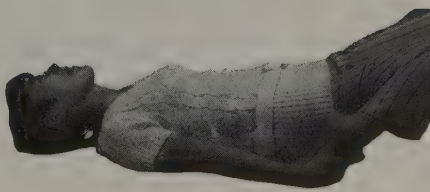
a. In the preceding position, alternately raise each knee, one at a time, and tap the floor two or three times with it. Now tap the floor two or three times with both knees.

b. Use your arms to raise yourself.









The effect of the exercises

The purpose of these exercises is to bring about awareness of the vital areas of the body. If you faithfully exercise as suggested before each zazen session, you develop a naturally proper posture. In addition, the abdominal organs grow strong, constipation usually vanishes in three or four days, neck and shoulder stiffness gradually disappears, insomnia and nervousness become less troublesome, muscle tone develops, and the lines of the legs improve.

If you have doubts, try the exercises for a week or ten days after bathing. The longer you continue daily practice, the more striking the benefits will be.

Traditional Zazen Postures

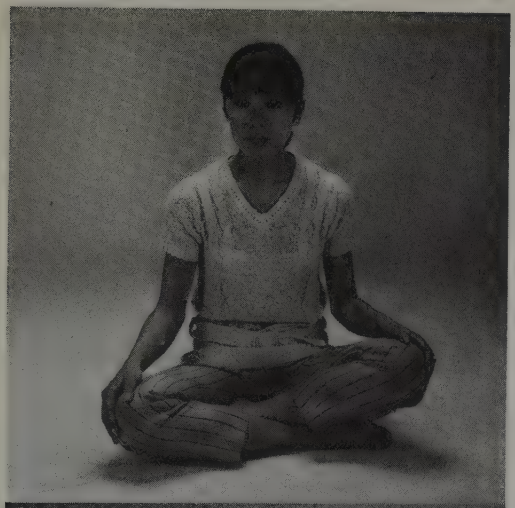
Full lotus posture (Kekkafuza)

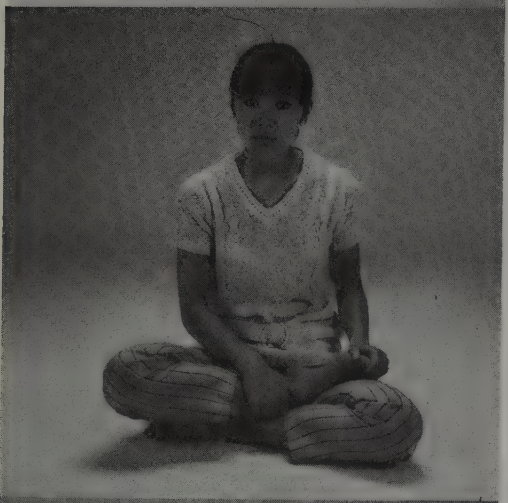
a. Right foot on left thigh (*gomaza*).

1. First sit Indian style with your feet pulled toward your groin.
2. Pick up your right foot and place it on your left thigh.
3. Next pick up your left foot and place it on your right thigh. Keep your knees on the mat. This position requires practice.

b. Left foot on right thigh (*kichijoza*).

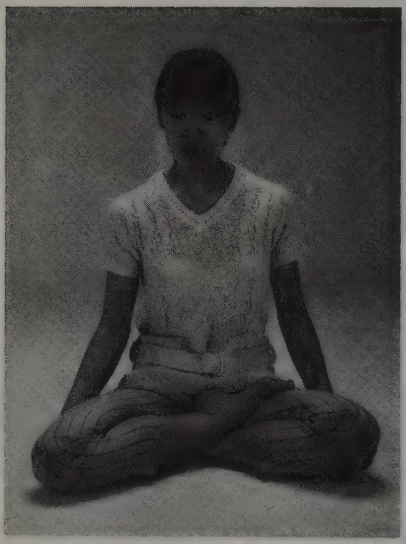
1. This is the reverse of the preceding position.
2. Place your left foot on your right thigh.
3. Now put your right foot on your left thigh. Keep both knees on the mat.





Half lotus posture (hankaza)

1. In this position only one foot is on the thigh. You may have to practice in this position for a time before attempting the full lotus posture. Either foot will do since they can be reversed as necessary.



Cushions

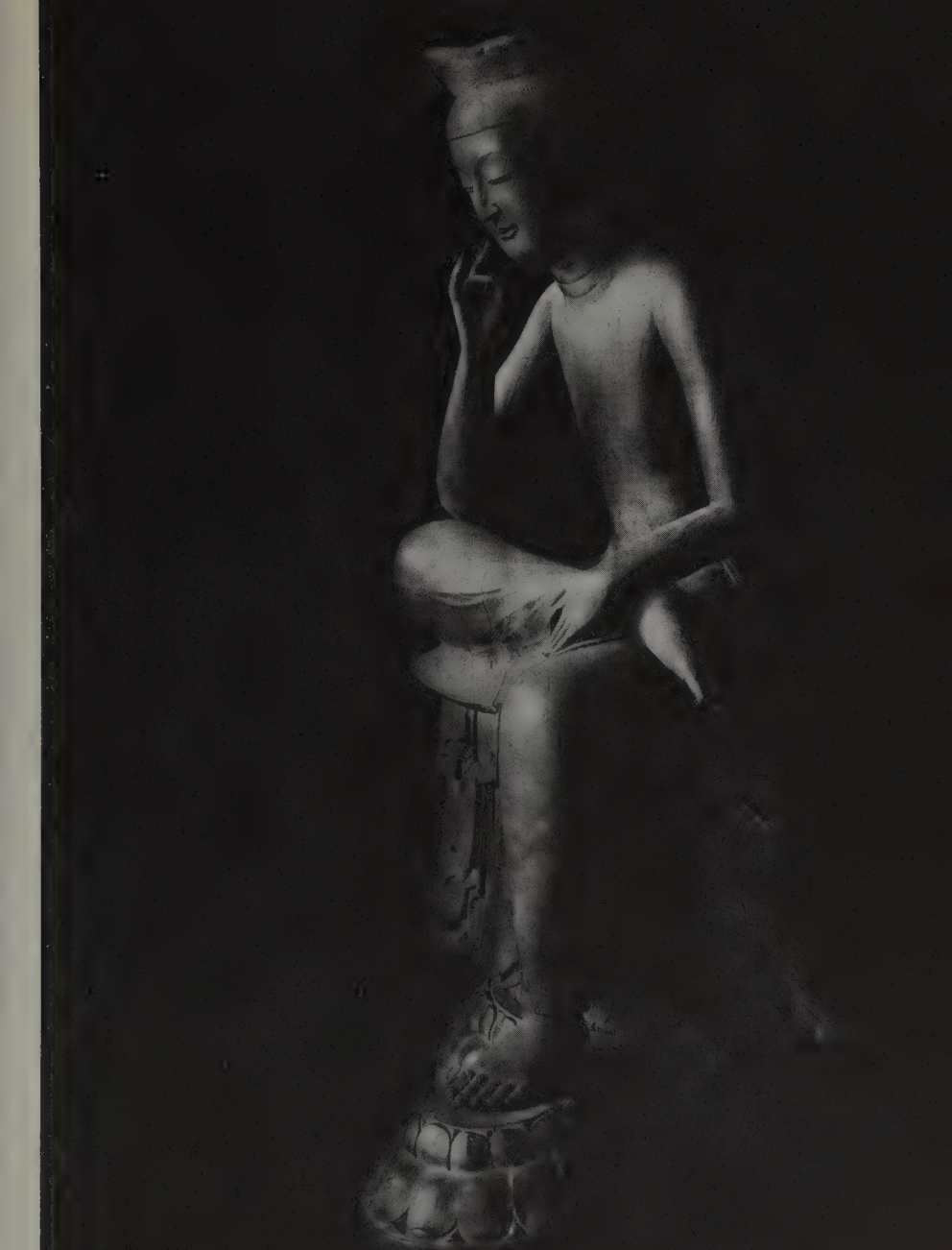
In both the full and half lotus positions the knees must remain on the bottom cushion. If one knee is raised, spiritual and physical stability are impossible. The following procedures are useful in keeping the knees in place.

a. Bring the foot (or feet) on top of the thigh (or thighs) and as close to the stomach as you can.

b. If the soles face up, the knees will stay down.

c. A cushion under the buttocks helps keep the knees down.

d. While keeping your knees down, stretch your spine upward and straight as though you were trying to push your head

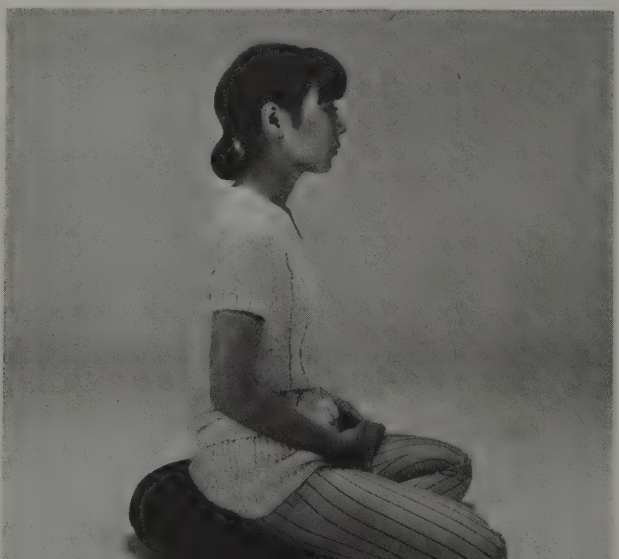


A statue of Miroku-Bosatsu (Maitreya-Bodhisattva). Miroku is to succeed Sakyamuni Buddha at some future time. This famous statue in the Koryuji temple in Kyoto shows the sitting half lotus position.

through the ceiling. Nose and navel must lie on a line perpendicular to the floor. Although a proverb says that if the cushions are for zazen, using many is not extravagant, two should be enough: one spread under the legs and another folded (or a small round pillow) under the buttocks.

Until you have become accustomed to the posture, your legs may ache; however, in attempting to assume a more comfortable posture you must not lose the energy concentrated in your stomach. Practice the half lotus posture until it is comfortable; then attempt the full lotus. During long sessions you may alternate legs. There is no need to keep one hand over the other; this is simply the custom in China and Japan. Similarly, feel free to change position if the first one becomes uncomfortable. Zazen does not require bodily contortions; instead it encourages one to assume stable, comfortable postures conducive to meditation and easy to maintain for long periods.

Accepted positions vary with Buddhist sects; the important point is that the position agree with the individual. Experiment to find the arrangement which suits you. At first many people find that their legs are uncomfortable in the traditional postures, but the discomfort passes with time. You may shift your position during zazen in order to ease cramps.

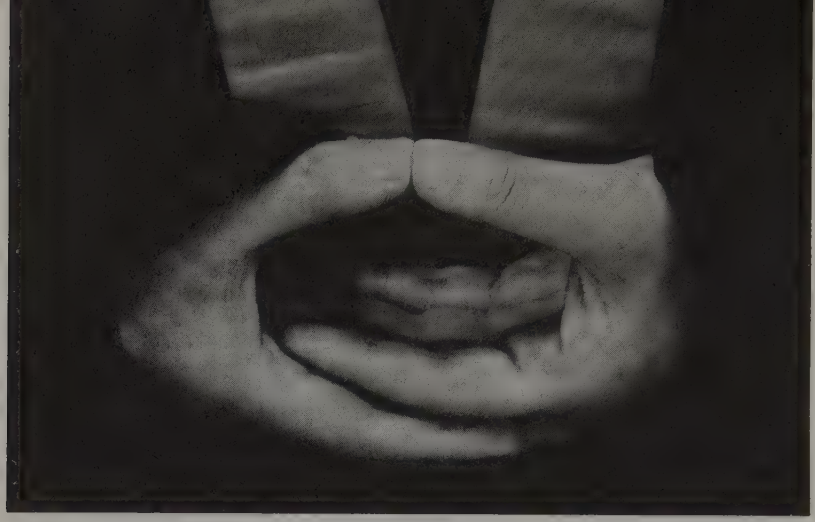


Hand positions

The zazen position of the hands, called *join*, is a symbolization of unification of spirit and peace of mind. Buddhist statues showing this hand position represent meditation. This position, palms up, one hand on the other, thumb tips barely touching, is generally accepted as most conducive to effective meditation.

On several occasions when I have been doing zazen I have suddenly been struck by the *keisaku* for no apparent reason. I admit my thoughts were wandering, but my body posture was flawless, and I maintained a most serious facial expression. I was puzzled to know how the priest could detect my wandering thoughts. Gradually I gained experience and, on occasion, carried the *keisaku* myself. It was then that I found that a good way to perceive a person's thoughts during zazen is to examine his hand position. It takes time to develop enough ability in meditation to maintain perfect hand positions constantly.

Hand position (*Hokkaijoin*): 1. Place your hands in your lap, palms up, right hand over left. 2. Extend both thumbs so that they touch lightly. 3. Holding this position, draw your arms back and your hands toward your stomach. 4. If you are in a *gomaza* posture (p. 32), keep your left hand on top of the right. 5. If you are in a *kichijoza* posture (p. 32), keep the right hand on top.



Meaning of the hand position

In Japan, the left hand is kept over the right; however, this is not true in India except in very limited cases. The Indian custom is to look upon the right hand as the one used in eating and the left as the one used in cleansing after relieving oneself. The separation of left and right is carried over into many other areas. Therefore, bringing the left and right hand together is considered tantamount to uniting filth and cleanliness. It follows, then, that to offer someone something with the left hand is an insult. Historical records show that when Buddhapâla came from India to China in 7th century and saw the Chinese monks in zazen with the left hand over the right, he was extremely shocked and tried to stop the practice. But in both Japan

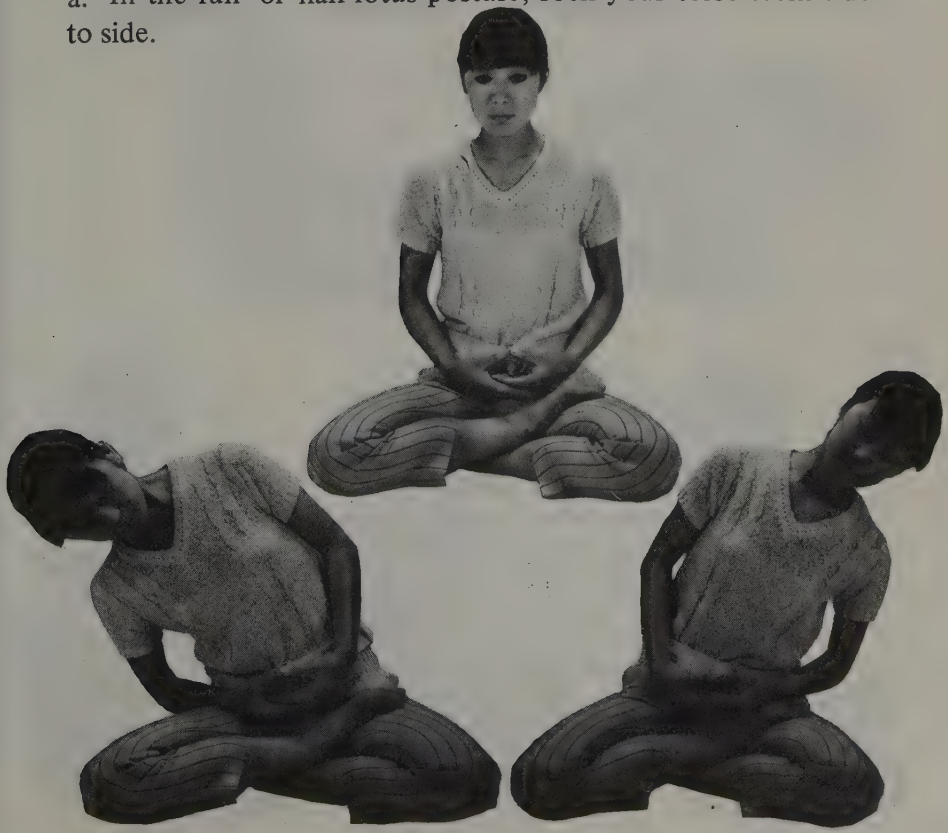
Incorrect hand positions.

and China this is the standard position. The custom developed in the sixth century in China. The left hand is equated with the Yin, or calm, force and the right with the dynamic Yang. During *zazen*, quiet replaces activity; consequently, the left is placed over the right.

Settling the Center of Gravity

Side-to-side

a. In the full- or half-lotus posture, rock your torso from side to side.



b. Start with wide rocking motions and gradually decrease and decelerate them. Imagine yourself to be a metronome, or the pendulum of a clock, which is gradually slowing down.

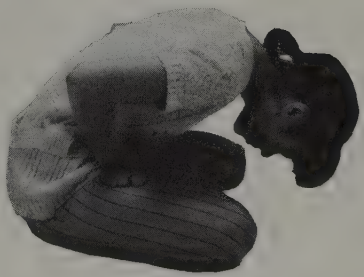
c. Finally, just as a pendulum naturally stops in the exact center of its arc of swing, you too must stop at the center of your side-to-side movement.

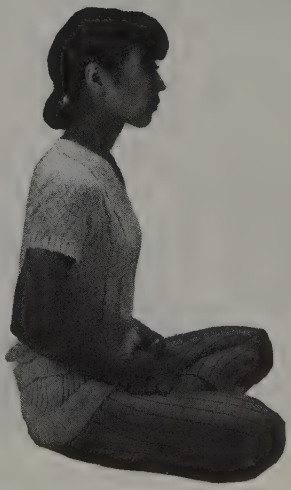
d. You must be in such a position that, seen from the front, your nose and navel are on a line perpendicular to the floor.

Front-to-back

a. Next, move your torso forward and backward. Continue as described above until you stop in the exact position where, seen from the side, your nose and navel are on a line perpendicular to the floor.

b. When you are in the proper position, begin zazen breathing.





The zendo or meditation hall differs slightly according to the sect. The hall here is a part of Eiheiji Temple.

Zazen breathing method (*tokiho*)

a. First, round your lips slightly, open your mouth and exhale all of those things which should be exhaled. As you do so, your torso falls slowly forward as far as possible.

b. Hold your torso forward at the point where you naturally stop exhaling.

c. Now put your lips lightly together and inhale the sweet air softly through your nose. Raise your torso to an erect position.

d. Bring your torso straight up until you feel that the top of your head will thrust through the ceiling.

e. Now exhale through your mouth again letting your torso fall forward as described above. However, this time keep your stomach stretched straight as it was when you felt you could thrust your head through the ceiling. In other words, do not lean as far forward as you did the first time.

f. Now close your mouth lightly again and inhale softly through your nose while bringing your torso erect. Feel as though you were putting the top of your head through the ceiling again. At this point your shoulders must be relaxed. Figuratively cast all shoulder tenseness away diagonally to the rear.

g. As you continue this exercise, gradually decrease the degree of leaning to the front and slow the motion.

h. At last, when you feel your head can penetrate the ceiling, stop at that exact point.

i. Seen from front or side your nose and navel will be on a straight line perpendicular to the floor.

Lips and teeth

Once the center of gravity has been settled and the breathing method established, close your mouth and breath through your nose only. The lips must be lightly and naturally pressed together; the upper and lower teeth must touch gently. The tongue must lightly touch the palate. Be careful that the lips, teeth, and tongue are in natural relaxed positions. Keep your tongue against the palate.

Zazen at the Chicago Zen Center.

Eyes

a. Your eyes must be half closed. If they are completely closed, you become sleepy; and if they are completely open, distracting sights enter your field of vision.

b. Your line of sight should be directed toward the floor at some point between three and nine feet in front of you. However, it must fall naturally in this range without your making any efforts to pick out a spot to stare at.

Posture and Breathing

Interestingly enough most of the many books on zazen written during the past one thousand years share the following points. First, they all teach that body posture must be such that the nose and the navel lie on a line perpendicular to the ground. Second, they are unanimous in holding that the body must be completely relaxed and that breathing must be so quiet that it is barely perceptible. One of the basic aims of zazen is to free oneself of mind and body, although to the novitiate the conception may seem strange. To accomplish this the mind must be calmly settled and the breathing quiet and completely controlled. Furthermore, because the relation between the two is one of mutual assistance, before breathing can become steady, the mind must be at peace. Conversely, before the mind can find repose, the breathing must be calm and almost unnoticeable.

Zazen encourages gradual strengthening of a spot just below the navel. English has no word for this spot, but in Japanese it is known as the *tanden*.

In addition to tranquility of mind and breathing, zazen requires certain things of bodily posture. The minor leanings and stoopings to which each person is prone, can only be seen by an onlooker. Consequently it is a good idea for zazen beginners to have someone examine posture and indicate where correction is necessary. In order to align nose and navel on a line perpendicular to the ground, imagine that there is a weighted string attached to the tip of the nose. If you sit so that the imaginary weight touches the navel, your spine and neck will stretch properly, and your shoulders will relax naturally. Still another aid in assuming good zazen posture is side-to-side and front-to-back rockings of the torso. Begin by allowing the upper body to sway naturally right and left in arcs of decreasing amplitude until it comes to a halt of its own. Next repeat the

same process from front to back. When your torso stops, you must feel like a clock, the now motionless pendulum of which hangs straight down. As your torso moves forward, exhale through the mouth, inhale through the nose as it moves backward. Exhalation must be slow and complete and must rise from the abdomen. Stretch the spine and raise the torso during inhalation. Although the chin must be tucked in, it is not necessary to concern yourself with this. If you concentrate on trying to touch the ceiling with the back of your head, your chin will naturally be in correct position.

In concluding this section, I remind the reader that these preparatory movements are designed to assist the beginner in assuming a pose conducive to effective meditation. Experienced people naturally assume such a pose without preparation. Sometimes, however, one may find that while attempting to correct posture, the shoulders tense. If this happens, in all likelihood, the nose and the navel are out of line. This must be corrected immediately. Finally, the zazen posture, whether seated or standing, can be applied to all kinds of activities. Since the nose is one of the most important organs in respiration and because the navel marks the spot of the chord that once bound the fetus to the womb, there is deep spiritual and physical significance in aligning them. Whenever I must make a momentous decision I always begin by assuming a position in in which they are on a straight line perpendicular to the floor, and I find that it helps calm my spirit and body.

Accumulation of saliva during zazen is a problem for some people because one must either hold a mouth full of it or swallow and make a noise that, though slight, is often extremely annoying to others. Fortunately old texts have solved the problem. They teach that by keeping the teeth and lips only lightly together and by pressing the tip of the tongue against the roof of the mouth, it is possible to avoid saliva accumulation. Remember, however, that since the entire body must be relaxed,

the lips and teeth are held together lightly.

Ancient texts are divided on the question of whether one must close one's eyes or hold them slightly open. In fact, however, the works that advocate closing them do so with true beginners in mind and say that the eyes should be *almost* closed; that is, distracting light and images must be shut out. Although I generally suggest that the eyes be about half closed, the amount of opening must be adjusted to suit the time of day. For example, almost closing them in bright daylight settles the spirit. Only considerably advanced Zen followers are able to meditate effectively with eyes wide open, but if one can do so, it helps ward off the sleepiness that naturally accompanies zazen. Even if one is not sleepy, however, the eyes must never be completely closed, because the eyelids act as screens on which flash images and pictures more distracting to the spirit than tangible objects.

Line of sight

Choose a point about seven feet (two meters) in front of you and allow your gaze to fall there; do not stare at any particular object because to do so, especially during long sessions of from two to three days, creates strange sensations in the mind and nullifies the effect of meditation.

Breathing

The four stages. Once your zazen posture is stabilized, exhale from your mouth. Form your lips lightly in to a narrow oval, and exhale quietly and completely as though the breath were a long string. Then close your mouth gently, quietly, and slowly and inhale through the nose. Repeat three times. The reason for this breathing order is that you must first rid your lungs and body of used and no longer useful things. Therefore you must exhale vigorously. Only then can you inhale sweet oxygen-filled air supplied us by the grasses and trees. Inhaling, too,

must be vigorous so that clean air penetrates to the tips of the fingers and toes and thus cleanses the whole body. This breathing method acts beneficially on heart and spirit.

The reverse of other deep-breathing methods, zazen breathing begins with exhalation, because profound spiritual benefits result from this order. Ancient Taoist as well as Buddhist texts support this approach. Four stages of breathing development, recognized for centuries, reveal the degree to which the zazen follower has calmed his spirit. The last of the four is considered optimum and should be the aim of everyone undertaking Zen discipline.

1. *Fu* In this stage sound—though perhaps faint—still accompanies exhalation and inhalation. Any sound at all is a sign that the spirit is unsettled.
2. *Sen* Breathing sounds have ceased, but pauses remain; in other words, unevenness persists.
3. *Ki* Both sounds and pauses have stopped, but the person is still aware of the act of breathing.
4. *Soku* No sound, or pause remains; neither the person himself nor an onlooker can tell that breathing is taking place.

Breath control methods

The difficulty with this series of stages is this: if one must constantly thinks about pauses and sounds, how can one ever progress beyond stage 3 to overcome awareness of breathing? Although this problem has plagued Zen scholars for centuries, the following methods, selected by me from the many that have been devised, are helpful.

a. Concentrate on the abdomen: Contrary to those who hold that the tip of the nose is a good object for contemplation during zazen, I feel that it is best to devote all one's attention to the navel, or to be more specific to the spot *(tanden)* about three inches below the navel. Some people say that, as an aid to concentration on this spot, it is a good idea to uncover the navel

from time to time and stare at it.

b. Relax the entire body, including the spot below the navel.

c. Breathe with the skin by imagining that air flows freely through the 84,000 pores the ancients believed the human body to have. Modern science, of course, has shown that there are many more than this number of pores in the human skin, but the important thing for zazen purposes is to feel—not to think—that inhaled air can flow freely outward through the whole body as fresh air flows in. When this conception has been established, the skin ceases to be a boundary between the body and the outside world, and respiration, in the standard physical sense, becomes unnecessary. Thus the individual is no longer conscious of breathing; he breathes in the true zazen way.

Unifying the Spirit

Counting breaths

When your position is settled and your breathing controlled, your spirit can be unified, by means of counting breaths.

a. Count breaths from one to ten.

When you get to ten, return to one, and repeat the series.

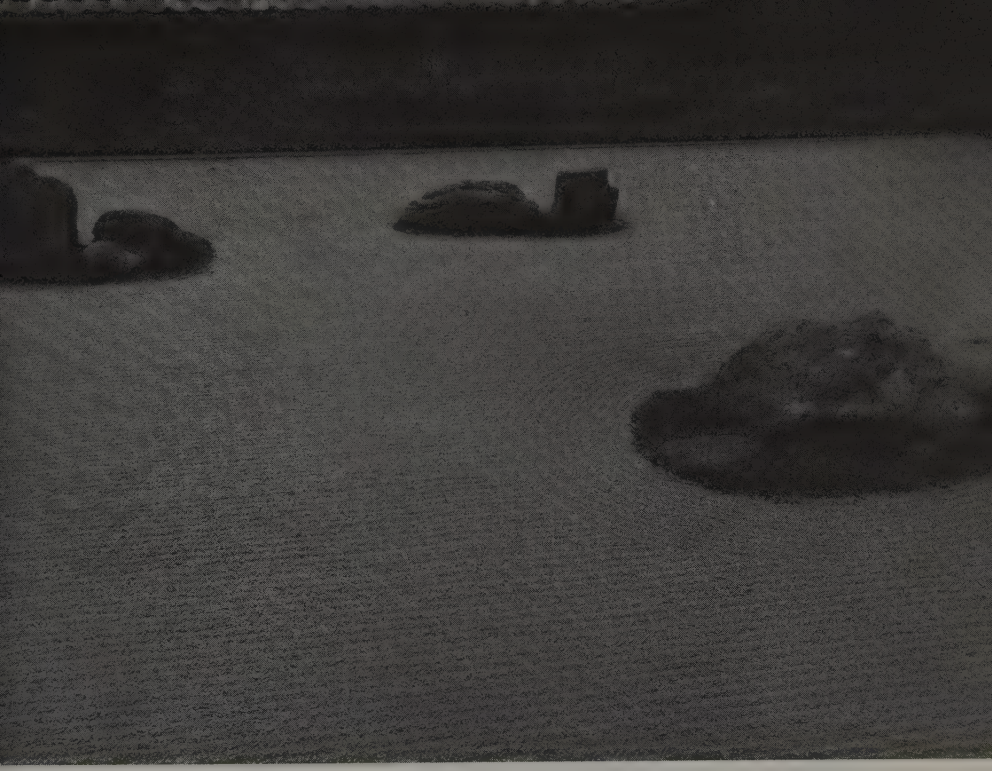
b. Concentrate on counting breaths and ridding the mind of distractions and idle thoughts.

The act of counting is insignificant. If you lose count or have random thoughts, as you probably will at first, return to one immediately and start again. Sometimes, without realizing it, you may count farther than ten, but this must not upset you. If you wonder why it is difficult to count to ten or reproach yourself for having distracting thoughts, achieving unification will become much harder. When you find you have made a mistake in counting, return to one and start again.

c. Count exhalations and inhalations separately or as individual sets. Either method is satisfactory. The important point is to rid the mind of distracting thoughts by counting and thereby to unify your spirit.

Locating the breath for counting purposes

How does the beginner know when to count a breath? He may select the moment air passes the nostrils, or he may choose the rise and fall of the abdomen that accompany each deep breath. For the novitiate the first is easier. It is a good idea to concentrate the spirit on the nose as air moves through it. On the other hand, this approach has a serious drawback. The nose often itches or sets up other physical distractions that interfere with deep meditation. I once solved this difficulty in the following way. In a series of experiments on counting breaths as they passed the nose, I concentrated only on the act of



breathing in order to rid myself of thoughts about or sensations in the nose itself. When I had managed this, I began to count the breath as it reached an imaginary point ten inches away from my nose, then twenty, then thirty inches. By doing this I gradually forgot about the existence of not only my nose, but also my head and entire body.

Although the nose is a good starting point for breath counts, the navel often proves more effective because it more vividly concentrates the spirit in one spot. Count the breath as the

abdomen rises and falls, and imagine that you have sunk into or have indeed become your own navel. Because of its associations with birth, the navel inspires reflections on the prenatal self. It therefore helps concentrate the entire mind and erases silly thoughts and upsetting images. Nevertheless, as you progress in meditation, you may find that even the navel either becomes a distraction or outlives its usefulness from the zazen viewpoint. When this happens, following a procedure similar to the one outlined for counting breaths at the nose, begin to count when the breath is at an imaginary spot twenty or thirty inches from the navel. Gradually increase the distance till you are no longer conscious of the existence of navel or body. For all of the nostalgia attached to it, the navel will remain indifferent to your having forgotten its existence.

Random breaths

With this method one entrusts both body and mind to the breaths. No effort is made to count and no thought given to number. When breath counting does not work well, try this more advanced method.

The ah-hm method

As you exhale, say "ah" softly in your heart. As you inhale, say "hm". This method too is said to be useful in ridding the mind of distracting thoughts and to aid in bringing about concentration. Of cource, no sound is made. Breathing must be silent, smooth, and barely perceptible. Exhaling and inhaling are forgotten—both body and mind are entrusted to the breath, and "ah" and "hm" become everything.

During zazen each exhalation spreads to the farthest corners of heaven, earth, and the cosmos, and each inhalation draws these three vast entities into the body.

Man lives because he breathes, and if his heart is unsettled his breathing too will be disorderly. Conversely, when the heart is

at rest, breathing is calm. In order to accomplish true zazen, breathing methods alone are useless. One's heart, or spirit, must first be unified and settled. The heart and the breath mutually influence each other, and when they are calm, true zazen takes place. A narrow heart narrows breaths, but broad breaths widen the heart. Being conscious of breathing draws attention to the self, and only when consciousness of self disappears does one realize unity with all existence and creation.

After practicing one or all of the three breathing methods given above, it is often helpful to receive direct instruction or guidance from a Zen master. These methods are given largely for the benefit of beginners, but they are also important even for those with great zazen experience.

Ways to calm the spirit

a. Avoid idle and distracting thoughts and concentrate the spirit on one place or thing.

b. Four incorrect conditions sometimes arise during seated meditation; the following sections describe and suggest ways to rectify them.

1. The submerged condition. The mind goes blank, and energy fails. The head tends to droop or tilt as the spirit gradually sinks. In this case, elevate the spirit by concentrating on the tip of the nose. If this does not work, move the point of concentration up to the forehead or, if necessary, to the roots of the hair.

2. The floating condition. The mind flits from one thing to another; even the body refuses to settle down. The spirit seems to be floating about unattached. When this happens, concentrate on the navel in order to bring the floating spirit to rest. If this fails, lower the point of concentration to the *tanden* (the spot three inches below the navel), and should even this prove ineffectual, as you imagine a line connecting nose and navel and continuing to the ground, move the point of concent-

ration down along that line until the spirit is calm.

3. The over-relaxed condition. The body slumps and droops as the head feels light, and the spirit is relaxed to the point of lethargy. To rectify this state, first correct your posture, bring your breathing back under control, and clear your head. There is no need to strive desperately and consciously to rid your mind of idle thoughts. Simply do as suggested, and the condition will right itself.

4. The hypertense condition. Sharp pains may occur in the chest. They indicate that you are trying too hard, your position is too severe, and your heart is straining too much. Relax, and breath quietly and normally. The exhalations will dissolve the pain into nothing.

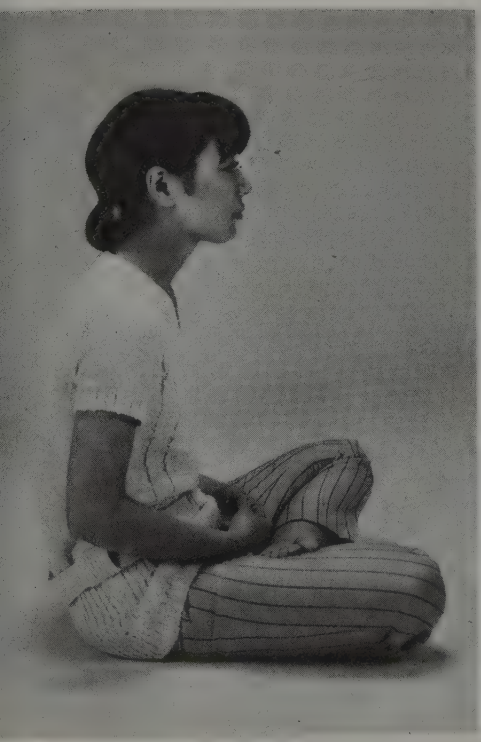
Keisaku

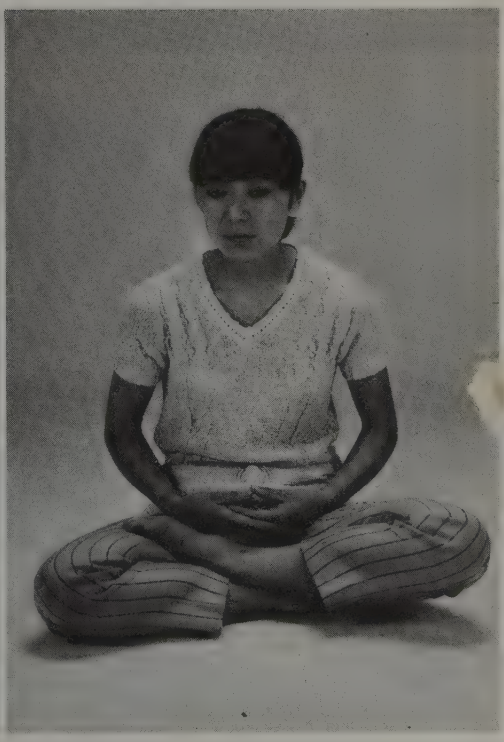
Ancient texts contain many references to the devils that confront us during zazen, and all of them agree that the source of these evils is idle thoughts and speculations. Although some demons attempt to cause us to lose the way or to be fearful, other kindlier spirits bring joy and peace of mind. Old writings say that the demons occasionally appear as distracting pleasant sounds or smells, in the images of familiar persons, or even in various forms of the Buddha. The most troublesome demon during zazen meditation, however, is sleep.

Idle thoughts and distractions can be chased away as soon as one becomes aware of them, but sleep creeps up and takes one completely away. When one has been engaged in zazen for several days, the sleep devil's attacks increase. One defence against this is to take turns in carrying the *keisaku* around the hall. Those who are having trouble with sleep can be assisted by the stick. Carrying the *keisaku*, also a part of *zazen* practice,

must be done properly. Often the sound of the stick striking someone else's shoulder will be your first notification that you were losing the battle against sleep. In earlier times, when people meditated alone, they often put a small *zenchin* on top of their heads. As soon as they began to nod, the bell would fall and wake them. Some zazen seekers even sat on the edges of cliffs where falling asleep meant plummeting to certain death.

In temples or Zen halls occasionally a priest or monk taps meditators on the shoulders with a long (about three feet or one meter) flat stick called a *keisaku*. A hardwood stick is used in winter, when meditators are more heavily clothed, and a softer one in summer. Since the *keisaku* is applied vigorously, several of them are usually broken at the long *sesshin* sessions.

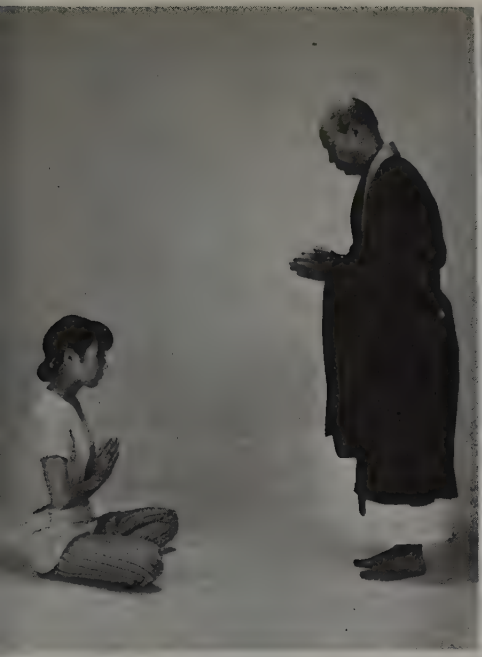




Incorrect postures. The shape of the hands is bent and the spine is curved.

The main purpose of the *keisaku* tap is to ward off sleepiness and to give encouragement to both the person struck and to others near by; but the *keisaku* has another important function: its tap removes stiffness from the shoulders. Consequently, people engaged in zazen often request the priest to tap them with the *keisaku*. This is how to make the request:

1. When the priest is near, hold your hands together in front of your chest in *gassho*. (see p. 82).
2. He will stand in front of you and return your *gassho*.
3. You must then bend forward from the waist and pull your shoulders inward. Remain relaxed and loose for if you are tense your shoulder, bones may project slightly, and the effect of the *keisaku* will decrease. Moreover the sound of the tap will be weak.
4. The priest will then tap you two or three times on each shoulder.
5. Finally, you and the priest exchange *gassho* again.

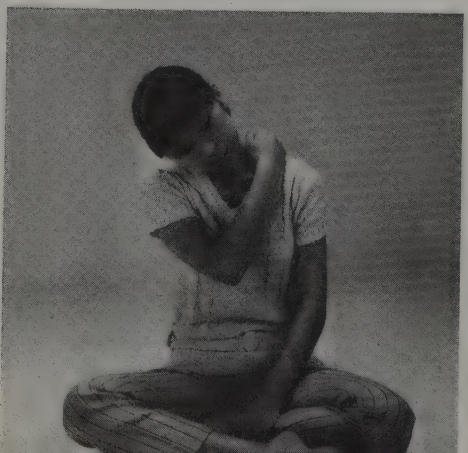


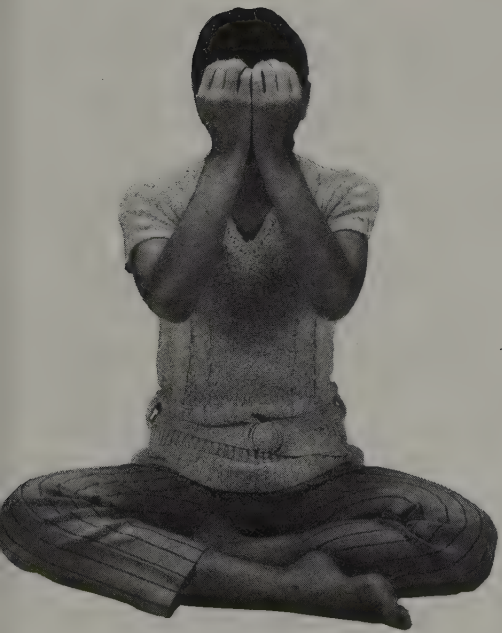
Ending Zazen

Each temple or hall where zazen is practiced has its own signal for ending meditation sessions—usually by ringing a gong or bell. At the end of zazen, whether individual or group, the following procedure is recommended.

1. First, free your spirit and relax your mind. For example, if you have been counting breaths, stop and relax.
2. Next, open your mouth in a narrow oval and exhale quietly but deeply. Set your spirit free. This breath will contain all the physical and mental tension that may have built up by this time. Repeat the exhalation two or three times.
3. Now, begin to move your body slowly and gently. If you feel tension in your shoulders and neck, gradually work it out. Discard the tension together with the breath you exhale. Move both shoulders and hands. Next unfold your legs; you may use your hands to do this. If your legs are numb or stiff, massage them until they return to normal.

   Now rub your palms together to warm your hands and next cup your hands and place them over your eyes. Open your eyes wide and accustom them to the light filtering through your fingers. Then take your hands away. When you are completely ready, rise to your feet.
4. If you are going to continue zazen, rest for a few moments in this relaxed mood before beginning again.





Points to remember

Though often overlooked, a correct ending to a zazen session is as important as a good beginning; furthermore, since the order shifts from the natural one—relaxing first body, then breath, finally spirit—to the opposite, the concluding procedure is slightly more difficult for beginners to master. Nevertheless it is essential, and the following hints make it easier. Begin by liberating your spirit; if you have been counting breaths, stop and mentally relax. Next begin to breath through your mouth; making a sound as you do so provides stimulation. Finally begin to move your body as explained above. Many people end zazen by beating their shoulders, twisting their backs, and contorting their bodies in other ways. Some complain that their abdomens are distended, and others moan of various aches and pains. Your head may feel heavy, or your eyes may hurt; however, these are generally positive signs showing that your zazen was solid. The stricter the practice, the more often these things occur. But after zazen you should feel generally good, and if you do not, then the fault often lies in the way the zazen ended.

Small mistakes in the order make little difference, but the broad outline must always be from the fine, inner side to the coarse outer side. That is, travel from the composed zazen state to the rough, rapid movements of the outside world. But the transition must be gradual and all movements gentle and slow.

Overall Remarks

Harmony of mind and body

I have now explained how one enters Zen meditation by calming body, breath, and spirit and by harmonizing the mind and the physical being and how one concludes a session by reversing the procedure and gradually moving from the subtle inner world

of zazen to the coarse outer world. But trouble often occurs during meditation itself. The following points must be observed faithfully if zazen is to produce maximum results.

1. From beginning to end, maintain harmony among body, breath, and spirit. Symptoms indicating that harmony has broken down include the following, all of which deserve close attention. Tendencies for the abdomen to cave inward and the jaw to jut forward. Some people tense their shoulders to the point where that part of the body alone seems to be engaged in zazen. Hand positions go wrong, and breathing becomes audible not only to the individual, but also to his neighbors. This last means that breathing is upset and, consequently, that spiritual equilibrium is destroyed. When this happens the door is open to all kinds of distractions and frivolous thoughts.

2. Be always on the lookout for these symptoms and correct them immediately. There is no prescribed order for rectifying them.

3. The most common posture problems are caving of the abdomen and forward leaning of the torso. In the train of these two faults follow slackness of the abdomen, crooks in the spine, distortions in the line of the neck, and resultant breath and spirit disorder. The moment you detect these conditions in yourself, you must immediately return the torso to a position in which the nose and the navel lie on a line perpendicular to the ground, but in doing so be careful of the following points.

4. Never attempt to correct faulty posture by tensing the abdomen or the shoulders because both methods invite breathing irregularity and consequent spiritual confusion.

5. Ignoring both shoulders and abdomen, imagine that you are attempting to push the back of your head through the ceiling. If you do so, the nose and navel will assume proper relationship by themselves, the neck will straighten, the chin will return to its correct position, the shoulders will relax, and the abdomen return to its original state of strength.

6. In short, after correction you must be once again in the state achieved when you ordered your body and calmed your breath and spirit at the outset of the meditation session.

7. This remedial method is effective for me.

While realizing that employing the image of pushing the back of my head through the ceiling is an excellent way to correct the stoops and slumps that occur during zazen, in numerous repetitions I found that the image itself became a distraction. I therefore resolved to do something to eradicate the hindrance. I first imagined a fine thread attached to a single hair on the top of my head. I then thought of my body as being suspened on that thread. In such a state of suspension, my entire body, legs folded in correct position, neck straight, chin tucked in, nose and navel in correct perpendicular relationship, was imaginarily hanging in mid air. Finally, I came to ignore the existence of the thread and the hair, with the result that, concentrating on no thing, I was able to maintain good zazen posture with natural ease.

In connection with this method and with good posture in general and by way of a brief review of my preceding discussion, I remind the reader that one is not conscious of his body when it is completely relaxed. Similarly, when breathing is perfectly quiet and barely perceptible, the body seems to breath with its countless pores, and the boundary between inner and outer worlds melts away. With the loss of consciousness of the skin, awareness of the body's existence and of the act of breathing also vanishes; and when this happens the very consciousness of self fades.

8. Faulty posture and disorderly breathing directly influence the spirit. Obviously these symptoms make truly valid zazen impossible, but it is equally important to remember that spiritual upset manifests itself in faulty posture and breathing.

9. Both of these conditions reflect most strongly in bad hand positions. The hand position, the symbol of zazen itself,

immediately reveals the condition of the spirit. It sometimes happens that a man whose posture and facial expression are, he knows, above reproach, receives a hearty slap on the shoulder from the priest with the *keisaku*. "How did the priest know I was thinking about something frivolous?" the slapped man asks himself. The answer is perfectly clear to anyone who has ever carried the *keisaku* around a hall where people are meditating in the Zen style. No matter how flawless all other aspects of the posture and breathing, incorrect hand positions immediately reveal lack of spiritual harmony and concentration. The ideal hand position, resembling a flame-capped sphere, is certain proof that the spiritual condition is excellent; such hand positions are rare. Distortions and twists indicate that something is amiss, but the worse possible hand position is the completely squashed and collapsed one because it proves that the person is enjoying the idle thoughts crowding his brain. Thumbs pressed very tightly together usually signify inner conflict. All of these hand positions indicate that the mental state of the meditator is not as it should be.

10. The most subtle relationship exists between spirit and breathing. Since the relation between the two is mutual in that one cannot be calm unless the other is, always begin meditation by first stabilizing and then deepening the breath.

Meditation periods and times

In Zen halls, a leader announces the start and end of each session by striking clappers or ringing bells. In these cases, simply be silent and obey the signals. Each hall has its traditional system: the start may be indicated by two claps of blocks and three rings of bells, and the end by two rings and one clap. The period from the last ring of the beginning signal to the first ring of the ending one is considered the zazen time. During it, one must remain in position no matter what happens. Earthquake or fire must not be allowed to disrupt meditation.

Fortunately, however, disasters are rare, and the most vexing things likely to happen are mosquito bites or an occasional bee that lights on one's body. Even these annoyances must be ignored. Generally, one is not permitted to move, clear the throat, or cough. If posture and breathing are proper, however, the need to do these things will not arise.

Although the rule is often relaxed for beginners, no amount of pain in the legs is considered reason to change position. Zazen must be a time of silence and stillness. If the meditator dozes, the man with the *keisaku*—he too is engaged in meditation as he moves about the hall—will awaken him.

The leader determines the duration of each session. Usually the minimum is thirty minutes, the maximum one and one-half hours, and the average about one hour. Zen priests spend an hour or two each morning in zazen and the rest of the day working; but during special periods, called *sesshin*, zazen may last uninterrupted for from five to seven days. Because the historical Buddha is said to have attained enlightenment just before dawn on the morning of December 8, the first week in that month is an intensive *sesshin* meditation period. Of course, even then, rest and meal breaks are allowed.

A useful gauge for lengths of zazen sessions is the time required for a single stick of incense to burn down. The beginner might advantageously employ this tool, but if he finds the time too long, he may break the incense stick to an appropriate length. In general, zazen sessions for persons not entirely accustomed to the discipline are best kept to about twenty or thirty minutes. Busy people may shorten the time, but they must be careful to meditate at the same hour daily.

Traditionally the hours before dawn and sunset are thought best because at those times, vital strength from an unknown source seems to fill the body and spirit and thus make zazen more meaningful. But after one is accustomed to Zen meditation, it is possible to do it effectively at any time. For

instance, a five- or ten-minute session at bedtime produces sounder sleep. Moreover, it is possible to control breathing and heartbeats while reading the paper or listening to the radio. Efficiency in work and appetite and digestion at mealtimes improve if you assume the zazen posture and practice correct breath control. Instead of scratching the head or falling into a Rodin's *Thinker* attitude when some problem assails, try zazen; the solution to the difficulty often presents itself clearly during meditation. In short, the opportunities for zazen are as limitless as you make them: you might well be in the zazen position as you read this.

Active Zen

Zen does not necessarily consist in sitting in a quiet place in traditional postures: it is part of every activity. In fact the Zen that we need most is practiced simultaneously with other activities. In this section I deal with procedures for walking, or active, Zen.

Human beings are always in one of four positions: walking (or running), standing, sitting, or lying. The term "zazen" applies to seated Zen meditation. The meditation technique used while walking, in Japanese *jyogyo-zanmai*, involves various rules which are in essence suggestions for maximum efficiency.

Length of steps

1. The end of your heel must not advance beyond the tips of your toes. In other words, move one foot length at a time.
2. Your torso must remain in the position used when you are in the sitting posture. Your nose, navel, and the tips of the toes of the extended foot must lie on a single line perpendicular to the ground.
3. The heel of the rear foot must be always off the ground and ready to take the next step.
4. Place one hand on the other and hold them to your chest. Hold your elbows lightly to your sides, forearms parallel to the ground. Your shoulders must be in a natural position.
5. With eyes open to the normal extent, look directly forward. Rolling the eyes and looking about you are strictly forbidden.
6. Breathe quietly as in zazen.
7. Walk at a speed of about one step for every two breaths, or at the speed established by the group. Though the pace is slow, you must keep your body energy highly charged so that, if suddenly ordered to leap, you can instantly jump several feet.
8. Walk firmly and forcefully.

Distance of separation

1. As a rule, when meditation takes place at temples, all members of the group walk to the left in a circle roughly centered on the main altar image. Changes are made according to place and occasion, but always follow the person in front of you.
2. The participants must be separated as widely as the space available permits, because if a person makes a mistake, it is likely to interfere with the practice of the others if all of the meditators are walking hard on each other's heels. When proper distances among the participants are strictly maintained each person is meditating correctly.

Adaptation of active Zen

In the Soto and Rinzai Zen sects active Zen, known as *kinhin*, is often used during long zazen sessions to allow the participants to exercise their legs while maintaining concentration. However, walking Zen alone has been adapted and is used as an active method of Zen concentration in a technique called *hanju zanmai* or *butsuryu zanmai*. The participants circle the main image and chant the *nembutsu* or read one of the sutras. Each step and each sound must be concentrated and centered upon the object of veneration. In Japan special temple buildings were constructed for this sole purpose. In these buildings the main image is not at the rear of the room but in the very center.

At the main temple of the Tendai sect there is an interesting adaptation of active walking Zen in a complex purification ritual, requiring 1,000 days. Once the session has begun, no one is allowed to stop for any reason. The first 700 days are spent walking nearly 19 miles (30 kilometers) a day around a fixed course among the temples and ruins in the valleys and mountains outside Kyoto and near Hieizan, a peak famous for its many religious buildings and monasteries. At 350 predetermined points, the participant must read certain sutras and make religious observances. At the conclusion of this section of the ritual, he undergoes a nine-day period during which he may not eat, drink, sleep, or even lie down. In the next 100 days, he walks to other famous spots in the area at a rate of nearly 38 miles (60 kilometers) a day and then embarks on another 100-day pedestrian journey through the city of Kyoto at a rate of almost 53 miles (84 kilometers) a day. This stint is followed by a second nine-day sleepless fast. For the final 100 days, he must return to the Hieizan course, where he walks at the original speed. After having finished all of this, he is subjected to a third nine-day fast. There are several priests at Hieizan who have completed this rigorous discipline, which requires seven years.

At the temple where I reside, in Nikko, there is a very difficult Zen training procedure called *mineshugyo*. It consists in climbing certain rugged mountain peaks in the vicinity to discipline mind and body.

Zen training method are often quite demanding and dynamic, but the basic idea of adjusting breathing and body posture to the activity and then becoming totally involved in it can be applied to any pursuit. Take driving for example. Sitting properly, eyes on the road, hands gripping the wheel, mind concentrated on the task, breathing deeply and quietly – this purely Zen approach is close to the ideal way to operate an automobile.

Returning to the traditional methods I might mention one in which half of the training time is spent in the sitting posture and the other half in walking in a circle around the main image while reading aloud from the sutras. This method seems especially well suited to young people who have little experience in zazen. The contrast between the training periods increases the appeal of the method.

Sitting and standing

First settle your mind. Then move your upper leg back a little. Lower the knee of that leg to the floor and keep your weight on the tips of your toes. Your hands must be on your thighs. Now align both knees and stretch your toes to the rear. Lower your hips. Your feet should be close enough that the big toes touch. Your knees should be separated by a distance of about one or two fists width. Move your hands close to your abdomen and keep your torso erect.

When seated on your heels (position shown), stand by raising your hips and bringing your toes underneath you, the toes of the lower foot first, then those of the upper foot. Lower your buttocks on your heels. Next raise the knee of the lower leg and bring the toes of that foot forward. After repeating this move with the upper leg, stand. There should be no change in breathing, and the torso should remain erect at all times.

Generally one enters a room by stepping first with the lower foot and leaves by moving the upper foot first. In other words, when entering the room where the main image is enshrined or where guests are assembled, one steps into the room with the foot which is closer to the door pillar and leaves by beginning with the opposite foot.

When it is necessary to move about in front of a main image or important guest it is often difficult to know which is the lower and which is the upper foot. To simplify the matter, movements are divided into left and right. When moving forward toward the image, step first with your left foot, and when moving away, step with your right. When you sit (if you are not using chairs), fold the left leg first. When you get up, bring the right leg up first.

Obeisances *(Gassho)*

In this gesture, one of the most common in Buddhism, both hands are simply placed together with the fingertips at about neck level. Some sects say the fingertips must be at nose level, but that is a bit too high and seems unnatural. After putting your hands in position, look directly at the person or object you are greeting or reverencing and, when your spirit is settled, bow. At that time let your arms drop to the sides of your body, then as you raise your torso, your hands will return to their original position.

Types

In the ordinary *gassho* the hands are held together lightly so that the palms do not touch. This is called *koshin-gassho*. When the hands are forced together so that the palms touch, the position is known as *kenjitsu-gassho*. A third position, in which the palms are separated slightly, is called *miburenge-gassho*. When the fingers are interwined, the position is called *kimyo-gassho;* there are at least twelve other positions. The zazen position, developed from *gassho*, is called *hokkai-join. Gassho* can be done in either standing or sitting positions. Finally there is a kneeling *gassho* position, known as *choki-gassho,* which is used when making penitence or requests.


供養

Observances toward representations of Buddha

Observances made toward statues of Buddha or other objects of worship, called *gotaitochi* or *tochirai*, follow this order:

1. Stand in front of the object and make the ordinary *gassho*.
2. Kneel gracefully on both knees, then sit on your heels. Your feet must be stretched flat behind you.
3. Lean forward so that both forearms come to rest on the floor, palms facing up. We are instructed to feel that we are about to receive the feet of Buddha in our hands. Next bow low: the forehead touches the floor.
4. Repeat this deep bow three times.

This, the most common gesture of deep reverence and respect, is usually repeated rapidly. Its movements must follow each other smoothly; it is known as the *sanrai*.

On special occasions some Buddhist denominations perform the *sanrai* several hundred times a day. It is considered to be excellent training for both the body and the mind. Dynamic Zen can be felt upon these occasions. There is another ceremony, held yearly in certain temples, during which the participants make 3,000 bows, over a period of nine hours.

Zen and Everyday Activities

Certain Buddhist texts classify all human activity as follows: 1. movement, 2. standing still, 3. sitting, 4. lying, 5. speaking, and 6. working. The senses too are divided into six categories: 1. seeing, 2. hearing, 3. smelling, 4. tasting, 5. feeling, 6. thinking. Zen can be present in all of these at any time. In fact, until it does pervade them the Zen itself is shallow. (The presence of Zen in all human existence is called *zuiji-zanmai.*) From the beginner's viewpoint, however, the best place to start Zen practice is a temple or some other quiet location. Furthermore one must begin practice in the traditional positions and with the usual techniques. After a foundation has been laid, one can build from there.

Although the more traditional postures are recommended, using a chair for zazen is acceptable.

Zen Itself

In the preceding sections I have explained something of the nature of Buddhism and Zen and have gone into detail on zazen meditation, other methods of meditation, and the physical mechanics and mental adjustments necessary to all meditation. In the remainder this handbook, I feel that it is urgently important to relate this material to daily life and, in closing, to touch briefly on the question of enlightenment. I can only give hints about and descriptions of this vitally important topic because there is no one well defined path to enlightenment. Each of us is bound to assist his fellows in reaching the goal, at least to the best of our abilities; but in the end, everything depends on the individual. As the Buddha said, "Work out your own salvation with diligence."

* * * * *

Zen and Sports

Scores of learned texts have been written on the nature of Zen --I have written some myself–but to the laymen expositions of sutras and delvings into philosophical profundities can be worse than useless; they can be active obstructions to true understanding. But Zen need not be obscure. In fact it is, or should be, part of everything one does. This book deals largely with the mechanics and spiritual training of zazen, seated Zen meditation, but without knowing why one meditates it is senseless to go

The daily cleaning is an important part of the monks' training.

through the ritual. To attempt to give reasons for meditating, in the following pages I draw on homely object lessons from many aspects of daily life to show just how Zen, in its truest manifestations, plays meaningful parts in all human activity.

Japanese masters of fencing in the past found Zen in their blades—"The sword and Zen are one," they said. But the baseball player up at bat could, if he thought of it, say something quite similar. Let us imagine that a player, though skillful and powerful, has had a run of bad luck. As he sits and mopes in the dugout the shouts and jeers of the spectators grate on his nerves; he frets about being struck out. His turn at bat comes. Suddenly, the spectators, the stands, the world, and he himself vanish from his consciousness as if they had never existed at all. For him there is nothing in the universe but the bat he holds and the ball that will soon come driving toward him. His whole being, spiritual and physical, is concentrated on the act of hitting the ball and sending it flying as far as his strength permits. That concentration is pure Zen. And at the very same moment in that baseball game more Zen is being born all over the playing field and in the stands: infielders and outfielders forget everything but the ball that might plummet out of the sky their way. The catcher thinks of nothing but retrieving a possible pop-up foul ball, and all the true baseball fans in the bleachers have eyes for nothing but the action. Having abandoned all other thoughts, they exist completely in that one moment. The absence of this kind of concentration can spell dire consequences.

For example, I was once watching a baseball game on television. In the batters' box a player was slovenly knocking mud off his spikes with the tip of his bat; I disliked him at first sight. And when he struck out I was relieved. It was not so much that the pitcher had skillfully spied out his opponent's weakness as that the batter was distracted and negligent of what he was doing. Of course, even candidates for the ten-best-

Monks reciting a Sutra before eating.

players category sometimes strike out. Since it is only a baseball game, it makes little difference. The batter can always hang his head and slink back to the box. But what does similar negligence mean under more serious circumstances? If the action at hand were heated sword battle, the man whose mind wandered at the crucial moment might well be split down the middle like an old piece of dried bamboo. Baseball is only a game; some strike-outs and a few errors, though they may have a bad effect on the player's reputation and income, often make the game itself more interesting. On the other hand, when life and death are the stakes, as they often were in sword fights of the past, the only people who lived to see another match were those who, figuratively, batted 1,000.

Since there was no room for negligence or lack of concentration, the sword masters of old steeled their bodies and disciplined their minds to the point where they could cut down a fly on the wing.

Their lives depended on their skill with the sword. And it was for this reason that these men said "Zen and the sword are one." Baseball players could do much worse than to follow their example.

There are other parallels in psychological requirements for the baseball player and the followers of the martial arts. Watching batter after batter emerge from the dugout to take their places at the plate, I often think of the line of men awaiting their turns in modern-day kendo (traditional Japanese fencing) matches; but there is one striking difference between the attitudes of the two groups. In the case of kendo, there is never a man who stands nonchalantly tapping his bamboo practice sword on the floor; there is also never a loser who, hangdog and grinning, ambles slowly back to his place after defeat. Of course, in modern practice no one's life depends on the outcome of a match. But in times past, when the weapons were hard glittering steel, life did hang on skill and concentration. Today men of the way of the sword preserve the same degree of concentration on the activity of the moment that was demanded of their forebears. Were it to be cultivated, this mental attitude—the Zen attitude—could well create a batter whom no pitcher on earth could fluster, let alone strike out. The pitchers, in a similar fashion, could have the spiritual power to pitch nothing but no hitters. Why does this never happen?

The answer to this question reveals the great spiritual gulf separating the martial arts and baseball. Let us examine this point in terms of the way outstanding men in both fields are frequently described and praised. The present age is dominated by technology. Skill unlocks all doors. Therefore, in saying that a batter has a mighty arm or a pitcher a keen eye, one

praises his technical abilities. Brilliant masters of the oriental martial arts, however, were, and are today, praised as great men, even as saints of the sword.

No single part of their anatomy--arm or eye--was singled out as representative of them and their skills. They were instead thought of as men, whole and mature, the possessors of unified bodies and spirits. The modern world, including baseball, overlooks this elemental and vital point. Any man with good reflexes, fast legs, and stamina can, if he trains diligently, become an excellent baseball player without giving any consideration to the condition of his mind or to the state of his whole being. This salient discrepancy between baseball and the martial arts clearly illustrates the limitations of modern society and equally clearly points the finger at its inherent danger. Since his scope of growth is limited, the baseball player reaches a stage beyond which he not only is unable to progress but also begins to regress. Let us suppose he has a few days of bad health or worry and is unable to train. This shows in his playing for a while, and he consequently begins to fret about the possibility of failing powers. When this happens the gap between his highly developed technical skills and his underdeveloped spiritual and mental harmony gradually widens and sucks him down into failure and oblivion. But if Zen and the bat—the mind and the body and all its skills—were one, no such gap would exist.

Because the split does exist in the baseball player, however, every other aspect of the game falls into isolated pieces. Defense is defense; offense is offense. A player engaged in one of these halves of the sport is totally unconscious of the other. The idea of compartmentalization spreads to players who can handle only one position, and reaches to its nadir in the grandstands player, unconcerned about the welfare of the team and infatuated with his own batting average. These are the men who stand smoking or yawning in the dugout as they wait their

turn to shine like stars. These too are the men who sulk back to the bench with foolish grins when their physically and mentally sundered state rewards them justly with "three strikes and you're out."

Finally, let me return to my slovenly friend tapping the mud from his spikes in the batters' box. What, in effect, is he doing? He is manifestly demonstrating his lack of total concentration on his game. When the all important moment comes and the ball has left the pitcher's hand, it is not the batter's arms or shoulders alone, but his whole body that must come into play to hit a good ball. And at that instant the bat is no longer a rod of wood; it must become part of the batter's body. If the batter regarded it so, would he risk sullying and scarring it on the cruel metal points of his spikes? It is no more likely that he would than that he would soil and scratch his own finger to clean away the mud. The fact that the batter does not regard the bat as part of himself, not only during the swing, but at all times, conceals the profound difference between this sport and the ancient martial arts. A samurai often sat silent and alone for hours carefully polishing the blade of his sword because he felt and often said that the sword is the soul of the warrior. It was not the metal or the workmanship of the blade, or the price of the weapon. The warrior cared for his sword as he did for his own body because his concentration and devotion to the art of fencing imbued in him the conviction that it was in truth a most important part of his mind and body. The devotee of the tea ceremony, the flower master, the calligrapher lavish tender care on their tools and equipment in symbolic expression of their belief that they and their arts are united: Zen is the tea ceremony, Zen is fencing, Zen is calligraphy, Zen is judo, Zen can be baseball. And in the light of baseball's great and increasing popularity in this country I sincerely hope that one day baseball players will be able to say "My sport and Zen—what I do and my mind and soul—are one."

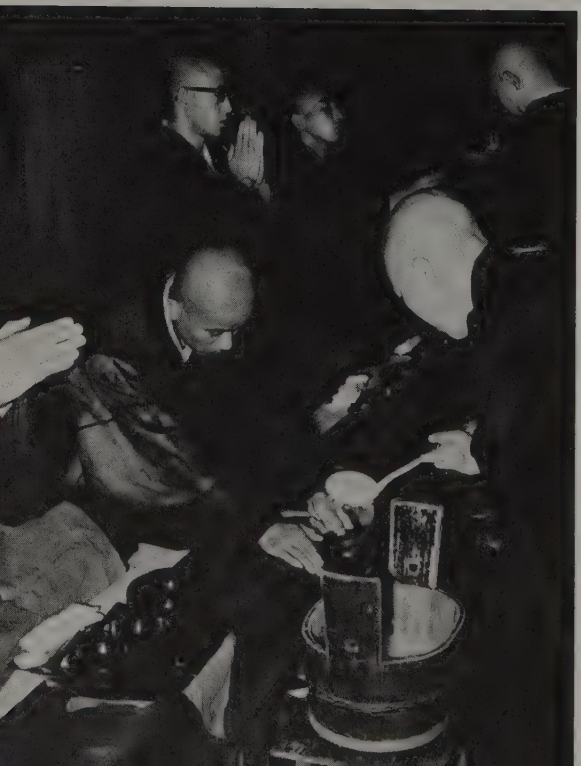
The beginning and end of all events in Zen temples is announced with wooden clappers or bells.

I hope the reader will not conclude that, since I have spent a great deal of time discussing baseball, I am opposed to the game. That is not the case; I simply find in it a number of good illustrations of the modern split between body and spirit that Zen strives to heal. I can, and in the following pages shall draw other examples from other fields.

Zen and Business

A group of large business firms, deeply concerned about the mechanization and automation that today robs thousands of employees of much of their basic humanity, conducted an interesting Zen-related experiment. They chose a number of new employees, all graduates of high school and many university graduates in specialized fields, and sent them to a Zen temple for three days and two nights of training in zazen. The companies requested that the temple make no special considerations for these people but that the priests treat them as they would all other novices. The intentions of the firms were admirable, and some good results proceeded from the experiment, though the method itself is open to question, as I think the following discussion will make clear. Nevertheless, the desire to introduce an understanding of Zen into all phases of life in order to intensify the joy of living and elevate the individual's work potential deserves nothing but praise.

At the conclusion of the training period, the companies conducted a survey to determine the impressions of the trainees. One of the most frequent comments concerned the vast difference between the world these young people knew and that of the Zen temple. This is scarcely surprising. Coming immediately from the roar and glare of cities packed with people, choked with polluted air, deafened with noise, and afflicted with crimes and debauchery of all kinds into the silence and tranquility of a temple, the trainees were bound to experience surprise if not shock. And it was on this point

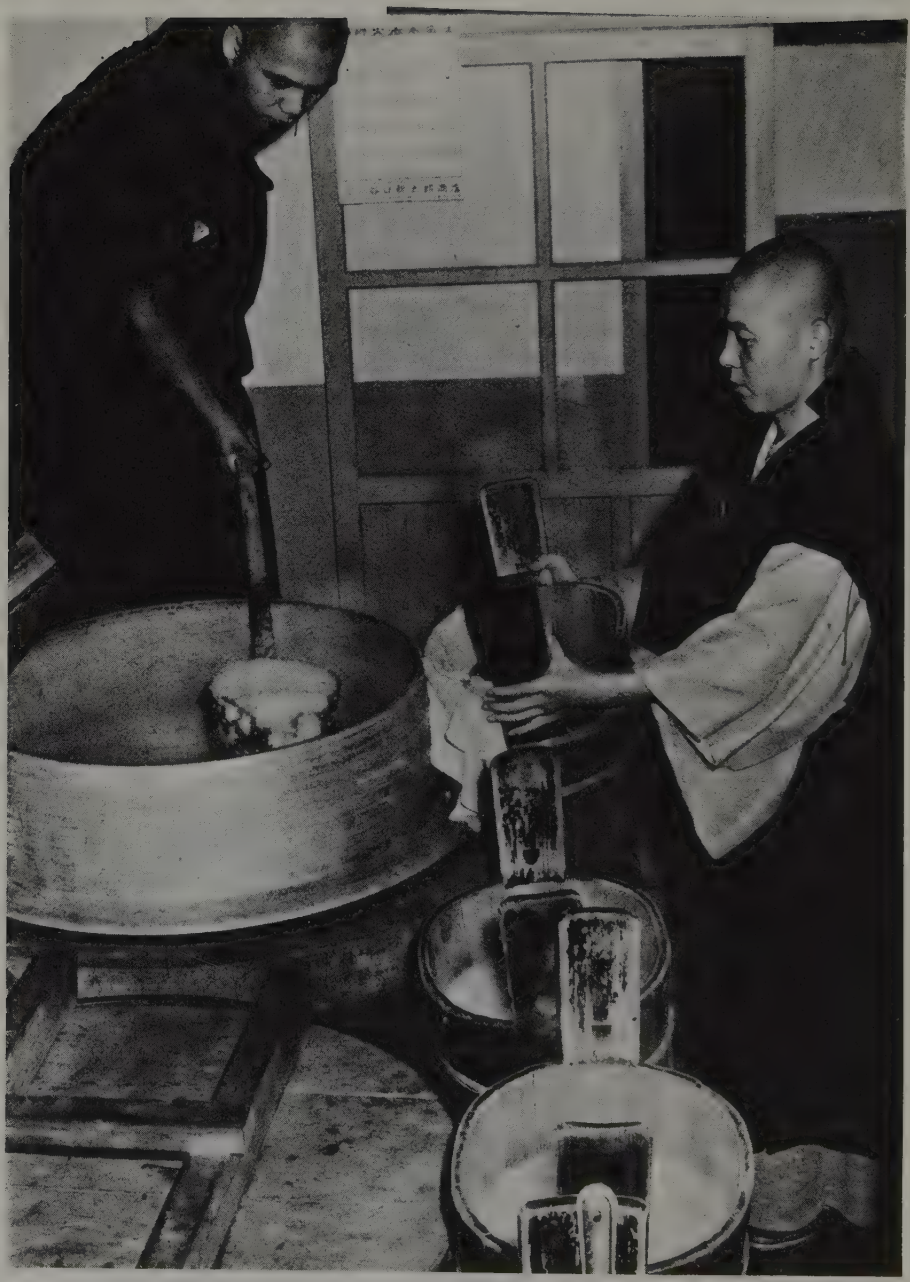


Meals in Zen temples are eaten according to the traditional manner. Absolute silence is observed.

that the request of the companies that no special consideration of inexperience be shown the trainees came to grief.

Moving smoothly and quietly through an established routine, the priests engaged in seated meditation, carried out their daily duties, ate, bathed and did everything in a mood of Zen tranquility. If no thought was to be taken of the trainees' lack of knowledge of this way of life, they too would have to do as the priests; but is that possible? All priests spend five, ten, or more years in training. It is only as a result of countless frustrations, angers, and ultimately triumphant control that they manage to attain the state where the Zen-temple life is as natural as breathing. How much of this can young people from a clamorous world of self-seeking and materialism achieve in three days and two nights? Though they tried to do as they were told and though they practiced seated meditation till their legs ached, they could never hope to gain more than a general impression of the way of life. Was it wise then to subject them to such training? I answer my question with another. Would it be advisable to put a greenhorn at the controls of a complicated machine ordinarily operated by a skilled workman with years of experience? I think the companies conducting this admirable experiment would have done much better to allow their young people to observe the routine of a temple in silence for a few days without participating in its regimen? After such a period of watching and listening, some of the prospective trainees might find that Zen held genuine interest for them. The companies could then send these people to an extended course of Zen study and discipline. True, the young person would miss a longer period of time from work, but the rewards in enthusiasm and efficiency gained from the experience would more than compensate the company for the apparent loss. In short, Zen is not a matter to be experienced to any degree of profundity in a brief period.

A second and more alarmingly recurrent comment about the



Meals are prepared with the same spiritual attitude that is present in Zazen.

training praised the strict discipline of the temple and suggested that the trainees had never undergone anything like it. Many said that the rigid control of temple life would stand them in good stead in office work and in other aspects of their business lives. Of course discipline is important, but how true a picture of the discipline of the Zen temple could these young people have got?

Zen and Discipline

Old timers, remembering the inevitable physical examination and subsequent drafting into the military of all eligible young men during the prewar period, moan that today's young people have no backbones, they are unruly and untrained. Although few of these men of experienee lament the passing of the military dictatorship that imposed the old-style training, most of them realize that nothing in today's home or school educations takes its place. Doubtless the business firms who designed this experiment felt the same way and pounced on Zen as an excellent tool for steeling the young to become more ardent employees. Unfortunately, however, this is where they went off the track. Zen is not a set of prohibitive restrictions imposed from without; its discipline must come from within.

The words used in Japanese to express the code that governs life and behavior in the temple is *kairitsu*: the first character used to write the word (*kai*) agrees entirely with the nature of Zen, whereas the second (*ritsu*) contradicts Zen. *Ritsu* is law, it is negative, prohibitive, and subordinating; in short, it means "thou shalt not." *Kai*, on the other hand, is admonition, it is positive, and it says "thou shalt" in order to contribute to the betterment of the individual's character and through him of all human environment.

The laws (*ritsu*), composed after the death of the historic Buddha Sakyamuni, were devised to maintain order in the many Buddhist groups and societies that were then spreading through-

out India. Numbering about 250, these prohibitions imply that if one transgresses them, the world will reproach and turn its back on the guilty party. The traditional ordination of a Buddhist priest consisted of his receiving both the *ritsu* and *kai*, but the nature of those considered fit to administer the ceremony reveals the higher spiritual level of the latter. To administer the laws or *ritsu* required three disciples and seven witnesses, human beings, but all ordained priests. On the other hand, although administration of the *kai* also required three parties, they are Sakyamuni himself and the Monju and Miroku Bodhisattvas. A Bodhisattva is a being who, though qualified to enter the state of Nirvana, postpones doing so for the sake of assisting humanity. The *ritsu* then have much in common with modern civil and criminal laws; they represent the lowest level of human morality. To descend below their standard is to become a criminal. Though the law has nothing to say to the man who conceives murder in his heart but does not do murder, it is severity itself once the act has been committed and uncovered. *Kai*, in strong contrast, emphasizes the emotions within the human heart that inspire actions. Finally, in brief, *kai* are admonitions for the sake of the betterment of all humanity, whereas *ritsu* are restrictions applicable only to the limited sphere of priests and temple life.

The young trainees who took part in tiring zazen sessions and observed as the priests ate in silence according to a prescribed pattern and took their baths in the same atmosphere of calm and order concluded that Zen is rigidity, when in fact nothing could be farther from the truth. What they mistook for externally imposed law is internally blossoming spiritual self-purification based on the concepts expressed in *kai*, or admonitions. In general since the time of Dengyo Daishi, a great priest of the Heian period (794–1185) who broke with the tradition of cumbersome and mentally crippling *ritsu*, the Japanese priesthood have disregarded the laws and followed the

admonitions. This is especially true of Zen, and to overlook the fact is to lose sight of what Zen is.

Zen and You

To bridge the preceding and the following discussions, let me recapitulate. I have so far said that Zen is everywhere and in everything, that it makes a unity of the mind and the body and, therefore, of the man and the thing he is doing. I also explained that it is not something to be mastered in a brief time and that its discipline is admonitory and positive instead of prohibitive and negative. I now want to give a few examples of just how Zen exists in some aspects of our lives.

Zen is like the air: it is all around us, we breathe it, live in its ambience, but we cannot grasp it in our hands, and we have no need to seek it. For instance the full power of a painting or a piece of music is apparent only when the viewer or listener is absorbed completely in it to the exclusion of all else: he is in as much a Zen state at such times as any priest in any temple. If she strives for loveliness with her whole being—her body and face, clothings, cosmetics, voice and movement—a woman in her legendary eternal desire for beauty is existing in a Zen state. Because it absorbs the attention of body and soul entirely, meaningful sex is an excellent example of Zen, and it has a further enriching element derived from the fact that its joy is not bought at the price of pain or loss on the part of one partner but is completely mutual. The man engrossed in his work, the mother breast-feeding her infant, the actor who pours himself entirely into his role all, whether they understand it or not, partake of the wholeness that is true Zen. These instances should be easy to comprehend, but there are other more subtle ones.

When one laughs, it must be with the whole body and spirit. A half laugh is no laugh at all. To laugh completely, however, implies the knowledge of sorrow and tears, which too are part

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of the human lot. There is Zen in abandoned laughter; conversely there is Zen in unrestrained weeping. Since all the world and the self are only offal, let us drown in tears. If sobbing is called for, it must be complete because retaining some of the grief within the heart is to plant it there forever. On the other hand, to weep with all one's being is to imply the existence and future reappearance of laughter and joy. This applies to all sorrowful situtations, including lost love.

But can there be lost love? The Zen answer is no, for a love that is capable of being lost is not love. Furthermore, by resigning oneself to the nature of all things, it is possible to know this. The meaning of resignation in this context, however, is very special. It is a Buddhist term that does not mean to give up something before it is finished, to throw up the hands, or to quit. Instead it means to know the truth. And the truth can only be known through constant, honest, straightforward examinations of the self and the world till both cease to exist. Zen must be part of all one does, for it is the way to see things clearly. It is limitless. It includes the simple and the difficult. The way to follow its path is first to seize upon what is understandable, make that one's own, nurture it, and let it develop its own subtleties. In my explanation of the best way to begin zazen training I say that one must first calm the body, then regulate the breathing, and finally establish mental balance. This order reflects what I mean by saying "seize first what is understandable." The more difficult will become clear in time.

Temple Life

In a book of this scale it is impossible to tell very much about enlightenment, the ultimate aim of Zen. In the preceding section I said that Zen discipline and meditation are designed to assist the individual in reaching the state in which he is no longer

concerned with things and in which, without depending on reason or logic, he sees the truth intuitively. Many years are required to experience this liberating enlightenment, and no one can point a straight way to it. Nevertheless, it might be illuminating to know some of the things Zen priests do in their search for enlightenment.

Dokusan—Individual Interviews

Not far from the main hall of a Zen temple there is a small room in which an experienced master priest interviews disciples. No one knows what these men say to each other during their sessions, and after the first flush of curiosity wears off—it soon does—not even the least trained priest at a temple would think of asking, because it quickly becomes clear to anyone who thinks on the topic that what happens in that room can be as varied as humans are different. Customarily an older priest will take a disciple under his tutelage; after a formal ceremony officially establishing this relationship, the younger priest may visit the small room, and there are two or three fixed hours each day when he must do so. At the sound of a bell, the young priests scheduled for desiring interviews leave the main hall, rush to a waiting room near the master's room, and seat themselves Zen style in order of their arrival. When another bell summons one of them, he strikes a prepared answering bell and proceeds to his interview. The way he rings the bell and the sound of his feet as he walks along the corridor tell much about his state of mind. In fact, sometimes both sounds are so insecure and trembling that the master priest will command "Return" before the disciple has even opened the sliding doors leading to the interview room. When this does not happen, however, the young man reverently and quietly opens those doors, exchanges a bow with the elder priest, seated and silent in the middle of the room, enters, closes the doors, and the session begins. When it is concluded, the

elder priest rings a bell to indicate that the disciple can go and the next one in line must come. The two will each pass other in complete silence in the corridor.

Each master priest assigns to his charges a paradoxical problem (*Koan*) for solution. I do not mean for logical solution of the kind used in mathematics. The *koan*, a profound tool of meditation, teaches the impossibility of reliance on reason; therefore, its solution may take many years. It is the *koan* that is the central topic of discussion in that small closed room. A famous priest of recent years at the Kencho-ji, in Kamakura, frequently forced his priests to ponder the same *koan* for as long as ten or fifteen years. He said that if the original paradox lost its interest, he would assign another but that he would not allow a priest to conclude a *koan* prematurely because the next one would certainly cause much trouble unless the first had produced true spiritual results. Without doubt priests often writhe in exasperation and frustration over having to spend years on one problem, but the truly skillful master priest–among whom I must number the famous man from Kamakura–is always able to encourage and maintain the interest of his pupil.

Since there are 1,700 traditionally established *koan* and no limit to the number of new ones that can be devised, it is often a good idea to stimulate fresh interest by changing the problem, but even so the process is long. Thousands of *koan* left, and one man may spend five or ten years on a single problem. It is easy to imagine his frustration and disappointment at being told time and time again, "You are not yet ready." How often he must see his whole situation as ridiculous and wish to run away. How often he must be hurt and humiliated. Sometimes beatings are the reward of inattention or failure to progress. But on the other hand, how many times must the priest long to sympathize and perhaps let slip something less than wholy

The gate to Kenchoji Temple.

satisfactory in a pitying attempt to help his pupil. But this cannot be done, and the master priest's role too is difficult.

The procedure followed in the Dokusan periods between the teacher and his follower is one of questions and answers centering on the *koan* with which the younger man is currently dealing. The world interpretation of Zen questioning and answering ranges from the notion that it is implausible, sly chicanery to the idea that it is at best nothing but a display of wit. Neither, of course is correct, but the routine is rigorous, intensive, and repetitious. Often the disciple becomes red-eyed with anger at his master's relentless persistence. To make matters worse, the Dokusan periods often fall at late hours or on cold nights when the young man, already suffering from lack of sleep, must drag himself from his quarters to be subjected to intense interrogation on difficult and illogical points. If he drowses he may be slapped; if he is negligent, he may be beaten. Is it any wonder that rage often floods his mind and makes him long for nothing so much as a chance rain blows on his torturer till he cries out for pity? To forestall the possibility of such attacks, the elder priest has a staff in front of him for should the need arise. A truly great master at Zen teaching, however, not only does not resort to the use of such a thing, he also never so much as raises his voice.

Zen and Kendo

Kendo, or Japanese fencing, offers an interesting comparison to the Zen state of total absorption in an activity. Usually in training halls, younger and older kendo pupils undergo strenuous daily training sessions among themselves. But once a month the head master of the school gives personal instructions in the form of one bout with each pupil. This monthly experience serves an extremely important psychological function. It teaches the young man to face situations as unique, never-repeating entities. Facing a master fencer, for whom he is no match, the young man strives desperately to win, but his driving

attacks are repelled with slight taps from the opponent or perhaps with one occasional stunning rap on the pate. Gradually the irritation and shame of being treated as if one's best attempts were worth no more than depreciatingly light rebuffs drives the young man to the point where the match ceases to be sport. Forgetting the time limit, he rushes to his opponent; he may strike from behind or resort to any method to accomplish his end. This is no longer training hall *kendo*; the young man wants to discard rules and his dummy bamboo sword and to fight in earnest. In other words, he has been forced into a Zen state.

He suddenly sees intuitively that Zen is not words and phrases, it is not rules and wooden, weapons: it is the gleaming steel edge of truth. And the fight in which he is engaged is unique, once in a lifetime, never to be repeated, and all engrossing. In Zen living every experience must be of just this kind.

Satori or Enlightenment

Flashes of understanding occur during *kendo* practice, but they are not the true enlightenment that is the goal of all training. To reach that there are many more sessions of questions and answers on the paradoxical *koan* much long meditation. It often happens that these sessions continue for so many years that the two men gradually run out of things to say and repeat the same comments over and over. The priest intones "you are not ready," but on occasion he offers a word of praise. Then how great is the younger priest's happiness, how light his feet as he returns to the main hall after meditation. Until, all at once, he realizes that the priest has praised him today for something that earned "not ready, not ready" a week ago. The words of commendation had a meaning similar to that of a mother's crooning to an infant who is just beginning to toddle, "That's good, how smart you are." No more, no less.

Reciting the Sutras.

The young man then resolves that he must solve the *koan* alone, that he no longer needs the help of that old man. Continuing his meditation with a determined face, he is in fact intent on finding his own solution. Someday, however, he will recall and offer the deepest gratitude to the elderly man always waiting for him in the small quiet room, for the relation between the two gradually becomes as close as that of a hen and a chick on the verge of emerging from its shell.

When the baby chick is ready to hatch, it starts pecking on the inside of the shell with its small beak. The mother hen may assist it from the outside, pecking and coaxing gently. But should she try to hasten the process or, in her anxiety to see her young, begin breaking the shell before the chick inside is ready, the small emerging life will be snuffed out immediately. Little

boys often find cicadas shedding their skins. Watching the laborious transformation, the child, thinking to help, gives the insect a tug; and a permanently deformed or maybe dead cicada is the result of his misdirected kindness. Similarly, the priest must not break the shell around his young charge's enlightening truth until it quickens of its own. Enlightenment will occur, but no one can say what will provide the stimulus. It might be something completely trivial; it might occur in any aspect of human life. In Japan we have a soft jelly like candy called *yokan*. It is sometimes sold in small rubber, or plastic skins that, when pricked with a toothpick, split completely open. So tightly stretched is the skin that the slightest rupture causes it to peel away from the luscious sweetness inside. It makes no difference where on the surface of the skin one makes the tiny hole; the effect is always the same.

Similar in certain respects to the hatching chick, the cicada emerging from its shell, and the candy contained in the stretched rubber skin, enlightenment is born from inner strivings and with the help of external coachings; it must not be forced, or it will be destroyed. No one can say and, in fact, it makes no difference what or where the stimulus that brings it to light is, or where or when it occurs.

The road is not smooth; there are times when one is elated and happy, as if standing on a high peak commanding a breathtaking view. There are other times when one gropes blindly through tangles and forests of gloom and melancholy, but the Zen way is marvelous in that when one falls down he must fall up. That is, there are no absolute pinnacles beyond which progress is impossible. When a peak is reached and the way seems to lead downward, in truth it leads only up, for even the descent must be part of a total rising development.

About the Author

Born in 1907, in Tochigi Prefecture, the son of a doctor, Shindai Sekiguchi entered a temple to study for the priesthood when he was only nine years old. In 1931, after graduating from the Taisho Buddhist University, he entered Kencho-ji, a famous temple in Kamakura, to study Zen meditation. He subsequently returned to Taisho University to teach.

In 1944, he went to China to study Chinese Buddhism; and in 1951, he and several other persons founded the International Buddhist Institute, which, with the help of several universities, conducts research on Buddhism from a modern, international standpoint. Reverend Sekiguchi's study of the Tendai Shoshikan sutra, considered the most basic and best source of practical information on zazen (seated meditation) methods, appeared in 1955. With the recommendation of the Japan Philosophy Association, it was included in the *Bibliographie de la Philosophie.* Though most of Sekiguchi's work has been scholarly, in 1963, he published a simplified work which enjoyed great popularity. Reverend Sekiguchi has traveled to many lands to meet and exchange ideas with specialists on the Orient. In 1969, when the Japan Cultural Center was opened in Köln, Germany, which he was one of its first lecturers.

At present he is a professor at Taisho University and presiding priest at the Nikkosan Temple.

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