

JOSHU SASAKI ROSHI'S

ADVICE TO STUDENTS ABOUT ZAZEN

given in the late 1960s

Some of you must be practicing zazen for the first time. While the practice of zazen is widespread in the United States, I do find it a little different from my interpretation of sitting. Dhyana meditation preceded Zen by many, many years. This sitting meditation is practiced even today in many parts of the world, including much of India. But the Mahayana zazen is quite different from the one accepted in Hindu and Yoga practices.

It is a little bit too complex to explain Zen sitting in a brief time, so I will talk about something that is more easily understood.

Meditation consists of quieting the mind, or contemplating some object or problem. Some ponder the question „*Who am I?*“ Also, in Mahayana meditation it is true that the idea is to realize who the self is, but the practice is slightly different. Some forms of Indian meditation ask the question:

„*Who am I?*“ and on this basis is meditation largely done. However, by asking the question „*Who am I?*“ the self becomes an object. In Buddhist thinking the true self is neither object nor subject. Therefore to think and ask „*Who am I?*“ is a foolish thing.

However, the Roshi reaches the height of folly, because he himself asks you to ponder that question. Since you obey his request you demonstrate an even higher form of foolishness.

To sit and try to understand the self is not strictly a Buddhist purpose. To realize the self in order to manifest the self is the true purpose. The truth of Zen is that at all times we are manifesting our true selves. Everybody here stand up. Put your hands on your hips, wrists up. Now everybody laugh out loud. While you were laughing were you thinking about yourself? You probably forgot to be concerned about yourself. However, the person who laughed was you – no one else. No one else but you did the laughing. So you were manifesting and realizing yourself while you were laughing. Not recognizing the fact that you are indeed realizing and manifesting yourself at all times, you are seeking elsewhere



objectively or subjectively to find yourself.

At all times you are manifesting God or Buddha or yourself. The Buddhists say your true nature is God's nature. Also, God's nature is also your nature. God is permeating your nature. And likewise you are in God's nature. You are always one with God. So you are always laughing and realizing your own and God's true nature.

Instead of affirming and manifesting the realization that you are manifesting God all the time, you expect something tremendous, external to yourself.

You seek that and thereby drive yourself crazy.

So Zen practice here is not to study what or who God is. This place here is for practicing sitting meditation in order to affirm the suchness that you and God are indeed the same.

Thus, if you ask me what is Zen, my answer will be to laugh as you people laughed a while ago. That is Zen, my Zen.

When you wake up tomorrow morning, first thing, stand up, put your hands on your hips, and laugh five or ten times, and that will cure you of much of your illness. This exercise is even better than a long period of meditative sitting. As a beginner in meditation, instead of suffering a long period of cramped legs, it would be better for you every morning as soon as you get up to immediately stand in this position and laugh about ten times. This is really the best beginning of Zen. If during that time you are doing this exercise and laughing vigorously, I were to ask you „*Where was God at that time?*“ How would you answer? Then immediately your logic and your consciousness starts to work. That is what is bad. That is time and space learning. That is not Zen. Just simply laugh and you will begin to realize.

MORE ABOUT ZAZEN

The problem of religious men is to find out where does God come from?

Where does he go?

The same as a physician would want to know where the blood comes from and goes. God is not born from the mind but from the sacrum. And he needs a place to leave. That place is the sternum. This is the Zen explanation.

However, the physician may have a different explanation. He may place God somewhere inside the chest or blood. So in Zen we emphasize that God needs freedom to go in and out and that is why the position of the sacrum and sternum is important. You may form God within yourself, but if that God cannot enter or leave freely at any time, then you are not in perfect condition. If your God goes out and is not able to return, then you are not balanced within yourself. So in my talks I repeatedly emphasize that God is inside as well as outside. The speed with which God enters and leaves is beyond description. The fact that God goes out from us and comes back again means that our mental attitude does not require past, present or future. When you think of God in terms of past, present or future, then that state of mind indicates that you have not yet realized God.

So, if you do zazen properly, you will not recognize past, present or future. Therefore the proper form of zazen represents the proper form of God, which is yourself. As soon as you start thinking:

How shall I breathe? or What shall I do with my eyes?

Then you are already out of balance and are not in the enlightenment position. We often hear noises during zazen such as dogs barking, cars, and so forth, but when you are really engaged in genuine zazen, none of these noises will disturb you. Neither do we think about accumulating saliva in our mouth. All these problems are forgotten, and no reasoning takes place in our mind. Even though your eyes are open, you do not see. You forget about breathing and yet you continue to breathe. Outside noises are heard and yet they are not heard.

So proper zazen requires a proper attitude of the senses as well as proper posture. In the proper posture, the head is held up straight from the spine towards the ceiling, so that the chin pulls in. This position allows the blood to circulate freely, and the mind becomes clear.

In Zen, we discourage head with the chin meditative position, mind. When the head is the shoulders naturally down along your nose in front of you. Your small semi-circle and look at a certain area,

Next is the breathing. In God which is born in and in one breath universe three

That is why we keep during zazen, so that freely. You may have photographs of great

are wide open and their lips are tightly shut. When you have the proper nose-mouth position you will feel the whole cosmos enter, circulate and leave your body and you will come to the state of mind where there is neither anything internal nor external.

When the sacrum is forward and the sternum is up, the abdomen will be in a very stable position, and only in the area between the navel and the chest is there a slight movement. Often during zazen, a person is surprised by his own sudden sigh. Your tongue is tightly pressed against your palate, the root of the tongue is very rigid and while air enters very gently through the nose, nothing enters through the mouth. The ears should be in line with the shoulders; eventually you will get to the point where none of the sounds such as children's voices, sounds of passing cars, and so forth, will disturb you. You should never dislike any sound that enters your ear. Try to listen to children's screams and try to like them until they become inaudible to you.



a relaxed position of the raised. This is a indicative of a resting in the proper position, drop. You should look to a place about six feet sight will be limited to a despite the fact that you you won't see anything.

the proper position, your sacrum goes out circles the entire thousand times.

our nostrils wide open God may come and go noticed in the men that their nostrils