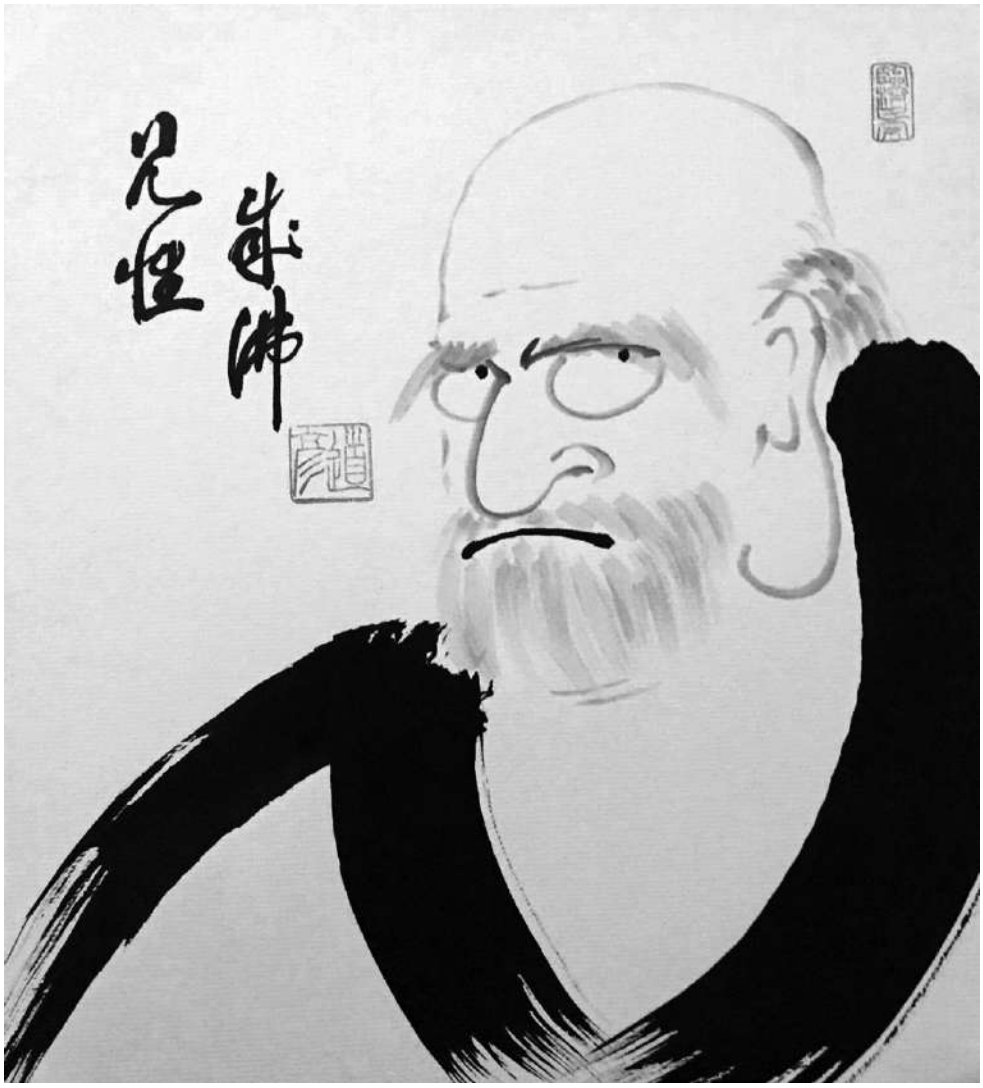
The RINZAI ZEN WAY

A Guide to Practice

MEIDO MOORE



Bodhidharma, the First Zen Patriarch. *Kensho Jobutsu*:
"Seeing [one's true] nature, becoming Buddha"
Painting and inscription by Dogen Hosokawa Roshi.

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Translation of Hakuin's poem inscribed on the cover painting:

> In the realm of the thousand buddhas
> He is hated by the thousand buddhas;
> Among the crowd of demons
> He is detested by the crowd of demons.
> He crushes the silent-illumination heretics of today,
> And massacres the heterodox blind monks of this generation.
> This filthy blind old shavepate
> Adds more foulness still to foulness.

Miura, Isshu and Ruth Fuller Sasaki. *Zen Dust: The History of the Koan and Koan Study in Rinzai (Lin-Chi) Zen*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1967.

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FOREWORD

SHAKYAMUNI BUDDHA turned his eye inward, realized his True Self, and set in motion the wheel of the dharma. In the twenty-some centuries since, the many schools of Buddhism developed, all of them centered on this fundamental experience but varying in their modes of expression and techniques of training.

The Zen school began in China, starting from the sixth century C.E. Zen emphasizes the primacy of realization and the necessity of continued refinement of that experience. Even within Zen, different styles of expression developed. The school of Zen associated with Rinzai (d. 866) is known for its dynamic style and its emphasis on the body: all activity can be meditation; wisdom must manifest in every action of the realized person. The Rinzai school became the dominant school of Zen in China, and was eventually transmitted to Japan.

Our line of Zen was transmitted to the West by Omori Sogen Roshi, one of the foremost Japanese Rinzai Zen masters of the twentieth century. He once expressed his understanding of Zen in these words:

> Zen is to transcend life and death (all dualism), to truly realize that the entire universe is the "True Human Body" through the discipline of "body-mind in oneness."...Zen without the accompanying physical experience is nothing but empty discussion.

Drawing on his own background, Omori Roshi developed a distinctive manner of training in Zen that can be summed up (in

Japanese) as *Zen ken sho*. *Zen* stands for traditional training in Rinzai Zen, including meditation and related practices. *Ken* means "sword" and stands for the use of physical training—in Omori Roshi's case, martial arts—to develop energy and dynamic use of the body and breathing. *Sho* means "brush" and stands for the fine arts; in the context of our training, it means to develop refinement and sensitivity. All these activities are the discipline of "body-mind in oneness." All these can be the manifestation of wisdom in action.

In this book, Meido Moore introduces the fundamentals of Rinzai Zen. Part 1 provides an overview of training in Zen. It locates Zen within the larger landscape of Buddhist practice, and presents the distinctive Zen approach to the motivations for undertaking training, the role of compassion, the nature of enlightenment and its manifestation, and connection between the physicality of training in Zen and the meditative states usually associated with Buddhism.

Part 2 gives practical instruction in the basics of Zen training in a manner suitable for beginners. Zen training is difficult to accomplish without direct instruction from a knowledgeable teacher. Moore Roshi has provided a detailed and accessible introduction to the use of the body, breath, and mind in meditation that can be fruitfully followed on one's own. He introduces the important practice of training in daily life; even the simplest activities provide the opportunity for training, and to begin these practices is to enter the practice of Zen. Finally, because progressing on the path requires instruction and correction, the text concludes with discussion of the role of a Zen teacher, selecting a teacher, and working with a teacher.

Though Zen has now spread widely, it is clear that modern students often lack an understanding of Zen's physicality and the embodied nature of Zen realization. The thread of bodily realization is in danger of being lost. Without this, Zen easily becomes the "empty discussion" about which Omori Roshi warned. For this reason, it is important that the Rinzai approach to Zen practice that Omori Roshi transmitted be clearly explained and more widely known.

I therefore hope that beginners will make use of this book as an entrance into correct Zen practice, thus avoiding mistaken steps on the path. Further, I hope that practitioners of any level—in any lineage—will use it to clearly see both the strong and weak points in their training.

—SO'ZAN MILLER
Abbot, Daiyuzenji Rinzai Zen Temple
Chicago, Illinois

PREFACE

A ZEN BUDDHIST LINEAGE descended from the Chinese master Rinzai Gigen (Linji Yixuan, d. 866) was first transmitted to Japan in a lasting way by Myoan Eisai (1141–1215). From that time onward—and with patronage from the ruling warrior class and imperial family—the Rinzai Zen school became well established. In particular, the great cultural and spiritual flowerings of the Japanese medieval period were largely centered in Rinzai monasteries.

Of the various Rinzai lines that eventually arrived in Japan, the vital Otokan* lineage alone survives to the present day. This was the lineage inherited by Hakuin Ekaku Zenji (1686–1768), who revived Rinzai Zen from a period of decline and organized the path of training into its present form. Today, all existing Japanese Rinzai lineages can be traced to that preeminent master.

A few of those lineages have now taken fragile root in the West. We may therefore say that we are witnessing another crucial stage of Rinzai Zen transmission, perhaps as crucial as that from China to Japan. Unfortunately, at this time there are few original works by Western authors that are useful for beginners desiring to actually practice Rinzai Zen. Certainly nothing in the West can yet match works such as Omori Sogen Roshi's *Sanzen Nyumon*[1] or, among older works, Torei Enji's *Shumon Mujintoron*.[2]

I, too, am unable to author anything matching those earlier works. But I believe that a short book for beginners primarily stressing actual practice details from a Rinzai Zen perspective might be useful. I therefore began writing this book with my students in mind, hoping simply to address points of practice that easily go awry. Recently,

however, I have been often contacted by distant persons asking how they also may start to practice Rinzai Zen. Of course, practice instructions are ideally received from a living teacher, face-to-face, and that relationship remains indispensable. Yet those who have not yet found a teacher can still begin in a limited way. Providing guidance for such people might thus be another use of this book.

Finally, I have thought for some time that Westerners, having available to them today a bewildering variety of Buddhist traditions from which to choose, might benefit from a work clarifying the Rinzai Zen path. When it comes to Zen resources in the West, there is a distinct lack of Rinzai works; the great majority of Zen books here have been written from the perspective of Soto or modern hybrid lineages. I have therefore tried to present a basic conceptual framework for beginners that is in accord with the profound One Vehicle standpoint and unique energy of Rinzai Zen, while remaining accessible to those who are not yet greatly familiar with Zen or Buddhism in general. In response to questions commonly asked by Westerners, I have included a chapter explaining Zen's view of its place among the many Buddhist paths and another examining Abrahamic faiths from a Zen viewpoint.

This book has been compiled from writings and talks given in the United States and Europe over the course of ten years. Naturally it rests upon the above-mentioned texts, as well as oral instruction received from my teachers, and compared to those is certainly inferior. But much of what I would want to say to any Zen beginner, as well as the practical instruction I often give in person to first-time meditators, is contained in this book. It could therefore serve as the framework for a kind of Zen introductory course or seminar, and I would be pleased if interested beginners who do not yet have a teacher might even join together to read and practice according to these instructions.

Intended as it is for a general audience, there are naturally many important things that could not be included. For now, though, I will be grateful if this small book serves as a useful companion, especially to new Zen students in the early days of their training.

—MEIDO MOORE
Korinji Monastery, Wisconsin

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PART ONE

UNDERSTANDING THE RINZAI ZEN WAY

1

THE APPROACH AND INTENT OP ZEN

Studying Zen, one rides all vehicles of Buddhism; practicing Zen, one attains awakening in a single lifetime.

—EISAI[1]

[FROM A *TEISHO GIVEN IN FEBRUARY 2012]**

In speaking with many beginning Zen* students, it seems apparent that although they may be familiar with some of the methods of Zen practice, what is often lacking is an understanding of the overall approach and intent of the Zen way. Without this understanding it will be difficult to follow the path of our practice and arrive at its fruition. For this reason, I want to speak simply about these things in a manner that is easy to grasp.

Bodhidharma[2] handed down to us a famous four-line description of what Zen is. I should say this description is *attributed* to Bodhidharma since we do not know whether it originally comes from him. But the important thing is that these lines express Zen's understanding of itself, so they should be understood by those of us who are Zen practitioners.

The four lines are as follows:

A separate transmission outside the scriptures.
Not dependent upon words or letters.
Direct pointing* at the human mind.
Seeing one's nature and becoming Buddha.

Let us take a look at each of these lines.

A separate transmission outside the scriptures means that the lifeblood of Zen practice lies within the relationship between teacher and student. Our way, though it does not conflict with the essential meaning of the sutras,* is not actualized through them. How is it actualized? Within your own body, and specifically through the joining together of your mind with that of your teacher. This vital human relationship within which Zen is transmitted and made to live is what "outside the scriptures" affirms.

Not dependent upon words or letters means that while the sutras, commentaries, records of the Zen patriarchs and other Buddhist writings all point to the awakening and its actualization, which are the Zen path, these texts (as well as writings of value from other traditions) must ultimately be viewed as *descriptions* of awakening or realization. That is to say, one might not be able to awaken simply by reading the descriptions. They are hints, pointers, maps. But they are not themselves to be relied upon or set up as sufficient, except inasmuch as you are able to make them come alive within your own body.

In other words, all of these writings arose out of someone's actual experience and are attempts to explain and describe that experience. This is important and crucial and helpful. These things have great usefulness on the path. In the course of Zen practice, we especially use the sutras and other writings to check our insight; at some point in our training, we must ensure that our experience is in accord with what has been written in the past. However, that insight itself must first be arrived at experientially in our own bodies, rather than intellectually.

These first two lines, then, reveal Zen's general approach: the transmission of Zen occurs "mind to mind"[3] within the vital, intimate relationship between teacher and student. Furthermore, the wisdom to which Zen points—and the path of its embodiment—may be described within the Buddhist writings but will not be completed through intellectual understanding alone.

This last point reminds me of an opportunity I had to participate in an interfaith dialogue at a Catholic center. Our focus was specifically the modern dialogue between Buddhist and Catholic monastics, which had been pioneered by Thomas Merton. While preparing for this event, I read something I had never known about Thomas Aquinas, the great theologian and philosopher. Near the end of his life, while performing mass, it is said that Aquinas heard the voice of Christ speaking to him. Christ, expressing that he was well pleased with Aquinas, asked him what he desired. Aquinas replied, "Only you, Lord," negating and dropping himself completely.

At that moment, Aquinas had a deeply transforming experience. He was later unable to describe it but refused to continue working and writing in the normal manner. When asked to do so, he declared, "Everything I have written now seems to me as straw."

I found this story moving. It reminded me of Tokusan,[4] who wrote a commentary on the *Diamond Sutra* and, packing this on his back, traveled to southern China, intending to discredit the Zen teachings. Upon experiencing his own breakthrough, however, he burned his treasured treatise, saying, "Even if we have mastered all the profound teachings, it is no more than a single hair in the vastness of space."[5]

Truly, all else pales before the actual experience of awakening. Yet until we arrive at that intimate knowledge, how easy it is to delude ourselves into thinking that we understand what Zen is. If even people of great ability and potential like Tokusan have fallen into such traps, how much more so each of us must be careful not to rest satisfied with a shallow understanding.

Now let us consider the second pair of Bodhidharma's lines, which reveal the actual approach of Zen practice and affirm the intent of the Zen way.

Direct pointing at the human mind refers to the many skillful means by which Zen students are led to *kensho*,* the recognition of one's true nature—that is, the nature of one's mind as not different from what is meant by *Buddha**—which is the entrance gate of Zen. We may say that fundamentally it is the Zen teacher's job to cause the student to discover this intrinsic wisdom.

There are many examples of such direct pointing in Zen writings. Rinzai said, "Upon this lump of red flesh [that is, within your own body] is the true human being of no rank. It is constantly moving in and out of the gates of your face. Those of you who have not seen it, look!"[6] The Sixth Patriarch[7] said, "Thinking of neither good nor evil [that is, putting down the habit of dualistic seeing], what is your original face?"[8]

From the day you begin your Zen training, you receive many such "direct pointings" through various means depending on the ability and style of the teacher. All the many forms of our practice—the ways we are taught to move, walk, and sit; the ways in which the sounds of instruments and voices are used; encounters with our teachers—can be methods of direct pointing. A good teacher, in fact, is constantly pointing out the essential meaning of Zen to you.

Of course, we are not all sharp enough to catch it right away. We may have many obstructions to awakening, which can be physical, energetic, conceptual, and so on. So at the same time that we are receiving many forms of direct pointing, we may also learn various practices to dissolve our obstructions. Again, it is fundamentally the Zen teacher's job to prescribe such practices that fit our situations.

The fourth line begins with the words *Seeing one's nature—that* is, awakening to the nature of mind. This is the moment when we actually do recognize that which is constantly being pointed out to us. Deep or shallow, this turning around of the light of awareness to recognize one's "original face" marks the entrance into Zen. This is kensho.

Before kensho, we do commonly say that we practice Zen. But in truth we should know that we have not yet actually, in our own existence, affirmed Zen. It is more accurate at that point to say we are doing Buddhist practice. But it is not yet really Zen.

And what happens when we have indeed passed through this gate of kensho? Everything is fine, right? No, not yet. There is still the second half of this last line: *becoming Buddha*. These final words call us not only to give testament to the truth of our nature, which is boundless, but also to fully actualize this awakening, to integrate it, to embody it, and so to realize all the activities of body, speech, and mind in accord with it.

Only such embodiment is what we call "becoming Buddha." Simply having the recognition of our nature does not mean that we have actualized the full fruition of awakening. The lifelong practice of liberation, which is the real meat and core of the Zen way, still lies ahead. Certainly, though, having gained the confidence of our own experience, we may expect our faith, our energy, and our commitment to deepen from the moment we enter the gate of Zen awakening. This is a special quality of the Zen approach, which takes awakening as both the entrance to the path and the path itself.

This concludes a brief summary of Zen's general approach and intent. It is not difficult to understand this. It is not even particularly difficult to enter the gate of kensho. But to actualize kensho along the lifelong path of liberation can, in fact, be quite difficult.

How to do it, then? Simply follow the instructions of your teacher, give yourself body and mind to the training, and follow the path of practice that has been clearly laid out by the masters of the past. Rely upon your teacher and community, and just throw yourself into it!

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[*] An asterisk appears at the first occurrence of a term that appears in the glossary.

2

ZEN AND THE ONE VEHICLE

The One Buddha Vehicle is called the True Great Vehicle, the Original Vehicle, the Supreme Vehicle, the Vehicle of Complete Wisdom. Having given rise in the heart to great and intrepid determination, it means to come to see clearly into the Buddha-Nature, to study fully the nature of all the Dharma Gates of differentiation, and to learn to see them as clearly as the palm of one's hand. Then the important matter of Advanced Practice is to be undertaken; this is called seizing the claws and fangs of the Dharma cave. (It means) to assist all sentient beings with free unimpeded action, and with unflagging heart to continue to carry on the Bodhisattva practice life after life, world after world, until the last sentient being has been helped to deliverance.

—TOREI[1]

TOREI ENJI was one of the foremost disciples of Hakuin, the pivotal master who revitalized the Rinzai school in Japan and organized many aspects of the practice we undertake today. The quote above is from Torei's text *Shumon Mujintoron* (*The Discourse on the*

Inexhaustible Lamp); it is a crucial and wonderful work, laying out in a detailed manner the Zen path.

Since we examined Zen's approach and intent in the first chapter, Torei's meaning in the above words should be clear. "To see clearly into the Buddha-Nature" is the entrance of kensho; "to study fully the nature of all the Dharma* Gates of differentiation" is the practice after kensho by which that awakening is actualized; "the important matter of Advanced Practice" is the culmination of this process and its dynamic embodiment to benefit others. But what is meant by describing Zen as the "One Buddha Vehicle" and the "True Great Vehicle, the Original Vehicle, the Supreme Vehicle, the Vehicle of Complete Wisdom"?

Understanding this will be crucial not only for successfully following the Zen path, but it will also grant us a correct view regarding Zen's relationship to other traditions. That is the intent of this chapter.

HIERARCHIES OF BUDDHIST VEHICLES

"Vehicle"—*yana** in Sanskrit—is a term commonly found in Buddhism. Vehicles have the function of transporting people from one place to another. Thus, the Buddhist teachings as a whole are described as a vehicle allowing one to travel the path of liberation. The different Buddhist traditions or schools, all their various practices, and even our own bodies within which practices are brought to life may also be considered vehicles in this way. The image of the Buddhist teachings as a raft ferrying one to the other shore of enlightenment well conveys what is meant by *yana*.

From this basic standpoint, no particular vehicle or tradition can be considered superior or inferior to another. Since we all have unique obstacles and abilities, the highest teachings and deepest practices for each of us are just those that *work*. Why do they work? Ideally, because they have been correctly prescribed for us by

qualified teachers. That is, they fit our circumstances. This is easy to understand.

Nevertheless, over time various hierarchies of vehicles have been set forth in different sutras or by particular Buddhist schools. At their best, these serve to differentiate approaches to practice suited to individuals according to their varying needs. Hierarchies also reveal how the traditions formulating them define their own approaches; they reveal, in other words, each tradition's view of itself. So they are not without use. But these hierarchies are often also used less skillfully in a triumphalist manner to elevate one tradition above others. Since Zen beginners may be confused when meeting practitioners of other Buddhist traditions that hold to such hierarchies, we will briefly examine the most common of them here. This will allow us to begin our Zen practice without falling into petty sectarianism and to affirm the essential principles of all Buddhism.

Three Vehicles in Mahayana

In Mahayana* traditions, the bodhisattva* ideal—attaining enlightenment for the sake of aiding other suffering beings—is asserted to be superior to the "enlightenment for oneself alone" approach supposedly found in non-Mahayana traditions. In Mahayana we thus commonly find described three vehicles, ranked in order from lesser to greater:

1. *Shravakayana*,* the "vehicle of the hearers": those who follow the Buddha's teachings but whose practice tends toward a partial, personal liberation rather than the full fruit of buddhahood.
2. *Pratyekabuddhayana*,* the "vehicle of solitary buddhas": those who arrive at enlightenment on their own and who do not ever teach. Their attainment is genuine but still considered incomplete, and they do not aspire to compassionately aid others. The Pratyekabuddhayana and Shravakayana together are also referred to as the Hinayana,* "lesser vehicle."

3. *Bodhisattvayana*,* the "bodhisattva vehicle": those who vow to attain enlightenment in order to liberate all beings. The bodhisattva path is marked by a gradual fulfillment of the paramitas,* or perfections, and culminates in complete buddhahood, including all the qualities and means for aiding others. Mahayana is another name for this vehicle.

Three Vehicles in Vajrayana

Another hierarchy of vehicles was set forth in Vajrayana* traditions, which practice with reference to tantric texts that were late additions to the Buddhist corpus in India and elsewhere. Vajrayana traditions often consider themselves superior to earlier, nontantric Buddhist paths (which they may dub "sutric"):

1. Hinayana, the "lesser vehicle"*: as above, encompassing both the Shravakayana and the Pratyekabuddhayana.
2. Mahayana, the "great vehicle"* (as explained above): though not inferior to Vajrayana in ultimate attainment, Mahayana is claimed to be inferior in method and so to require a much longer time—multiple eons of inconceivable length—to attain buddhahood.
3. Vajrayana, the "diamond vehicle" or "thunderbolt vehicle": making use of so-called esoteric practices, this promises swift attainment of buddhahood within one or, at most, a handful of lifetimes.

Aside from this general hierarchy, specific Vajrayana traditions have sometimes gone further. For example, the Nyingma sect in Tibet divides Vajrayana practice itself into nine yanas and places the *Dzogchen* (great perfection) teachings, a profound treasure of that school, at their apex. Japanese Shingon* organizes vehicles according to its founder Kukai's[2] *Ten Stages of Spiritual Development*. In this hierarchy, the various stages of common foolish people, the Hinayana, the partial Mahayana, and the

complete Mahayana are described in a manner accounting for each of the Buddhist schools existing in Japan during Kukai's time (not including Zen, which had yet to arrive there). The highest, most sublime position is naturally assigned to the Shingon esoteric teachings.

THE ONE VEHICLE THAT TRANSCENDS VEHICLES

The distinctions seen in the hierarchies of Buddhist vehicles we examined above—"lesser" versus "greater," "sutric" versus "tantric," "exoteric" versus "esoteric"—can be confusing to beginners, who perhaps little expect to find in Buddhism the kind of sectarian division common in other religions. In fact, from the Zen viewpoint, we may also express a vehicle hierarchy. The purpose of doing so in Zen teaching, however, is simply to clarify our own practice. If understood correctly, this actually frees us from sectarianism. Let us examine such a Zen formulation now.

The first three vehicles in this Zen view align with those of the general Mahayana presented above: Shravakayana, Pratyekabuddhayana, and Bodhisattvayana. Beyond these three, Zen affirms a fourth vehicle: the *Ekayana*,* or "One Vehicle."* This One Vehicle is what Torei Enji also called the "True Great Vehicle, the Original Vehicle, the Supreme Vehicle, the Vehicle of Complete Wisdom." What is the Ekayana? It means, simply, any path that takes a direct recognition of one's own nature—that is, the heart of the Buddha's own realization and the original face of all beings—as its entrance gate and essential point.

This is important. It means that in Zen there are inner meanings to the first three vehicles that do not primarily refer to traditions held in lower regard than Zen, or to earlier, less complete Buddhist teachings. Rather, these three vehicles are used to illustrate incomplete approaches to Buddhist practice in which anyone, no matter what tradition or sect one follows, could become trapped. The fourth vehicle, Ekayana, likewise reveals a universal, inclusive

approach that is open to anyone, in any tradition, because it relies upon our intrinsic buddha-wisdom. Thus, the Zen hierarchy of vehicles is never to be used as a sectarian or triumphalist formula. Instead, it is a reminder that genuine Zen ultimately transcends traditions, sects, and schools.

Examined from this inner Zen standpoint, then, Shravakayana does not refer to the historical "hearers" of the Buddha's teaching in fifth-century B.C.E. India or to those traditions rejecting the Mahayana teachings (today, the Theravada* school). Nor does it refer simply to those whose practice aims at a shallow, personal liberation. Instead, it represents Buddhist practitioners in any tradition who continue to subtly conceive of the Buddhist teachings as pointing to something outside themselves, or beyond human capacity. That is, the Shravakayana is the vehicle of those who do not yet have complete faith that their own nature is not different from what is signified by "buddha." Consequently, they are satisfied with small gains. They cannot hope to encompass other beings within the scope of their practice.

In truth, we all belong to this Shravaka vehicle in the beginning stages of our Zen training when we lack confidence, are naturally obsessed with our own issues, and crave to experience some tangible benefit from our practice. Though we may intellectually grasp various Buddhist doctrines and say that we are practicing Zen for the sake of liberating all beings, we actually do not yet truly believe such a thing is possible because we have not entered the gate of direct experience. Inevitably, we practice with a very small spirit. This is when it may be said we are practicing Buddhism but not yet the Mahayana—and certainly not yet Zen.

The inner meaning of the second vehicle, Pratyekabuddhayana, refers not to those theorized solitary individuals who arrive at enlightenment on their own rather than by following a Buddha's teachings and who do not ever teach others. It signifies practitioners in any tradition who, though they may attain to the wisdom of recognizing their true nature, fail to adequately deepen that understanding under a living teacher. Without a teacher's guidance,

we may well become fixated upon what we have recognized and think that our path is done. But the crucial training of refinement after kensho, by which we give life to wisdom and gain the means to benefit other beings, will be nearly impossible to complete. Any Buddhist practitioner whose awakening remains self-verified, unrefined, solitary, and partial—like a sliver of moon rather than a bright sun, lighting the way for others—walks the Pratyekabuddha path.

All of us will, at some point in our Zen practice, arrive at such a place of genuine but incomplete attainment. If we linger there and never enter sincerely into face-to-face relationship with a teacher from whom we may ultimately obtain the full energetic transmission of Zen, then it may be said that we have become bound within this lesser Pratyekabuddha vehicle.

The inner meaning of the third vehicle, Bodhisattvayana, refers not simply to those who vow to attain enlightenment in order to liberate all beings and so take up the gradual training of the paramitas. As excellent as such practitioners are, it here signifies those whose tendency is to become stuck in notions of gradual stages and progress, and the notion of delusion versus wisdom. Although having truly seen into their nature and having begun to clarify that wisdom, such persons will thus still end up actualizing a gradual path over eons rather than the rapidly ascending path of Zen. While it is true that the Zen path only opens due to the power of great compassion—the mark of the bodhisattva—the point here is that truly great compassion only arises when we completely relinquish even a subtle grip on what we have attained.

Any practitioner, in any tradition, can become trapped within lower stages of the noble bodhisattva vehicle like this. The trap, in fact, is the very conception of it as a fixed vehicle: a clinging to the skillful devices of "vehicle," "stages," "path," and "goal" themselves. Zen, though it makes use of and fulfills all Buddhist teachings, *must ultimately transcend them with great freedom*. If we fail to do so, we may become attached to this very beautiful bodhisattva vehicle. It is a vehicle of those who retain a subtle dualistic obscuration and

fixation on “holding” or “cultivating” what has been realized, or who retain the attachment of fascination with various paths and methods of practice. Thus, they cannot rapidly gain the wondrous means to help others; they cannot approach the final freedom.

These three vehicles together also comprise what Zen calls the approaches of the “teaching schools.” By this is meant any tradition whose practitioners depend primarily upon traces of the Buddha’s teachings found in sutric or tantric texts, rather than upon a direct approach to the Buddha’s actual experience from which the myriad texts and teachings arose—the essential awakening that is only to be actualized within one’s own body. These are practitioners who, in one way or another, have not yet dissolved the fetters of their own concepts, ultimately including even the noble, rather useful concepts of “practice,” “enlightenment,” “Buddha,” and “Buddhism.” Torei writes, “The teaching schools merely discuss stages of the Way; the Zen school directly points at the surpassing of the Way. The teaching schools talk abstractly about the wondrous state of becoming Buddha; the Zen school aims at directly becoming Buddha.”[3]

No matter what the actual tradition—whether it be Hinayana, Mahayana, or Vajrayana, exoteric or esoteric, even Zen—practitioners becoming stuck in such ways are not followers of the supreme One Vehicle. Though their conceptual understanding may not be lacking and they might gradually progress along the path, for such people “Buddha” will always continue to be something far away. They have yet to bodily make the crucial leap directly into the Buddha’s realm.

The true, highest teaching according to Zen, therefore, is neither sutric nor tantric; it is our own intrinsic wisdom, which is not bound by sutra or tantra.* The supreme meditation method is not any technique of manipulating thoughts, being “mindful,” or “staying in the present moment,” but rather to turn around and directly recognize the luminous, boundless nature of one’s own mind. The true esoteric Buddhist teachings are not secretly transmitted mantras* and hidden practices, but rather the direct recognition of one’s true nature by which the point of all Buddhist practices is

clearly seen. The highest transmission and initiation one may receive is just this actual awakening, no matter how it is accomplished. The supreme vehicle is the ascending path—free from all limitations—that only awakening reveals.

This being the case, though Zen may use many teachings, methods, and practices, it must ultimately be said that these are not fixed at all. Being "not dependent upon words or letters," Zen could at any time change or evolve to suit the needs of beings. As Torei says, "Our Patriarchal Zen school does not depend on the traces of the teachings, but has a special meaning: energy, free and unobstructed, responding in accord with the situation, that is what it is about."[4]

This, then, is what is meant by Ekayana, the supreme One Vehicle of which Zen is an expression. Ekayana in Zen does not ultimately refer to a single tradition, text, or method. Rather, any tradition, text, or method used in a manner that leads to direct recognition of our own intrinsic wisdom—and which subsequently takes that wisdom as the basis of the path itself—is an expression of the One Vehicle. Zen is one of these.[5]

Any attempt to interpret Ekayana in a manner justifying intersect triumphalism is therefore deluded. When we attain, in a shallow manner or deeply, that insight that is the heart of all Buddhism—and then enter with great faith into practice based upon that—we become followers of the supreme One Vehicle. Whether someone attains the initial insight through direct pointing from a teacher, meditation, repetition of a buddha's name,[6] esoteric empowerment, deity practices, mantra recitation, koan,* internal cultivation,[7] or any other of the myriad practices transmitted by teachers of the many Buddhist schools is unimportant. At the moment when entrance to the Zen way is accomplished, we will immediately grasp the essential intent of them all.

This is crucial: though we say that the Ekayana approach of Zen transcends all vehicles, "transcend" here does not mean "to be higher than." It means to encompass and unify while simultaneously passing beyond. What does the One Vehicle encompass and unify?

All vehicles, paths, and teachings. What does it pass beyond? It passes beyond rigid conceptions of vehicles, paths, and teachings, all hierarchies and stages, distinctions of delusion versus wisdom, so-called Zen, and so-called Buddhism itself.

This is the wondrous path of Zen, the path of liberation within this very body, which has been handed down to us. This is the supreme vehicle, the vehicle of complete wisdom, the buddha-heart vehicle: a path bound by nothing and able to integrate anything—even the practices and texts of other traditions—freely according to need. It should be clear now that there is nothing in Zen that conflicts with any expression of the buddha-dharma,* and there is nothing in the buddha-dharma—or life itself—that may not be encompassed within the Ekayana approach of Zen. Within the Zen way, there is from the beginning no accumulation of wisdom or merit lacking, no perfection unaccomplished, and no goal unattained.

It should also be clear now that this Zen hierarchy of vehicles is not for criticizing others. It is for correcting ourselves.

Torei says the following concerning vehicles. When today we encounter competing arguments regarding the superiority of this or that Buddhist tradition, we would do well to remember his words. Moreover, his final sentence leaves for all of us a precious test for gauging the depth of our own practice:

> Nowadays there is much talk about the sublime and the profound, or conversely criticism of the Two Vehicles (Shravaka and Pratyeka), belittling their authority. The partial, the round, the exoteric and the esoteric schools contend with each other, yet they have not even accomplished the confirmation of the Two Vehicles, let alone that of the Bodhisattva Vehicle. And as for the One Buddha Vehicle, how could they conceive of it even in their dreams? What use to them are the partial, round, exoteric and esoteric teachings?
>
> None of this applies to our patriarchal school,* which surpasses expedient means. When by bitter interviews[8] and painful training at last the Principle is attained, then the

Buddha-Dharma of the exoteric and the esoteric schools appears directly before the eyes. Looking at the Sutras after having smashed the many prison gates and broken free, it seems as if they were one's own teachings.[9]

3

ZEN AND ABRAHAMIC FAITHS

Between You and me there is an "I am" that battles me,
So take away, by your grace, this "I am" from in between.

—MANSUR AL-HALLAJ[1]

BUDDHISM IS A DHARMIC rather than Abrahamic tradition, meaning that it arose not in the ancient Near East but in the sophisticated religious and philosophical context of the Indian subcontinent. Naturally there are many differences between Buddhism and, for example, Christianity or Islam.

In my experience teaching Zen beginners in the West, some of the more common questions asked are, "Does Buddhism believe in God?" "What is the role of a supreme deity in Zen?" and "Is Buddhism atheistic?" Since so many in the West come to Zen not from dharmic backgrounds but from ones steeped in Abrahamic religion, this is not unexpected.

It may therefore be useful to say a few words about God as commonly conceived by adherents of those faiths common in the West. I would like to discuss God from an everyday, practical standpoint rather than a sophisticated theological one. After all, religions universally arise from what we may call the human religious

impulse, a fundamental spiritual or existential questioning. (We shall have more to say about this in the next chapter, since Zen practice too begins with such questioning.) We should therefore be able to discuss similarities and differences between religious traditions without losing sight of that basic human foundation that, in fact, predates them all.

When I am asked about God in Buddhism or specifically Zen, my first response is usually to ask in reply, "Which God?" In other words, which version of God is the questioner referencing?

The reason I ask this is that although Abrahamic faiths ostensibly share the same God, in reality God has many faces in many times. For example, there is the Yahweh of early Judaism—the nonmonotheistic religion of David and Solomon—who was not thought to be a universal deity but simply the chief god of the kingdoms of Judah and Israel. There is the Yahweh of later, postexile Judaism, by then generally viewed as sole deity and creator but still requiring animal blood sacrifice. There is the deity of Christianity, both loving father (abba) and judge, whose pivotal act was affirmed in later theology to be incarnating as the person Jesus and so providing the required blood sacrifice at the Crucifixion. Finally, there is the Allah of Islam, from whose Koranic revelations yet more and different obligations for believers were formulated encompassing principles of jurisprudence, government, and economics. Already, it seems obvious that there are in fact several quite different gods referred to by this word "God," each with varying demands depending on the tradition, time, or text in question.

But the main reason I say God has many faces is that it is clear that persons of Abrahamic faith naturally project onto God their own individual predispositions, hopes, fears, and fantasies, along with those inherited from any tradition. I suspect this is unavoidable for the following reason: Abrahamic faiths are inherently dualistic, centered as they are on a crucial relationship between separate individuals—namely, the believer and the believer's God. But because the nature of a universal, omnipotent God must be, in the end, utterly inconceivable to our limited human minds, the deity is

necessarily perceived as a mirror reflecting the one who seeks him. Within that mirror, people of Abrahamic faiths thus see images of a God that are at least partly reflections of themselves. These images, imperfect as they are, are what allow the crucial sense of relationship between reified individuals—believer and object of belief, creation and Creator—to exist.

Thus, as an individualized reflection, the one God becomes legion. A person who yearns to establish self-worth or fulfill a sense of personal destiny may project a God who commands active engagement and victory in the world; such a person may feel called to charitable or missionary work, or even to take up arms as God's instrument to combat perceived forces of evil and heresy. Conversely, a person of a more retiring and gentle demeanor will often project God as a loving, merciful being and may feel more comfortable approaching the deity through introspective prayer. Persons craving material possession may project a God who commands and bestows prosperity or who grants them dominion over the earth's resources. Persons filled with self-loathing may be inclined to see the image of a God who either harshly condemns or unconditionally accepts those very aspects of themselves they despise. Persons feeling dismayed by the diversity and rapid change of the modern world may project an irritated God who angrily affirms lost traditions and power structures.

Such a creation of God in humanity's image is, of course, a familiar phenomenon to those who study polytheistic traditions: deities in many cultures personify the very human qualities valued or feared by their worshipers. What many fail to acknowledge, however, is that there are likewise myriad "Gods" in the supposedly monotheistic Abrahamic faiths—as many, in fact, as there are believers. Though broadly related by evolving theologies and changing cultures, each believer's supreme, universal God is ultimately that person's own, created to establish the necessary relationship between individuals upon which Abrahamic faiths depend, and so existing primarily within each mind.

In the prayer practices of Abrahamic faiths, it is common, even though one intends to communicate with a deity believed to be omniscient and omnipresent, to close one's eyes and address prayer to a space within oneself. This is interesting. It reveals that it is indeed within the mind that each believer's individualized version of God is created and lives.

I do not mean to sound unkind or disrespectful by saying these things. But from the Zen standpoint, this most common way of "believing in" a projected image of God cannot hope to liberate us from fundamental ignorance or create the conditions for true happiness. Why? Because it replaces a direct experience of the inconceivable nature of reality with an image that will be precisely as deluded as the human creating it. In truth, this projection of a personal God can be a form of that transgression that Abrahamic faiths have often considered the most heinous of all: idolatry, or venerating a false image. In this case, the image created and venerated is none other than that of the believer—a self-referential reflection. As such, it can even become a devil separating persons of faith rather than uniting them.

Having said this, however, I would like to also criticize Buddhists in the West. We have been loath to use the word "God" when in dialogue with the adherents of Abrahamic faiths. This has been a mistake. Such hesitance naturally comes in part from the fact that Buddhism has a nontheistic approach, which does not posit the existence of a creator deity. But truly, since Buddhism is a relative newcomer in the West, we Buddhists should not reflexively avoid the word "God." We should instead be able to use it in a skillful manner that does not obscure our viewpoint yet allows us to discourse with others. We might point out, for example, how some figures in our own iconography are used in a deep manner to reveal the actual path of fulfilling our own potentialities, rather than as distant objects of adoration.

In fact, we Buddhists may even be able to contribute to the continuing evolution of what the word "God" signifies by sharing our own perspectives. From the Zen standpoint, God—the inconceivable

heart of reality, transcending all limitations, which can nevertheless be directly recognized—should never solely be a mirror reflecting an image of the individual. Rather, individuals must simultaneously experience themselves as mirrors reflecting, in each moment, the inconceivable, boundless heart of reality. Mirror and reflected image thus indistinguishable, both are let go. In that moment, the fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil—that is, dualistic seeing—no longer poisons us. The lost paradise is regained, atonement is accomplished, and the shining kingdom of God is clearly revealed.

God experienced in this manner is, I think, the true God that some Abrahamic prophets and contemplatives have known. This is the God of al-Hallaj, who said:

> I am the One whom I love, and the One whom I love is myself.
> We are two souls incarnated in one body;
> if you see me, you see Him,
> if you see Him, you see us.[2]

This is also the God of Mechthild of Magdeburg,[3] who said, "The day of my spiritual awakening was the day I saw, and knew I saw, all things in God, and God in all things."[4] It is the I AM encountered by Moses within the burning bush, so different from the self-referential "I am," which al-Hallaj, in the quotation opening this chapter, said separated him from God. It is the God experienced in that place where the words "God," "self," "good," and "evil" no longer make any sense at all.

If we can discuss God in this way, then Buddhism and Abrahamic faiths may at least discourse respectfully. Furthermore, as Zen practitioners, when we ourselves emerge from the limiting mind of "I am" to realize I AM here and now, we will see that there is no longer any need to talk about religions. When we awaken to our boundless nature through Zen and exclaim with Buddha, "In heaven and earth, I alone am the honored one!" we will see that this is not so different from what the word "God" points to when used in its deepest sense. We will know that Jesus's words "Neither shall they say, Lo here! or,

lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you" are perhaps not so far from Hakuin's lines:

> At this moment, what more need we seek?
> Nirvana reveals itself before you!
> This very place is the Pure Land,
> This very body, the Buddha.[5]

Finally, we will realize that the word "God" can also be a skillful tool, not something to reflexively avoid. In this manner, we will be able to work together with our Jewish, Christian, and Muslim brothers and sisters from within the beating heart of wisdom—expressing the supreme One Vehicle in endlessly creative ways—rather than from behind the trappings of a tradition.

4

EXAMINING OUR EXISTENCE

Beneath great doubt there is great awakening.

—HAKUIN[1]

IN THIS CHAPTER and the next, we will talk a bit about our motivation for entering into Zen practice. If this motivation is clear and sufficiently profound, then we will be able to follow a correct course and avoid many obstacles.

Each of us comes to Zen for different reasons. Classically, these motivations may be considered shallow or deep. For example, there are the five types of Zen in which those who practice for common or selfish benefits are differentiated from those with more profound motivation. This is described in detail in Omori Roshi's* *Sanzen Nyumon* and many other places, so I will not do so here. Another reason to dispense with it here, though, is that beginners need not worry too much about such things. When we first begin to practice Zen, even a shallow motivation is worthy. A student who knows nothing of Buddhism but suffers, for example, from anxiety and simply hopes through meditation to become calm is to be encouraged no less than one who has reflected deeply on Buddhist teachings.

Why is this so? Because when we begin to practice Zen, our way of seeing will change. If we practice correctly, we may have confidence that our motivation will gradually become more profound.

TIME AND SPACE

The best way to begin will be, perhaps, to examine where we stand and so clearly see the starting point of our journey. There are many Buddhist teachings that can help us gain a conceptual framework supporting practice. It is true that the entrance into Zen, as we have said, is an awakening that is "not dependent upon words and letters" and grasped for oneself experientially rather than intellectually. Nonetheless, it can be helpful to begin with a basic conceptual view of our situation. We will not here establish this view using complicated teachings or quotations from the sutras. It will be more useful for us to just begin simply, with a straightforward appraisal of the human condition.

One useful approach to this was used by Omori Roshi. When we observe existence, he said, it is clear that we seem to exist within both "time-being" and "space-being." What does this actually mean? Let us leave aside for a moment any ideas we may have of the so-called reality or unreality of time and space, and try to examine our existence from these standpoints. Let us also set aside any personal beliefs we may hold about the nature of the universe, ultimate reality, heaven or hell, and so on. We are just working right now with what we may observe.

The Standpoint of Time

First, let us observe our existence from the standpoint of time. Doing so, several things are apparent. Constant change—arising and passing away, birth and death, growth and decay—is a hallmark of this existence. It seems clear that our own lives and the existences of everything we observe are subject to such change over time.

It is easy to recognize this fact of impermanence in our bodies or in the transient nature of things around us. Obviously, we age. Things clearly rust, rot, break down, and so forth. Even great persons all disappear and become dust, as do their works, monuments, and memories. But examining more closely, we see that even all the various aspects of our minds, or what we consider to be our "selves"—our thoughts, emotions, memories, and personalities—are not constant. Never static or permanent, they completely change moment to moment and dramatically over time. This is quite interesting. Simply put, we are unable to find anything that does not change and transform, including this inner sense of self that each of us calls "me."

So, that is one undeniable aspect of life. Nothing at all is permanent, unchanging, or stable. Nothing within us is fixed. We are not at all, as we tend to believe, objects existing within time and witnessing its passing, moment by moment. We ourselves *are* that passing. In fact, we may say that we more exactly seem to be processes, ongoing phenomena manifesting flux and transformation, rather than things.

The Standpoint of Space

Now let us view our existence in another manner, from the standpoint of space. Transient and unfixed as things may be, it does at least seem that they exist for a time within a concrete "here," that is, within defined locations and in some solid—if changing—manner. Yet when we examine closely, we observe that this is also untrue. We actually do not exist in any solid manner or location independently from everything else.

This is because when we examine ourselves and all other objects, elements, and conditions that seemingly exist in space and to which we give names—things like "body," "cup," "tree," "sky," and so on—we observe that these arise only dependently upon many other objects, elements, and conditions; and these, in turn, exist only in the

same dependent manner. That is to say, all “things” exist only in relationship with and through the combining of many other “things.”

As an example, I may consider my own body. Examining it, I can see that it is in fact a collection of parts, structures, and processes that only receives the label “body” when assembled in a very specific manner. In fact, I know that these parts are themselves, in turn, composed of many things I have received from my parents or have assimilated over the years through food. Already, then, it is hard to talk about my body as something truly mine or truly existing in any real manner except as a collection of constituent parts that in their origin have little to do with “me”—much as a shifting sand dune is actually a collection of grains from many places that have happened to come together. Certainly, if I were able to extract some part from my body and examine it, I would no longer call that bit of matter “my body.” Its identity as a part of me would cease. This is because such identity is not inherent within the matter at all. In reality, “body” and “me” are just names, a kind of sloppy shorthand that has been fabricated to refer to this momentary association of many things.

Let us go a bit further and look at one source of the things I mentioned that make up my body: food. For example, we may recognize the various elements (carbon, calcium, iron, and so on) within food, the energy streaming from the sun that powered the systems by which these elements were organized into compounds and eventually living plants, and even the happenings over eons that have caused the sun and earth to form and the conditions here to be amenable to plant growth. Likewise, we may recognize some of the many conditions that have given rise to the person I today call “farmer,” along with all the happenings and mental intentions that led the farmer to produce the actual food I have eaten. All of these factors and infinite others—stretching out in a vast web that is ultimately beyond my ability to conceive—are in fact as much part of what makes up “my body” as anything else.

Of course, we could go on and on in this manner and never exhaust all the factors that have led to our existence arising just now as it is. But for our purposes, it is enough to grasp that “things” do

not exist as separate things within space at all. They are, again, simply labeled appearances within a web that stretches endlessly in all directions. Energetically, materially, and in many other ways, there is no rigidly defined separation between these shimmering, shifting appearances, and no "here" that does not interpenetrate with "there."

Giving Rise to Inquiry

To sum up, then, this is what we may observe regarding our existence in time and space: temporally we and everything we may ever observe either "inside" or "outside" of ourselves are transient, changing, and more accurately described as flowing processes rather than things. Spatially, we and everything we may ever observe do not exist independently as things with any real solidity or fixed location, but rather within an infinite web of connectivity. Truly, viewed in this way we may even come to understand that temporal and spatial ways of describing our existence are not actually separate at all.

And here is a final important thing to grasp: the great majority of all of this mystery is not to be controlled by "me" at all—any more than the vast depths and currents of an ocean that has churned since the beginning of time could be controlled by a bubble appearing momentarily on its surface.

No matter what religious or philosophical beliefs we may hold, I think we can all accept that the above seems to honestly describe our situation as far as we are able to dispassionately observe. We may also perhaps see that this situation, marked as it is by impermanence and lack of any fixed physical or mental identity, may unavoidably include some feeling of inherent dissatisfaction or insecurity. We may rightfully wonder, given this situation, if any of our usual activities or pursuits—indeed, if life itself—can ever produce a lasting happiness of any kind. Naturally Buddhism recognizes these same points, but there is no need here to discuss such things using

Buddhist terminology. We are just observing the incredible, almost unbelievable nature of life for ourselves as best we can.

But then, as we observe all of this, we may find that an interesting question arises. Who—or what—is this very quality of *observing*? That is, if we can accept that our existence is something boundless and lacking fixed, unchanging qualities, then naturally we may also wonder: What is it that is *aware* of all this? What is it that knows endless thinking, feeling, seeing, hearing? Right here within this *now* at the intersection of time and space, what is the seeming quality of knowing that is effortlessly aware, for example, of the words in this book as the eye scans them or the feel of its pages to the fingers? Before there arises a conceptual division of the universe into self and other, inside and outside, and me versus not-me—that is, dropping completely all our fabricated names and categories—*what is this*? Or, as the Sixth Patriarch asked, "Thinking of neither good nor evil, what is your original face?"

Pondering in such a way, we may in time give rise to a keen existential questioning that defies answering. It is no small matter, this question. It is, in fact, the original human question, the deepest question, the question from which all religions ultimately arise. *What is this? Who (what, where) am I, really?* However phrased, it is the question beneath and behind all other questions, and to which all questions ultimately lead. It is just this question that Zen addresses.

If we arrive at such a point of essential human questioning and resolve to inquire into it with all our being, it really does not matter if we call ourselves Buddhist or not. We are then indeed ready to deeply practice Zen. It is such people that Torei exhorts, "Look at what is, at who sees, hears, walks, sits—now, here! With all your heart, look at everything. Without giving rise in the heart to being and not being, to yes and no, without discrimination and without reasoning, just look!"[2]

Of course, we should know by now that any answer to such profound inquiry that we might devise intellectually—and certainly, any answer that reifies simplistic concepts of "me" and "I"—will not

suffice. In this situation, the old answers of various religions also will not do, because they are not *our* answers. Arriving at this place of fundamental questioning and doubt regarding the nature of our lives, we must admit that only an answer arising from the depths of our own being as actual experience will satisfy. Even if some enlightened being or God should miraculously appear before us, still nothing such an entity could say would be enough. Indeed, this is a place in which we must do as the famous swordsman Musashi Miyamoto wrote: "I respect the Buddha and the gods, but I do not rely on them."[3]

What we have discussed thus far forms part of the motivation that leads us to undertake Zen practice. No matter our reasons for beginning to practice, we should closely observe the reality of our own existence in this way. If we do so sincerely, we will in time give birth to a seed of profound doubt and inquiry regarding existence itself. Eventually, we may even resolve that the most important task we could undertake in life is precisely to answer the fundamental questions of what and why a human being is. That is strong motivation indeed.

5

THE POWER OF VOWS

Anyone who wants to attain the Way of enlightenment must drive forward the wheel of the Four Great Vows.

—HAKUIN[1]

HAVING EXAMINED OUR EXISTENCE and, perhaps, felt the stirrings of doubt and inquiry, there is still something more required for a truly profound motivation sufficient to walk the Zen path. This is because in our lives as human beings we exist in relationship with others. Here I do not refer to the web of things and conditions we discussed in the last chapter. Rather, I simply mean that there are seemingly many other beings (again, let us put aside for now concepts of "real" or "unreal") that wander through this interesting, inexplicable existence along with us. For that reason, when we reflect upon the angst and suffering we may experience within this impermanent, unstable, wondrous life, naturally we also see that there are others who likewise struggle.

At any moment of day or night, it is appropriate for us to remember the incalculable numbers and varieties of other beings who right now also live and experience as we do. They are present all around us, these fellow wanderers, as boundless and yet as deluded

as we are—not only other people but all the many creatures everywhere. As Torei writes:

> When closely observing sentient beings, it appears that they always throw away the origin and chase after end-states; thus, much attached to all kinds of karma-producing activities, dying here and being born there, they revolve through the various stages of the Wheel of Becoming. The Five Signs of Decay of heavenly beings, the Eight Hardships of men, the states of hungry ghosts and of animals, the excruciating pains of the hells—just try with all your might to imagine these and feel them in your own heart.[2]

Torei here mentions various classes of beings in realms of existence other than our own. But leaving this aside, his primary point is that there are many other wanderers like us. Let us here do the wonderful practice he suggests and try to imagine some of those beings and what suffering they experience. Many of them are not in distant realms at all but very nearby where we may easily see them:

There are those dying painfully in a nearby hospital, those a few blocks or miles away who are hungry and do not know how or when their next meal will come, those grieving everywhere, the billions who grind their lives away in mindless toil.

There are those who, somewhere in the world at this very moment, experience horrific torture. There are the imprisoned and those imprisoned within mazes of mental illness, addiction, loneliness, and depression.

There are shivering and lost stray animals, the fear-stricken creatures in slaughterhouses, and all the living things within ravaged forests and poisoned waters during this time of environmental degradation.

In winter, sitting in warm homes, we may remember the people and many smaller creatures who starve and freeze, silently and unnoticed, just outside our windows. When we eat, we may give thought to the uncounted lives, large and small, that are extinguished

even in the process of growing our vegetables, let alone to bring meat or fish to the table. We may ponder what actual cost in lives, great and small, was paid so that we may wear a garment or flip a switch to light a room. We may, each of us, recognize that even in the act of walking about, myriad small creatures are killed simply by our footsteps.

These are just some of the suffering beings who exist very nearby. Though it seems impossible to comprehend, still we may try to ponder and feel with our hearts as Torei advises: in how many places and ways throughout the universe do beings exist right now, arising and passing away, living and dying, again and again?

As we have discussed, our existence occurs within a web of connectivity and dependency. All livings things participate in it. All living beings suffer and inflict suffering upon each other endlessly. From another standpoint then, we must say this web of connectivity is also a web of insecurity, killing, and consumption, a chaotic turmoil completely lacking safety or stability.

When we see this, it is natural that we should feel pity for others. This is not wrong. But deeper still, when we acknowledge the degree to which we participate in this web, both inflicting and experiencing pain, then a more profound feeling may arise. Seeing the many beings together with us being born, suffering, and dying ceaselessly, we may actually feel the first stirrings of *compassion*.

Compassion is mentioned often in Buddhist teaching. It is not a sentimental feeling arising from a sense of superiority or separateness; thus we differentiate it from pity. Compassion is, rather, a deep feeling of *suffering with*, the root meaning of the English word. It is a sympathy, a sharing of feeling. This sharing arises at the moment when we transcend in some small way our habit of viewing others as “others” and are thereby able to join with them in their experience. Doing so, we give rise to a fervent wish to aid them.

In this way, compassion is in fact an active and true expression of our deepest natural wisdom. It has nothing to do with judging others and no concern for whether it is deserved by others. It is nothing less

than the concrete manifestation and activity of awakening, the wisdom that sees through the illusory boundaries of time and space, of self and other. For this reason, Torei says, “The strength of the vow[3] is founded on Great Compassion….Truly, truly, Great Compassion is the origin and foundation of becoming Buddha.”[4]

It should be clear, then, that the genuine path of Zen cannot for long stay just “my” path. It is a path that encompasses, includes, and becomes one with all the infinite beings in the universe. Thus, our motivation for walking the Zen path must deepen. We must see that we practice Zen not only to answer our own fundamental spiritual inquiry, and in hope of becoming happier, but also with an aspiration to become something of use to other suffering beings. They are, in fact, our true family, our true teachers and friends, and our fellow travelers. Torei writes, “Again, life after life, all sentient beings become fathers and mothers, are brothers and sisters, world after world. Considering this today, what a great debt of love we owe to each other! Reflecting on this, Great Compassion is bound to arise in the heart.”[5]

Though in some aspects our path may seem to be something we walk alone, we will eventually see that it is walked with—and for—every single being existing everywhere. This aspiration is summarized within the first of the four great vows, which all Zen students take and continuously recite:

Sentient beings are boundless: I vow to save them.
Delusions are inexhaustible: I vow to cut them off.
The dharma gates are infinite: I vow to practice them.
The Buddha way is unsurpassed: I vow to attain it.

These four great vows, in fact, express the very essence of the Zen way. Each of them constitutes a sublime teaching pointing out our true nature. What does it mean after all to say that sentient beings are boundless or that dharma gates—the practices serving as entrances into awakening—are infinite? In our own practice, we will come to penetrate such questions.

The first vow to save others reminds us that the path we travel is walked in community with all the other boundless sentient beings—high or low, large or small, wise or deluded, near or far—and forsaking none. Torei exhorts, "To state it concisely: by the power of the vow of Great Compassion all karmic obstacles disappear and all merit and virtue/strength are completed. No principle remains obscure, all ways are walked by it, no wisdom remains unattained, no virtue incomplete….The first requirement for trainees, therefore, is to let go of 'I' and not to cling to their own advantage."[6]

We should never underestimate the power of these vows. If our motivation for practicing Zen were only for ourselves, it is unlikely that we would long endure the various difficulties of the path. We often have the experience that things done for ourselves alone may be done haphazardly or carelessly, while things done for others can bring out our greatest effort and care. How much more true this is in our Zen practice, when we join the power of our vows with those of all awakened beings everywhere, establishing a heroic aspiration to help infinite others along the path of wisdom no matter how long, or how many lifetimes, it takes.

Once we encompass all beings within our path and strongly establish an aspiration to help them, remarkably limitless bravery and an inexhaustible font of energy well up within us. For this reason, Torei urges us:

> If at this point your spirit and morale slacken, all the more rely on this vow/aspiration. If faith in the heart is shallow and weak, all the more rely on this vow/aspiration. If obstacles are many, all the more rely on this aspiration. If you are intelligent and clever, all the more rely on this aspiration. If you are stupid and dull, all the more rely on this aspiration. If your seeing into the true nature becomes fully clear, all the more rely on this aspiration. If your insight and function become fully free, all the more rely on this aspiration. Right from the beginning, from the first aspiration of the heart to the final end, there is no

time when you do not rely on the strength of this vow/aspiration.

Reciting the Four Great Vows, directing them from the mouth outwards, and inwardly ever holding them in the heart, invoking them as a prayer day by day and continuously pondering them, then just like a wondrous scent or an old strange custom, or like fine mist that yet drenches one's clothes, or as the smell of incense pervades and clings, so the awareness of Buddhas and patriarchs will ripen of itself and, benefiting oneself and others, everything will be accomplished.[7]

Torei's words are incredibly kind and forthright, openly revealing to us the living heart of his practice. Taking his advice as the foundation of our own practice, there is no doubt that the Zen way will open up broadly for each of us. Whatever our initial motivations for practicing Zen, Torei's words point out a path to deepening them.

In this and the preceding chapter then, a profound motivation to begin Zen practice has been simply described. To summarize:

1. Setting aside beliefs and simply observing our lives in a commonsense manner, we may examine the uncertain, transient, boundless nature of our existence within time and space. This is sufficient conceptual understanding upon which to establish our initial practice and will naturally give rise to a powerful feeling of inquiry and doubt powering it.
2. Recognizing that all the many beings everywhere share this existence and that all suffer, we may give birth to a feeling of compassion—that is, "suffering with"—and so establish an aspiration to include them in our path and aid them.

In Buddhist teaching, it is said that from beginningless time we have each, due to our delusion and fixation on an illusory self, been reborn again and again in uncounted forms. This is samsara,* the "wheel of becoming" that Torei mentions. But at the moment when the factors summarized above coalesce into an actual determination

to practice Zen—an aspiration to realize wisdom not only for ourselves but for others—then we utterly cease to be common beings. The course of all our future existence irrevocably changes. We have given rise to *bodaishin*,* the "mind of awakening." We have become fledgling bodhisattvas.

What will sustain us now is our ceaseless vow to save others along with ourselves. As we experience our own suffering and challenges, and recognizing our kinship with others, we encompass all together with deeply compassionate regard. All our activities become focused on the path of awakening together with all beings. No matter how difficult the conditions in whatever situation we find ourselves, we will never stop practicing. Even if the world should shake itself apart with war and famine, we will bravely work to help others. Even if we should find ourselves in a hellish realm filled with great suffering, we will immediately set about working to help the beings there. Even if we should find ourselves reborn again and again without cessation over endless eons, wherever we arise we will work to help the beings we encounter with a buoyant, courageous spirit. No matter where we go, the power of our vows carries us.

Certainly, there is still a long path to walk. We must ourselves awaken and through training gain the very tools by which these profound vows may be accomplished. But with this new direction our path itself is now a radically different one. All beings walk side by side with us, and we will never again feel alone. This is a path, finally, leading home.

6

DELUSION AND CONFIDENCE

The reason beings transmigrate
through the Six Paths of existence
is that they are lost in the darkness of ignorance.
Going further and further astray in the darkness,
how can they ever be free from birth-and-death?

—HAKUIN[1]

NOW THAT WE HAVE CONCEIVED a profound intention to help others as well as ourselves, we must honestly acknowledge that we often live our lives in a manner that is not in accord with that aspiration. From the point of view of the Buddhist teachings, this is because we are habitually deluded, entwined within deeply rooted ignorance. Let us take a moment now to examine more closely the nature of this obstructing delusion.

THE HABIT OF DUALISTIC SEEING

At the core of the suffering we experience, and at the root of our angst and confusion, is a deep-rooted habit of experiencing things in

a dualistic manner. “Dualistic” here simply means that, habitually and unconsciously, each of us orders our experience through a self-created division of the world into “I” and “not-I”—that is, subject and object, self and other. Having split the world into such opposing categories, we naturally must then set about judging and manipulating them. Those objects we judge to be “I,” “mine,” or “good” we treasure, striving to obtain and preserve them at all costs. Those that are “not me,” “not mine,” or “bad” we often ignore, push away, or even wish to destroy. This dualistic habit is subtly and deeply rooted within both body and mind. Essentially, it means that everything we do, say, and think is colored by a pervasive conviction that we are each the perceiving center of the universe, around which everything and everyone else turns.

Of course, the universe is not actually like that at all, and so we experience many difficulties as we spend our lives wrapped up in this self-centered way of being. Sometimes succeeding and sometimes failing at what becomes a lifelong game of gain and loss, we rarely transcend our habitual, self-absorbed way of seeing marked by bifurcation, conflict, division, and a profound sense of incompleteness. Furthermore, finding ourselves increasingly at odds with a universe impossibly divided between “I” (the entity somehow residing behind my eyes, it seems) and “everything else not-I,” our mental state becomes chaotic and confused. Our bodies over time become tense. Our senses are constantly pulled this way and that by the so-called outside world, while in our minds we weave endless egoistic fantasies, which we then project onto the world for good or ill.

We spend a great deal of our time wandering inwardly in imaginary realms of the past (what we remember, miss, have lost, regret, or resent) and of the future (what we desire, fear, or is unclear to us) but are rarely able to remain present, relaxed physically and mentally with clarity in the unfolding of existence as it is. Only infrequently, in fact, are we completely present for our own lives at all. More often we are merely visitors to our lives even as we live

them, “dropping in” only occasionally to pay attention to what is happening.

Another effect of this habitual dualistic vision is that we often adopt the attitude of a victim. Since we find ourselves seemingly oppressed by so many aspects of the vast “not-I” universe that surrounds us, we tend to blame it—our environment or other people—for our unhappiness. We think that our suffering is somehow uniquely tragic, and we fail to ever see that we ourselves are responsible, at least to a certain extent, for the way we experience our lives. We always have a choice to refine ourselves, to use challenging conditions to become stronger, and to accept ownership of our lives—in other words, to adopt a positive approach to working with difficult conditions. But we often lack the tools, conviction, or courage to do so. How fortunate that the Zen path can help us to find all of these.

Our situation, colored by feelings of separation, loneliness, and dissatisfaction, is truly the reason practice is necessary. We may conceptually grasp the teaching that “this very mind is Buddha”[2] and go about exclaiming Zen-like sayings such as “All things are perfect just as they are!” or “The highest wisdom is just this!” But such beautiful ideas do not bring us the actual experience to which those words point. If we leave it at that and remain trapped within a deluded way of seeing, we will end up wasting our lives. Our aspiration may be high and noble, but we will continue to be very far from fulfilling it.

On the other hand, if we are able to experience the decisive awakening of kensho, then everything will shift for us. For the first time, we will have a taste of freedom from habitual delusion. We will quickly sever some of that delusion, in fact, much as a sculptor’s first cuts remove large pieces from a wood block. Furthermore, from this initial awakening we will gain a tremendous power and faith with which to continue along the Zen path, and eventually to cut the root of habitual delusion completely.

Confidence to Enter the Way

When we see the magnitude of our delusion and the extent to which it binds us, the path of dissolving it may seem truly daunting. But in the beginning there is no need to be discouraged if we do not feel equal to the challenge or to heroically aspiring to benefit all beings. Though delusion is deep rooted, the medicine of Zen practice is indeed very strong! In fact, no matter how shallow or deep our motivations for wanting to practice, we should grasp one important point: our attraction to Zen—for whatever initial reason—in fact arises exactly from our own intrinsic wisdom. In other words, if we were not already in some manner endowed with the very wondrous awakening that we seek, such an attraction to the Zen path would not arise in the first place.

Furthermore, from the standpoint of Buddhist teaching, the fact that we have encountered Zen at all shows that we already have a deep affinity with it. We have, after all, not only been born in a time and place where the Buddhist teachings exist; we have actually encountered an expression of the One Vehicle, the supreme vehicle, the vehicle of complete wisdom. How incredibly fortunate this is! And needless to say, actually giving rise to the desire to practice Zen shows that we have a very deep affinity indeed.

The rationale of Zen (and all expressions of the One Vehicle) is that sentient beings, though they are seemingly imprisoned by false seeing, intrinsically do not lack the *tathagata** wisdom, the wisdom of awakening. True, this wisdom may seem obscured by the habitual delusion we have discussed. But the fact remains that each of us already possesses the highest qualifications for this path. Zen people are often concerned with the lineage of this teacher or that, but we should never forget this: no matter what our individual backgrounds or what challenges we face, we are all human beings who have encountered the buddha-dharma. It is thus clear that each of us already belongs to the most profound, noble lineage possible: that of beings who—though confused and deluded—nevertheless have the

capacity to realize the wondrous mind of awakening and who have a deep karmic connection with the teachings leading to liberation.

If only we could recognize the precious treasure of enlightenment, which is so near to us! As Hakuin writes in his *Song of Zazen*:

> All beings are intrinsically buddhas.
> It is like water and ice: apart from water, no ice.
> Apart from beings, no buddhas.
> Not knowing how near the truth is we seek it elsewhere—
> what a pity!
> We are like one in the midst of water who cries out in thirst.
> We are like the son of a rich family who has strayed among
> the poor.

Resolve, then, that since you are holding and reading this book right now, *you* have a deep affinity with the Zen teachings and are able to experience their fruition. Allow yourself to have this confidence, because it is completely true. No matter what your motivation in the beginning, you—of all the infinite beings—are among those who have been drawn to and encountered the sublime path of Zen. This is no accident at all! Realizing this, establish a determination not to squander such incredible opportunity, and resolve to follow the path to its very end.

Certainly, there is a lot of work ahead along that path. But we may each take heart, because our potential is inconceivably great and vast. There is no need at all to worry about whether our capacities are seemingly lesser or greater. Our situation is, in fact, fortunate in an almost miraculous way.

7

ACCOMPLISHING ZEN THROUGH THE BODY

Zen without the accompanying physical realization is empty discussion.

—Omori Sogen[1]

I HAVE SAID that our delusion is deeply rooted in both mind and body. It is not simply conceptual in nature. If it were, then it would be enough for us to intellectually grasp it as we have done in the previous chapter, or by studying various Buddhist teachings that point out our error, and so be immediately free. Yet it is clear that such intellectual understanding alone does not liberate us. Why? Because our entire existence, including the body, has arisen in a manner entwined with this delusion.

Delusion is not something we learn after we are born, nor does it manifest solely within the mental continuum. It is, in fact, something habitual with which we have been enmeshed for endless eons and many lives. In this life, now, it is revealed not only in our minds, but within the very fiber of our bodies. It manifests as deeply ingrained psychophysical distortion, *jikke*,* and so it is with the body as well as the mind that our battle to be free must be waged.

Of course, it may not be easy (or even necessary) to accept such ideas in the beginning. It is understandable to have doubt regarding, for example, the possibility of prior and postmortem existence, or the persistence of habitual delusion from lifetime to lifetime. Many of us today are influenced by prevailing materialist views. That is, we tend to view the mind as a skull-contained, brain-created phenomenon that begins with formation of the body and is extinguished utterly upon its death, rather than according to the Buddhist teaching that the mental stream arises in causal continuity with previous existence. Likewise, we tend to discount the degree to which the body is conditioned by and reveals the state of the mind.

In any case, it is clear that we—try as we might—are unable to completely transform our minds through force of mind alone. There is a Zen saying to this effect: "One cannot wash off blood with blood." Grasping the concept that our existence is actually utterly boundless and free will not by itself cause us to experience that freedom; it remains just another concept added to all the others. If we wish to actually experience freedom, we will in the end need to relinquish conceptual fabrications and limitations, and dissolve the knots of delusion that permeate all dimensions of our existence, including the physical.

We are therefore fortunate that the various Zen lineages transmit potent yogic practices engaging the mind, body, and subtle energetic system. Zen practice is exceedingly powerful, but we should understand that its power comes only from such engagement of our whole existence. As physical beings, a physically engaged practice is required to dissolve our psychophysical delusion. Only thus can Zen fulfill its promise of being a path by which one may realize liberation within this lifetime, in this very body. As Omori Roshi wrote, the purpose of Zen is to "truly realize that the entire universe is the 'True Human Body' through the discipline of 'body-mind in oneness.' "[2]

These words are quite profound. "Body-mind in oneness" points to how the body, breath, and energy are unified in Zen practice. It also points to the manner in which this makes possible the penetration of liberative insight into the body and the seamless embodiment of

awakening. We will not examine these points in great depth here, but naturally they are things we will grasp for ourselves if our training is correct and thorough.

To sum up this crucial point then: the Zen approach is one that uses the body and senses to further the aims of practice. They are not suppressed or negated in an ascetic manner. Unlike some other traditions, Zen is not a path of renunciation. Rather, in Zen the senses and body are embraced and utilized as gates to liberation, with a spirit of great playfulness and enjoyment.

Kiai (Energy)

Understanding the need to engage our whole existence in Zen practice without reservation—in keeping with our great aspiration to fulfill the wondrous promise of the One Vehicle—we may ask: with what energy shall we do so?

It does seem that many persons attracted to Buddhism are quite retiring and mild in spirit. However admirable this may be within some contexts, it is not always the spirit required of a practitioner. Nothing short of complete, unwavering commitment and courage will suffice when it comes to the actual work of dissolving our own ancient, deeply embedded ignorance. In *Hagakure*, an early eighteenth-century Japanese collection of anecdotes and commentaries intended to edify warriors, there is a well-known passage: "If a Buddhist monk is not compassionate on the outside and courageous inside his heart, he will never become enlightened in the Buddhist Way. In the case of a samurai, unless he is courageous on the outside and bursting his gut with great compassion on the inside, he will be unable to execute his duties. Through mingling with samurai, the Buddhist monk is able to understand courage, and conversely, the samurai learns compassion from the monk."[3] This is worth pondering. The path of Zen practice is not a hesitant, timid thing suited to the faintheartedness. It requires that we develop a kind of ferocious energy and joyful self-abandonment, not unlike that of a

warrior making a final, courageous charge against overwhelming odds. But again, this spirit cannot be of a solely conceptual kind; it must arise as actual vital energy within our bodies.

Such energetic and spiritual force is called *kiai*.* The first character of this word, *ki*,* is the same as the Chinese *qi*, the vital, animating force that sustains living things. Kiai should not be thought of as a kind of internal energy that is created through practice. Rather, it is the natural, inexhaustible vitality of the universe itself, which flows freely through us when our minds and bodies are balanced. Many aspects of Zen practice, such as the posture of meditation and ways of breathing that we will learn in chapters 11 and 12, serve to untie psychophysical knots and facilitate this flow of vital energy. Kiai viewed in this manner may thus be thought of as a concrete manifestation of our connectivity with the universe.

Deeper meanings of kiai will become clear as we begin to practice and also as we are able to resonate with the kiai of a qualified teacher. The face-to-face energetic transmission that occurs between teacher and student, discussed further in chapter 16, is crucial in Rinzai Zen. We must “catch” the vibration of our teachers with our own bodies in order to inherit and preserve the vitality of the lineage.

Fig. 1: The Nio (statues at Daiyuzenji temple)

One way in which we might begin to understand kiai's importance, however, is by examining the Buddhist images found in any temple or monastery. For example, the statue of the Buddha himself, which may be said to represent the goal of our practice, is obviously quite peaceful and serene. Typically, it is found deep within a Zen temple in the Buddha Hall. But if we examine the outside gate of the temple, we will often find very different figures greeting us: the Nio (fig. 1). These are frightening beings rippling with muscle and bearing astonishingly fierce expressions. Intense, even martial, energy emanates from them.[4]

It is not meaningless that these powerful images with demonic faces reside at the temple entrance. The Nio represent the intense kiai required of one who wishes to enter the gate of Zen practice. In other words, the state represented by the Buddha may be the goal of Zen, but the path of practice requires us to embody the energy of the

Nio. The Nio, we may say, reveal an active, dynamic manifestation of the Buddha's wisdom.

Fig. 2: Fudo Myo-o (painting at Korinji monastery)

There are other images in Buddhist iconography that also carry such energy. One that is quite well known is Fudo Myo-o[5] (fig. 2). A tremendously wrathful figure, he is often depicted sitting solidly with a furious glare, holding in one hand the fiery sword of wisdom that cuts through delusion and in the other the rope of discipline by

which evil forces are subdued. He is surrounded by the raging, consuming flames of his intense energy.

There is, in fact, a wonderful Kamakura-era statue of Fudo within the collection of the Art Institute of Chicago. When younger, I would often visit this statue just to stand in front of it and gaze into its lifelike glass eyes, trying to absorb something of the nearly overwhelming energy that seemed to emanate from it. Doing so, I could indeed feel my condition change. I truly believe I was able to receive something of lasting effect from that wood statue sitting in its glass case. This reveals a way in which we may resonate with the kiai of such images in order to immediately transform our own kiai, a practice quite different from analyzing the conceptual, symbolic meanings they carry.[6]

Another well-known figure is Marishiten (fig. 3), a god (or at times, goddess) of the dawn who was venerated by the samurai. Coursing through the sky balanced upon the back of a raging wild boar, freely wielding sword, spear, bow, fan, and other implements in multiple arms, Marishiten flashes in front of the sun and is said to move so quickly that she cannot be seen, traced, or hindered. Truly, the image of Marishiten reveals a freedom and nonfixation of body and mind that mark true Zen.

From such images we may grasp that Zen is not a path that seeks to avoid difficulties or to renounce and escape the world. It is a path of bravely encompassing the world and its difficulties within our own fiercely energetic, unwavering compassion. When we view ferocious Buddhist figures, we should consider them to represent the potential strength and dynamism of our own inner liberation. The Buddha statue may be wholly balanced and serene, but Fudo Myo-o and Marishiten show us how vitally energetic the life of an awakened being in this world must be. As we begin Zen practice, it is good to cultivate such spiritual and physical vitality.

Fig. 3: Marishiten (image at Korinji monastery)

When Rinzai Zen is contrasted with other schools of Zen, it is often described as sharp or martial in mood. Certainly, to adopt such a mood in a superficial way would be ridiculous. One hallmark of Rinzai training, however, is its use of internal practices that cultivate the body's subtle energetic system. The purposes of such practices include deepening the meditative state, maintaining health during periods of severe training, and manifesting the intensely vital energy

we have said is so important for practice to succeed. But the importance of cultivating the flow of internal energy extends far beyond such pragmatic support of practice. The Zen practitioner who manifests this kiai in daily life is not only able to meet difficulties and suffering with fearlessness, zest, and a lightness of heart; such a person is also able to activate the wisdom attained through practice and apply it bodily within the world. Without such energy, any insight attained may prove largely useless since it does not vibrate forth from the totality of our embodied being.

Perhaps the description of Rinzai Zen as energetically sharp is not so incorrect then. True practice must resonate with the distinct and very physical kiai we have discussed. Ultimately, it is by means of this energy that awakening will penetrate our very bodies to the bone, and we may arrive at the great peace revealed by the image of the Buddha. This last point reveals a crucial, hidden aspect of Zen practice that as practitioners we must eventually grasp if we are to fully realize that "the entire universe is the 'True Human Body.'"

Of course, all of this can be difficult to understand for people living modern lifestyles lacking bodily engagement and instead valuing the skill of navigating electronic devices! Recently the situation seems to have even reached a point that simple skills such as the ability to make eye contact when speaking with others or to have accurate awareness of one's own bodily position in space seem everywhere increasingly rare. These are among the reasons that physical labor and physical culture, such as martial arts, are especially valuable in the modern era as complements to Zen practice.

Even if we do not practice something like martial arts, though, we may still seek out situations that help us develop our embodied courage and kiai. Any situation that is fearful or challenging for us can, if willingly sought and entered into bodily, become a wonderful place to throw away self-attachment and develop our power. To give some examples: One of my teachers was advised by his master to lift weights in order to develop and bring out his physical kiai. Another advised his students to stand knee-deep in heavy surf and shout at the incoming waves with a determined feeling of trying to push them

back. Certainly, we could each imagine many possibilities for this kind of self-training, according to our individual conditions, weaknesses, and insecurities.

The Visible Fruition of Zen Practice

If delusion is entwined within the body-mind and our entire existence is to be utilized in practice as we have described, then from this it also follows that correct Zen practice will cause actual change in our bodies. As deeply ingrained delusional habits and the vestiges of stored psychophysical distortion are liberated, at the very least we should observe visible shifts in our posture, way of breathing, energetic functioning, and gaze. A person who has attained Zen realization will be able to recognize these changes in others at a glance. Truly, our entire inner state can be observed manifest in our bodies by someone who has the eye to see.

Knowing this, we may come to understand more deeply certain stories in the records of the ancient Zen masters. For example, there is the famous incident—also mentioned by Omori Roshi in *Sanzen Nyumon—during* which students of Hyakujo[7] were tested for their ability to lead a new monastery simply by being asked each in turn to take a few steps forward and clear their throats. In terms of the fruition of Zen practice, there truly are crucial things that can be seen from someone's manner of standing, walking, breathing, and clearing the throat. This story will bear careful reexamination as we begin to learn Zen practice methods.

Regarding this last point, I can share an interesting personal anecdote. I once traveled to attend a distant retreat. While there I experienced a breakthrough and was beside myself with joy, feeling as if I had dropped a tremendous weight. After the retreat concluded I traveled back home and returned to our *zendo** there. Later, several of my friends told me that they had not recognized me at all when I walked through the door; they had wondered who this unknown person was entering the hall, perceiving me to be bigger and taller,

with a completely different appearance, than the person they knew. Of course, it was soon clear that my experience was shallow and I was still extremely confused, so my friends had no trouble recognizing me after that. Still, it was a revealing experience.

From all of this, what should be very clear is that the purpose of our training is ultimately to bring all activities of body, speech, and mind into accord with awakening. As embodied beings, our Zen training must manifest an embodied enlightenment within this everyday world. Though we do not seek to purposefully display our practice to anyone, it is still the case that the eyes, countenance, body, and feeling of a mature Zen practitioner are unmistakable when present and obvious when lacking. It will be useful for us at all levels of Zen training to remember these things, and so to throw ourselves completely—body and mind—into our practice.

It is fair to say that this subject of physical fruition and the entire subject of accomplishing Zen through the body are among those least understood by many modern Zen practitioners, who tend to view practice as a mental activity and the arising of wisdom as a purely psychological transformation. It therefore bears repeating: a sterile, tepid, wholly intellectual, or self-consciously "spiritual" Zen practice will never suffice and will not have the power to help ourselves or others. In the modern era, the hazard of falling into such a practice—or of mistaking a shallow, conceptual grasp of the path for actual realization—seems even greater.

8

FUNCTIONS OF ZEN PRACTICE METHODS

Even if the illness has deteriorated and is now grave, there is no reason why an appropriate remedy should not be tried.

—TOREI[1]

LET US NOW EXAMINE more closely Zen's actual practice methodology. It is true, as I said earlier, that Zen is ultimately without fixed methods or practices. This does not mean that Zen is methodless; there are many practices that have been devised over the centuries, proven useful, and so transmitted to us. What we really mean when we say Zen is without fixed methods is that it allows for the free, flexible creation and application of methods—like medicines—according to each student's needs. The only things limiting this creativity are the conditions and determination of the student, as well as the power or depth of the teacher's realization.

With this in mind, it will be useful for us to understand in a very general way how Zen practice methods are used. It may be said that the many practices of Zen have three main functions:

1. To remove obstructions to seeing our true nature
2. To actually point out our nature, causing us to awaken (kensho)
3. To help us clarify, actualize, and embody that awakening

Most practice methods may be used for any of these purposes and often may accomplish more than one simultaneously. Thus, interestingly, a practice that for one student is foundational may in another student's case be an advanced method for embodying awakening.

To give an example: a new Zen trainee may be given the method of *susokukan*,* or breath-counting meditation. This is a profound method by which the mind's habit of chasing wandering thoughts is cut, the body's energetic currents are gathered with the breath at the navel energy center (*tanden**), and meditative absorption (*samadhi**) is cultivated. It is a method often given to new students because it develops a basic stability needed to take up other practices. In this case, then, we may say that the intent of the breath-counting method is to remove obstructions to—or create conditions conducive to—seeing our nature. Instructions for this method are given in chapter 13.

But the same practice of breath counting may have a different function: to actually point out our nature. For some students, susokukan is itself a perfectly sufficient method for passing through the gate of awakening. Entering deeply into the samadhi of this method by completely becoming the count with each breath, even the one that "becomes" ultimately drops away. There then arrives a moment in which the samadhi shatters, and coming out from that state, kensho is attained.

In yet a third case, a student who has already attained deep awakening could well use breath counting as an advanced practice of clarifying it. With each breath, giving rise again and again to an upwelling of the recognition that is kensho, susokukan here becomes a practice of seamlessly embodying awakening. In this case, it is a method of untying the knots of habitual delusion—jikke—that remain after kensho.

It is similar with *wato** and koan practice, methods refined to a high degree in Rinzai Zen. Using these, one may enter the decisive gate at which the mind's boundless, luminous nature is clearly recognized. Usually they are methods that cannot be effectively taken up unless one has first cultivated the basic stability mentioned earlier in connection with susokukan. Nevertheless, in some cases a wato or koan will be assigned to a student lacking such stability. This is because the wato and koan methods may themselves be used to cultivate such stability. In such cases then, they combine within themselves the functions of preliminary or foundational practice and a direct approach to kensho. Later, after kensho, wato and koan are also used to clarify and integrate awakening. Indeed, one may revisit a wato or koan many times to gain a greater depth of understanding.

Many things in Zen are like this. Vows and ethical precepts may be taken as skillful guidelines for behavior, and also unfold to reveal themselves as profound teachings directly pointing out our nature. Robes and statues have historical, ritual, and aesthetic value, and also transmit specific, practical information regarding how to use body and breath to further the aims of practice, or how the fruition of practice manifests in the body. Bells and other musical instruments have practical function (and sound nice as well) and, when used properly, may cause us to enter samadhi and awaken through sound. The list goes on. Needless to say, Zen practitioners should completely grasp the subtle and sometimes hidden uses of these inherited practice forms before choosing to alter or do away with them in the interest of "adapting Zen to modern culture."[2]

We may also view many disciplines that have historically complemented Zen practice, such as forms of physical culture and the arts, in a similar light. The approach to practice called *Zen ken sho** (literally, "Zen, sword, brush"), exemplified by people such as Omori Sogen and Yamaoka Tesshu,[3] reveals a tremendously creative adaptation of such disciplines to support the intent of Zen. A beginning student struggling to integrate posture, breath, and mind in meditation, for example, may find that something like martial art training—the nature of which forces one to rapidly develop such

integration and manifest intense kiai—actually serves to accelerate meditative attainment. Likewise, an advanced Zen student engaged in post-kensho training to seamlessly integrate awakening with activity might discover in arts such as calligraphy or painting an ideal support for this, especially since they reveal one's inner state instantly upon the paper.

One thing that is clear from all of this is that as Zen students we should never judge others according to the specific practice or discipline they are using in their Zen training. Unless we ourselves have deep realization, we will not be able to see the depth of others or know what the function of their practice truly is. It is best, in fact, to just consider all other people to be advanced bodhisattvas and ourselves to be common, deluded persons. That way, whatever difficult circumstances arise in our interactions with others, we will be able to use them to deepen our own practice.

This final point reveals, in fact, a way to approach all activities and life circumstances and bring them within the sphere of awakening. When we are able to apply the qualities developed through our practice to the conflicts and challenges of daily life, then we will begin to understand how life itself may function as the supreme practice method. This is what is meant by *shugyo*:* deep physical and spiritual training. A number of Japanese words describe aspects of training and practice, for example *tanren** (forging) and *kufu** (grappling or striving in a manner that engages all aspects of one's existence). Shugyo, however, refers to training the whole being in the most profound manner by taking the wisdom of awakening itself as the basis of training. This manifests ultimately as a training in which there is nothing in our lives that is *not* encompassed within practice. Everyone we encounter is a realized being teaching us. Every circumstance we enter is a dojo* in which we endlessly refine ourselves. As Zen practitioners, we should all wish to become true *shugyosha**—"shugyo persons"—by bringing our lives to fruition in this manner. Shido Bunan Zenji's[4] words regarding the way to approach such a path are direct and very kind: "If you think of everything as training, your suffering will disappear."[5]

If we can practice in such a manner, in fact, we will eventually pass beyond the three functions of Zen practice methods. We will come to a place in which talk of "practice" versus "nonpractice" will seem nonsensical to us. There will be no situations that appear as obstacles to practice and no moment in our lives when we are apart from the fruition of practice. Shido Bunan described such effortless, integrated practice as the "Ultimate Vehicle," saying, "In the Ultimate Vehicle, you do as you will and there is nothing to observe. It is a wonderful thing, and it is very rare in this world."[6]

These words are simple, but their import is vast. One may do as one will, with no particular points to observe, because all of one's life has been encompassed within effortless practice, and all phenomena reveal one's original face. It is truly a rare and wonderful thing, this embodied practiceless practice, and the intent of our training is to actualize it for ourselves.

As beginners, of course, it is best not to cling to such ideas, much less try consciously to act as if we have attained a state in which "you do as you will and there is nothing to observe." Most of us are still in an early stage of training where conscious practice—and a great deal of it—is required, and there are, in fact, quite a lot of things for us to observe. Sparing no effort, not judging or worrying whether our practice (or the practice of others) is "good" or "bad," and communicating well our experiences to our teachers: this is the dependable manner of practicing that cannot fail.

9

SAMADHI (MEDITATIVE ABSORPTION)

Direct mind is the place of awakening.

—TRADITIONAL SAYING IN BOTH ZEN AND MARTIAL ARTS[1]

SAMADHI, or "meditative absorption," is a word that bears further explanation. It is something mentioned often yet often misunderstood by beginning Zen students. Perhaps one reason misunderstanding arises is that the term can be used in different ways depending on the tradition.

All the different Buddhist schools—as well as non-Buddhist traditions that make use of yogic practices—have their own ways of describing the types, content, and purposes of samadhi. We may hear, for example, of some Hindu yogi who has gained a miraculous power of entering deep samadhi whereby his heart and breathing slow, and he can survive being buried underground for days. In Buddhism, which stresses that enlightenment is the supreme miraculous accomplishment, the *Surangama Sutra* explains many different states that may arise during practice and the dangers of fixating upon them. In Zen specifically, the *Platform Scripture of the*

Sixth Patriarch clarifies the essential Zen understanding of samadhi in oneness with *prajna*,* the transcendental wisdom of awakening first revealed in kensho.

For our purposes, however, it will be useful at first to just consider samadhi to be a human experience, not one solely encountered in meditation. In this general way, we can say that samadhi is a state marked simultaneously by unwavering concentration and free-flowing, relaxed clarity. Many (if not most) people have experienced such a state on some occasion in their lives. It is not unusual to sometimes be so absorbed in an activity or situation that we forget ourselves, our surroundings, and the passage of time. Whenever we so throw ourselves into something that for a time we become one with it—that is, the sense of being a "subject" in relation to "objects" lessens—we may experience this kind of samadhi. Athletes, for example, speak of entering a "zone." Artists and craftspeople commonly have the experience of becoming immersed in their work, forgetting all else. Even walking outside or watching a beautiful sunset, we may find ourselves experiencing a free-flowing stillness of mind, a blissful clarity, or a timeless sense of connection to our surroundings, even to the point that the line between ourselves and our environment—between "inside" and "outside"—seems less rigid. No doubt many of us carry a wistful memory of some such moment, perhaps from youth, when the world seemed magically, intensely alive and vivid in this way. These are often experiences of a sort of common samadhi.

In my own case, I clearly remember such things. For example, in my high school days, I liked to sit unmoving on the roots of a favorite tree, staring at the light shimmering in the surrounding leaves. Sometimes it would happen that everything appeared completely white, silent, and somehow still, even as the leaves and boughs continued to move in the breeze. This experience would last for a while and then gradually dissipate. On another occasion, riding a train in India and staring out the window for many hours at mile after mile of fields, villages, and people, I suddenly experienced a complete clarity of mind in which each stranger's face I saw was

literally as familiar as those of my own parents. Again, this experience lasted for a while and then faded. It was only later, after beginning practice and also experiencing similar things upon meeting with certain teachers, that I realized these were experiences of a kind of samadhi.

As we enter the path of practice we may experience many such states, both shallow and profound. For example, we may experience our surroundings as unusually bright or vividly colorful. We may, when walking or driving, feel that we ourselves remain still while it is the world that moves past. We may come to experience a seeming oneness of mind and body or oneness with our environment, perhaps even to the point that we feel we have become the universe itself. We may experience the state that Hakuin likened to entering a world that is vast and clear as crystal, as if surrounded by a pure sheet of ice stretching thousands of miles.[2] We may even experience that all our senses and our awareness of time and space utterly drop away.

Again, these are all just states of samadhi. If we practice hard, they will naturally arise and can indeed feel liberating for a time. But what we should grasp in our Zen training is this: samadhi states are not really important by themselves. That is, they are not themselves awakening or the fruition of Zen. They are part of the path, but they are not something to which we should cling at all.

It is sometimes the case that Zen teachers are hesitant to discuss such things. This is because students often seize onto their practice experiences in a mistaken way. As students, it is true that we sometimes so hunger to feel we are making progress and to experience some glimmer of the awakening about which we have heard that when such experiences spontaneously arise—seemingly miraculous and different from our everyday condition—we tend to believe they are evidence of some great attainment. But they are not. Thus, a teacher's reaction to our reports of samadhi experiences is typically to dismiss them and remind us to just return again to our practice. It is good advice, and we may rest assured that we are not losing anything important by following it. On the contrary, this

advice points out the fastest way to deepen samadhi in our practice by forging straight ahead.

That being the case, I have sometimes heard practitioners from other Buddhist traditions mistakenly state that Zen does not recognize samadhi or value it in any manner. Of course, this is ridiculous, as could be learned by reading any important Zen text. The error is perhaps understandable since Zen emphasizes a direct entry into the recognition of one's nature (however brought about) at the beginning of the path, rather than the initial cultivation of progressively deeper samadhi states. Because each person is unique, this direct entry does not always require prior cultivation of samadhi, and so Zen training has no fixed preliminary practices or sequence.

Worse, though, I have even heard some Zen students claim that such experiences should not arise in Zen or that they mark mistaken practice. These people sometimes boast, in fact, that they themselves have never experienced something called samadhi and instead only cultivate a practice of "ordinary mind." Often what such people do not see is that theirs is not the ordinary mind of awakening—it is just ordinary, deluded mind. Practitioners like this have not yet grasped the actual intent of Zen, so they are really difficult to help. In this camp we might also number those who believe that a quiet, blissful meditation of stillness—which in fact is stagnant and completely lacking in kiai—is Zen samadhi. With a tepid, shallow concentration that comes and goes, such people may spend many years sitting peacefully and with great decorum, stewing in the endless arising of subtle dualistic thought and stale emotion. Such practice is like a pot of turd slowly warming over a low flame: no matter how long you cook it, it will never become something useful. This kind of meditation practice is a pitfall about which many masters have warned us for centuries.

Resolving not to fall into such traps then, let us examine the role of samadhi cultivation in Rinzai practice, mapped somewhat onto the three functions of Zen practices discussed earlier. We will thus differentiate between samadhi before awakening (kensho) and samadhi after awakening.

SAMADHI BEFORE AWAKENING

To have the awakening called kensho does indeed sound wonderful, doesn't it? Though it depends somewhat on our individual conditions and karmic roots, we may be surprised then to hear that it is not generally a difficult thing to experience. It may surprise us less if we consider kensho, like samadhi, to be a human experience, not one specific to Buddhism or Zen. In fact, there are probably many people who experience awakening at some shallow level, even without prior practice. The Sixth Patriarch, who awakened spontaneously upon hearing a line from the *Diamond Sutra*, is a famous example.[3]

But for most of us, things are very different. Our conditions are such that we do not spontaneously enter the gate of kensho without first practicing to remove some of the obstructions—layers of habitual delusion—that cloud our eyes. This is the first function of Zen practice methods, which we discussed: if we are unable to directly enter the experience of awakening through a direct pointing from our teachers or other means, then in Zen we will be given various practices to begin dissolving these layers of obstructions. Whatever form they take, such methods generally cultivate samadhi. Why is this? Because the habit of dualistic seeing—our fundamental delusion—becomes less rigid in samadhi, and so we will be able to begin penetrating it. In samadhi we come to grasp the illusory nature of our obstructions, and thus their power over us diminishes. Manifesting a broad, relaxed, nonabiding mind that flows freely without fixation, we learn to remain present and clear.

Eventually we will be able to enter into a truly profound samadhi and experience the "great death" in which body and mind completely drop away. Emerging from this, we may recognize our true self-less nature and for the first time know the experience of kensho for ourselves. This is the manner in which samadhi serves to lessen the hold of obstructing delusion and opens up the possibility of awakening.

Samadhi after Awakening

Having seen our true nature and finally understood what is meant by kensho, we must now still continue to practice in samadhi. In fact, even if we have been one of those able to have the recognition of kensho without prior practice, it will still be useful for us to cultivate a correct samadhi along the path of training that follows. Why is this?

It is, as I have said, because kensho alone is not sufficient. After kensho we still must practice to fully cut the habitual roots of delusion and suffering once and for all, using the wisdom of awakening itself as the blade. Having experienced a genuine awakening, it must then be made to penetrate the body and function seamlessly in each moment. Only in this way may we actualize the full potential of "becoming Buddha." Such continuity of awakening—a constant upwelling of the recognition that is kensho—is established through the power of samadhi. In fact, to be more exact, we may describe the role of samadhi after kensho in this way: awakening itself serves as the objectless object of our samadhi. If we do not actualize such a seamless, liberative samadhi, we are likely to slip into conceptualization regarding our insight and so fall back once again into our old dualistic habit.[4]

There are various ways to describe this path of embodying the recognition of one's nature. For example, there are the hidden practices of *hokkyo zanmai* (the "jewel mirror samadhi") and *hen sho ego zanmai* (the "alternating samadhi of differentiation and equality") in Rinzai training,[5] by which realization of the boundless nature of this "I" and all phenomena is truly made one's own. But for now, it is enough for us to understand that just as samadhi was useful for removing obstructions to kensho, after kensho it is samadhi that makes the integration and embodiment of awakening—and its wondrous expression in activity to benefit others—possible.

Using other Buddhist terminology, we could describe these later stages of Zen practice in this way: a samadhi arises that encompasses all the qualities of *shamatha* and *vipashyana*, the respective

practices of calm stability and liberating insight.[6] The clear insight of kensho here is the fulfillment of vipashyana; the continued, seamless upwelling of that insight is the stable fulfillment of shamatha. Resting in the nonabiding recognition of one's true nature, transcending differentiations of "practice" and "nonpractice," true Zen samadhi inseparable from prajna-wisdom is realized.

This at last is the perfected Way in which there are no obstructions and there is nothing to cultivate. This is the "very rare" and "wonderful thing" that Shido Bunan Zenji described. There are many other ways to describe this fruition of Zen practice. It may be called the perfected unity of Manjushri and Samantabhadra,[7] the actualization of the four wisdoms and three bodies,*[8] the immovable or nonabiding mind,[9] the transcendence of life and death, or the oneness of practice and enlightenment. It may be called the embodiment of no-self, the true self, original mind, or natural mind. Whatever one calls it, it is the great peace; within it there is nothing particular to do and nothing one must become.

Now, finally, we should be able to grasp the difference between the common samadhi that may be experienced in activities such as sport or art and authentic Zen samadhi. True Zen samadhi means shattering the dualistic fixations of subject and object to realize what Omori Roshi has called the "selfless self." When this selfless self enters into the myriad activities of life, illuminating and shining through them with the wisdom of awakening, then at last we may call it the true samadhi of Zen.

Here, then, I have briefly explained the role of samadhi in the crucial post-kensho practice of Zen. Although we may understand all of this, if we have not yet entered the gate of kensho, it is just more conceptual baggage to be set aside for the time being. If we cannot sit in meditation for even a short while with stability and focus, we must first practice to develop those qualities. If we cannot remain undistracted when we stand up from the meditation cushion and enter into daily activities, we must practice ceaselessly to do that.

To sum up, samadhi—both before and after kensho—may be thought of as the field within which Zen cultivation takes place. Even

if our conditions are such that we do not need to cultivate samadhi through practice before kensho, we will certainly have to do so afterward.

With this, we have reached the end of part 1. In part 2, we will actually begin to do the thing for which the text thus far has been meant as preparation: practice. Returning now once again to our aspiration, we should resolve to practice in such a way that we can actually give life to all these concepts and become something of great use to others. As Torei explained, if we can go beyond a solely intellectual understanding and attain genuine realization, then we will arrive at a truly wonderful place. When we read the many Zen writings and Buddhist sutras, it will seem as if they are our own teachings. Reading the words of great teachers, we will intimately understand them as if we ourselves had spoken them. Reading the many koans, we will enter seamlessly into the situations they describe and penetrate for ourselves the minds of the masters.

PART TWO

PRACTICE

10

RELAXATION

Just set aside your body and mind, forget about them, and throw them into the house of the buddha; then all is done by the buddha.

—DOGEN[1]

UP UNTIL NOW we have explored Zen with words and from a distance. I have already discussed the need for summoning up an intense feeling of inquiry—in unity with compassionate regard for others—as the motivation for correct practice. We have also examined the need to throw one's entire being into that path of practice, holding nothing back of one's energy. Now, in part 2, we are finally ready to enter into practice with our own bodies.

But a danger exists at this juncture of which we should be aware. It is that words such as "intense inquiry" and "holding nothing back of one's energy" can be misunderstood such that practice is undertaken in a manner increasing physical and mental tension, rather than decreasing it. Such tension will, in fact, hinder our practice.

What we should remember here is that awakening to our natural, intrinsic wisdom is not accomplished by striving to acquire something we lack. It will be accomplished, rather, by dissolving

layers of habitual delusion, which merely obscure the treasure we already possess. For that reason, our practice must balance an intensely energetic effort with deep relaxation and a sense of releasing tension. “Relaxation” here does not mean to lessen one’s effort. It means to engage in that effort without undue tension or fixation.

This is really not hard to understand. A marathon runner, for example, has a clear goal and exerts extreme effort without ceasing, even to the very limits of strength. This is done, however, with great relaxation and efficiency of form, born out of long training in how to run correctly. Relaxation in Zen practice is like this also: exerting our utmost effort over years, we must nevertheless do so in a manner that releases—rather than adds to—habitual fixation and tension.

In this chapter, we will thus first learn a few simple practices that will help us begin releasing psychophysical tension. These may serve as useful preparation for what we will learn in the following chapters.

Releasing Fixation

“Nonabiding,” *muju*,* is an important term in Zen practice. For our purposes here, we may say that it refers to an aspect of the experience of samadhi in which the mind functions freely and with clarity in a flowing manner, without reflexively “stopping” upon phenomena. Our usual deluded state is not like that at all; it is marked instead by a serial fixation on whatever we apprehend, such as visual images, sounds, mental activity, and so on. As we have noted, the greatest of these fixations is the delusional fabrication of “self” separate from “other”—that is, the fundamental and habitual ignorance of dualistic seeing.

As we enter the path of Zen practice, therefore, it will be useful for us to being learning to release habitual fixation. Doing so, we may experience a great sense of nonabiding relaxation and calm. The following exercise can help us to accomplish this.

Practice Instructions: Releasing Fixation

1. Sitting or lying in any comfortable position, bring your attention to your various senses and their objects. Take a few moments to examine, for example, the sensation of seeing with the eyes, noticing what they currently sense (objects, colors, light, and darkness), the sensation of hearing with the ears, noticing what sounds are heard, and so on. Do this for all the senses in turn: sight, sound, smell, taste, touch. Finally, do so for the mind: examine how your mind is aware of its own movement, such as thoughts arising and passing away.
2. As you bring your attention to each of your senses in turn, try to feel the degree to which you are tightly grasping or fixated upon what they perceive. Are you constantly attracted to what the eyes see, for example, and compulsively following after those sights? Is your awareness constantly following after mental movements, impressions, and thoughts, chaining them together into wandering dialogue? With some examination, you may see that you are tightly fixated upon the activity of your senses and that your mind "stops" upon or pursues various phenomena as they arise, one after another.
3. Now, for one of your senses, practice releasing this rigid fixation. For example, bringing your attention to the act of seeing, try to relax your fixation on the visual stimulus without suppressing or ignoring it. In other words: let the eyes see but without following after sights obsessively as if your mind was reaching out through the eyes, attempting to touch what is seen. Remaining present and relaxed, just let visual activity occur as it does without any attempt to follow, suppress, ignore, or manipulate it. If you can do this, you will experience that you are still aware of what the eyes perceive (since obviously they continue functioning as sense organs), but you will feel slightly detached and clear, no longer as fascinated or disturbed by the objects seen. The feeling will be as if you had been tightly pulling on a rope attached to something but have now let it gone

slack and relaxed in your hands: you are still connected to the sense of seeing but are no longer pulling upon it with a grasping tension. Sights simply come and go without your chasing after them.

4. Now try doing this for each sense in turn. Practice letting your body feel through the sense of touch but without judging or chasing after the sensations. Let your ears hear whatever sounds strike them, effortlessly and without judging, analyzing, or following after the sounds. Do the same with the senses of smell and taste: take a sip of water or bite of food, for example, and allow sensations of taste to come and go without overly involving yourself with them or judging them. Finally, practice this with the mind: becoming aware of thoughts and other mental objects as they arise, do not engage with, judge, worry, or conceptualize about them at all. Let the "rope" of your fixated attention go slack, and just allow mental activity to arise and pass away of its own accord without stopping upon, chasing after, trying to control, or suppressing any of it.
5. When you have been able to experience releasing each sense, including the mind, now practice doing so with all of them at once. That is, let all the "ropes" go slack simultaneously. Rest in the feeling of relaxed, expansive awareness that results—free from fixation or stopping upon any object of the senses.
6. As a final step, try to bring this relaxed, nonabiding quality into daily activities: walk, work, eat, and so on with awareness, noticing when your awareness stops upon or chases after some object of the senses. When you notice this, just release that tension and return to a more centered, free-flowing awareness.

This exercise, though seemingly simple, is truly useful. Along with the result of calm relaxation, we will start to understand how our awareness is actually able to function effortlessly and with clarity even when engaged with many objects at once. Eventually, this exercise will help us understand how to unite nondistractedly with a specific method of Zen practice rather than grasp it tensely; in other

words, we will start understanding how to enter into the samadhi of practice.

More than this, however, we should know that experiencing a nonfixated, nonabiding state is actually a "turning around" of the light of our own awareness, by which we might clearly recognize the source of seeing, hearing, thinking, and so on. It is, therefore, a method of directly pointing to the boundless, luminous nature of our minds.

NANSO NO HO (HAKUIN'S "SOFT BUTTER" PRACTICE)

The famous "soft butter"[2] practice of Hakuin, *nanso no ho*,* is also very useful for beginners. Hakuin widely taught this visualization that "washes" the body with energy from crown to feet, removing tension, energetic obstructions, and disease.

In *Yasen Kanna* and other writings,[3] Hakuin relates how he learned several internal energetic-cultivation methods from the mysterious hermit Hakuyu who dwelt in a mountain cave. Hakuin had been suffering from an increasingly grave illness brought on by the excessive severity and tension of his practice. Despite the best efforts of doctors, he was eventually told that his condition was incurable. Using the practices he learned from Hakuyu, however, he was eventually able to recover completely. He later credited these practices for the great vigor he maintained into old age.

Hakuin's practices have been transmitted within Rinzai lineages ever since. Nanso no ho is still effective today for releasing tension and clearing psychophysical obstructions, and can even be practiced lying down or sitting in a chair.

Practice Instructions: Nanso no Ho

1. Sit or lie in any comfortable position. You may close the eyes or leave them open as you wish. Breathing in a relaxed manner,

visualize as follows:

- On the crown of the head, suddenly there has appeared a mass—about the size and shape of an egg and the soft consistency of butter—of a wondrous healing substance. This substance is composed of every medicinal herb and panacea one can imagine. (Here, you may imagine this substance in whatever manner brings it to life for you: for example, perhaps it is slightly warm or gives off a wonderful scent such as sandalwood, and so on.)
- Watching this substance, the heat of one's body begins to warm and melt it. Feel it slowly running down to cover the scalp and face—and also within the head, descending through the body, into the skull, behind the eyes—always moving downward slowly. Wherever it goes, imagine that this substance warms, softens, and heals the tissue there. All tension, disease, scars, negativity, and trauma of any kind within body and mind melt like lumps of frozen, dirty ice and run downward ahead of the wondrous substance. Where this substance has passed through, the body now feels light, open, soft, and warm, relaxed and vibrantly healthy.
- The healing substance continues its downward journey: into the neck and over the shoulders, down into the torso, through the heart and lungs, the upper and lower arms, into the hands. Visualize and strive to vividly feel all of this.
- Descending farther, it moves into the low back and hips, down into the bowels, melting all disease and negativity, healing any distress, relaxing and opening the body, leaving it feeling light and free.
- Farther down now, it moves into the upper legs, the knees, the lower legs, and finally to the feet, pushing out all disease and obstructions, which flow out the bottoms of the feet like filthy water. The entire body is now left warm, relaxed, clear as crystal, and vibrating with energy.

2. This completes one round of the visualization. You may rest at this point for as long as you wish, visualizing strongly that vital energy has descended to fill the lower body. It is as if you are sitting up to the waist in a steaming hot bath infused with fragrant, healing herbs. Feel the warmth of it penetrating the body from the waist downward.
3. When you are ready to continue, visualize that suddenly there appears upon the head another mass of the wondrous healing substance. It begins to melt, and so repeat the downward-moving visualization. You may continue with as many rounds of this practice as you wish.

Like all visualizations, nanso no ho will be effective to the degree you are able to make it come vividly alive. With practice, tremendous benefit will begin to manifest. There is no harm in doing it for as long as you like. Some students have found that in the beginning it is useful to have a voice guiding them through this visualization. For that reason, you could, if you wish, record yourself reciting the text above and play it as you practice. But eventually, when the visualization becomes more vivid, it will be better to dispense with exterior aids.

An important note: your visualization should always move downward, from the upper body to the lower. As Hakuin explained, the essential point of this method is to cause the vital energy to settle in the lower body, filling the area from the lower trunk to the feet. This energy will follow our mental visualization, and so we should never visualize in an opposite manner that it is rising.

Nanso no ho can be done any time and is even an excellent practice to do when lying down to sleep. You may find that this causes you to sleep more easily and deeply. It is also possible that it will cause you to experience lucid dreams or else a deep, dreamless sleep. In this way, nanso no ho is one of the methods that can support the cultivation of a night practice.

These, then, are two practices that may usefully be taken up as we enter the path. Even if one were never to practice Zen, something like

nanso no ho could still be useful for health. For those of us who wish to follow the Zen way, though, what is again most important to understand is that our practice must be an extremely intense, committed undertaking, yet simultaneously marked by a constant releasing of fixation and tension. Like marathon runners, we should throw ourselves wholly into our training without reserve. We must do that, however, in a manner that allows us to function with freedom and flexibility, letting layers of tension and habitual fixation fall away rather than solidify.

In truth, such an intense but relaxed manner of practicing is actually an expression of faith. It is only because we have faith in the great promise of the One Vehicle—that is, the truth that our own nature is already not different from what is called Buddha—that we can relax with confidence in our practice and so penetrate swiftly into it like a heavy stone sinking straight down into the depths of the ocean. We must never forget that we are not striving to become buddhas; we are letting go our grip upon everything that separates us from manifesting as buddhas here and now. That is the spirit of Master Dogen's words in the quote opening this chapter.

With such an attitude, let us now move on to the next chapter in which we will begin to learn the crucial practice of seated meditation.

11

MEDITATION—THE BODY

If you wish to attain this true and genuine Way, you need to pay close attention to all the details.

—TOREI[1]

IN THIS CHAPTER and the two that follow, we will learn perhaps the most important core Zen practice: seated meditation, or *zazen*.*

For the sake of learning, we will approach zazen from three standpoints: the body, or how the posture is trained in zazen; the breath, or how we breathe during zazen, which is also related to energetic cultivation; and finally the method, meaning the manner in which we cultivate our minds in unity with breath and body. There are many possible variations on these points. But we will here examine a method that is foundational and may be useful for everyone.

Though this book is not meant to take the place of a living teacher, the meditation instructions that follow are safe for you to try on your own. When you do begin formal training under a teacher's guidance, what you have learned here should serve as useful preparation even if there are small differences. At such time, you will be able to clarify the method and receive instructions suited more closely to your

individual situation. As we have said, true Zen practice is transmitted from teacher to student, mind to mind and body to body.

The Posture of Meditation

The position of the body in zazen—that of a seated buddha—is actually a yogic posture requiring time to master. Though beginners may find it difficult, its purpose is not to cause discomfort but to harness and unify body, breath, energy, and mind in the most rapid, effective manner.

Zazen posture should not be thought of as a position of the body alone and certainly not as something adopted for aesthetic (or ascetic) purposes. It is, rather, a psychophysical *kamae** that simultaneously cultivates and expresses Zen insight. For this reason, it has been used by practitioners for many centuries.

We must each master the zazen posture in a manner that fits our bodies and abilities. While it is useful in the beginning to observe our teachers and other senior practitioners, ultimately it is fine that we may not look exactly like them. It is true that we must initially learn the correct posture by copying an exterior form. But it will be more useful to think of correct zazen posture as something that emerges from our bodies naturally over the course of our training. In other words, we each must come to manifest a balanced, clear zazen posture that arises organically in accord with our unique conditions. What is certain is that as our training deepens, the depth of our awakening, or lack of it, will be clearly shown in our posture.

We will begin by examining the seated foundation of the zazen posture and will then move upward through the body point by point to clarify details.

Foundation

For zazen, typically a large flat cushion (*zabuton**) is laid down upon the floor (a folded blanket can also suffice). Upon this is placed one

or more small cushions (*zafu**) upon which the buttocks rest. It is very important to sit forward on the edge of the zafu, rather than squarely upon their middle; doing the latter tends to cause an incorrect backward lean.

The legs are folded in one of three ways, which we will examine on the following pages. In some of the photos, the model's lower garment (*hakama*) has been pulled up to better reveal the leg positions; note that during actual meditation the legs and feet would not be exposed in this way.

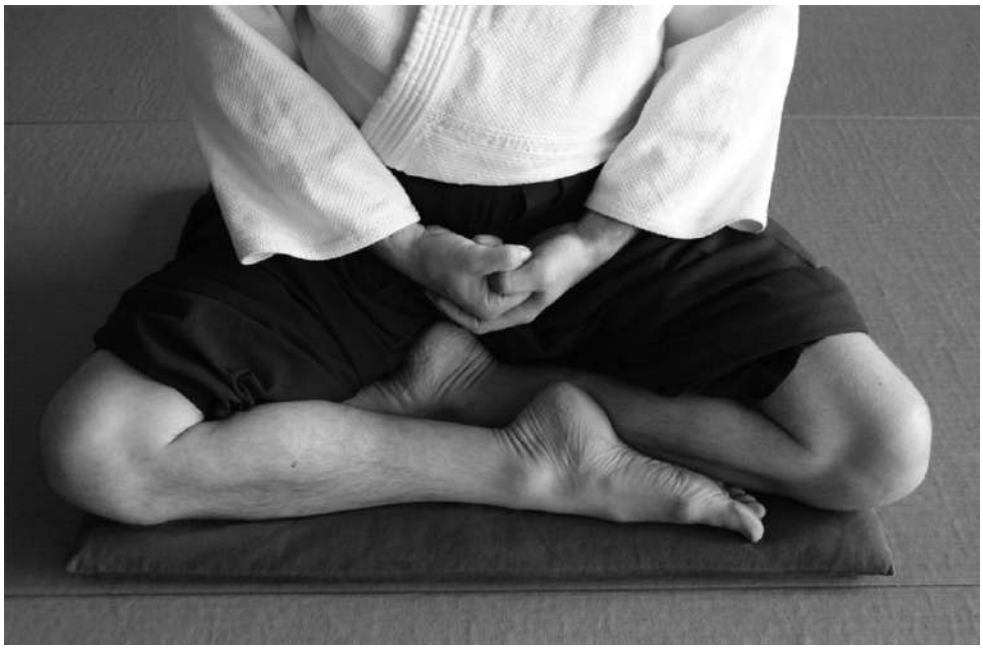

Fig. 4: Agura, or basic cross-legged posture

Agura (Cross-Legged)

*Agura** (fig. 4) is a simple folded-leg posture, which is fine for beginners. In agura the feet are placed one in front of the other. Note that the ankles are not crossed in the manner often done when sitting on the floor in a casual manner, as this impedes circulation.

In agura, as in the other cross-legged postures that follow, it is important to sometimes switch the leg that is placed forward when

one sits down. This will help prevent postural imbalance, which can occur over time from habitually favoring one side.

Fig. 5: Hanka-fuza, or “half lotus”

Hanka-fuza (Half Lotus)

In *hanka-fuza** (fig. 5), commonly called the half-lotus posture, one foot is placed upon the opposite thigh. Hanka-fuza is a wonderful posture providing greater stability than agura. Until beginners are accustomed to it, they may find that the top leg becomes more quickly fatigued or painful. It will thus be even more important to sometimes change which leg is placed on top at the beginning of each meditation session.

Kekka-fuza (Full Lotus)

*Kekka-fuza** (fig. 6) is the classic full-lotus posture. Both feet are placed upon the opposite thighs. The degree of mental and physical stability experienced in kekka-fuza is unmatched. The manner in

which the breathing and subtle energetics of the body are cultivated in this posture is also important.

Even for experienced practitioners, kekka-fuza takes some time to master. After becoming comfortable in hanka-fuza with either leg on top, you may begin to use kekka-fuza for some periods of meditation. In this manner, gradually increase the amount of time you sit in kekka-fuza.

Fig. 6: Kekka-fuza, or “full lotus”

Now we will examine several other ways of sitting in meditation. To be clear, the cross-legged postures have advantages and should be used by everyone not physically precluded from doing so. Still, the following are useful options that may be suitable for some students.

Seiza (Kneeling)

It is sometimes the case that hip or other conditions completely prevent sitting cross-legged. Kneeling in the Japanese *seiza** posture (fig. 7) may thus be done. In order to support the buttocks, a pile of small zafu have been straddled in the manner of riding a horse.

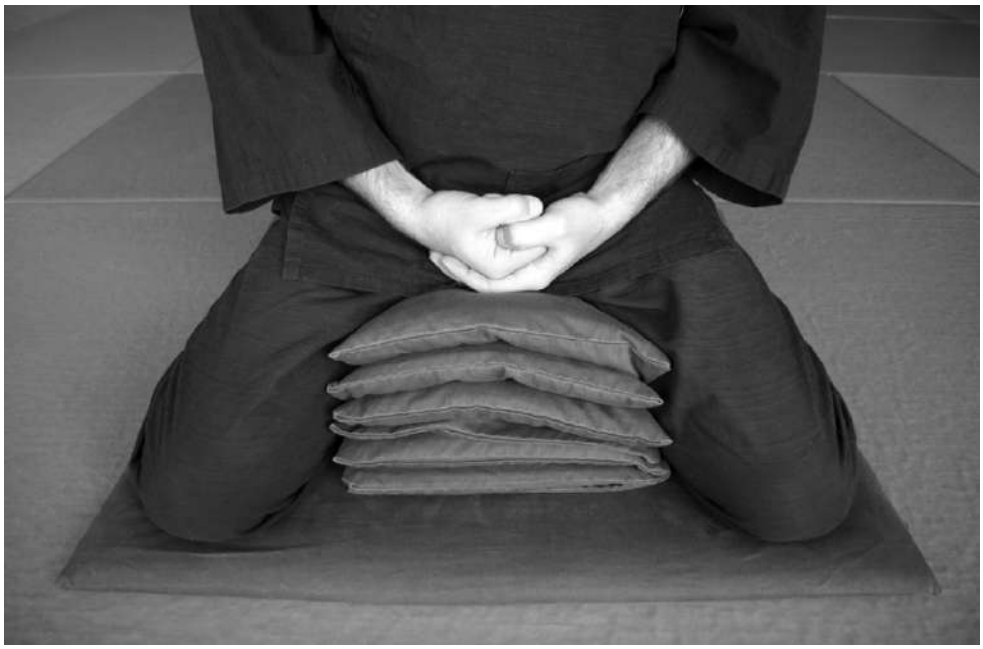

Fig. 7: Seiza, or kneeling posture

Using a Chair or Stool

If your physical condition makes sitting on the floor completely impossible, another option is to sit on a chair or stool of such height that the hips are slightly above the knees. Zafu may still be used to cushion the seat, and the feet should rest flat on the floor (fig. 8).

Fig. 8: Using a stool or chair

If a chair with a back is used, you should not lean against it but rather sit forward with the same body alignment as if sitting cross-legged on the floor. It is best, actually, to use a stool without a back.

THE PELVIS AND SPINE

Whatever posture is chosen we should be aware of two common errors that will hinder progress. Since these can be subtle and difficult for beginners to sense, we must pay extra attention to them.

The first error is to misunderstand the use of the pelvis. In short, the sacrum must be allowed to “drop” in such a manner that excessive curve (lordosis) is removed from the low back. In other words, the pelvis should settle in such a way that the tailbone turns downward.

To accomplish this we should not fire the abdominal muscles in the manner of performing a sit-up exercise. Rather, the muscles around the solar plexus, abdomen, low back, and sacrum must simply all release. Simultaneously, we extend upward through the crown of the head. In this way, a downward-dropping force in the

sacrum and an upward-reaching force in the neck together serve to lengthen the spine.

An incorrect posture displaying excessive lordosis in the low back (fig. 9) will prevent free movement of the diaphragm. Correct breathing (or any deep breath, really) will thus be impossible. Tension and gross thought activity will increase, and energetic imbalances may manifest. This is a mistaken "military" posture, with chest thrust forward, that many beginners will assume when told to "sit up straight."

Note in figure 9 how the stomach does not hang freely; the navel here actually points downward. You may also sense that the energetic "feeling" of this body is moving upward. A person sitting like this will begin to feel tightness, heat, and pressure in the chest and head. Wandering thoughts will proliferate.

Fig. 9: Incorrect posture with excessive lordosis (curve) in the low back

An interesting thing about this mistaken posture is that it is commonly assumed by people who have read Zen books, which sometimes advise students to "push the hips forward" in zazen. Unfortunately, the Japanese word translated as "hips" in such cases is often *koshi*,* which actually refers to the entire lower trunk, not solely the iliac crests. Because of this simple misunderstanding, I suspect there are many practitioners who have sat for years doing exactly the opposite of what those books mean to advise. I have even heard Zen teachers verbally advise their students, based on such misunderstanding, to increase the curve in the low back—a truly unfortunate thing!

The second common error is to lean too far backward in one's seat (fig. 10). This posture is often adopted by beginners because it can feel more comfortable to them; accustomed to sitting back in chairs, their postural support muscles have become weak and this position alleviates some of that discomfort. But it also leads to a struggle with gravity that pulls the practitioner inexorably backward.

One particularly tricky aspect of this backward-leaning habit is that, clothed, it can appear relatively straight and relaxed. Over time, however, tension will manifest. It is also a posture completely lacking in vitality, and so the resultant state of mind will be cloudy and dull.

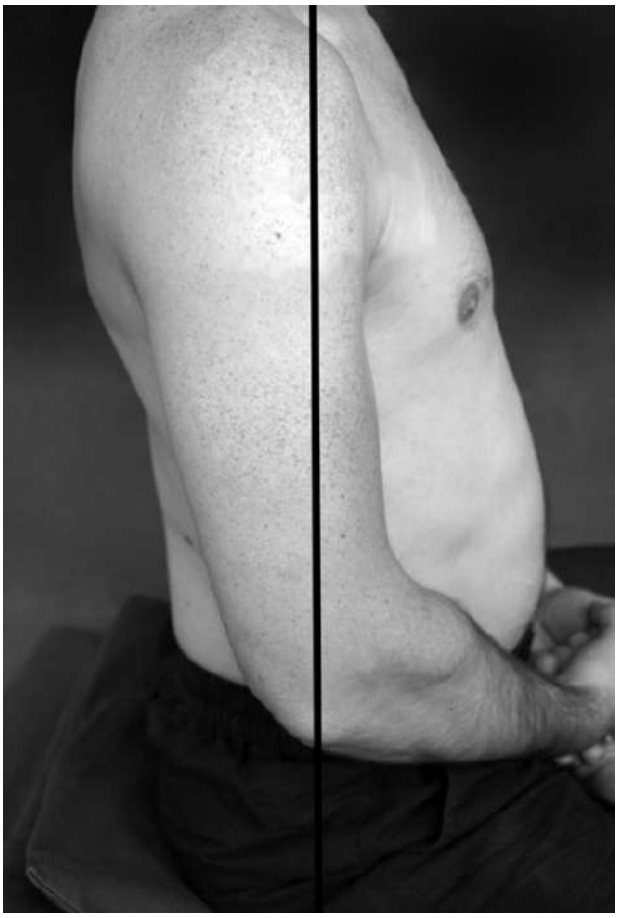

Fig. 10: Incorrect posture, leaning too far back

Both of these common errors may be seen in many meditation halls. Certainly, some aspects of our lifestyle, such as overuse of chairs, encourage such habits. It is distressing, though, to see that even experienced meditation practitioners with many years of training sometimes unknowingly indulge in such mistaken body usage.

In general, if our meditation does not deepen steadily over time with adequate practice, it is likely that misuse of the body or breath is among the causes. This is important to remember.

Now let us examine a more balanced posture (fig. 11). This is one in which the pelvis has been allowed to relax and deep breathing is possible. Note in figure 11 the slight forward attitude of the posture. The feeling of correct zazen posture should not be a static stillness,

but rather as if one were able to stand up suddenly. This is a subtle but crucial point.

Another thing to notice is the "set" of the *hara*,* or lower abdominal area, which is the seat of the body's energetic power and the location of the tanden. Because the posture is correct, the breathing may be cultivated correctly. This is revealed by a concavity of the solar plexus and a round fullness in the lower abdomen. (We shall have more to say about this in chapter 12.) The navel here is actually pointing upward rather than downward. Compared to figures 9 and 10, the body in figure 11 has a more grounded appearance. You may be able to sense that it is energetically settled in a manner that the others lack.

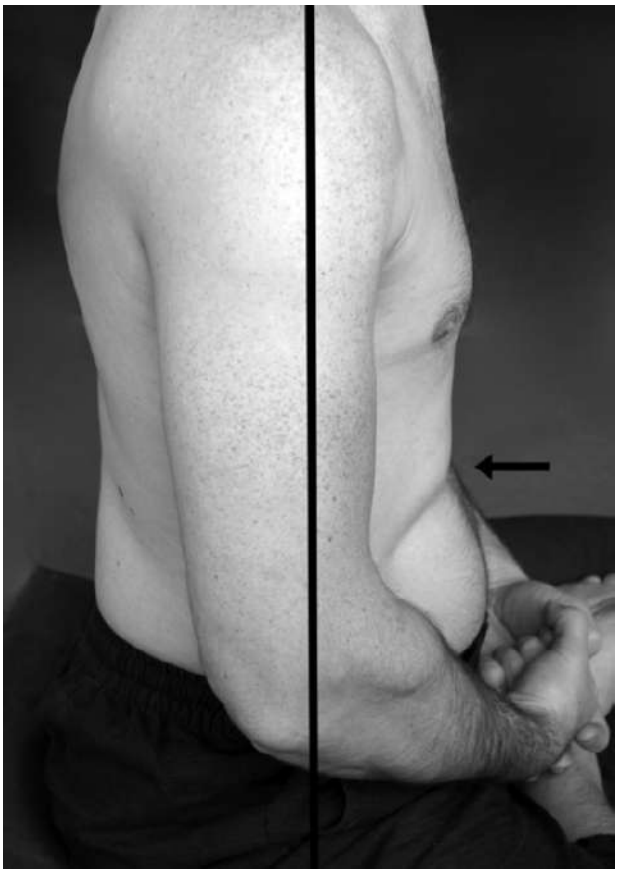

Fig. 11: Balanced posture; the arrow points to the concavity in the solar plexus

Of course, the student who has cultivated a correct posture should never forget the need to continuously enliven it with energetic vitality. Advanced practitioners who become quite comfortable with zazen may sometimes fall into a dull, hazy state devoid of the poignant intensity that marks true zazen. Naturally this will also be revealed in their postures, which will appear essentially correct yet somehow contracted or small; their bodies will appear sleepily still rather than containing an inner potentiality of dynamic movement.

As we accumulate experience, we will gain the eye to see these things in ourselves and others.

The Hands

There are several *mudras*,* hand positions, used in zazen. What follows are instructions for the one commonly used in Rinzai training.

First, hold out the left thumb and grasp from above around its last joint with the right hand. All the fingers of the right hand should remain gently closed, as if making a relaxed fist (fig. 12).

Fig. 12: Hand position, first step

The fingers of the left hand are then placed to line up with the knuckles on the back of the right (fig. 13).

Fig. 13: Hand position, second step

Fig. 14: Hand position, rear view

There is one exception, however: the small finger of the left hand is allowed to slip behind, where it rests on the coiled small finger of the right hand (fig. 14).

The two hands together are then placed against the belly at the level of the tanden (approximately two inches below the navel) with the palms facing upward (fig. 15).

Fig. 15: Hand position, final step

A common error is to turn the palms in toward the belly (fig. 16). This causes tension in the shoulder girdle.[2]

Fig. 16: Incorrect hand position with palms turned inward

The Torso and Shoulders

As noted, the belly in general should not be tensed or pulled in but allowed to hang freely. The solar plexus must remain soft, while the chest muscles and upper body as a whole should be free of any tension. The shoulders must relax, dropping down and to the rear. This will be possible if the hands are placed correctly. Conversely, if the hands are allowed to drop too low, the shoulders will slump forward and become painful.

The Head and Neck

Without tensing the neck, and keeping the chin level, extend upward through the crown of the head. Be sure not to change the alignment of the pelvis when doing this. Again, it is an error to thrust out the chest and arch the back in an effort to "sit up straight." Rather, as we have mentioned, the upward extension of the neck balances the downward relaxation of the sacrum, serving to lengthen the entire spine from both ends.

It is poor head alignment if the chin juts forward excessively (fig. 17). There is a lack of energetic strength in the spine and neck. Sleepiness and cloudiness of mind will result. This is the common position once called "television posture," though perhaps now we may call it "computer posture."

Another type of poor alignment is caused by too much tension; in an effort to sit ramrod straight, the chin has been tightly pulled in (fig. 18). The mind will likewise become tense, and fatigue will result from the effort expended to maintain this alignment.

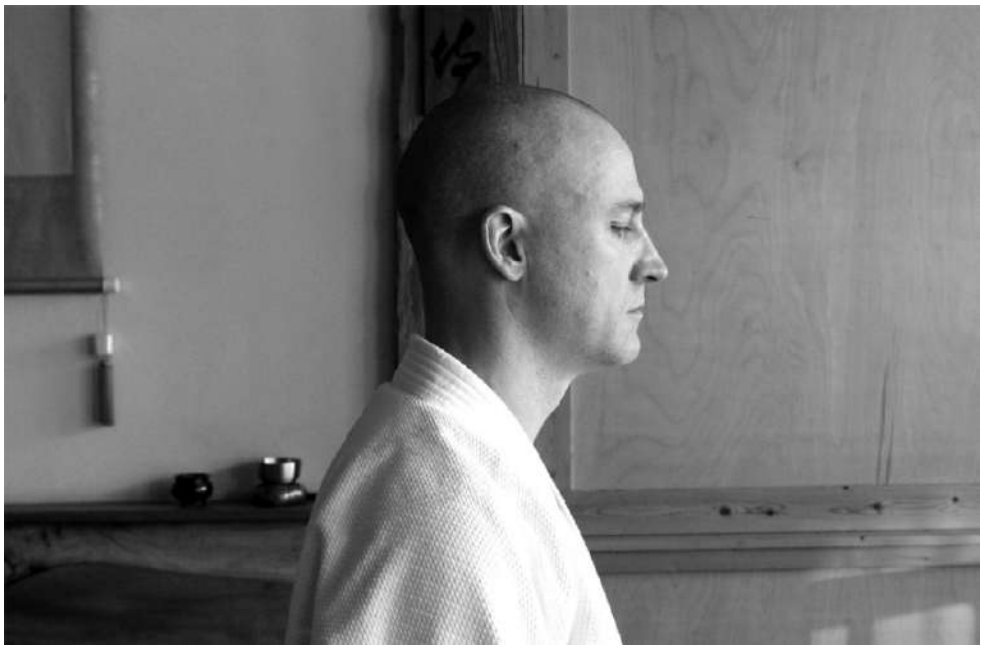

Fig. 17: Incorrect head alignment with chin jutting forward

Fig. 18: Incorrect head alignment with chin tightly pulled in

Fig. 19: Balanced head alignment

A more balanced head alignment will extend upward yet remain relaxed (fig. 19).

The Eyes

Use of the eyes is a particularly crucial aspect of zazen. Correctly done, it causes gross mental activity to lessen and allows the student to quickly enter samadhi. Strangely, though, this is another physical aspect of meditation that is often neglected or misunderstood.

First, the eyes in zazen remain open but gently downcast. We should remember that we aspire to unify our practice with the situations of daily life in which we move and function while awake rather than to enter into an escapist trance or inner world of fantasy. For this reason, we do not shut the eyes completely. Of course, it is fine to blink as needed.

Let the field of vision drop at an approximately forty-five-degree angle. This means that your gaze will rest on the ground perhaps four or five feet in front of you. But this angle is not a rigidly fixed thing, and you will learn with experience that it is useful to modify it

depending on your condition. For example, if sleepy you may choose to raise the eyes somewhat (remembering throughout that the chin should remain level).

The most important point then is this: do not stare with focused vision at the place where your vision rests. Rather, activate your peripheral field such that your awareness extends out in all directions. In other words, let your gaze encompass everything at once, from side to side and top to bottom, thereby permeating both internal and external space with the same awareness.

Really, this way of using the eyes in zazen is another way of experiencing the nonabiding and nonfixation we discussed in chapter 10. To learn it, the following exercise is useful.

Practice Instructions: Spreading Out the Vision

1. Sitting or standing, gaze straight ahead and spread out your vision so that you are watching the entire room at once (rather than staring at whatever point across the room your gaze actually strikes).
2. Extend your arms behind your head where you cannot see them, and raise your index fingers to eye level. Slowly bring the arms forward until the fingers appear in your peripheral field. Stop at the point where you can just see both fingers at the same time on the very edges of your vision (fig. 20). Stretch your vision out to simultaneously encompass both fingers and the entire visual field between them.
3. Now drop your arms and maintain this expansive gaze, stretching your awareness to the limits of the peripheral field.
4. Finally, allow the angle of your gaze to drop to forty-five degrees but maintain the expansive vision you cultivated (fig. 21). You are not staring at one thing; you are softly seeing everything.

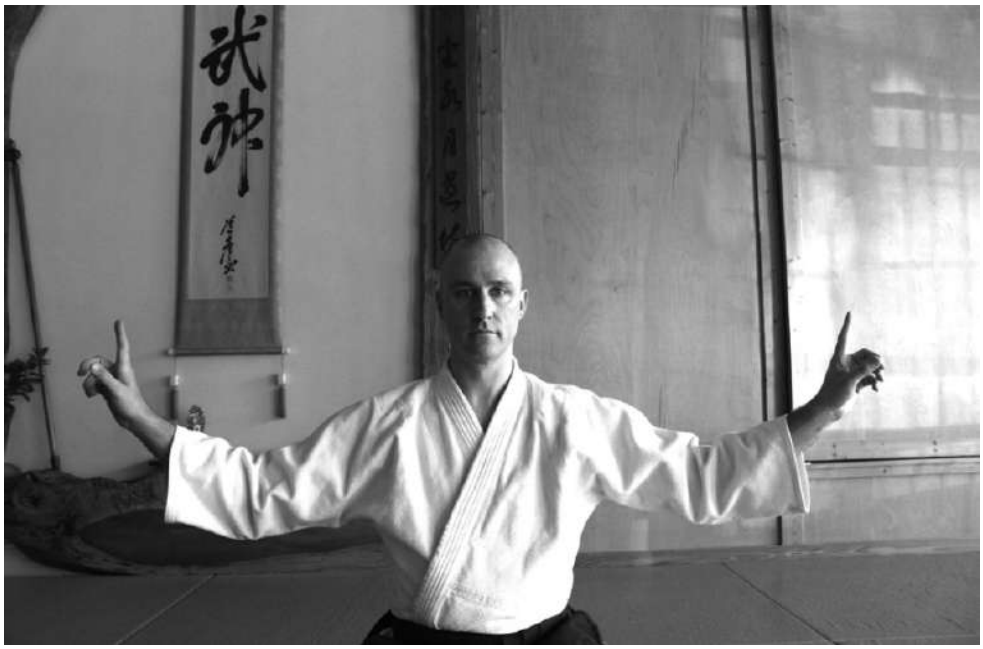

Fig. 20: Using the fingers to activate the peripheral field

Fig. 21: Eyes downcast, maintaining an expansive gaze

In general, the eyes must remain quite relaxed to achieve this way of seeing. During zazen, staring, excessive tension, not blinking naturally when required, and other errors will cause strain and

discomfort. Needless to say, glancing around the room from thing to thing is not zazen at all.

The Tongue

The final physical point to observe in zazen is the manner of holding the tongue. As you inhale and exhale through the nose, let the jaw remain naturally relaxed and the lips gently closed. Then, without tension, gently touch the tip of the tongue to the roof of the mouth, someplace behind the two front teeth. The exact location may be wherever on the palate feels most natural. After finding that spot, gently maintain the contact throughout the period of zazen.

Aside from purposes related to energetic cultivation, a secondary benefit of this tongue placement is that it tends to decrease saliva flow, thus preventing the need to constantly swallow during zazen. If the mouth becomes too dry, however, you may drop the tongue down to its usual position for a time.

A Note Regarding Discomfort

It is extremely common for practitioners to experience some amount of discomfort while sitting in zazen posture for long periods of time. Again, the purpose of zazen is certainly not to cause this. Yet sometimes we may experience pain. Our feet may fall asleep. We may have various aches that reveal old injuries or weak points in our structure. We may have sensations of heat or cold, of growing larger or smaller, of itching or burning. In our minds, also, we may experience various phenomena: emotions held just under the surface may suddenly erupt, stored trauma may be relived, and so on.

In short, there is no end to what may arise in body or mind. Please be assured that you will not physically injure yourself in zazen as long as you do not force yourself into a posture for which you are not ready. Regarding mental phenomena, there is also no reason to be afraid. The key is simply to sit with an attitude of lightness and

relaxation, in a posture that suits your condition while also challenging you to improve.

That being said, no matter what we do, sometimes discomfort or distress comes. In such cases, we need not try to mask or avoid discomfort. We just sit with it, accepting it as part of our existence, which is manifesting moment by moment. No matter what arises in body or mind, pleasant or unpleasant, we neither push it away nor chase after it; we simply return to our practice.

Beginners often imagine, I think, that there is something wrong when they experience discomfort or that it must mean they are practicing incorrectly. But often this is not the case at all. Everyone is different, and each day is also different. Some days we will feel discomfort, while on others we may experience a blissful meditation. With time, we will learn to relax through discomfort and even dissolve it using our breath unified with the posture. For now, the main point is to accept and join with these constantly changing conditions, relax, and do our best. Beyond that, we should of course discuss our experiences with our teacher.

This, then, is the posture of zazen (figs. 22, 23). We must come to realize it for ourselves not as something static, but constantly adjusting to the changing conditions, profoundly settled, and intensely alive.

Aside from zazen there are many other activities that can support this process of working with the body. Exercise emphasizing relaxed, natural movement and increased range of motion may be useful. Conversely, exercise that emphasizes isolating muscle groups and contracting them repeatedly—for example, certain types of bodybuilding—are often detrimental. Much more useful is whole-body physical labor and disciplines requiring integrated use of the body, such as dance, yoga, and martial arts.

Bodywork, too, can be truly useful to reveal and clear sticking points in our bodies. Diet is naturally something we may also consider; eating unhealthy foods or large amounts of meat will tend to increase stiffness and discomfort.

Finally, begin using your eyes in a sweeping manner when walking and moving about the world, not just when sitting in meditation. In every activity, work on developing a stable, relaxed, and integrated posture.

With a correct posture established, we may now begin to learn how to enliven it with vital energy. This will be accomplished by means of the breath.

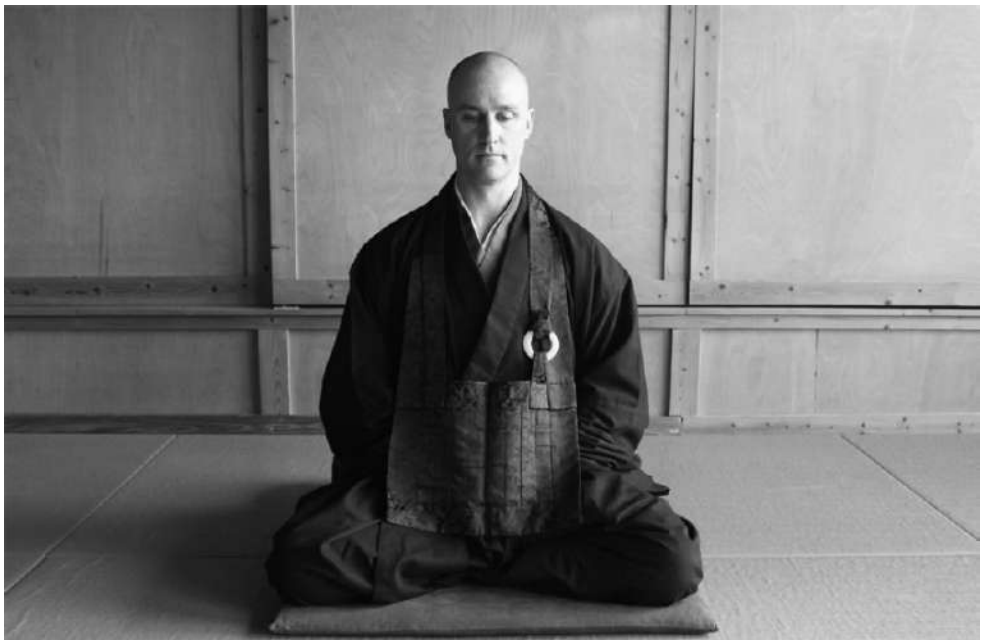

Fig. 22: Complete zazen posture, front view

Fig. 23: Complete zazen posture, side view

12

MEDITATION—THE BREATH

Even though one may be hemmed in by worldly cares or tied down by guests who require elaborate attention, the source of strength two inches below the navel must naturally be filled with the vital breath, and at no time may it be allowed to disperse. This area should be pendulous and well rounded, somewhat like a new ball that has yet to be used.

—HAKUIN[1]

ONE REASON FOR our detailed emphasis on zazen posture is that it allows deep breathing of great power to manifest. Practitioners have long observed that the quality of one's breathing has a dramatic effect on both the energetic system and mind. Cultivation of the breath is therefore crucial, and its mastery is among the factors determining the depth and clarity of our meditation. To be more exact: it is by using breath and posture to unify the mind and energetic currents at the navel energy center (tanden) that a samadhi of the greatest depth and subtlety may be cultivated. This also reveals the means by which insight will ultimately be made to permeate the body.

Luckily, breathing is a process that is partly under our conscious control. Thus we are able to train it, and there are many ways to do so. In general, it may be said that breath practices in Rinzai Zen are grouped into four categories revealing a progressive training:

1. Methods of establishing (or reestablishing) natural abdominal breathing
2. Taking the latter as a foundation, methods of cultivating a trained breathing focused on the tanden
3. Methods of increasing the depth and energetic vitality of the tanden-focused breath
4. Finally, methods of lengthening, refining, and integrating the tanden-focused breath so that it is subtle and constant, in both meditation and daily activity

To go deeply into all the methods used in such training is beyond the scope of this book. But in this chapter we will learn a few basic practices suitable for beginners.

FUKUSHIKI KOKYU (ABDOMINAL BREATHING)

As a minimum requirement to practice zazen, we must first become abdominal breathers. The Japanese term for this kind of breathing is *fukushiki kokyu*.*

Abdominal breathing means simply that the belly, solar plexus, and chest are allowed to relax, and the diaphragm moves freely and strongly as it should with each cycle of breath. If this is so, then upon inhalation the abdomen and lower trunk will expand. Upon exhalation, they will relax and drop. Abdominal breathing is really just natural and correct breathing, easily observed in infants and children. But as adults we often lose this ability to breathe naturally. Tension, both mental and physical, causes us to breathe in a shallow, incorrect manner. Such breathing is marked by an up-and-down movement of the shoulders and chest instead of the belly. Persons

with great tension or those who train the body improperly (for example, with an overemphasis on tightening the abdominal muscles) may even have no movement in the belly at all.

While incorrect breathing is generally caused by physical and mental tension, it also causes such tension. This creates a habitual closed loop that can be detrimental to well-being. If we begin to breathe incorrectly in this way, our gross mental activity—the "chatter" of our minds—increases. The energetic system becomes imbalanced, creating a sense of pressure, tightness, and heat in our head and shoulders. Our voices become weaker. Losing our physical grounding, our ability to react to difficult situations with clarity and strength is lessened. Ultimately our health will decline. Needless to say, our meditation will be shallow and inconsistent, and we will be unable to enter a consistent samadhi of any depth.

The good news, though, is that abdominal breathing can be easily relearned. Our bodies already know how to do it. It is just a question of breaking the bad breathing habits we have acquired. For this purpose, we will use a simple exercise.

Practice Instructions: Fukushiki Kokyu

1. Lie on the floor in a relaxed position. Place one hand on your sternum and the other in the center of your lower abdomen about two inches below your navel. This is the area of the lower tanden.
2. Take several natural breaths through the nostrils without trying to alter or control them in any way. Observe: Which hand moves as you inhale and exhale? Is there movement in the chest? In the belly? Both? At the beginning of inhalation, where does the movement initiate? These points reveal how you are currently breathing and thus the starting point from which you will be able to improve.
3. Now remove the hand from your sternum and focus on the hand placed over the lower tanden.

Fig. 24: Abdominal breathing, inhalation

Fig. 25: Abdominal breathing, exhalation

4. As you inhale deeply, try to push this hand up toward the ceiling as much as possible. In other words, make the belly rise and become full (fig. 24). Of course, if you take a very deep breath, the chest will also rise. But for this exercise, just breathe deeply to the belly; the point is that the inhalation, shallow or deep, should initiate in the area of the tanden.

5. Now, to exhale, simply relax completely and let the belly fall (fig. 25). At the end of the exhalation, you may experience a brief moment of clarity during the space of stillness between breaths. Your mind will be quiet and calmly aware. Just rest in that feeling until it feels natural to inhale again, and then do so.
6. Repeat this cycle as many times as you like, smoothly and without forcing or tensing in any way.

It is good to practice this exercise for ten minutes each day. You will begin to see your habitual way of breathing deepen. The chest and shoulders will relax, and inhalation will consistently be felt to initiate in the area of the tanden. Of course, you may also practice this breathing when sitting in zazen posture, and you will use it when practicing the meditation method we will learn in the next chapter.

Once you become comfortable with it, try to take this deep breathing into your daily life. When you notice that you are tense or overwhelmed by situations, just stop whatever you are doing, put your hands on your belly, and breathe down to them five or ten times. With just a little practice, you will be able to quickly sink your energy back to the tanden and let go of tension that accumulates during the day. This is a wonderful, simple, and effective practice you may do at any time.

The following point cannot be stressed enough to beginners: if you are serious about Zen practice, please take time each day to refine your breathing using this exercise. Even if you do not practice Zen, you could still practice this. You may also share it with anyone suffering from stress, insomnia, or fatigue. As long as it is done gently and with no tension or attempt to force the breath, it will be safe. Though a simple thing to learn, the benefits of abdominal breathing are truly immense.

Tanden Soku (Breathing to the Navel Energy Center)

As mentioned, fukushiki kokyu is a prerequisite for practicing zazen. If you do not breathe in this manner, your meditation simply will not progress. It is unfortunate that we see many Zen practitioners who have never grasped (or never been taught) this simple fact.

Once fukushiki kokyu is mastered to a reasonable degree, however, we must begin to cultivate an additional method of breathing that is the core of zazen and crucial for Rinzai training in general. This is called *tanden soku** (*soku* means "breath"), or *tanden kokyuho* (tanden breathing method). A sort of slang term we often use for this is "hara breathing." As noted earlier, *hara* refers to the lower abdominal area where the tanden is located and is considered the seat of an individual's energetic power.

In tanden soku, the musculature of the lower torso, diaphragm, and pelvic floor are consciously trained in such a way as to maintain subtle pressure within the hara and lower trunk at all times. In contrast to the natural abdominal breathing we learned, during the exhalation phase in tanden soku, the belly does *not* drop completely. An expansion and fullness remains, filling the entire area from the lower abdomen to the sacrum and low back (that is, the koshi). This may all sound confusing now, but when learned with the body, it becomes quite clear.

By means of this breathing method, we may easily merge with whatever Zen practice method we employ. The energetic currents gather more and more in the lower tanden, allowing us to cultivate great vigor and radiate power throughout the body to dissolve obstructions. Using tanden soku, over time our respiration in zazen will become increasingly refined and subtle, even to the point that we may only breathe two or three times a minute. With this, our samadhi becomes powerfully refined and subtle as well.

Tanden soku is a large subject on its own. It is most easily learned in person from a teacher who has actualized it, since each student's physical condition and ability may require modifications to the way of practicing. There are also many methods for practicing tanden soku, and a teacher will be able to prescribe the ones that best fit a student's condition and level of development.

But we will now learn two exercises that for many people could be sufficient to begin cultivating this way of breathing. The first will help us learn the basic body usage of tanden soku, which concentrates breath power at the tanden.

Practice Instructions: Basic Tanden Soku

1. Lie on the floor in a relaxed position. Begin fukushiki kokyu—abdominal breathing—as we have practiced. Allow the belly to expand with each inhalation and fall with each exhalation through the nostrils.
2. When you are ready, now take a deep inhalation and allow the belly and lower trunk, which have expanded, to remain full for a few moments. Letting all tension fall away from the upper body and especially the area around the solar plexus, gently "push" the air down into the lower abdomen. Simultaneously, lightly close the anal sphincter and contract the muscles of the perineum or pelvic floor. This is not a forceful contraction or clench but rather a gentle feeling of "lifting" from below with these muscles. With practice, you will feel that a slight downward pressure centered below the solar plexus, combined with this upward pressure created by lifting the pelvic floor and closing the anus, together cup and compress the breath at the tanden. This is what we call "setting" the breath in the hara.
3. You may now begin to take the all-important step of trying to maintain some degree of this set in the hara—a fullness and gentle pressure—during the entire exhalation. In other words, as you exhale (continuing to gently lift on the pelvic floor and keeping the anus lightly closed) see if you can keep the belly and lower trunk from fully collapsing. It is important that when attempting to do so you do not forcefully "bear down" on the stomach, tense the abdominal muscles, or exert any undue pressure at all. Just let your breath continue to settle deeply

into the lower abdomen as you exhale, and hold something of its power there throughout your exhalation.

4. As the exhalation ends, rest for a moment with relaxation. When you are ready, you may then inhale again to expand the lower abdomen, set the hara as above, and practice exhaling once more. Note that it is natural for the hara to drop somewhat with each exhalation, but again the purpose now is just to see if you can maintain some degree of fullness there, without letting it collapse completely.
5. If you feel pressure or heat in your head while practicing this, or tension increasing in your upper body, cease the exercise and just practice relaxed fukushiki kokyu once more. Later you can try again.
6. After you have gained the ability to accomplish this basic exercise while lying down, begin practicing it while seated upright in zazen posture. Lying down is useful for beginners as it helps them relax and release tension, but you may actually find it easier to practice tanden soku upright since gravity will aid you.
7. Finally, it is a good idea to practice nanso no ho, as we learned in chapter 10, for a few minutes at the conclusion of your session of breath training. This will serve to prevent problems arising from incorrect or overly tense practice.

Though we might describe the physical mechanism of tanden soku breathing in greater detail than I have done here, it is really not useful to do so. Each student, using the above basic instructions, may with practice learn how to accomplish it. It is best in this case to keep verbal explanation to a minimum and allow the body to learn for itself.

The second exercise now builds upon the tanden soku body usage. This exercise is also used later to begin lengthening and refining the breath, but here it may serve to reinforce the body usage required for tanden soku.

Practice Instructions: Breathing the Syllable "Ah"

1. Sit upright in one of the zazen postures we have learned. Spread your vision out. You may hold your hands in the meditation position described in chapter 11, or you may use another called *nigiri katami* (fig. 26). In nigiri katami, the fingers of each hand enclose the last joint of each thumb, making a kind of snug fist. The hands in this position are then placed palm-side down on the thighs. Holding the hands in this way has several effects, one of which is to release tension in the upper body, allowing the breath to drop to the hara.
2. Once settled in your posture, begin fukushiki kokyu—abdominal breathing through the nostrils—as we have practiced. Allow the belly to expand with each inhalation and fall with each exhalation.

Fig. 26: Nigiri katami

3. When you are ready, take a deep inhalation through the nostrils and set this breath in the hara. Remember that it is essential to let your low back relax and your sacrum drop, so that excessive curve (lordosis) in the low back is released. Again, allow all tension to fall away from the upper body and especially the area around the solar plexus. Gently close the anal sphincter and lift the muscles of the perineum or pelvic floor.
4. Now, to exhale, this time open your mouth very slightly, and breathe out making a voiceless, almost silent "Ahhh..." sound. Let this sound be as smooth as possible and centered in the back of the throat, maintaining the same steady intensity of the airstream throughout the entire exhalation. Do not open your mouth too wide as if yawning; if you do so, you will feel that the breath is centered at the palate and in the front of the mouth, with the resultant sound being harsh and raspy. It is important, rather, to relax the face and throat. As in the basic tanden soku exercise, keep the anal sphincter closed, maintaining a degree of fullness in the lower trunk without letting the abdomen collapse completely.
5. Exhale this "Ah" as long as you are able without becoming tense. You may reach a point at which you still have air to exhale but seem to hit a barrier of tension or anxiety; often this manifests in the area of the solar plexus. If this happens try to relax, let the breath settle back into the abdomen, and continue to exhale. With practice these layers of tension stored in the body will dissolve.
6. As the exhalation eventually subsides by itself, just relax completely and rest for a moment in the feeling of clarity that may arise. When you are ready, relax and inhale deeply again through the nostrils to the abdomen, expanding it once more. If you have fully exhaled, this actually will happen without much effort as air rushes in to fill the partial vacuum.
7. Completing the inhalation, then repeat the cycle as above: set the breath in your lower abdomen while gently closing the anal sphincter and lifting the pelvic floor muscles, open your mouth

slightly, and exhale “Ah” while maintaining power at the tanden.

8. Again, do not forcefully bear down on the stomach, tense the abdominal muscles, or exert any undue pressure. Your solar plexus should remain soft, even concave. Just let your breath settle deeply again and again into the lower abdomen, and hold something of its power there throughout your exhalation of “Ah.” Over time you will find that the exhalation naturally becomes longer.
9. As with the basic tanden soku exercise, it is a good idea to practice nanso no ho for a few minutes to conclude your session of breath training.

The syllable “Ah” carries a mantric vibration by which we may experience a kind of wakeful clarity. If we wish, we may therefore also exhale an “Ah” sound aloud with the voice. We could also use other syllables, such as the vowels *i, u, e*, and o,[2] each with different effects. Such things will become clearer when we begin a study of sound and vibration through the practice of Zen chanting in chapter 14.

Incidentally, this practice of breathing the syllable “Ah” may also help us settle the breath right at the beginning of our sessions of zazen. Omori Roshi wrote in *Sanzen Nyumon* that by concentrating the breath at the tanden and exhaling deeply from the mouth four to ten times upon sitting down to meditate, we may quickly enter samadhi.[3] He suggests that when doing so, we should exhale with a feeling of joining the air around us with the lower abdomen. This is very good advice. Another interesting point is that through this exercise, we might also learn how to adjust our breath in accordance with conditions; for example, breathing more deeply and intensely will generate warmth, allowing us to practice without difficulty in colder conditions, while a finer, softer breath will be more useful to settle our bodies when conditions are hot.

By first mastering fukushiki kokyu and then working with the two exercises here, you may gently begin training yourself in tanden

soku. When we eventually become proficient in tanden soku and integrate it with our zazen, we will breathe in an extremely refined manner. Naturally in zazen we do not open our mouths to exhale or make an “Ah” sound; in fact, our breathing during zazen should not be audible to anyone sitting next to us, and even the stream of air from our nostrils should be difficult to feel by a hand held in front of the nose. Ultimately, the subtle holding of power in the lower abdomen that tanden soku cultivates will become unconscious and seamless, more a feeling than an overt physical usage. This allows us to attain an unshakable stability in both meditation and our daily activities. It requires time and practice.

I wish to stress again that the exercises given in this chapter must be practiced without undue force. As you work with them, remember above all that their effect should be to open, loosen, and enliven the body—never to increase tension. When done correctly, in fact, they should feel pleasant and deeply relaxing. If this is not the case, it will be best to just focus on practicing gentle fukushiki kokyu until such time as you are able to work with a teacher in person. In this way, your breathing will develop naturally and without difficulties.

As we work with our breathing in Zen, the essential point to grasp is this: the breath is the force that enlivens zazen and gives our practice the power to cut deeply entrenched habits of body and mind. Unless our meditation is driven by vital and correct breathing, it will likely remain a lethargic, cloudy, and largely conceptual practice, the “dead sitting” within which many practitioners unknowingly become stuck.

13

MEDITATION—THE METHOD

Should you desire the Great Peace, prepare to sweat white beads.

—HAKUIN[1]

HAVING EXAMINED the use of the breath and body in zazen, we are now ready to learn the method: the manner in which the mind is engaged. Reflecting upon what we have examined thus far, it should be clear that this is just a convenient way of speaking. Any zazen method cannot be a purely mental exercise but must encompass all the aspects of body and breath we have examined. Still, we have broken things down in this way to make it easier for beginners to learn. It remains for us as practitioners to bring these elements into unity within our practice.

There are many methods used in zazen. As we have said, what is most important is that the one chosen fits the student's needs and level. There are some methods that should be undertaken by beginners only with frequent guidance from a teacher, due to the ease with which they are mistakenly employed. In Rinzai practice these include the use of koan or wato, and in Soto* practice the method called *shikantaza** ("just sitting").

Some other methods, however, may initially be taken up—and their benefits experienced—on one's own. The one instructed below is among these. Naturally, it would be immensely easier to learn it with a teacher's guidance. But lacking that, at least no harm will be done if we begin working with it ourselves. Then when we do meet a teacher we will have some useful things to discuss.

SUSOKUKAN (COUNTING THE BREATH)

Susokukan, or breath counting, is a profound technique that is very effective for cultivating samadhi. For this reason, in Rinzai training it is often used as a foundational meditation practice developing the qualities required for other methods, such as koan practice. But as we have said, the fact that susokukan can be foundational does not mean it is necessarily basic or simple at all. Indeed, for some practitioners this method could be an advanced practice and sufficient for their entire lives.

Here are instructions for the method of breath-counting meditation.

Practice Instructions: Susokukan

1. Sit in one of the zazen postures described earlier. As a preliminary exercise, you may breathe out "Ah" four to ten times as we have practiced.
2. Now breathing through the nostrils, bring your attention completely to that. Beginners should here just utilize the relaxed abdominal breathing (fukushiki kokyu) that we learned. Of course, more advanced practitioners will be able to begin integrating the more cultivated breathing of tanden soku.
3. The core of the susokukan method, now, is this: unite your mind with your exhalations by counting them. Whenever you inhale, just relax and remain present; that is, simply be aware of the whole-body sensation of inhaling. But when you exhale,

count each exhalation mentally to yourself: “One…” And then on the next exhalation, “Two…” And so on, until you have counted ten exhalations. When you reach ten, return to one and repeat the cycle.

4. It is important that you do not count an exhalation at its beginning only and then immediately lapse into wandering thought as you continue exhaling. Rather, extend your count and unify it with the entire thread of each exhalation. This attention will be similar to the feeling of throwing a ball and watching with great intensity as it moves away from you: focus unwaveringly on just counting the entirety of each exhalation in this manner, from beginning to end, with all your might. In fact, rather than saying that we “count the breath,” it is perhaps better to say that we must completely—with the whole body and mind—“breathe the count.”
5. In general, let your senses and wandering thoughts rest by relaxing. When thoughts, pain, or distractions of any kind arise during this practice, there is no need to judge or suppress them. Nor should you follow them. The same goes for pleasant feelings: there is no need to examine or chase after them. In fact, there is no need to conceptualize about anything that arises at all in body or mind. If thoughts happen to arise during inhalation, just calmly notice them; they will dissolve by themselves. With each exhalation, simply return fully to the count.
6. If at some point you find your attention has wandered completely, and you have lost the count or forgotten which number is next, just start over again from one.
7. In this manner, cultivate an intense, one-pointed, and completely relaxed awareness that remains uncompromisingly present. The breath—unified with the count—serves as your anchor. Everything you see, hear, feel, and think may just be allowed to be as it is and encompassed within each breath.
8. Again, it is crucial to understand that this is a practice employing one’s whole being. Do not count with just a part of

> your mind, while another part of your mind is chattering or lost in fantasy. Recruit all of your mind, body, and senses. Put each count in your belly with the breath, and perform it with your flesh and bones. Whatever distractions arise in body or mind, do not move at all: just relax, encompass it all within the dynamic presence of your count, and continue. The meaning of these instructions will become clear over time.

When beginning such a practice, it is very common for students to worry that they are meditating incorrectly, and so they judge themselves constantly. For example, students will often think, "This meditation session is going badly (or well)." And they will become upset or elated depending on their perceptions of failure or success with the method. But this is all just another kind of distraction. There is no need to judge anything. Judging ourselves during zazen, in fact, reveals that there is some part of the mind that is not engaged in the method but rather standing aloof and apart, watching what is happening from a distance. Instead, as explained above, we must recruit all of our mind and body and just throw them completely into this method of counting the breath. It may be that this requires a certain kind of courage.

I often say the following to new students to illustrate the type of focus that the susokukan method initially requires. I have forgotten where I first heard it, so it is possible that it was stolen from one of my teachers. But perhaps you will find this illustration useful as I have:

> Imagine for a moment that you are walking across a tightrope over the Grand Canyon. Can you imagine how your awareness would remain with each step as you walk? It is likely that for you, at that moment, it would seem that nothing else in the universe exists apart from the placing of each step, one by one. In this same way, we should enter with all our being into counting each exhalation.

Indeed, if we practice in this way with our whole existence—counting each breath as if it were our last act on this earth—we may well find ourselves sweating "white beads" with the intensity of our effort, as Hakuin said we must.

Related to this, beginners often ask why we count the exhalations rather than the inhalations, or why we do not count both. The reason is simply that the mind's concentration and bodily power are both stronger during the exhalation phase. Also, it seems useful for the mind to alternate periods of the intense focus during exhalation I have described with a relaxed openness during inhalation. This is something like the function of a bellows, which stokes a fire powerfully when compressed but must then expand and open.

So what, then, is success in this susokukan method? In the beginning, it is not that our minds somehow become completely clear and still, free from arising thoughts. It is, rather, that when our minds do wander and are distracted, we notice. Noticing the distraction, we then remember to return our attention to breathing the count. That is success: noticing that we have wandered and remembering to return.

And what is failure? Only this: sitting without full effort, in a somewhat present and somewhat distracted state. In other words, it is failure if we sit half-heartedly.

Working in this manner over time—staying relaxed and yet exerting full effort to completely become one with each count—we will begin to change the mind's habit of wandering and fixating on phenomena. Slowly we become comfortable remaining present, and the natural clarity of our minds becomes apparent. Joining together the posture, the breath, and the single thought of the count, we will enter into a unified state in which the mind is free flowing and cognizant but does not fixate upon whatever arises. Thus we enter samadhi.

If we enter deeply into this method, in fact, at some point we will find that the count itself falls away, and we no longer need it as an anchor. We may begin to experience more profound states. Typically in Rinzai training, however, once we are consistently able to hold the

count and remain reasonably present for extended periods of time without becoming lost in distraction—perhaps for the length of a typical meditation session (thirty to fifty minutes)—we may begin to use other methods. At such a time, a teacher will be required to prescribe what is best for us.

Even if we do begin to work with other methods, though, we may always return to susokukan. Any time we feel scattered, we may take up this simple method of breath counting. It is a practice that will only grow more profound the more we work with it. We will never exhaust it or cease to benefit from it.

It must be stressed again that there is no true Zen practice without a Zen teacher and that practice needs to be done frequently and consistently. It would be foolish to expect lasting transformation from a haphazard meditation done on one's own without needed advice and correction, or only done a few times a week. Beginners, however, may productively focus on establishing the thread of practice continuity rather than on quantity. Sitting in zazen as we have learned every day for twenty minutes or so will be much better in the beginning than trying to sit for an hour but only once or twice a week.

Aside from zazen, beginners should also remember to practice fukushiki kokyu for ten minutes each day without fail. If you can do these things, your practice will begin to take root in ways that will both surprise you and transform your life.

14

OKYO (CHANTING PRACTICE)

> *In English there is the word "pray," which means to pray to something. But in Japanese, there is the word eko.* Eko doesn't mean we are praying to something. It means we become it.*
>
> —TENSHIN TANOUYE (1938–2003)[1]

EVEN BEFORE WE come to Zen, we may hear recordings of Buddhist or other chanting and find them compelling. Contemplative traditions throughout the world have often made use of the human voice's power to generate sympathetic resonance. Zen, too, values a practice of chanting *okyo*,* the Buddhist sutras and other texts.

There are several reasons for this. One is that practices of chanting or reciting aloud have been part of the Buddhist tradition from early times. Initially this was due to the fact that knowledge was transmitted orally; memorization through recitation was the crucial means by which the teachings were preserved for centuries. Even with the advent of written texts, though, chanting still had a place. As it utilizes body, breath, and mind in a way that silent reading does not, chanting serves as an effective method for internalizing the meaning and energy within written words. We can also say that each

time a text is chanted aloud it is reborn into the world: it is heard, it vibrates, and it echoes through space. The practitioner thus literally chants the texts into existence anew each time they are intoned.

In Rinzai practice, moreover, there is still a deeper dimension to chanting. The term *kozen no ki**, found in Mencius[2], refers to the universal energetic force that permeates and binds together the heavens, humankind, and earth. When chanting is done profoundly —that is, when body, breath, and mind are unified in samadhi—it is in fact possible for us to vibrate at a frequency that is in accord with kozen no ki. In other words, through the practice of chanting we may be able to join with the universal force and thereby be transformed. We may also use it to transform others and our surroundings.

In this sense, chanting should be considered yet another practice that may be used, as all Zen practices are, to reveal and embody our awakened nature. This also means that calling to mind the conceptual meaning of the text is not in fact crucial when chanting it. Certainly, there is no need to chant with the thought that we are reading the words in honor of something or to worship something. As Tanouye Roshi has said, “You don’t need to chant to Buddha. Buddha knows it already.”

Rather, we should just approach the practice of chanting with an understanding that if the patterns of mantric vibration preserved in each text are intoned in a manner causing the practitioner’s body to vibrate, then change will start to manifest. This way of chanting is one of the most effective ways to enter samadhi, and it is also a means by which we can cause others to enter it.

How to Chant

Chanting is best considered an art. If you wish to truly learn it, you will need to study with experienced practitioners. Instruction in the way of engaging one’s body and breath when using traditional accompanying instruments, such the *mokugyo* (a deeply resonant wooden drum), should also be imparted in a hands-on manner.

For beginners practicing at home, though, the instruments are not necessary, and it is enough at first to just chant energetically and with full concentration on each syllable. Whether we are with others or alone, we should chant loudly and with boldness. Chant from the hara, remembering that the entire body is meant to carry the sound; you must project the sound down into the body cavities to vibrate them rather than upward from the throat as if trying to project to an audience. Engage your whole body in this manner, and you will truly be chanting. This, in fact, is one reason why chanting is still done in Sino-Japanese (which in some texts also preserves an approximation of the original Sanskrit sounds): it is more difficult to vibrate the body in the necessary manner when chanting English translations.

When you do have the opportunity to practice chanting with others in a group, an old piece of advice handed down is this: hearing the sound of others, chant in such a way that you feel as if their voices enter your ears and pass out through your own mouth. This means that we should chant in oneness with others rather than as an expression of ourselves. One of my students has compared this to being like a reed instrument that sings as air blows through it. This may be a useful description.

Once you have practiced and begun to integrate the breathing method of tanden soku, your chanting will develop further and begin to manifest great power. Chanting, in fact, is one of the most important methods we may use to deepen and perfect such breathing.

Suggested Chants for Daily Practice

Five commonly chanted short texts are included below. Longer chants, such as those found in the morning ceremony performed in monasteries, can be learned later. Chanted together in order, the sequence here constitutes a wonderful basic practice for daily use.

1. Makahannya Haramita Shingyo: Heart Sutra

The *Heart Sutra* is a short text summarizing essential Buddhist teachings in an extremely direct manner. It is among the most commonly chanted texts in Zen practice.

This entire text is a direct pointing to one's true nature. As such, the English translation is important to study and contemplate apart from chanting. Since our emphasis here is to use chanting as a practice integrating body, breath, and mind—that is, in a manner similar to the other practices taught in this book—I have not included the translation below. The *Heart Sutra* is widely known and studied, however, so translations may be easily obtained from many sources if you are interested, along with great numbers of dharma talks, articles, and papers examining it.

> Kan-ji-zai-bo-satsu gyo-jin-han-nya ha-ra-mit-ta-ji sho-ken-go-on-kai-ku do issai ku-yaku. Sha-ri-shi shiki-fu-i-ku ku-fu-i-shiki shiki-soku-ze-ku ku-soku-ze-shiki ju-so-gyo-shiki yaku-bu-nyo-ze. Sha-ri-shi ze-sho-ho-ku-so fu-sho fu-metsu fu-ku fu-jo fu-zo fu-gen. Ze-ko ku-chu mu-shiki mu-ju-so-gyo-shiki mu-gen-ni-bi-zesshin-i mu-shiki-sho-ko-mi-soku-ho mu-gen-kai-nai-shi-mu-i shiki-kai-mu-mu-myo-yaku mu-mu-myo-jin nai-shi-mu-ro-shi yaku-mu ro-shi-jin mu-ku shu-metsu-do mu-chi-yaku mu-toku. I-mu-sho-tok-ko Bo-dai-sat-ta e-han-nya ha-ra-mi-ta-ko shin-mu-kei-ge mu-kei-ge-ko mu-u-ku-fu on-ri issai ten-do-mu-so ku-gyo ne-han. San-ze-sho-butsu e-han-nya-ha-ra-mi-ta-ko toku-a-noku ta-ra-san myaku-san-bo-dai ko-chi-han-nya-ha-ra-mit-ta ze-dai-jin-shu ze-dai-myo-shu ze-mu-jo-shu ze-mu-to-do-shu no-jo-issai-ku shin-jitsu-fu-ko ko-setsu-han-nya-ha-ra-mit-ta-shu soku-setsu-shu-watsu "Gya-tei gya-tei ha-ra-gya-tei haraso-gya-tei bo-ji sowaka."[3] Hannya-shingyo.

2. Shosaishu Myokichijo Jinshu [Shosaishu]: The Dharani to Protect Against Misfortune

A *dharani** is a short text that, like a mantra, gains efficacy from its pattern of sounds rather than the literal meaning of the words. *Shosaishu* is a dharani specifically chanted to avert misfortune, both present and future. The vibration it carries—predominantly the sound "ahhh"—has the effect of energizing and bringing clarity. It is said that *Shosaishu* was chanted by some samurai before entering battle, in order to cut through crippling fear and hesitation. We may use it with similar effect whenever we find ourselves in situations of crisis.

Repeat this chant three times in a row:

> Na-mu-sa-man-da mo-to-nan o-ha-ra-chi ko-to-sha so-no-nan to-ji-to en gya-gya gya-ki gya-ki unnun shi-fu-ra-shi-fu-ra ha-ra-shi-fu-ra-ha-ra-shi-fu-ra chi-shu-sa-chi-shu-sa shu-shi-ri-shu-shi-ri so-ha-ja-so-ha-ja se-chi-gya shi-ri-ei so-mo-ko.

3. Honzon Eko: Dedicating the Merit to Others

Eko are verses that dedicate the benefit of preceding chants—in this case *Hannya Shingyo* and *Shosaishu—for* the benefit of others. *Honzon* refers to the main image of veneration on an altar that the chant invokes; here it is the historical Buddha Shakyamuni ("Hon-su Shi-kya ji-rai") who is mentioned. "Ho-jya shin-kin" and "Sho-sai-myo ki-jyo jin-shu" specify *Hannya Shingyo* and *Shosaishu* to be the preceding chants. *Honzon Eko* ends with an invocation of all the awakened ones of the three times (past, present, and future) and ten directions, that is, throughout all time and space.

Though only a short verse, the intention of eko is crucial. As Zen practitioners we must give away everything—our energy and effort, our time, our personal "stories" and ambitions, and even the very

benefits of practice itself—for the sake of others. Though of course we know that we will gain a great deal from our practice, there is actually no such "I" who gains and from the beginning nothing that we fundamentally lack. To dedicate the benefits of practice to others is thus not only part of our aspiration to aid them but to affirm the wisdom of awakening, which frees us from dualistic seeing. This is why, in the quote opening this chapter, it was said that the intent of eko (and all chanting, essentially) is "to become." Shakyamuni does not need the merit of our chanting, of course. Rather, it is to actualize "becoming Buddha" that we chant *Honzon Eko* to the Buddha. It is to actualize "becoming others" that we dedicate the merit of our practice to others.

Place your hands in *gassho*—that is, palm to palm in front of you—when chanting this eko:

> Nyan-ni sampo ansu shinshi. Jo-rai fun-zu "Ho-jya shin-kin" "Sho-sai-myo ki-jyo jin-shu" sushi-kuntei ui-kyo "Hon-su Shi-kya ji-rai." Shin-ji ji-shi so-nen bu-jyo buko bu-ji jyo hosu-in asu san nyu hakai gin san zun-nen shu-shi. Ji-ho san-shi i-shi-shibu-shi-son busa moko-sa moko ho-jya horo-mi.

4. Shikuseiganmon: The Four Great Vows

These are the four vows* of the bodhisattva that were discussed in chapter 5. It will be useful to reflect on the translation given there and then, when chanting, to do so with the energetic feeling—rather than an intellectual consideration—of the aspiration they express.

Place your hands in gassho during this chant, and repeat it three times in a row. *Shikuseiganmon* is chanted slowly and with gravity. By stretching out each syllable, we may easily use the vowel sounds to vibrate the body as we have discussed:

> Shu-jo mu-hen sei-gan-do;
>
> Bon-no mu-jin sei-gan-dan;

Ho-mon mu-ryo sei-gan-gaku;
Butsu-do mu-jo sei-gan-jo.

5. Enmei Jukku Kannon Gyo: The Ten-Phrase Life-Prolonging Scripture of Avalokitesvara

Chanting this short text in praise of Kannon (Avalokitesvara), the bodhisattva of compassion, was recommended by Hakuin as a way to ensure health, well-being, and longevity. In contrast to *Shosaishu*, this chant vibrates with the sounds "oooo" and "ohhh," which produce a deeply calming, stabilizing effect. Chanting this text can aid those who are ill or in distress.

Place your hands in gassho during this chant, and repeat it three times in a row:

> Kan-ze-on, na-mu-butsu, yo-butsu-u-in, yo-butsu-u-en, bup-po-so-en, jo-raku-ga-jo, cho-nen-kan-ze-on, bo-nen-kan-ze-on, nen-nen-ju-shin-ki, nen-nen-fu-ri-shin.

In conclusion, vibration and resonance are tools we may harness not only for our own Zen training but also to benefit others. Do not underestimate the power of such vibration. Using it, one's mind state or mood can be quickly altered. The energy of a place can be transformed. If we possess sufficient power, we may use sound to heal, to ease suffering, and even as a method of direct pointing to bring about awakening. Ultimately, by connecting to the universal energy—kozen no ki—using sound, we may give rise to endless skillful means in order to aid others.

With these things in mind, we might also consider the many Zen stories in which masters use an energetic shout[4] to awaken others. Such a shout is, in fact, given before the remains of the deceased during a Zen Buddhist funeral ceremony. What could be the purposes of this? What are the deeper aspects of Zen ceremony to which this understanding of the function of sound points? It is useful

to ponder the significance of such things as our own practice develops.

15

PRACTICING IN DAILY LIFE

It is relatively easy to accomplish the important matter of insight into one's True Nature, but uncommonly difficult to function freely and clearly (according to this understanding), in motion and in rest, in good and in adverse circumstances. Please make strenuous and vigorous efforts towards this end, otherwise all the teachings of Buddhas and patriarchs become mere empty words.

—TOREI[1]

IT SHOULD BE OBVIOUS by now that Zen does not ultimately distinguish between practice and other activities. Every moment of our days and nights—even sleep—can and must eventually be encompassed within the samadhi of our practice and illuminated by our awakening. There are no limitations in this regard.

But, as Torei says above, it is a difficult thing even for one who has entered the gate of kensho to sustain the continuity of correct awareness. How much more difficult it can be for beginners to know how to proceed when they are directed by their teachers to "bring Zen practice into daily life." For beginners, periods of practice in fact seem rather separate and easily differentiated from daily life.

We may often feel that the responsibilities of our daily life intrude upon, and sometimes even prevent, practice. It seems there is not enough time in the day. In this world of work, productivity, and "doing," somehow sitting down to practice zazen, to chant, or to cultivate our breath and energy does not always happen easily. Even when we are able to practice and experience the meditative state, we find that our shallow samadhi dissipates easily when we are confronted with the pressures and confusions of daily life.

Of course these experiences are not unusual, so we should have some patience with ourselves. For laypersons living in the world, it is normal to feel that life somehow has not been set up in a way that supports a practice like Zen. But there is no need to be discouraged. While it is true that our modern life presents unique challenges, still things were not so different in this regard for the ancients; there is a reason that the Buddha said his teachings were "against the stream" of the world. What is therefore important is that we simply try our best and honestly assess our effort.

Let us look, then, at some ways in which we may enter into the hectic stream of everyday life, buoyed by our practice.

Remaining Present

If there is a single point that is most crucial for us to understand as we begin Zen training, it is just this: the training ground of all buddhas, the true monastery or temple, the pure place in which we ourselves arise as awakened ones, is nowhere else but precisely here.

This is a simple statement, but its import must be something we come to know intimately. Within the samadhi of our practice, we certainly will know beyond doubt that "remaining in the present moment" and "being here now" are not catchy mottoes reminding us to be less distracted or things that we might choose to do as a kind of practice. These words, in fact, point us beyond conceptual views of time and space. In other words, remaining present is not ultimately a method of practice; we will come to know that it is awakening itself.

Of course, right now we might not be awakened simply from hearing such a description. So we do take up the effort to remain uncompromisingly present as a practice. Just as when using the method of susokukan we will sometimes become distracted and then with energy return to the count, so in daily life we must exert ourselves to attend to the present moment's activities fully, with our whole bodies.

When we are working, we just enter fully with body, mind, and breath into that work. When we must think of something in the past, we just do it fully. When we must plan for the future, we just throw ourselves into that. When we speak with others, we listen to them completely, and when it is our turn to speak, we do it from the core of our being. Everything we do can be like this.

Remaining present, really, is not a matter of setting up a kind of concentration that extends through time. It actually has nothing to do with time at all. Rather, it is the practice of throwing ourselves wholly into every activity and situation. It is just living completely and sincerely, with our whole being engaged in the unfolding of life. Whatever we meet with our bodies and minds in the arising and passing away of each moment of existence, we just become one with that. As Hakuin has said, in our practice we need not strive to be like a string connecting a series of beads; we must just become each bead.

I have described this practice here as a way to bring the full commitment of mind and body that we cultivate on the meditation cushion into nonzazen activities. It may seem that this is a practice for beginners. But this practice of uncompromising presence—as well as the points that follow—are also profoundly crucial aspects of the advanced, final practice of Zen at which we may arrive later in our training.

Constantly Refining Breath and Posture

Daily life practice means, of course, that we ourselves are embodying Zen. Thus, our concern with the balance and energetic integrity of

body and breath also extends into our daily activity. As we move about our day and exert ourselves to remain present, we should extend our all-encompassing awareness simultaneously into every fiber of our own bodies. Where is there tension? Is our alignment correct? Are we moving efficiently? Do we walk, sit, and use various articles in ways that are in accord with the balanced form cultivated on the meditation cushion? These are all very interesting things to examine.

It is likewise with breathing. We will notice that when flustered, fearful, or anxious, we often lose the deep abdominal breathing we have practiced. In such circumstances physical and mental tension bind us, and so our breath rises up into the chest. We lose the integrated unity of mind and body, by means of which energy is made to radiate and a samadhi encompassing all activities may manifest. Observing this, however, we now know how to change it; at the very least, by placing our hands on our bellies and practicing fukushiki kokyu for a few minutes, we may quickly regain a more balanced condition. This returning again and again to correct breathing is very helpful not only for our practice, actually, but for our health, our general well-being, and even our relationships or professions.

In short, our daily life practice includes the wonderful opportunity to use this body and mind as a laboratory. When our bodies manifest some condition, we just look to see how that affects our minds. Likewise, when our minds are in some particular state, we look to observe the effect on the body. Experimenting with our breath and posture, we will see how these affect our bodies, minds, and energetics. Truly, living life as a practice is never boring! There is always some interesting thing to observe and adjust. In this way, we take up a practice of constantly refining our posture and breath, and so begin to untie the physical, mental, and energetic knots that obscure awakening or obstruct its integration and embodiment.

Engaging the Senses

The senses themselves are also wonderful laboratories, as we began to explore using the practice instructions for releasing fixation in chapter 10. We continuously perceive sights, sounds, smells, tastes, feelings of touch, and mental objects to which we habitually develop feelings of attachment or aversion. Examining this, again, we may observe many interesting things.

Among these is our habit of favoring one sense or another. For example, perhaps because of electronic devices and our modern habit of staring at screens for hours at a time, many of us today are overly dependent on the visual sense. That sense, though, has atrophied in some ways, because our overuse of it is primarily an exercise in focused vision. We may regain a more balanced vision and experience a resultant increase in clarity and mental stillness by taking the sweeping vision we learned for zazen into the rest of life. For example, when walking down the street, we should not be like those people who stare at the ground lost in spinning thought or, worse, those who stare at telephones oblivious to the world. Spreading out our vision, we instead walk with our heads up, encompassing the entire world—nadir to zenith, and horizon to horizon—within the field of our vision. Unifying so-called inner and outer awareness in this way, it is not difficult to enter into samadhi.[2]

Another exercise that is wonderful is this: going out to some place where we can see a tree, we may stand and practice spreading out our vision expansively to encompass the whole tree at once, from earth to topmost branches, rather than glancing about from branch to branch or leaf to leaf using sharply focused vision. Doing so, we will find that we see the tree anew. We feel its aliveness and the totality of its existence in a manner completely different than usual. The shore of a lake or of the sea is also a good place to do this: spread out the vision and see the entire expanse of water at once—from horizon to horizon—with all its waves, movement, and activity.

The effect of changing our vision habit like this is truly dramatic. We will find whole new worlds of detail and mystery opening up to us. This world we inhabit is incredibly colorful, alive, and vibrating with energy. It is a small thing to change the way we use our eyes so

that we may perceive this for ourselves in a nonabiding, expansive manner without fixation. We may in this way experience something of the world of our ancient ancestors, who used focused vision for fine tasks but likely spent many more hours each day using a broadly sweeping vision to hunt, to avoid danger, and to immerse themselves in the living patterns of the world. From this, we might also realize how much our tension and neuroses may in fact be increased by using our bodies in ways they have not evolved to endure.

Our practice using the other senses is much the same. When we taste something such as tea or food, we should sit or stand in a balanced, grounded manner, spread out our vision, and attend fully to every nuance of flavor. How wonderfully complex and rich even the simplest tastes are, when we choose to simply attend to them without judging or conceptualizing. Sounds, too, open up to us: how mysterious and poignant the simple call of a bird, footsteps on a sidewalk, or the bubbling of a pot. We will even come to feel that so-called unpleasant sounds are not necessarily so.[3] The sense of touch also opens to us: walking in the evening air, how indescribable the feeling of coolness on every inch of skin; when working, how gracious the touch and movement of a single sheet of paper, or the feel of warm water and soapy dishes in the sink. Even painful sensations have their own living, wondrous qualities when we attend to them and relax into them; somehow, then, the discomfort is not so severe.

Everything is like this when we allow ourselves to “taste” it completely. What we are really doing is undertaking the practice of “becoming one with” whatever we encounter. As I have mentioned, this kind of practice will be crucial for us during our advanced training, informed as it will be then by the wisdom of awakening, and extended powerfully through the depth and power of our samadhi.

Daily Practice Schedule

Let us now return to formal practice. All of the daily life practice I have described still rests upon and will be deepened by the regular practice of zazen and other things. Beginners often ask how much they should practice, however, so it is worth saying a few words about this.

As Omori Roshi has said in *Sanzen Nyumon*, we should "sit hard and sit a great deal to such an extent that it may even be said that we are disciplining ourselves in sitting rather than in Zen."[4] Like most advice, though, we must apply this according to our individual conditions if it is to be useful for us. "Sit hard" means that when we practice zazen, we should do so with all our effort, setting aside for a time any concerns other than the method we are using in our meditation. "Sit a great deal," though, can mean many things. Particularly for beginners, as I have said, it seems much more useful to practice zazen regularly and with consistency for short periods, rather than to do so for longer periods of time but only infrequently.

Therefore, I usually recommend that beginners when practicing zazen at home first do so for just twenty minutes at a time—but every day without fail. Arrange cushions, sit in zazen posture, breathe deeply as explained, and just count your breaths with all your might. Do not do so half-heartedly, with concern for how much time has passed or with any judgment as to whether you are doing well or badly. Just set an alarm clock for twenty minutes, put it behind you where it cannot be seen, relax, and practice with the commitment of one performing his or her last act.

If we practice in this way, then gradually and without much effort twenty minutes can become thirty or more. If possible, practicing zazen twice a day for this length of time is even better. You will find this to be a very easy way to start and will soon be able to sit for longer periods and to participate in group practice—for example, at a Zen center or temple—without difficulty. Eventually in this manner your sitting discipline can increase to the point recommended by Omori Roshi.

In addition to this, as suggested earlier, it is ideal if we can devote at least ten minutes each day specifically to training our breathing.

The fukushiki kokyu exercise is important for new students, and it will be no great hardship if we set our morning alarm clocks to ring ten minutes earlier than usual. When the alarm rings, continue to lie in bed; open your eyes wide, spread your vision out, and just breathe deeply to the tanden as we learned. You will find, in fact, that this practice changes the quality of your morning in a beneficial way. It may even happen that you will no longer need to depend upon the alarm to wake you.

Finally, during the rest of your day, just try to remain present and throw yourself into activities with your whole body and concentration, as we have discussed at length in this chapter. If you have time for additional practice, start to chant and develop the breath in that manner. All of this will deepen simultaneously with your meditation practice.

To sum up these recommendations:

1. Practice zazen with full effort each day, for a minimum of twenty minutes in the beginning.
2. Practice breathing each day for ten minutes.
3. During the rest of your day, remain uncompromisingly present.
4. Open your senses, refine your breath and posture ceaselessly, and move through the world with awareness.
5. Throw yourself exuberantly, body and mind, into each activity and situation of life.

The Importance of Retreats

We have discussed how the situations of normal life are really wonderful opportunities for practice. There are indeed strengths to the approach to practice taken by laypersons, that is, persons who do not enter into the life of a monastic.

That being said, a structured environment focused solely on practice does have some unmatched advantages. If we choose to remain laypersons (as most do), it will therefore be very important

for us to enter at least periodically into situations of intensive retreat. Leaving our work, homes, and families a few times a year for short periods, we will thus be able to set aside other concerns in order to deepen our practice with a great, one-pointed dedication. Returning afterward to our normal lives, we may well find that we feel reborn. Our daily practice will deepen even more profoundly.

Too much need not be said about this subject here. Beginners should just know that the periods of retreat offered by many Zen centers and temples are truly wonderful opportunities. In fact, students who practice correctly may eventually come to a point at which such focused retreat is necessary for a time. We should therefore prepare ourselves to one day train in such a manner. Short retreats lasting a day called *zazenkai** are wonderful for newer students. Longer retreats of a few days to a week or more are called *sesshin*,* and are among the most important and rigorous Zen practice forms. Of course, there are also the two traditional four-month training periods in Rinzai monasteries each year, which generally include a one-week sesshin each month. To be able to set aside other responsibilities to attend even one such training period would indeed be a precious opportunity. Finally, when we are very stable in our practice, we may be able to undertake extended periods of solitary retreat in some uninhabited place or even alone in our homes; what we call "retreat" is really a mode of practice and a condition of the mind, not something dependent on a particular environment.

A teacher is the best judge of when the student is ready to undertake the training of retreats. I mention it here only to stress its importance and preciousness. In the next chapter we will, in fact, examine the great importance of the teacher. We will also consider how we might approach the task of finding one.

In this chapter we have looked at the ways in which beginners may start to encompass the totality of their lives within Zen practice. As our training comes to fruition, we will come to see that this is, in fact, the true practice and the ultimate point of Zen. We may even come to understand that the difficulties of our environments and busy lives

are, in fact, wonderfully ideal conditions for practice. Truly, if we can learn to practice effectively even in the midst of a career or family life, then we will realize that our life conditions are never obstacles at all; they are tools to be used, and they are the fuel powering our great vow to help others. It is good to again remember Shido Bunan Zenji's words mentioned in chapter 8: "If you think of everything as training, your suffering will disappear." They mean that Zen must be a practice in which all the circumstances and situations of our lives, wherever we may find ourselves, are revealed to be nothing other than the pure dwelling place of a buddha.

16

PRACTICING WITH A TEACHER

I wish that everyone would realize that studying Zen under a teacher is not such a simple matter after all.

—HAKUIN[1]

IF YOU HAVE READ and practiced according to the instructions given thus far, you have truly made a giant leap. For you, Zen is no longer an idea of something that other people undertake. It is a path you are now walking. The further you walk, the more this path will open itself and reveal stunning vistas of insight.

But, as we have said, the path also has pitfalls and false detours—thus the need for an experienced guide. In this chapter, therefore, we will examine four things: first, the role of the teacher in Zen training; second, the manner in which initial awakening is verified; third, the question of how to find a qualified teacher; and finally, because teachers do not exist apart from those they teach, we will consider what it might mean to be a worthy student.

THE ZEN TEACHER'S ROLE

As Bodhidharma's lines from chapter 1 state, a distinctive feature of Zen is *direct pointing at the human mind*. When the question is asked, "What is the Zen teacher's primary task?" we here have one answer. Simply put, the initial job of the Zen teacher is to cause us to recognize our true nature by directly pointing it out to us.

Simultaneously, of course, the teacher often prescribes for us methods of practice to approach and clarify awakening. We have in the last few chapters learned such practice methods, seated meditation in particular, by which obstructions to kensho may be dissolved and we may enter an all-encompassing samadhi. But from the first moment we enter into contact with a qualified Zen teacher—even before we begin to practice at all—it is fair to say that the game is already on. A good teacher, meaning one with sufficient depth of realization and power, will bring about this direct pointing if we are ready.

This may sound odd or confusing. Is it not the teacher's initial role to explain to us the Buddhist teachings, to guide us in the practice of the Buddhist ethical precepts, and to help us deal with all the confusing circumstances of our lives from a more wise perspective?

These would seem to be reasonable expectations, and certainly all of them could be true. But in Zen, these things must ultimately rest upon and flower outward from the illumination of kensho: the buddha-wisdom, which we need only recognize for ourselves. If we do recognize it, we will be able to clarify the purposes and uses of all such Buddhist teachings and precepts. If we do not, we may learn many teachings and practice the precepts, but we will miss the one essential point.

In any case, it is certainly true that if we seek a teacher because we would prefer to give over responsibility for ourselves to another who will just tell us how we should live, then we will end up misusing the teacher-student relationship completely. In fact, a worthwhile teacher would never allow this. Although a guide is crucial, qualified teachers will always affirm that in the end each of us must walk the path for ourselves.

Direct Pointing

How is it, then, that direct pointing is effected? The Japanese word *sottaku** is used for this activity of the teacher. Sottaku means "pecking," as in a mother hen pecking at a new chick's shell from the outside, even as the chick struggles from within to free itself. Transmitted within Zen lineages are understandings of how this is accomplished. Like all practice activity, direct pointing is not a fixed thing and so will manifest in myriad ways according to the circumstances. Still, generally speaking, we could say that such means include use of the body or physical action, use of speech or sound, and finally what may be called "extraordinary" means.

Examples of bodily or verbal means are easily recognized in Zen literature. There are many anecdotes in which a blow with a stick, a gesture, a word, or a shout from the master causes a student to suddenly arrive at insight. Since we have discussed the cultivation of samadhi through practice, we may sometimes understand these stories as cases in which the student was in fact deeply absorbed in samadhi and had arrived at the brink of a breakthrough. At such moments, if the teacher possesses sufficient *kan**—the clear seeing to accurately gauge the student's condition—it is possible to shatter that samadhi with a spontaneous word or action. Emerging suddenly from that state, the student may experience kensho.

I personally experienced or witnessed such things on a number of occasions. For example, at the beginning of my training I struggled for two years with the wato "Who am I?" Determined, finally, that I would break through no matter what, I began to truly throw myself into the wato without reserve during my daily activities, holding the question "Who am I?" day and night without letting it fall away even for a moment. After about a week of this, I was nearly out of my mind, walking around wide-eyed like a zombie and largely unable to function. My late teacher Toyoda Rokoji[2] noticed my state; calling me to sit down in front of him, he asked what I was doing. I explained that I was working on the wato, at which point he looked at me long and hard, fixing my gaze, and with a kind of slow, quiet

harshness said, “What you seek…is nothing special.” At those words I felt as if awakened from a dream; it seemed as if a veil or haze had lifted from my physical vision. For the rest of that day, I felt quite relaxed, and then early the next morning—just as I awoke from sleeping—the answer to the wato came.

Extraordinary means are more difficult to trace, as they may or may not involve such obvious happenings. The essential point here is that simply being in the presence—the *ba*,* or “field”—of a deeply realized person can arrange our conditions in such a manner that we enter samadhi or recognize our nature. When discussing this type of situation, we may speak about the ability of one person to affect another through kiai (energetic power) or *joriki** (samadhi power), much as a strongly vibrating guitar string causes sympathetic vibration in an adjacent string. But it is perhaps most simply said this way: in such cases, the mind of the student and that of the teacher momentarily match. This is a very concrete example of what is meant by the words:

A separate transmission outside the scriptures,
Not dependent upon words or letters.

I will share an experience of this sort of thing as well. On one occasion, I was able to spend several hours talking alone with Tanouye Roshi—someone well known for having the ability to transform others simply through his presence. As we sat looking out over the grounds of Chozen-ji, his temple in Hawaii, it began to softly rain. We ceased talking for a while to watch the drops come down. After a few minutes passed, I noticed that the surroundings appeared oddly clear, vivid, and shining. At that moment, Tanouye Roshi turned toward me and asked, “How is your state of mind now?” I found I was unable to speak in reply or even to form a thought, so I simply stared at him. He chuckled, saying, “That’s why people like to be around me.”

Another example is actually a formal part of the schedule during sesshin. Each evening the teacher enters the zendo and performs

kentan,* a formal inspection, by walking slowly to pass in front of each trainee; this is perhaps the most solemn and energetically charged moment of the day. The students believe that they are being examined with a critical eye, which of course is true. But the teacher's hidden intent is to change the state of each student, one by one, by passing in close physical proximity. In other words, the teacher must manifest a unified state of awakened samadhi and—if possessed of sufficient power—by so doing will be able to cause students to experience the same to some degree as each is passed. It is likewise when the teacher sits with the trainees in the zendo; there is a method then to mingle one's mind with the space of the zendo, and when this is done by a qualified teacher, each trainee will spontaneously experience something of the teacher's condition.

Now, what if we happen to meet a Zen teacher and do not have such immediate experiences of recognizing our true nature or entering samadhi? This could be for several reasons. One of course is that the teacher does not have sufficient ability or power. Another is that we ourselves are too enmeshed in delusion and so must first practice in the usual manner. Finally, it is also sometimes the case that a teacher is indeed able to cause us to recognize our nature immediately or to enter various states but will not do so in order that we first practice to develop the foundational qualities allowing us to sustain and clarify those things. As we have said, kensho without such practice afterward is incomplete. If we are not yet committed to continuing our training, it can even be a disservice for a teacher to cause us to have an experience that might later become just another object of attachment. Later in this chapter, we will discuss that last pitfall a bit more.

As practitioners, we should not neglect to understand these things that are so crucial to the Zen approach. This is the reason I have ventured to mention them here, including my own experiences, even though it is not usually the custom to discuss such things openly. Also, since today it seems there are many Zen students and even teachers who do not fully grasp the profound nature of these methods transmitted in Zen, it is my hope that some will read this

and aspire to gain the ability to use them. Truly, for teachers too there is no end to Zen training, and those of us who take on the responsibility of guiding others should conceive of no limitations to the wondrous skillful means that can manifest from embodiment of the buddha-wisdom.

SANZEN (INVESTIGATING ZEN TOGETHER)

Here we will briefly discuss an essential Rinzai practice that is intimately related to both direct pointing and the crucial post-kensho training. This is the face-to-face encounter of *sanzen*,* in which all the insight of both teacher and student are brought to bear.

Once we have entered into relationship with a teacher, we may be called to begin sanzen. This means that we will periodically meet with the teacher privately and there be required to demonstrate our insight in a concrete manner. Some practice methods, such as koan, may require frequent meetings. But even if we are not using the koan method, we will still gain benefit from entering the teacher's room, reporting on our practice, and encountering whatever occurs in the interaction.

Sanzen, really, is another form of that face-to-face dharma encounter that has long been part of Zen practice. We may read in Zen writings many anecdotes in which a master, such as Rinzai, enters the monastery hall where monks are assembled. There, he challenges all present to probe his understanding or demonstrate their own and proceeds through various means to slash at their obstructions, shatter their preconceptions, and—very often—directly point out the awakening they seek.

When we read these old records, it is perhaps easy to forget the power that such encounters must have had in person. We are apart from the actual context, and so to us these are just stories, not something we are actually living. Thus, when Master Rinzai says that the "true human being of no rank" is present right here, constantly going in and out of the gates of our faces, and that those who have

not yet recognized this should look, we may read that kind of thing and think, “Yes, sure, I understand that.”

But what if Rinzai was actually glaring there in front of you now, seeing your condition clearly, and then directed a fierce shout of *“Look!”* at you? Further, what if you, in that situation, having practiced and cultivated some depth of samadhi, had arrived in that very moment at the state of profound absorption we call “ripe”? What if Rinzai had the eye to see this and his *“Look!”* further manifested from within his own moment-by-moment embodiment of exactly that “true human being of no rank”—that is, the intrinsic wisdom of awakening—spontaneously and in accord with his compassionate vows?

Perhaps your experience then would be the direct turning around of kensho. You would then also understand how it is possible, in the old Zen stories, for someone to be awakened when struck with a stick, or upon breaking a leg, or upon hearing a single shout, and how all of these could be instances of direct pointing by which those ancients entered the gate of Zen.

It should be clear, then, that sanzen is the practice of entering into that same kind of vital dharma encounter today, here, with one’s own teacher. If the student is practicing sincerely and the teacher has the eye and the power to employ various spontaneous means, then sanzen becomes a unique method by which obstacles to kensho may be quickly cut through, and the long path of training after kensho may be kept on track and nurtured. All of this also points out the way in which Rinzai koan practice functions; it requires us to enter completely into the situations described in the old anecdotes, such that we do indeed find ourselves standing before old Rinzai and forced to answer him.

There are various other aspects of sanzen practice that I will also mention, just to demonstrate the manner in which the teacher’s clear seeing is crucial. Before entering the sanzen room, for example, the student strikes a bell twice with a wooden hammer. A good teacher may discern from the sound what the student’s inner state is. After this, the student performs a series of prostrations in front of the

teacher. From these, and from the student's way of moving, speaking, using the eyes, and so on, the teacher should be able to clearly know the student's condition. Because of these things, in fact, it is not uncommon for a teacher to ring his or her small bell—signifying that the interview is ended—before the student has said a word, or even entered. Again, I am discussing these things openly only to demonstrate that there is depth and intention beneath the outer forms. Those who have the title of teacher should naturally understand such things.

What is most important for us to know at the beginning as students, however, is this: in the authentic Rinzai tradition that has been transmitted to us, the spirit of true sanzen is not casual. It is not therapy or an extended conversation. Rather, it carries the energy of a mutual life-and-death encounter. Both teacher and student must bring all the power acquired through assiduous practice to bear within that meeting. Through such intense forging within the presence of a qualified teacher, with nothing held back and one's sincere effort completely put forth, obstructions to realization can be quickly dissolved. This may be considered another of the special qualities of the Rinzai way.

Dangers of Self-Verifying Awakening

Since we are discussing the teacher's role in Zen, I would like now to discuss a very important related point: the manner in which kensho, the initial awakening, is verified to be genuine.

Certainly there are many people who have experiences they believe to be kensho but are not. Without a teacher's guidance such people often go far astray. But, as mentioned earlier, it is indeed possible to enter into kensho without prior practice. Should we spontaneously arrive at awakening on our own in that way, several things could then happen:

1. We may recognize our nature and then later—lacking guidance or a path of subsequent practice—experience a fading of the

experience as deep-rooted, habitual delusion reasserts itself. The freedom we experienced with kensho becomes merely a pleasant memory.

2. We may recognize our nature dimly or not fully have confidence that we have, indeed, recognized it. Later, after beginning practice under a teacher's guidance, we may say, "Ah, that was kensho after all!"
3. We may recognize our nature and know, correctly and without any doubt whatsoever, that we have indeed had a genuine experience of some kind. Commonly, we may also see that previous instances of what we thought were awakening in fact were not, or were very shallow.

Regardless which of these (or other) results we experience, though, I have emphasized that kensho alone is not enough and only marks the entrance into an authentic practice to embody wisdom. Therefore, even if we arrive at awakening and could somehow accurately determine it to be such on our own, we still are faced with a quandary: How to go forward from there? Without knowledge of the path of practice by which kensho is actualized, how will it be of use to us? There are also degrees in the clarity or depth of kensho. How shall we accurately gauge this for ourselves and so know what practice going forward best suits us?

The fact is, kensho alone without a correct path afterward can even be mostly useless. This is not because awakening itself carries no benefit or lasting effect. It is because over time, if initial awakening is not deepened and clarified, habitual delusion will surely reassert itself even more strongly. We will fall back into old patterns of ignorance and self-referential view. Worse yet, we may do so fiercely clinging to the ghost of a faded kensho that we believe marks us as somehow special. This treasured memory of kensho cannot free us. It becomes just another possession and may even be co-opted to feed a resurgent sense of self that unfortunately now believes it is "enlightened."

The founders of some so-called cults may well have had legitimate, spontaneous awakening experiences. But lacking guidance and correct practice afterward, their personalities and teachings become arrogantly twisted in this way. Such are the dangers of thinking that the basic recognition of kensho is a culmination. This is also a danger of presuming to teach others prematurely.

Because of these things, self-verification of kensho is not accepted in Zen, and a teacher is absolutely required at least from the time that we experience awakening. True, awakening is always something one must recognize and gain confidence in for oneself. But a teacher is relied upon to help lead us to that recognition, to confirm it, to guide us during the difficult practice afterward by which confidence and continuity are gained, and finally to one day verify that we ourselves—though far from finished—are qualified to begin guiding others.

In summary, we should understand that there are real dangers to misjudging our own experiences to be awakening or failing to continue correct practice after kensho. These points alone reveal the necessity of finding a qualified guide.

FINDING A TEACHER

It should now be clear that choosing one's teacher is no light matter. Committed students have always been willing to go to great lengths and travel great distances to meet with a qualified master. Beginners naturally wonder how to tell who is a good teacher and—more to the point—which one they should follow.

Certainly the teacher we choose should be well qualified to transmit the practices of Rinzai Zen. This means not only that the teacher has completed the requisite training and received *inka shomei*,* the seal of lineage inheritance from a legitimate master; more importantly, it means that the teacher manifests some degree of embodied realization, ideally including the spontaneous, extraordinary means of guiding students.

But as beginners, how will we know such things? The legitimacy of a teacher's lineage and certification can be researched, of course. But to be honest, I must admit that as a beginner I was not even aware of such things and did no research at all. In fact, I cannot say that as a beginner I really knew anything about Zen, the differences between the various lineages, or about my teachers at all. Actually, I did not even have my heart set on Zen. I had already by that time met several masters from other Buddhist traditions, any one of whom I would have been incredibly fortunate to follow. But upon meeting the person who would be my *shisho**—*my* primary teacher, or what in some traditions might be called one's "root" teacher—I knew immediately that I wanted to follow him. This was not due to anything he said or did. Rather, it was simply because I was irresistibly drawn to what I can only call his atmosphere, or the vibration of his presence: his ba, or field. I do not therefore recall viewing the situation as a choice, and without much thought I shortly afterward left my home and moved into his training hall. I am therefore sorry to say that my own experience gives me few definite answers to these questions. In this endeavor, I believe we are each largely pulled by karma.

Perhaps not everyone will have the same experience. But it is worth remembering that the choice of a teacher, like the choice of a life partner, is not always a rational thing. Of course, it is the same from the teacher's side; teachers also choose their students, and the relationship exists as a mutual obligation. For these reasons I always advise students to choose a teacher based on a feeling of affinity and observation of the teacher's qualities rather than on whatever tradition, lineage, or type of practice one thinks most interesting.

Leaving aside my experience, however, there may be some commonsense advice to give.

Searching Carefully and Patiently

The first point is that our best hope for finding our teacher will be to search carefully and patiently.

"Carefully" means that we should make efforts to learn more about various teachers and then go visit a few. We should attend lectures and retreats with different teachers if we are able, observing their interactions and meeting their students. We should listen to talks, read books, and over time establish relationships with a few teachers to whom we feel attracted.

Meanwhile, during this process we could, of course, learn basic zazen as in this book and start practicing every day without fail. We could also learn other practices before we have chosen a teacher: to breathe, to chant, to do prostrations, to examine our behavior in light of the precepts. There are no restrictions as long as we receive such foundational instruction from someone qualified, and we are clear which practices will be safe for us to begin on our own.

"Patiently" just means that if we use the above approach, nothing will be wasted by taking our time—even several years—to choose a teacher.

So really, it is best to just search for and choose a Zen teacher with the same diligence we might use for any other important decision in life. In this way, it is likely that we will eventually find someone under whom we wish to practice. Hopefully that teacher will agree.

Friend or Enemy?

Next, we must never forget that it is ultimately we ourselves who are responsible for our own liberation. This does not mean we can dispense with teachers. But it means that we are not required to dispense with common sense. If a teacher or group we visit feels somehow "wrong," it may well be wrong for us. We should sometimes trust our sense of things.

On the other hand, this does not mean that everything we experience should make us comfortable and fit our preconceptions of how a teacher should appear. There is an old saying, "The superior

student becomes the successor to his enemy." That is, sometimes the teacher we find most puzzling, harsh, and intimidating—who seems almost an enemy to us—is the one who in fact displays true kindness by not indulging our weaknesses and self-centered preferences. Of course, only if we are superior—having sufficiently strong and correct motivation—will we be able to endure practicing under such a person.

If we wish to approach this situation honestly, perhaps it is best to just acknowledge that while we each would naturally prefer a teacher who is kind and indulgent in demeanor, we may nevertheless have to accept some amount of harshness depending on our unique inner obstructions, like bitter medicine that is unpleasant yet necessary. True, it may be that a teacher can "attract more flies with honey than with vinegar." But we do not as students aspire to be flies; our training is to fulfill our potential as human beings. We might therefore beware of too much honey as much as we might of too much vinegar. A kind, mild teacher with many adoring students could be a great master—or a weak, indulgent one. In this light, the opinions of the early Edo-period Soto Zen priest Suzuki Shosan are interesting. In his book *Roankyo* he wrote, "In learning the Buddhist Law (Zen) these days, many people seem to have forgotten that Zen includes high spirits of bravery and great power. Therefore, those who learn the Buddhist Law become so tenderhearted, admirable-looking, desireless, and good-natured that they somehow tend to lose the will to react to any unfavorable stimulus as angrily as if saying, 'Damn it!'"[3]

In any case, ultimately we each must decide for ourselves what degree of training we are willing to endure and what type of teacher suits us. It is likely that in most cases some amount of both honey and vinegar will be required.

All of this constitutes the best advice I could give. Now, those who do not have the patience for such a search or who are prone to just jump into things impulsively, as I did, should know that the risk of making a mistaken choice will be greater. Unfortunately there will always be a few charlatans ready to take advantage of others. This

should rightfully concern us, though we may at least take some long-term comfort in knowing that Zen lineages lacking integrity or vitality have historically tended to die out.

One more thing it is helpful to know: if our practice is correct, it will deepen, and we will eventually gain the eye to see for ourselves what depth of practice others have done. Eventually, we should be able to see at a glance if a teacher is qualified or not, and so to advise others accordingly. Gaining such an eye is another reason why the fact of Zen as a "transmission outside the scriptures"—living primarily in the face-to-face relationship between teacher and student—remains crucial.

Surpassing Our Teachers

In the end, if we practice correctly, it will be our responsibility to repay our profound debt to our teachers by surpassing their attainments. The purifying fire of Zen is intensive, exhaustive practice over many years. Someone like Hakuin, a great master possessed of the eye, energy, and personality to address the conditions of his day, could arise at any time from among those who have been forged in such fire. We must therefore resolve to not only gain the eye to see through others; we must also gain the ability to help others and so aspire to become teachers ourselves.

We should see clearly that "teacher" is not a title to crave and indicates no high status. On the contrary, to be a teacher is to be the servant of everyone and to constantly negate oneself. Such is the way to honor our teachers most deeply: by taking up their mantles with gratitude and awe. Torei says:

> Look! In the line of Rinzai, each heir surpasses the teacher. They do not just continue the teacher's words—that is dead teaching. Suffering unendurably bitter pains again and again until they penetrate the very bones and reach the marrow—and when then it comes flowing out from the depth of the heart of each one individually, they altogether stretch out their single

hand to establish the true teaching. This is why the teachings of our school have continued uninterrupted and never died out.[4]

Many people lament today's conditions and the seeming difficulty of finding a qualified Zen teacher, but that is really a wrong way to think. Instead we should just resolve to become great teachers ourselves and so throw ourselves into practice of a similar intensity to what great masters such as Daito Kokushi[5] and Hakuin endured. That is a truly worthy goal, and it reflects the spirit of a worthy student.

The Many Kinds of False Zen Students

With that last point in mind, let us finish this chapter by examining what being a worthy student means. To be exact: since we are rightfully concerned with discerning unqualified or false teachers, let us here consider what a false student might be.

The following list was not written for others but as a reminder to myself of how ingeniously I had found many ways to be false. Since then, however, a few people have said that they found it valuable. In the teisho that comprises the final chapter, we will consider what it means to be a genuine Zen practitioner.

The Many Kinds of False Zen Students

- One who takes refuge in the Buddha but never sees that nothing is lacking in one's own house.
- One who takes refuge in the dharma but treasures habitual views.
- One who takes refuge in the *sangha** but avoids spiritual friends (teachers).
- One who gives lip service to the precepts but acts without regard.
- One who chants the four vows while fortifying the walls of "self and other."

- One who sits in zazen posture without practicing.
- One who practices according to one's own preferences.
- One who makes of Zen another possession or another hat to wear.
- One who thinks realizing the Way is difficult.
- One who thinks realizing the Way can be accomplished without sweating blood.
- One who thinks oneself and one's teacher are equals.
- One who does not enter the place where oneself and one's teacher are equals.
- One who does not set aside everything for the sake of Zen.
- One who cannot put down "Zen."
- One who feels no shame.
- One who forgets common sense.

17

BEING A GENUINE PRACTITIONER

The true Dharma of the Zen school does not differentiate between monk and layman, man and woman; nor does it choose between high and low, old and young; in it there is neither great nor little, neither acute nor dull energy/motive power—but only the great-hearted will finally and without fail attain. So believe profoundly in this Dharma and seek deliverance with diligence. Start walking according to your ability and do not speculate whether the Way is long or short.

—TOREI[1]

[FROM A TEISHO GIVEN IN MARCH 2012]

I WOULD LIKE to welcome all of you and congratulate you for coming to this retreat and taking time away from your busy lives to devote yourselves to practice. What an incredible opportunity, a wondrous thing!

We do not generally divulge what is said in the sanzen room. But I would like now to divulge in a general way things that many students say there. These are things they say as they struggle with a koan or with counting the breath or whatever other method they may be using. In short, these students say they sometimes just cannot get into the method or that the method does not open up for them. So I

always ask them, “Well, how’s your practice? I don’t see you that often. I wonder how often you’re practicing?” “Oh, I’m not sitting that much these days,” they say.

There is a very dangerous disease of Zen students about which you need to be aware. None of us are immune to it, whether teachers or students, lay or ordained. That disease is called “being a Zen practitioner who doesn’t practice Zen.” It is a very easy virus to catch. Many of us have struggled with it. In short, it means that although you may come to retreats like this, if you do not also engage in intensive practice during your daily life, then you will always be playing catch-up. If you go to a sesshin without having done zazen regularly, without having actually thrown yourself into practice in a consistent way, then you will always be playing catch-up.

I am not necessarily talking at this moment about how much you sit on a daily basis but rather the *consistency* of your practice, the thread that continues day to day. If that thread is not there, and suddenly you come to a retreat like this one, we can say that it is like trying to run a marathon without having gone jogging. You could do such a thing, but you will probably suffer. It is likely you might not do very well. Perhaps, in that sense, it is useless suffering.

Of all the Buddhist schools, we should understand that Zen is among a few that claim to be uncommonly direct, rapid approaches to liberation. That does not mean Zen is easy. In fact, it means that we are called upon to train as much as we can.

We talk a great deal about “Zen in daily life” and the importance of encompassing normal daily activities within our training. A danger, though, is that you may come to think that because you are a Zen person, your daily activities are, de facto, Zen practice. You might say, “I do my best to be present when I’m at work, to not be distracted, to throw myself into what I am doing. I don’t actually practice zazen much. I don’t really do too much of the formal practices my teacher taught me. But as much as I am able, I at least do try to be present, and I try to be a good person.”

Certainly that is all wonderful, and it is part of encompassing our daily activities within training. But this effort must still rest upon a

foundation of deep, consistent, and intensive formal practice. Without such a foundation, your training within the activities of daily life may really just be an up-and-down effort of trying to remain present. Again, trying to remain present is wonderful. By itself, though, it is not sufficient in the beginning and actually has little chance to succeed.

We do not say that to practice Zen you must shave your head and enter a monastery. We never say you must leave a normal layperson's life behind. Yet the other side of this coin is that you must indeed do a great deal of something within your so-called normal life. That something includes formal daily practice, done according to the instructions received from your teacher. This is indispensable. In fact, you will need to do enough of this practice that to other people your normal life might not seem so normal at all!

I want to stress again: we do not make a great distinction between lay or ordained. That does not matter. What matters is the question, "How are you spending the time during each of your days?" If you are spending some amount of time practicing each day as instructed by your teacher, then the consistent thread of training is there. It does not matter to us if you have a robe on or not; we do not care about that. If you are not practicing—if I am not practicing—then it doesn't matter that I wear this *rakusu*.* In that case I am ordained in name only. More importantly, in that case I am a Zen practitioner in name only.

There are many examples in history of deeply realized lay practitioners who did not ever ordain. Perhaps they had families and vocations. We remember people such as Yamaoka Tesshu in Japan: a very famous Zen practitioner, heavily involved in the turbulent politics of his day including civil war, and additionally a master of both martial arts and calligraphy. But if we point to someone like Tesshu and say, "Well, here is a person who apparently did not spend all his day doing zazen in some ideal place, and still he attained very deep realization," then we also need to ask ourselves two things.

First: "How did Tesshu actually practice?" True, he did not wear a black robe, meaning he was not a priest. Yet could any of us do even

one day of the kind of really severe training that Yamaoka Tesshu did as a layperson? I encourage you to read a biography of Tesshu if you want to understand what intensive practice is, how much sitting he did, and how "normal" Tesshu's day-to-day life was.

Second, we might each ask this: "Am I of the same caliber as someone like Yamaoka Tesshu?" It could be that people like you and me, who seem to have average ability, need in fact to practice more than someone like Tesshu in order to develop energy and ability remotely approaching his.

Ho Koji[2] in China was, of course, another very famous lay Zen practitioner. He had a wife and a daughter, and though not a monk was well known for visiting monasteries and giving hell to the Zen masters of the day. This is another example of someone who was a layperson and yet still deeply mastered Zen. But do not forget what *he* did. Ho Koji abandoned his house. He took all his belongings and riches, put them on a raft in the middle of a river, and sank it. He cut off his former life completely, wandering about with his wife and daughter, and making bamboo baskets just to obtain a bare subsistence living while practicing with several masters, constantly training and testing himself.

That is the example of another layperson who mastered Zen. Does it matter that he wore a layperson's clothes instead of monk's robes? What kind of practice in daily life did he do?

What I am trying to say is this: Zen is nothing less than what it claims to be. It is a very direct, precipitous, rapid approach to having that insight that is the essential point of all Buddhist teaching, and afterward to actualizing it, embodying it, and causing it to penetrate our very bones. We do not depend upon many lifetimes or endless eons for this. It is to be done within this life. And because Zen is that, it requires your utmost effort.

I give this lecture not as a scolding, but rather so that I myself—and each of you—might examine ourselves and ask, "Was I a Zen practitioner today?" That is the important question. If our answer day after day continues to be a sheepish no, and then we go to

zazenkai or to sesshin and have a hard time and lots of pain, well, we should not be surprised.

You know, during long hours of practice, discomfort sometimes comes no matter what we do. Pain is pain, and that is fine. However, if I am constantly butting up against the wall of not being able to penetrate zazen physically or not being able to penetrate my koan or am unable to make the breath-counting method or energetic-cultivation methods come alive and manifest signs of accomplishment—if none of that happens for me year after year, and I do not really spend a lot of time practicing except perhaps a few times a week when I come to sit at a Zen center or temple—well, I should not be surprised. Yes, we have the examples of people such as Tesshu and Ho Koji, who lived in the world and engaged with the world. They did not leave the world to become monks. You better believe they spent a lot of their time practicing, though.

I often say that a healthy sense of shame is an important part of our practice. Shame is a loaded word, I suppose, in our culture. By shame I do not mean that we are somehow unworthy or that there is something wrong with us. Shame means, rather, that when we compare ourselves to the lineage teachers whose names we chant,[3] or when we read their life stories and learn about the tremendous, even hair-raising lengths to which they went in their practice, and we then look at our own efforts….Well, we might feel some amount of embarrassment. And then, how do you use that feeling? If it goads you onward—if it causes you to examine your daily life and say, "I could sit! I could practice more! What is my life for? Damn it, I'm going to use this life!"—well then, that is the usefulness of shame. That is what I mean by positive shame.

Through Zen practice we all have the opportunity in this life to change how we see. We have the opportunity to change how we experience our own existence. Leaving aside what you believe or do not believe about what happens to us after death, recognize that right now you have the choice to experience your life differently, in a manner that is saner and less entwined with delusion.

What is that delusion? We sometimes call it dualism, meaning a self-reifying way of seeing that splits the universe into pieces. We thereby suffer, of course, because the universe just does not seem to care much about the identities, categories, and plans we fabricate. The spiritual traditions that have most influenced our culture, as they are commonly understood, tend to affirm this way of seeing: there is spirit, and there is matter, which is below spirit and created by it. There is God, and there is me, which is not God. There are all the things inside my mind, which are me (subject), and there are things outside my mind (objects), which are not me. There is heaven and earth; there is nature and humanity. And all of these are apart from each other and arranged into a hierarchy. Something like my hand—which is amazing, really magical when you look at it—is just matter, so it is less pure than spirit. Perhaps there is an ideal hand, an archetypal hand someplace in a spiritual realm, of which this one here is just an imperfect reflection or created image!

That is the religious and philosophical background, the way of seeing, by which many of us have been conditioned. But it is not just a Western concept or an Abrahamic religious concept. Dualistic perception of some kind is something common to humankind. Of course it has some practical purpose, some usefulness too; if I do not differentiate my body from its environment in some manner, for example, I may not know to keep my hand out of the fire or not to walk off a cliff.

The point, however, is that we might also be able to experience in a different manner. Within the Buddhist teachings, for example, we may describe things from the standpoints of the three bodies of the Buddha. By that I do not mean that the historical Buddha had three bodies. Rather, there are different ways of seeing from the standpoints of *dharmakaya,** *sambhogakaya*,* and *nirmanakaya*.*

Dharmakaya is grasping the so-called ultimate, the experience of utter and pure nondifferentiation and nonreification. Were someone to hand us something such as a clod of earth, from this standpoint there is no way to speak about it. There is no conceptualization or separation at all. This is the experience of the breakthrough koans,[4]

like Mu[5] or “Who am I?” When the answer to the koan comes, it is a direct knowing of *this* [hits lectern]. Suddenly you know who and what you really are, what “it” is, wordlessly and without doubt. This is recognizing your nature; this is the awakening we call kensho.

But we cannot get stuck in nondifferentiation, or we will never truly walk the bodhisattva path. Coming immediately out from it, we must experience the same clod of earth from the sambhogakaya viewpoint. All is boundless and empty of self, true, but this in our hands is precisely a clod of earth, luminously perfect as it is—only thus could the ultimate manifest. Using the language of some religions, this is the place where we could even say that a clod of earth is something holy, sacred, or magical, or that the holy and sacred manifests exactly as a clod of earth. This is our wisdom, and the training after kensho by which everything we encounter is revealed as not different from the original face of our true nature.

Still, we cannot get stuck there either. We must experience from the nirmanakaya viewpoint. Here, the earth is just earth, and it is black, and it looks like it might be good for growing carrots. It holds up my feet when I walk. This is the wisdom realm of our everyday activities, our work, and our lives. With great compassion, we must enter fully into this world in which we will manifest the wondrous functioning of wisdom within daily activity and so apply myriad skillful means to help others. Coming full circle in our Zen training, we must in the end be completely ordinary, nothing special at all.

Penetrating in this manner through existence, without splitting or seizing it, without attaching to any view or standpoint, is one way of describing how practice helps us see differently. Of course this way of describing things is just a device, and there is still a further step if we truly wish to give life to the three bodies. But the point here is that if we practice, we may be certain that our way of experiencing life will change.

So if you are exerting effort and enduring frustration and hard work—the challenges, I should say, of daily zazen, of practicing, of going into the small sanzen room with your teacher from time to time and facing your own obstacles—then please just be sure you do

it all for a reason. If you are going to put work into living your daily life differently, being present during your activities—which is hard work, yes, doing those things—then please just be sure you do it all for a reason. Do it as part of a practice that has a chance to succeed. Do not be what have been called "mosquito students" or "mosquito practitioners"; there are a lot of them, and they're very strong for a certain time or season, but after a few months pass, all seem to disappear. No consistency. Maybe they come back the following year! But the thread of practice continuity and penetration is not there.

Sit every day. Do some type of breathing or energetic cultivation every day. With your own body—your flesh and bones—practice and practice and practice. If you are a Zen practitioner, then truly *do* Zen. Do not succumb to the illness of being a Zen practitioner who does not practice Zen. Do not be someone who sits in meditation during a retreat like this but is not really meditating—just marking time, swimming in thoughts, wondering when the bell will ring to signal the end of meditation, or perhaps sniffing the air and wondering what is cooking for the next meal. *Will it be miso soup? Is that sesame oil I smell? It sounds like carrots are being cut!* If you spend your zazen time indulging in these kinds of distractions and you manifest little progress over the months and years, recognize that it is entirely due to your insufficient motivation and effort.

In the *Hagakure* a poem is mentioned, the last line of which begins with the words, "When your own heart asks…" These are important words. Indeed, when we ask ourselves about our practice, our own hearts certainly know the truth.

Be brave! Summon up your courage! You must raise up your original motivation and aspiration, plant yourself with fearlessness in the unity of mind and body, and cut through obstructions using your koan, using the breath counting, using whatever your method is. In this training, you may have confidence that all the awakened beings of the ten directions support you; all the myriad things—the earth with its trees, mountains, and rivers, all creatures and people, the sky, sun, and moon and extending to the most distant galaxy—all of these ceaselessly proclaim the Buddhist teaching. Every sound is

the preaching of the dharma; every sight meeting your eyes is the image of a buddha; every thought that arises in your mind reveals just your own original face, which, from the beginning, has lacked nothing at all.

Just do not waste time! In one form or another, this is the only message we can give you.

This lecture is given from me to myself. If you overheard it and something in it struck you, then please use it.

NOTES

Preface

1. Wm. Theodore Barry, ed., *Sources of East Asian Tradition Volume 1: Premodern Asia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 788. Omori Sogen (1904–94) was among the most important Rinzai Zen masters of the twentieth century, well known for his *Zen ken sho* ("Zen, sword, brush") approach to practice integrating Zen, physical culture, and fine arts. *Sanzen Nyumon* has been translated into English by his dharma heir Dogen Hosokawa Roshi (see the suggested readings).
2. Torei Enji (1721–92) was a dharma heir of Hakuin. His work, which lays out the entire Zen path in an exceedingly kind manner, has long been a standard text in Rinzai monasteries. It has been translated into English twice (see the suggested readings).

Chapter 1: The approach and Intent of Zen

1. The quote is found in the preface to Eisai's treatise *Kozen Gokoku Ron (Propagation of Zen for the Protection of the Country)*.
2. The first patriarch of Zen, who traveled from India to China in the fifth century to transmit the Zen teachings.
3. Japanese: *isshin den shin*.
4. Tokusan Senkan (Deshan Xuanjian), ca. 780–865.
5. Tokusan's breakthrough is described in case 28 of the koan collection *Mumonkan*.
6. Rinzai's declaration of these words in front of his assembly is recorded in the *Rinzairoku*.
7. Daikan Eko (Dajian Huineng), 638–713. One of the greatest Zen masters, traditionally counted as the Sixth (and last) Patriarch in the line begun by Bodhidharma. Huineng's life marks the beginning of Zen's distinctly Chinese flowering.
8. Huineng's use of these words to awaken another is recorded in the *Platform Scripture of the Sixth Patriarch*.

Chapter 2: Zen and the One Vehicle

1. Yoko Okuda, trans., *The Discourse on the Inexhaustible Lamp* (London: Zen Centre, 1989), 186.
2. A polymath, Kukai (774–835) is revered in Japan for his cultural as well as spiritual achievements.
3. Okuda, *The Discourse on the Inexhaustible Lamp*, 127.
4. Okuda, *The Discourse on the Inexhaustible Lamp*, 132.
5. In the seventh-century Chinese work by Daoxuan *Continued Biographies of Eminent Monks*, the teaching transmitted by Bodhidharma is in fact called the "One Vehicle School of Southern India." In China this eventually became known as simply the Chan (Zen) school.
6. A practice of the Pure Land traditions.
7. Practices centered on the subtle energetic system, which are found explicitly or implicitly in many traditions including Zen.
8. Private encounters with one's teacher, an important Zen practice. We shall have more to say about this in chapter 16.
9. Okuda, *The Discourse on the Inexhaustible Lamp*, 134–36.

Chapter 3: Zen and Abrahamic Faiths

1. Yannis Toussulis, *Sufism and the Way of Blame: Hidden Sources of a Sacred Psychology* (Wheaton, IL: Quest Books, 2011), 80. A Persian Sufi mystic and poet, while in a trance state, he famously exclaimed, "I am the Truth!" This and other seeming blasphemies led to his imprisonment and execution in 922.
2. Bernard Lewis, trans., *Music of a Distant Drum: Classical Arabic, Turkish, Persian, and Hebrew Poems* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 65.
3. Mechthild of Magdeburg (1207–82) was a medieval Christian mystic and author of *The Flowing Light of Divinity*.
4. Sue Woodruff, *Meditations with Mechthild of Magdeburg* (Rochester, VT: Bear & Co., 1982), 42.
5. From Hakuin's famous poem *Zazen Wasan*, or *Song of Zazen*.

Chapter 4: Examining Our Existence

1. Philip B. Yampolsky, transl., *The Zen Master Hakuin: Selected Writings* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971), 144. A famous statement in Zen, found in the writings of the Chinese master Dahui Zonggao (1089–1163) and elsewhere, and quoted by Hakuin in *Orategama* within his letter to a Nichiren sect nun.
2. Okuda, *The Discourse on the Inexhaustible Lamp*, 191.
3. Kenji Tokitsu, *Miyamoto Musashi: His Life and Writings* (New York: Weatherhill, 2006), xxxviii. The quote is found in *Dokkodo*, a short collection of aphorisms composed by Musashi a week before his death in 1645.

Chapter 5: The Power of Vows

1. Norman Waddell, trans., *Wild Ivy: The Spiritual Autobiography of Zen Master Hakuin* (Boston: Shambhala, 2010), 1. The Japanese name of Hakuin's autobiographical work is *Itsumadegusa*.
2. Okuda, *The Discourse on the Inexhaustible Lamp*, 164–65. The "Stages of the Wheel of Becoming," according to Buddhism, are the six paths or realms into which beings may be reborn endlessly according to their karma. Torei refers to five of these in the words that follow. "Heavenly beings" are those born as godlike beings in realms free from all suffering; however, they will eventually observe with distress the "Five Signs of Decay," which foretell the ending of their lives there. The "Eight Hardships" experienced in our familiar human realm are birth, old age, sickness, death, difficult or painful situations, the inability to hold on to things desired, the frustration of not getting what is desired, and the general anxiety or dissatisfaction that pervades even the most fortunate life. "Hungry ghosts" are beings wandering lost in realms marked by extreme craving. "Animals" are the familiar nonhuman creatures who suffer in many ways, such as being preyed upon. "Hells" are realms of extreme pain, anger, and endless despair. All of these may be understood as actual dimensions of existence and also as states we could experience at any time in this life, even in the course of a single day.
3. The vow to awaken in order to aid all beings (see the four great vows, which follow in the text).
4. Okuda, *The Discourse on the Inexhaustible Lamp*, 162–63.
5. Okuda, *The Discourse on the Inexhaustible Lamp*, 165.
6. Okuda, *The Discourse on the Inexhaustible Lamp*, 181.
7. Okuda, *The Discourse on the Inexhaustible Lamp*, 200–201.

Chapter 6: Delusion and Confidence

1. From Hakuin's famous poem *Zazen Wasan*, or *Song of Zazen*.
2. The statement "mind is Buddha" is most famously found in case 30 of the koan collection *Mumonkan*.

Chapter 7: Accomplishing Zen through the Body

1. This quote is from a short statement composed by Omori Roshi defining the principles of training at Chozen-ji, the temple he founded in Hawaii.
2. This quote is from a short statement composed by Omori Roshi defining the principles of training at Chozen-ji, the temple he founded in Hawaii.
3. Alex Bennet, trans., *Hagakure: The Secret Wisdom of the Samurai* (North Clarendon, VT: Tuttle Publishing, 2014), 250.
4. It may be noted that the faces of the Nio also display cycles of inhalation ("Ah") and exhalation ("Un") used in a type of breathing practice.
5. More regarding Fudo's symbolism in Zen practice may be found in Takuan Soho's *Fudochi Shimmyo Roku*.
6. Suzuki Shosan (1579–1655), a samurai who became a Soto Zen priest, was well known for his approach to practice using Buddhist images in this way.
7. The Tang dynasty master Hyakujo Ekai (Baizhang Huaihai, 720–814). He is credited with establishing the rules of Zen monastic life, which came to differentiate Zen from other schools and established a foundation for its eventual dominance in China. The conclusion of the story mentioned here is found in the fortieth koan of the *Mumonkan*.

Chapter 8: Functions of Zen Practice Methods

1. Okuda, *The Discourse on the Inexhaustible Lamp*, 534.
2. Unfortunately this is not always the case, and so a reflexive rejection of traditional training tools, garments, practices, etc. may in some cases only reveal the personal likes and dislikes—or knowledge deficits—of the one rejecting them.
3. Tesshu (1836–88) was famous for mastering Zen, swordsmanship, and calligraphy. He was a student of the Zen master Tekisui Giboku (1822–99), who held the lineage that Omori Sogen Roshi inherited several generations later and then transmitted to the West. Omori Roshi in fact deeply admired Tesshu's example, serving as head priest at Koho-in, a temple in Tokyo on the site of Tesshu's residence, and as Zen master of the Tesshu-kai.
4. Shido Bunan (1603–76) was the dharma heir of Gudo Toshoku (1579–1661) and the teacher of Dokyo Etan (1642–1721), who would become Hakuin's master.
5. Dogen Hosokawa, *Omori Sogen: The Art of a Zen Master* (London: Keegan Paul International, 1999), 98.
6. James W. Heisig, Thomas P. Kasulis, and John C. Maraldo, eds., *Japanese Philosophy: A Sourcebook* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2011), 211.

Chapter 9: Samadhi (meditative Absorption)

1. Japanese: *jikishin kore dojo*. The saying is drawn from the *Vimalakirti Nirdesa Sutra*; "direct mind" is the free-flowing, nonabiding mind of samadhi.
2. Yampolsky, *The Zen Master Hakuin*, 118.
3. The Sixth Patriarch's initial awakening came when he overheard this line from the *Diamond Sutra* chanted aloud: "They [bodhisattvas] cherish thoughts which dwell on nothing whatsoever." In Rinzai practice these words are taken up as a koan.
4. These days, of course, "mindfulness" has become the catchword for a kind of secularized, simplified, and easily marketed meditation practice, but whatever its benefits, we may here begin to grasp its limitations: in Zen, only cultivation of the seamless, liberative samadhi here described constitutes true mindfulness.
5. See Hakuin's *Keiso Dokuzui* for his teaching regarding Tozan's five ranks.
6. These two types of practice together constitute the core of Buddhist meditation across many traditions. Some practices may be said to emphasize one or the other, while others cultivate both simultaneously.
7. Two bodhisattvas: Manjushri (Japanese: Monju) represents wisdom; Samantabhadra (Japanese: Fugen) represents compassion and awakened activity. The union of these two—wisdom and compassion, principle and its function, the gate of kensho and its full actualization/embodiment—is complete realization, symbolized by the figure of Shakyamuni Buddha. This trio of statues, the *shaka sanzon*, is commonly found on a Zen altar.
8. For more on the Zen interpretation of these Mahayana concepts, see Hakuin's *Keiso Dokuzui*.

9. See Takuan Soho's *Fudochi Shimmyo Roku*.

Chapter 10: Relaxation

1. Kazuaki Tanahashi, ed., *Moon in a Dewdrop: Writings of Zen Master Dogen* (New York: North Point Press, 1985), 75. The quote is found in Dogen's famous work *Shobogenzo*.
2. *Nanso* has been translated as "soft butter" or "ghee," the latter being the clarified butter used in India. Ghee is traditionally considered a pure substance possessing healing properties.
3. Many of Hakuin's writings have been translated into English and are easily found, including several in which he discusses nanso no ho as well as another important method called *naikan no ho*.*

Chapter 11: Meditation—the Body

1. Okuda, *The Discourse on the Inexhaustible Lamp*, 186.
2. One of my teachers trained when younger at Tenryu-ji, a famous monastery in Kyoto, where he was known for the severity of his practice. Many years later he was shown a recent photo of trainees at Tenryu-ji, and it was noticed that many of them held their hands in this mistaken way. He commented, “The training in Japan has gone down.”

Chapter 12: Meditation—the Breath

1. Yampolsky, *Zen Master Hakuin: Selected Writings*, 30. The quote is from *Orategama*, in a letter written by Hakuin to a feudal lord who was a lay follower. “Source of strength” refers to the kikai tanden. A traditional Japanese game uses kick balls made of stuffed deerskin; a new, unused ball would be firm and taught.
2. Here pronounced in the Japanese manner: “ee,” “oo,” “ay,” “oh.”
3. Omori Sogen, *An Introduction to Zen Training*, trans. Dogen Hosokawa and Roy Kenichi Yoshimoto (New York: Kegan Paul International, 1996), 49.

Chapter 13: Meditation—the method

1. This famous quote is a line from one of Hakuin's poems.

Chapter 14: Okyo (Chanting Practice)

1. Tenshin Tanouye Roshi was a dharma successor of Omori Sogen Roshi and the driving force behind the founding of Chozen-ji, a temple in Hawaii that served as the crucial bridge for the transmission of Omori Roshi's lineage to the West. This quote and the one that follows in this chapter are taken from a conversation between Tanouye Roshi and the author.
2. Mencius (Mengzi), 372–289 B.C.E. A prominent Confucian philosopher.
3. The ending line of the *Heart Sutra* shown here in quotes is a mantra, and transliterates the original Sanskrit: *Gate gate paragate parasamgate bodhi svaha*.
4. In Japanese the character indicating this shout is pronounced "Katsu!" In modern Chinese it is rendered "Ho!" The Japanese preserves an older, original Chinese pronunciation.

Chapter 15: Practicing in Daily Life

1. Okuda, *The Discourse on the Inexhaustible Lamp*, 15.
2. This manner of cultivating awareness points also to one of the ways training in traditional martial arts intersects with that of Zen.
3. A Chan (Chinese Zen) master once advised the participants at a retreat I attended that if the snoring of others at night bothered them, they should not shut out the sound but rather listen to every nuance as if it were a piece of music. Many students subsequently found they were able to sleep undisturbed, despite the "symphony," which continued unabated.
4. Omori Sogen, *Introduction to Zen Training*, 130.

Chapter 16: Practicing with a Teacher

1. Yampolsky, *The Zen Master Hakuin*, 122. The quote is from *Orategama*.
2. Tenzan (Fumio) Toyoda (1947–2001), a Japanese Aikido master who emigrated to the United States in 1974. He had trained as a youth at the famous Ichikukai Dojo in Tokyo, which was founded by one of Yamaoka Tesshu's disciples; while there he happened to meet Omori Roshi. He later met Tenshin Tanouye Roshi and became his student, eventually being named one of Tanouye Roshi's lay dharma heirs.
3. Omori Sogen, *Introduction to Zen Training*, 116.
4. Okuda, *The Discourse on the Inexhaustible Lamp*, 415.
5. Daito, who would later become the founder of the important monastic center Daitoku-ji, famously spent twenty years practicing in obscurity after receiving inka shomei from his teacher Daio Kokushi. It is said that during that time he lived with beggars under Gojo bridge in Kyoto, in order to refine himself in difficult conditions. His student Kanzan Egen similarly secluded himself, living for eight years as a laborer in a mountain village after receiving Daito's seal of approval.

Chapter 17: Being a Genuine Practitioner

1. Okuda, *The Discourse on the Inexhaustible Lamp*, 491.
2. Better known by his native Chinese names Pang Jushi or "Layman Pang" (740–808), he has long been regarded as the model of a lay Zen practitioner.
3. Zen trainees routinely chant *Teidai Denpo Busso no Myogo*, a list naming all the past teachers—stretching back through Japan, China, and India—in the lineage carried by their master.
4. Breakthrough koans are those assigned early in one's training, intended to bring about the awakening of kensho. They are also called *hosshin* (dharmakaya) koans.
5. "Joshu's Mu," a well-known koan.

GLOSSARY

Abbreviations

Jpn.: Japanese
Chn.: Chinese
Skt.: Sanskrit

AGURA (Jpn.). A simple cross-legged posture used in zazen, with one foot placed in front of the other; sometimes called "Burmese posture."

BA (Jpn.). "Field" or "place," in Zen practice denoting the proximity of a realized person, which has the power to transform the conditions of those within it.

BODAISHIN (Jpn.; Skt., *bodhicitta*). The aspiration to attain liberation for oneself and others. The arising of such aspiration marks the beginning of the bodhisattva path.

BODHISATTVA (Skt.; Jpn., *bosatsu*). Literally, "awakening-being." In Mahayana and Zen teaching, this is a being who vows to strive endlessly, life after life, for the liberation of others. Zen practitioners take such vows as a foundation of their path.

BODHISATTVAYANA (Skt.; Jpn., *bosatsujo*). The "vehicle of the bodhisattvas." *See* Mahayana.

BUDDHA (Skt.; Jpn., *butsu*). "One who is awake." When capitalized, this refers to the historical Buddha Shakyamuni, one of the three treasures (along with dharma and sangha) in which Buddhist followers formally take refuge. More broadly, the term in

Mahayana refers to many fully realized beings throughout the universe. Zen expresses an additional, inner meaning as well.

BUDDHA-DHARMA (Skt.; Jpn., *butsudo*). The "teachings of the Awakened One"; the Japanese word *butsudo* translates as "Way of the Buddha." Buddha-dharma refers to all genuine Buddhist teachings. It is in fact more proper and carries more profound meaning than the modern term "Buddhism."

DHARANI (Skt.; Jpn., *darani*). Literally, something that "retains or holds." Some dharani are passages contained within longer sutras that when chanted are believed to carry the essential meaning and power of the longer work or of an enlightened being that they invoke. In this regard dharani are similar to mantra.

DHARMA (Skt.; Jpn., ho). A word used in various ways, but most generally referring to the Buddhist teachings, one of the three treasures (along with Buddha and sangha) in which Buddhist followers formally take refuge. Zen expresses an additional, inner meaning as well.

DHARMAKAYA. *See* three bodies.

DIRECT POINTING. A crucial aspect of Zen training, referring to the various means by which a student is led to awakening (kensho) as the entrance of the path.

DOJO (Jpn.). "Place of the way," most commonly referring to a practice hall. The word has been used to translate the Sanskrit word *bodhimanda*, a "place of awakening," where buddhas and other awakened beings realize the truth.

EKAYANA (Skt.; Jpn., *ichijo*). The "one vehicle," a harmonizing, inclusive approach to Buddhist practice that takes direct recognition of one's nature as its foundation, thus encompassing the essential point of all Buddhist vehicles and paths. Zen considers itself an expression of the Ekayana.

EKO (Jpn.). Literally, "to return or rotate toward." In Zen ceremony, eko are verses dedicating the merit of chanting to other people or beings. A deeper connotation of the word within the context of Zen practice is "to become."

FOUR VOWS (Jpn., shikuseiganmon). Also called the four great vows or four bodhisattva vows. These are the vows taken by all Mahayana and Zen practitioners, namely, (1) to liberate all beings, (2) to cut off all delusion, (3) to engage in the various practices that lead to liberation, and (4) to attain buddhahood.

FUKUSHIKI KOKYU (Jpn.). Natural abdominal breathing.

GREAT VEHICLE. *See* Mahayana.

HANKA-FUZA (Jpn.). The half-lotus posture used in zazen.

HARA (Jpn.). The lower abdomen, considered the seat of the body's physical and energetic power. The tanden, or navel energy center, lies within this.

HINAYANA (Skt.; Jpn., *shojo*). The "lesser vehicle," a Mahayana term for other Buddhist traditions that are considered incomplete approaches to practice. The Hinayana encompasses the Shravakayana and Pratyekabuddhayana.

INKA SHOMEI (Jpn.). The seal of confirmation (also called "mind seal") given by a Rinzai Zen master, certifying that a student is a dharma heir and lineage holder. Inka shomei often (though not in all cases) empowers the recipient to guide others as a teacher; *roshi* or *shike* are titles used when referring to such persons.

JIKKE (Jpn.; Skt., *vasana*). "Habit energy," the ingrained karmic traces from this and many past lives. Kensho does not necessarily dissolve all of these, which is the rationale for post-kensho practice taking that awakening as its basis.

JORIKI (Jpn.). "Samadhi power," the physical/spiritual energy that manifests through intensive practice.

KAMAE (Jpn.). Often translated as "stance" or "position." But the term—also used in cultural arts such as swordsmanship and Noh theater—refers to more than just one's bodily posture; it encompasses one's mental state, energetic quality, and degree of spiritual development as these are revealed through the body.

KAN (Jpn.). The intuitive clear seeing that manifests with actualized awakening.

KEKKA-FUZA (Jpn.). The full-lotus posture used in zazen.

KENSHO (Jpn.). "Seeing [one's true] nature," a decisive awakening not different in substance—though often in depth—from that attained by the Buddha under the Bodhi tree. Kensho is considered the entrance into authentic Zen practice, as well as the basis of subsequent practice to completely embody awakening.

KENTAN (Jpn.). Formal inspection of trainees in the zendo by the teacher.

KI (Jpn.; Chn., *qi*). The vital or inner energy; life force.

KIAI (Jpn.). Vital energy as manifested in practice and other activities.

KOAN (Jpn.; Chn., *gong'an*). Literally, "public case." Koan are anecdotes, stories, or passages from texts, many of which relate the activities of famous Zen masters. When taken up as a practice method, the student must examine these within samadhi and give life to them by experientially grasping their import. Rinzai Zen is well known for developing the koan method to a high degree. *See also* wato.

KOSHI (Jpn.). The lower torso or trunk. Within this is the hara, or lower abdomen, and the tanden, or navel energy center.

KOZEN NO KI (Jpn.; Chn., *hao-jan chih ch'i*). The universal energetic force that permeates and binds together heaven, humankind, and earth. The term is found in Mencius (Mengzi).

KUFU (Jpn.; Chn., *gongfu*). Kufu connotes skill accomplished through great effort over time. As a term describing aspects of Zen practice, it has the meaning of grappling or struggling wholeheartedly in a manner that engages all aspects of one's existence. Koan practice, for example, is called *koan kufu*.

LESSER VEHICLE. *See* Hinayana.

MAHAYANA (Skt.; Jpn., *daijo*). The "great vehicle," also called the *Bodhisattvayana*: the vehicle of the bodhisattvas, who vow to attain enlightenment not solely for themselves but to liberate all beings. In Mahayana traditions that became dominant in Central and East Asia, it is believed that only this vehicle results in complete buddhahood, including all the qualities and means for

aiding others. The common Mahayana path is marked by a gradual fulfillment of the paramitas.

MANTRA (Skt.; Jpn., *shingon*). Literally, "to protect the mind (*manas*)"; the Japanese word *shingon* may be translated as "true words." Mantra are words and phrases that are believed to carry the essential power or qualities of a text, enlightened being, or deity, and thus ultimately of awakened mind itself. Like dharani (which are typically longer), there are various understandings of how mantra function.

MUDRA (Skt.; Jpn., *inzo*). "Seals" or hand positions used in practice. Within various Buddhist traditions there are well-developed theories regarding the symbolism, purposes, and effects of mudra. In Rinzai practice, they may be viewed primarily as a means to express kiai (vital energy) in different ways.

MUJU (Jpn.; Skt., *apratisthita*). "Nonabiding," describing the mind when functioning freely, with clarity, in a flowing manner without fixation, as in samadhi.

NAIKAN NO HO (Jpn.). The "internal elixir method," a breath and energetic-cultivation practice taught by Hakuin and transmitted within Rinzai lineages.

NANSO NO HO (Jpn.). The "soft butter method," a healing visualization taught by Hakuin and transmitted within Rinzai lineages.

NIRMANAKAYA. *See* three bodies.

OKYO (Jpn.; Skt., *sutra*). The Buddhist scriptures. The word can also refer to the practice of chanting these scriptures aloud.

ONE VEHICLE. *See* Ekayana.

OTOKAN (Jpn.). The sole surviving Rinzai Zen lineage in Japan, descending from three masters under whom the school may be said to have achieved a distinctly Japanese flowering: Daio Kokushi (1235–1308), who traveled to China and returned in 1267; his dharma heir Daito Kokushi (1282–1337), who would found the monastery Daitokuji; and Daito's heir Kanzan Egen (1277–1360), who would found Myoshinji. The name Otokan is a

combination of the characters *o* from Daio, *to* from Daito, and *kan* from Kanzan.

PARAMITAS (Skt.; Jpn., *haramitsu*). "Perfections" or, in another reading, "crossing to the other shore." These are Buddhist virtues, the gradual fulfillment of which commonly marks the Mahayana/Bodhisattvayana path. Most often six perfections are enumerated, encompassing the virtues of generosity, morality, forbearance, energy, concentration, and wisdom.

PATRIARCHAL SCHOOL: Another name for Zen.

PRAJNA (Skt.; Jpn., *hannya*). The transcendental wisdom of awakening.

PRATYEKABUDDHAYANA (Skt.; Jpn., *engakujo*). The "vehicle of solitary buddhas." In Mahayana classification, the term refers to those who arrive at enlightenment on their own and who do not ever teach. Their attainment is genuine but still considered incomplete, and they do not aspire to compassionately aid others. This vehicle and the Shravakayana together comprise the Hinayana.

RAKUSU (Jpn.). A bib-like stole worn by ordained persons. It is an abbreviated form of the *kesa*, the full Buddhist outer robe.

RINZAI (Jpn.; Chn., Linji). The Zen lineage named for Rinzai Gigen (Linjji Yixuan), from whom it descends. Along with Soto Zen, it is one of the two major Zen lineage branches transmitted from China to Japan; it was first established in a lasting manner there by Myoan Eisai (1141–1215).

ROSHI (Jpn.). "Venerable master," a Rinzai Zen teacher who has received inka shomei and is thus a lineage holder, qualified to take disciples and serve as the training master of a monastery. Another title, *shike* ("lineage master"), is roughly similar in meaning.

SAMADHI (Skt.; Jpn., *zanmai*). Meditative absorption.

SAMBHOGAKAYA. *See* three bodies.

SAMSARA (Skt.; Jpn., *rinne*). Literally, "wandering through." The cycle of existence; the endless round of rebirths experienced by

beings entangled in delusion.

SANGHA (Skt.; Jpn., so). The community of Buddhist practitioners, one of the three treasures (along with Buddha and dharma) in which Buddhist followers formally take refuge. In Mahayana teaching, it refers specifically to the *arya sangha* ("noble sangha"), that is, awakened beings. Zen expresses an additional, inner meaning as well.

SANZEN (Jpn.). To "investigate Zen," understood as something done mutually within formal relationship with a teacher. More specifically, the word refers to the private meetings with one's teacher—also called *dokusan—that* are a central element of Rinzai practice.

SEIZA (Jpn.). A kneeling posture much used in traditional Japanese culture. It may be used for zazen when the traditional cross-legged postures are not possible.

SESSHIN (Jpn.). To "collect [or gather] the mind," an intensive Zen retreat lasting from a few days to a week or more. Sesshin is among the most important and rigorous of Zen training forms.

SHIKANTAZA (Jpn.). "Just sitting," a meditation method much used in Soto Zen that is related to an earlier practice called *mozhao* in Chinese, or "silent illumination."

SHINGON (Jpn.; Skt., *mantra*). As a proper noun. Shingon refers to the Japanese Buddhist school founded by Kukai (774–835), through which early tantric teachings transmitted to China have been preserved to the present day. In general usage, the word simply means "mantra."

SHISHO (Jpn.). "Master" or "teacher." Among words with a similar meaning, however, shisho connotes one's primary master, or what in some Buddhist traditions might be called one's "root" teacher.

SHUGYO (Jpn.). The most profound physical and spiritual training that is possible. In Zen training, this implies practice that takes the wisdom of awakening as its basis.

SHUGYOSHA (Jpn.). "Shugyo person," someone undertaking the deep and intensive training denoted by shugyo.

SOTO (Jpn.; Chn., Caodong). Along with Rinzai Zen, one of the two major Zen lineage branches transmitted from China to Japan. The Soto lineage was established in Japan by Eihei Dogen (1200–1253).

SOTTAKU (Jpn.). "Pecking," referring in Zen to the activity of the teacher that helps a student arrive at awakening.

SHRAVAKAYANA (Skt.; Jpn., *shomonjo*). The "vehicle of the hearers." In Mahayana classification, this refers to those who follow a buddha's teachings but whose practice tends toward a partial, personal liberation rather than the full fruit of buddhahood. This vehicle and the Pratyekabuddhayana together comprise the Hinayana.

SUSOKUKAN (Jpn.). The breath-counting method of meditation.

SUTRA (Skt.; Jpn., okyo). The Buddhist scriptures.

TANDEN (Jpn.; Chn., *dantian*). The energetic center in the lower abdomen, approximately two inches below the navel. There are a number of such centers in the body, but for various reasons this lower tanden—called the *kikai tanden* ("sea of energy tanden")—is most commonly engaged in Zen practice.

TANDEN soku (Jpn.). A cultivated method of breathing focused on the tanden, or navel energy center, that is central to Rinzai practice.

TANREN (Jpn.). "Forging," a term among those describing certain aspects of Zen training.

TANTRA (Skt.). Texts that were late additions (from around the fifth century and after) to the Buddhist corpus in India, and which greatly influenced the practice methods used in Vajrayana traditions.

TATHAGATA (Skt.; Jpn., *nyorai*). Originally a title of the Buddha, the term more broadly carries the meaning of "suchness" or the apprehension of reality "as it is."

TEISHO (Jpn.). Oral teachings given by a Zen master within a formal context, such as during periods of intensive retreat (sesshin).

THERAVADA. In Pali, the "School of the Elders," the dominant Buddhist tradition in South and Southeast Asia. It considers the Pali canon definitive, rather than Mahayana texts.

THREE BODIES (Skt., *trikaya*; Jpn., *sanshin*). The Mahayana three-bodies teaching elucidates the nature of buddhahood and enlightenment; it holds that a buddha has three bodies or aspects, namely, the dharmakaya (Skt.; Jpn., *hosshin*), or "truth body"; the sambhogakaya (Skt.; Jpn., *hojin*), or "reward body"; and the nirmanakaya (Skt.; Jpn., *ojin*), or "manifestation body." Various Buddhist traditions interpret the meaning of these differently within the contexts of their paths.

VAJRAYANA (Skt.; Jpn., *kongojo*). Buddhist traditions that practice with reference to tantric texts, which were late additions to the Buddhist corpus in India. They may also be called in Sanskrit *Mantrayana* or *Tantrayana*.

WATO (Jpn.; Chn., *huatou*). "Word-heads," meaning key words or phrases—often taken from a koan—upon which the student may be directed to focus inquiry within samadhi. Perhaps the most famous wato is the word mu, taken from the first koan in the *Mumonkan*. *See also* koan.

YANA (Skt.). "Vehicle or conveyance," in Buddhism referring to the various paths of practice by which liberation may be attained.

ZABUTON (Jpn.). A large flat cushion for zazen. It generally serves as a base for smaller cushions called *zafu*.

ZAFU (Jpn.). Small cushions upon which the buttocks rest during zazen. Zafu generally sit upon a larger base cushion, the zabuton.

ZAZEN (Jpn.; Chn., *zuo chan*). Literally "seated Zen"—that is, formal seated meditation.

ZAZENKAI (Jpn.). Short Zen retreats usually lasting a day or overnight. The word literally means a "zazen group or gathering."

ZEN (Jpn.; Chn., *chan*; Skt., *dhyana*). "Meditation." As a proper noun, the word has come to refer not only to the Zen school or lineages, but more broadly to the wisdom of awakening itself.

ZEN KEN SHO (Jpn.). Literally, “Zen, sword, brush”—that is, the unity of Zen practice, physical culture (such as swordsmanship), and artistic endeavor (such as calligraphy). Yamaoka Tesshu, in the Meiji era, and Omori Sogen, in the twentieth century, are Rinzai Zen masters who exemplified this approach to training.

ZENDO (Jpn.). A Zen meditation hall.

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