

## My Zazen Sankyū

(san = to participate humbly; kyū = to inquire or explore)

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Notebook (3)

Fragmentary Thought X <“Means to Sweep” and “Wandering Here and There to Practice”>

“*Fukanzazengi*” (“The Way of Zazen Recommended to Everyone”) of Dogen Zenji says “The Whole Being (reality as a whole) is free from all dusts (delusion). Why should we believe in the means to sweep them away? We are never separate from the great capital. Why should we wander here and there to practice.” I think that this paragraph is presenting a criterion to distinguish zazen from *shamata/vipasyana* practices.

Let me translate this passage into a modern expression of what I believe Dogen Zenji meant. “Zazen far transcends all dusts (defilement/delusion), because it is not a personal practice, but the practice of the whole universe (whole being). Since we sit at the place which transcends relative differences such as purity vs. impurity, there is no need to rely on a gradual method (with levels, phases, steps and so on) to sweep and purify it. Zazen, as sat in the great capital where all the virtues are perfectly accomplished, is sufficiently fulfilled as it is at each moment and at each place. Therefore, there is no need to fix it with tricks, and there is no point in wandering here and there searching outside for something missing.”

In other words, from the viewpoint of zazen, both *shamata* and *vipasyana* practices are just the “means to sweep” and “wandering here and there”, and we should not apply them to zazen.

If we analyze my definition of meditation at the beginning of Fragmentary Thought IX, there are three elements in meditation: (1) one’s present condition which is evaluated as not preferable; (2) one’s future condition (objective/purpose) which is deemed preferable; (3) meditation practice (means) to move oneself from (1) to (2).

According to what is written to explain the five contemplations in the Encyclopedia of Buddhist Terminology by Gen Nakamura, there are numerous examples of meditation that have this structure: “contemplation of impurity” to rectify one’s greed by contemplating impurities in the external world; “contemplation of loving/kindness and compassion” to calm down one’s anger by contemplating all sentient beings and the arising of one’s loving/kindness and compassion; “contemplation of causal relationships” to rectify one’s stupidity by contemplating that everything arises from causal relationships; “contemplation of various worlds” to rectify one’s wrong understanding

that things are substantial by contemplating the five aggregates and the eighteen realms; “contemplation of counting breaths” to calm one’s agitated mind by counting breaths, and so on.

The phrase “means to sweep” originates from Shen-hsiu’s following poem in the Platform Sutra of Sixth Ancestral Teacher: “The body is the tree of enlightenment; the mind is like a bright mirror-stand. At all times we must strive to sweep it, and must not let the dust gather.” Hung-jen, the Fifth Ancestral Teacher from Bodhidharma, for some reason, did not consent to Shen-hsiu who wrote this poem based on the traditional perspectives of *shamata/vipasyana*. Instead, Hui-neng, who was hulling rice, was transmitted the dharma and became the Sixth Ancestral Teacher. Hui-neng’s following poem is written from a totally different dimension from Shen-hsiu’s – “Originally enlightenment is not a tree. The bright mirror is not a stand. From the beginning, not a single thing exists; where, then, can a grain of dust collect?”

“If we are not mindful, dusts tend to accumulate in our minds. This is not good. Let us clean dusts using certain methods and keep our minds always clean.” – this is very logical and understandable. However, the anecdote of Shen-hsiu and Hui-neng is telling us that this is not about zazen correctly transmitted from Bodhidharma. What is the problem?

Although I think that studying this from various perspectives is possible, let me point out one thing here. It depends on whether or not the practice has a personal intention/fabrication. The intention/fabrication here is, simply put, an effort to somehow create one’s desired condition based on the calculation “if such and such is done, this will follow.” So, no matter how lofty one’s aim would be, this kind of practice is doomed by personal intention to move toward the direction which is desirable for oneself. This intention/fabrication is called “*zenna*” (contamination; stains). The practice of *zenna* is merely a personal technique based on self-power; therefore, the mind cannot help caring about ideas (thoughts wishing to move out from (1) to (2)) and choices (selections to pick (2) which is good and which is trash (1) and what is not good) based on self-centered judgments. No matter how sophisticated a technique/method it would be, for pure and spotless zazen, it is a “side event” trying to capture something as a practitioner’s personal possession. Kodo Sawaki Roshi said, “You are thinking that you, only egocentric you, would like to attain enlightenment and peace of mind. Dharma does not exist just for you!”

For Dogen Zenji who declared that “The Buddhas and ancestral teachers have been preserving practice-realization, that is, “*fuzenna*” (spotlessness; unstainedness; the antonym of *zenna*)” in “*Senjo*(Washing)” of Shobogenzo, it cannot be called the practice of dharma as long as it has *zenna*, regardless of how eagerly practiced. I think that the fundamental difference between zazen and so-called meditation lies here. In order to practice zazen correctly, close and deep study of *fuzenna* “which has been preserved by the Buddhas and ancestral teachers” is essential.

A passage in “*Yuibutsuyobutsu*(Only Buddha and Buddha)” of Shobogenzo serves as our reference. “To be unstained does not mean that you try forcefully to exclude intention or

discrimination, or that you establish a state of non-intention. Being unstained cannot be intended or discriminated at all.” In other words, *fuzenna* cannot be the result of intentional activities striving for or making up the state of non-intention or no selection, nor is it something attainable through completely absorbing oneself into sitting aiming at *fuzenna*.

In “*Shoji*(Birth and Death)” of *Shobogenzo*, Dogen Zenji described this attitude as “Just set aside your body and mind, forget about them, and throw them into the house of Buddha; then all is done by Buddha and we just follow this path.” When we are like this, “as one is not disturbed by one’s perception and consciousness (outside of one’s perception and consciousness)” (“*Bendowa*(On Endeavoring the Way)”), “you are free from birth and death and become a Buddha without effort or calculation.” (“*Shoji*(Birth and Death)”)

We all should be aware that, to capture *zazen* as elusive as this in the context of intention/selection, which is easy to understand through common sense, is by no means possible, and *zazen* should not be discussed as one of the meditations within such a context as intention/selection. Dogen Zenji himself declared that “*Zazen* is not the dharma of the three worlds, but the dharma of the Buddhas and ancestral teachers.”

Fragmentary Thought XI <*Vipasyana* Practice and *Zazen*>

Right After I finished writing Fragmentary Thoughts IX and Xs which are about *shamata/vipasyana* practices and the genealogy of Shikan-Taza, I received an article titled “Concrete Method of Practicing the Way in Dogen Zenji – an essay based on the hypothesis that Shikan-Taza inherited the Theravada samatha/vipassana tradition” (Soto Zen Research Bulletin Vol.27) from its author, Rev. Hodo Hatano. The fact that there is a person who shares my view that the genealogy of Shikan-Taza should be studied, encouraged me greatly. Taking this opportunity, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to him.

Let me also reemphasize here that my fragmented thoughts are just personal opinions by a non-researcher who has no academic training in Buddhist studies and has few literary reference at hand to support such studies.

Rev. Hatano is trying to connect Shikan-Taza to vipassana practice in Theravada Buddhism by saying in his article, “Since there is a limitation in traditional Zen just practicing samadhi, vipassana practice as observation to understand impermanence should be added. That is (real) ‘non-thinking’ and Shikan-Taza.” He is thinking that, by doing so, he may be able to clarify Shikan-Taza, which has been left ambiguous, idealistic, and abstract. His letter attached says that he intends to proceed with his research in this direction based on the Mahasatipattanasutta, which is the basic text of *vipasyana* practice. I am looking forward to learning the results of his further research.

I myself have participated in a 10-day course of *vipasyana* practice at the large center nearby and studied commentaries on Mahasatipattanasutta, but my conclusion is that

zazen differs from *vipasyana* in its philosophy on which its practice is based. (Let me reemphasize here that it is not a matter of which practice is superior in terms of values.) Therefore, my opinion is different from that of Rev. Hatano.

Although there may be some overlaps with what I wrote so far, let me raise several points which can serve as issues of discussion.

<1> Zazen is not meditation/contemplation but Shoshin-Tanza (sitting in correct posture; sitting upright).

There, not only the body but the mind is also engaged in Shoshin-Tanza simultaneously (“At the time of zazen, the body-mind is that of zazen”). Although the mind is not engaged in a particular contemplation practice, it functions in a certain unique manner. If we pick up only this part, we might be able to say that zazen has an element which seems like *vipasyana*. However, that is just a part of zazen, not its entirety.

Rev. Hatano described the concrete way of practicing *vipasyana* – based on the “rising” and “falling” continuously in our minds as the belly expands and contracts as we breathe (labeling), label things happening one by one and moment by moment such as “itchy”, “sluggish”, “painful”, “sleepy”, “hearing”, “seeing”, and so on.

The 10-day course of *vipasyana* practice I attended devoted the first three days to training one’s sensitivity to sensations of the body by focusing on sensations around the nose (practice called *anapanasati*). The rest of the seven days were devoted to observing the internal state of the body continuously by scanning from head to foot and vice versa, like a searchlight, with attention to the sensation training of the first three days.

Both labeling and scanning practice are done by “consciousness”, and its activities are the heart of their practice. So, although there was an instruction to stretch the back, it was simply because it is a convenient posture for engaging in this work. As far as a person can continue his or her observation practice for an extended period of time without moving the body, contrary to zazen, instructions on maintaining an upright posture is not so much fussed over. I had difficulty in maintaining my sitting posture, maybe because my mind was too busy with this work. When I used my mind consciously then someplace in my body tended to get tense. If I get accustomed to this practice, it may get easier.

During these ten days, while physical pains did not bother me particularly, I felt the mental fatigue of this practice which is very different from that of zazen during *sesshin*. This is maybe due to the fact that I used my mind in a manner different from zazen, because using seldom-used muscles causes pains in the body. While asleep, I had various interesting dreams. This might be the result of my brain being stimulated by this practice in a unique manner. My opinion that *vipasyana* practice and zazen are two different practices comes from these different “tastes” I personally experienced rather than theoretical differences in their approaches.

<2> Zazen does not consist of psychological manipulation techniques/methods “I” implement consciously/actively to attain a certain objective.

Zazen should have no room for such zenna to creep in. Kosho Uchiyama Roshi says clearly in his book Opening the Hand of Thought (published by Penguin) that “To practice zazen is to leave everything thoroughly and continuously to this correct posture of zazen.” That is to say, zazen is to set aside all activities driven by human desires, leave everything to the posture of non-intention and non-fabrication. In Shobogenzo-Zuimonki Dogen states, “To sit is, namely, non-fabrication.” Ordinary “human” activities are done in zazen, therefore, it is also called the practice of Buddha. There the self just exists as the self practiced and experienced by zazen, as the self as it is.

The following passage in “Genjokoan” of Shobogenzo, “Driving ourselves to practice and experiencing the myriad things is delusion. When the myriad things actively practice and experience ourselves, that is the state of realization,” can also be taken as a description of this nature of zazen.

I think that both labeling and scanning practices are active efforts in which self-consciousness as “I” engages. If I borrow grammatical terms, they are more like transitive verbs (the structure requires a subject doing something to an object). On the contrary, in zazen, the consciousness is clearly awake and seeing the whole zazen (metaphoric expression), yet it does not pick up something intentionally to pay special attention to nor engage in intentional activities such as organized observations. To the extent that the whole is being the whole as it is - here and now, as we hear, as we see, as our body feels, as our thoughts float in our mind, we can say that zazen is more like an intransitive verb (the structure subject describes its function by itself without reference to object). “*Jijuyu Zanmai*(self-fulfilling samdhi)” and Sawaki Roshi’s phrase that “self is doing self by itself” point out these natures of zazen. In short, zazen is “being,” not “doing.”

If the practice of *vipasyana* gets deepened, ultimately it might be possible to reach a unified condition that has no discrimination between subject and object, and the perception of conscious effort drops off. However, I cannot say anything definite yet as to whether it is possible to attain it only by training the mind without going through Shoshin-Tanza.

<3> Genealogy of zazen in relation to *vipasyana*

I am also thinking that Shikan-Taza may have certain connections with *vipasyana* practice, but probably the connections between the two are not simply continuous ones, and there must be a quantum leap of a kind in its quality (such as *vipasyana* practice overcomes its own structure). How should we see this?

<4> “Self-completeness” and autonomy

The tradition of Pure Land Buddhism, as it was transmitted into Japan, was transformed fundamentally by Honen and Shinran, and chanting the name of Amida Buddha emerged with totally different meanings. I do believe that this incident has utmost importance for all the people who are practicing Buddhism. My present hypothesis is that there must be a “transformation” of the same magnitude that happened in the tradition of meditation and *shamata/vipasyana* that transformed it into zazen.

As one goes back to the Primal Vow of Pure Land Buddhism by throwing sundry practices away, chanting the name of Amida Buddha emerges as “great practice”. It is not chanting to go from here (this world) to there (Pure Land) in the future, but chanting as a proof of the fact that the Pure Land has come and is already here with us. Benefits of religious faith such as “non-retrogression in the present life”, and “grasp and never abandon” lie within religious faith itself. They are not outcomes of accumulated religious faith, nor the results that one can obtain in an exchange of religious faith. This is the reason why the one can rest peacefully in “just chanting.” Zazen also has the same kind of structure: zazen is autonomous and self-completed within. It has no future, it rests peacefully in the present, and the benefits of zazen lie within zazen itself. For this reason, we can “just sit”. “Practice and realization” does not mean realization after a series of practices, but is a phrase describing the fact that the practice itself is already in the state of realization. Can this be said of *vipasyana* practice?

Let me stop here after raising these four issues of discussion. I think that, to let the originality of zazen stand out, comparison to *vipasyana* practice is very useful. I intend to continue my study on this issue.