



# Polishing a Tile

collected essays of  
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# Zazen is not Shuzen

## Zazen is not Shuzen – PART I

In my Zazen Sankyu Notebook (1) [Dharma Eye Number 2], I wrote, “*Zazen as the body of text is always seeking to be freshly re-read with new footnotes under the renewed light of the present age. Those who practice zazen in this modern society are being requested by zazen itself to bring their own unique words to it*”. More than ten years have passed since I wrote that impression and I still feel so. I would like to share with Dharma Eye readers some footnotes I have made during these years. I hope my little effort to add new footnotes to zazen will inspire, even a little bit, the readers to creatively make their own footnotes.

Around early 6th century CE a strange Buddhist monk came to China from South India. Unlike other visiting monks, he did not bring any new Buddhist scriptures or commentaries. He did not translate nor give lectures on Buddhist scriptures, either. He did nothing that could be called “missionary work.” What he did was just sit all day long facing the wall in a room at Shaolin temple. So people gave him a nickname, “wall-gazing Brahman” (an Indian monk who indulged in meditation facing the wall). This monk was Bodhidharma who is now revered as the “First Ancestor of Zen”.

Except for his own disciples (small in number), very few could understand the true meaning of what he was doing by facing the wall. For example, a famous Buddhist scholar-monk, Nanzan Dousen (Tang dynasty, a founder of Nanzan Vinaya School), classified Bodhidharma in

a shuzen section when he compiled *The Sequel of Biography of Eminent Monks*. That implies that Dousen thought of Bodhidharma as a shuzen practitioner, one who engaged in meditation to attain a special state of mind called “*dhyana*” (Skt.; Jhana, Pali). But Dogen criticized Dousen, saying that such an understanding is completely wrong and irrelevant because zazen encompasses the whole Buddha Dharma, not a part of it. In *Shobogenzo* Gyoji he wrote, “*This was the utmost stupidity, which is lamentable.*” According to Dogen, the sitting zazen facing the wall that Bodhidharma practiced in silence is totally different from what had been practiced as zazen to train (*shu*) a meditative state of dhyana (*zen*). What Bodhidharma did was authentic zazen, which had been correctly transmitted through generations of ancestors from Shakyamuni. “*The ancestral teacher (Bodhidharma) alone embodied the treasury of the true dharma eye transmitted from buddha to buddha, from heir to heir*”. Zazen is not a training of dhyana (shuzen) which is one genre of Buddhist practice, like the Three Studies (sila, samadhi, prajna) or Six Paramitas (dana, sila, kshanti, virya, dhyana, prajna) . It is a quite different practice from zazen. In other word shuzen is a personal training to achieve a human ideal (small vehicle, hinayana) and zazen is an expression of something transpersonal or universal (great vehicle, mahayana).

I believe that it is crucially important for us as zazen practitioners to distinguish zazen as the entirety of Buddha Dharma from shuzen as one genre of it, even though these two practices look similar at a glance. We should avoid confusing them. That is why Dogen repeatedly emphasized this point (**zazen is not shuzen**) in his writings (*Fukanzazengi*, *Shobogenzo*, *Eihei Koroku*, etc..). It could be said that the bulk of his writings were written to clarify the criteria for discerning authentic zazen.

**Then, what is the difference between zazen and shuzen?** This is a very important question to consider when we practice zazen. Even if we are



sitting with almost the same posture, it does not mean the content is also the same (*“If there is a hairsbreadth deviation, it is like the gap between heaven and earth”* – **Fukanzazengi**). I am wondering how many zazen practitioners are keenly aware of the importance of this question.

I stayed at a small zendo in western Massachusetts from 1987 until 2005 as a resident teacher and practiced zazen together with a group of people. That was a great experience for me to deepen my understanding of zazen. Luckily in that area many people were interested in Buddhism and many Buddhist centers and groups (large and small, Theravada, Mahayana, Tibetan) were full of activities. Moreover, the colleges nearby all offered introductory courses in Buddhism and seminars on Buddhist philosophy. Those classes were very popular and many students attended them.

Because I was living in such a “hot place” of Buddhism, I was often visited by people who had already studied and practiced various traditions of Buddhism such as Theravada, Tibetan Buddhism, or Rinzai koan practice before coming to my zendo. I was, in a sense, forced to distinguish shikantaza (just sitting) from those types of sitting meditations. It is not a matter of showing off the superiority of my practice to the other but I needed to clarify what shikantaza is all about in comparison with other kinds of practice. Otherwise I could not fulfill my responsibility as a teacher of that practice.

In English speaking countries zazen is usually translated as “zen meditation” or “sitting meditation”. But this translation makes it almost inevitable that people think of zazen as an effort to control the mind and attain a certain state of mind by applying a certain method. This is exactly what shuzen means. Therefore I had to explain that zazen was different from meditation. When I talked about zazen, I decided to use Japanese word, zazen, instead of using English translations. Then it was quite

natural that people started asking me, “Ok. Then what is zazen? What should we do to do zazen?”

I realized that when people tried to do zazen based on the shuzen-like assumption they first physically sat down with a certain posture and then applied some mental technique (with emphasis on the mental technique). They thought they had to do some psychological work in addition to physically sitting. But zazen should be practiced within a totally different framework. So I had to clarify the difference between zazen and their deeply held assumptions.

Near the zendo where I resided there was a vipassana meditation center founded by S. N. Goenka in the tradition of Sayagyi U Ba Khin. This center, formally called Dhammadhara (land of Dhamma), was the first meditation center in North America (founded in 1982) among about 100 centers worldwide. The center consists of 108 acres of land and many buildings, including a bathhouse, two dining rooms, meditation hall for 200 people, a 60 cell pagoda, separate residences for men and women and a center manager's house. Every year around 2,000 people participate in their 10-day course of vipassana meditation. (for more information, see their website at <http://www.dhara.dhamma.org/ns/index.shtml>). I attended 10-day courses offered by this center twice.

During the 10-day course, for the first three days they practice anapanasati, focusing the attention to the physical sensations around the nostril and the rest of the period they keep “scanning” the whole body by using the cultivated attention to the sensations ( for the details of this technique, see *Art of Living* by William Hart).

Later I met Larry Rosenberg, a guiding teacher at Cambridge Insight Meditation Center and an author of an excellent book, *Breath by Breath:*

*The Liberating Practice of Insight Meditation.* He kindly invited me as a guest participant to the 10-day course for advanced yogis he led at Insight Meditation Center in Barre, MA. There I experienced another style of vipassana called “labeling” in the tradition of Mahasi Sayadaw. In this practice practitioners are encouraged to keep noting/labeling every activity all day long.

Before I came to America, I had experienced 5 day or a week long Zen sesshin many times. But I never had a chance to experience 10-day meditation retreat in Japan. Physically it was not so hard for me to sit for many hours for 10 days. But it was the first time I had to apply a certain meditation technique for that long period. These were practices such as exclusively focusing on the sensations around the nostrils, or keeping scanning the whole body for a long time, or labeling whatever is happening in body and mind. Metaphorically speaking, I used “mental muscles” a lot which I seldom use during zazen. And I felt mental “muscular pain” from overusing them. In zazen our mind pervades throughout, resting with the body that is sitting and breathing. It does not engage with any other activity. In zazen we do not intentionally use or actively control our mind, applying a certain method and technique. In those two types of vipassana practice I had a different “taste” of sitting, compare to the one I had in zazen. Where does this difference in taste come from? It was very informative to think about it. Of course this is but my personal impression as a complete beginner of this practice. It is highly likely that the “taste” will change as I deepen the practice further. And also it could be that vipassana is quite different from shuzen.

Another helpful hint for me in clarifying the difference between zazen and shuzen is Uchiyama Roshi’s definition of zazen. He says it is “*an effort to continuously aim at a correct sitting posture with flesh and bones and to totally leave everything to that.*” In his definition there is no shuzen element which assumes the central role of mind in shuzen

practice. In opposition, the *somatic element of zazen is strongly emphasized*. If we can understand Bodhidharma's "wall gazing" as an effort "to keep sitting with bodymind being like a wall, whatever happens, let it flow as it is, without clinging to or fighting against it", it is very similar to Uchiyama roshi's definition of zazen. In this kind of practice, to do zazen means just to sit solely aiming at a correct posture. There is no other need to reach a certain state of mind as a goal or to attain a special experience. Therefore we are freed from anxiety and frustration which comes from seeking for a special state of mind and experience which we have not yet attained and are able *to peacefully rest in the here-and-now as it is*, nothing special. There can be no competition or ranking based on what is achieved because there is no fixed attainment target. All those human struggles are totally suspended in zazen. That is why zazen is called the "*dharma gate of joyful ease*". We simply make a sincere and straightforward effort to sit zazen with body and mind all together without desiring to get something however lofty it may be. This is the way of zazen and in that sense it is quite different from shuzen.

This is easy to say but very difficult to do for us because we are usually driven by a desire to achieve something which does not exist here and now. When we hear that zazen is about no achievement, we immediately ask, "If zazen is that, how can I do it?" But this is a question exactly stemming from the framework based on "means and end" which is always behind the shuzen approach. It is nothing but an undertaking to grasp zazen using the shuzen concept. This shuzen attitude is deeply rooted in our way of behavior and thinking. That is why we should take a radically different approach to zazen so that we can *avoid changing zazen into shuzen*, consciously or unconsciously.

How can we clearly understand total difference in quality between zazen and shuzen?

## **Zazen is not Shuzen – PART II**

I often use “Magic Eye” to illustrate a difference in quality between zazen and shuzen. “Magic Eye” is a picture of a two-dimensional pattern generated by a computer graphics. When you continue looking at it in a certain way, a three-dimensional image emerges out of the pattern. In Japan, it has become popular thanks to a sales pitch – “Good for improving your vision.” Some of you might have already had “Magic Eye experience”.

If you look at a Magic Eye picture in an ordinary way, the three-dimensional image hidden in the picture will never come out. If you stop seeing it in the usual way, tensing the muscles around the eyeballs to focus on the object and find out something – if you relax those muscles, giving up the effort to find something and wait patiently with a soft-focused eye (this kind of eye is called “Magic Eye”), a three-dimensional image suddenly emerges from nowhere. When we try to see the image more clearly, thinking “Wow, this is interesting!” and return to the ordinary way of seeing, the image immediately disappears. The attitude, the way of seeing and what is seen are interrelated. There is no way of cheating this relation.

An interesting thing about this “Magic Eye” phenomenon is that, depending on how we see the same picture - with ordinary eyes or with “Magic Eye” – a totally different visual world unfolds. I don’t know how we can see a three-dimensional image in a two-dimensional picture, but I am sure it is not just psychological but a matter of the physical way in which we use our eyes.

I think “Magic Eye” is an interesting and helpful metaphor for the whole different world of experience that unfolds depending on whether we sit

zazen, in the shuzen way of using bodymind or in zazen way of “dropped-away bodymind.” In an old commentary to Shobogenzo, there is a phrase, “*When sitting zazen, zazen becomes the self. It is not the self at ordinary times.*” If we replace “self” with “bodymind,” it would go like this: “*When sitting zazen, zazen becomes the bodymind. It is not bodymind at ordinary times*”.

By extending the metaphor of the two types of eyes, ordinary eyes and “Magic Eye” and applying it to describe the characteristics and differences between ordinary bodymind and magic-eye-like bodymind, it is possible to say that shuzen is done with the former bodymind and zazen with the latter. With ordinary bodymind, we first set up the goal, control our body and mind in a certain way to accomplish the goal, and make a conscious effort to make result of our action match with the goal through comparing the two. Whatever we do, there is a basic structure of “I (consciously) operate my bodymind to accomplish a purpose.” In the case of shuzen, the purpose is to produce a certain state of mind which can be clearly described as “dhyana” and the practitioner applies a various methods (Dogen Zenji called it “means to brush it clean”), like counting breath, following breath, body-scanning, mental noting, etc.. With these methods, body and mind are consciously and purposely used to make progress toward the goal. It is an act of self-control – “I” control “my body and mind” – and an approach of actively doing something to achieve a goal.

In contrast, magic-eye-like bodymind is an approach of undoing what we do not need to do or what we should not do. Physically speaking, it is a state of deep relaxation with unnecessary tension totally released. Psychologically speaking, it is a state of resting ease in a relaxed way in which the ordinary way of actively running the mind is put aside (Dogen Zenji called it “give up the operations of mind, intellect, and

consciousness”). In Dogen Zenji’s “Birth-Death”, he wrote, “*Just letting go of and forgetting body and mind, casting them into the house of Buddha, being activated by the Buddha - when we go along in accord with this, then without applying effort or expending the mind we part from birth and death and become Buddhas*”. I think this is a wonderful description of magic-eye-like bodymind. Therefore zazen should not be a “job done by self-power.” Essentially zazen is not what we can “do” directly by exerting our own power. Keizan Zenji wrote, “***Just sit zazen. Do not fabricate anything. This is the essential art of zazen***” in *Zazen Yojinki* (Notes on What to be Aware of in Zazen).

To give zazen instruction, we often say, “straighten your back,” “keep your eyes half-open, half-closed” to regulate the body, “make your out-breath long,” “do abdominal breathing” to regulate breath, and “do not think anything,” “focus your attention on your breath” to regulate the mind. I think there is a big problem here. Zazen should not be something forcefully built up by imposing a ready-made mold onto our body-mind from outside. It should be what is naturally and freely generated from inside as a result of non-fabrication. There is a danger that a rote way of giving instruction is leading us to change zazen into shuzen.

In zazen, the spine should elongate by itself instead of our lengthening it by effort. I would like to briefly touch upon the topic of “outer” and “inner” muscles. When we try to lengthen our spine consciously, we use the “outer muscles” – the volitional muscles. These are designed for purposeful movement. When the spine elongates by itself, the body is using the autonomously-controlled “inner muscles.” These are the muscles of “being” – the non-volitional muscles – designed as a system of supportive movement (Jeremy Chance, “Alexander Technique”).



In many cases the natural function of inner muscles is blocked by unnecessary tensions of outer muscles. We must reactivate and fully develop the intrinsic functions of inner muscles by undoing unnecessary tensions in the outer muscles. The fundamental problem of human beings is that the outer muscles tend to take every chance to intrude where the inner muscles are supposed to play a main role. I think this is closely related to saying that zazen (inner muscle dominant) is not shuzen (outer muscle dominant).

Anyway, the principle of *“it is good to spontaneously become so but not good to artificially make it be so”* should be applied not only to spine but also head, eyes, hands, arms, legs and the all other parts of zazen posture, breath, and the mind. In zazen, we should not perform a special breathing method to control the breath but leave everything to the natural breathing, which is a life-sustaining activity of the body sitting with a correct posture. Dogen Zenji never tells us to breathe this way or that way. He just says, *“breathe softly through your nose”* or *“your in-breath and out-breath are not long nor short (leave them alone).”*

The idea of outer and inner muscles is about the body but I think we can also apply this idea to the mind. When we are absorbed in our thoughts, thinking of this or that – as usual – it is a function of “outer-muscle mind.” In everyday expression, we say “use your head.” In contrast, “inner-muscle mind” functions to support the appearing and disappearing of thoughts at the basic level. It enables intuition, awareness, and mindfulness to arise. Here again in zazen, we can say that we are calming down an excessive activity of outer-muscle mind and activating and manifesting the function of inner-muscle mind which has been suppressed. Therefore as Dogen Zenji said, *“stop measuring with thoughts, ideas and views.”* We should avoid bringing the “side job” of various meditation techniques like the four foundations of mindfulness, Sun

meditation, Ajikan meditation and so on, into zazen. When we engage in these meditation techniques, our mind inevitably becomes active and is dominated by “outer-muscle mind.” In zazen, the mind is dominated by “inner-muscle mind.” It is not focused on any particular spot. It evenly and softly permeates inside and outside the body, calmly receiving sensory inputs (including all kinds of thoughts) with equanimity. It suspends any reaction and control against the inputs whatever they may be.

So far I have been using strange metaphors like “Magic-Eye-like bodymind” and “outer muscle, inner muscle.” I did this to help you become familiar with the zazen approach in which we practice zazen as zazen, not as shuzen. For us the shuzen approach is much easier to grasp than zazen approach and we are much more familiar with it. Because it’s difficult to understand and unfamiliar, we often lose sight of shuzen being totally different from the zazen Dogen Zenji recommended so highly.

As a result, we are actually doing shuzen very hard believing it is zazen or zazen becomes “a dead letter,” a matter of appearance, or just an imitation of the form. I think something has to be done to change such a sad situation. It is the main reason why I started writing this article.

Of course, I do not have an ultimate answer to the problem. As I quoted earlier, “*when we sit zazen, zazen becomes bodymind.*” I am now exploring one step further to discover what kind of bodymind arises during zazen and what we should do in order to have such a bodymind. Zazen is not just a training or exercise for us to attain some preferable goals but a spiritual practice of “immediately entering into Buddhahood.” I really hope that we can open up the way we, today, can practice such zazen as a template of following what the buddhas and ancestral teachers practiced .

# Zazen is not Shuzen

Zazen is not a method which we can learn or master by studying it or following a manual. In his “*Universal Recommendation for Zazen*,” Dogen writes that zazen is not shuzen, and he repeats the statement in some of his other writings. Shu means “learning” and zen means Zen, Chan or dhyana. Together, shuzen means “learning zen.” Shohaku Okumura translated shuzen as “step by step meditation.” It's about some special state of mind which we can attain by applying some method to the mind and body.

We are very familiar with shuzen-style learning. In areas like sports, we learn from instructions, and there may be a teacher or a judge that decides whether we got it. In language learning, there are beginning and intermediate levels, and if we take a test and pass, we can go on to the next level. Dogen clearly said that zazen is different from shuzen. If so, how should we practice zazen?

In Shobogenzo *Shoji* (Birth and Death), Dogen writes that the way to become buddha is not by using force nor expending the mind. Just making simple, naive effort is not good in this context. The more we make naive effort, the farther we are away from the right track.

For example, in zazen, we take it for granted that an instructor says, “Straighten the back. Cross your legs. Eyes at 45-degrees.” We are like an operator operating a machine, like a human merged with a robot. We have this model behind us when we interpret instructions for zazen. This is shuzen, isn't it?

This became my koan six or seven years ago. I was working very hard to do zazen, but I realized that I was just doing shuzen. Effort is necessary, but somehow it's a different kind of effort. One day I had a thought: what about the Buddha under the bodhi tree? When Buddha first sat under the bodhi tree, there was no manual. We have to think about what brought him to the bodhi tree. What did he do before that? According to legend, there was an episode right after he left the palace where he tried yogic meditation under a master. He learned the technique and quickly attained the goal of stopping the mind, but it wasn't what he was looking for. Then he shifted his practice to the body, and did ascetic practice. He did it very thoroughly, almost dying, but he realized this was not the right way to nirvana. He did all the ready-made methods available in those days, learning them from the teachers, but he was not satisfied with those things and he didn't solve his fundamental questions. He had nothing any more.

When he sat down under the tree, he did something very new, not based on a method or manual – something more spontaneous, more natural. By trial and error, he gradually learned how to sit in a stable way by paying attention to how he felt in the sitting posture. He learned how to be with the body and mind, without doing anything artificial or intentional. He gave up and surrendered, and that's the origin of our zazen. There's a big difference between what he did before and what he did under the bodhi tree. He tried all the shuzen types of practice and saw their futility; from this, zazen emerged.

When we do zazen as shuzen, we try to order mind and body to obey instructions from outside – usually without getting agreement from the body and mind. Without any negotiation or permission from the mind and body, no wonder they go against our instructions.

For instance, in order to make the back straight, we usually try to do it by moving the back itself, but that often results in a bad shape or posture.

**The shape of the back should be a result, not a cause. How do we make the back naturally straight?** *We have to pay attention to the body part below the back: the pelvis.* Based on the feeling of the pelvis on the cushion, the back naturally becomes straight. The shuzen approach is to always try to accomplish something directly, but for zazen it should be an indirect procedure.



# Nothing to attain, Nothing to enlighten

my footnotes on Zazen 3

<http://global.sotozen-net.or.jp/eng/dharma/pdf/30e.pdf>

We, as ordinary human beings, are always seeking for something that will give us self-satisfaction. In the Japanese Buddhist tradition, this way of being is called “*bonpu*.” It literally means “an ordinary person.” It is so difficult for us as *bonpu* to become relaxed or restful because we are constantly seeking for something. This pattern of restlessness is so deeply rooted in us that we naturally feel zazen practice as something very unsatisfying, disappointing, and nonresponsive. This might sound strange, but in zazen we as *bonpu* are satisfied with this unsatisfactoriness, or we rest in deep peace with uneasiness. That is exactly what zazen is all about. It is the most wonderful thing about zazen. It is, of course, very hard for us as *bonpu* to understand and accept this. But it is, above all, important to sincerely study and wholeheartedly practice this kind of zazen without distorting it. When we start zazen practice, we should clearly understand this point beforehand.

While we are sitting in zazen, we definitely have a feeling of disappointment and unsatisfactoriness, a sense of uncertainty or fruitlessness. We think, “I am working so hard but I’m not experiencing the ‘response’ or ‘effect’ that I wish. Maybe I am doing something wrong. Maybe my effort is not enough. Or maybe I am not suited for

zazen...” These kinds of doubts and questions arise one after another in our mind. At that time we feel at a complete loss, thinking, “Should I keep doing such an unresponsive thing or not? Is not this a waste of time?” But that is totally all right for zazen. Rather, it is a good sign that we are doing zazen in the right direction.

Buddhism teaches that we human beings cannot be fully satisfied after all, however hard we strive for it. I think that is the true meaning of the word dukkha in Sanskrit which is the first truth of Four Noble Truths. This word is often translated as “suffering” but it should be understood as a description of the fundamental fact in life that it is impossible for us to get ultimate satisfaction in this transient world.

When this feeling of unsatisfactoriness is driving us, we are never able to be settled and rest in peace and relaxation at the bottom of our heart. We need to let go of our deep-rooted tendency to look for exciting experiences to fill up the empty feelings of unsatisfactoriness or to try to distract ourselves from confronting unsatisfactoriness by indulging in all kinds of diversions. And we also need to settle down to unsatisfactoriness itself without trying to change it. To do zazen, we should clearly and deeply admit that there is no other way to authentic peace and just sit down with unsatisfactoriness.

In Shobogenzo Genjokoan, Dogen Zenjisaid, “*When dharma does not fill your wholebody-mind, you may assume it is already sufficient. When dharma fills your body-mind, you feel something is missing.*” This means that when we are sincerely practicing zazen while feeling somehow unsatisfied, dharma actually fills our mind-body beyond consciousness. So we should sit zazen being completely reassured, trusting zazen, however disappointing it may appear to our consciousness. On the contrary, when we feel zazen satisfying us, we should think, “I have



slipped away from zazen” because we have created an unguarded moment by being caught up in pleasant thoughts.

Dogen Zenji says in *Shobogenzo Genjokoan*, “*When Buddhas are truly buddhas, they do not necessarily notice that they are buddhas. However, they are actualized buddhas, who go on actualizing Buddha.*” So when we are practicing zazen without consciously feeling that we are realizing the Way, we are actually realizing the Way, perfectly and fully receiving all the benefits of zazen apart from what we think or feel about it. Zazen cannot see the result or effect of zazen ( the realization of the Way) as an external object. Zazen and the realization of the Way have such an interesting relationship with each other. For example, when we are in deep sleep, we are not thinking we are sleeping. But that is totally fine with sleep. We are, in fact, perfectly sleeping (The fact that we never care about whether we are sleeping or not is a proof that we are truly sleeping. If we care about it, it means we are not really sleeping). We are receiving all the benefits of sleep, for instance, rest for body, brain, and central nervous system, renewal of the cells, etc... We have not yet understood everything about sleep – sleep is far deeper than our current understanding of it. Therefore, what we need to do is just to sleep peacefully. In this sense, zazen very much resembles sleep. Religiously speaking, zazen is to awaken from the sleep of fundamental ignorance. It is very interesting that sleep is a very useful metaphor to understand zazen.

As we cannot see ourselves sleeping while we are sleeping, we cannot see zazen as a whole from outside while doing zazen. Even though we cannot see it as an object, sleep is perfectly happening as sleep and zazen is perfectly happening as zazen. We should understand this fully and clearly.

What we can become consciously aware of is not the totality of zazen. **Zazen is much bigger and much deeper than the territory of conscious grasping.** Its size and depth is beyond our imagination. Its subtlety is beyond our scope. When we do zazen, we should put a higher priority on what is quietly happening beyond our knowing by perceiving and thinking than on what we can experience consciously. This is very distressing for us who live with the assumption that what we can perceive is all that exists. As humans we deeply desire to know everything, to be satisfied by understanding everything. Therefore, it is unbearable that, however hard we practice zazen, we cannot expect to see the results and effects of the effort ourselves. Usually we can only feel satisfaction, fulfillment, pride and so forth only when we can clearly see the results and effects of our effort. Nevertheless, in the case of zazen we cannot do it. So zazen is exactly “to have all our efforts for nothing.” So we have tremendous difficulty in finding a positive reason to do zazen. Then how can we motivate ourselves to do zazen? **Nothing to gain.** Nothing to enlighten. Nothing to satisfy us.... There is absolutely nothing in zazen. We can never find the meaning or reason to sit zazen when we look at zazen from a bonpu’s viewpoint.

We feverishly and busily move around, always figuring out how to manage things so that we can get the maximum profit with the minimum effort and gain what we want with the least labor. But we should ponder on how much happiness we enjoy by gaining those “profits” in that way. Shouldn’t we calm down and deeply reflect upon this matter? We cannot help but feel empty and lonesome in living out our whole life restlessly like that. This feeling makes us aspire to do something completely different, without any specific reason, even for a short time. Kodo Sawaki Roshi said, “*Stop being restless and have a short break.*” We certainly have something within us which encourages us to move in this direction. This kind of encouragement does not come from rational and utilitarian

reasoning, an idea of “I will try zazen because it is good for something.” It is a kind of “gut feeling,” a strong call stemming from a deeper part of our existence beyond intellectual explanation. I think we cannot find an answer to the question of “Why do you do useless zazen?” without getting access to the source of this gut feeling.

We are, as a whole, a part of nature. We usually ignore this and overuse our “human mode,” or *bonpu*, way of acting. That is why we are sometimes called to come back and be a part of nature by taking a break from “human mode” and becoming nature itself. When we are sleeping, we are in that state. (Here is the metaphor of sleep again.) This is true rest for human beings. Zazen is exactly an activity which actualizes this in the purest way.

In his book titled *The Prayer*, Father Ichiro Okumura, a Japanese Carmelite, quotes Ms. Toshiko Takada’s poem titled “Empty Bench”.

### **Empty Bench**

*Mother and her child*

*All day long, frequently*

*They talk to each other*

*But not so as expected*

*They are not so often*

*Engaged in a true talk*

*Therefore on the way back home from  
shopping*

*Or after doing laundry*

*Even only for ten minutes*

*Getting out of the house*

*Let us have a talk*

*For that, the gentle shade of a tree is  
waiting*

*For that, an empty bench is waiting*

Father Okumura gives his comments on this poem in the context of prayer and says, “Just ten minutes are enough. Getting out of the house, make a special time to talk to each other. Whatever is said in such a situation, it is a true talk. Here the fact they talk in that way is much more important than the content they talk about.” I think this is a very deep comment. Fr. Okumura is trying to say that a true talk is possible not in the content of the talk but through the concrete action of making a special time, getting out of the house, sitting down together on a bench in a park and talking to each other.

I would like to replace “true talk” in this poem with “zazen.” Zazen is “to study the self” (Shobogenzo Genjo Koan) – that is, to study how the true and original self is made alive by myriad things through engaging ourselves with actual practice with our body-mind. The reality of this true and original self has nothing to do with whether we practice or not. It is always with us. But, in fact, we are living our daily life while totally losing the sight of this reality and never making time to be intimate with the true self. That is why we need to make a time – even for a short time – to get out of the busyness of everyday life and to intimately contact the true self. That is why an empty zafu is waiting for us to sit down. **The most important point here is not the content of zazen – what you experience or what happens during zazen – but the fact that you carry your body-mind onto the zafu and sit zazen even when you feel “I am so busy that I cannot leisurely sit down even for a short time.” We do zazen for the sake of zazen, not for any other reason.** In that sense, zazen has no other purpose and is totally self-sufficient. Therefore, whatever happens during zazen, even what might be called “defilement,” becomes precious nourishment for zazen and is solemnly decorating zazen.

# The Whole of Zazen

My Zazen Notebook (16)  
Fragmentary Thought XXV

<http://global.sotozen-net.or.jp/pdf/dharma-eye/17e.pdf>

In preceding articles, I have often used the expression “*the whole of zazen.*” I would like to explain why I have expressly used this redundant expression and was not able to simply leave it at “zazen.” To explain this from the conclusion, the reason is that I wanted to emphasize that zazen itself fills heaven and earth; that zazen transcends our limit of knowing and is infinitely vast and deep.

Most people, if they are asked to draw an image of zazen on a piece of paper, would draw a person sitting in the lotus position. This shows that when we think of zazen, we only think of the sitting person’s body as well as the internal mental activity that cannot be seen. In other words, we only see zazen in terms of the mental and physical activities of one individual person. However, Dogen Zenji did not think of zazen as simply the capability of one individual person. As Kodo Sawaki Roshi said, “*Zazen is not one person shut up in one corner of the universe enjoying respite from his or her suffering.*” So, if we were to show Dogen Zenji such a drawing, surely he would say, “This is completely inadequate. We cannot possibly say that this is a drawing of the whole of zazen.”

In Dogen Zenji’s writings, we often see words such as “*throughout the ten directions,*” “*all things,*” “*the entire world,*” “*throughout heaven and earth,*” and so forth. He used these expressions to express an infinite

depth and vastness that cannot be measured. When Dogen Zenji speaks of zazen, he is actually speaking of it in terms of this idea of “entire” or “complete.” For example, in *Shobogenzo Yuibutsu Yobutsu* he wrote, “*The Buddhas practice simultaneously with the entire world and all sentient beings. If it is unable to do this with all things, then it is still not the practice of the Buddhas.*” It is possible to replace the expression “the practice of a Buddha” in this sentence with “zazen.” “Sitting is the practice of a Buddha,” so that zazen, which is a practice of a Buddha, must be “zazen that permeates all things.”

As is often the case for us, each of us sits zazen in order to attain satori or peace of mind as my own possession. Then in the name of “seeking the Way” or “practice” we each become obsessed with spiritual practice as a means of resolving our individual internal sufferings and in the process become more and more absorbed in a narrow, complicated world. From the beginning, there is no idea of “throughout all things” in this standpoint. This is nothing other than setting off from the small self and returning to the small self in a narcissistic sort of way. However, as Sawaki Roshi said, “*If there is even the slightest amount of personal interest, then zazen will never be pure and unadulterated.*” For that reason, no matter how ardently we practice in a way that is exclusively personal, then it is not possible to do zazen. For zazen to be truly zazen, there is this strict condition that will not permit compromise. From this basic formula that “Buddhist practice = zazen = together with all things”, when drawing a picture of zazen, it is necessary not only to draw the image of an individual person, but an image that includes the whole world.

Earlier, I touched on the subject of a painting of Shakyamuni Buddha attaining the Way, a painting in which not only is there Shakyamuni Buddha’s “Attaining the Way.” There is not only Shakyamuni Buddha

sitting in zazen, but the great earth, trees, sky, stars, and so forth are also depicted. It is not actually possible to completely draw “all things” and so it is also not possible to draw a perfect drawing of zazen. Nevertheless, this painting can be said to be a relatively good depiction of zazen. And yet, more often than not, we are likely to pay attention only to the figure of Shakyamuni Buddha and think that that is zazen, while considering the rest of the painting as simply the stage of zazen. In other words, we think of Shakyamuni Buddha as the center design of the painting and the rest as the background and in this way we think of only the central image as zazen. However, the correct way to appreciate this painting of “Attaining the Way” is not to see it as a dichotomy between the design (zazen) and the rest of the painting (not zazen). Wouldn't it rather be better to see the whole thing in a holistic way? In a word, this would be to see all things depicted in the painting as being zazen itself. It would appear as if the words Shakyamuni Buddha is said to have uttered when attaining the Way “I have attained the Way together with the great earth and all sentient beings” would be supporting evidence for this way of looking at such a painting. In short, this is to say that when Shakyamuni Buddha attained the Way it was not only the individual person Shakyamuni Buddha sitting in the lotus position who attained the Way, but the infinite 3,000 worlds – the whole Universe – that attained the Way.

If the zazen practice of Shakyamuni Buddha was not an individual effort that excluded “all things,” and rather was zazen which included “all things,” then those of us who are his disciples must be able to conceive of a zazen on a much more magnificent, infinite scale. Furthermore, we must study and practice zazen like Shakyamuni Buddha so that our practice is always facing the infinite, opening to everything. And yet, it would appear that nowadays, many people think of a drawing of practice of zazen in a way that is restricted to the small scale of one individual person. That is why I have used this seemingly unnecessary expression,

“the whole of zazen,” in an attempt to distinguish it from the common sense, limited way in which many people think of it.

This will be repetitious, but I would like to think a bit about this question using the example of a fish in water. For fish that are living and swimming in water, it is not possible to be separate from water. It can be said that because a fish is in water a fish can swim in a lively, active manner. If we try to apprehend the living nature of a fish itself, then we must not look only at the fish, but we must look at the whole thing including both the fish and water. However, even in that case, if we see the whole thing as being a combination of the swimming fish in the environment of water, it must then be said that we have clearly fallen into a dualistic standpoint. But rather than that, first there is one complete whole where there is no seam and what is referred to as a “fish” and “water” is expediently divided into two parts. Each part has different features and functions and appears to us for that reason as if the two things are independent. In Dogen Zenji’s *Shobogenzo Zazenshin*, there is the line “Fish are swimming like fishes,” and so the seamless whole is “the whole fish” or if this is expressed even more directly, the whole thing should be called one word “fish.” (Of course, this is not something fixed that does not move. The fish swims and the water moves, so this is a something that continuously moves in a fluid way).

Our usual way of paying attention to an individual object is in this case like treating a fish as if it were out of water – a dead, dry object. In Dogen Zenji’s *Shobogenzo Genjokoan*, there is the line “*If a fish leaves the water, it perishes at once.*” A fish without water is nothing more than an abstraction of a fish and as expressed in Wanshi Zenji’s *Zazenshin*, “*The water is clear right to the bottom. Fishes swim leisurely.*” There is a great distance between a fish swimming leisurely within limitless water and the imaginary fish that only exists within our conceptions. For that reason,



we must understand this verse “*Water clear to the bottom, a fish swims leisurely*” to express the real fish itself.

To think of zazen as only being limited to one person sitting is similar to thinking of a fish removed from water. This is nothing other than grasping the whole of zazen as an abstraction. In that way we only see the desiccated form of zazen that is dead and lose sight of the essential nature of zazen that permeates life in a fresh and lively manner. For a fish, the thing we call “water” is for us in zazen like being surrounded by “*throughout all things.*” This means that raw zazen itself which has not become something abstract is nothing other than the unlimited whole that comes from the mind-body of our zazen and “*throughout all things.*”

In sense perception psychology, it is taught that the scope of what we can perceive is quite limited. For example, people are able to perceive sounds anywhere between a vibration frequency of 20 per second on the low end to 20,000 vibrations per second on the high end. We are not able to perceive sound outside of this range which is to say such sounds do not exist for us. That does not mean, however, that those sounds do not exist at all. There are animals that can perceive such sounds and it is also possible to detect them by means of machines. In the same way, we have a horizon (a line that marks the limit beyond which perception does not reach) that limits our perceptions and so it is only natural that it isn't possible to grasp completely the whole of infinite zazen. No matter how we try to perceive it, the zazen we glimpse is only one part or one side of it.

Within his writings, Dogen Zenji discussed various aspects of the limitations of perception. For example, in *Fukanzazengi*, there is the expression “a glimpse of wisdom.” “To glimpse” means that no matter how hard we try to perceive the whole of zazen, we will never be able to

see more than one part of it. This is to say that with these words Dogen Zenji cautions us to be careful of feeling some kind of ecstasy as a result of getting into some position where we cannot move because we are caught by that experience. No matter how profound and refined the insight, or delicate and subtle the perception might be (that in itself is a valuable thing...), it is limited as it is a human perception and inevitably is partial or one-sided.

It is possible of course for us to widen our range of perception through training, although this is not an objective of zazen. However, as zazen deepens it can be a side-effect to the extent that it will be possible to glimpse many things that previously were unperceivable. However, we must not forget that this is merely one part of the whole of zazen. In *Shobogenzo Genjokoan*, Dogen Zenji wrote “*We can see and understand only to the extent our eye is cultivated in practice. If we are to grasp the true and particular natures of all things, we must know that in addition to apparent circularity or angularity, there are inexhaustibly great virtues in mountains and seas. We must realize that this inexhaustible store is present not only all around us, it is present right beneath our feet and within a single drop of water.*”

The whole of zazen is far vaster and deeper than perception. For example, “the flowing movement of fluid in the cerebrospinal cord system” that I mentioned in an earlier article, in itself is not directly an object of perception. It is only something indirectly perceived by passing through the minute movements of each part of the body. This cerebrospinal cord fluid completely unperceived by the human consciousness continues to flow as long as a person is living and makes possible the biological function we call perception. In the condition we call “zazen,” there is a tendency to shift the center of balance towards paying attention only to what we are able to perceive. However, in the same way as the flowing

movement of cerebrospinal fluid, the world [that supports perception and certainly exists even though by means of perception it can never be caught objectively] spreads infinitely, outside (behind?) perception. Not to think about this would be as foolish the Japanese proverb of “trying to see the ceiling through a hollow reed.”

The whole of zazen, or more straightforwardly “zazen”, is something that cannot be gauged by means of perception. (This is what Yakusan Zenji stated as “Not even 1,000 sages know it.”) Nevertheless, if we simply sit correctly in zazen, the whole infinite body that transcends perception will appear with nothing held back. *“When even for a short period of time you sit properly in samadhi, imprinting the Buddha-seal in your three activities of deed, word, and thought, then each and every thing throughout the dharma world is the Buddha-seal, and all space without exception is enlightenment.”* (Bendowa) As long as we are making effort to sit in zazen, it will not be possible to see outside the whole and so it is not possible to see the whole of zazen while sitting zazen. So, without trying to do what is not possible and entrusting everything with peace of mind to zazen and soaking in that wholeness, it would be enough to simply continue with the practice of letting zazen become zazen. That is why it is called “shikantaza.”

Let me add one other thing, isn't it possible to understand “casting off body and mind” and “body and mind cast off” in this context, expressions often used in connection with zazen? In other words, “casting off body and mind” is a depiction of being freed by means of zazen from the individual, private, limited body-mind that each person holds onto and becoming the universal, public, infinite reality. These are also words that express the realization of that. To speak of this experientially, this is to cast off the dualistic viewpoint of my body-mind (the central image) and the entire surrounding world (the background) and to realize the vastness

of the oneness of body-mind with the rest of the world. (Of course, this is not a result that we can see with our own eyes). “Cast off body and mind” is a depiction from another viewpoint of this same reality where the cast off body-mind is “this” (in Zen parlance “suchness”) that is functioning so vividly as the body-mind, as well as an expression of that realization. Speaking of this experientially, it is to realize with bodymind that the infinite whole is concretely unfolding in the body-mind. In both cases, they are simultaneously descriptions of an unperceivable condition that is manifested in zazen as well as a description in words of an experience of perception opening to that. In either case, “casting off body and mind” and “body and mind cast off” are welcome words that directly capture the body-mind absorbed in the infinite whole and the way in which zazen functions within such body-mind.

# Zazen

## in which nothing is gained

My Zazen Notebook (17)  
Fragmentary Thought XXV

<http://global.sotozen-net.or.jp/pdf/dharma-eye/18e.pdf>

In Shobogenzo Zuimonki, there are the words “*When you sit upright with no idea of something to gain or something to realize, then immediately this is the Way of the Ancestors.*” This is to state decisively that “You mustn’t practice zazen with any idea of gaining something or realizing something. This would be to split zazen in two and having any idea of gaining something while practicing zazen is absolutely not the Way of Buddha.” I think that this expression “nothing to gain” is the most important keyword in understanding Dogen Zenji’s teaching about zazen. For me, this concept ranks with “sitting upright” as being of equal importance in Zen practice. I have already written my observations on this in Fragmentary Thought “Zazen Only.” Here I would like to take up several topics that I did not touch upon:

1. “*Do zazen without gaining mind,*” this is not a matter of reaching a state of mind that is called “nothing to gain.” If this were the case, then this would be nothing other than attempting to add it to zazen and it would become of a practice of “gaining something.” Shouldn’t it be said that zazen in which both “nothing to gain” and “something to gain” have both been forgotten entirely is the state of “nothing to gain”? So “nothing to

gain” is really another word for zazen (zazen is nothing to attain) and it is not a goal we have in mind when sitting in zazen.

2. It is important that we must keep close watch so that in our practice of nothing-to-gain zazen we do not mix into zazen elements of practice that change zazen from “nothing to gain” to “something to gain.” More than anything else, this is first of all a fundamental attitude for those people who take on the practice of zazen and it is a matter of even before we begin to practice. Wouldn’t it be all right to say that the quality of zazen is in fact dependent on this attitude we have even before we begin practicing zazen? With regard to our actual zazen, the result is nearly decided even before we get up “on the stage”. When we sit down on a sitting cushion (zafu), with what attitude are you facing zazen? Isn’t there some expectation lurking in your mind that you will get something in exchange for practicing zazen? How deeply do you understand that zazen is not a means to attain something? In order that we can sit zazen so that just sitting zazen can itself be nothing to attain, it is necessary that we carefully check to see if this is the case so that we can purify in advance our attitude in taking up zazen.

3. Dogen Zenji said, *“Let go of it and it fills your hands; it isn’t a question of one or many.”* Sawaki Kodo Roshi said, *“We lose what is sought for. There is the wealth of ‘not-seeking’.”* The instant we grasp what we think we have gotten, we lose our freedom. So in fact, it is an illusion to think we will become wealthy by means of what we acquire. Zazen isn’t “wealth through gain” but studying and tasting for ourselves the teaching of the “wealth of not seeking.”

4. In order for us to be able to sit upright in zazen without gaining mind, we must foster a certain conviction within ourselves. If we do not, then no matter how much we shout in a big voice “Nothing to gain, nothing to

realize”, it will be limited to just a slogan at best and the contents of our actual zazen will tend to be an extension of the usual “gaining mind.” This conviction is *“Right now, no matter what the circumstances may be, there is no need to add anything and no need to remove anything. The ‘present’ has nothing lacking and nothing extra. It is absolutely perfect as it is. It is perfect and faultless with nothing lacking and this is precisely why the present can attain the present here as the present. To try by means of your own speculation and plans to do something about the present so that it is something else is nothing more than a useless escape. You are missing the present and only floating in the air because you want to escape.”* This is nothing other than the deep insight into the true nature of the present and ourselves. I think it can be said that upright sitting with no gaining mind is the concrete form of absolute acceptance that embraces all things as they are in here and now. Behind this, there must be the understanding that the present is perfect and absolute regardless of what we think about it and the “faith” that we can completely surrender ourselves unconditionally to the present. It is when zazen is backed with this “faith-understanding” that it becomes possible to do just sitting without seeking anything and without bringing in any objectives or intentions, something that is extremely pure but not easy to do. How, then, can we cultivate this understanding and faith?

5. Here, in the time we call the “present” there are currently conditions around us that include injustice and evil, poverty and war, violence and oppression, discrimination, and so on, conditions that we must address and change. To say that the present is absolutely perfect within upright sitting in which there is nothing gained does not mean that it is all right to close your eye to the situation indulging yourself by feeling good nor is it acceptable to approve of the present situation as being good, praising it as good, and thinking that there is no need to change it. Making all sorts of effort, it is necessary to change such a situation. We mustn’t use upright

sitting with no gaining mind as an excuse not to make an effort. To the contrary, we must be active in correctly leading the effort to make actual change. We must practice in such a way. More often than not, it happens that because the people who participate in movements to do real change are twisted and turned about by their inconclusive principles and ideals so that they are not in touch with the crucial reality, their attachment to their self-centered sloppy acknowledgements of reality, by bringing forward their own individual chaotic feelings (greed, anger, prejudice, and so forth) and acting on them, that finally they end up causing these social movements to become deadlocked.

I think that it is precisely those people confronting such situations where complicated problems are entangled who must temporarily pause and clearly let go of those earnest problems and concerns that they must do something about, and then from that vantage point perceive the reality as it is. They need to foster the power to deeply see through the whole thing.

Movement that doesn't know stillness is blind movement. However, if it is stillness without movement, then it is a dead thing. A hand that only grasps and doesn't know how to let go is restricted continuously by the thing it is holding. That said, if there is a fear of grasping things, then the function of the hand is not fulfilled. To forget returning to the source and only stay outside is to wander. However, to quit going outside and stay at the source is to stagnate. Stillness and activity, grasping and letting go, returning and learning, when these directly opposed activities are working together harmoniously, then free and unrestricted movement unfolds. Furthermore, within movement there is stillness and within stillness there is movement. To leave is to return...it is possible that there is a higher state where both can be totally unified. As in this example, the relation of between "no gaining-mind" zazen based on "faith/understanding" about the absolute perfection of the present



moment (where the present settles in the present) and squarely looking at the problem of the present and grappling with the change are independent to each other. But it is necessary within a person's life as a human to simultaneously harmonize those two in an interlocking way. The deepening of zazen prepares penetrating insight into social problems, in the manner that the work of taking on actual problems makes us keenly feel the need for more and more zazen, we must carefully study the way in which the path of coming and going will develop so that the two activities can mutually give energy to each other.

In present-day America, the topic of "engaged Buddhism" is frequently discussed and I have been inspired by this in various ways. To sit in zazen is itself certainly one social movement already and it is an expression of one's attitude in relation to society. For that reason, it is possible to have the opinion that to practice zazen is enough and any more than that is to transgress the sphere of a religious person. Yet, of those people who practice zazen, how many of them see the practice of zazen in the context of social criticism or criticism of civilization? Isn't it rather that they see zazen as a psychological method to adapt well to the current social system?

It is certain that the practice of zazen with nothing to gain is not a social movement that tries to bring about direct resolutions to social problems by means of that practice. If someone did think this way, then zazen would end up being sorcery. Zazen is only zazen, nothing more and nothing less. However, if the sense of tension is lost between the practice of zazen and the realities of society that are full of contradictions, then there is a great danger that zazen falls into a conservative activity just as if you were to shut yourself up in a silkworm's cocoon. We must acknowledge that in the past this very thing has happened and we can now see similar indications here and there.

We mustn't simply understand the "perfect nature of the present" in a bland, monotonous way and thereby jump to the conclusion that it's all right to accept the way things are and the maintenance of the status quo on the pretext that everything is all right as it is. To not insert your own convenience and preferences and to accept the way things are no matter what is completely different to accept and maintain the present with the secret intention to utilize it for one's own convenience. "The perfection of the present moment" does not teach us to indulge in the present nor is it to say that there is no problem either with society or us. Regardless of your discriminations, expectations, and hopes, it is clear that it isn't possible for the present to be anything else, including all of the contradictions in society as well as your own suffering and anguish. This is related to the solemn nature of the present.

6. Usually, when we think of "practice" in a commonsense sort of way, it is thought to be a means of somehow changing your present imperfect self and the effort involved in ultimately reaching your perfect self. However, as it says at the beginning of Dogen Zenji's *Fukan-zazengi*, "*The Way is originally perfect and all pervading. How could it be dependent upon practice and realization?*" Originally, the Way of Buddha is such that there is nothing that must be added, and furthermore, it is also not a matter of ending in an impasse with the way things are. **There is no need at all to do anything.** (Uchiyama Kosho Roshi's version in modern speech). This means that this sort of zazen is not a practice based on a transition model moving from imperfection to perfection. Rather, it is a practice based on a "deepening model" (perfection → perfection) in which the originally perfect "present" is more and more deeply verified at your own position here, right now. What is here referred to as "the absolute perfection of the present" is generally referred to in Buddhism as "The real form of all things" (The different forms of all things as they are is the form of true sameness or

equality) or “*The world in all its totality is never hidden*” (The myriad things that clearly appear in front of us are themselves the complete appearance of the original Self). Dogen Zenji expressed this as “the Genjo-koan.” This is a word which expresses the teaching of the absolute nature of facticity, regardless of whether we believe it or don’t believe it, or whether we practice or don’t practice, or our own personal circumstances. And so, it is not something “distant” that we attain after all the human effort involving faith and practice. Rather, it is the other way around, that faith and practice are already the human activity within this reality and so it is something “intimate” or “close.”

Nevertheless, as long as we live weighed down by our thoughts and emotions, it will not really be possible to have faith in this “absolutely perfect present.” “Thoughts” and “emotions” are not self-contained and so for that reason we are always and at all times creating the sense that in terms of the present there is something lacking or something extra. So, we inevitably perceive that the present is always insufficient and imperfect and we end up constantly viewing the present with the doubt “Is it really okay like this?” We cannot live peacefully in the present nor can the self settle down. With regard to all endeavors, we try to make them perfect. By making this effort a little at a time, or in a burst, we live in the imperfect present by counting on sometime getting a hold of “perfection.” What develops there is continuing to live your life constantly “either wanting something or fearing something” (the fear that you will not get what you want or the fear of losing what you have obtained). Sadly enough, however, no matter how much we manipulate or extend “thoughts” and “emotions”, it will not be possible to reach the absolute perfection of the present.

7. The reality of “the true form of all things,” “the world in all its totality has never been hidden,” and “the Genjo koan” cannot be grasped with

either thought or emotion. The struggle (end-gaining mind) itself to grasp such things prevents us from directly experiencing this open secret. It is only when we are just sitting, having let go of pursuing all of the imaginary ideas we have constructed in our head about “perfection” that it is possible to encounter the present which from the beginning has essentially had nothing extra and nothing lacking. For this reason, the expression “the true form of things” simultaneously indicates “reality” as well as the problem or theme we must practice and verify.

**Letting go of this gaining-mind, it is an absolute requirement for the self to be able to open itself and surrender completely to the present and for the present to be able to permeate the self with an unlimited abundance.** *To say “permeate” doesn’t mean that something new is tacked on. It simply becomes clear that there is the lively, animated self inter-connected with all beings. Zazen isn’t a process of aiming at getting something, but a practice of how to let the self be present now, which is a completely different practice in quality and dimension. “Nothing to gain” can be said to be an expression which helps clarify that zazen is not an activity that is involved in gaining something as a result. It is not for “having”, but for “being”.*

8. When we hear that zazen “is only sitting still without seeking anything,” surely there are some who think “What?! Such a simple thing! It’s a waste of time and energy to do that. To put value in such a passive and escapist thing is only something an idle person who has given up life in the world would do.” “Nothing to gain” can, in other words, be thought of as a condition where there is completely no challenge or worth, and so, such a person might tend to indulge themselves in a way that their zazen becomes “like a cat sunning itself on the veranda.” It may be that the above-mentioned criticisms are aimed at this sort of understanding of zazen.

However, zazen where there is nothing to gain is essentially likened to “*a dragon that has reached the water, like a tiger that has entered the mountain.*” (Fukanzazengi) If this kind of lively enthusiasm and impetus does not fill the body and mind, then this sort of zazen will not be manifested. In non-gaining zazen, the importance is placed on the way one is, moment by moment, rather than what will be gained as the ultimate result. In other words, it is a question of process rather than output and so, each moment is important in the same way, each moment cannot be neglected. It is because it is “nothing to gain” that “continual diligence” is asked for. Where there isn’t “continual diligence,” the mind quickly succumbs to “gaining mind” or laziness or negligence and upright sitting which is poised not to gain anything will crumble. So, the practice in which there is no gaining mind is the purest and simplest thing and is never simple. To the contrary, it can be said that there is nothing more difficult.

The time spent sitting with nothing to gain and nothing to realize may seem to be wasteful in market terms because nothing is produced at all. However, as I wrote earlier, it is there that the self can meet the absolute perfection of the present. It will permeate the self and so there is no greater gift than this for the self.

Zazen is not something for an idle person who has turned his or her back on the world. It is something that can be recommended to all people regardless of whether they are from the West or the East, regardless of gender or age. I think there is an urgent need for people to practice this sort of zazen and moreover to become people who can accurately and clearly explain this to other people.

(Note: I have written above about the “absolutely perfect present.” There is no obstacle in that perfect present moment continuously arising to the next perfect

present moment. Within perfection of the moment, there is included the power of hidden vigor that can bring forth the next perfect moment. It isn't that it moves to the next thing because it is imperfect, but rather because it is perfect it is always being renewed).



# Zazen and Everyday Life

My Zazen Notebook (18)

Fragmentary Thought XXVII

<http://global.sotozen-net.or.jp/pdf/dharma-eye/19e.pdf>

If I were to express my view of zazen in a nutshell, it would be the “*nothing to be attained*” of “*upright sitting*.” I think that if these two points are carefully examined they will cover most of zazen. Nevertheless, there is for me one other very important topic and that is “zazen and everyday life.” Unfortunately because of space limitations though, I will confine my remarks to briefly mentioning the main issues. I will wait for another opportunity to develop these ideas.

- Zazen is, to the end, the direct abandonment of everyday life. It is the extra-ordinary activity in which all activities of usual, everyday life have been brought to a stop. In every regard, the value of zazen exists within this extraordinary nature. Zazen can have a power to change our everyday lives from its foundation, precisely because we keep the continual practice of zazen that is thoroughly extra-ordinary in the middle of ordinary everyday life. Even if zazen is integrated into everyday life, we must not obscure the difference between zazen and everyday life. It is also a mistake, however, to cut off zazen from the context of everyday life and try to grasp it that way. It is necessary to discern both the difference and the link between zazen and everyday life.

- Zazen cuts vertically through the horizontal flow of everyday with its extra-ordinary nature. This means that the mechanically recurring nature of customary patterns is stopped for some time as I mentioned before. Unconsciously, without our awareness, our everyday lives that dawdle along are punctuated with a line clearly drawn that marks the beginning and ending. In this way, a rhythm and awareness is brought into everyday life. Life then has a cadence which is marked by means of zazen.
- To make time for zazen within the limit of the twenty four hours of the day inevitably means cutting back on other activities. In what manner will you do this? This question will stare you in the face as you reconsider what is really important to you. Rearrangement and streamlining your life.
- In zazen, the response to physiological and psychological phenomena such as sensations, thoughts, and feelings is different than the usual response. In zazen, we are clearly aware of them and yet there is no intention of doing something with them. It is only natural that this attitude which is fostered in zazen is also displayed in activities other than zazen. The things that are fostered through the practice of “no gaining mind” and “upright sitting” (i.e. the body/mind attitude of “shikan”) are also reflected as a matter of course in everyday life. There is a subtle ripple effect brought into everyday life by zazen.
- *“Making zazen as the standard, from morning to night, the attitude of the self is cultivated and refined, cleansed and purified. With regard to the unlimited changes that take place within our everyday lives, we reflect upon our attitude of living, being illuminated by zazen.”* (Sawaki Kodo Roshi) Zazen is one type of mold (a fundamental form) that molds and forms our outlook on everyday life.



- The way in which we live everyday is clearly revealed within zazen. Zazen is something like a tree that has sunken its roots into the soil of everyday life. In order to cultivate zazen as a great, stable tree, quiet dedication and effort in building up an orderly, respectable, and decent everyday life as its soil is indispensable. Without that, zazen becomes nothing but an escape from everyday life.
- All of the events in everyday life challenge us to choose between doing zazen or not. There is a mountain of excuses nearby for postponing or stopping zazen. Within this situation, it is necessary, in order to continue zazen, to have a vision with regard to your own zazen practice that is not borrowed from someone else. How will you foster that vision?

### *Conclusion*

Thus far, I have introduced my studies and investigations regarding zazen. There are still plenty of other themes I would like to look into, but I will wind up this series of articles at this point. On rereading what I have written, I think I've been somewhat forceful in my approach, writing things that were at times headstrong. This has given me pause for thought. I would like to sincerely thank Dharma Eye for giving me this opportunity. If these articles have given any of you who are interested in zazen food for thought, then this gives me great happiness.

Gassho.



# Shobogenzo Zazenshin

A Free Translation – Part 1

<http://global.sotozen-net.or.jp/pdf/dharma-eye/20e.pdf>

## **Introduction**

Thus far, I have been writing My Zazen Notebook in which I attempted to describe my various observations about zazen. I collected these essays in a series in which I freely expressed in my own way my personal experiences of zazen. Those articles were written in Japanese about ten years ago and looking back at them now, there are many places I would like to rewrite and new ideas have also arisen in the meantime. Nevertheless, I did introduce them in Dharma Eye, thinking that they were not a bad record of me in my forties.

What was the zazen that Dogen Zenji intended to encourage all people to practice? From now on, I would like to continue making the effort to express in my own words, as accurately as possible and with deep understanding, the answer to that question.

I have received an offer from the Dharma Eye editors to begin a series with a new theme. So, I would like to begin with a free and colloquial translation of Shobogenzo Zazenshin, a chapter that I have been giving teisho on once a month at a Zen temple in Tokyo. I have finished a series of teisho on Fukan-zazengi that took about a year and a half, choosing this text because I thought it was important for the practitioners to have an understanding of the concrete method of zazen. The reason that I have

chosen Shobogenzo Zazenshin next is because in this text Dogen Zenji focused on aspects of the internal attitude of zazen using Yakusan's "Beyond Thinking," Nangaku's "Polishing a Tile," Wanshi's Zazenshin, as well as Dogen Zenji's Zazenshin.

Since long ago, it has been said that this chapter of Shobogenzo is difficult to understand and even if commentaries are consulted, there are many places where there isn't agreement. Nevertheless, as many very important questions are addressed in Shobogenzo Zazenshin which we as practitioners cannot avoid, I will do my best to write about this text, despite my limitations.

The translation I have made is not literal, but rather one in which I have added words, lines and brief comments to help in understanding the meaning so that it can be understood reading the text as it is. I hope that with study and reflection on this translation you readers will be able to taste Shobogenzo Zazenshin for yourselves. Please send any questions or comments to me in care of the editorial department of Dharma Eye.

## **The chapter as an acupuncture needle to heal the fatal disease of failing zazen**

(What is the appropriate way of practicing zazen like an acupuncture needle curing the fundamental human illness?)

First of all, let us consider two treasured koans. This is because these two koans are the best to elucidate what zazen is all about and to teach us the standard for the correct way to practice zazen.

The first one is “Yakusan’s Hishiryō (beyond thinking)” which is number 14 in the Keitoku Dentoroku and number 129 in Dogen Zenji’s Shinji Shobogenzo.

One day, Yakusan (745-828) was sitting in zazen and a monk who saw him sitting said the following. (At first glance, this dialogue seems to be a question-and-answer between master and disciple. But according to Dogen Zenji, this was not the case. He thought both Yakusan and the monk had equally an excellent and deep understanding of zazen and that we must understand this story as a lively exchange of wonderful expressions that highlight zazen in their individual ways).

The monk said, “When you are sitting zazen in that upright, immovable position, you keep indefinitely leaving thoughts that appear naturally come and go without chasing after them or driving them away (just like clouds that float through the blue sky and then disappear) and carefully entrusting the body to the upright sitting posture. So, when sitting in zazen, our thoughts are not forming an ordinary thinking process of ‘me’ trying to intentionally think of something as our own project. Rather, it is the unlimited spontaneous function of Nature itself, like naturally breathing in and out while being deeply asleep. Therefore, it isn’t

possible to describe the thoughts during zazen by assuming in words that people have made up, such as ‘In zazen, I am thinking about such and such.’ However, if I had to say something, there is no choice but to use the interrogative ‘What? (nani in Japanese. This is not used to ask a question but rather a creative and original use of the interrogative form in Zen tradition to indicate what is beyond conceptual limitation).’ And so, I say to you, ‘In zazen, our thinking (shiryō) is (the manifestation of) What.’”

In response, Yakusan said, “Well, that is a very subtle way of stating your understanding of thinking during zazen. For myself, though, I would like to put it this way, focusing on the ground from which thought appears. ‘When we are practicing zazen such that all thoughts are let go of, it is only a matter of surrendering to each thought as it arises and disappears, which is not-thinking. There, any thought appearing and disappearing is the function of Life as not-thinking (fushiryō), which is prior to the division into self and other. So in zazen, thinking itself is (the work of) not-thinking.’”

Then, the monk said, “I see. It is certainly as you say, master, that not-thinking actually doesn’t exist outside the individual thoughts appearing and disappearing. The only way to express the nature of ‘not-thinking, which is not separated from thinking’ is by using the interrogative ‘in what way (ikan in Japanese. This is another unique way of using the interrogative to express what can not be expressed through words)?’ So I would like to say it this way, ‘Not-thinking (hishiryō)’ is (truly the lively, dynamic flow of) ‘thinking- in-what-way (ikan shiryō)’.”

Yakusan wrapped up this dialogue this way.

“You’ve really delved into this matter and expressed it very well. But there is not any more need to continue this dialogue with those dualistic terms such as thinking/notthinking and that is because ‘thinking is not-thinking’ and ‘not-thinking is thinking-in what-way.’ In a word, zazen is beyond thinking (hishiryō in Japanese, something that cannot be grasped by thought). So, the only thing we can do is to make every possible effort to actually practice zazen with both body and mind, all together. Zazen is nothing other than the stance of endeavoring in the posture of body-mind single-mindedly, prior to discriminative activity.”

With clear understanding, through own practice, of what this great teacher Yakusan Kodo taught with these words, we must practically study zazen. And we must also correctly transmit zazen to other people. This is precisely the way of studying zazen that has been passed down through an unbroken chain of people in Buddhism.

There have been many examples of people who explored zazen. And certainly, Yakusan isn’t the only one. However, his words truly stand out and are of the first magnitude. That was his expression, “thinking is not-thinking.” (Whatever thought there is is itself not-thinking). Thinking in this sense is the total reality of the self’s body /mind and not-thinking as well is the total reality of the self’s body and mind (Thinking and not-thinking have the same meaning). It is only depending on which angle it is looked at that we could say it is thinking or not- thinking. Both expressions equally point to the whole practice of zazen. Let’s look at the words which the monk said, “‘Notthinking’ is truly the lively, dynamic flow of ‘thinking-inwhat-way’” Certainly the words “not-thinking” point to our eternal, unchanging nature, to our original reality. But the monk was not satisfied with this and without stopping there he proceeded one step further and said, “thinking-inwhat-way.” Here, he presented his own lively view based upon the actual practice here and now. It isn’t that there

is no thought in zazen. Zazen is to continue aiming at a dynamic posture. And it is the activity of unending awakening to the reality of life right here, right now. Therefore, zazen as the activity of Life that is continuously going beyond itself (kojyo in Japanese) and is free with no stagnation. Consequently, if this monk is not a low-down fool who can only see what is right in front of him, someone who is content with a casual understanding of zazen, then he should have the power to dig a little deeper, questioning and clarifying zazen. It is only natural that there would be this kind of exploration.

Next, let's study Yakusan's words "beyond-thinking (hishiryō)". The working of beyond-thinking is, in other words, the function of Life as-it-is is completely transparent like a jewel, without a speck of cloudiness or muddiness (invisible). It is so free and unrestricted that it cannot be captured with a fixed shape. Beyond-thinking is beyond perception. Nevertheless, when we are in the state of "thinking is not-thinking" (practicing to realize our natural and original state of body-mind which cannot be grasped by thought), in other words when we are practicing zazen, then certainly we are sitting there with the life power of "beyond-thinking." It isn't possible to sit in zazen without using that power. The reality of beyondthinking has the clear structure of thinking/not-thinking.

So, within beyond-thinking, there is the structure of "whom" (tare in Japanese, referring to thinking/notthinking), and that structure safeguards "I" (ware in Japanese, referring to beyond-thinking). Since zazen is the activity of beyond-thinking itself ("I"), it isn't only thinking but rather zazen appears as zazen by means of the structure of "thinking is not-thinking". Then with regards to that zazen which appears, ultimately we can only say that zazen is zazen. So, in actual zazen, it is sufficient for us to completely dedicate ourselves to zazen. Here, there is no need to repeatedly discriminate about zazen as an object, thinking this and that



about it. To the extent we do such unnecessary things, we deviate from zazen. Zazen can never see zazen itself.

For that reason, zazen is something that cannot be measured by any kind of yardsticks, whether it is in terms of buddha, dharma, satori, understanding, and so forth. It is something that far transcends the frame of all conceptual and speculative limits and standards. It is immeasurable and boundless. Yakusan was a great man of zazen who belonged to the Dharma lineage in which such zazen with no limits had been transmitted through the intimate relationship between master and disciple, as if water had been poured from one vessel to another. He was the 36<sup>th</sup> Ancestor in the lineage of successive generations who had continued this unbroken transmission straight back to the source of the water, Shakyamuni Buddha. Tracing back 36 generations from Yakusan, there was Shakyamuni Buddha. It was precisely “thinking is not-thinking”, in other words, zazen that was correctly handed down in this face-to-face transmission. This is called “correctly-transmitted zazen” or “shikantaza.”

Nonetheless, there are fools these days who bandy about half-baked things. They say, “The aim of zazen practice is to attain a peaceful state of mind that is clear and in which there are no random, delusive thoughts”. Someone who sets the final goal of zazen practice at attainment of some personal skills or some temporary, special mental state has a crooked, half-baked way of thinking; it is a shallow understanding that doesn’t even reach the standpoint of someone who is practicing Hinayana Buddhism. What is more, it is far inferior to the two lowest ranks of the Five Vehicles: the Vehicles of human beings, celestial beings, sravakas, pratekya-buddhas, and bodhisattvas. That crowd can definitely not be called “people who study the Buddhadharma.” Unfortunately, there are now many people in China who practice with

this way of thinking. I can't help but feel sad that the correct way of zazen, which the Buddhas and Ancestors have carefully transmitted, has fallen into such ruin. There are also people who tell everyone, "As a way of studying Buddhism, zazen practice is an important tool only for beginners and older people. It isn't something necessarily practiced by the Buddhas and Ancestors. Once a person has had satori, then it isn't necessary to practice zazen. For those people on such a high level, walking is Zen and sitting is also Zen. For such people, the body and mind is peaceful regardless of whether they are speaking or silent, moving or sitting quietly. So, there is no need to be concerned only about the practice of zazen." Many people who proclaim themselves to be affiliated with Rinzai Zen think like this. The true teaching of Buddha has not been transmitted to them, so they are stuck in a truly poor understanding of the Buddhadharma. And so, they spew out these kinds of astonishing remarks that are flagrantly mistaken. "A beginner?" They talk as if they understand what a beginner is, but what really do they think it is? Do they mean someone who has just learned something? If we say "a beginner," isn't that everyone is a beginner? Is there anyone who isn't a beginner? These people don't understand the true meaning of being a beginner. Where does being a beginner begin and end? They say such things because they don't know the most fundamental point of Buddhism which is "Practicing the Way as a beginner is already the whole of original realization."

# Shobogenzo

## Zazenshin

A Free Translation – Part 2

<http://global.sotozen-net.or.jp/pdf/dharma-eye/21e.pdf>

The following is something that we really must keep in mind. In the study of Buddhism, there is a particular way to study the Dharma that must not be avoided and that is: as long as we practice at all, we must exert ourselves to the utmost in zazen, regardless of whether we are beginners or veteran practitioners. The fundamental point that must serve as the model and bastion for the practice of zazen must be: “The practice of being a buddha (=zazen) without seeking to become a buddha.” The practice of being a buddha, in other words the practice of zazen, is selfsufficient and complete of itself and so it is not a practice to make an extra effort to newly become a buddha from now on. So, truth as-it-is, with nothing whatever lacking, is manifesting itself as the conditions of right here and now (koan genjo). Zazen is already the actual practice of the buddha by means of the body-mind and so there is absolutely no room for the unnecessary intention to become a buddha to enter in. We mustn't view the practice of zazen as the cause and becoming a buddha as the result by dividing the two into before and after. (The non-interaction, fuego, of sitting buddha zabutsu and becoming buddha sabutsu).

At the same time, however, when we can let go of a dualistic way of thinking, which works like a cage and net catching and keeping birds and

fish and restricts our freedom, there isn't the slightest hindrance between sitting buddha (= practicing buddha = body-buddha = zazen) and becoming a buddha. There is no problem at all in saying that sitting buddha is becoming buddha itself (the interaction, ego, of sitting buddha and becoming buddha).

Thus, when we are totally free of the restrictions of words and concepts (the dropping off of both interaction and non-interaction), from the far distant past until the present day, zazen always has this power to freely enter the world of buddhas as well as the world of demons. It also has the vastness to crossover and fill in our activities like walking forward or backward, and all ditches and valleys (See Bendowa).


[This is the first part of Zazenshin and concludes Dogen Zenji's commentary on the story of Yakusan's "Beyond Thinking", which belongs to the Soto dharma lineage.]

Next, Dogen Zenji refers to a story belonging to the Rinzai dharma lineage called "Nangaku Polishes a Tile" and he explains the essential nature of zazen as understood within the Rinzai lineage. The result is that Dogen Zenji shows the source of both schools of Zen to be the same: the correct practice of zazen.

[The following is a further exploration of the correct way to do zazen by referring to the story "Nangaku Polishes a Tile.]

**Kozei Daijaku Zenji, namely Baso Doitsu (709-788), practiced the Way under Nangaku Daie Zenji.** (Dogen Zenji uses Baso's honorific name and we can see from this that Dogen Zenji thought very highly of him.) **Baso had deeply experienced and realized the Zen tradition, having received the Mind Seal directly from his master (true mind-**

**to-mind meeting of master and disciple) and after that he always practiced zazen earnestly.** This proves that the viewpoint criticized by Dogen Zenji earlier that “Zazen is a practice for beginners” is totally a mistake. In other words, the mondo that develops between these two Zen figures isn’t a shallow story in which Baso is mistakenly sitting zazen with the intention of becoming a buddha and his master Nangaku cautions him because of that. We must understand this story in such a way that it highlights two people who are equals and who have both gotten to the essence of zazen and then cooperate together to express the true nature of zazen. So, Dogen Zenji is, in the same way he did with the earlier story of Yakusan and the monk, examining through their dialogue, which is not simply questions and answers, as an exchange using different expressions, between two standpoints about the true nature of zazen.

**One day, Nangaku went to Baso’s place and addressed him in the following way: “Virtuous monk!** (Notice the honorific is being used. This form of address would be too polite if a teacher were using it to his disciple). **I understand that you are earnestly doing zazen as a concrete picture (=specific form, manifestation or expression) of ‘What’** (this can be pointed out only by using the interrogative because it is beyond all sort of descriptions with words).” We must understand the Sino-Japanese character used here “” as “form”, “figure”, or “picture” and it does not mean “intention” to think of something that does not exist now. So, we must read Nangaku’s statement not as a question but as an affirmation of Baso’s zazen as a picture of “What.”

Quietly considering this question, we must deeply investigate into this through actually practicing zazen. Is there some other purpose we must aim for that goes beyond zazen? Is there something outside of zazen that we must intend for that hasn’t been expressed yet? Or, is it that there

must be no intentions which exist “beyond” or “outside of” zazen? Or, is Nangaku asking: When we are sitting in zazen, what sort of picture is being realized? We must think about such things and clarify them.

(There is the story of Sekko who loved dragons and decorated his room with sculptures and paintings of dragons, but when a real dragon came to visit him, he fainted). We must proceed beyond the level of loving carved dragons (=sitting buddha) to the level where we love real dragons (=becoming buddha). We must study the fact that both carved dragons as well as real dragons have the same capability to make clouds form and rain fall. We mustn't think that something far away (=becoming buddha) is valuable. We mustn't think of something far away as being worthless, either. Rather, we must be familiar with and master things that are far away. Also, we mustn't look down on things that are close (=sitting buddha=zazen). We mustn't value things that are close. We must be familiar with and master things that are close. We mustn't disparage things we see with the eyes (=close). We mustn't esteem things we hear with the ears (=far). We mustn't disparage things we hear with the ears. Without leaning either way, we must make the eyes and ears sharp and clear. This concludes Dogen Zenji's comments on Nangaku's first statement.

**Then, Baso answers, “Yes, zazen is certainly a picture of making a buddha.”** We must clearly understand this expression and penetrate it. No matter what happens, we must say this expression is “making a buddha”. This is to say that you are being made into a buddha by zazen. It is also saying that you are making a buddha through practicing zazen which is a form of being a buddha.

Furthermore, this statement is saying that the tangible form of buddha is appearing in each moment, one after the other during zazen. “A picture of

making a buddha” is the form of “dropping off body -mind” (emptiness) itself. The dropped-off body-mind is actualized as a picture of making a buddha. In this way, there are various aspects of this fact of making a buddha. The picture of making a buddha implies, in a sense, that a zazen practitioner is being dragged around by this form or picture called zazen and getting tangled up in it.

This is something we must know all about. Baso is saying that surely zazen is a picture of making a buddha. Zazen is always a tangible picture of making a buddha. And then, that picture must come before becoming a buddha. (This is because I am being made into a buddha by the work of the picture=zazen). That picture must also come after becoming a buddha (because I am verifying the reality of the originally being a buddha by doing zazen=picture). And also that picture exists exactly at the same moment of becoming a buddha (because the tangible form of buddha is appearing in zazen).

Now, let’s try posing the following question: How much ‘making buddha (sabutsu)’ is entwined (katto) around this one picture, in other words, this concrete form of zazen? It isn’t possible for a person sitting in zazen to be conscious of the totality of zazen itself. In fact, even if it isn’t possible to be conscious of this, all kinds of “making buddha” is entangled with this picture. It is by means of entanglement and further entangling this entanglement and continuing this entanglement that zazen continues to be zazen. At that time, the entanglement that each branch of every making buddha makes up is certainly the whole of making buddha itself. Each branch is the realization of each picture. It is impossible for one picture to circumvent this entanglement (zazen and making Buddha are two sides of the same coin). If you go ahead and try to avoid this entanglement, in short, if zazen and making buddha are separated, then the life of making

buddha is immediately lost. Losing life is, however, also one of the pictures.

**Nangaku then picks up a tile and starts to polish it on a rock. Daijaku (Baso) then says, “Master, I understand that you are polishing a tile to demonstrate that in zazen we are solely doing what can only be indicated as the interrogative ‘What’ because it is beyond all sort of descriptions with words.”** (On the surface, it sounds as if Baso is asking, “Master, what are you doing?” But we must notice that Dogen Zenji doesn’t understand it that way). Anyone who saw Nangaku doing this would think he was polishing a tile. But that is only to see the façade. No one sees the true meaning of polishing a tile. That is why Baso expressed the form of his question about polishing a tile as “What?” “What” is the only way he could have said it. The practice of zazen that casts off all limits is surely the polishing of a tile. This world and other worlds are different, but in this sense of polishing a tile, there is a principle that never ceases. It is important to clearly decide that there is a fundamental point in humbly studying various kinds of work rather than only being attached to our own views as our own views.



# Shobogenzo

## Zazenshin

A Free Translation – Part 3

<http://global.sotozen-net.or.jp/pdf/dharma-eye/22e.pdf>

The next thing is something that we all must thoroughly acknowledge. (If we are stuck on what we see and are caught by our assumptions), regardless of the fact that we are meeting buddha from morning until evening, we will not be able to recognize buddha even though we see buddha and we will not be able to understand buddha either. In the same way, even though we see water, we won't truly know it; even if we see mountains, we won't be able to truly understand them. Even though the true nature of water and mountains and the self are not different, we only look at such things as objects dualistically with our discriminative mind. If you hastily assume that things and phenomena before our eyes are not doorways leading to profound truth, then it isn't possible to say that you are studying the Way of Buddha. You mustn't imprudently assume that there is no entryway within the task named "polishing a tile" into becoming buddha.

**Nangaku said, "Polishing (itself is) making a mirror."** (Dogen Zenji didn't interpret these words to mean "polishing to make a mirror," but rather that the action of polishing is, in other words, "making a mirror.") We must study the truth of these words and clarify them. In this expression, "polishing (is) making a mirror," there is certainly a

legitimate logic. The logic of the “genjokoan” penetrates these words with the implication that the reality in front of us is absolute truth. It certainly isn’t a fabrication, empty delusion, or a far fetched allusion. In “polishing a tile is making a mirror,” even though tiles are tiles and mirrors are mirrors, what matters most must be the action of “polishing.” If we study the logic of “polishing” with all our might, then we must know that there are many diversified examples of “polishing.” So, it isn’t good to make narrow or shallow assumptions based on particular points of view. Speaking of mirrors, there are ancient mirrors (kokyo, Seppo’s word) and there are bright mirrors (meikyo, Huineng’s word). In any case, however, they have all been made into mirrors by polishing a tile. If we don’t know that mirrors are made by polishing a tile, we wouldn’t have the Dharma teachings of the Buddhist Ancestors. We also wouldn’t be able to see and hear them speaking.

**Baso said, “Since polishing a tile itself is making a mirror, it is never possible to get a complete mirror as a result that is separate from the polishing.”** So polishing a tile is completely polishing a tile and that is thorough, without borrowing any other resources. For that reason, polishing a tile is independent and self-sufficient as polishing a tile and nothing else (i.e. making a mirror) is necessary; there is no room for such a thing. I should add that in polishing a tile, realizing a mirror is already there. Realizing a mirror is nothing but realizing a mirror and in between these two things (polishing a tile and realizing a mirror), there isn’t the slightest gap. The polishing of the tile itself IS realization of the mirror and this no-gap-ness is called “instantaneous.”

**Nangaku said, “It’s just as you say. In the same way that polishing a tile is complete and there is no need to wait for realizing a mirror, it is good to leave zazen as it is. There is no need to wait to become a buddha. Since zazen itself is nothing other than becoming a buddha,**

**there is no more room for adding ‘becoming buddha’ to it.”** We can clearly understand through these words that zazen is totally content only with zazen. It is independent and unaccompanied by anything. It is absolute. This is the logic that zazen does not become zazen by depending on becoming buddha. To put it the other way around, becoming buddha is absolute and is not something to be attained by means of zazen. Consequently, the point clearly comes out here that there is no connection between zazen and becoming buddha.

**Baso said, “Everything as-it-is is the truth itself.”** (We must be careful not to understand this as a simple question asking about Nangaku’s words for the teaching. He is not asking, “What, then, should I do?”) Thus, Baso’s words appear to be an earnest question about here (= zazen = polishing a tile), but he is also asking about there (= becoming buddha = realizing a mirror). Figuratively speaking, it is like a close friend meeting a close friend. In other words, these two people are not separate and there is something that continues on between them. What is a close friend to us (= zazen) is also a close friend to him (= becoming buddha). And so, “everything as-it-is is the truth itself” indicates that “zazen” (polishing a tile) and becoming a buddha (realizing a mirror) appear at once (simultaneously, instantaneously).

**Nangaku says, “I’m going to try to explain as best I can your wonderful expression, ‘Everything as-it-is is the truth itself’”. To sit in zazen is like a person riding in a cart.** (This is a metaphor to explain that sitting zazen and becoming buddha are one thing). **Riding in the cart, that itself is the important thing. There is no connection between becoming buddha and whether the cart moves forward or not. As far as you are riding in the cart, it’s all right to hit the cart and it’s alright to hit the ox.”** (Most people understand Nangaku’s words as a question to mean that even if you practice zazen, in the case

that you really are not able to attain satori, should we make more effort in the bodily practice of zazen or to train the mind? So they understand Nangaku to mean that we must stop being attached to zazen and that he was encouraging some sort of mental practice. But that isn't what Dogen Zenji thought.) Here, he says "the cart does not move". Actually whether the cart moves or not, both are "what is it?" (= nothing to say) For example, is water flowing the same as the cart moving? Is water not flowing a cart moving? It is possible to say that flowing water is not moving, but we mustn't overlook that we could also say that water moving is not flowing. The reason is that flowing is the original nature of water and so there is a logic for being able to say it as "not moving" (water doesn't change its nature) and there is also a reason for saying that water moving (= flowing) is not flowing (= not flowing, in other words, not moving).

(In this case, water flowing/cart moving are zazen, polishing a tile and water not flowing/ the cart not moving correspond with becoming buddha and making a mirror). In this way, if we study deeply the words of Nangaku, "the cart doesn't move" (this is usually read as "if the cart doesn't move," but should be read as "already the cart doesn't move"), then we must accept that there is "not moving" and we must also accept there isn't not moving. It isn't possible to line these two things (the cart moving and the cart not moving) up and discuss about them. (They are completely mutual and complementary. If one side exists, the other side disappears. It isn't possible to have the question: how would they relate if they were both together?). This depends on "time." At the "time" when the cart does not move, we can't see the cart moving. At the "time" when the cart moves, the cart not moving hides. If the time is different, the names are different. In this way, the expression "already it does not move," doesn't only state about not moving one-sidedly. We mustn't

overlook the fact that the meaning of both the cart moving and the cart not moving are included in this expression.

# Shobogenzo

## Zazenshin

A Free Translation – Part 4

<http://global.sotozen-net.or.jp/pdf/dharma-eye/23e.pdf>

When Nangaku said, “Is it right to hit the cart or is it right to hit the ox?” he wasn’t asking to choose between hitting the cart or hitting the ox, like forcing to choose only between A or B. He wasn’t asking to choose which one is correct. (Putting this into the context of zazen, he wasn’t saying we must choose one or the other, based on the dualism of practice /realization.) No, he was saying that surely it can be “hitting the cart” as well as “hitting the ox.” It meant that “It is sometimes all right to hit the cart and it’s sometimes all right to hit the ox as well.” Does this mean hitting the cart and hitting the ox are the same? Or are they not the same? Since a person riding in a cart pulled by an ox is used as a metaphor for sitting in zazen and “person-ox-cart” is seen as one unified whole, then it is possible to understand this to mean that both hitting the cart and hitting the ox are pointing to practicing zazen in which a person is hitting(practicing) the ox-cart .

At the same time, however, we mustn’t overlook the difference between them. Hitting the cart is a metaphor of the practice of zazen and hitting the ox is a metaphor of the verification of becoming buddha. The two things are neither one nor two. It is a relationship in which those two are “not the same” and also” not separate.” In the everyday world when the

ox-cart doesn't move forward, there is no principle of hitting the cart. In the world of common, deluded human beings, there is no way of hitting the cart, but we learn through Nangaku's words that in the Way of Buddha there is this principle of hitting the cart. In the study of the Way, this is the important point and the place we must keep our attention on. Nevertheless, even if we learn that in the Way of Buddha there is this principle of hitting the cart, we mustn't simply assume that this is the same as hitting the ox. Regarding this point, we must closely investigate it. We must really delve into the principles of zazen (=hitting the cart).

Also, even though there is, in the everyday world, this principle that we would usually hit the ox when the oxcart doesn't move forward, we mustn't take it for granted that hitting the ox in the context of the Buddhadharma is the same way of hitting the ox as it is done in the context of the usual way of doing this in the everyday world. We must look into this question further and really investigate it. That is to say we must delve into the question: what is the ox in the Buddhadharma and what does it mean to hit or prod? Is it to hit a water buffalo? (This is the ox that appears in the koan of Nansen Fugan and Isan Reiyu.) Is it to hit an iron ox? (This is the ox that appears in the koan of Zengetsu Koen and Fuketsu Ensho.) Is it to hit a mud ox? (An ox referred to in the words of Ryuzan.) (These are the references to cows and oxen in famous Zen koans. The metaphor of the ox is a representative example of an expression used to describe the way of "making Buddha" which takes place within zazen). Shall we hit the ox with a whip? Shall we hit it with the whole universe? (This is to do zazen as the universal Self). Shall we hit the ox with the whole mind? (This is to do zazen with the whole mind which is "one mind is all dharmas, all dharmas are one mind.") Shall we hit it fast and furiously so that it reaches the marrow of the bones? (This is to do zazen so that it penetrates the bone marrow of our being). Is it to hit the ox with the fist? It is to proceed with such questions. Furthermore,

it should be that the fist hits the fist and there should also be the ox hitting the ox. When hitting something, we usually suppose that there are two separate things: the thing hitting and the things being hit. But here, this dualism is rejected. In zazen, this means that the fist hitting and the ox being hit are one, that the whole is all fist and that the whole is all ox.

Baso didn't respond to this. This lack of confrontation was not such that he couldn't respond because he could not find the answer. The correct way we must read this is that it isn't possible to express in words that "there is no making buddha other than zazen" and that he is completely avoiding saying anything about this with his non-confrontational activity. Baso's non-confrontation is based firmly on deep understanding the meaning of Nangaku's words "Is it right to hit the cart or is it right to hit the ox?" So, we mustn't fail to understand the true meaning of Baso's silence.

In Buddhism and particularly in the Zen world of mondo, we mustn't easily overlook the meaning of nonconfrontational answer with deep silence. Baso's nonconfrontation is like "Throwing away a tile and pulling in a jewel." (This is a saying of Joshu's which if we read literally means to make a choice. Here, however, in the same way as polishing a tile to make a mirror, it means that throwing away a tile and pulling in a jewel are the same.) and "Turning around the head and changing the features." (This means to replace the same thing with the same thing. The thing itself is turned and it is still the same thing. This is to say that no matter how Buddhanature is transformed, it is still Buddha-nature.) We mustn't snatch away this precious non-confrontation and sell it cheaply.

Nangaku teaches further and says, "Your study of zazen is, in other words, to study sitting buddha." By investigating these words (this isn't to memorize words and theory but to actually practice zazen with your



body and understand by thoroughly experiencing with the body that zazen is sitting buddha), we must swallow and digest by clearly mastering the activity (zazen) which is the core or essence of the successive ancestors. What is this “studying zazen” that is referred to here? It is absolutely impossible for this person who is sitting in zazen with all his body and mind to experience or understand this, but through Nangaku’s words, he/she was able to understand that studying zazen is no other than “studying sitting buddha.” If it is not those who have inherited the lineage of the correct Buddhadharmā, how will they be able to clearly say that studying zazen is studying sitting buddha? The following is something that we must really understand: the zazen practiced by someone who has just entered the Way of Buddha is the first zazen. Since the first zazen is the first sitting buddha, this means that there is no difference at all between the zazen of a beginner and that of someone who has been practicing for a long time.

“In words describing zazen, it is said that ‘If we study zazen, Zen is not restricted to sitting or lying down.’” In Dogen Zenji’s text, “if” should not be read as “in the case that” but rather as “now that” and “not restricted to” is not simply a denial, but must be understood to mean “beyond.” This is often the case and I have often mentioned it previously. This also applies to the usage here. What he is trying to say in this line is “Zazen is always zazen and it is different from an ordinary way of sitting as only one of all the various gestures of our everyday life.” It is sitting that transcends the usual form of sitting and so we mustn’t simply call it sitting but rather “zazen.” In that sense, we mustn’t discuss zazen as if it were the same thing as everyday sitting. The same thing can be said about lying down. When lying down is lying down buddha, it must be called lying down Zen and not discussed as if it were the same as lying down in everyday life. In short, when saying Zen, this isn’t restricted only to zazen, but refers to all activities imbued with the transcendental quality.

So, these words are saying that “Zazen is zazen. While it looks like a form, sitting or lying down, the ordinary sense of sitting or lying down is transcended, liberated, and cast off.” Through purely being transmitted with this sort of insight and firmly making it your own mastery, sitting and lying down (=zazen) will evolve limitlessly as your original self. At that time, there will be no need at all to try to find the dualistic separations and ask whether sitting and lying down and the self are intimate or estranged; there will be no need to discuss the distinction between delusion and enlightenment. Furthermore, there will be no room for human agency to intrude and try to cut off delusive desire by means of wisdom. This is because there is no object that must be cut off.

Nangaku said, “If you study sitting buddha, that buddha is not a fixed form.” (Here as well, we must understand “if “as “now that” and “not” as “beyond.” We mustn’t read “buddha is not a fixed form” as denying form). If we clearly convey what must be said, then it will truly be said like this masterly expression. In these words, Nangaku is saying that “When we study zazen, it is sitting Buddha that is studying and that buddha has a form of beyond-form.” The buddha that sits in zazen takes various ways of being from one moment to another. It adorns (embodies) with the transcendence of any set form (taking the form of no fixed form). Saying that “*Buddha is beyond fixed form*” precisely expresses the form of buddha. Since buddha is free of any limitations or constraints, is adaptable and without hindrance, it is perfectly natural that we cannot avoid the fact that zazen (=embodiment of beyond fixed form) is sitting Buddha. Since it is this way, we must understand that zazen isn’t the limitation into a particular form, but rather is the clear manifestation into a concrete form of the free, unobstructed buddha (Yokoyama Sodo Roshi said “*The sitting form is the advent of Buddha.*”) Stated another way, since zazen is the specific manifestation (adornment) of the formless buddha, we can state that “studying zazen is sitting buddha.” (When we

study zazen, that is nothing other than the buddha itself sitting in zazen.) In the “nonabiding Dharma” (this is a word similar to “beyond fixed form”, a way of not dwelling in a specific, fixed place), it isn’t possible to make a choice of throwing it away because it is not a buddha or of taking it because it is a buddha. It is precisely because the possibility of making choices has fallen away from the beginning that it is a buddha.



# Sitting Upright With Proper Posture

## Sitting Like An Infant

My Footnotes on Zazen (4)

<http://global.sotozen-net.or.jp/eng/dharma/pdf/31e.pdf>

### **The poise of an infant's sitting**

When we teach zazen we often show a photo of an austere Zen monk sitting zazen with upright posture. We begin by saying, "This is a model for zazen. You should sit like this..." I usually show a photo of an infant sitting on the floor. Here is a photo of an eleven-month-old baby. I think we can learn a lot about zazen posture from this photo. According to Zen master Dogen, sitting upright with proper posture (shoshin tanza in Japanese) is the A to Z of zazen. Breath and mind will naturally be regulated by establishing proper zazen posture.

Please notice that this baby shows no sign of contrivance or pretentiousness. We do not see any strain or lack of naturalness. The baby does not seem to be thinking, "I should keep my back straight!" "I must not move!" "If I sit nicely, I will be praised." He is effortlessly sitting comfortably. To borrow Dogen's phrase, he sits "*with no need for any expenditure of either physical or mental effort*" (Shobogenzo Shoji). Nevertheless he is sitting firmly grounded on the floor so that his upper body stands up beautifully and freely, extending in the direction of gravity. He does this because his posture has spontaneously emerged from within as katadori (form), and not as katachi (shape) forcibly imposed from the outside. Shosui Iwaki, a Japanese traditional martial

arts master, says, “Katadori has softness and flexibility. Katachi is stiff and lacks liveliness or principle. It is artificial, like a doll’s posture.”

In many cases, zazen instruction consists of a series of “how to’s” - how to cross legs, how to place the hands, how to drop the line of sight, how to keep the back straight, how to pull in one’s chin, how to settle one’s tongue, how to breathe, how to control one’s mind, and so on. With these “how to’s,” practitioners make a lot of effort to control all the body parts, the breath, and the state of mind by faithfully following those instructions one by one. That kind of effort is usually understood as “regulating body, breath and mind.” In this approach to zazen the shallow layer of the mind, the “conscious I” (the ego-consciousness, which is the product of thought), is trying to unilaterally give orders and force the rest of the mind and body to devotedly obey. It is as if it is telling them, “Because our instructor said so, you should do what I tell you without complaints or questions! That is zazen!”

This approach might work to some extent in the beginning, but eventually there will be many problems - “I can’t sit still because of so much pain in my legs!,” “I can’t do anything about idle thoughts. My mind is out of control,” “I am not good at zazen...” It is no wonder because “I,” which is only a product of thought, is trying to control everything else without getting any agreement, consent, or cooperation from the layer of the mind and body which is much deeper, wider, and wiser than “I.” It is quite natural that the practitioner will experience many kinds of resistance, rebellion, disagreement, and complaint one after another in the form of sleepiness, chaotic thoughts, uncomfortable sensations and so on. If one tries to win this battle by willpower, one is bound to fail. The practitioner will just end up hurting the body and mind by doing too many unnatural things.

## **Forcible action and spontaneous action**

Zen master Dogen calls this type of action go-i (forcible action). It means to do something intentionally, by force, aiming at certain goal. He sets un-i against go-i. Un-i is spontaneous action that emerges naturally in response to the situation beyond judgment and discretion. There is a common misunderstanding that zazen is done as accumulation of go-i. But Dogen says that zazen should be done by “letting go of both your body and mind, forgetting them both, and throwing yourself into the house of Buddha, with all being done by Buddha” (Shobogenzo Shoji). This means that zazen should be practiced as un-i. I show a photo of an infant’s sitting when giving zazen instruction because I hope it will prevent practitioners from practicing zazen as go-i. There is a sentence in the Bible (Matthew 18-3): ”Unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” Borrowing this famous phrase, I would like to say, “Unless you turn and sit like children, you will never enter the gate of zazen.”

So, how can we sit zazen as un-i? What path should we follow? That is what we need to investigate thoroughly.

Sitting with sit bones (ischium) Looking at the photo of the infant’s sitting, we notice that he is firmly connected with the floor through his pelvis. His spine-neckskull (twelve thoracic, five lumbar and seven cervical vertebrae), like the links of a chain, is freely stretched upward, supported by the solid pelvic structure. The points of contact between the pelvis and the floor are the two sit bones, right and left (see figure 1). In sitting, the most important thing is letting our body weight fall onto the best point of the sit bones. This determines the tilt of the pelvis, which in turn strongly influences the shape of the upper body and the balance of the whole body. Sit bones are literally “zazen bones.”

When doing zazen, we put a round cushion, called a zafu, under the sit bones. If we use a zafu of appropriate thickness – not too thick, not too thin – the outsides of both knees will easily and firmly touch the zabuton (square cushion under the zafu) or the floor (see figure 2).

Now please see figure 3. The line connecting the right and left sit bones (I) and the line connecting the anus (A) and sexual organs (S) meet at C. If we draw a line from C to the top of the head (TS), it defines a central axis of the body. It is crucial to sit so that the line C-TS extends up and down freely and vertically. Of course, this line does not exist as an anatomical entity. It only exists as a felt-sense to the sitter. The isosceles triangle KCK' (K and K' are the knees) is the foundation supporting the central axis.

For this to happen, it is necessary to let the body weight fall vertically straight onto the proper points of the curved surface of the sit bones. When we do this, our body's innate self-regulatory mechanism allows the upper body to naturally elongate upward. It is necessary to have the muscles around pelvic joints, pelvis, spine, neck and shoulders deeply relaxed so that they do not hinder the spontaneous adjusting movement of the whole body.

Slowly rolling the pelvis forward and backward on the curved surface of the sit bones, we carefully look for point 2 in figure 4, the point where our body weight is supported most properly. If our body weight is supported at point 1, the pelvis tilts too far backward. This results in rounding of the lumbar and thoracic area, sliding down of the ribcage, compression in the abdominal area, pulling in of the chin, and closing of the eyelids. If our body weight is supported at point 3, the pelvis tilts too far forward. This results in bending backward at the lumbar and thoracic area, sliding up of the ribcage, protruding of the abdominal area, pushing



out of the chin, and opening of the eyelids. These connected changes in various body parts are induced naturally by the movement of the pelvis, as a chain reaction. The body should be flexible enough to allow these changes to happen freely. Through carefully sensing with the whole body (figure 5), we should discover point 2, where our spine naturally elongates, somewhere between points 1 and 3.

When we are sitting on point 2 of the sit bones, our body weight is so firmly and solidly supported with such a good balance that we can reduce muscle tension substantially. We can have a feeling of being in a perfectly “neutral” position and sometimes even feel that we have no sense of weight. Here there is no need to make an extra effort to put our back in position.

### **Natural regulation of the body**

When we sit down on point 2, we can feel the flow of supporting force from the floor along the central axis of the body (in reaction to body weight). We align our neck and head with this upward flow. Then, the back of the neck and the back of the head naturally extend upward and the chin is appropriately tucked in without forcibly pulling it in. If we keep our eyes softly open, with relaxed muscles around them, this upright posture naturally invites our line of sight to drop downward. Zen master Dogen never said, “Drop your line of sight to forty-five degrees.” Trying to align the line of sight with an artificially fixed angle is nothing but a forcible action. We must avoid such unnecessary effort.

With this posture, our mouth is naturally closed (teeth naturally together) and our tongue is naturally placed against the roof of our mouth just behind the teeth (not intentionally pushing against them). In zazen we relax the facial muscles because we do not need them to interact with others. We should particularly release the tension at the forehead.

## **Natural regulation of the breath**

Under these conditions, it becomes possible to naturally breathe with much ease and depth. Through the nose, in-breath and outbreath quietly happen with our body's own rhythm. With in-breath, the whole body expands, the sit bones press on the zafu, the pelvis tilts forward a bit and the spine slightly stands up. With out-breath, the whole body contracts and the pelvis and the spine come back to the original position. In this way the waves of breathing movement spread through all corners of the body. If we feel this spread is blocked, we unwind the blocked part so the wave of breath can go through our whole body. When we are casually (without focusing) sensing this subtle movement created by breath, we gradually become able to notice the intervals between in-breath and out-breath when breathing completely ceases.

## **Natural regulation of the mind**

As the body is arranged, the mind calms down by itself and becomes very sharp and wakeful. Various thoughts still freely appear like clouds, but there is now no more clinging to them. We just observe them freely appearing and disappearing. This state of mind is not produced volitionally or methodically by applying some technique to the mind but as a natural result of sitting with good alignment and deep relaxation.

Zazen is not "self-absorption - sinking deep into the inner world" by shutting oneself off from the outer world. Rather, it is acting to deeply reconnect oneself with outer world by opening oneself and responding to the world. Actually, it is possible for us to sit upright with proper posture only when we fully receive support from the outside world in what we see, what we hear, the supporting force from the floor, the air coming from outside, etc.

## **How to settle legs, arms and hands**

As for our limbs, we just settle them at appropriate places so that they do not disturb the torso's balance. If we can cross our legs without so much difficulty, the traditional full-lotus or half-lotus position is recommended. This cross-legged position gives us a wonderful sense of groundedness and stability of lower body. Because the balance of the torso is most important, we should find the best position for our legs so that they give it maximum support. It would be counterproductive to sacrifice the torso's balance by forcibly crossing our legs.

As for arms, we naturally let them hang from both sides of the body. We relax the hands (particularly the center of the palm) and place the left hand palm-up on our right palm. The tips of our thumbs lightly touch each other. Consulting with our sensations, we find the most comfortable position for our hands and settle them there. We do not freeze our hands up, but keep them soft so they can freely move together with the whole body's subtle re-adjusting movements.

The practice of sitting upright with a proper posture is a dynamic self-regulatory process powered by the continuous interaction between consciousness (thinking to move the pelvis so that the body weight falls vertically onto point 2) and sensations (sensing the result of this movement in body, breath and mind). So, during zazen the body continually fluctuates in very subtle ways, although they are too subtle to notice. While sitting zazen, we continue minutely adjusting the pelvis so that our body weight falls vertically onto point 2 at the bottom of our sitting posture, and we keep a delicate balance while feeling the verticality of the body's central axis in deep relaxation. This balance is so delicate and fragile that it is easily lost by drowsiness and discursive thinking. When we notice that the balance is lost we just slowly recover it, unhurriedly guided by kinesthetic sensations. Keeping ourselves open

to the world, we patiently recover the balance every time it is lost. The practice of sitting upright with proper posture is just such a sober and sensible work, to be done serenely with sharp awareness (*kakusoku*).

# The Buddha's Sitting Under a Tree |

My Footnotes on Zazen (5)

<http://global.sotozen-net.or.jp/eng/dharma/pdf/32e.pdf>

When we trace back the root of zazen (shikantaza), we find the Buddha's sitting under a tree. That is what I think for now. This is because I take literally what Dogen Zenji wrote in *Eiheikoroku* vol. 4: "*The true Dharma correctly transmitted by buddhas and ancestors is simply just sitting.*" The first sitting in the line of that tradition was the Buddha's under a tree right after he gave up self-mortification practice. Here I would like to discuss the significance of the Buddha's sitting under a tree. First of all, we need to know about the process through which he came to sit under a tree. What brought him there? For an answer, I looked in one of the Pali scriptures, the "*Maha-Saccaka Sutta*" (Majjhima Nikaya 36). This scripture offers us very useful information about this matter.

According to "*Maha-Saccaka Sutta*," the Buddha said, "when I was still young, blackhaired, endowed with the blessings of youth in the first stage of life, having shaved off my hair & beard — though my parents wished otherwise and were grieving with tears on their faces — I put on the ochre robe and went forth from the home life into homelessness." Right after this Great Renunciation, he headed south to Vaisali, a flourishing commercial city. There he studied under a meditation teacher named Alara Kalama, who taught a form of meditation leading to the

“attainment of the state of nothingness.” Gautama practiced the method and quickly attained the goal. Kalama then set him up as his equal and co-teacher, but Gautama — concluding that “this Dhamma leads not to disenchantment, to dispassion, to cessation, to stilling, to direct knowledge, to Awakening, nor to Unbinding, but only to reappearance in the dimension of nothingness” — left his teacher, dissatisfied with that Dhamma.

He moved further south to Rajagriha. He studied under another meditation teacher, Uddaka Ramaputta, who taught the way to a higher state, the “attainment of neither perception nor non-perception.” Gautama again quickly mastered this state and was proclaimed a teacher. But, concluding that “this Dhamma leads not to disenchantment, to dispassion, to cessation, to stilling, to direct knowledge, to Awakening, nor to Unbinding, but only to reappearance in the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception,” he left this teacher, too, dissatisfied with that Dhamma.

Thus the Buddha-to-be was dissatisfied with what he attained under these two famous meditation masters and he rejected it. Why so? Had he been satisfied with what he had mastered — in other words, with what the mainstream religious tradition of Brahmanism offered in those days — Buddhism as a brandnew and revolutionary path would never have been created by him. Therefore, we, as his descendants, should thoroughly investigate this question of why Gautama rejected what he had been taught. This investigation illuminates an important topic — the difference between concentration-oriented meditation and zazen. It is also related to Dogen Zenji’s statement, “*zazen is not shuzen.*”

Following this, the Buddha went further south and arrived at the village of Sena in Uruvela in the suburbs of religious city, Gaya. There he

launched a practice of severe selfmortification, which, in addition to meditation, was another mainstream religious practice. According to the “Maha-Saccaka Sutta,” his austerities were extreme. He practiced holding his breath to induce a trance. It was excruciating to his body. He also practiced fasting, taking only a little bean or lentil soup each day. His body became emaciated, his spine became bent like an old man’s. He fell forward when trying to stand up, fell backward when trying to sit down. He later recalled what he did at that time, saying, “Whatever brahmans or contemplatives in the past have felt painful, racking, piercing feelings due to their striving, this is the utmost. None have been greater than this. Whatever brahmans or contemplatives in the future will feel painful, racking, piercing feelings due to their striving, this is the utmost. None will be greater than this. Whatever brahmans or contemplatives in the present are feeling painful, racking, piercing feelings due to their striving, this is the utmost. None is greater than this.” But he gave up this practice of self-mortification, concluding, “with this racking practice of austerities I haven’t attained any superior human state, any distinction in knowledge or vision worthy of the noble ones.” We should also investigate the question of why he abandoned self-mortification. We must deeply explore it as a serious question, not being satisfied with a perfunctory answer found in a textbook. Even though we can never attain the degree of severity the Buddha endured, we often tend to fall into the mindset of asceticism and make zazen “*the gate of ease and joy*” to self-mortification before we know it.

Gautama tried to thoroughly practice the two standard spiritual methods, self-absorption meditation and self-mortification, popular in India in his days, but he could not get what he wanted. This means that he did not attain his goal by applying existing methods. At that moment his spiritual inquiry was a total failure. Facing these setbacks and this impasse, Gautama had two options in front of him. One was to totally give up his

inquiry. The other was to open up a truly new path where no one has gone before, which was neither self-absorption meditation nor self-mortification. He chose the latter. With a faint hope that “there could be another path to awakening,” he recalled an event which happened in his childhood. He said, "I thought: 'I recall once, when my father the Sakyan was working, and I was sitting in the cool shade of a rose-apple tree, then — quite secluded from sensuality, secluded from unskillful mental qualities — I entered and remained in the first jhana: rapture and pleasure born from seclusion, accompanied by directed thought and evaluation.’” This recollection pushed him to sit down under a tree near the river bank with the conviction that “that is the path to awakening” after taking a bowl of rice and milk offered by a woman named Sujata to recover his strength and bathing in the Neranjara River to cleanse his body.

Now we have finally come to Gautama’s sitting under a tree. Here we need to ask: What kind of sitting was it? I think that his sitting under the tree was completely and fundamentally different in quality from meditative practice and self-mortification he had practiced before. A quite radical and revolutionary kind of sitting emerged under the tree for the first time in human history. Out of that sitting, totally fresh path, later called Buddhism, was born as a path of happiness in this world. When he shifted from meditation/selfmortification to sitting under a tree, what really happened there? How should we understand it? How should we think about the radical and revolutionary nature of his sitting under a tree? Those are questions directly related to how we understand and practice shikantaza.

Every time we do zazen, we should re-enact the qualitative shift the Buddha made and fully embody the revolutionary quality of his sitting under a tree 2,500 years ago. Otherwise our zazen transmitted from the Buddha would be practiced not as it should be but as something else,



such as the meditation or self-mortification he gave up before he sat under the tree. We can discuss the uniqueness of the Buddha's sitting under a tree from various angles. Here, I would like to discuss it based on my own assumption that the uniqueness of his sitting lies in the fact that he deeply and minutely observed the natural workings of his own body-mind, without consciously controlling them.

Before the Buddha sat down under the tree, he experienced two types of being or living. First, he lived a worldly life in his palace. This is a way of living in which one is almost unconsciously performing three karmas of body, speech and mind. One is acting with one's body, speaking with one's mouth, thinking with one's mind according to habits acquired before we were able to understand. We take these actions, thoughts and words for granted, without questioning. We are like a robot which repeatedly performs the same programs installed by others outside ourselves without our understanding. It is "auto pilot," in which there is no awareness, no mindfulness. In Buddhism it is called a state of "fundamental ignorance." The Buddha was dissatisfied with this type of life and decided to renounce it. He chose the second type of life, the practitioner's life. To deny the worldly life (or to live a sacred life), one tries to consciously, one-sidedly manage and control all three karmas of body, speech and mind from outside. Here, from the very beginning an ideal state is already clearly set up as a goal - for instance, extinction of all defilements, or deliverance. There are effective and sophisticated methods to realize the ideal. By strictly following those methods, practitioners seek to control body and mind. It is as if they were taming wild body and mind by dominating them.

Let me use breath as an example to explain these two types of being or living in a tangible way. We are usually not aware of our own breath. We believe we are breathing normally, but for various reasons our "normal"

breath is pretty often far away from “natural breath.” From the viewpoint of a person who rediscovers natural breath through training in breathing methods, our “normal” breath is very imperfect, shallow, and irregular. It is a very low-level breath. We do not die immediately due to this imperfect breath but actually we are suffering many minor symptoms caused by “normally” breathing in an “unnatural” way for a long time. Because we are not conscious of this fact, it is unlikely that we improve our breath. This is “fundamental ignorance” in terms of breath. Some people feel that the way we usually breathe does not bring good health and they try to learn a useful breathing method or technique to improve their breathing. They look for the best, ultimate breathing method which teaches an ideal way of breathing. They do their best to master that method. In their effort, the priority is to precisely follow the method and govern their breath by the method. When they can perfectly breathe in the way described by the method, they feel successful. However, such breathing is not “natural” but “artificial.” The reality is that our breath is maintained by a very complicated and refined mechanism spread through the whole body. Therefore, our consciousness can control only a tiny part of that vast breathing mechanism. It is an arrogant fantasy to think we can change our breath consciously. It is impossible to transform our breath at a deep level in this way. This is an artificial approach to breath.

(To be continued)

# The Buddha's Sitting Under a Tree II

My Footnotes on Zazen (6)

<http://global.sotozen-net.or.jp/eng/dharma/pdf/33e.pdf>

I understand that the Buddha's (first) sitting under a tree was an embodiment of a "middle way," which avoids two dead ends. The first is living in fundamental ignorance and the second is living by controlling oneself artificially. "Fundamental ignorance" means that we just live driven by the power of habits with no awareness, without noticing how our body-mind is functioning. I use "body-mind" here because I want us to think of body and mind as one. "Artificial control" means that we try to unilaterally force our body-mind to follow some method or technique that we have decided on. The Buddha discovered a third way, in which we deeply experience the natural functioning of our body-mind without consciously manipulating it. For example, if we are watching our breath according to the Buddha's third way, we will carefully notice our spontaneous breathing without interfering in its natural flow. We will neither be unaware of our breath, nor will we try to consciously control it.

Let's consider the relationship between the body-mind and consciousness under these conditions. In the case of fundamental ignorance, consciousness does not pay any attention to the body-mind's functioning. Therefore, there is little possibility for body-mind to improve its function, and it only repeats habitual patterns. In the case of artificial control,

consciousness is giving one-sided orders about how the bodymind should function without caring about how it really wants to function. This causes unnecessary difficulty. Because in this approach change cannot reach the deeper layer of body-mind, once we stop our conscious effort at control, we inevitably return to our old habits. In Buddha's sitting under a tree, however, consciousness is sincerely attending to the body-mind's natural functioning. In this situation, body-mind can spontaneously improve its function by receiving feedback from our consciousness. I think this is part of the revolutionary nature of the Buddha's sitting under a tree. I think Buddha pioneered the practice of deeply observing the natural function of the body-mind as it is, without controlling it in accordance with specific procedures based on a ready-made technique.

What the Buddha tried before sitting down under a tree - self-absorption meditation and self-mortification - were intentional efforts using ready-made means to realize a sacred state which cannot be obtained by simply living in ignorance. These involved use of the mind (in the case of meditation) or use of the body (in the case of self-mortification) as a means to an end. In this type of effort, there is no intention to humbly study the true nature of body itself, mind itself and body-mind which transcends the duality of body and mind. The Buddha's sitting under a tree was an effort to study the body-mind just as it is through direct observation. His meditation and ascetic practice were efforts to force something that was not there yet to appear by viewing body and mind as objects and trying to change them. There was such a qualitative difference between meditation and ascetic practice and what the Buddha actually wanted to realize that he eventually abandoned them and went to sit under a tree.

When he sat down under the tree, there was neither a ready-made manual nor a teacher at hand. In his mediation and ascetic practice, he probably followed a very sophisticated, timetested method which described

techniques in detail. He probably also had teachers who were recognized masters of those techniques. He practiced very hard to follow these externally imposed instructions. But when he sat down under a tree, the situation was totally different. He was not following prescribed procedures already existing as established methods. If this is true, we – those who wish to explore how to make our zazen equivalent to the Buddha’s sitting under a tree – should not “do” zazen by just following the descriptions in a zazen manual or instructions from a teacher, consciously moving our legs to lotus position, hands to a cosmic mudra, eyes to half-open .... To do this is to do something different from what the Buddha did under the tree. If Buddha’s sitting was not simply following a ready-made method, how should we practice zazen?

When Dogen Zenji talks about zazen, he often repeats this phrase, “Zazen is not shuzen” (learning in order to attain the state of dhyana). We find this phrase in Fukanzazengi, Shobogenzo Zazengi, and Shobogenzo Zazenshin. It means that the zazen of shikantaza is not practice so we can be proficient in a particular meditation skill invented to create a special mental state called dhyana in which the mind remains in one place without being distracted. There is an important reason for Dogen Zenji’s repeated emphasis on this point. In Dogen Zenji’s day people were practicing zazen based on their confusion of zazen with shuzen, or misunderstanding zazen to be shuzen, or just practice for something else. For Dogen Zenji, this was such a crucial mistake that he could not overlook it.

The misunderstanding of zazen has not changed so much even now. People still confuse zazen with shuzen. Zazen is often thought to be a method of mental concentration or a technique for achieving a state of no-thought. Although the founder of our school strongly emphasized that zazen is not shuzen, we have not yet worked effectively enough to correct

that conventional misunderstanding of zazen. We are just superficially practicing and teaching zazen without paying attention to this mistake. Thus, we are open to criticism that we are lazy as zazen practitioners and teachers.

The difference between zazen and shuzen is not a matter of good and bad or superiority or inferiority, but of quality. The confusion between them is a problem to be overcome. It is important to clearly distinguish them, to practice zazen as zazen in the proper way, and to teach zazen by definitely showing the appropriate way of doing zazen.

Let us examine again how the Buddha's sitting under a tree went far beyond the practice of shuzen. As I mentioned, when he sat down under this tree he did not refer to any guidebooks or manuals and he had no teacher. He did not regulate his posture, breath and mind by following instructions on how to regulate them. He did not imitate the example of a coach and did not control his body, breath, and mind by following instructions given by someone like a coach.

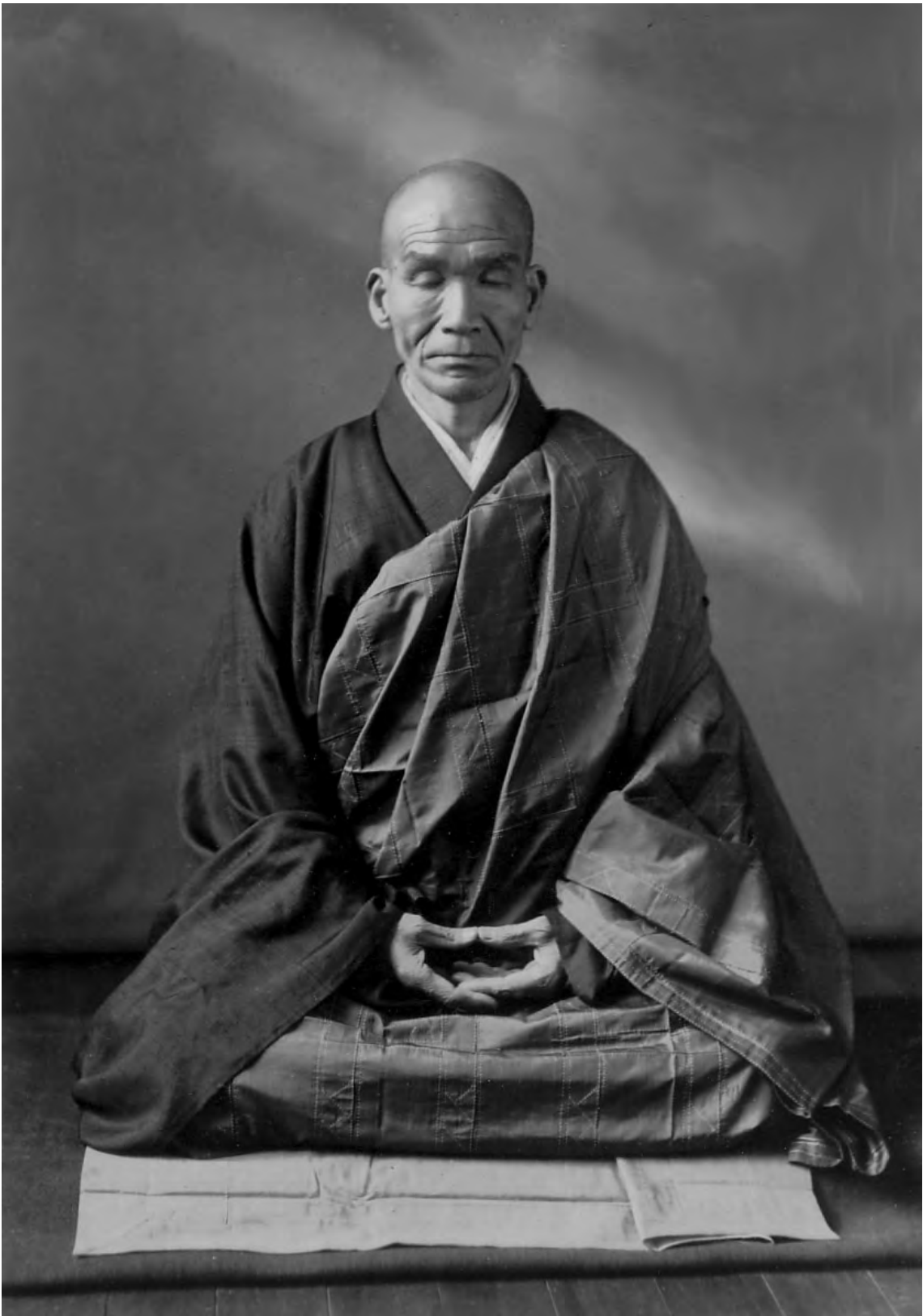
Then, what was it that guided his sitting? We can find only one hint about this matter in the Buddhist scriptures. In one place, the Buddha recalled that when he was a child he sat down under a tree and thought this must be a path to awakening.

His sitting under a tree when he was a child was also done without suggestion or instruction from others. He spontaneously sat down for the first time in his life. It was a simple, plain, very innocent sitting. He did not have any intention or expectation of getting something out of it. He was not restricted by rules or frameworks about sitting. He was just moved by a strong calling from deep inside to sit alone quietly. He just happened to sit down that way. There was no room for artificial

fabrications or manipulations. It was a complete and pure sitting, “just sitting.” The Buddha intuitively thought this must be the path to awakening. I do not think the mental state he attained then (traditionally called the first dhyana) was the key to his later awakening. Rather, this crucially important recollection of his childhood led him to spontaneous sitting. He felt hope for awakening, not in the result of sitting, but in something much larger which makes zazen itself possible. And he decided to leave everything to it.

I think the Buddha’s two sittings under a tree – one in his childhood and another right after abandoning self-mortification – did not happen because of an external force like a teacher’s instruction, or a ready-made method. It was a spontaneous movement initiated by something released deep inside him. When the Buddha was stuck in a dead end in his spiritual quest and pondering what to do, he recalled the “afterglow” of this spontaneous movement which was stored as a very nostalgic, subtle and definite somatic memory. It was very different in “flavor” from what he had experienced since his departure from the palace. In that difference he tangibly felt something very fresh and it made him think “this must be the path to awakening.”

(To be continued)





# Sealing Up Human Foolishness

My Zazen Sankyu Notebook (6)

Fragmentary Thought XVI

[http://global.sotozen-net.or.jp/eng/dharma/pdf/hogen07/hogen07\\_06.htm](http://global.sotozen-net.or.jp/eng/dharma/pdf/hogen07/hogen07_06.htm)

*"Since zazen is the posture in which a human being does nothing for the sake of the human being, the human being is freed from being a human being and becomes a Buddha."*

From "Songs of Life - Paeans to Zazen" by Daiji Kobayashi

*"It is good to take a little break. Buddha is a human being who is just taking a break from being one. Make no mistake, Buddha is not a human being grown up great and admirable!"*

Kodo Sawaki, Roshi

In these two quotations Mr. Kobayashi and Sawaki Roshi use the word "ningen", a word that is usually translated into English as "human being." The familiarity of the English phrase may obscure what they mean by it. They are contrasting "Buddha" with "ningen (human being)." If so, it is more appropriate to use the Buddhist technical term "bonpu (ordinary human being)" or "shujo (living being)" which have a much more clear definition. A bonpu is a non-Buddha, a person who is not yet enlightened

and who therefore is caught up in all sorts of ignorance, foolishness and suffering. As a reminder of this meaning I will use the word "bonpu" in this article. In the Shobogenzo Zuimonki Dogen says that "Zazen is Buddha's practice." When we actually carry out the buddha's practice instead of keeping it as an idea, we should never fail to understand that, zazen practice is in a sense, negation or giving up our bonpu-ness as Mr. Kobayashi and Sawaki Roshi said, "doing nothing for the sake of bonpu" or "taking a little break from being a bonpu."

If we fail to take this point seriously we ruin our selves by pandering to our own bonpu-ness, we get slack, adjust zazen to fit our bonpu-ness and ruin zazen itself.

By folding our legs into a full or half lotus position our ability to use our legs for standing or walking is temporarily suspended. Under these circumstances it is impossible for us to chase after the things or states of mind which we want, or to run away from the things and mental states that we don't want.

In **Fukan Zazengi** ("Universally Recommended Method of Zazen") Dogen Zenji advises us on how to properly place the hands in the cosmic mudra: "*Put your right hand palm up on your left foot, and your left hand palm up on your right palm. The tips of your thumbs should be lightly touching.*"

In doing this the capabilities of the hands, like those of the legs in lotus position, are temporarily suspended.

Human hands were freed from bearing the weight of the body when human beings acquired the ability to walk upright on two legs. Now,

using the cosmic mudra, we free our hands from their inclination to seize, to manipulate, to hold, and so on.

Dogen Zenji explained how to close our mouths: "*Place your tongue against the roof of your mouth. Close your lips and jaw.*"

When we follow these instructions we temporarily relinquish our ability to speak – yet another ability of great importance to a social animal like us. Without the use of speech we are deprived of the ability of communicating with others, of negotiating with them, of persuading them.

Further, Dogen Zenji says: "*Do not think of either good or evil. Do not be concerned with right or wrong. Put aside the operation of your intellect, volition and consciousness. Stop considering things with your memory, imagination, or reflection.*"

Following this advice we are free, for the time being, to set aside our highly developed intellectual faculties. We simply let go of our ability to conceptualize. In zazen we do not intentionally think about anything. This does not mean that we ought to fall asleep. On the contrary, our consciousness should always be clear and awake.

While we sit in zazen posture all of our human abilities, acquired through eons of evolution, are temporarily renounced, and suspended. Since these capacities – moving, speaking, grasping, thinking – are the ones which human beings value the most, and are most proud of, we might accurately say that "entering zazen is going out of the business of being a human being" or that in zazen "no human being business gets done."

What is the significance of giving up all these hard-won human abilities while we sit in zazen? I believe it is that we have the opportunity to "seal up our bonpu-ness." In other words, when sitting in zazen we unconditionally surrender our human ignorance.

In effect we are saying "I will not use these human capacities for my confused, self-centered purposes. By adopting zazen posture, my hands, legs, lips and mind are all sealed. They are just as they are. I can create no karma with any of them." That is what "sealing up of bonpu-ness" in zazen means.

When we use our sophisticated human capacities in our everyday lives we always use them for our deluded, self-centered purposes, our "bonpu" interests. All our actions are based on our desires, that is our likes and dislikes.

The reason we decide to go here or there, why we manipulate various objects, why we talk about various subjects, have this or that idea or opinion, is determined only by our inclination to satisfy our own selfish interests. This is how we are. It is a habit deeply ingrained in every bonpu human being. If we do nothing about this habit we will continue to use all our wonderful human powers ignorantly and selfishly, and bury ourselves deeper and deeper in delusion.

If on the other hand we correctly practice zazen our human abilities will never be used for bonpu interests. In this way this tendency will be halted, at least for a time. This is what I call "sealing up bonpu-ness."

Our bonpu-ness still exists, but it is completely sealed up. Dogen Zenji described zazen in the Bendowa (On Following the Way) as a condition

in which we are able *"to display the Buddha seal at our three karma gates – body, speech and mind – and sit upright in this samadhi."*

What he means is that there should be absolutely no sign of bonpu activity anywhere in the body, speech or mind, that all that is there is the mark of the Buddha. The body does not move in Zazen posture. The mouth is closed and does not speak. The mind does not seek to become Buddha, but instead stops the mental activities of thinking, willing, and consciousness.

By removing all signs of bonpu from our legs, hands, mouth and mind, which ordinarily act only on behalf of our deluded human interests – by putting the Buddha seal on them – we place them in the service of our Buddha nature. In other words, when our bonpu body-mind acts as a Buddha it is transformed into the body-mind of a Buddha.

This recalls Keizan Zenji's injunction in his Zazen Yojinki (Things to Watch Regarding Zane): **"Sokuhyo shobutsu tai"** – *Immediately manifest the Buddha's body.*

With our bonpu-ness completely obstructed by Zazen posture, pursuing our deluded human interests becomes impossible. We might say "I, a deluded human being, am crucified in Zazen, and so can no longer manifest my deluded nature."

Understood this way, my deluded human nature does continue to exist, even while I am sitting in Zazen. However it is totally annihilated at the same time.

We should remember that when we seal up our deluded human nature we break open the seal of our Buddha nature. When we take Zazen posture

the signs of Buddhahood appear everywhere. Then only Buddha is active. The sealing up of our deluded nature in Zazen, and the liberation of our Buddha nature, take place at the same place and the same time.

This is a matter of perspective. From the deluded human point of view, when our legs folded in lotus position what we notice most is that we are unable to stand and walk. From the deluded human point of view, in this case, our legs just seem useless.

However, at the same time, from the point of view of "zaso mihotoke" – "Zazen posture is the Buddha" – (cf. fragmentary thought XV), our legs in zazen posture immediately become an essential part of a Buddha's body. This same sort of comparison can be made for the hands, mouth, mind and so on.

We should be very careful about the fact that when we talk about "sealing up our deluded human nature" this "deluded human nature" we are talking about is not something which exists as a fixed entity, as either a subject or an object, from its own side. It is simply our perceived condition.

We cannot just deny it and get rid of it. The fact of the matter is that when we sit zazen as just zazen, without intentionally intending to deny anything, our deluded human nature gets sealed up by the emergence of our Buddha nature at all three gates of karma, i.e. at the level of our body, speech and mind. As a result, our deluded human nature is automatically renounced.

All the foregoing explanations – of renunciation, of sealing up, of deluded human nature – are just words. These explanations are based on a particular, limited point of view, looking at zazen from outside.

Certainly it is true that zazen offers us the opportunities I have been describing. However, when we practice zazen, we should be sure not to concern ourselves with "deluded human nature", "renunciation", and those kinds of ideas.

All that is important for us is to practice zazen, here and now, as pure, uncontaminated zazen.





# Just Sitting

My Zazen Sankyu Notebook (7)

Fragmentary Thought XVII

[http://global.sotozen-net.or.jp/eng/dharma/pdf/hogen08/hogen08\\_05.htm](http://global.sotozen-net.or.jp/eng/dharma/pdf/hogen08/hogen08_05.htm)

In the previous Fragmentary Thought XVI I wrote about "*Sealing up human foolishness (bonpu-ness)*" and "breaking open the seal of Buddha nature". I surely think that this is what is happening during zazen. We might describe this as the "benefit (kudoku)" of zazen. However, it does not mean that in order to get the benefit of zazen, we have to set up the goal of attaining it and practice zazen aiming at it. As a matter of fact there is no such necessity at all. To the degree that zazen becomes zazen, it naturally provides this benefit. So we do not have to worry about it at all. The harder we work to attain it, the more we are driven by the desire for it, the farther we are from it. This is really an irony.

We are strongly advised not to insert any kinds of "anticipation", "aim" or "intention" into the practice of zazen. If you bring any goal, however noble it may be, into zazen, this calculating frame of mind will, in a sense, split into two facts: one doing zazen and one who's attending to the goal. This kind of zazen has a crack inside, which prevents the practitioner from hitting the mark of zazen. Dogen's Manual of Zazen said, "*Do not try to become Buddha*". Therefore, when practicing zazen, we need to let go of all of unnecessary considerations like "I should try to become like this or that in the future". We should only do our best to just sit zazen.

In addition to this, the person who is sitting zazen should avoid the temptation to sneak a look at the result or effect of his or her zazen. The moment he/she yields to this temptation to peak, he/she slides away from zazen. This is similar to the fact that you can not watch yourself sleeping deeply. If you try to, you wake up and the sleep is gone. (...all this does not mix into the perception of the person sitting, because it takes place within stillness without any fabrication and they themselves are enlightenment. ...What is associated with perceptions cannot be the standard of enlightenment ... Bendowa) In zazen there is no place for judgement from an outside point of view. There is no viewpoint from which to say "My zazen is getting better" or "I'm doing a good job". What we can do is to just sit zazen, adjusting our sight toward zazen, without looking away from it.

The point is to sit zazen, not to do it aiming at certain "benefits or results." If zazen is thoroughly zazen, that is all. Zazen is so completed in itself that it does not need anything else. Therefore when we practice zazen properly, we do not need to have any "sales pitches" or "statements of virtues". As Yokoyama Roshi said (Fragmentary ThoughtXV), .it is enough to instruct, "Cross your legs like this, put your hands together, straighten your back and tuck in your chin, etc ...."

But a strange thing happens here. When you just sit zazen without doing anything to do with "benefits/results", the unlimited and immeasurable "benefits/results" are naturally given to you beyond your expectation. Therefore if we say that zazen has some benefits and results, they are not what we attain as the results for which we seek with our will and intention but what is given to us unexpectedly. That is why we can not take credit for them as if they were the results of our own efforts.

Let us assume that we hear or see the sentence, "If you practice zazen, you will get X results". Examples of X might be "enlightenment", "peaceful mind", "freedom", "calmness", "compassion and love", etc. Hearing this kind of formulation people who think that they lack "X" within themselves will imagine that X must resemble their mental image of X and so they start practicing zazen very hard in order to get closer to their ideal. There may be a lot of people like this. However, as I have argued so far, this type of zazen practice is misdirected. It can not be called zazen. And this X, what is guaranteed as the benefits/results of zazen, will never ever be attained.

Let me explain this by using one example. Here is a man who feels he is always irritated and short-tempered. He is suffering from this trait and wishing, by all means, to become a person whose mind is always calm and peace. One day he hears from someone that he can attain calmness by zazen. He thinks, "This is a good news. I might be able to change myself by this method". He, then, immediately starts practicing zazen. He tries to find out what he imagines is the peaceful mind in his zazen. And by accumulating the benefits of zazen little by little, he also expects to increase the degree of imagined calmness in his mind.

Do you think that he will succeed in becoming a calm and peaceful man? I do not think if he keeps practicing zazen this way. The peaceful mind which he pictured to his mind as an ideal is nothing but a kind of photographic negative or projection of the very same irritated mind which disturbs him. He does not really understand what the peaceful mind is like. Therefore, each and every effort he makes to attain peace contains subtle irritation, which sneaks into his practice. The fact that he can not accept his irritated mind as it is, is by itself the manifestation of his deep-seated irritation. Even if he feels that he is becoming calmer a little bit, it only implies that his irritation is becoming subtler and better at disguising

itself. Then his irritation will simply become deeper and deeper part of him.

If this is the case, how do we avoid this pitfall in our practice? First, we should temporarily stop looking at ourselves through words, concepts and judgements such as, "I am always irritated and short-tempered. It is not good". And then we should set aside the impulse to change ourselves as we wish. In fact, to sit proper zazen is not to try to calm down his irritated mind and forcefully create the peaceful mind but to put oneself in the state of completely setting aside all over personal agendas. When this is accomplished, we can directly see the reality of ourselves; the reality of our irritation in our body, speech and mind. This is not the fabricated self grasped by thoughts but the real and true self.

It is possible for us to "see deeply the reality of irritation as it is" only when zazen is being practiced as zazen. This seeing enables the irritation to transform itself into true peace. There is no peace outside the irritation. They are not separate.

I used the case of irritation as an example of how the transformation is brought about by seeing it as it is. Roughly speaking, I think the deep transformation as the result of zazen happens in the same way.

# Zazen as "Whole and One"

## Zazen posture as "whole and one"

### Part I

My Zazen Sankyu Notebook (8)

Fragmentary Thought XVIII

[http://global.sotozen-net.or.jp/eng/dharma/pdf/hogen09/hogen09\\_10.htm](http://global.sotozen-net.or.jp/eng/dharma/pdf/hogen09/hogen09_10.htm)

When people give instruction on how to sit zazen, they usually do it in order: first on regulating the body, then on regulating the breath, and finally on regulating the mind. Generally they begin by explaining how to deal with each part of the body: the legs, the torso, the hands, the mouth, and the eyes as a way to establish the body's sitting posture. Next they teach how to breathe and then how to deal with the mind. In order to explain how to do zazen, there is no alternative but to first to dissect zazen, to disassemble zazen into the parts of the body, the breath and the mind, and then to describe what to do with them in sequence.

Of course it is possible to think about the method without using words. You could simply demonstrate zazen first and then just say, "Do it like this". But I don't think this method is effective or helpful for beginners. Because with this method it is very difficult to communicate the subtle

aspects of zazen posture and it is almost impossible to learn anything about the psychological aspects of zazen simply by watching it from outside. And even if we try to copy the appearance of zazen by imitating it, in most cases we would probably take a look at each part of the posture and try to copy it, part by part, thinking "all right, legs are like this, then hands are like that...". So after all we cannot help but link each part of the body in a certain order, to build zazen posture. In this sense it is not much different from providing a verbal explanation of how to do zazen.

Anyway when we teach or learn how to do zazen, we can not teach or learn zazen as a whole at a single stroke. So it is inevitable for us to initially dissect zazen into small pieces and then to arrange them into a certain sequence. Also when we begin to practice zazen we will tend to gradually construct the body-mind of zazen by following a sequence: regulating the body (choshin), regulating the breath (chosoku) and regulating the mind (choshin). (In the Eihei-koroku Dogen wrote, "In our zazen, it is of primary importance to sit in the correct posture. Next, regulate the breath and calm down").

But after going through this preliminary stage (of course this is already an important part of zazen), when zazen becomes zazen (when sitting in the correct posture, Shoshintaza, is actualized), all instructions given in the form of many separate pieces in terms of space and time must be integrated as a whole (integration in space) and in a single stroke (integration in time) in the body-mind of the practitioner of zazen. The "whole" of zazen must be integrated as "one" sitting. In other words, zazen must become "Complete, Unified Zazen"(or "Zazen, Whole and One"). The expression, "Taza", seems to be emphasizing this quality of being whole and one in time and space.

Let me focus here on how this quality of being whole and one is manifested in the sitting posture of zazen. When zazen is deeply integrated as whole and one, the practitioner does not feel that each part of his/her body is separate from the others and is independently doing its job here and there in the body. The practitioner is not engaged in doing many different things in different places in the body by following the various instructions on how to regulate the body. In reality he/she is doing only one thing to continuously aim at the correct sitting posture with whole body. So in the actual feeling of the practitioner, what is there is only a simply and harmoniously integrated sitting posture. He/she feels the cross-legged posture, the cosmic mudra, the half-opened eyes, etc., as local manifestations of the sitting posture being whole and one. While each part of the body is functioning in its own unique way, as a whole body they are fully integrated into the state of being one. It is experienced as if all boundaries or divisions among the bodily parts have vanished and all parts are embraced by and melted into one big pose (one unified posture; one complete gesture) of flesh and bone. We sometimes feel during zazen that our hands or legs "have vanished or gone away".

Our living human body is not just a collection of bodily parts but an organically integrated whole. It is designed in such a way that when one part of the body moves, however subtle the movement may be, it simultaneously causes the whole body to move in accordance with it. Late Dr. Keizo Hashimoto, the founder of the Japanese body-work called Sotaiho, named this phenomena as "The Law of simultaneous and interrelated link-movements."

For example, if you try to move only a big toe, it looks like only that part is moving. But if you grip your big toe tightly enough to prevent it from moving and try to move it forcefully, you will find that your ankle joints, knee joints, pelvic joints, spine, neck joints, and skull all receive some

force and start moving. Even the muscles in your face, your fingers and all the joints of your upper limbs move in harmony with the other parts. So we can say that even a tiny movement of one joint can create a chain reaction of the movement in neighboring joints, and that this movement spreads through the whole body.

Our human body is originally one and whole. We should consider how subtle and tricky it is to create a correct sitting posture and maintain it with such a body, a body which can be described as a "highly sophisticated machine in which each of the parts moves jointly". For example, there is an instruction that tells how to deal with the eyes during zazen: "Keep your eyes open, without opening widely nor closing". This instruction sounds pretty trivial and easy. But you should realize that if you try to follow it properly and strictly, it goes beyond the matter of treating one local area of the body (in this case the eyes) and ultimately becomes a matter of treating the whole body (including the mind).

(to be continued Dharma Eye 9)



# Zazen as "Whole and One"

## Zazen posture as "whole and one"

### Part II

My Zazen Sankyu Notebook (9)

Fragmentary Thought XVIII

[http://global.sotozen-net.or.jp/eng/dharma/pdf/hogen10/hogen10\\_05.htm](http://global.sotozen-net.or.jp/eng/dharma/pdf/hogen10/hogen10_05.htm)

When we correct zazen posture, we must keep in mind that the impact of adjusting one part of the posture inevitably spreads all over the body following "the law of simultaneous and interrelated link-movement" mentioned in the last article. It is highly possible that improving the posture in one part of the body might result in making other parts worse. Moreover unless we can correct the fundamental cause which is the focal point of postural distortion (the crucial spot for the correct posture, that is, the lower back and neck in many cases), partial corrections often have only momentary effects. Therefore in order to correct the sitting posture, we have to have a wholistic and fundamental-cause-oriented approach by observing the posture as a whole, instead of partial and syndrome-oriented approach by focusing only on isolated parts of the posture.

The question is: How to deepen the correct zazen posture as "whole and one"? We should study and embody the wisdom of "the grammar of

body" through daily practice of zazen. This "grammar" gives us concrete knowledge such as how moving one bodily part influences other parts of the body (the law of simultaneous and interrelated link-movement) and which parts of the body are crucial to correct the posture (vital spots of the posture).

When we begin zazen practice, we are so much caught up with the part-by-part instructions for each part of the body that we feel that all the bodily parts are separated from each other and they are totally out of order. So it is very difficult for us to physically feel our zazen posture as an integrated one. It is as if each bodily part is willfully asserting itself and is loudly complaining about being uncomfortable. It is a state of being "unsettled". But as we gradually manage to become intimate with zazen over time, we slowly begin to understand the grammar of body and to master the sitting posture. Then in zazen we can naturally feel the sense of integration and the sense of oneness. And these senses steadily become deeper. It is as if each bodily part can get along with other parts and all the parts are peacefully and quietly coming home to the totality of sitting posture. It is a state of being "settled". In the last article I expressed this state of being "settled" as "all parts are embraced by and melted into one big pose of flesh and bone". If I explain this state more concretely, it is the sense that all the weight is falling on the center of lower abdomen (the so-called Tanden in Japanese) and simultaneously the fullness (the force) we feel at that spot is spreading and permeating toward every corner of body. In this way we feel the deep sense of integration between the center and the other parts of body.

We feel these sensations of inner bodily conditions mainly through tactile sense, particularly deep somatic sensations (sensations from muscles, tendons and joints) and internal organ (visceral) sensations. Both are sometime called inner tactile senses. In zazen we aim at the correct sitting

posture with our flesh and bones. Therefore it is very important for us to be able to clearly detect the information about the qualities of our inner bodily conditions (comfortable-uncomfortable, the relationship with gravity, muscle tone, bodily shape...etc). That is why our "inner receptors" have to be working very sensitively. So-called "five senses" mainly receive the information from outside. In our everyday life we tend to put too much emphasis on these "outer receptors". Zazen is described as "to take the backward step that turns the light and shines it inward". This expression maybe indicates that to practice zazen is to make a shift from the dominance of "outer receptors" to the dominance of "inner receptors".

The sense of integration or the sense of oneness is not something fixed but something that is always subtly changing and flickering depending on many conditions of the moment, such as the precision of the posture and the sensitivity of our inner receptors...etc. It is a stream-like sensation vaguely felt by the practitioner's whole body, corresponding to the degree of whole-and –one-ness of zazen. It is different from the physical pain which has a strong intensity and clear locality. It is a kind of elusive sensation which is very vague, unclear and spreads throughout the whole body.

To cultivate the sensitivity for such a subtle sense of oneness, to refine and clarify it is to polish the ability to know, at a very deep level, how well one's sitting posture is regulated. As for the problem of zazen as "whole and one", we must examine not only the appearance of the sitting posture (He is sitting so beautifully!) but also inner qualities of sitting posture which can be only experienced through inner tactile sensitivity. And that aspect of the posture is more important than its outer shape.



# Zazen as “Whole and One”

## Whole-and-Oneness of body, breath and mind

### Part III

My Zazen Sankyu Notebook (10)

Fragmentary Thought XIX

[http://global.sotozen-net.or.jp/eng/dharma/pdf/de11/de11\\_06.htm](http://global.sotozen-net.or.jp/eng/dharma/pdf/de11/de11_06.htm)

So far I have discussed the issue of “*Whole-and-Oneness*” solely focusing on the aspect of sitting posture and regulating the body. But strictly speaking, that is not an appropriate way of doing it. In reality, in order for the sitting posture to be whole and one, it is essential to accomplish regulating both the breath and the mind. So in the truest sense “*the Whole-and-Oneness of zazen*” really is “*the Whole-and-Oneness of body, breath and mind*”. What I have presented so far is simply how this “*Wholeand-Oneness*” manifests itself on the bodily aspect of zazen.

When we practice zazen, our effort to regulate our body, breath, and mind must be undertaken as a single action. None of these three tasks can be accomplished without accomplishing the other two. That is why we can accurately describe this principle with expressions like, “*Three are one, one is three,*” or “*The trinity of body, breath and mind*”.

Let me give some examples. In Dogen's *Fukan Zazengi* (The Manner of Doing Zazen, as Recommended for Everyone), Dogen wrote about how to regulate the breath. He gives a very simple and plain instruction. He says, "*Breathe quietly through your nose.*" That is all. By referring to his other descriptions on how to regulate the breath, for example in "Bendoho" (The Model for Engaging the Way) of "Eihei Shingi" (The Pure Standards for the Zen Community) and in "Eihei Koroku" (The Analects of Eihei Dogen)", I understand this instruction as this: "Let the air come in and go out quietly through your nose. Make it sure that the air is going deep down to your lower abdomen. Let your breath happen naturally (not artificially.) Do not allow your breath to become coarse or noisy, nor gasp for air. You should not experience any difficulty in breathing. Your breathing should be quiet and subtle." When our posture is not good or our mind is agitated, it is impossible to have this "quiet, subtle and deep breath," even if we try hard.

Another example: A variety of psychological problems during zazen, such as feelings of discomfort or instability, drowsiness or agitation, are partially caused by an awkwardness of the posture and the breath. If we try to deal with these psychological problems only psychologically, without taking care of the posture and breath, our treatment will be futile. Or it might even make the situation much worse.

In order to regulate the body we must have a keen sensitivity, as I mentioned before. For the sensitivity to function fully, we have to have calmness and clarity, achieved by regulating the mind. Our effort to regulate our breath naturally leads us to correct our posture.

Let me share my own experience. For a couple of years right after I started practicing zazen, sitting zazen meant to me a battle against physical pain. I sat zazen always with a hope that someday I would be

able to sit without feeling any pain. I tried many things such as Yoga, stretching exercise, fasting ...etc. to make my body more flexible so that I could sit with peace and ease. But it did not work. I still experienced the same pain as before. Then, at one period of zazen during a sesshin, a thought suddenly popped up in my mind. “Aha! Zazen is supposed to be painful, no matter what I do to reduce it. Zazen without pain? It was nothing but my foolish illusion. All right! I give up fighting against physical pain. I sit with it.” At that moment, I felt that the “taste” of the pain I experienced had drastically changed. I found that the tension in my body somehow dissolved; my back lengthened, seemingly on its own. I do not mean the pain had totally disappeared. It was still there. But when, in my mind, my relationship with it changed, without any expectation, something simultaneously changed in my posture and breath. It seems to me that these changes brought about the decrease of the pain (maybe due to the relaxation of muscles). When in my mind I could let go of my extra baggage, that is, clinging to the dream of “zazen without pain”, that was immediately reflected in the dimensions of body and breath.

These are some examples of the “*Three are one, one is three*” relationship between body, breath, and mind. To sum up, when body, breath, and mind fuse into oneness and function harmoniously as a whole, the body-mind exists with a quality called “Shoshintaza” (sitting with correct posture.) At the moment of the fusion of these three Shoshintaza is actualized with its full vitality. Only then we are truly experiencing zazen as “*Whole and One*”.

Now let us take a look at our ordinary state of body, breath, and mind. Unfortunately we usually live with a quality very far from this “*Whole-and-Oneness*.” Our body totally loses its sense of centeredness, as if our body was divided into parts, and all the parts of our bodies exist in separation. Our breath is shallow and irregular. Our mind is constantly

cycling up and down and is frequently agitated, like a wild horse or a wild monkey. Our mind is often caught up with the past or the future. Our body and mind are usually somehow separated. So it is quite natural that we are rarely able to sit zazen as “*Whole and One*” when we begin to practice zazen. After we receive a general instruction on how to sit zazen, we have to grope for how to do it with our own body and mind. We often have an experience of being totally lost, with no idea of where to start. At such a time we cannot help but repeat our process of trial and error, and zazen seldom becomes zazen thoroughly. We are pressed to the point where we start thinking of quitting zazen, feeling that we are not fit for zazen practice. Should I quit it? Or Should I keep sitting? If we do not have both a deep understanding and strong faith that zazen as “*Whole and One*” is our own true body (the right way to be), if we do not recognize that we cannot truly settle our body, breath, and mind down until we return to this “true body,” it will be impossible for us to continue the endless effort toward it.



# Movement within Immovable

## Sitting

### Part I

## The Pulsation of Whole Body

## Breathing

My Zazen Sankyū Notebook (11)

Fragmentary Thought XX

[http://global.sotozen-net.or.jp/eng/dharma/pdf/de12/de12\\_09.htm](http://global.sotozen-net.or.jp/eng/dharma/pdf/de12/de12_09.htm)

In Japanese, we have two other words that can be used for zazen, gotsuza and gotsugotsuchi. The image from which the Chinese character for gotsu (found in both of these words) is derived is said to be “a level place at the summit of a mountain and furthermore, a place where there is not even one tree growing.” Since this represents a mountaintop with no trees, no matter how hard the wind blows, there is absolutely no movement. For Japanese people, even the sound “gotsu” gives rise to this image of a lonely mountaintop, and so it well expresses the immovable nature of zazen.

Consequently, the teaching “settle into steady, immovable sitting” that appears in Dogen Zenji’s Fukanzazengi (A Universal Recommendation for Zazen) has the meaning of “*sit steadily without any movement like an immovable mountain.*” When we practice zazen, it is not possible to

sit in a settled way if we are always reacting to every thought that comes floating by (emotions included) or all of the various bodily sensations we feel whether they be pleasant or unpleasant, painful or itchy, and so on. For that reason, it is only natural that when instruction is given concerning zazen, that emphasis is put on sitting continuously with as little movement as possible. In our everyday life, we move our bodies unintentionally in response to itchy sensations or sounds we hear unexpectedly. But in the practice of zazen, we expressly do not move the body in response to such stimuli. This also applies to strong sensations of physical pain or mental agitation caused by emotions arising, conditions which in everyday life we could not sit through without moving.

However, in the case of zazen, we continue sitting without standing up and leaving the room. Usually in such everyday situations, we react habitually or unintentionally by moving our body in such a way as to try to change the situation so that it feels more comfortable. For the most part, this is only a repetition and reinforcement of habitual patterns. It is rare for us to be able to use such situations for the possibility of development or study. In contrast to these patterns, however, when we practice zazen, we consciously decide not to move the body. This has the significance of inhibiting habitual patterns and because of that, our usual reaction patterns stand out in relief as resistance to not moving. So in this way, it is possible to become familiar with yourself in a way we usually never notice. By means of this awareness, a way is then opened for obtaining a fresh insight into the self and it is also a way to foster the power of not being dominated by those habitual patterns.

It is certain, then, that the essence of the practice of zazen is first to all to be found within not moving the body. (Of course, something should be said about the important problem of the immovability of the mind. However, I will not touch on that topic here.) Nevertheless, the

immovable nature of true zazen that is full of life is completely different from something that is dead. (Strictly speaking, all things are moving and so it must be said that even dead things are not without movement.) Certainly, when viewed from the outside, a person who is sitting upright in immovable zazen appears to be as stationary as a rock. In fact, however, there is very subtle moment that is going on. Furthermore, this movement is generated without intention. It is a natural, spontaneously caused movement. This could be called “the pulsation of living zazen” and is a movement inherent within immovable sitting.

There is a tendency, though, to overemphasize this matter of not moving in zazen. Certainly, an equation can be made such that zazen=immovable sitting=immovability. However, if this is understood only in a rough sort of way, then it can happen that this will be the cause for misunderstanding. It happens from time to time that I see people sitting zazen whose understanding is based on the assumption that they literally should not move at all and so the muscles are tense, the body is as hard as a rock, and the breathing is stifled. However, if a person is sitting in such an unnatural pose, then far from their intention to sit quietly, they are constantly moving, the breath is unregulated, and their heads are surely full of thoughts.

Actually, the immovability of sitting upright enables a person to sit in a suitable relation to gravity and consequently, any unneeded tension in the body is completely diminished and so, it is possible to sit in a comfortable way that is relaxing and refreshing. When the body/mind is settled in zazen and really settles into sitting (“to sit” is defined in the Japanese dictionary Daigenkai as “fixed, not moving, and well suited to one’s whereabouts”), then there is movement that arises of itself. And so, even though it is said that zazen is a posture of not moving, this should not be something that is understood in a superficial or overly simple sort

of way. I think it is necessary to direct our attention to the fact that while we depict the correct image of zazen as one which is immovable, in fact there is movement always arising. Zazen appears to be immovable, but there is an abundant world of varied and subtle movements concealed within it. So wouldn't it be better to cast off the quiet, fixed image of a certain zazen pose in favor of a new image which is a fluid process like dance (although that may be saying too much)?

Be that as it may, what, then, is the movement that appears while sitting immovably? This movement is not one that arises from the ego consciousness nor is it a rough sort of movement that resists the immovability of zazen or intentionally tries to destroy that lack of movement. This is to repeat myself, but this sort of movement is one that inevitably arises out of correct zazen that is full of life. It is movement that is subtle and arises unconsciously. And so, it is movement that arises out of the immovability of zazen and yet movement which supports that immovability.

Among these various movements, the easiest one to notice is the movement that accompanies the breath. In zazen, breathing naturally occurs from the tanden (the lower abdomen below the navel). Regardless of how quiet or subtle the breath is, it is always filled with movement. If you are sitting correctly, in other words if your zazen is whole-and-one (please refer to the previous Fragmentary Thought), it is not only the chest, the diaphragm, and the belly that move, but actually the whole body is moving very slightly. When you take a breath, first the belly and lower ribs expand and that movement then spreads in a chain reaction through the abdomen, the neck, the head, the upper limbs, the pelvis, to the lower limbs, in the same way as when a rock is thrown into a still pond, the waves ripple outwards. (I would like you to recall earlier articles in which I have mentioned simultaneous correlation and the law

of interconnected movement.) When a breath is exhaled, the belly and lower ribs contract, and that movement is then passed throughout the whole body in the same way. (Of course, this movement that spreads throughout the whole body is very subtle and it is not possible to perceive that the sitting posture is disturbed because of it. If the movement caused by the breath can clearly be seen from the outside by another person and especially if it is a rather large movement, then it is safe to say that somewhere or other, there is problem in the manner of sitting).

As upright sitting deepens, the body relaxes, and consciousness awakens, the movement of the breath throughout the whole body becomes more and more subtle and delicate. However, it is something that we become more and more aware of (*kakusoku*). As far as the person sitting *zazen* is concerned, it is possible to feel that there are bodily sensations of rhythmic cycle of the whole body expanding and contracting which accompanies the breath. This is a feeling as if you were a single-celled amoeba, the whole body of which is expanding and contracting (pulsation= a periodical subtle change of something which is in a state of equilibrium). When I sit in *zazen* and can clearly feel the pulsation of the whole body that accompanies the breath (the whole body repeatedly becoming bigger and smaller, relaxing and tightening, extending and contracting), I recall the expression “the bodily sense of being the primordial life form” of Noguchi Mitsuzo, founder of the Noguchi Exercise System.

“The bodily sense of being the primordial life form” is a sense of existence that works as the source of inspiration in the Noguchi Exercise System. This expression points “to a deep sensation that my whole existence has the same quality as the undifferentiated totality of coacervate (at the original form of life as discovered by Alexander Oparin). When I am awake, I am doing all activities with this

fundamental sense that I exist in a way which is like coacervate, the primordial life form. Whenever I experience an activity that is truly satisfying, I am always one with this bodily sense. At that time, I clearly feel this sense is the basis, the matrix, the background, the Source, of that action.” (Quoted from *Human Beings as the Primordial Life Form*, published by Iwanami Shoten).

Breathing in the practice of zazen is said to take place in the tanden. However, it is a mistake to think that breathing only takes place within the tanden, that this is the only area of the body to expand and contract. In reality, breathing takes place throughout the whole body, so in fact, the whole body is the respiratory organ. And so, as far as the tanden is concerned, the teaching is rather that this area is only the place we feel as the source of breathing movement.

Immovability, then, does not signify rigidity or stiffness that would prevent the sensation of the unavoidable movement that accompanies breathing. Nor is it the sort of immovability that because it is weak or numb to sensation would become easily disturbed by such movement. Rather, it should be the sort of immovability that is highly flexible and full of elasticity and resilience. We must personally search for a way to do zazen in which the pulsation of whole body breathing is smoothly conveyed throughout the body, or a way of sitting an immovable zazen in which we can immerse ourselves in the sense of being the primordial life form.

# Movement within Immovable

## Sitting

### Part II

## Swaying Motion of the Body Axis

My Zazen Sakyu Notebook (12)

Fragmentary Thought XXI

[http://global.sotozen-net.or.jp/eng/dharma/pdf/de13/de13\\_index.htm](http://global.sotozen-net.or.jp/eng/dharma/pdf/de13/de13_index.htm)

In comparison with the standing posture, the sitting posture is far more stable. In the case of the standing posture, the soles of the feet are the only part of the body in contact with the ground as the base of the posture to support the body weight. This area is only about 1% of the total surface of the body, so this foundation is very small. In contrast to this, in the sitting posture of zazen that base is much broader. In the case of someone sitting in the full lotus position, the two knees and buttocks form a foundation that is triangular in shape. It could be said, then, that if the standing posture were likened to a cone standing on the pointed end, the sitting posture is like a trigonal pyramid that sits heavily. The main cause for the increase in stability is that in the sitting posture the center of gravity is placed much lower. Consequently, the full lotus position provides the most stable posture in which the central axis of the body naturally stands upright.

Nevertheless, the quality of stability in the sitting position is different from the immovability found in material objects. No matter how stable a posture may be, a living person who is sitting is always pulled down in a vertical direction by the force of gravity. For that reason, it is inevitable that there are always movements to correct the balance of the whole body in relation to the pull of gravity along the body axis. For this reason, it should be called “dynamic stability.” I would like to look at how the body axis moves during zazen.

When we begin to sit in zazen (as well as at the end of sitting), we sway the body left and right. This is a movement we make by not moving the buttocks and then swaying the body by keeping the head and spine in a straight line. This is a movement, then, where the body from the lower back upwards moves like a stick in a slow manner from left to right (moving forward and backwards is also acceptable). At first, we make big movements and in the process of gradually making seven to eight smaller movements we come to a stop in the center. This is part of the preparation for sitting including “Take a deep breath” that is mentioned in Dogen Zenji’s *Fukan-zazengi* (A Universal Recommendation for Zazen). These movements help to remove the stiffness in our muscles and joints. It also has the objective of helping us to release any tension in our posture.

There is another objective that I would like to add. This is the discovery through bodily sensation of the most balanced position for the body axis, (“Sit upright, leaning neither to the left nor to the right, neither forward nor backward”) and this is done through the process of swaying first in bigger movements and gradually making smaller ones. In this way through moving forward and backward, left and right, and trying various angles, we gradually approach the best position. Finally, our body axis stops at the right place. (For this reason, this movement has an important



significance in leading us into upright sitting and is something we must not neglect).

“Settle into immobile sitting” means that we must firmly put the body axis in a stable position and then sit there without moving. Nevertheless, the swaying motion never stops completely. Even though the larger, intentional swaying movements have stopped, the subtle swaying motions continue unconsciously as before. This is the natural swaying motion of the body axis.

Even though we have settled for the time being into a suitable position for the body axis, that position easily changes because of various things that influence both our body and mind while we sit in zazen. To maintain the perfect upright position of the body axis is a profoundly subtle thing. For this reason in order to keep sitting upright, we must continually make compensations as we detect divergences from the basic upright position. If we clearly feel the correct position of the body axis and are sensitive to any divergences, then we can quickly detect and adjust those divergences so that from the outward appearance the movements are so minute they cannot be seen by another person. On the other hand, if we are drowsy when we are sitting (dullness), the sensation of divergence becomes dull and the body rocks when we correct our position, in a way we say in Japanese “rowing a boat.” Also, when we chase after thoughts during zazen (distraction), the sensation of divergence from the upright position also becomes dull and detection of those movements slows down. This results in the body leaning in one way or another.

Most of the small movements that take place in upright sitting are corrected unconsciously. A person is just sitting comfortably, enjoying the feeling of “the body axis being in a good place where it is harmonized with the force of gravity and a comfortable sensation where the whole

body is balanced”, and is remaining in that position, aiming to deepen this “feeling.” Any other actual small adjustments are entrusted to the body. When this “feeling” becomes clearer, the position of the body axis might become even more well-adjusted. Or it can happen that this sensation becomes indistinct and so we lose the “feeling” of this centeredness. This “feeling” itself is also changing and fluctuating with time.

A Japanese researcher, Yaichiro Hirasawa — also known as the “Dr. Foot-Sole,” has opened up a new field of study called “stasiology” that studies the nature of the body at rest. Dr. Hirasawa has developed a special device to detect and record the fluctuations of the center of balance on the upright sitting position. In connection with what I feel his writings are so important reference materials for my investigation into zazen. If I can, I would like to use his device to investigate the fluctuations of the center of balance during zazen. This is because I expect that we will learn more details about the actual way of the “movements within non-movement”, the relation between the degree of the fluctuations of the center of balance and the accuracy of sitting posture, the relation between such fluctuations and a person’s mental state during zazen...etc... I believe that this approach will more clearly reveal the various aspects of the actual sitting posture itself than studying brain waves during zazen.

# Movement within Immovable

## Sitting

### Part III

## Rhythms Emitted from the Cranial Sacrum System

My Zazen Sankyū Notebook (13)

Fragmentary Thought XXII

[http://global.sotozen-net.or.jp/eng/dharma/pdf/de14/de14\\_08.htm](http://global.sotozen-net.or.jp/eng/dharma/pdf/de14/de14_08.htm)

Up until this point, I have discussed two among the many subtle body movements that take place in the immovable posture of zazen. In brief, the two I chose to write about are the pulsation of the whole body that accompanies the breath and the swaying motion of the body axis that supports upright sitting. To explain this more concretely, the former is a repetitive movement of expansion-contraction (like an amoeba) that originates in the tanden (the lower abdomen below the navel) and pulses throughout the whole body. The latter is a minute movement of the body axis (like the centrifugal movement of a spinning top) that moves forward and backward, left and right.

Both of these movements arise as a natural manifestation of the “aliveness” of zazen and are inevitable and spontaneous movements that we do not intend to cause. So these can be said to be “autonomous

movements during zazen.” There are other such movements as well. For example, we could mention movement that originates from the pulse of the heart and the accompanying blood circulation. Speaking from my own experience, I can say that while sitting in zazen, it is possible to clearly feel the pulsation of the heart on the left side of my chest as well as in both hands of the cosmic mudra (hokkai join). At other times, I can feel the whole body pulsating with the rhythm of the heart pulse. This movement is much more minute than the two movements which I discussed in earlier chapters. And it cannot be perceived from outside the body. However, from within the immovable posture of zazen, it is possible to feel this essential life-supporting movement much more clearly than usual.

Everyone is aware of the movements of the breath as well as the heart pulse. With a little bit of attention, it is possible to easily observe these movements through the senses of sight and touch both in your own body as well as other people’s bodies. There is actually a third movement called the cranial sacral rhythm that undulates rhythmically throughout the body. It is not well known among most people. This is a very subtle movement and in order to feel it, it is necessary to have an especially keen sense. This movement is originated from the deepest layers of the body (“brain and cerebrospinal cord system” that could be called the “core” of the body). I think this is a particularly interesting phenomenon when considered from the nature of human life. Of course, I also think that with regard to the study of zazen, this rhythmic movement will offer valuable material. Especially with regard to “movement within immovable sitting”, this is a phenomenon which must not be ignored. At this point, I am still nothing more than a novice when it comes to the theory of cranial sacral rhythm as well as the “bodywork” called cranial sacral therapy. But I would nevertheless like to write about this movement to the extent that I understand it.

I don't know how well known cranial sacral therapy is at the present time in Japan. However, in America, it is a kind of bodywork that has been gradually attracting attention during the past ten or so years. The cranial sacral rhythm carries out the main role in this type of therapy. With this rhythm our skulls are subtly expanding and contracting and our skeletal systems are subtly turning in and out around the central axis of the body. Both of these movements are extremely minute, but after a certain degree of training, it is possible to feel them whenever the hands are placed on the surface of the body. By placing the palm on the body surface with a very light touch (said to be five grams), you wait quietly with a clear mind until it is possible to feel the rhythm. At the beginning, it is difficult to distinguish this rhythm from the breath or heart pulse rhythms. So, it is important not to be in a hurry and not to force yourself to feel the cranial sacral rhythm by adding your own intention to feel it. When a person is at rest, the breath movement per minute is between fourteen and twenty, for the heart pulse it is between sixty and eighty, and for the cranial sacral rhythm it is between six and twelve. Because the cranial sacral rhythm is very slow and it moves in a peculiar way, it gradually becomes easier to distinguish it from other rhythmic movements as a person becomes used to looking for it.

At the workshop for cranial sacral therapy that I participated in, we worked in pairs and practiced detecting our partner's cranial sacral rhythm. In my case, it was really rather difficult to grasp this sensation by myself. So, the workshop leader put her hands on mine and moved them, following the cranial sacral rhythm movement of my partner in order to give me the feedback information. In this way, I was able to sense it to the extent that I thought, "Is this it?!" Continuing further by myself, I was able to clearly sense the movement — "This is it!" I remember that when I first sensed this rhythm, which is totally different from the breath and

pulse, with my own hand, I felt deeply connected with the “core” of my partner.

The cranial sacral rhythm is created by the flowing movement of fluid in the brain and cerebrospinal cord system. The brain and cerebrospinal cord are not in direct contact with the cranial or sacral bones and spine. In fact, they are wrapped in a bag-like membrane that is shaped like a tadpole. The inside and outside of this membrane is full of a clear liquid called the cerebrospinal fluid. This fluid is secreted from deep within the brain and flows down the backside of the cerebrospinal cord to the sacrum and then returns to the brain by flowing back up the front side of the cerebrospinal cord. When the pressure within the membrane caused by the secretion of the cerebrospinal cord reaches a fixed level, the secretion stops and the fluid within the membrane is absorbed outside and so the pressure falls. When it falls to a certain fixed level, the fluid is again secreted. In this way, the inner pressure rises and falls. (This cycle of secretion and absorption takes between five to eight seconds). This change in the pressure within the membrane is transmitted throughout the whole body: not only places close to the cerebrospinal cord such as the head, face and sacrum, but the cranial sacral rhythm also appears in the shoulders, ribs, buttocks, legs, arms, and so forth. The movements of the breath and pulse easily change as a result of the influence of mental tension or gross body movements. However, the cranial sacral rhythm is by comparison relatively much more settled and stable. In the deep recesses of our bodies, it ticks secretly, yet certainly the life rhythm of each individual person.

If there is stagnation or imbalance in the flow and rhythm of the cerebrospinal fluid, this will then bring about a bad effect on the brain and cerebrospinal cord system, resulting in various symptoms appearing in sense perceptions, body movements and the intellectual life of a

person. In a word, cranial sacral therapy is a treatment in attempting to encourage the return to a normal condition of any stagnation or imbalance found in the cranial sacral rhythm. This is done through examinations made by hand of the flow of the cerebrospinal fluid and rhythm (width, intensity, speed, symmetry) by dissolving that imbalance through various techniques. The feeling I received from the cranial sacral therapy that I participated in was of deep relaxation and peace. I thought that perhaps this condition is what is referred to in the Yogacara (Consciousness-Only) School as *prashabdhi* or “light-peace”, said to be one of the ten general good functions of the mind that gives a sense of easiness and enables a person to do good. Previously, I had sometimes had the sense of the way the body pulsates with the different rhythms of breath and pulse. Since I have become able to sense the cranial sacral rhythm with my hands, I can now sense this other body rhythm more often and more clearly. It seems to me that it is easier to feel it during the slight pause that separates the inhalation and exhalation of breath.

If through the benefits of cranial sacral therapy it would be possible to balance the smooth flow of cerebrospinal fluid and we could sit in a way that the cranial sacral rhythm was balanced symmetrically left and right, up and down, throughout the whole body, I think it would be much easier to put the sitting posture and breath in order. I think it is necessary for zazen practitioners to devise ways so that they can correct the body irregularities and difficulties and can create the balanced and harmonized body-mind for the better quality of zazen. It does seem that along with yoga and diet cranial sacral therapy would be of great use in this regard. Might it not be possible while sitting zazen to use cranial sacral therapy in such a way that we could monitor and correct the cranial sacral rhythm by touching our hands to the back of the head and coccyx or the shoulders and the knees? Conversely, might it not also be possible to bring about an improvement in the quality of cranial sacral rhythm by

sitting zazen for a certain amount of time? In other words, there may be a definite aspect of cranial sacral therapy in zazen. It also seems possible to get a firmer hold on the various medical benefits of zazen that have been emphasized from long ago — such as improvement in energy, recovering balance in the autonomic nervous system, improving blood circulation, gaining courage and composure — by looking at these things from the standpoint of cranial sacral therapy.

I have come to think that zazen practice is primarily concerned with the core part of human existence (the brain and cerebrospinal cord system), beyond the surface layer of the mind (the neo-cortex). I have come to see the actual condition of this “core” in concrete terms since learning cranial sacral therapy and since knowing about the existence of the cranial sacral system that is moving rhythmically inside the membrane. Zazen, which is one spiritual practice, and cranial sacral therapy, which is one kind of body work — these may seem to be completely unrelated, but I feel that in fact an essential connection will be discovered at some deep place between the two. Can it not be said that this material is a must for furthering our understanding of “physiology of zazen”?

I have discussed the pulsation of the whole body breathing, the swaying motion of the body axis, and cranial sacral motion in relation to the theme of “movement within immovable sitting.” Certainly, there are still other movements that must be considered. We can see that within the immovable posture called zazen, there exist many different kinds and qualities of movement. These different rhythms are played simultaneously within one whole body like a symphony. Isn't this something that deserves our surprise?! What is the mutual relationship between these movements? Are they mutually independent? Or do they mutually affect each other? I will leave these questions for a future topic of investigation.



Finally, I would like to mention two points that require some caution. The first is that these movements are not restricted only to when we are sitting in zazen. In fact, as long as we are alive, these will exist wherever we are and at any time. Also, they are not created by us intentionally or by means of our personal effort. Rather, they are naturally and spontaneously manifested through the function of beyond-thought (*hishiryō*). Zazen is the purest posture of “losing, defeated, trusting, waiting” (the definition by Noguchi Mitsuzo of “faith” in the Japanese vernacular vis-à-vis the Chinese concept of it) in the regard to the work of Great Nature. It is simply for this reason that the forms and rhythms of these various spontaneous movements appear more purely and clearly in zazen.

The second point is that especially in the form of zazen called *shikantaza*, where a person expressly does not maintain a fixed concentration on any special object; we would not actively try to detect these movements by paying selective attention to them. It is only that during zazen our sensitivity is sharpened and so we notice those subtle spontaneous movements that always exist even though we usually don't take notice of them because of our usual scattered mind. It would be all right to say, I think, that during zazen consciousness is thoroughly passive — “losing, defeated, trusting, waiting” — and that by some chance these movements are coming from somewhere over there and are picked up in the net of sensitivity. For this reason, the movements that I have mentioned so far are not objects for us to pursue during zazen. We should rather think that we are suddenly given notice to them as one of the sceneries of zazen.

# Zazen and Knowing

## Part I

My Zazen Sakyu Notebook (14)

Fragmentary Thought XXIII

[http://global.sotozen-net.or.jp/eng/dharma/pdf/de15/de15\\_06.htm](http://global.sotozen-net.or.jp/eng/dharma/pdf/de15/de15_06.htm)

Within each of us is the strong urge to pursue comfortable sensations, emotional contentment, and intellectual understanding as far as these can be pursued. In other words, an essential human habit is the compulsive desire for possessing all pleasant things as the objects and contents of conscious experiences (as physical sensations and intellectual understanding). This is something that drives us from deep inside ourselves. It can even be said that for human beings, living with consciousness, what can be known as the content of consciousness is everything. (“What-is-known-is-everything-ism”).

However, if we open the writings of Dogen Zenji (e.g. Shobogenzo Genjo-Koan), we often find statements such as “there is clearly a limit to our knowing. It isn’t possible to grasp the limitless enlightenment of the Buddha by means of our limited knowing.” Consequently, realization or satori should not be verified by something that can be known as experience. In Bendowa, Dogen Zenji states, “If perceptions and understanding (=knowing) are mixed in, then it is not the mark of verification.” In Dogen Zenji’s teaching of zazen, we see that it transcends the knowing, while embracing it within, and that it is absolutely impossible to become the object of knowing. So it can be

called “a state of beyond knowing.” (In this case, “beyond” is used in the same sense as in “beyond-thinking”, hishiryo).

In most other meditation practices, the issues involved take place within the sphere of knowing and from beginning to end, these methods focus on this sphere. In short, the core of the practice is concerned with the regulation and control of conditions in the sphere of knowing. In that sense, they are built on “what-is-known-is-everything-ism” and we can see that there is no interest in a dimension of beyond-knowing. With regard to this, zazen doesn’t ignore the value of knowing, but the main emphasis is put on beyond-knowing which transcends knowing and makes knowing possible. It is precisely for this reason that no matter what happens within the sphere of knowing, it is all right not to deal with such things with your own thoughts and simply entrust yourself to their appearance and disappearance by simply noticing them. In zazen, it is enough to know that such things appear naturally moment to moment within the sphere of knowing. It is not to have the intention of trying to produce some special condition. For us, we do our best to use the ability to know (and that is all there is), however, the totality of zazen is beyond-knowing which transcends knowing. It is necessary then that we keep this in mind in order to practice zazen as beyond-knowing. We mustn’t lose sight of this “beyond-knowing-ness” of zazen by being overtaken by our habit of “what-is-known-is-everythingism.”

For example, I have written in previous articles of a subtle “feeling of Oneness” or minute “movements” within zazen. Usually, it would be difficult to experience these sensations that are in one sense pleasant. As our zazen deepens, our perceptive power becomes sharper and so from time to time, we experience strange sensations that transcend the threshold of ordinary sensations coming in through the five sense functions. It is only natural then that some people take a liking to such sensations and end up placing far too much emphasis on them by only

being concerned by such feelings. Surely, there are some people who single-mindedly make efforts to head for an experience of satori that is based on their own imagination, which again is based on a common (mis)understanding that “Zen is to attain a mysterious insight of satori by means of zazen.”

Surely, such people think they are earnestly seeking something lofty (=seeking the Way), but ultimately, this is nothing more than the manifestation of ordinary, deluded mind that frantically wants to possess certain sensations, emotions, and understanding within the sphere of their own knowing. You can get an idea of this frame of mind if you think of someone who wants to indulge in a feeling of joy by putting something of great value into his/her secret box.

Even though knowing is definitely one part of zazen, it isn't all of zazen. This means that no matter how much we investigate into knowing, that by itself would not be enough to cover all of zazen. The whole of zazen is expressed in Dogen Zenji's Fukuan-zazengi as “an activity beyond human hearing and seeing, a principle prior to human knowledge and perception.” I would like to continue my investigation of zazen based on this teaching. In zazen, the sense functions of seeing, hearing, and smelling are left completely open to the outside world and so it is only natural that things are reflected in the eyes, sounds in the ears, and odors in the nose. Moreover, various physical sensations are felt throughout the body and there is the experience of all kinds of thoughts and emotions appearing and disappearing. Our knowing is made up of these raw materials that are brought in through the six sense functions (seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, and thinking). (When I use the word “knowing”, I am not referring to individual pieces of the raw materials, but rather to a coherent whole that is comprised of such sensations as an

organic structure). Moment-to-moment knowing has its own unique characteristics and these are endlessly changing without a break.

In the same way that the surface of a river is running, constantly expressing a never-ending panorama of configurations, the knowing within zazen keeps running, manifesting endless features. When zazen is practiced as zazen, no matter how knowing is manifested, that is undoubtedly “one facial expression” of zazen; each and every knowing is equally “one scenery” of zazen. Furthermore, for zazen, each “facial expression” and each “scenery” is the absolute truth of each moment. This is to say there is no room to compare those knowings and say, “This knowing is good. That knowing is bad” or “it is good to have this knowing but it’s bad to have that knowing.” There must be absolutely no value judgments to knowing in zazen, based on comparative good and bad, correct and incorrect. We mustn’t enclose the knowing within the confines of our own thought, having unneeded worries such as “Is it all right that this kind of knowing arises? Is it wrong that this kind of knowing arises?” and so on. I understand the teaching present in Dogen Zenji’s Fukuan-zazengi, “Do not think good, do not think bad. Do not administer pros and cons” to mean “Don’t bring your narrow views of what is good and bad into zazen. Stop that because it results in suppressing and paralyze the knowing”.

One of the most important aspects of psychotherapy is to create a place where the client can open the heart and express everything to the therapist by hiding nothing. Can’t we say the same thing about zazen? In short, shouldn’t zazen be such a condition where all kinds of knowing can freely appear as it is with nothing hidden and with no deception? Aren’t we aiming for zazen setting the knowing free, instead of zazen restricting the knowing?

Zazen isn't an escapist business of shutting off knowing in order to peacefully dwell in a world of no knowing. For that reason, zazen isn't a narrow, limited matter of trying to expel bothersome knowing. In zazen, knowing isn't something that "If this is here, there is going to be difficulty." In Keizan Zenji's Zazen Yojinki, there are the words, "Like one who has died utterly, whose eyes are not clouded by anything, whose feet are not supported by anything. Where is there any dust? Where is there a barrier?" This expresses a condition in zazen where no matter what sort of knowing arises; it does not become an obstacle or trouble. This is because zazen has a magnanimity that allows any kind of knowing to freely play and there isn't the slightest restriction.

Furthermore, zazen isn't a matter of actively or intentionally making an effort to create a preferable knowing. Neither is it a selective activity where we choose to maintain only a certain kind of knowing. We take it for granted to live a life whose center is what we know and never question this way of living. So naturally we are very much concerned about the content of knowing. Methods to control such content have been refined over a long period of time. However, I think that zazen is something that came into existence based on the unique effort to critically transcend "what-is-known-is-everything-ism".

With regard to methods that seek to control the content of knowing, zazen implies an essential criticism. "Knowing isn't our true nature. To only chase after knowing is like chasing after our own shadow, isn't it? How about stopping the impulse to meddle with knowing for a while? If we can do, it will be possible for us to become much more intimate with a vast world..."

Whether we escape from knowing or chase after it, certainly we must assume a certain posture of body and mind when we actually do this.

However, the upright sitting of zazen is a unique posture we take where we neither flee from knowing nor chase after it. In martial arts, there is a posture called “Mugamame = the posture of nothing” (Kashima Shinryu) or “Shizentai = the natural body” (judo) which is said to be neither offensive nor defensive with regard to one’s opponent. It is a posture of “voidness” that precedes the “actual” movement. That posture is said to be immovable and at the same time, while not being a dead body (a posture which lacks a potentiality to transform into a technique), within it is concealed a limitless creativity that can freely give birth to a technique which is able to properly suit the situation. It can be said that the upright sitting called zazen is to face any sort of knowing with this “posture of nothing” and to maintain it. If beforehand we carry fear, animosity, hopes, and expectations with regard to knowing into zazen, and sit with the thought of choosing between likes and dislikes, then it will not be possible to maintain the “posture of nothing” with regard to the continual flow of knowing that appears within zazen. Consequently, it is important to first have a clear understanding that no matter what knowing arises, zazen will not be sullied by it in the least and a strong conviction that it is all right to peacefully aim at sitting zazen with this “posture of nothing” (the basis for this understanding and conviction will be the insight that knowing is essentially contingent and empty) and then after that, it is a matter of embodying and deepening this “posture of nothing” through continuing this practice.

In this way, as long as we are sitting upright in a “natural body” mode to the flow of knowing, it is only a matter of entrusting yourself to knowing as it arises in each moment. It seems to me that the phrase “Not doing anything at all, the six senses inactive” found in Zazen Yojinki, points to a person sitting zazen with this attitude. Consequently, even if you are asked why you have such and such knowing at any certain time, the only answer you can give is “I don’t know because I was not consciously

involved with it.” This is because that knowing simply happened at that moment, naturally coming out of the totality of zazen.

In the midst of the great sky, various clouds appear from somewhere, going this way and that way, and then they go off, we do not know where they disappear to. In this way, the condition of the whole sky changes from moment to moment. However, there are an unlimited number of factors that contribute to this process of change so it is beyond our ability to explain it in terms of cause and effect. And it is also impossible for us to control this process as we would like to. As for those of us who are watching this process and ask, “Why is it that at this moment this certain condition appears?” or “What condition will it turn into next?” this is something that can only be said to be “mysterious” or “incomprehensible.” (Something that cannot be reached by words or thought). If we were to ask the great sky, it would surely answer, “Don’t know.” Nevertheless, the fact is that the great sky tirelessly continues to freely change its condition. The only thing that we can do is to watch and enjoy it as it is. Isn’t this the same with regard to the knowing during zazen? For the person sitting zazen who has nothing to do with it, there is the continual appearance of knowing that changes from moment to moment without ever stagnating in the least. That process itself, which transcends the ability to know of the person sitting zazen, is being guided by an unlimited number of conditions that cannot be grasped through knowing. By means of a grace that is beyond our knowing, we are forced to know something. However, that function, that grace itself, in short, that part of “we are forced to” is something that is absolutely not an object of our knowing. And so, it looks to us as if the knowing is operating by itself. This is the foundation for the birth of the fundamental illusion that “There exists the self who knows and it is the subject of knowing.” Nevertheless, the reality is that there is no room at all for the knowing to influence the process. In that sense, the knowing has the same status as



“the creature” (what is created) in Christianity in opposition to the Creator. Consequently, “the self who knows” is totally unable to do anything about knowing itself. And so, the only thing that “the self” can do is to receive each condition from moment to moment without complaint, with the attitude of “Let me be just as You like” (the words of Jesus on the cross).

# Zazen and Knowing

## Part II

My Zazen Sakyu Notebook (15)

Fragmentary Thought XXIV

[http://global.sotozen-net.or.jp/eng/dharma/pdf/de16/de16\\_05.htm](http://global.sotozen-net.or.jp/eng/dharma/pdf/de16/de16_05.htm)

Behind knowing, something beyond it is functioning. While making knowing possible, it transcends knowing. Certainly there is something that can never be reached by means of knowing. Without that, knowing doesn't even exist. But it would never be possible to use words that appeal to knowing by saying "It's A or B." In a word, it's a condition where a predicate cannot be attached. This is why in Zen it is indicated by the interrogative "who." In Dogen Zenji's Shobogenzo Zazenshin, we find, "There is a 'who' in non-thinking'. A 'who' maintains the self." In Zen expression the prefix "non (非)" is not simply a negation. It contains the meaning of "transcending while embracing." So I borrowed this usage of the word and made an unfamiliar phrase of "the condition of nonknowing" in preceding articles that I have written.

This expression "the condition of non-knowing" in concrete terms is nothing other than the totality of zazen (lumping together the person practicing zazen and the whole environment around him). I think it is necessary to investigate the true nature of knowing within zazen in the relationship with this conditions of non-knowing. If this is omitted and the focus is only on knowing, there is the danger of not putting knowing in its proper place within zazen by either putting too much value on

knowing (e.g. mixing zazen and meditation, a tendency to overemphasize the psychological aspects of zazen, etc.) or conversely by underestimating the value of knowing (e.g. neglecting or ignoring the important role that knowing carries out in zazen, a superficial view of zazen that only pays attention to the externals of zazen, etc.).

The whole of zazen, which is the condition of nonknowing, is not in the same dimension as knowing (not one). However it expresses or reflects itself in a form of knowing. So they are directly connected with each other and not two. I think this not-one nor not-two relationship must not be overlooked. From this point, the following two things can be taken up as important points in the practice of zazen. One thing is that we must never lose sight of the fact that the source and "what is knowing" is not knowing itself but that it is the condition of nonknowing. In short, knowing is unilaterally born by the totality of zazen and we mustn't obscure this cause-result relationship. The other thing is to correctly and minutely differentiate the messages that come from the condition of non-knowing without distorting them or mixing them up with noise. In other words, knowing should faithfully reflect the conditions of non-knowing as it is.

What sort of sitting is necessary so that this quality of knowing can be attained within zazen? With regard to zazen, it is stated in Dogen Zenji's *Fukan-zazengi*, "Cease all movements of the conscious mind, stop the gauging of all thought and views." This is to not antagonize the movements of the conscious mind or thought and views by trying to eliminate or do away with such things. The meaning of these words is to completely give up all intentions, all fabrications based on the ego consciousness (practices of controlling the self) that aim to control the mind according to our wishes by trying to bring about special mental states. What we must cease or stop are "the movements of the mind"

which is to actively use the mind by setting up your goals and "gauging all thoughts and views" which are activities that involve will and intention. We don't need to stop mental activities themselves. Even when you "cease all movements of the conscious mind" and stop the "gauging of all thoughts and views," knowing will vividly appear within zazen apart from any thoughts. It will be just as it is written in Dogen Zenji's Shobogenzo Zazenshin, "It is actualized in non-thinking."

In this way, to "cease all movements of the conscious mind, stop the gauging of all thought and views" and to let knowing "actualized in non-thinking" is the essential condition for knowing to be able to faithfully reflect the totality of zazen. Nevertheless, in truth, this is not an easy thing to do.

As I touched in the last article, we are deeply conditioned by "what-is-known-is everything-ism". Therefore it is relatively easy for us to make the mistake of assuming that the contents of knowing are the whole self (i.e. to regard knowing and the self as the same; in a word, the illusion that the known self equals the true nature of the self). As a consequence, by turns, we are usually happy or unhappy depending on the content of knowing and we are always trying to control and manage our knowing according to our own conveniences, preferences, and ideas. If we bring these habits into zazen, then, as mentioned earlier, zazen becomes a means of constant movements of the mind and gauging thought and views, i.e. zazen becomes a method for self control (actualized in thinking).

How is it possible to protect zazen from these deeply rooted habits? First of all, in our own thoughts and behavior we must be clearly aware of the reality in which we regard knowing and self as being the same. Then, it is necessary to clearly acknowledge that it is a big mistake to regard

knowing and the self as the same. We must realize that this is nothing more than a self-serving prejudice, by fully applying our intellect. Knowing is surely one part of the self but it isn't all of it and this is something we must be able to agree with completely. Nevertheless, this deeprooted habit isn't something that will be cured simply by understanding it with your head. Zazen is the practice of returning to the "true nature of the self" by waking up from the dream of the "known self." Ultimately, there is no other way of fundamentally correcting this habit than through the effort of really practicing correct zazen.

If you try zazen, you will quickly realize that as long as you regard knowing and the self as the same, you cannot simply accept knowing as knowing. There will inevitably be a reaction against the contents of knowing and you will end up being dragged around by this. And then, you will end up forgetting the essential effort of upright sitting because the center of your intention will shift to managing the contents of knowing. Moment to moment in our zazen, we are standing at a crossroads: will we be deepening into zazen or will we become occupied with knowing? In most cases, little by little and without being aware of it (or while being aware of it), people tend to go tottering off in the latter direction. It is through fully tasting this difficulty in zazen, that we experience over and over again the strength, the depth, and the persistence of our habit to regard knowing and the self as being the same.

However, it isn't possible for those of us who practice zazen to stagnate there. In any case, there is nothing else we can do except to make the effort over and over again of awakening from our infatuation with knowing by retracing our steps and heading in the direction of upright sitting. When our diligence bears fruit and gradually our zazen ripens, we will be able to distinguish between the condition of knowing and that of non-knowing (the totality of zazen equals the true nature of the self).

Then, upright sitting and knowing will no longer get involved in the habitual entanglements and confrontations and knowing will become of use to upright sitting. Actually, the root of the problem is not knowing itself, but rather the attitude we have toward knowing and the manner we deal with it. When this changes, then we are no longer disconcerted or manipulated by knowing. Rather, we will be able to use knowing as a key for regulating the body, breath, and mind, and in this way effectively make use of it in zazen. Furthermore, knowing will be an indispensable part of zazen that will merge and unite with it. In this way, knowing is fully integrated with zazen and it becomes zazen's knowing (the knowing of "the actualization in nonthinking") and then a new development will occur in knowing itself. In the previous sections of My Zazen Notebook, I touched on the subtle feelings of oneness within the whole body as well as the experience of all sorts of subtle movements. These are actual examples of this type of knowing.

There are still other things to discuss with regard to knowing within zazen, but I will stop here because of space limitations. For a person who practices zazen, one thing we must always keep in mind is to practice zazen in such a way that knowing is effectively used as knowing. Within that kind of zazen, knowing which usually serves for delusions functions actively as an indispensable part of "sitting Buddha." How is it possible to sit zazen in which knowing "becomes a Buddha?" That is the task to be accomplished.

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Sermons on  
Soto Zen Yearly Events

[sermons](#)

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# January

## Welcoming New Year

Happy New Year to all!

I hope that the New Year finds you in happiness and good health. How have you started off this brand-new year?

In the Soto tradition, we celebrate New Year's Day at training monasteries in Japan by performing special ceremonies such as *Saicho Ninji* (New Year's morning salutations), *Gakyaku Settai* (receiving visitors), *Tendoku Daihannya* (ceremonial reading of Great Perfection of Wisdom Sutra). In the *Saicho Ninji*, the *chiji* (stewards) and *choshu* (prefects) in unison voice formal congratulations to the abbot, saying:

*This day of renewing the year is an auspicious occasion; we humbly express our congratulations. These days the weather is extremely cold; with deferential consideration for you, Reverend Abbot, we respectfully inquire if everything is going well.*

At this moment of welcoming New Year, we should investigate the deep meaning of "this day of renewing the year is an auspicious occasion." Here I recall one of Daichi Zenji's verses, titled Gantan (New Year's Day).

*If someone asks me, "What is the Buddha Dharma of New Year?"*

*I would open my mouth and say, "there are no words to tell you."*

*When the New Year comes, the true face of spring is revealed everywhere around us.*

*Look at the December plum newly blooming because the spring winds have blown (Nothing is hidden. No need to speak in words).*

The auspiciousness of each New Year lies in the feeling of renewal and freshness when we welcome the beginning of the brand-new year. But in Zen we should live every day as New Year's Day, shouldn't we? We eat meals every day. If eating meals is our practice, we should eat each meal with a totally fresh attitude as if it is the first (and the final) meal in our life. We sit zazen everyday. But we should sit each zazen as if it is done for the first time in our life. If we become too used to zazen and lose freshness in our attitude, it stops being a practice. It simply becomes "routine work."

So "*the Buddha Dharma of New Year*" is the Buddhism of living each and every day as New Year's Day. When every day is an auspicious day, our whole life will become auspicious and a matter for congratulation. Not only is New Year's Day auspicious but also every day. It is really auspicious that any day is auspicious.

We meet each day anew. This is the correct attitude of living in the impermanent world. Everything is in constant flux; it never stops. We will never be able to live the same day again. Every day is the first and last day for us. We have to freshly invent our own unique "TODAY" without imitations and repetitions. Moment by moment we should renew ourselves and produce "*New Year's Day*."

Here is one of Dogen Zenji's Jodo ( Dharma Hall Discourse) on the first day of the year from Eihei Koroku (Dogen's Extensive Record);

*Today is the beginning of a new year [1241], and also a day with three mornings. I say three mornings because it is the beginning of the year, beginning of the month, and the beginning of the day.*

*Here is a story. A monk asked Jingqing Daofu, "Is there Buddha Dharma at the beginning of the new year or not?"*

*Jingqing said, "There is."*

*The monk asked, "What is the Buddha Dharma at the beginning of the new year?"*

*Jingqing said, "New Year's Day begins with a blessing, and the ten thousand things are completely new."*

*The monk said, "Thank you, teacher, for your answer."*

*Jingqing said, "This old monk today lost the advantage."*

*A monk asked Mingjiao Zhimen Shikuan, "Is there Buddha Dharma at the beginning of the new year, or not?"*

*Mingjiao said, "There is not."*

*The monk said, "Every year is a good year, every day is a good day; why isn't there [Buddha Dharma in the beginning of the new year]?"*

*Mingjiao said, "Old man Zhang drinks, and old man Li gets drunk."*

*The monk said, "Great Elder, [you are like] a dragon's head and snake's tail."*

*Mingjiao said, "This old monk today lost the advantage."*

*The teacher Dogen said: [Both teachers] say the same, "This old monk today lost the advantage."*

*Hearing such a story many people say, "These are good stories about [teachers] losing advantage [in a dialogue]." This*

*mountain monk [Dogen] does not at all agree. Although Jingqing and Mingjiao speak of one loss, they do not yet see one gain. Suppose somebody were to ask me, Kosho, if there is Buddha Dharma at the beginning of the new year, or not.*

*I would say to them: There is.*

*Suppose the monk responded, "What is the Buddha Dharma at the beginning of the new year?"*

*This mountain monk would say to him: May each and every body, whether staying still or standing up, have ten thousand blessings.*

*Suppose the monk said, "In that case, in accordance with this saying, I will practice."*

*This mountain monk would say to him: I, Kosho, today have advantage after advantage.*

*Now please practice.*

[translation by Taigen Dan Leighton & Shohaku Okumura]

I would like you to chew on this Dogen zenji's presentation of "The Buddha Dharma at the Beginning of the New Year."

In this year why don't we make sincere effort to enrich and renew the eternally ancient Buddha Dharma ("December plum") so that it freshly blooms in a brand-new form in the year of 2012!

# February Nehan-e Nirvana assembly to commemorate the Buddha's entering Nirvana

Shakyamuni Buddha passed away at the age of 80 under twin sala trees near the town of Kushinagara. We are very familiar with this name of the town as we recite this name every time when setting out eating bowls, intoning "Buddha was born in Kapilavastu, enlightened in Magadha, taught in Varanasi, entered nirvana in Kushinagara..."

We sometimes call his death "the Buddha's Entering Nirvana," but, strictly speaking, the Buddha was a person who had already attained nirvana when enlightened under the bodhi tree and he always remained in that state. So it is problematic to use this term only for his death. Therefore later Buddhists assumed two types of nirvana; nirvana-with-body and nirvana-without-body. If this idea is applied, we can say the Buddha was in the state of nirvana-with-body while he was alive and entered nirvana-without-body when he was dead.

But I think this is still problematic. In their doctrine of two types of nirvana, nirvana-with-body is imperfect compared to nirvana-without-body. They think as far as we have a body in this world, we can not attain a perfect nirvana because it is impossible to eradicate all delusions while having a body. It implies that we need to die to attain a perfect nirvana or

we have to give up attaining nirvana in this world. Is this really the Buddha's message?

In Mahayana Buddhism there is a phrase, "Without eradicating delusion, we attain nirvana". Here nirvana is not an ideal world somewhere far away from us but a world of reality in which we are living here and now. *Nehan-e* is a good opportunity for us rethink about a very important concept in Buddhism, nirvana, being guided by "if you can understand that birth and death are Nirvana itself, there is not only no necessity to avoid them but also nothing to search for that is called Nirvana." These are Dōgen's words in *Shoji* (Birth-Death).

In the Soto Zen tradition, we perform a special ceremony, *Nehan-e*, to commemorate the Buddha's death and express our gratitude to him on February 15th. *Nehan-e* is one of the three most important commemoration days in the Soto Zen tradition. It is one of the three Buddha memorials (*San Bukki*): *Nehan-e* (Buddha's Nirvana assembly), *Gotan-e* (Buddha's birthday assembly) and *Jodo-e* (Buddha's attainment assembly).

For this ceremony, temples hang a big scroll depicting the Buddha entering nirvana. In the painting, the Buddha is lying on his right side in a grove of sala trees, his head toward the north and his face toward the west. He is surrounded by weeping gods, humans, and animals.

We, as Buddhists, should know what his last words were, his last message in this world. According to Mahaparinibbana Sutta, he said to the bhikkhus, "***Behold now, bhikkhus, I exhort you: All compounded things are subject to vanish. Strive with earnestness!***" This was the last word of the Buddha.

This sounds almost too ordinary to be the last words of a great person revered as a "World Teacher." But this should be deeply understood as the essence of his whole teaching.

The teaching of impermanence is telling us that anguish, worry, sadness, and suffering come from the delusion of taking the impermanent as the permanent. To clarify this, the Buddha further taught that the five aggregates (our body and mind) were not the permanent selves. Thinking of body and mind as a permanent self, we tightly cling to it. This is a core of all delusions.

The teaching of impermanence also encourages the Buddha's disciples to strive to practice diligently. If they are forgetful about the fact that they are impermanent and mortal, they might reserve today's practice for tomorrow and make light of the practice. There is no guarantee that we will be alive tomorrow. If we wish to accomplish the practice and attain nirvana, the ultimate peace in this lifetime, we should strive to practice with full earnestness.

This is what the Buddha meant by his last words. And he himself was a great living example who lived out a life of what he said in his last words. Why don't we follow him?

Finally I would like to introduce to you a verse titled "Buddha's Nirvana" composed by Zen master Daichi as an incense phrase for the celebration of *Nehan-e*:

*Willow trees are dark and flowers are bright. It is February of spring.*

*In a grove of sala trees the Buddha manifested and moved toward nirvana.*

*Venerable Chunda tried to cover Buddha's corpse with white cloth but could not do it.*

*Buddha's radiant golden body was fully exposed.*

This verse is saying that nirvana is eternal and permeates throughout the whole universe and can't be covered by the limited cloth of our conceptual grasping. It is fully exposed everywhere, as spring scenery of dark willows and bright flowers.

Buddha's entering nirvana is a skillful means to teach us about impermanence and he is actually dwelling in the whole world forever. That is why Nirvana Assembly Statement begins by intoning, "*The pure body of the dharma realm fundamentally has no emerging or disappearing. The power of the vow of great compassion is manifest throughout the goings and comings ...*"



# March Higan The Other Shore

Higan, "the other shore" or "the farther shore," is a sister word with shigan, "this shore." Our use of higan here derives from a metaphor. Buddhists say that the goal of practice is to cross the river from this shore of ignorance (the world of birth and death) to the other shore of awakening (the world of nirvana). This river is said to consist of four rushing streams: the stream of craving, the stream of clinging to being, the stream of wrong view, the stream of ignorance.

Reaching higan means going beyond all these streams. Mahayana Buddhism teaches that we can accomplish this crossing through our practice in this lifetime. But it is also traditionally taught that higan as a practice of crossing the river to the other shore of enlightenment is mainly for renounced monks and nuns. For lay people, practice to reach the other shore lies in visiting temples and graves to pay respects to the Buddha and ancestors. In this context, "the other shore" means temples and a gravesites. So there are two different versions of the other shore, one for monks and another for lay people. This is an illustration of the situation in Asia. There are "two versions of Buddhism", one for monks and one for lay followers.

In Japan the seasonal higan-e (The other Shore Assembly) until now has been focused on commemorating ancestors. In the Japanese Buddhist tradition, higan-e is held at temples twice a year for seven days (three

days before and after vernal and autumnal equinoxes), priests and practitioners perform offering ceremonies for departed spirits of the founding abbot, successive generations of buddhas and ancestors, and lay followers. During this time people visit family temples and graves to comfort the spirits of ancestors, some of them travelling great distances. People usually call this period of the year as "o-higan," with the prefix "o" to make it more polite.

March and September are national holidays, making it possible for people to visit their family graves for o-higan. The living relatives prepare flowers and candles, incense and some favorite foods of the deceased. They sweep the area around the graves (most temples always have brooms available) and clean the gravestones. They put flowers in graveside vases and pour water into a special hole in the center of the grave. Incense is lit and water is poured over the headstones. Family members pay their respects by squatting and bowing their heads with hands pressed together. This is a time for people to punctuate the flow of everyday busyness and remind themselves to appreciate the life given to them by serenely putting hands together to the ancestors.

Higan comes from Sanskrit Buddhist word paramita which means "perfection." In Mahayana tradition we, as bodhisattavas who aspire to attain enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings, are walking from this shore toward the other shore by means of practicing the six paramitas: giving or generosity (*dana*), morality or keeping the precepts (*sila*), forbearance, tolerance or endurance (*kshanti*), effort (*virya*), meditation (*dhyana*), and wisdom (*prajna*).

According to Professor Kodo Matsunami, the six items that are indispensable when visiting the family temple and the family gravesite during o-higan correspond to the six paramitas. The items are water,

powdered incense, flowers, stick incense, food and drink, and light. Therefore by offering these things to the Buddha and ancestors, one is actually practicing the six paramitas. Here is what he says about the six things. *"Water is necessary for all life and so reminds us of the importance of giving. Powdered incense may be rubbed over the body to perfume it, getting rid of bad smell and refreshing both body and mind, just as keeping the precepts does. Flowers calm the mind, assuage anger and evoke forbearance. Stick incense, when lit, wafts a pleasant fragrance, recalling effort. Food and drink gives us a feeling of repleteness and reminds us of contemplation. Light refers to candles - as light illuminates the darkness, wisdom shows us in which direction we should move."* Interesting, isn't it? It would be nice if we can keep these correspondences in mind when we perform rituals with these items.

Finally let us see what Dogen Zenji said about paramita. In his "Shobogenzo Bukkyo (The Buddha's Teaching)" he wrote; Paramita means "arriving at the other shore" [of enlightenment]. Although the other shore does not have the appearance or trace from olden times, arriving is actualized. Arriving is the fundamental point. Do not think that practice leads to the other shore. Because there is practice on the other shore, when you practice, the other shore arrives. It is because this practice embodies the capacity to actualize all realms." (Treasury of the True Dharma Eye-Zen Master Dogen's Shobo Genzo vol.1 Edited by Kazuaki Tanahashi)

We should deeply investigate the meaning of "because there is practice on the other shore, when you practice, the other shore arrives". Here the duality of this shore and the other shore is beautifully transcended. The other shore has reached us when we practice paramita wholeheartedly. We, whether monk or lay, should remain mindful of the six paramitas in this sense at all times, not just at higan.

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# April

## Buddha's Birthday Assembly

Zen master Daichi (1289-1366) wrote a verse entitled "Buddha's Birth." This was possibly composed as "Kogo", or Incense Phrases for Buddha's Birthday Assembly, what we call "Butsu Gotan-e".

*"In Jambudvipa, there are eighty-four thousand castles.  
Without using any weapons such as swords and shields, great  
peace is created.  
We capture Gautama, a daylight thief, alive.  
So we do not bother to give him a blow with a stick, as  
Unmon once said."*

In Indian cosmology, Jambudvipa is considered a human world.

It is said to be filled with 84,000 earthly desires which cause us to suffer. These earthly desires are likened to "castles" in this verse. We tend to think that our practice is to attack and destroy those castles, believing that we can never attain awakening unless we extinguish all earthly desires.

The Buddha was born into Jambudvipa in order to teach us that that is not the case. He showed us the way to live in peace without resorting to battle against the castles of earthly desires. He never taught how to invent and use weapons to destroy them. True peace is not possible so long as we rely on weapons.

Chinese Zen master Unmon once blamed the Buddha for tricking us like a wily thief by talking about delusion and enlightenment as if they exist separately. So we started a kind of spiritual war against delusion for the sake of enlightenment. According to Unmon, Gautama made uncalled-for statements only to misguide us to practice as though we were at war. He said, "If I had been there when Gautama was born, I would have given him one fatal blow so as to bring peace back to the people's mind". (Of course he is actually praising the Buddha through an expression of reproach). Zen master Daichi says that if only we can capture the Buddha alive, we need not perform "Unmon's one blow" to the Buddha to correct his error.

How is it possible to create great peace without using weapons? How can we capture the Buddha alive?

The answer is to sit zazen of shikantaza. In zazen we do not fight against whatever happens to us. We do not apply any method or technique as a weapon to win the fight. Instead we simply accept it and naturally let go. Zazen is to "cease fire" and to create a profound peace within oneself and the world.

During zazen, "sitting-buddha" is being actualized in a vivid way with our whole body-mind. In that sense a new Buddha is being born moment by moment. That is how we capture the Buddha alive.

In this verse of celebrating Buddha's birth, Zen Master Daichi points out that the purpose of the Buddha's birth into this world is to show us how to "bring about peace in our life without fighting against our earthly desires." And he suggests we practice and realize it through zazen by which we "capture the Buddha alive." As the sixth descendant of Japanese Soto Zen tradition (Eihei Dogen – Koun Ejo – Tettsu Gikai –

Keizan Jokin – Meiho Sotetsu – Gida Daichi), he tries to convey what zazen is all about by describing the significance of the Buddha's birth.

In our Soto tradition, we observe Buddha's Birthday Assembly on April 8th to commemorate his birth. Sometimes it is called "*Hanamatsuri*", meaning "Flower Festival", because he was born in the flower garden in Lumbini. As well as performing a solemn ritual and sutra chanting, people also ladle ama-cha (a tea prepared from a variety of hydrangea) on a small standing baby Buddha statue in a pavillion with a roof decorated with flowers. It is also a day for us to remind ourselves how lucky we are to be born into this world as a human being, because we can meet with wonderful teachings and practices taught by the Buddha.

# May Senzo Kuyo Ancestor Veneration

Traditionally in Japan, a Buddhist altar (butsudan) is installed in the most solemn location in almost every household. Inside it are placed tablets with ancestors' names inscribed (*ihai*). Ancestors are remembered and venerated through various rituals and observances, such as offering incense and flowers, placing sweets and tea on the altar, chanting sutras, and performing annual ancestral ceremonies (*higan* and *bon*) as well as memorial services.

Recently it is said that Japanese people are slowly losing interest in the veneration of ancestral spirits. But showing appreciation of ancestors is still an important component in Japanese Buddhism, one through which the living feel that they are spiritually connected to deceased family members. By performing many forms of expressing their care of their ancestors, people can find and get in touch with their own roots more deeply through their ancestors. Therefore, they don't feel alone and alienated.

In the areas of Asia (China, Korea, Japan and Vietnam) whose cultures were strongly influenced by Confucian ideals of filial piety, respect for ancestors became very important and was incorporated in the teachings of the Buddha. But how about in areas outside of Asia, such as North America and Europe? To the people of those areas, is ancestor veneration just an "Asian" form of "primitive" or "pre-modern" religious belief? Does it have no spiritual significance or meaning to modern-day non-



Asian people? Don't they need to practice, or at least understand the reason for the caring of ancestors?

Ancestor veneration is not a matter of belief, but a matter of practice—the "*practice of looking deeply into ourselves in order to recognize the presence of our ancestors in us, in every cell of us*" (Thich Nhat Hanh). When we understand it in this way, we can deepen and widen the concept of ancestor veneration. It becomes a practice for our ancestors AND us, both existing in the present moment, instead of merely doing something for deceased spirits only. We are the continuation of our ancestors, and those ancestors literally live in us. If we earnestly follow Buddha's teaching and live a happy and meaningful life together with other people, then that makes our ancestors within us happy as well. This way of living—ancestor veneration in the truest sense—can be universally recommended as a Buddhist practice.

Besides blood ancestors, we also have spiritual ancestors. When we start walking on the Buddha's Way, we are born anew into the world of Buddhas and Ancestral Teachers (*busso*). All those who have been walking on the Way before us become our spiritual ancestors. In Sotoshu, during morning service (*choka*), we have Ancestral Teachers Hall Sutra Chanting (*sodo fugin*). After chanting Harmony of Difference and Equality (*Sandokai*) and/or Precious Mirror Samadhi (*Hokyo zanmai*), the chant leader (*ino*) recites the following *eko* (dedication of merit):

We humbly beg your true compassion and attentive concern. Having chanted the Harmony of Difference and Equality and the Precious Mirror Samadhi, we present the excellent merit just accumulated to the successive generations of buddhas and ancestors who transmitted the flame....

## STANDARD OBSERVANCES OF THE SŌTŌ SCHOOL

And then the great assembly together recites the names in the lineage, beginning with Great Teacher Vipashyin Buddha and ending with the teacher immediately preceding the founding abbot of the particular monastery. This is a wonderful way for us to remember and repay their compassionate blessings.

We also have animal ancestors, plant ancestors, mineral ancestors, and so forth. Our existence is only possible with the support of these infinite ancestors; we live and practice together with them. Dogen Zenji refers to this togetherness of all as "Buddhas and Ancestors" (*busso*): "...[B]y the continuous practice of all buddhas and ancestors, your practice is actualized and your great road opens up. By your continuous practice, the continuous practice of all buddhas is actualized and the great road of all buddhas opens up. Your continuous practice creates the circle of the way."(Shobogenzo Gyoji)

We should take a fresh look at our care of ancestors in the light of this profound understanding. Then we can recreate and revitalize the way of ancestor veneration for the future.

# June Funeral

It could be said, perhaps, that human culture and civilization started with funerals. The act of performing funerals sharply distinguishes humans from animals. Animals might grieve over the death of fellow creatures, but they never bury dead bodies with burial accessories. Only humans take care of their dead and have special rites to send the dead to the next world whether in a primitive way or a sophisticated way. For us, death is not only a biological event but also a spiritual matter.

All of us, without exception, are mortal. So it is essential for us to create appropriate forms for the disposition of a corpse, the emotional healing of a bereaved family/relatives/friends, and the recovery of a community's integration after someone's death. We need to approach this matter of funerals very seriously because to think about how to mourn for the dead is directly related to thinking about how to die, and eventually leads us to think about how to live.

There can be many different ways to grieve someone's passing, to maintain the dignity of the deceased, to pay our respects, and to send those we have lost out to the next world. The manner in which a funeral is performed varies depending on how people view life and death. For example, in the case of funerals in Japan, we can find elements of native shamanism, Shintoism, Confucianism and Buddhism.

In the Soto School, when someone dies, first a priest is called to perform a vigil (*tsuya*). And then (usually the next day) a funeral ceremony

(*honso*) is held at the family home, a temple, or a funeral home. After the funeral, the corpse is taken to a crematory. There, the mourners pick up the skeletal remains with chopsticks and put them in an urn. This urn is eventually—after ceremonies on the forty-ninth day after death—consigned to a tomb or an ossuary.

The main part of the Sotoshu funeral is a ritual to make the deceased a disciple of Buddha by performing tonsure (only as a gesture) and by bestowing the sixteen precepts, a precept name, and a lineage certificate. After giving the precepts, the officiant offers the following words:

"When sentient beings receive Buddhist precepts, they enter the rank of all the buddhas. When one's rank is the same as the greatly awakened, truly one is a child of all the Buddhas. Hail great pity, great compassion, and great mercy, which embrace us."

In this way we are calling out to the dead person, wishing him/her to continue walking (practicing) on the path of the Buddha even after death. Because death is a departure from this world, this is a sort of heartfelt prayer that we offer for the dead to have a safe journey. It is a very natural and pristine feeling, something very human; we need not rigidly assume the existence of a soul after death.

These days, in many developed countries, funerals are often handled by professional funeral companies, very efficiently but somehow in a businesslike manner. In that situation, the very human and sacred activity of holding a funeral tends to be relinquished over to people who have never met or known the departed. During the funeral, everything is done smoothly and on schedule, and soon after the ceremony, the attendees quickly return to their everyday ordinariness as if nothing has happened.

This tendency makes us forget that death is a great reminder to learn about the impermanence of life. For this reason, we are losing our sense of the tremendous value and depth of our lives. By ignoring the fact of death, we ignore the miracle and mystery of life. In other words, to appreciate life, we need to appreciate death. A funeral is a golden opportunity for this kind of appreciation. In that sense, death is a wonderful and precious gift from the deceased to us, the living. But then how can we make the best use of this gift?

With this in mind, let us once more seriously consider this matter of funerals, and how we approach them in the present socio-historical context. I believe it is extremely important, particularly now.

## July

# A Visit to a Grave

When I was eleven years old, my father was offered a job transfer to Osaka city, the third largest city by population in Japan. At that time our family lived in a provincial part of another prefecture, where my father worked for a local branch of a big construction company. For him, this offer meant a promotion in his career. One day at dinnertime, he brought up the move. Upon hearing about it, my grandmother on my father's side, who was then living with us, said in a loud voice, "Absolutely not! Who will take care of our ancestors' tomb? I will never leave here, even if all of you move out!"

We were very surprised by her flat refusal because she was usually very quiet and even-tempered. My father was her only child (all his brothers and sisters were dead); he could not leave her alone and go to a far place. So he had no choice but to give up his special chance to get promoted.

As soon as I started writing about "a visit to a grave," this memory popped up in my mind. Even though it was a long time ago, I still remember that scene very vividly. At that time, I could not understand why she insisted so strongly, but now I can understand that for her, as a descendant, it was a very important duty to make regular visits to our family's graveyard.

She often went to the graveyard—sometimes with us, sometimes by herself. In front of the tombs she put her hands together and spoke some words, maybe a kind of greeting. Then she swept the ground with a broom, picked up trash, and washed the tombs. After cleaning up, she

offered flowers, incense, candles, sweets and fruits. She poured water over the tombs and put her hands together again, lowered her head, and spoke: "I am here, again," "It gets warmer these days," "We are all fine so don't worry," "My grandson just entered a junior high school," and so on. She talked as if somebody was really there in front of her.

The dictionary definition of a tomb is "a monument to the memory of a dead person" under which his/her skeletal remains were buried. In this context it is pointless to argue about the existence of the dead in a scientific sense. People go there to cherish the memory of the deceased. We humans have an amazing ability to visualize non-existing beings in our mind's eye, relying on our memories. We can tangibly feel the presence of the deceased and can even have a dialogue with him or her. In this way we can communicate with someone who already passed away.

Please try to call to mind the most significant person in your life who has already passed away. As vividly as you can, picture the details of a scene in which you and that person are interacting. What is happening there? How do you feel about it? You might have some strong emotions welling up in your body. Or, through this exercise, you might be surprised to find out something new about that person, something that was unknown to you before. In this exercise you are not talking with a ghost, but to a person who has been alive in your heart.

A grave is a kind of tool which makes it easier for us to do such an exercise in our mind. By making an occasional visit to a grave beneath which our ancestors or close friends sleep, we are reconnecting ourselves with those significant people in our lives. It is very meaningful and important for us to commemorate someone's death and to include him/her

within our own life so that we can fully live, connected with those who have come before us.



# August Urabon-e

Urabon'e (usually called *Obon* or just *Bon* in Japanese) is a Japanese Buddhist custom to honor the deceased spirits of one's ancestors. "*Urabon*" ("*e*" means an assembly) originally came from the Sanskrit word "Ullambana", which means "hanging upside down". This is a metaphor of great suffering.

In Sotoshu tradition, the most important element of this custom is a ceremony called *Sejiki-e* (Food-Offering Assembly). This is performed to make offerings not only to one's own ancestors but also to the Three Treasures, and all the departed sentient beings, particularly beings in the Realm of Hungry Ghosts.

The origin of this ceremony is a story of Maha Maudgalyayana (*Mokuren*), one of ten great disciples of the Buddha. It is described in the Ullambana Sutra. This is the outline of the story;

One day during a summer retreat he used his supernatural powers to look for his deceased mother. To his astonishment he discovered that she had fallen into the Realm of Hungry Ghosts and was enduring great afflictions. She was experiencing extreme thirst and hunger. Her son, Maudgalyayana, offered her water and food to alleviate her suffering but they all turned into a fire right before she took them. He was helpless. Greatly distressed, he went to the Buddha and asked how he could release his mother from this misery. Buddha said to him, "Make offerings to the all Buddhist monks who attend this retreat, on the final day of the 90-day summer retreat (the 15th day of the seventh month). Then your mother

will be able to receive a part of those offerings". So Maudgalyayana did what the Buddha instructed and his mother was able to eat and drink and be released from the pain of being in the Realm of the Hungry Ghosts.

What can we learn from this story? I would like to point out two things. First, in this story the Buddha instructed Maudgalyayana to make offerings to the sangha in this living world, instead of to his own mother. According to the story, his mother fell into the Realm of Hungry Ghost because her love for her son had blinded her to the need of others; she was very greedy and selfish to everyone except to her son. So her son had to practice generosity for her. When he felt a great and deep joy of doing this, his mother within him could also feel the same joy and be saved. In this way Maudgalyayana experientially learned about the karmic result of self-centered greed and the power of unselfish offerings. In that sense his mother was a great teacher for him. He must have greatly appreciated his mother for this important lesson. If we use "supernatural power" of looking deeply, we can be guided by even deceased people living in our hearts.

Secondly, his mother was saved not by her son alone nor by the Buddha but by the practice-power of the sangha. In Bon Festival Food-Offering Assembly Statement, this point is clearly expressed.

The mountains of delusion are profound in gloom; the light of the sun and moon fail to illuminate them.

The ocean of suffering has towering waves; the power of sageliness fails to transport one across it.

The ladder of wisdom seems to be of no use; the boat of compassion appears to have lost its capacity.

As for Brahma and Indra, they can do nothing about it.

As for all the Buddhas, even if they flocked to the scene, their hands would be tied.

The Tathagata devised an expedient means in which he resorted to the mighty spiritual power of the assembly of monks.

Maudgalyâyana saved his own beloved mother from the most severe hunger and starvation.

One should respect the mighty spiritual power of those who have practiced together during the retreat which greatly exceeds the great power of wisdom of all the Buddhas of the three times.

Do not doubt that the aggregate of merit of the harmonious assembly of monks instantly destroys the aggregate of ignorance of living beings who experience suffering.

As mentioned above, whether we are ordained as monks or not, we should highly value and have faith in the "mighty spiritual power" of the Buddhist sangha. Let us do our best to bring out that power in order to help out all sentient beings that are in anguish.



# September Ryoso Ki Two Founders' Memorial

In the Sotoshu we honor Shakyamuni Buddha, Koso Joyo Daishi (Dogen Zenji) and Taiso Josai Daishi (Keizan Zenji) as Ichi Butsu Ryo So (One Buddha Two Founders). Shakyamuni is the founder of Buddhism. Dogen is the "father" who established Japanese Sotoshu and Keizan is the "mother" who nurtured it. These three figures are also collectively called Sanzon (Three Honored Ones). They are our objects of reverence.

Dogen Zenji, the founder of Eihei-ji, passed away in Kyoto on August 28th, 1153 at the age of 54. Keizan Zenji, the founder of Soji-ji, passed away in Ishikawa prefecture on August 15th, 1325 at the age of 58. These dates are based on the lunar calendar. In 1877, when these dates were converted to the solar calendar, the dates of their death fell on the same day. Since then the Sotoshu has fixed a date for the Two Founders' death on September 29th.

So on this day at Sotoshu temples in Japan the Two Founders' Memorial is observed to remember their blessings and to express our heartfelt gratitude. The depth of our gratitude to them is well expressed in the Two Ancestors's Memorial Statement, which is read aloud during that ceremony.

... Crossing over ten thousand leagues of billowing waves and returning home empty-handed, from far away [Dôgen] planted the extraordinary seedling of Tiantong [Rujing] on these exquisitely craggy shores.

Receiving the bowl in the fourth generation, [Keizan] ate the meal with his entire body and transplanted Eihei's [Dôgen's] spiritual tree to the Hourglass Drum Woods.

Thereby, at this training center for future abbots, foremost in the realm, the virtues of the old buddhas have long been reverently praised.

In this Zen monastery, peerless in Japan, the blessings of the two founders are always recompensed.

We truly know that: The Treasury of the True Dharma Eye, that extraordinary composition, has promoted the soft and subtle way of our [Sôtô] ancestors.

The Record of the Transmission of the Light, that marvelous record, proclaims and spreads their open-minded style of Zen.

Already there are ninety-some chapters of marvelous text; how could there not be fifty-two generations of dharma lamps?

The water of the streams of Etsu flows into Crane Bay, widely benefiting the triple world. The clouds of Kippô Peak [Eiheiji] circulate around Shogaku Mountain[Sôjiji], broadly blanketing all nations ....

Among Soto rituals, the Two Founders' Memorial is performed in the most courteous and solemn way. The main memorial service involves special offering of tea, leaving ranks and burning incense (shuppan shôkô), and circumambulating while chanting "Life Span" Chapter of Lotus Sutra.

The Two Founders' Memorial is a good opportunity for us to ponder on the following question: As their Dharma descendants, how can we "repay their blessings"? We can do it by embodying their teachings in our daily life. But what did they want to transmit to later generations? Is it still relevant to us? We are now living in a world almost seven hundred years distant from their death.

Both of them lived their life with the vision of spreading the true Dharma and saving all sentient beings. They also trained many excellent disciples who could carry on this vision. We have to follow their footsteps as much as we can.

Dogen and Keizan strongly recommended that we live a life centering around zazen practice. We should be creative so that we can find a way to realize such a life-style in our own situation whether we are ordained or lay, living at a temple or at an ordinary house, being a man or a woman, young or old.

Try to have a time for zazen on a regular basis. If we can make zazen an essential part of everyday life, then zazen itself will start guiding us.

Here zazen means just sitting still in upright posture (of course traditional cross-legged posture is ideal) at a quiet place for even a short period of time. Blaise Pascal once said, "All human evil comes from a single cause, man's inability to sit still in a room" If he is correct, our Two Founders proposed a wonderful way to overcome this inability!





# October Darumaki Daruma Memorial

In the Sotoshu tradition, we commemorate the Daruma Memorial on October 5th.

Daruma is a Japanese name for the famous Indian monk Bodhidharma who lived during the 5th/6th century A.D. The accounts of his life are largely legendary (see Comics "Bodhidharma" 1-12 at Sotozen-net International website) but according to Denkoroku (The Record of Transmitting the Light) written by Keizan Zenji, he was born as the third son of the king of Koshi in southern India. He became a monk and practiced under the guidance of Venerable Hannyatara(Prajnatara). He is considered to be the 28th Indian Buddhist teacher in a direct line from Gautama Buddha, and also regarded as the first master in Chinese Zen tradition.

Following the instruction of his Master to transmit Dharma to China, Bodhidharma traveled east to Southern China in 526 A.D. In Shobogenzo Gyoji (Continuous Practice) Part Two, Dogen Zenji wrote about his journey to China as follows.

*How severe the wind and snow was throughout his three-year journey! How innumerable the waves of the ocean, under clouds and mist, as he sailed toward an unknown country! This journey is beyond the imagination of those attached to body and life. This continuous practice is due solely to his great*

*compassionate determination to transmit dharma and to save deluded beings.*

I vividly remember what my grandfather master, the late Kosho Uchiyama Roshi, said to me when I visited him right before departing for the USA to live at Pioneer Valley Zendo, a small zendo in Massachusetts, as a resident teacher. I asked him for some advice and he said, "*You write down the whole Bodhidharma section in Shobogenzo Gyoji and recite it every day. That will help you keep walking on the Way. I said exactly the same thing to all your seniors that went to the USA before you. I want you to become like Bodhidharma in the USA*". He particularly emphasized the importance of deep understanding of the sentences in that section as in the following:

*He was able to do it because he himself was the 'dharma-self-of-transmission' and for him the whole universe was 'the world of transmitting dharma.'*

*He did it because he understood that the whole-ten-direction-world is nothing but the Self and that the whole-ten-direction-world is nothing but the whole-ten-direction-world.*

*Wherever you are living is a palace; and there is no palace that is not an appropriate place to practice the Way. This is why Bodhidharma came from the West the way he did. He had neither doubt nor fear, because he was living in 'the world of saving deluded living beings'.*

Of course at that time I could not understand at all what these words meant. The only thing that I knew was that what Bodhidharma did "to transmit dharma and to save deluded living beings" was just sitting zazen in silence facing the wall at Shaolin temple (Still and silent, coolly he sat at Shaolin: In silence he completely brought up the true imperative),

instead of massively publicizing the Dharma. Uchiyama Roshi told me to make sincere effort to follow the example of Bodhidharma and encouraged me to live by vow like him.

When I arrived at the Zendo, there I found out, in the drawer of a desk, the manuscript of that section handwritten by the previous resident teacher. I used it for my recitation. Looking back, I am sure that Uchiyama Roshi's advice worked very well to me.

As a follower of Bodhidharma's tradition, we try to live a life guided by vow, such as the Four Universal Vows, not a life guided by self-centered desires, such as the Five Desires. The Daruma Memorial Statement which is read aloud by a rector (Ino) in the ceremony, is closed with a prayer like below:

*May the great vow have power, and the Zen tradition spread vast and wide. We shall revere his benevolent virtue for inexhaustible ages yet to come.*

*May [Bodhidharma's] true compassion be unobstructed, and the way of the ancestors luminous. May it proclaim and spread the brilliance of our lineage for trillions of years.*

The Daruma Memorial is a great opportunity to renew our commitment "to transmit Dharma and to save deluded beings".

# November

## Hoji

### memorial services

*Hoji*, literally translated as "dharma event", is an important Buddhist practice to commemorate a deceased person and to pray sincerely for the repose of his or her soul. It also provides a wonderful opportunity for surviving family and friends to reconfirm human ties which the departed brought about, to realize that they owe much to the deceased, to renew their gratitude to him or her and to deeply reflect upon themselves in connection with him or her.

It is believed that these *hoji* services will increase the merit of the deceased person so that he/she will be reborn in the pure land. Therefore these *hoji* are sometimes called *tsuizen-kuyo* (later-practice of offering goodness). In *Jucchikyo* (*Daśabhūmika-sūtra*, "The Sutra of Ten Grounds") three kinds of offering are taught: (a) offerings of incense, flowers, food, candlelight, etc.; (b) offerings of praise and reverence (by chanting sutras and worshipping the Buddha and his teaching); (c) offerings of right conduct (by practicing the Buddha's way and living a wholesome life).

After the Buddha entered into the nirvana, Buddhist monks did a ceremony of doing *gassho* and making prostrations in front of the stupa where his relics were placed. This commemorative ritual of reverence is the origin of *hoji*.

Nowadays in Japan after a funeral is held, hoji is performed every seven days after the day of death, seven times altogether. These memorial services are called kinichihoyo. This is based on the ancient Indian idea that the soul of the deceased would stay in an intermediary realm (chuin, or chuu in Japanese) for 49 days after death, wandering between this world and the next. Each period of seven days marks a gradual loosening of the connection with this world and on the 49th day the deceased is reborn according to his/her karmic retribution.

Dogen Zenji wrote in Shobogenzo Doshin (Heart of the Way),

*"...When you leave this life, and before you enter the next life, there is a place called an intermediary realm. You stay there for seven days. You should resolve to keep chanting the names of the three treasures without ceasing while you are there. After seven days, you die into another intermediary realm and remain there for no more than seven by seven days (49 days)...."*

Through a funeral ceremony, a deceased person is made to take refuge in the Budhha, Dharma and the Sangha and to become an ordained Buddhist. And then while being in an intermediary realm, the deceased one devotes oneself to Buddhist practices under the protection of many buddhas. Family members and friends also support and encourage the deceased to diligently practice the Dharma by observing hoji every seven days. This is also a period of time for the bereaved family to mourn the loss, gradually coming to terms with it, and to regain a sense of peace.

There are also further memorial services after the 49th day, such as the service on the 100th day, the 1st year, 3rd year, 7th, 13th, 17th, 23rd, 27th, and 33rd year. These anniversary memorial services are called nenkihoyo. They are performed in order to support the deceased who

have already gone to the pure land to continue walking on the path of the Buddha. Normally the 33rd year (sometimes 37th, or 50th year) is the last (tomuraiage, "end of mourning"), marking the time when the individual deceased is thought to have become absorbed into the general ancestral spirit. It means that the spirit is gradually purified by the power of tsuizen-kuyo, eventually loses its individuality and becomes a full blown bodhisattava (in Buddhism) or a guardian god (in Shinto).

When we pray for the happiness of a deceased person even after the death and accumulate the goodness by performing hoji (tsuizen-kuyo), it will eventually bring happiness to ourselves and our family members who are still alive in this world. Thus through observing hoji, the living and the dead can influence and help each other. Of course it is possible only when we do it for real. We must not make light of the power of these rituals.

# December

## Jodo-e

### Ceremony Commemorating the Awakening of Shakyamuni Buddha

At Soto Zen monasteries in Japan, a very intensive zazen retreat (sesshin) is held from December 1st until the 7th. On the 7th, all-night zazen (tetsuya zazen) continues until 1 a.m. next morning. After the end of the last zazen period, the Buddha hall bell is rung and all the practitioners enter the Buddha hall. The abbot offers a stick of incense. Everyone makes three prostrations together, then they fold up their sitting cloths. The abbot then offers sweet hot water, rice gruel and tea, and everyone chants the Great Compassion Dharani (Dai Hi Shin Dharani). When the assembly finishes with the dedication (eko) and three prostrations, they hold small convocation (shôsan). Then they leave the hall and sleep until morning.

This whole event is called Rohatsu sesshin. "*Ro*" means December. "*Hatsu*" means eight. This special retreat is annually held to commemorate Shakyamuni Buddha's realization of the Way. According to the Buddha's story, after many years of difficult ascetic practice, Shakyamuni sat in zazen beneath the Bodhi Tree. At dawn on December 8th, he saw the morning star (Venus) and had a great awakening. He was transformed from an ordinary, common person to the Awakened One, the Buddha.

His awakening is also called *Jodo*, literally meaning "realizing the Way". Here the word "Way" is a Chinese translation of the Sanskrit word "*bodhi*". In the Zen tradition "*bodhi*" is understood as "*to awaken to the true self as it is.*" When he realized the Way, Shakyamuni became the real and authentic Shakyamuni.

In Keizan Zenji's Denkoroku(Transmission of the Light), Case 1 describes his awakening as follows;

*Shakyamuni Buddha, seeing the morning star, attained awakening. He said, "I along with the great earth and all sentient beings simultaneously realized the Way."*

We should take notice that before he made this statement he, it is said, radiantly exclaimed: "How wonderful! How wonderful!"

It implies that he was, first of all, emotionally lightened up. Until that moment he had been moping his time away because it seemed to him everything around him was an enemy or a demon. It was just obnoxious. He felt separated from the world and lonely. But once he awakened, he found out that he was surrounded by all kinds of precious treasures shining brilliantly. He could feel intimately connected with all the things in the world. He was not alone anymore. The world as a whole fundamentally changed. Shakyamuni Buddha profoundly enjoyed this unity.

The doorway to this simultaneous transformation of the self and the world is open to us, too. As descendant practitioners of Dogen Zenji and Keizan Zenji, we are fortunately taught a wonderful and direct way to realize the Way like Shakyamuni Buddha. That is to practice zazen. "*Sitting upright, practicing zazen, is the authentic gate to free yourself in*



*the unconfined realm of this samadhi"* (Bendowa). Samadhi here is not a special state of the mind but this dynamic and fluid unity of the self and the world.

Dogen Zenji described this transformation as follows in Bendowa:

*When someone, even for a short moment, sits up straight in the balanced posture of the Buddha that puts the body right, it becomes apparent that everything in the Universe also exhibits the same balanced state, and that this realization spreads through the whole of space. Practicing thus returns us to the joyful state of the buddha and we confirm anew how splendid reality is. All the various states of mind and all the different physical conditions that human beings go through in living their lives dissolve immediately, replaced by a state of wholeness that is clear and pure. We enter the state that is free from all that hinders our acting freely and return to our state of natural balance. Experiencing and understanding what is truly real extends through all things, and each thing assumes its balanced and natural form. In this moment, sitting supreme in the same posture as the Buddha under the tree of bodhi, each thing passes beyond the limits of what can be experienced and understood. In its balanced state, each thing in this moment is in tune with the teachings of the Universe and is exhibiting the bare and profound state that exists before the world is conceptualized. Because it is dynamic balance between the practitioner and the world, it works in both directions in ways that we cannot fully understand, so that we who are sitting in zazen are freed of the split between body and mind, cut away the various indoctrinations and thoughts we have accumulated from the past, and thus realize in experience the real and pure nature of this world...*

On December 8th, after Rohatsu Sesshin, a special ceremony called Jodoe is performed to express our deep gratitude to Shakyamuni Buddha. In the Buddha's Attainment Assembly Statement, there is a statement of heart-felt appreciation:

*On the eighth day of this month, we respectfully celebrate the occasion of the attainment of the way by our Great Benefactor and Founder of the Doctrine, the Original Teacher, Most Reverend Shakyamuni Buddha. We have reverently prepared incense, flowers, lamps, and candles, sweet hot water, sweets, tea and rare delicacies, and have extended them in offering. Respectfully gathering the present pure assembly, we have also chanted the Ryō Gon Shu (Dai Bucchō Man Gyō Shu Ryōgon Dharani from the Surangama Sutra). We hereby offer up the excellent merit accumulated thereby to requite the compassionate blessings of his dharma milk.*

*The following is humbly considered. When pitchers, plates, hairpins, and bracelets are melted together, they become one metal; were it not for the fire of wisdom, this would scarcely be possible. When guitar, zither, lute, and harp are tuned together, the six dominant tones can be harmonized; but without wise fingers, how could this ever be accomplished? That is, the "wonderful pointing" (i.e. teaching) of the Buddha. It is true that all living beings are fully equipped with the properties of wisdom and virtue of a tathâgata (nyōrai), but if the Greatly Awakened One did not have the expedient means to reveal the delusion and awakening of living beings, Ennyadatta's madness would be difficult to stop, and the jewel in the strongman's forehead would be long forgotten.*

*We now know of the attainment of the way by the great earth and sentient beings, and are freshly aware of the direct cause of the inherent buddha-nature.*

*May the illumination of wisdom long shine, and the flame of a single lamp be transmitted to hundreds and thousands of lamps. May the wind of the way long blow in this world and reach to limitless worlds....*

Thus Jodo-e is an important occasion when we vow to renew our effort and commitment to follow the Buddha Way.

## About Issho Fujita

Issho Fujita was born in Japan in 1954. He studied developmental/clinical psychology at Tokyo



University. Besides academic study, he intensively practiced aikido and Noguchi Exercise. When he was a PhD student, at the age of 27, he was recommended by a master of Chinese medicine to attend a week-long Zen sesshin at Enkaku-ji, a traditional Rinzai monastery in Kamakura. Through this experience he was deeply fascinated by zazen practice. Eventually he dropped out of graduate school to study Zen full time and entered Antai-ji, a Soto Zen monastery in the tradition of Kodo Sawaki and Kosho

Uchiyama.

In 1987, he was sent by his teacher to be a resident teacher at Pioneer Valley Zendo in Massachusetts. During his stay until 2005, he also taught at Smith College, Amherst College, Mt. Holyoke College, Barre Center for Buddhist Studies, and other colleges and institutions.

In 2010, he was assigned to be Director of the Soto Zen Buddhism International Center in San Francisco. He is currently visiting many Zen centers and temples worldwide to teach Soto Zen teaching and practice. Issho is interested in inventing new and fun ways to articulate the depth of the simple practice of shikantaza (just sitting).













