

Fukanzazengi

A Universal Recommendation for True Zazen

by Dogen, Who Transmitted the Dharma from Sung (China)

In exhaustive pursuit, the root of the Way is perfectly penetrating. Why should you assume cultivation and verification? The supreme vehicle moves freely. Why should you consume striving and skill? Much more, its entirety is far beyond the realm of dust. Who would believe in the measures of sweeping? It never departs from right where you are. Why should you require the steps of cultivation?

And yet, if there is even the slightest discrepancy, you become separated as far apart as heaven and earth. If the slightest liking or disliking arises, the mind is lost in confusion. Even though you may achieve insightful power of glimpsing the [Buddha's] ground, taking pride in your understanding and enjoying enlightenment; even though you may generate the aspiration of pressing on to heaven, attaining the Way, and clarifying the mind; even though you may roam around the boundary of this realm, reaching the point of putting your head in, still you largely lack the life-path of liberation.

Moreover, the trace of six years' upright sitting by the innately awakened [Shakyamuni Buddha] at Jetavana must be observed. And the fame of nine years' facing the wall by the transmitter of the mind-seal, [Bodhidharma,] at Shaolin Temple, must be heard. If the ancient sages were like this, why should you, a person of today, not exert yourself?

Therefore, you must stop comprehending the conduct of investigating words and chasing discourses. You must learn to step backward to turn your light around to reflect on yourself. Mind and body will naturally fall away and your original face will manifest itself. If you wish to attain suchness, devote yourself to suchness at once.

Now, in entering into Zen, a quiet room is suitable. Eat and drink in moderation. Abandon all relations and put all concerns to rest, not thinking of good and bad, not entertaining right and wrong. Still the driving of your heart, mind, and consciousness. Stop the measuring of memories, ideas, and meditations. No design, even that of becoming a Buddha, should be harbored. How can it (i.e., Zen) be concerned with sitting or lying down?

The usual practice is to spread out a thick mat and place a cushion upon it. Then sit in the full or half cross-legged position. In the full cross-legged position, place your right foot on your left thigh and your left foot on your right thigh. In the half cross-legged position, simply press your right thigh with your left foot. Wear your robes and sashes loosely but neatly and orderly.

Next, rest your right hand on your left foot, and place your left palm on your right palm, [both facing upward], with the thumbtips supporting each other.

Now, sit upright, leaning neither to left nor right, neither forward nor backward. You must align your ears over your shoulders and keep your nose in line with your navel. Rest your tongue against the upper palate, lips and teeth closed. You must always keep your eyes open. Breathe through your nose subtly and silently.

Maintaining the proper bodily alignment, exhale deeply once and rock to the left and right. Settle into the solid, steadfast seated samadhi. Fathom the unfathomed state. How do you fathom the unfathomed state? Fathomless! Such is the essential art of zazen.

What is here called zazen is not learning mere meditation. It is the Dharma gate of pure peace and bliss. It is the cultivation and verification of ultimate awakening. Here, the universal truth is realized, and nets and cages are totally absent.

If you realize this tenet completely, you are like a dragon obtaining water and a tiger reclining on the mountain. You will surely know that the True Dharma will naturally manifest itself, and dullness and distraction will drop off.

When you rise from sitting, move slowly and rise calmly and carefully. Never act hastily or violently.

Observe and appreciate that transcending the ordinary and going beyond the holy, passing away while sitting and dying while standing, all depend solely on this power. The transforming ability of a finger, a staff, a needle, and a mallet, or the verifying utilization of a whisk, a fist, a stick, and a shout at a critical moment cannot readily be realized by the discrimination of measuring thoughts. How can they be known even by the cultivation and verification of supernatural faculties?

These are the dignified forms beyond sounds and colors. Are they not the rules before knowledge and views? Therefore, you should not be concerned whether you are a person of lofty intellect or lowly foolishness, nor discriminated as being a sharp person or a dull one. If you strive singlemindedly, that itself is the realization of the Way. Cultivation and verification by nature does not defile. Going forward then is totally calm and constant.

All the Buddhas, whether in this world or in other quarters, in the western heaven (India) or the eastern earth (China), equally held the Buddha-seal and altogether enjoyed the supreme style. They were fully devoted to this total sitting (shikantaza) and were totally installed in this unmoved state. Even though there are a thousand differences and a million nuances, they engaged devotedly in practicing zazen and realizing the Way.

Why should you forsake the seat of your own home and stray into the dusty realms of other countries? If you make a single misstep, you will mistakenly pass it by while directly facing it. You have ultimately obtained the functional essence of a human body. Never let the light and shadow (i.e., day and night) pass in vain. You have embraced and engaged in the essential function of the Buddha's path. Who could enjoy the spark of a flintstone aimlessly?

Furthermore, form and substance are like dew on a blade of grass, and fleeting life is as a flash of lightning, instantly emptied and immediately lost.

May respectable Zen practitioners constantly learn the right form and never doubt the true dragon.

Urgently strive for the Way that points directly to the right target, revere the unfabricating and unconditioned person, fit into the awakening (bodhi) of the Buddhas, and rightly inherit the samadhi of the ancestors. Practice in such a way constantly and you will never fail to realize suchness. The treasure house will open by itself, and you will appreciate and use it at will.