

Zazengi
and
Fukan Zazengi
by
Eihei Dōgen Zenji

These translations of two writings by Eihei Dōgen Zenji (1200-1253) are courtesy of Shasta Abbey Buddhist Monastery, www.shastaabbey.org. Shasta Abbey offers free of charge many translations and commentaries about Sōtō Zen Buddhism and meditation practice. We are grateful to Shasta Abbey for providing these materials.

Zazengi, “On the model for doing meditation,” is the shorter of the two. It comes from Dōgen’s masterwork, *Shōbō Genzō*, “The treasury of the true dharma eye.” It offers concise instructions for the disposition of the body and mind during meditation.

Fukan Zazengi, “Rules for meditation,” is the earlier of the two works. It was written by Dōgen shortly after his return to Japan from China. It is more detailed, especially with regard to the disposition of the mind during meditation.

www.southwindsangha.org

On the Model for Doing Meditation

(Zazengi)

To train under a Master is to do seated meditation. In doing seated meditation, a quiet place serves well. Spread out your meditation mat so that it lies thickly. Do not put it in a place that is windy or smoky, and do not expose it to rain or dew. Make the place where you sit secure for your body. There is the example from the past of Shakyamuni's sitting in a diamond-hard place under the Bodhi tree, seated upon a huge rock in the shape of a lotus, upon which He had spread out a thick cushion of dry grass. Your sitting place should be lit, without letting it be in the dark, day or night. Make 'warm in winter and cool in summer' your technique.

Set aside all involvements and give everything a rest. Do not think about what is good or what is bad. Do not exercise your discriminatory mind or weigh and judge your mind's remembrances, concepts, and reflections! Do not aim at becoming a Buddha, and drop off any concern with whether you are sitting or lying down. Eat and drink in moderation. Cherish the light of days and the dark of nights. Take to doing seated meditation as though you were extinguishing a fire upon your head. The Fifth Chinese Ancestor, Daiman Kōnin of Mount Ōbai, did not do anything particularly different: he just diligently did seated meditation.

When sitting in meditation, wear your kesa.* Spread out your mat and put your round cushion atop it. Do not sit in lotus position with the cushion supporting the whole of your legs, but put it well behind the back half of your legs. Consequently, the mat will be under your knees and thighs while the cushion will be under the base of your spine. This is the method for seated meditation that has been used by Buddha after Buddha and Ancestor after Ancestor.

Some people sit in the half lotus position and some sit in the full lotus position. When sitting in the full lotus position, we put the right foot atop the left thigh and the left foot atop the right thigh. The tips of our toes should line up

* See *Glossary*.

uniformly on our thighs and not lie unevenly. When sitting in half lotus position, we simply place our left foot on our right thigh.¹

We should drape our clothing in a loose-fitting manner, yet neatly. We place our right hand atop our left foot and our left hand atop our right hand. The tips of our two thumbs touch each other. Both hands are then held close to our body. The point at which the two thumbs touch should be placed opposite the navel.

You should sit with your body upright, that is, not leaning to the right, inclining to the left, bending forward, or arching back. You need to align your ears with your shoulders and your nose with your navel. Let your tongue rest in your mouth. Breathe through your nose. Your lips and teeth should be touching. Your eyes should remain open, but neither widely nor narrowly so.

With body and mind regulated in this manner, breathe out once. Sit with the stillness of a mountain, and let what you are thinking about be based on not deliberately trying to think about any particular thing. How can what anyone is thinking about be based on not deliberately thinking about something? Simply, by not making ‘what I am thinking about’ the point of your meditation. This, then, is the technique for doing seated meditation. Seated meditation is a practice and not something for intellectual study. It is the Dharma Gate to peace and joy. It is unstained training to realize the Truth.

Delivered to the monks at Kippō-ji Training Temple, Yoshida Prefecture, Echizen Province, in the eleventh lunar month of the first year of the Kangen era (December 1243).

Copied in the chief disciple Ejō’s quarters at Kippō Hermitage, Echizen Province, on the twentieth day of the first lunar month in the second year of the same era (March 1, 1244).

1. Readers who choose to follow Dōgen’s practice of sitting in full or half lotus are cautioned to alternate which leg is on top so as to avoid back problems that can develop over long-term practice. Also, to avoid putting injurious strain on the spine and knees, several other modes of sitting have developed in the Zen tradition, such as sitting in a chair or on a meditation bench. One may even meditate while lying down.

Rules for Meditation.

[This scripture was written by Great Master Dogen, the founder of the Serene Reflection Meditation tradition in Japan. It is studied in great detail and recited daily at mid-day service in churches and monasteries of the Serene Reflection Meditation tradition.]¹

Why are training and enlightenment differentiated since the Truth is universal? Why study the means of attaining it since the supreme teaching is free? Since Truth is seen to be clearly apart from that which is unclean, why cling to a means of cleansing it? Since Truth is not separate from training, training is unnecessary—the separation will be as that between heaven and earth if even the slightest gap exists FOR, WHEN THE OPPOSITES ARISE, THE BUDDHA MIND IS LOST. However much you may be proud of your understanding, however much you may be enlightened, whatever your attainment of wisdom and supernatural power, your finding of the way to mind illumination, your power to touch heaven and to enter into enlightenment, when the opposites arise you have almost lost the way to salvation. Although the Buddha had great wisdom at birth, He sat in training for six years; although Bodhidharma Transmitted the Buddha Mind, we still hear the echoes of his nine years facing a wall. The Ancestors were very diligent and there is no reason why we people of the present day cannot understand. All you have to do is cease from erudition, withdraw within and reflect upon yourself. Should you be able to cast off body and mind naturally, the Buddha Mind will immediately manifest itself; if you want to find it quickly, you must start at once.

You should meditate in a quiet room, eat and drink moderately, cut all ties, give up everything, think of neither good nor evil, consider neither right nor wrong. Control mind function, will, consciousness, memory, perception and understanding; you must not strive thus to become Buddha. Cling to neither sitting nor lying down. When meditating, do not wear

Serene Reflection Meditation ©1996 Shasta Abbey
This article is offered for free distribution only.
You may print and distribute copies of this article
as long as no changes are made to the original.
Otherwise, all rights reserved. Copyright for
this article belongs to the author.

2 *Rules for Meditation.*

tight clothing. Rest the left hand in the palm of the right hand with the thumbs touching lightly; sit upright, leaning neither to left nor right, backwards nor forwards. The ears must be in line with the shoulders and the nose in line with the navel; the tongue must be held lightly against the back of the top teeth with the lips and teeth closed. Keep the eyes open, breathe in quickly, settle the body comfortably and breathe out sharply. Sway the body left and right then sit steadily, neither trying to think nor trying not to think; just sitting, with no deliberate thought, is the important aspect of serene reflection meditation.

This type of meditation is not something that is done in stages; it is simply the lawful gateway to carefree peace. To train and enlighten ourselves is to become thoroughly wise; the koan appears *naturally* in daily life. If you become thus utterly free you will be as the water wherein the dragon dwells or as the mountain whereon the tiger roams. Understand clearly that the Truth appears naturally and then your mind will be free from doubts and vacillation. When you wish to arise from meditation, sway the body gently from side to side and arise quietly; the body must make no violent movement; I myself have seen that the ability to die whilst sitting and standing, which transcends both peasant and sage, is obtained through the power of serene reflection meditation. It is no more possible to understand natural activity with the judgemental mind than it is possible to understand the signs of enlightenment; nor is it possible to understand training and enlightenment by supernatural means; such understanding is outside the realm of speech and vision, such Truth is beyond personal opinions. Do not discuss the wise and the ignorant, there is only one thing—to train hard for this is true enlightenment; training and enlightenment are naturally undefiled; to live in this way is the same as to live an ordinary daily life. The Buddha Seal has been preserved by both the Buddhas in the present world and by those in the world of the Indian and Chinese Ancestors, they are thus always spreading the Truth—*all* activity is permeated with pure meditation—the means of training are thousandfold but pure meditation must be done. It is futile to travel to other dusty countries thus forsaking your own seat; if your first step



Serene reflection meditation.

is false, you will immediately stumble. Already you are in possession of the vital attributes of a human being—do not waste time with this and that—you can possess the authority of Buddha. Of what use is it to merely enjoy this fleeting world? This body is as transient as dew on the grass, life passes as swiftly as a flash of lightning, quickly the body passes away, in a moment life is gone. O sincere trainees, do not doubt the true dragon, do not spend so much time in rubbing only a part of the elephant; look *inwards* and advance directly along the road that leads to the Mind, respect those who have reached the goal of goallessness, become one with the wisdom of the Buddhas, *Transmit* the wisdom of the Ancestors. If you do these things for some time you will become as herein described and then the Treasure House will open naturally and you will enjoy it fully.

Note.

1. We have removed the sections that describe meditation in cross-legged positions from the *Rules for Meditation*. Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett explains: “We found that this type of sitting, when practiced by people who sat alone, injured too many legs and backs. If there are persons who would really like to learn this method we can show it to them but we are keeping it out of the *Rules for Meditation* from here on so that people do not suffer from the idea that this is the only way to go; there are other methods and they are just as effective and a lot safer for western people.”