

Source: ON ZEN PRACTICE: Body, Breath, Mind, Wisdom Pubs, pp. 41-42.

Breathing in Zazen

Koryu Osaka

BREATHING IN ZAZEN is natural and based on your own breathing cycle. Generally speaking, the normal frequency of our breaths is roughly seventeen breaths per minute. For those who are more experienced in sitting the frequency of breaths per minute decreases, to perhaps five or six times per minute, or for those who have been sitting many years, two to three times per minute, or even less.

However, if you try force your breath to slow, then your breathing becomes awkward and your sitting becomes very uncomfortable. So in order to improve your breathing, try to narrow your breathing.

By narrowing your breathing I mean that when you exhale, exhale less than you usually do. Do not try to lengthen the time of your exhalation immediately, but just try to exhale a slightly smaller amount. Narrow the stream of air, then breathe with your natural frequency.

When you inhale, do not inhale too much air at one time, but try to inhale a slightly smaller amount. Again, do not lengthen the span of breathing right away. By breathing like this, more air is saved in the lungs, making it easier for you to breathe. As a quite natural consequence of this, your breathing will slow down of its own accord.

Breathing in this way will make you more comfortable; being comfortable, you can sit better; and sitting better, your breathing becomes slower. As your breathing becomes slower, it also becomes deeper. Breathing in this way, eventually you start to experience the very subtle taste of breathing.

When you breathe longer and deeper, the transition from inhalation to exhalation will become smoother. The path of the breath circulating

in and out becomes somewhat like the shape of an egg; your breath circulates very smoothly along an oval course, in and out. When you practice this kind of breathing, you will find an almost immeasurable pleasure simply breathing in *zazen*.

The breath must come from the lower abdomen, the *hara*. But don't push the breath *down*; that is the wrong way. Instead of trying to push air down, push your lower abdomen *forward* slightly as you inhale, and then, as you exhale, allow the lower abdomen to sink in. When you inhale, it goes out; when you exhale it goes in. If you try to push the air down, then you compress the diaphragm and the abdominal muscles, which may cause pain or unpleasant tension and strain in that area. There should be no tension and no strain in your stomach as you breathe. Practicing in this way, eventually you will experience deep, quiet, natural breathing in your lower abdomen.

When you sit, your body, breath, and mind become harmonized, and when your breath slows down, the mind also calms down. When this happens, a unified, comfortable feeling is quite natural. Please do not be hasty; take your time and diligently practice this breathing.

You must acquire this experience by yourself by practicing this breathing.

From individual to individual the process of unifying body, breath, and mind won't happen in exactly the same way. Breathing in, be one with your breath. Breathing out, be one with your breath. Each of you has to find your own way to achieve this integration. This is the fundamental condition of *zazen*.

SOURCE: ON ZEN PRACTICE: Body, Breath, Mind, Wisdom Pubs, pp. 59-62

On Sitting

Koryu Osaka

LET ME SAY a few words about the act of sitting and the pain that you will almost certainly experience. Some have more trouble or pain than others. Regardless of how much pain you have, I want you to sit well. If the pain is very bad, sitting on a chair is quite all right. Our practice is not asceticism! As Dogen Zenji said, *zazen* is supposed to be very comfortable and peaceful. So I want you to sit comfortably. But being comfortable is not enough. You must do *zazen*.

Just physically sitting on the cushion is not sitting. Let the body sit, let the breath sit, let the mind sit. In a sense, body and mind are not two but one. If you really make your body sit, mind sits, too. Making effort to really sit is *zazen*. Just sitting on the cushion, letting your mind wander around, is not *zazen*.

For convenience, we can conceptualize the process of doing *zazen* this way. First we have to physically sit; it's almost like catching a wild horse and tying it to a post. Then gradually we tame the horse—but it's straining against the post, trying to get away. The first stage, to catch the horse and tie it, is like *za*, the "sitting" part of *zazen*. At the beginning, this part can be really painful, physically and mentally, especially during *sesshin*. Then, taming the horse—that's the *zen* in *zazen*.

Originally, the word *zen*, as you know, derived from the Sanskrit term *dhyana*, which means "quiet thinking." Instead of letting our conscious mind go wild, we think quietly. We let the body calm down first, then we let the mind calm down. And in order to accomplish this, we use techniques such as breathing. We concentrate on breathing by counting breaths or following breaths. After we have settled, we enter *samadhi*, we focus on one single thing and become one with it.

So if your practice is Mu, become one with Mu. If you are counting the breath, become one with the counting. If you do shikantaza, become zazen yourself. By doing this, you enter samadhi. Then, when you really get immersed in samadhi, eventually you forget yourself, and dichotomy is transcended.

Forgetting yourself is sometimes referred to as "Man is forgotten; man is empty." But at the beginning stages of forgetting yourself, there is still the object on which you're concentrating. So you go further into samadhi, and that object is also eliminated. That is called "Dharma is empty." Then when that samadhi ripens, we say, "Both man and Dharma are empty." This state is called "Great Death," the ideal condition of samadhi.

But this ideal condition of samadhi is static, so remaining there endlessly is no good. In this state, there is no activity, no functioning. Ultimately, samadhi must function. The functioning of samadhi is wisdom. Once you really reach Great Death, then Great Rebirth takes place in realization. This is the fundamental process, the fundamental principal of zazen.

If, after the first opening-up or the first breaking-through, you have not completely emptied yourself, the process is not complete. When it's not complete, what you see, what you realize, is limited and partial.

In other words, before samadhi really ripens fully, you can still have an experience of breaking through. We call that experience kensho. Strictly speaking, until you come to the point where you have eliminated subjects and objects altogether, you can't really say that you attain enlightenment as such. In the experience of kensho, each individual differs one from the other. The clarity is different. No two people experience kensho in exactly the same way, because realization and samadhi are still partial.

In order to get into that samadhi, your sitting, your posture must be right—otherwise, your mind gets busy and you can't get into deep concentration. Just making your back straight is not quite enough. Place the weight of the body in the proper place. The center of gravity of the body is supposed to fall in the center of the triangle formed by the two knees and the base of the spine. In order to bring this about, shift the gravity of your upper body slightly forward, almost like pushing in

between your two hip joints. By doing this, the point of gravity of the upper body is shifted.

Make sure your lower back is not curved out—a slouching lower back is a very weak position and doesn't create strength in your lower abdomen. But straightening your back by itself is not enough; shift it forward. Don't arch your lower back too much, otherwise you'll start having back pain. This disposition of the upper body allows the center of gravity to fall down into the middle of that triangle formed by your knees and cushion. When you sit, when you do zazen, please remember this and try to let your body really sit well.

When you sit like this, you will naturally start feeling slight tension in your lower abdomen, even without putting any artificial effort or strain on it. I want to remind you not to strain. People working on Mu especially have the tendency to strain. Those concentrating on breathing become too self-conscious about it and unconsciously tighten up that stomach area trying to breathe deeply. Please avoid that. Tightening the muscles around the stomach, the stomach can't function. Just wait until that strength in the abdomen comes naturally and try to sit properly.

In sitting properly, you must concentrate on the lower abdomen, the area known as the *hara*. Then, when you sit, you can imagine all of the energy of all parts of the body flowing back into that area, and at the same time feel that energy permeate all parts of your body. Going into and out from the center, these two energies are balanced. There is no conflict of any power or energy within the body. Having that center of gravity placed in the lower portion of the abdomen, you are sitting in a very solid state, and the posture starts generating the energy by itself. That's what we call *joriki*, "power of stability." It's almost physical power. That's what I want you to acquire first; that's what will let you enter deeply into samadhi.

thighs. I understand that there are about seven hundred acupuncture points and about sixteen meridians, all relating to one particular point in the sole. In putting the feet in the half or the full lotus position, the soles are nicely stimulated. The body settles down and we can physically sit very comfortably.

When you sit on a chair, be aware of these principles and place the soles of your feet firmly on the floor. The soles of the feet are like the roots of a tree. The roots are growing, penetrating into the ground—not necessarily pushing their way into the earth but naturally filling it. Have your body in the same way, solid and penetrating into the ground. We become strong by doing so, and we can sense the unity and harmony with the earth.

START When you have settled your body, sway your upper body from side to side in large arcs, slowly decreasing the angle of swaying. As you decrease the angle of swaying, adjust your spine so that it is upright and let it settle in this upright position. Tuck in your chin and let your eyes settle half open, setting your gaze about three to four feet in front of you at a forty-five degree angle. Then start sitting. When you come out of zazen, sway your body again, but in reverse. Slowly start swaying in small arcs, increasing to large arcs. Sway not only your body but also your concentration, so that you can carry that concentration into standing and walking. This slow swaying is a very natural procedure. When your *samadhi* is strong, you can't immediately jump up from sitting. Standing very quickly indicates your *samadhi* is not very strong. Easing the body into and out of the sitting posture can help you focus your concentration.

When you are settled for zazen, take several deep breaths. In English we say inhale and exhale. In Japanese we say *kokyu*. *Ko* is exhalation and *kyu* is inhalation. It may seem more logical for your inhalation to come first, but after settling your body, exhale first. When you exhale, exhale as much air as possible through your mouth, not your nostrils. Our exhalations are usually very small, so open your mouth slightly and exhale completely so that you feel your lungs are squeezed. You can bend slightly forward when exhaling.

When you exhale through the mouth, you have a direct sensation of

exhaling toxins from the body, not just breathing out air. Then when you have to inhale, the air comes in quickly. Expand your lungs to breathe deeply. Then once again, exhale and inhale in the same way. While exhaling, you can squeeze and tighten the muscles in your butt, relaxing when you inhale. Then let your breathing return to normal. Let your breathing become relaxed.

Regarding breathing, I am reminded of one of my teacher Koryu Roshi's favorite expressions. He said that when you breathe in, swallow the whole universe. When you breathe out, breathe out the whole universe. In and out. In and out. Eventually you forget about the division between breathing in and breathing out; even breathing is totally forgotten. You just sit with a sense of unity.

We put our mental concentration in the *hara*. The *hara* is a point in our body that generates *chi*, energy, and it is approximately two inches below the navel. If we sit in half or full lotus position and the soles of our feet are supported by our thighs, they are close to the *hara* and receive more stimulation from our concentration, and altogether the entire body functions better.

Having settled our body and breath, we next adjust the mind. In his *Universal Promotion of the Principles of Zazen (Fukanzazengi)*, Dogen Zenji writes, "Think of not-thinking. How do you think of not-thinking? Non-thinking. This in itself is the essential art of zazen."* In other words, penetrate into one point, into the nondual state.

When we sit, we may have the experience of observing. Observing includes the observer and the object that is being observed. This is dualistic. As long as we are dualistic, we can't experience being, seeing, hearing, smelling, touching. As long as there is a division between you and something else, there is a separation. You can make a conscious effort of seventy, eighty or even up to ninety percent to eliminate this gap. But as long as you are consciously trying and holding an object, you can't quite do it. The very last ten percent is the most important effort.

* Norman Waddell and Masao Abe, trans., "Fukanzazengi (The Universal Promotion of the Principles of Zazen) by Dogen Zenji," in *On Zen Practice II: Body, Breath and Mind*, ed. Hakuyu Taizan Maezumi and Bernard Tetsugen Glassman (Los Angeles: Zen Center of Los Angeles, 1976), 14.

The way to realize yourself one hundred percent is to penetrate into samadhi, the state of nonthinking. As long as we remain within the confines of the thinking mind, we can't experience the state of nonthinking. If we can't experience nonthinking, we will not understand what our life truly is. Please realize this for yourself. Just sit!

Just-sitting is perhaps the most difficult thing to do. For in order to just-sit, we have to forget the self. What does that mean? There are no thoughts because there is no thinker. Instead, we *are* the thoughts that come up. There are no bird songs because there are no concepts of bird songs. Instead, we *are* those sounds. In the same way we are the raindrops, we are the thunder and the lightning. In sitting, the whole universe is revealed and manifested.

In zazen we do not expect anything. Zazen is not a technique to achieve anything, it is much more natural. And yet, somehow the most natural thing is difficult to do. How come? Because we think. There is nothing wrong with thinking. Thinking is a very natural process, but we are so easily conditioned by our thinking and give too much value to it. We try to take care of ourselves, of our ego structures, by thinking. Thinking is an abstraction. It is not being, it is thinking about being. And since we are born and die seven thousand times in one second, the conditions that we think about are already gone. We are thinking about shadows rather than being this very life itself. **END**

A famous koan states that mind is ungraspable. Since mind and body are not two, this body is ungraspable. And yet there is a way to appreciate the ungraspable. How? By *being* it. The whole, complete being manifesting *as is*. Everything is here right now. Nirvana is right here. But somehow we ignore that fact, and we start doing something else or looking for something else. All these expectations are unnecessary. There is no need to look for any further accomplishment or attainment of anything. Everything is already here.

Zazen is our life, the life of the Buddha Way, the way to practice the Buddha dharma. Dogen Zenji wrote: "To study the Buddha Way is to study the self. To study the self is to forget the self. To forget the self is to be enlightened by the ten thousand dharmas." To study this life and to forget the self mean to truly be the Way. The Way is not a path or a

Source: Taizan Maezumi + Bernie Glassman, *ON ZEN PRACTICE: Body, Breath, + Mind*, Wisdom Pubs, pp 7-9.

Can Everyone Realize True Nature?

Taizan Maezumi

CAN EVERYONE realize true nature? Before we say yes or no to this question, let us think about what "realizing one's true nature" means. "True nature" is a synonym of Buddha nature; and Buddha nature is in turn also known as the original self, one's original face, Mind, Mu, thusness, reality, or even "the cypress tree in the garden"—according to the situation.

It will clarify our understanding to examine Buddha nature from three different standpoints. The first is *shoin bussho*, the Buddha nature inherent in all beings, whether enlightened or not. The next is *ryoin bussho*, the Buddha nature manifested when one begins to practice the Dharma. And the last is *enin bussho*, the Buddha nature of one who has attained enlightenment.

Shoin bussho is like unmined gold. Regardless of whether or not people realize it, the gold is there in the earth. The second, *ryoin bussho*, is like knowing how to extract the gold. The third, *enin bussho*, is like mining the gold and having it in your hands. This is a very simple analogy, of course, but it may be useful to you.

In reality, all of us are nothing *but* Buddha nature. And yet, to draw upon our analogy, if we are not aware that what we have in our hands is in fact gold, we won't feel wealthy, and we will not be satisfied until we realize what we have. So in order to realize the gold in our hands, our Buddha nature, we have to exert ourselves. We all know that in some places in the ground there is gold, and in other places there is not. If we dig in the wrong place, regardless of how diligently we try, it is in vain. So in order to realize Buddha nature, we have to employ the right means in the right way to actually find the gold.

And so, what, then, is the right means?

Let's reflect upon the words of Dogen Zenji: "It is not a matter of being smart or dull, well-learned or foolish, but that when one practices wholeheartedly to find the Way, that is nothing but the accomplishment of the Way." Straightforward wholeheartedness is the essence. The famous words of Dogen Zenji *issiki no bendo* mean "to practice the Way with wholeheartedness," or "to become one with whatever you do." This becoming one is the key. When you really become one with whatever you do, that is the realization of the Way; yet whether you realize your true nature or not depends on you.

Even being lazy and not practicing is still nothing but manifesting being-lazy-and-not-practicing Buddha nature. This unrealized Buddha nature is like having gold but believing oneself poor. The Buddha offers us this story: An impoverished man had a very rich friend. One time they met, enjoyed a few drinks, and eventually the impoverished man fell asleep. The rich man felt sorry for him and secretly slipped a precious jewel into his garment. After they parted, this poor man returned again to his life as a beggar without knowing he had that precious jewel. After some time they met again and the rich friend was surprised to see his friend still begging, and asked him: "I gave you a jewel; why did you not use it to make your life comfortable?" The beggar protested, "You never gave me anything!" So the rich friend reached into the garment where he had put the jewel, took it out, and showed it to him. Buddha nature is like this.

To discover this jewel, this gold, our true nature, we must have faith. Faith is fundamental, a very important matter. Strengthening our faith is synonymous with strengthening our practice. But we must have faith in the right things. What are the right things?

We must put our faith firmly in the teachings of the Buddha and the ancestral teachers. Having faith in the right things means we put ourselves wholeheartedly into practice and practice diligently. Furthermore, one should have strong faith in oneself, in the fact that one's life is itself nothing but Buddha nature. This kind of strong faith leads us to better practice. We strengthen our practice, and this further strengthens our faith, and this faith, again, strengthens our practice. It is like a circle.

Dogen Zenji said that our practice is like a spiral comprising four

strands: raising the bodhi mind, practicing, attaining realization, and attaining liberation. In the state of liberation lies the bodhi mind, the mind that aspires to enlightenment, which leads again to practice, then attainment, then liberation, spiraling ever upward.

Source: The ESSENCE OF ZEN, Harada
Sekkei, Kodansha International, pp 53-54.

WHAT IS SESSHIN?

Before we begin, I would like to say a few things concerning *sesshin*. In our everyday life, with all its troubles and complications, we often lose sight of our selves. Accordingly, when those who aspire to sit quietly and practice zazen in order to awaken to the true Self come together for a certain period of time, we call this “*sesshin*.”

The Japanese word “*sesshin*” is written with Chinese characters that can be interpreted with two meanings. They can mean either “to focus or unify the mind” or “to put the mind in order.” Not only zazen but many forms of spiritual discipline and practice have a similar aim. However, one aspect concerning focusing, unifying, or putting the mind in order makes the content and direction of the practice of zazen very different from other similar disciplines or practices. This point is embodied in the question, “Where in the vast universe is the mind to be put in order?” “This thing” [the Rōshi points to himself] is not separate from other people, from the universe, mountains, rivers, trees, or grass. There is no division. The big problem, then, is by what standard can we measure whether the mind is in order? If some means or method is used to order or unify the mind, it implies that there is a clear distinction between something that is in order

point to
yourself! ←

and something that is not in order. If, for example, zazen is used as a means to order or unify the mind, there are necessarily two things: the part that is in order and the part that is not. No matter how long you continue, there will never come a time when you can say, "Yes, it's finished. The mind is unified and in order."

When I speak of ordering or unifying the mind, this is not something done gradually as a process by quietly practicing zazen. The fact is that all things are already in order, and beyond that there is no need to do anything. The aim of *sesshin*, then, is to realize that this condition—where everything is already unified and in order—is our condition right now.] For those of you who have been practicing zazen for years and still feel something that

SOURCE: THE ART OF JUST SITTING, ed. by
John Daido Loori, Wisdom Pubs.

Readings: pp 105-106

pp. 107-109

pp. 113-114

TO STUDY THE SELF

Shohaku Okumura

*To study the Buddha Way is to study the self.
To study the self is to forget the self. To forget the self
is to be verified by all things. To be verified by all things
is to let the body and mind of the self, and the body
and mind of others, drop off. There is a trace of realization
that cannot be grasped. We endlessly keep expressing
the ungraspable trace of realization.*

—Dogen Zenji from "Genjokoan"

START Reading #1

To study the Buddha Way is to study the self. This is the most essential point of Dogen's as well as Buddha's teaching. In the *Dhammapada*, one of the earliest scriptures in Buddhism, Shakyamuni Buddha said, "The self is the only foundation of the self."

But what does this really mean? When we say that we study the Buddha Way, we think "I," this person, studies some objective thing called the "Buddha Way." "I" is the subject and the "Buddha Way" is the object. This person called "I" wants to understand it and make it "my possession." This is our common understanding of "I" "study" "something."

The original Japanese word Dogen uses for "study" is *narau*. *Narau* comes from *nareru*, which means "to get accustomed to," "to become familiar with," "to get used to," or "to become intimate with." This is not simply intellectual study.

In the Chinese character for *narau*, the upper part of the *kanji* means "bird's wings." The lower part of the *kanji* refers to "self." This study is like a baby bird studying or learning how to fly with its parents. By nature, a baby bird has the ability to fly, but a baby bird does not know how to fly. So the baby watches its parents and learns how to fly. It tries

again and again, and finally it can fly like its parents. This is the original meaning of “to study” here. This is not simply intellectual study. Of course, intellection is included in the case of a human being, in the capacity of studying or learning, but merely accumulating knowledge does not allow us to fly (to live out ourselves in its true meaning). As flying is the essential thing for a bird (except a bird like a penguin or an ostrich), to be a bird, to study the self is the essential thing for us human beings to be human. A human being is a living being that needs to study the self to become the self.

This is the meaning of “to study” here. When we study the self, we cannot see ourselves as objects. We have to live out ourselves. We have to practice with this body and mind to study the self. Intellectual investigation is only a small part of it, though it is not less important.

Even when we say, “I study the Buddha Way,” still there is a subject “I” and an object—the Buddha Way. When we speak in that way, “I,” “study,” and “the Buddha Way” are separate. In the case of the Buddha Way, this is a mistaken way of thinking. This creates a basic problem for us human beings to see actual reality as it is. When we practice the Buddha Way or study the self, there is no separation between “I” and “the self” or “the Buddha Way,” nor between the action of “study” and “practice.” When we study the self, “I” is the “self,” and there is nothing called “I” beside the action of “studying.” Subject, action, and object are completely the same thing. But as soon as we start to think or speak using words and concepts, we have to say, “I study the self” or “I study the Buddha Way.” The important point here is just study or practice. Within the action both “the self” and “the Buddha Way” are manifested. Keep studying, practicing, manifesting. Dogen Zenji said, “When buddhas are truly buddhas, they don’t need to perceive that they are buddhas. However, they are enlightened buddhas, and they continue actualizing buddha.” Sawaki Roshi elucidated Dogen Zenji’s expression, *jijuyu zanmai*, when he said, “In zazen, the self does the self by the self.” **END.**




“I drink water.” That works within the

someone may bring a cup of water. And we have no problem with this on the ground of conventional living in human society.

But when we talk of Buddha Dharma, it does not work. This is the point where our language or our way of thinking using words and concepts starts to be a problem. We need to go beyond words, concepts, language, and logic to be free from the problem of separation. But this does not mean we have to stop thinking and see things in some mysterious way beyond our usual way of thinking.

What I am saying is that the reality of our life is a very obvious, ordinary thing, but once we start to talk about it, we lose the vivid, immediate reality.

In our practice we just sit with this body and mind on a cushion in the zendo. Or we do various things outside the zendo, but when we practice the Buddha Way there is no separation between the "self" that is studying the self and the "self" that is studied by the self. Self is studying the self. And the action of studying is also the self. There is no such thing called the self outside of our action. There is no runner beside the action of running. Runner and running are exactly the same thing. If there is a runner outside of "running" then the runner is not running. That is, the runner cannot be called a runner because the runner is not running. This is the one point of discussion made by Nagarjuna to show emptiness and negate the existence of a fixed ego that is permanent and the owner of our body and mind.

We run. This is a very ordinary thing, just like we sit, we eat, we drink, or we breathe. But when we say, "There is no 'I' besides running" or "running without a runner," we feel that we are discussing something mysterious. But that is not a correct way to understand the discussion by people like Nagarjuna or Dogen. They are trying to express the ly realistic way without fabrication. The  words negate the words themselves and s  ghts.

When we practice the Buddha Way, there is no self, no Buddha Way, no others. Self and all others are working together. The working done by self and all others are called our actions. When we drive a car, we think "we" are "driving" "a car." We are operators (subject) and the car is operated upon (object). But, actually, we are also operated by the car.

Depending upon the style or the quality of the car, we have to drive in a different way. Depending upon whether we drive a cheap old truck carrying junk or a luxurious, brand-new car carrying a VIP, our feelings and attitude are totally different. In a sense the car is driving us.

We are owned by the car. I and the car work together and the action of driving is manifested. This is not only about a special practice done by a group of people called Buddhists. This is the actual way all beings are working within the circle of independent origination.

The Buddha Way includes both self and objects. The Buddha Way includes both people sitting and sitting done by the people. It is one thing actually. This is very difficult to explain but it is really an obvious, plain reality of our lives. This is not some special state or condition accomplished by only certain, so-called enlightened people. Even when we don't know it, the self, others, and action are working together as one reality. We don't need to train ourselves to make those three into one thing. If those are really three separate things, they cannot become one. They are always one reality.

"To study the self is to forget the self." When we study ourselves as the Buddha Way, we find that there is no such self that is separate from "others." The self is connected with all beings. We see that the self does not really exist. It is like a dream, a phantom, a bubble, a shadow, a drop of dew, or a flash of lightning, as the *Diamond Sutra* says. The self is in its self-being empty. So, we need to forget the self. Even the self that is studying the Buddha Way should be forgotten. The self forgets the self in studying the self. This is what we do in our zazen by opening the hand of thought. We let go of whatever thoughts, feelings, or emotions come up from our selves in zazen. Letting go is complete negation of everything coming up from egocentric karmic self. We let go not only of selfish ideas but also our understanding of the Dharma. Just sitting—shikantaza—is the complete negation of the self. And at the same time, in letting go everything is accepted. Nothing is negated. Everything is just as it is. Letting go of thought is not killing the thought. Thoughts are coming up moment by moment, but we just let go. Thoughts are there, but in our zazen we don't think. We just sit. Within just sitting everything is just as it is. Nothing is negated and nothing is affirmed. This just sitting is the *prajna* (wisdom) which sees emptiness without

separation of subject and object. Zazen is not a kind of contemplation as a "method" through which "I" (subject) can see "emptiness" as object. Practice of just sitting is itself prajna. This is why Dogen Zenji said in the *Shobogenzo*, "Zanmai-o-zanmai": "Sitting is itself Buddha Dharma." In the *Shobogenzo* "Zuimonki" Dogen Zenji said, "Sitting is itself the true form of the self." **END # 2**

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whole being on the ground of interdependent origination. We do nothing but "just sitting" with whole body and mind. Dogen Zenji's zazen (shikantaza) is a unique practice even within different kinds of meditation practices in the various forms of Buddhism. We don't meditate. Meditation is done by our mind. But in zazen, we don't do anything with our mind. We don't count breath. We don't watch breath. We don't chant mantra. We don't contemplate anything. We don't try to concentrate our mind on any particular object. We have no techniques. We really just sit with both body and mind. We sit in an upright posture, breathe through the nose quietly, deeply, and smoothly from our abdomen. We keep our eyes open. Even when we sit in this posture, our mind is functioning. Our heart is beating; our stomach is digesting food. Each and every organ in our body continues to function. There is no reason that our brain stops working in our zazen. The function of our brain is to secrete thoughts. Thoughts well up in our mind moment by moment. But we refrain from doing anything with our thoughts. We just let everything come up freely and go away freely. We don't grasp anything. We don't try to control anything. We just sit.

This is such a simple practice. To be simple does not mean to be easy. It is very difficult and it is very deep practice. In zazen, we accomplish nothing. As Sawaki Roshi said, zazen is good for nothing. But zazen is itself Buddha Dharma. Refraining from doing anything, the self is illuminated and verified by all things. Just sitting is not our personal practice. But we let go of our karmic self that always wants to be satisfied.

"To be verified by all things is to let the body and mind of the self, and body and mind of others, drop off." Dropping off body and mind is a translation of *shinjin datsuraku*. This is one of the key words in Dogen

In buddhas' and ancestors' zazen, they wish to gather all buddha-dharma from the time they first arouse bodhi-mind. Within zazen, they don't forget living beings. They offer a compassionate heart even to an insect. They vow to save all living beings and they dedicate all merits to all living beings. Therefore, buddhas and ancestors practice zazen within the world of desire. Even in the world of desire, they have the best connection with the Pure Land. They practice many virtues generation after generation and allow their mind to be flexible.

He made a prostration and said, "What do you mean by allowing the mind to be flexible?"

He said, "Affirming buddhas' and ancestors' dropping off body and mind is the flexible mind. This is called the mind-seal of buddhas and ancestors." Dogen prostrated six more times.

→ **STAZT #2** What does shinjin datsuraku mean in our practice? The literal meaning of the Chinese character *datsu* means "to take off," or "slough off," and *raku* means "to drop off," "cast off," or "fall down." Carl Bielefeldt translates this expression as "slough off body and mind." This translation puts emphasis on the first half of the compound, "datsu." "Dropping or casting off" puts emphasis on the second half, "raku."

We always wear clothing from the time of our birth to the time of our death. Clothing indicates the class or occupation of a person in society. Monks wear a monk's robe. An emperor wears an emperor's garment. Soldiers wear a soldier's uniform, depending upon their position. Farmers wear farmers' clothes. Rich people wear luxurious garments. Poor people wear cheap clothes. Clothing also shows the national, cultural or religious background of a person. Chinese wear Chinese clothes. Japanese wear Japanese clothes. Americans wear American clothes. When we see people's clothing, we see who people are in society.

It is not only clothes that we put on to cover ourselves. We wear costumes that show us as rich, poor, or middle class. Occupations such as a doctor, lawyer, mechanic, priest, student, and teacher are also a kind of clothing. But when we sit facing the wall, and let go of thought and association with others, we take off all the clothing. When we just sit

facing the wall, and let go of thought and association, at that time I am not a Japanese Buddhist priest. We are neither Japanese nor American. We are neither rich nor poor. We are neither Buddhist nor Christian. We are Japanese or American, Buddhist or Christian, man or woman, only when we compare ourselves with others. When I compare myself with Americans, I am a Japanese. Until I knew that there are some people who are not Japanese, I didn't know that I was a Japanese. When we just sit, we are neither deluded living beings nor enlightened buddhas. We are neither alive nor dead. We are just as we are. That's it. We take off all the clothes and become a naked being in zazen.

Since our birth, we have had many different experiences. In the process of experiencing billions of things, we create a self-image, such as we are capable or not; we are superior or inferior; we are rich or poor; we are honest or not. This is how we define ourselves. And we grasp ourselves as, for example, a rich, superior, capable person or a poor, inferior, stupid person. These are the selves created by karma. When we sit in zazen and let go, all these self images are ungrasped. When we open our hands, all these concepts drop off. Our body and mind are released from karmic hands. This is what datsuraku means.

As Nyojo Zenji said, when we just sit and let go of thought, we are released from the five desires and six coverings. We are not pulled by objects. We are released from the three poisonous minds that bind us within samsara. This just sitting zazen is itself the practice of nirvana.

I am a Buddhist priest. I am my wife's husband. I am my children's father. When I am with my family, I am a father. So, I try to play a role of a father at home. When I give a lecture, I am a teacher. So, I try to do my best to talk on Dogen Zenji's teachings in the most understandable way, though I don't know whether I am successful or not. These are the costumes I put on in each situation. And I define myself as a father or a teacher, and I try to do my best to play the role in each situation. But when I sit facing the wall, I am not a father. I am not a Buddhist priest. I am nothing. I am empty. I am just who I am. This is liberation from my karmic life.

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s drop off." This means that the separa-
s dropped off. Zazen reveals the total