

Fukan-zazengi (Universal Way of Zazen)

Originally, The Way is complete and universal.
How can we distinguish practice from enlightenment?
The Vehicle of Reality is in the Self.
Why should we waste our efforts trying to attain it?
Still more, the Whole Body is free from dust.
Why should we believe in a means to sweep it away?
The Way is never separated from where we are now.
Why should we wander here and there to practice?

Yet, if there is the slightest deviation, you will be as far from the Way as heaven is from earth. If adverse or favorable conditions arise to even a small degree, you will lose your mind in confusion. Even if you are proud of your understanding, are enlightened in abundance, and obtain the power of wisdom to glimpse the ground of buddhahood; even if you gain the Way, clarify the mind, resolve to pierce heaven, that is only strolling on the border of the Buddha Way.

You are still, almost always, lacking the vivid way of emancipation. Moreover, consider Shakyamuni Buddha who was enlightened from birth; to this day you can see the traces of his sitting in the straight posture for six years. And Bodhidharma who transmitted the mind seal; even now you can hear of the fame of his facing the wall for nine years. These ancient sages practiced in this way. How can people of today refrain from practice?

Therefore, cease studying words and following letters. Learn to step back, turning the light inwards, illuminating the Self. Doing so, your body and mind will drop off naturally, and Original Self will manifest. If you wish to attain suchness, practice suchness immediately.

Now, for zazen a quiet room is best. Eat and drink moderately. Let go of all associations, and put all affairs aside. Do not think of either good or evil. Do not be concerned with either right or wrong. Put aside the operation of your intellect, volition, and consciousness. Stop considering things with memory, imagination and contemplation. Do not seek to become Buddha. To be Buddha has nothing to do with the forms of sitting or lying down.

Usually a thick zabutan is put on the floor where you sit, and a zafu placed on it. You may sit full lotus or half lotus. Your clothing should be loose but neat. Then put your right palm up on your left foot and your left palm up on your right palm. The tips of your thumbs should be lightly touching. Sit upright, leaning neither to the left nor right, neither forward nor backward. Your ears should be in line with your shoulders; your nose should be in line with your navel. Place your tongue against the roof of your mouth. Close your lips and jaw. Always keep your eyes open. Breathe quietly through your nose. After having regulated your posture, exhale completely and take a breath. Sway your body from left to right a few times. Sit stably in samadhi. Think of not-thinking.

How do you think of not-thinking? Beyond thinking. This is the essential way of zazen. The zazen which I am talking about is not step-by-step meditation. It is simply the dharma gate of peace and comfort. It is the practice-enlightenment of the ultimate Way. In doing zazen, the

Koan manifests itself; it cannot be ensnared. When you grasp this, you are like a dragon with water, or a tiger in the mountains. You must know that true dharma manifests itself in zazen, and that dullness and distraction drop away.

When you rise from sitting, move your body slowly and stand up calmly. Do not move abruptly. You should see that to transcend both ordinary people and sages and to die sitting or standing, depends upon the power of zazen. Moreover, your discriminating mind cannot understand how buddhas and patriarchs taught their students with a finger, a pole, a needle, or a mallet, or how they transmitted the Way with a hossu, a fist, a staff, or by shouting. Needless to say, these actions cannot be understood by practicing to attain superhuman powers. These actions come from the practice which is prior to discriminating mind.

Therefore, do not consider whether you are clever or stupid, and do not think of whether you are superior or inferior. When you practice wholeheartedly, it is truly the practice of the Way. Practice – enlightenment cannot be defiled. Making the effort to obtain the Way, is itself, the manifestation of the Way in your daily life. The Buddhas and sages, both in this world and other worlds, in India and China, preserved the buddha-seal in the same way and expressed the Way freely. They just practiced sitting and were protected by zazen. Although their characters were diverse, each of them practiced the Way of zazen wholeheartedly.

There is no reason to leave your own seat at home and take a meaningless trip to the dusty places of other countries. If you make a false step, then you will miss the way, even though it is before your eyes. You have already been given a human body which is vital, so do not spend your time wastefully. Since you are endowed with the essential functioning of the Buddha Way, why pursue worthless pleasures that are like sparks from a flint?

Furthermore, your body is like a drop of dew on a blade of grass, your life is like a flash of lightning. Your body will disappear soon, your life will be lost in an instant. You, honored practitioner, after learning in a partial way like the blind people who touched various parts of the elephant, please do not be scared by the real dragon. Devote yourself to the Way which indicates Reality directly. Respect those who realize their Self and no longer seek anything outside. Be in accord with the buddhas' bodhi. Succeed to the sages' samadhi. If you practice suchness continuously, you will be suchness.

The treasure house will open of itself, and you will be able to use it at will.

Dogen Zenji-1227

– ZCLA version, translators unknown