

Fukanzazengi (Universal Recommendations for Zazen)

The Way is basically perfect and all-pervading. How could it be contingent on practice and realization? The ancestral vehicle is free and at ease. What need is there to waste our worthy effort? Indeed, the whole body is far beyond the world's dust. Who could believe in a means to brush it clean? It is never apart from you, right where you are. What is the use of going off here and there to practice?

And yet, if there is the slightest discrepancy, you are as remote as heaven from earth. If the least like or dislike arises, the mind is lost in confusion. Suppose you gain pride of understanding and wallow in enlightenment, full of the wisdom that glimpses the utmost ground, attaining the Way and clarifying the Mind, arousing an aspiration to escalate the very sky. You are making the initial, partial excursions about the frontiers, but are still somewhat deficient in the vital path of total emancipation.

Even considering the Buddha, although he was possessed of inborn knowledge, the impact left by his six years of upright sitting remains noticeable. As for Bodhidharma's transmission of the mind-seal, the fame of his nine years of facing a wall is celebrated still. Since this was the case with the ancient sages, how can we today dispense with wholehearted practice?

Therefore, put aside the intellectual practice of investigating words and chasing sayings and learn the backward step that turns your light inwardly to illuminate your self. Body and mind of themselves will drop away and your original face will be manifest. If you want to attain suchness, diligently practice suchness without delay.

For sanzen, a quiet room is suitable. Eat and drink moderately. Discard all involvements and take respite from concerns. Do not think good or bad. Do not adjudicate right and wrong. Cease all the movements of the conscious mind, the gauging of all thoughts and views. Have no designs on becoming a Buddha. How could it be limited to sitting or lying down?

At the site of your regular sitting, spread out a thick mat and place a cushion above it. Sit either in the full-lotus or half-lotus position. In the full-lotus position, first place your right foot on your left thigh, then your left foot on your right thigh. In the half-lotus, simply place your left foot against your right thigh. Wear your clothes and belt loose and arranged neatly. Then place your right hand on your left leg and your left palm (facing upward) on your right palm, thumb-tips touching. Thus, sit upright with posture straight, neither inclining to left or to the right, neither leaning forward or backward. Align your ears with your shoulders and your nose with your navel. Place your tongue against the front roof of your mouth, with teeth and lips both shut. Always keep your eyes gently open and breathe softly through your nose.

Once you have adjusted your posture, take a breath and exhale fully, rock your body right and left, and settle into a steady, immobile sitting position. Think of what does not think. How do you think of what does not think? Non-thinking. This in itself is the essential art of zazen.

The zazen I speak of is not learning meditation. It is simply the Dharma gate of peace and bliss, the practice-realization of totally culminated enlightenment. It is the manifestation of ultimate reality. Traps and snares can never reach it. Once its heart is grasped, you are like a dragon gaining the water, like a tiger settling into the mountains. For you must know that just there (in zazen) the true Dharma is manifesting itself and that from the first dullness and distraction are struck aside.

When you arise from sitting, move slowly and quietly, calmly and deliberately. Do not rise suddenly or abruptly. In surveying the past, we find that transcendence of both mundane and sacred, and dying while either sitting or standing, have all depended entirely on the power of zazen.

In addition, energetically turning the crucial function to teach with a finger, a banner, a needle, or a mallet, and the effecting of realization with the aid of a whisk, a fist, a staff, or a shout cannot be fully understood by discriminative thinking. Indeed, it cannot be fully known by the practicing or realizing of supernatural powers either. It must be majestic deportment beyond sounds and forms — is it not a guiding standard prior to knowledge and perceptions?

This being the case, intelligence or lack of it does not matter; between the dull and the sharp-witted there is no distinction. If you concentrate your effort single-mindedly, that in itself is wholeheartedly engaging the Way. Practice-realization is naturally undefiled. Proceeding forward is after all a matter of everydayness.

In general, in this world and others, both in India and China, all equally hold the Buddha-seal, exclusively enacting the character of this school. They simply are devoted to sitting, totally covered in resolute immobility. Although it is said that there are ten thousand distinctions and a thousand variations, it is solely in zazen that we fully engage the Way. Why leave behind the seat that exists in your home and make futile trips to the dusty realms of other lands? If you make one misstep you stumble past what is directly in front of you.

You have gained the pivotal opportunity of human form. Do not spend your time in vain. You are maintaining the essential workings of the Buddha Way. Who would take wasteful delight in the spark from the flintstone? Besides, form and substance are like the dew on the grass, destiny like the dart of lightning — emptied in an instant, vanished in a flash.

Please, honored followers of Zen, long accustomed to groping for the elephant, do not be suspicious of the true dragon. Devote your energies to a way that directly indicates reality. Revere the person who is beyond seeking attainment and is free from effort. Accord with the enlightenment of the buddhas; succeed to the legitimate lineage of the ancestors' samadhi. Continuously perform as such and you will be such a person. Your treasure-store will open of itself and you will joyfully use it at will.

-Eihei Dogen Zenji 1200-1253 C.E.