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**BEYOND THINKING**  
*A Guide to Zen Meditation*

**Zen Master Dogen**

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## RECOMMENDING ZAZEN\* TO ALL PEOPLE

THE ESSENTIAL WAY FLOWS EVERYWHERE; how could it require practice\* or enlightenment?\* The essential teaching is fully available; how could effort be necessary? Furthermore, the entire mirror is free of dust; why take steps to polish it? Nothing is separate from this very place; why journey away?

And yet, if you miss the mark even by a strand of hair, you are as far apart from it as heaven from earth. If the slightest discrimination occurs, you will be lost in confusion. You may be proud of your understanding and have abundant realization, or you may have acquired outstanding wisdom and attained the way by clarifying the mind. However, even with high aspirations, if you wander about and get an initial glimpse of understanding, you may still lack the vital path that allows you to leap free of the body.

Observe the example of Shakyamuni Buddha\* at the Jeta Grove,\* who practiced upright sitting for six years even though he was gifted with intrinsic wisdom. Still celebrated is the Master Bodhidharma\* of Shaolin Temple,\* who sat facing the wall for nine years, although he had already received the mind seal.\* An-

\*Terms found in the Glossary carry an asterisk in their first occurrence.

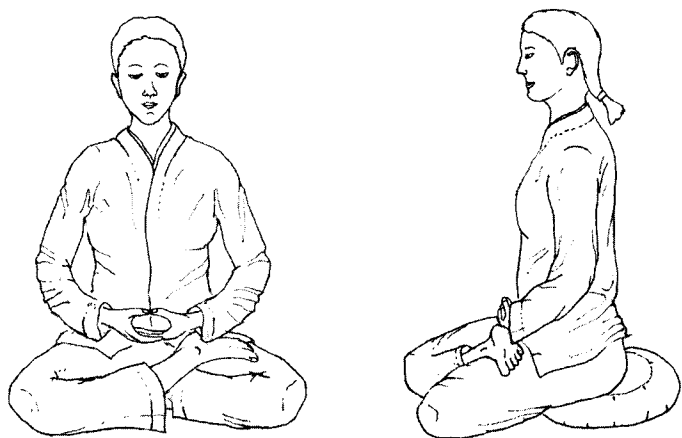
cient sages were like this; who nowadays does not need to practice as they did?

Stop searching for phrases and chasing after words. Take the backward step and turn the light inward.\* Your body-mind of itself will drop away\* and your original face\* will appear. If you want to attain just this,\* immediately practice just this.

For zazen, a quiet room is appropriate. Drink and eat in moderation. Let go of all involvements and let myriad things rest. Do not think good or bad. Do not judge right or wrong. Stop conscientious endeavor and analytic introspection. Do not try to become a buddha.\* How could being a buddha be limited to sitting or not sitting?

In an appropriate place for sitting, set out a thick mat and put a round cushion on top of it. Sit either in the full- or half-lotus posture.\* For the full-lotus posture,\* first place the right foot on the left thigh, then the left foot on the right thigh. For the half-lotus posture, place the left foot on the right thigh. Loosen the robes and belts and arrange them in an orderly way. Then place the right hand palm up on the left foot, and the left hand on the right hand, with the ends of the thumbs lightly touching each other.

Sit straight up without leaning to the right or left and without



*Zazen posture.*

bending forward or backward. The ears should be in line with the shoulders and the nose in line with the navel. Rest the tongue against the roof of the mouth, with lips and teeth closed. Keep the eyes open and breathe gently through the nose.

Having adjusted your body in this manner, take a breath and exhale fully, then sway your body to left and right. Now sit steadfastly and think not thinking. How do you think not thinking? Beyond thinking.\* This is the essential art of zazen.

The zazen I speak of is not learning meditation. It is simply the dharma gate\* of enjoyment and ease. It is the practice-realization\* of complete enlightenment. Realize the fundamental point\* free from the binding of nets and baskets.\* Once you experience it, you are like a dragon swimming in the water or a tiger reposing in the mountains. Know that the true dharma\* emerges of itself, clearing away hindrances and distractions.

When you stand up from sitting, move your body slowly and rise calmly, without haste. We understand from the past that going beyond the ordinary and sacred, where sitting and standing are effortless and boundless, depends solely on the power of zazen.

Furthermore, to bring forth the fundamental turning point\* by raising a finger, a pole, a needle, or a mallet, or to precipitate realization with a whisk, a fist, a stick, or a shout cannot be understood by discriminatory thinking. How can it be understood by the use of supernatural powers?\* Zazen is an awesome presence beyond form and description. How is it not the path prior to conception?

Thus, do not be concerned with who is wise and who is foolish. Do not discriminate the sharp from the dull. To practice wholeheartedly is the true endeavor of the way. Practice-realization is not defiled, not special. It is a matter for every day.

Now, in this human world and in other realms, in India and China, buddha ancestors\* invariably have maintained the buddha seal\* and upheld the teaching of zazen practice immersed in steadfastness. Although circumstances may vary in a thousand

ways, just practice zazen, giving yourself fully to the realization of the way. Why give up the sitting platform of your own house and wander uselessly in the dust of a remote land? Once a wrong step is taken, you depart from the way.

Having received a human life, do not waste the passing moments. Already upholding the buddha way, why indulge in the sparks from a flint? After all, form is like a dewdrop on the grass, life is like a flash of lightning—transient and illusory, gone in a moment.

Honored practitioners of the way, do not grope for the elephant or doubt the true dragon.\* Endeavor on the immediate and straightforward way. Revere the mind that goes beyond study with effortless effort and surpasses all doing. Experience the enlightenment of the buddhas and correctly inherit the samadhi\* of the ancestors. Practice thusness\* continuously, and you will be thus. The treasury will open of itself for you to use as you wish.

## RULES FOR ZAZEN

PRACTICING ZEN\* IS ZAZEN. For zazen a quiet place is suitable. Lay out a thick mat. Do not let in drafts or smoke, rain or dew. Protect and maintain the place where you settle your body that settles you. There are examples from the past of sitting on a diamond seat\* and sitting on a flat stone covered with a thick layer of grass. Day or night the place of sitting should not be dark. It should be kept warm in winter and cool in summer.

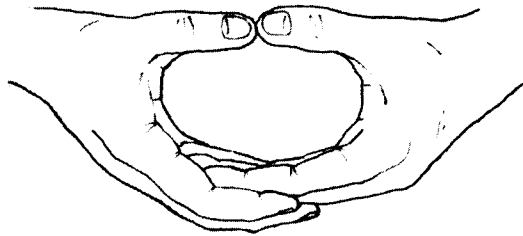
Set aside all involvements and let the myriad things rest. Zazen is not thinking of good, not thinking of bad. It is not conscious endeavor. It is not introspection. Do not desire to become a buddha. Let sitting or lying down drop away. Be moderate in eating and drinking. Mindful of the passing of time, engage yourself in zazen as though saving your head from fire. On Mt. Huangmei\* the Fifth Ancestor practiced zazen to the exclusion of all other activities.

When sitting zazen, wear the kashaya\* and use a round cushion. The cushion should not be placed all the way under the legs but only under the buttocks. In this way the crossed legs rest on the mat and the backbone is supported with the round cushion. This is the method used by all buddha ancestors for zazen.

Sit either in the half-lotus position or in the full-lotus position. For the full lotus put the right foot on the left thigh and the

left foot on the right thigh. The toes should lie along the thighs, not extending beyond. For the half-lotus position, simply put the left foot on the right thigh.

Loosen your robes and arrange them in an orderly way. Place the right hand on the left foot and the left hand on the right



*Zazen mudra.*

*This common hand position is called dharma world samadhi mudra.*

hand, with the ends of the thumbs lightly touching each other. With the hands in this position, place them close to the body so that the joined thumb tips are at the navel. Straighten your body and sit erect. Do not lean to the left or right; do not bend forward or backward. Your ears should be in line with your shoulders, and your nose in line with your navel.

Rest your tongue against the roof of your mouth and breathe through your nose. Lips and teeth should be closed. Eyes should be open, neither too wide, nor too narrow. Having adjusted body and mind in this manner, take a breath and exhale fully.

Sit solidly in samadhi and think not thinking. How do you think not thinking? Nonthinking.\* This is the art of zazen.

Zazen is not learning to do concentration. It is the dharma gate of great ease and joy. It is undivided practice-realization.

In the eleventh month, the first year of the Kangen Era [1243], this was taught to the assembly at the Yoshimine Temple,\* Yoshida County, Echizen Province.

## INFORMAL TALKS

*Recorded by Ejo\**

ONE DAY DOGEN SAID:

While I was reading the recorded sayings of an ancient master in a monastery in China, a monk from Shu who was practicing the way said, "What's the use of reading such a book?"

I said, "I want to study the deeds of ancient masters."

He said, "What's the use of that?"

I said, "I hope to guide people when I go home."

He said, "What's the use of that?"

I said, "To benefit beings."

He said, "Ultimately, what's the use of that?"

Later, I thought about the meaning of his questions. I realized that reading recorded sayings and koans,\* studying the deeds of ancient masters, and explaining them to the deluded are of no use for one's own development or in helping others. If you practice just sitting\* and clarify the great matter—the essential meaning—your understanding becomes unlimited in guiding others, even if you don't know a single letter. That is why the monk said, "Ultimately, what's the use of that?"

Realizing he was right to the point, I stopped reading recorded sayings and other texts. I sat wholeheartedly and clarified the great matter.