

thought and perform the reality of the zazen posture that we are practicing with our flesh and bones. In other words, it is with our flesh and bones that we actualize the reality of the self.<sup>52</sup>

### Waking Up to Life

What actually goes on in the internal experience of doing zazen? An analytical description of it is difficult, but that is exactly what I will try to do. First of all, consider a line ZZ'. This line represents truly maintaining the zazen posture (see figure II). When we are doing zazen, this line ZZ' is the reality of our lives right now, so we make every effort to keep to it. But we are not fixed and unmoving the way rocks are, so it happens that we tend to drift away from this line: thoughts come up or we doze off.

When a thought comes into our mind and we move away from the steadiness that line ZZ' represents in the figure, if we take this thought *a* as a basis and continue with thoughts *a'* and *a''*, we are thinking. If something about our work comes to mind and we continue with thoughts about the arrangements and management of the work, we are clearly doing nothing but thinking about our work. Then we open the hand of thought and let the thoughts go, and we wake up to the posture of zazen with our flesh and bones. We return to the reality of life. This waking up is the arrow pointing back down to line ZZ'.

But after a while we become drowsy. This is *b*. If this *b* continues on to *b'* and *b''*, we are actually dozing. Perhaps it seems strange to use this progression of symbols, *b*, *b'*, and *b''*, for dozing, too, but in actually doing zazen, that is the way it is. Thinking and sleeping in zazen are pretty much the same. When we get sleepy, a drowsy thought *b* wafts into our mind, and then without our noticing it

another sleepy thought *b'* slides in on its heels. Thus, when we become sleepy during zazen and some thought floats into our head, that is nothing but dreaming. If a thought comes to mind while we are wide awake and we chase after it, this is called *thinking*. And, if a thought comes to mind when we are sleepy and we drift after it, we are simply chasing after a dream in our sleep. Or we may be nodding away and at the same time *thinking* that although we are sleepy we are holding our and sitting as solidly as ever. What we are really doing here is just dreaming about doing zazen.

In actually doing zazen, there is no difference between chasing after thoughts and sleeping—at least speaking from my experience of zazen this is the case. Therefore, when we become sleepy during zazen, we have to wake up by vigorously putting our energy into our sitting with our flesh and bones and cease chasing after thoughts. We have to “wake up” and return to the reality of life, which can also be expressed by an arrow pointing up to ZZ'.

Sometimes we completely forget about where we are and what we are doing. We may chase after thoughts *c*, *c'*, *c''*, and end up completely separated from the reality of our life of doing zazen right now. Without being aware of it, we may start associating with or carrying on a dialogue with some vivid figure *c'''* that has been totally fabricated within our own act of chasing after thoughts. Even at a time like this, if we wake up—that is, actually perform the posture of zazen with our flesh and bones and open the hand of our thoughts—this very lifelike phantom *c'''* will disappear instantly and we will be able to return to the reality of zazen (ZZ'). This is a truly remarkable point. It makes us realize clearly that our fantasy *c'''* has no reality and that it is nothing but the empty coming and going of thoughts. Noticing things like this during zazen,

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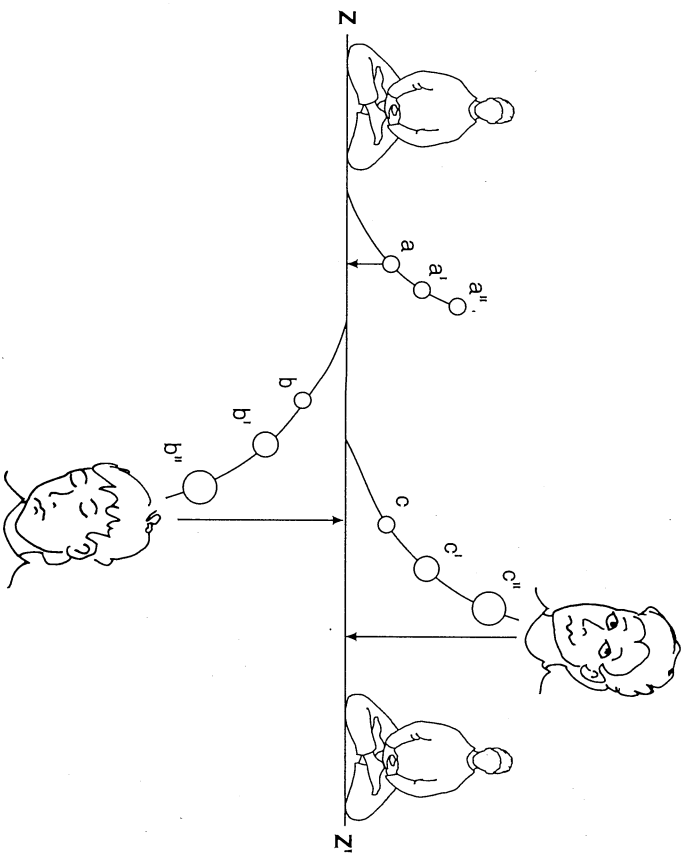


FIGURE 11  
The mind in zazen

whether it is at stage  $a$ ,  $a'$ , or  $a''$ , we should wake up to zazen as soon as possible and return to  $ZZ'$ .

Actually, zazen is not just being somehow glued to line  $ZZ'$ .

Doing zazen is a continuation of this kind of returning up from sleepiness and down from chasing after thoughts. That is, the posture of waking up and returning to  $ZZ'$  at any time is itself zazen.

This is one of the most vital points regarding zazen. When we are doing zazen line  $ZZ'$ , or just doing zazen, represents our reality, so it is essential to maintain that line. Actually,  $ZZ'$  represents the reality of the posture of zazen, but the reality of our life is not just  $ZZ'$ . If it were only  $ZZ'$ , we would be as unchanging and lifeless as a rock! Although we aim at the line  $ZZ'$ , we can never actually

adhere to it, because it ( $ZZ'$ ) does not exist by itself. Nevertheless, we keep aiming at  $ZZ'$ , because it is through clinging to thoughts that we keep veering away from it. The very power to wake up to  $ZZ'$  and return to it is the reality of the life of zazen.

Zazen enables us to realize that all the thoughts that float into our heads are nothing but empty comings and goings that have no real substance and vanish in a moment. Yongjia's poem *The Song of Enlightenment* (Ch. *Zhengdaolue*; Jp. *Shōdōka*) puts it this way:

The five elements of existence are just clouds floating aimlessly to and fro,

While the three poisons are but bubbles that appear and vanish.

When reality is seen, neither subject nor object exists,

And in a moment a hellish destiny is averted.<sup>26</sup>

Truly, all thoughts, delusions, and cravings are like bubbles and are nothing but empty comings and goings that lose their appearance of substance when we wake up in zazen. Even a hellish realm, developed by our own thoughts and fantasies, is eradicated in an instant. Zazen enables us to experience this as reality. The reason I have taken it upon myself to try to explain with diagrams what is actually happening during zazen is this: people tend to think that doing zazen means to aim at the line  $ZZ'$ , to train and discipline their minds, and finally to hold unwaveringly to  $ZZ'$  itself. I wish to make it clear that zazen as real life—the zazen that Dōgen Zenji called “the directly transmitted zazen of the buddhas and patriarchs”—is not like that. Consider the following passage from Dōgen Zenji's *Eihei Kōronku*.

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The Patriarch Nagarjuna spoke thus: Zazen is the dharmā of all the buddhas. Non-Buddhists also practice zazen. However, they make the mistake of coloring it; their incorrect views are like thorns. Therefore, it cannot be the same as the zazen of the buddhas and bodhisattvas. Sravakas and pratyeka buddhas also do zazen, but they wish only to control their minds and seek to reach nirvana. This is not the same as the zazen of the buddhas and bodhisattvas.<sup>27</sup>

These words of Nagarjuna, who lived about 150 to 250 C.E., were quoted by Dōgen Zenji in the thirteenth century. Nagarjuna had already made clear the difference between the zazen of the buddhas and bodhisattvas and the meditation practices of non-Buddhist practitioners and Buddhists seeking only their own salvation, which he labeled *hinayana* (a small-minded attitude, literally “small vehicle”).<sup>28</sup> The meditation practices of non-Buddhists are not the pure zazen of life itself. They are flavored or colored with various kinds of profit and are developed from a worldly and utilitarian outlook. *Sravakas* and *pratyeka buddhas* meditate in order to gradually decrease delusion and craving; finally seeking to extinguish them entirely and enter nirvana. Neither of these is the zazen that has been correctly transmitted by the buddhas and ancestors.

In other words, the zazen we do is not something at which we succeed only when we become one with ZZ!, as in the drawing we have been considering. Decreasing delusion and desire and finally extinguishing them completely is not the purpose of zazen.

Some Buddhists say nirvana (enlightenment) is the complete extinction of delusion and craving; and zazen or meditation is practiced in order to reach this state. However, if we assume this type

of enlightenment to be the truth of human life, then this is nothing but saying that the truth of life is lifelessness, or death! Since cravings existing in human life are the cause of suffering, such Buddhists struggle to extinguish them and attain the bliss of nirvana. But isn't seeking to get rid of pain and to attain the bliss of nirvana itself a desire or craving? Actually, this too is craving, and precisely because of that the practitioner is caught in self-contradiction and can't escape suffering.<sup>29</sup> This is why Dōgen Zenji said, “The practice of the buddhas and patriarchs is completely different from the way of *hinayana*,” and it is why he quoted from an earlier ancestor about not trying to follow a limited form of zazen as self-control.

The zazen of the buddhas and ancestors, the zazen of the reality of life, is not like this. Since desires and cravings are actually a manifestation of the life force, there is no reason to hate them and try to extinguish them. And yet, if we become dragged around by them and chase after them, then our life becomes fogged over.<sup>30</sup> The important point here is not to cause life to be fogged over by thought based on desires or cravings, but to see all thoughts and desires as resting on the foundation of life, to let them be as they are yet not be dragged around by them.<sup>31</sup> It is not a matter of making a great effort not to be dragged around by desires. It is just waking up and returning to the reality of life that is essential. If we apply this to zazen, it means that, even if various thoughts like *a* and *b* do occur, they will all vanish when we wake up to zazen.

Even when one is completely off track, carried away to the point where *c'''* appears as a very vivid image, by waking up to zazen even *c'''* will disappear in an instant. Anyone who does zazen is actually enabled to experience with her whole body that thoughts are nothing but empty comings and goings without any independent or

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unchanging substance. However, unless we actually practice zazen, this is very difficult to understand.

I realize that to say you cannot understand this without doing zazen may sound presumptuous. I say this because usually we are unable to recognize that what we think about is nothing but empty comings and goings, due to plunging our heads too far into our thoughts and living too much in the world of thought. Once we think of something we want or like, we assume that the simple fact of thinking we want it or like it is the truth. Then, since we think this idea is the truth and is worth seeking, we proceed to chase after it everywhere and our whole world becomes a world of greed. On the other hand, once we think of something we hate or dislike, we assume again that the simple fact of thinking we hate it is the truth. Thinking that this idea is the truth so we ought to follow it, we chase after it until our whole world turns into anger.<sup>32</sup>

The activities in our everyday lives are almost entirely the result of chasing after ideas this way, causing vivid lifelike images to become fixed in our mind, and then giving more and more weight to these fixed delusions and desires until finally we get carried away by them.<sup>33</sup> It would be even more accurate to say that ordinarily we are being flung about by desire and delusion without even knowing it. It is like a man who is drinking saké (consuming fantasies). At first he knows that he is getting drunk, but when he gets to the stage where the saké is drinking the man, then he is adrift in fantasies without even knowing it, and he acts accordingly. Almost all people and societies throughout the world today are carried away by desire and delusion. This is precisely why our zazen comes to have such a great significance. When we wake up during zazen we are truly forced to experience the fact

that all the things we develop in our thoughts vanish in an instant.

Despite the fact that we almost always stress the content of our thoughts, when we wake up, we wake up to the reality of life and make this reality our center of gravity. It is at this time that we clearly realize that all the desires and delusions within our thoughts are substantially nothing. When this kind of zazen experience fully becomes a part of us, even in our daily lives, we will not be carried away by the comings and goings of various images, and we will be able to wake up to our own lives and begin completely afresh from the reality of life.

So are desires, delusions, and thoughts like *a*, *b*, and *c* all things that primarily do not exist and should be denied? Of course not, because as I mentioned before, even thoughts, which produce desire and delusion, are a manifestation of the power of life. Yet if we continue the thought and become carried away by desire and delusion, life becomes obscured and stifled. So we wake up to <sup>or</sup>ZZZ and from this standpoint of waking up we are able to see that thoughts, desires, and delusions are all the scenery of life. During zazen, they are the scenery of zazen.

There is scenery only where there is life. While we are living in this world, there will be happiness and unhappiness, favorable and adverse conditions, interesting and boring things. There will be pleasant times and painful times, times to laugh and times to be sad. All of these are part of the scenery of life. Because we plunge into this scenery, become carried away by it, and end up running helter-skelter, we become frantic and we suffer. In zazen, even though various lifelike images appear to us, we are able to see this scenery of life for what it is by waking up to ZZZ.

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This is important to consider in regard to the “I” that is determined by relationships with “the other.” The “I” ruled from the outside is scenery in the life of the self. It is not that there is no such thing as an “I” fixed from the outside. There is, and it produces all sorts of scenery. But my own true life is the reality of life that I wake up to without being carried away by the scenery. Zazen is the foundation of life where this reality of life is being manifested. In that sense, zazen is the reality of the self—the true self.<sup>34</sup> The essential thing in zazen is not to eliminate delusion and craving and become one with ZZI’. Of course there are times like this during zazen, but this, too, is just part of the scenery of zazen. We aim at ZZI’ even though we have a tendency to diverge from it. The very attitude of returning to ZZI’ and waking up is most important for practicing zazen as the foundation of life.

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F O U R

## The World of Intensive Practice

### Sesshins Without Toys

I want to clarify further the actuality of zazen and our life attitude in accord with zazen by looking at intensive Zen retreats, *sesshins*, and what is experienced through them.

The word *sesshin* means “to touch or listen to the mind,” and sesshins consist of several days dedicated almost entirely to zazen.<sup>35</sup>

After my teacher Sawaki Rōshi’s death in 1965, I began to do sesshins at Anraiji for five days every month. There are no sesshins in February, however, due to the cold, in August, due to the heat, and the July and September sesshins are only three days long. In all of these sesshins the schedule consists simply of a repetition of fourteen periods of zazen interspersed with briefer periods of Zen walking meditation (*kinhin*), from four o’clock in the morning until nine in the evening. There are three meals a day and

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