

## *Fukanzazengi*

*(Principles of Seated Meditation)*

*by Dogen Zenji,*

*translated by Carl Bielefeld*

FUNDAMENTALLY SPEAKING, the basis of the way is perfectly pervasive; how could it be contingent on practice and verification? The vehicle of the ancestors is naturally unrestricted; why should we expend sustained effort? Surely the whole being is far beyond defilement ; who could believe in a method to polish it? Never is it apart from this very place; what is the use of a pilgrimage to practice it? And yet, if a hair's breadth of distinction exists, the gap is like that between heaven and earth; once the slightest like or dislike arises, all is confused and the mind is lost.

Though you are proud of your understanding and replete with insight, getting hold of the wisdom that knows at a glance , though you attain the way and clarify the mind, giving rise to the spirit that assaults the heavens, you may loiter in the precincts of the entrance and still lack something of the vital path of liberation. Even in the case of the one of Jetavana, innately wise though he was, we can see the traces of his six years sitting erect; and in the case of the one of Shao-lin, though he succeeded to the mind seal, we still hear of the fame of his nine years facing the wall. When even the ancient sages were like this, how could men today dispense with pursuing [the way]? Therefore, stop the intellectual practice of investigating words and chasing after talk; study the backward step of turning the light and shining it back. Body and mind will drop away of themselves, and your original face will appear. If you want such a state, urgently work at such a state.

For studying Zen, one should have quiet quarters . Be moderate in food and drink. Cast aside all involvements and discontinue all affairs. Do not think of good or evil; do not deal with right or wrong. Halt the revolutions of mind, intellect, and consciousness; stop the calculations of thoughts, ideas, and perceptions. Do not intend to make a Buddha, much less be attached to sitting still.

In the place where you regularly sit, spread a thick mat and use a cushion on top of it. Sit in either the full cross-legged or half cross-legged position. For the full position, first place your right foot on your left thigh ; then place your left foot on your right thigh. For the half position, simply rest your left foot on your right thigh.

Loosen your robe and belt, and arrange them properly. Next, place your right hand on your left foot, and your left hand on your right palm. Press the tips of your thumbs together. Then straighten your body and sit erect. Do not lean to the left or right, forward or backward.

Your ears should be in line with your shoulders, and your nose in line with your navel. Press your tongue against the front of your palate and close your lips and teeth. The eyes should always remain open. Breathe gently through the nose.

Once you have regulated your posture, take a breath and exhale fully. Swing to the left and right. Sitting fixedly, think of not thinking. How do you think of not thinking? Nonthinking. This is the essential art of zazen. Zazen is not the practice of dhyana it is just the dharma gate of ease and joy. It is the practice and verification of ultimate bodhi. The koan realized, baskets and cages cannot get to it.

If you grasp the point of this [practice], you are like the dragon gaining the water or the tiger taking to the mountains. You should realize that when right thought is present, dullness and agitation are, from the start, struck aside.

When you arise from sitting, move slowly and arise calmly; do not be hasty or rough.

Considering the past, we see that transcending the profane and surpassing the holy, shedding [this body] while seated and fleeing [this life] while standing are totally subject to this power. Surely, then, to grasp the turning of the opportunity through a finger, a pole, a needle or a mallet, and to present the verification of the accord with a whisk, a fist, a staff or a shout — these are not to be understood through the discriminations of thinking, much less can they be known through the practice and verification of supernormal powers. They must represent conduct beyond sound and form; how could they fail to provide a standard before knowledge and understanding?

Therefore, it does not matter whether one is very smart or very stupid; there is no distinction between those of sharp and dull faculties. Single-minded exertion is itself pursuit of the way. Practice and verification are by nature undefiled. Advancement [to enlightenment] is just an everyday affair. In our world and the other quarters, from the Western Heaven to the Eastern Earth, all equally maintain the Buddha seal, while each enjoys its own style of teaching. They devote themselves only to sitting; they are obstructed by fixedness. Though they speak of ten thousand distinctions and a thousand differences, they only study Zen and pursue the way.

Why abandon the seat in our own home to wander in vain through the dusty regions of another land? If you make one false step, you miss what is right before you. Since you have already attained the functioning essence of a human body, do not pass your days in vain; when one takes care of the essential function of the way of the Buddha, who can carelessly

enjoy the spark from a flint? Verily form and substance are like the dew on the grass, and the fortunes of life like the lightning flash: in an instant they are emptied, in a moment they are lost.

Eminent students [of the dharma], long accustomed to groping for the elephant, pray do not doubt the true dragon. Apply yourselves to the way that points directly at reality; honor the man who is through with learning and free from action. Accord with the bodhi of all the Buddhas; succeed to the samadhi of all the Patriarchs. If you act this way for a long time, you will be this way. Your treasure store will open of itself, and you will use it as you will.

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