

Fukanzazengi: How Everyone Can Sit

by Eihei Dogen zenji

translated by Yasuda Joshu Dainen roshi

and Anzan Hoshin roshi

[published in Progress Into the Ordinary (Great Matter Publications, 1986) and Chanting Breath and Sound (Great Matter Publications, 2001) and will appear in the forthcoming book Dogen: Zen Writings on the Practice of Realization]

Primordial Awareness is in essence perfect and pervades everywhere. How could it be dependent upon what anyone does to practice or realize it? The movement of Reality does not need us to give it a push. Do I need to say that it is free from delusion? The vast expanse of Reality can never be darkened by the dust of presumptions. Who then could believe that it needs to be cleaned of such dust to be what it is? It is never separate from where you are, so why scramble around in search of it?

The thing is, if there is the slightest gap, sky and earth are ripped apart. If you give rise to even a flicker of like and dislike, you lose your mind in delusion. Just suppose you become puffed up about your understanding and inflate your little experiences: You think you have seen the truth, attained the Way, recognized the luminosity of mind and can grasp at heaven. You might think that these initial jaunts about the borders are entering the realm of enlightenment but you've lost the Way of complete liberation.

May I point out the one from Jetavana, the Buddha, who was himself Primordial Awareness and still sat for six years? And how about Bodhidharma transmitting the seal of Awareness through doing wall-gazing at Shaolin temple for nine years? The echo of those is heard even now. If this is how it was with the great ones and their diligence, then how about you in your own practice? You should stop chasing understanding through juggling words, allow the external seeking of your mind to collapse upon itself and light up your own nature. Doing this, the bodymind will drop through itself spontaneously revealing your Original Nature. If you wish to be realized in Suchness, immediately practice Suchness.

A quiet room is good for zazen. Eat and drink moderately, don't entangle yourself in delusive relationships. Just leave such things to themselves. Don't think about good or bad, right or wrong. Don't give rise to the mind's common concepts, the judging of thoughts and observations. Don't sit to become an Awakened One because you can't fabricate a Buddha out of sitting or lying down.

In the place where you practice spread out some thick matting and place a round cushion on top of them. Sit on the cushion with your legs crossed in either the full lotus posture or the half-lotus. This means place your right foot on your left thigh and your left foot on your right thigh, loosen your clothes and belt keeping them neat. Then put your right hand palm up on your left foot and put your left hand in the palm of your right, the tips of the thumbs touching lightly. Find your posture, leaning neither to right nor left, forward or back. Your ears should be aligned with your shoulders, and from the front, your nose in a direct line with your navel. Place your tongue against the roof of your mouth keeping mouth and lips closed. Your eyes should be open and you should breathe gently through your nose.

Once you have found your posture, breathe in and out deeply, sway left and right and then settle firmly and steadily. Think of not-thinking. How do you think of not-thinking? Be Before Thinking. These are the basics of

zazen.

What I call zazen is not developing concentration by stages and so on. It is simply the Awakened One's own easy and joyful practice, it is realized-practice within already manifest enlightenment. It is the display of complete reality. Traps and cages spring open. Grasping the heart of this, you are the dragon who has reached his waters, the tiger resting in her mountains. Understand that right here is the display of Vast Reality and then dullness and mental wandering have no place to arise.

Getting up from zazen move slowly and quietly. Don't just jump up. Looking at the past, we see that transcending common and sacred, or being able to die while in zazen or standing are all rooted in the power of this practice. It is impossible for words or thinking to grasp how the old masters could seize the moment for disciples with a finger, pole, needle or mallet, display Actuality with a whisk, a fist, a staff or a shout. Practising mystical powers or thinking dualistically about practice and realization don't help in this either. Practice and realization are the deportment of this very bodymind, beyond sight and sound, before thinking and analyzing.

Since this is as it is, it doesn't matter if you're clever or stupid; the distinctions distinguish nothing. Whole-hearted practice is the Way. Since realized-practice cannot be stained, progress into the ordinary.

In this and all other worlds, in India or in China, every place is marked by the seal of Awake Awareness. Upholding the essence of this Way, devote yourself to zazen, completely do zazen. You might hear about ten thousand ways to practice but just be complete and sit. What's the point of giving up your seat to go wandering around in dusty lands and countries? Take a wrong step and you'll miss what's there.

You've got what you need, the treasure of this body and birth, so don't waste your time. Keep to this as the basis of the Way of Awake Awareness. Don't be attracted by just a spark from the flint. Anyway, your body is like dew on the grass, your life a flash of lightning; vain for a moment and then vanished in an instant.

You who are in this excellent lineage of Zen, don't blindly grope only a part of the elephant or fear the true dragon. Put all of yourself into this Way which directly presents your own nature. Be grateful to those who have come before and have done what was to be done. Align yourself with the enlightenment of the Awakened Ones and take your place in this samadhi-lineage. Practice in this way and you'll be what they are. The doors of the treasure house will fall open for you to do with as you will.

1227 C.E.