

Yaza 2006

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Welcome to our annual yaza — sitting throughout the night. We sit throughout the night because on a hot and humid night like this, who could sleep anyway?

When Eihei Dogen zenji studied with his master Rujing at Tiantong shan in China, the schedule for the day would begin around 2:30 or 3:00, and zazen would extend well past 11:00 at night. Some records show that during Rujing's abbacy, the time for washing one's face in the morning after rising from sleep had been moved to one o'clock in the morning. It was during one of these late night rounds of zazen that Rujing struck a student sitting near to Dogen, saying "Zazen is dropping body and mind." Hearing Rujing speak of dropping through the body-mind, shinjin-datsuraku, Dogen fell away: fell right through and all around as all directions and all beings.

At Hakukaze-ji it was very common for zazen to continue throughout the night during sesshin. Rohatsu, the most intense sesshin of the year, usually began with merely eighteen hours of zazen on the first day, twenty hours of zazen on the second day, twenty-two on the third day, and twenty-four on the fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh day. So you do the math.

We practise yaza to commemorate the efforts of those who have come before us. But also because it's a lot of fun. Just as familiar faces and places and objects appear one way in the daylight and yet can look entirely different seen at night, the coming and going of moments, the coming and going of the breath, the coming and going of moments of wandering into discursiveness or sinking into dullness, or opening up and opening around, take on a very interesting character when experienced doing zazen when we would usually be asleep.

Now there is a good reason for our usually being asleep at night: the systems of the body-mind, its circadian rhythms, are such that during the night, the body rests and renews itself. And as we sit throughout the night, the rhythms of body-mind will be different than they are throughout the day. It's interesting to experience this. There will be times when attention will wander into discursiveness or sanran. And there will be times when you will experience dullness or sinking mind, konshin.

However, it's not going to be as difficult as you think. All that you have to do is to stay awake for one moment: this moment, this breath, this sound. Opening to and attending mindfully to this moment, you find that there is an infinite infinity of sensations, of sounds, variations in temperature. Even the colours of the wall, although white, are many different shades of white.

Rather than struggling and trying to survive, just let yourself die away. Let that thought die away. Let the past moment die away. Let the moment drop through itself. Do this, and you will know shinjin-datsuraku — dropping through the body-mind.

You just have to be willing to enjoy this moment as it actually is. If there is sinking, feel that — feel what it's actually like without attempting to push it away or steel yourself. And without snuggling into it, without collapsing, without becoming someone experiencing the sinking. All around the sensations of sinking, everything is quite bright: the lights are on, and we'll keep them on all night. Notice how attention can

flatten: how the sounds can flatten and seem distant, or can be vivid and dimensional and rich, and are not merely heard but felt bodily.

If the eyes blink and itch, and a tendency to close them continues to arise, raise your eye gaze, open your peripheral vision, notice the depth that is present in the visual field even facing the wall. If attention sinks, if it flattens, notice what this actually feels like — what the effect of that movement of attention has on all of the senses. In doing so, you will be able to recognize not only coarse states of sinking such as sleepiness, but subtler forms of inversion that are part of self-image's recoil from the richness of reality. Sinking mind — *konshin* — and wandering mind — *sanran* — are not all that different. In order to become lost in thought, your attention must already invert and narrow. This inversion and narrowing is of course much stronger with sinking mind. But even within sinking mind, there is wandering — there are bits and pieces of discursiveness, there is imagery, and of course a flux of feeling tones.

Whether there is wandering or there is sinking, practise with it in the same way by balancing attention with whole-bodily feeling, with the breath, with this whole moment.

So, on this hot and humid night, please, enjoy yourselves.