

Zanmai-O-Zanmai: The Samadhi That is Sovereign of Samadhis

by Eihei Dogen zenji

translated by Anzan Hoshin roshi

and Yasuda Joshu Dainen roshi

[excerpted from the forthcoming book Dogen: Zen Writings on the Practice of Realization]

Sitting in the full lotus posture is transcending the universe as a whole and is living a life that is priceless and great in the realm of the Buddhas and Awakened Ancestors. Sitting in full lotus steps over the heads of views and demons, and enters fully into the most intimate place of the Buddhas and Ancestors. To move past even the supremacy of the Buddhas and Ancestors' supremacy, this is the only method. Thus this is the only practice of Buddhas and Awakened Ancestors and there is no other practice.

The universe of zazen is very different from other universes. Through understanding this fact the Buddhas and Ancestors resolved and followed through on the aspiration of true practice, Awakening, and nirvana. In this moment of sitting look into whether the universe is vertical or is it horizontal. In this moment of sitting look into what sitting in itself is. Is it turning a somersault? Is it a state of vigorous activity? Is it thinking? Is it not thinking? Is it doing something? Is it not doing anything? Is there sitting inside of sitting? Is sitting inside of the bodymind? Is sitting free of "sitting inside" and "inside of the bodymind"? And so on. You should investigate thousands, tens of thousands, of points such as these. Sit in the full lotus posture with the body. Sit in the full lotus posture with the mind. Free of "body" and "mind", sit in the full lotus posture.

My late Master, the Old Buddha, said, "Practising Zen is dropping through the bodymind. Just sitting is primordial realization. Offering incense and worshipping the images of the Awakened Ones, chanting the names of the Awakened Ones, repentance, reciting the Discourses and other religious rituals are not necessary." Surely, over the last four or five hundred years only my late Master has been the one to scoop out the Eye of the Buddhas and Ancestors and to sit inside this Eye of the Awakened Ancestors; few have equaled him, even in China. Very few people have realized that the activity of sitting is the Buddha Dharma and that Buddha Dharma is the activity of sitting. Even if some have physically realized that sitting is the Buddha Dharma, few have realized sitting as sitting. So how can the Buddha Dharma then be upheld and supported as the Buddha Dharma? As this is so, there is sitting with the mind, which is not the same as sitting with the body. There is sitting with the body, which is not the same as sitting with the mind. And there is sitting absent of body and mind which is not the same as "sitting dropped through the bodymind." Being like this already brings together the practice and realization of the Buddhas and Ancestors. Continually and brightly investigate this thought, this mind, will, consciousness.

Sakyamuni said to the vast assembly, "Through sitting in the lotus posture then samadhi is realized in the bodymind and its virtue and dignity can be recognized by the people. Just as the sun illumines the world so the mind is cleared of dullness, laziness, and indolence. The body is bright and not dull. Perception and cognition are also bright and supple. You should sit like dragons coiled. Just the image of the lotus posture brings fear to king of the demons of delusion. How much more so should he see someone sitting without collapsing or leaning but actually experiencing the truth?"

So, on seeing even a drawing of the lotus posture shocks, worries, and frightens the sovereign of the demons of delusion. Further, if we actually and completely sit in lotus posture, its virtue is unimaginable. Sitting every day is limitless joy and virtues.

Sakyamuni said to the vast assembly, "This is why we sit in the full lotus posture." Then the Thus Come, the Generous One, teaches his disciples to sit like this. Sometimes those outside of the Way seek for truth by standing on the tips of their toes, sometimes they seek the truth by ceaseless standing, sometimes they seek the truth by wrapping their legs around their shoulders. Through silliness like this their minds sink into a sea of delusions and the body is never left in peace. For this reason, the Buddha teaches his students to sit in the full lotus posture with upright minds. Why? If the body is upright, it is easy for the mind to be upright. When the body sits up straight, the mind is not weary, the mind is evened, intention is aligned and attention is woven with what is just present. If the mind is agitated or distracted or if the body wavers or leans they are restored and balanced. If you want to experience samadhi or enter samadhi, or even if the mind is just distracted and following various images, all such states can be completely balanced. Practising in this way, we experience and enter the samadhi that is sovereign of all samadhis.

Clearly, sitting in full lotus posture is the samadhi that is sovereign of all samadhis and is experience and entry. All samadhis are the retinue of this, the sovereign of samadhis. Sitting in full lotus posture straightens the body, straightens the mind, straightens the bodymind, straightens the Buddhas and Ancestors, straightens realized-practice, straightens the brain, and straightens the thread of living. Sitting with this human skin, meat, bone, and marrow in full lotus posture, we sit the samadhi that is the sovereign over samadhis: the full lotus posture. The seal of Awareness authentically transmitted by the Seven Buddhas is just this. Sakyamuni Buddha sits in lotus posture beneath the bodhi tree for fifty lesser eons, sixty eons, numberless eons. Sitting in full lotus posture for three weeks, or for hours, turns the wondrous Wheel of Dharma and is the Teaching of the Buddha throughout his life. It lacks nothing. It is a yellow sutra scroll on a red stick. Buddha meets Buddha in this moment. This is the time when living beings become Buddhas.

The First Ancestor, the Venerable Bodhidharma, arrived from the west and spent nine years facing the wall at Shaolin-si on Su-san sitting Zen in the lotus posture. From that time to this day, brains and eyes [the essence and view of Dharma] have pervaded China. The life blood of the First Ancestor is just this practice of sitting in full lotus posture. They have known about this since the Ancestral Master came from the west. And so, just sitting in full lotus posture, day and night, from the beginning to the end of this life and for tens of thousands of lives without leaving the monastery grounds, without practising anything else, is the samadhi that is sovereign of all samadhis.

*Presented to the assembly at Kippo-ji in Etsu-u, on the 15th of February, 1244.
Transcribed that night in the head monk's quarters by Ejo.*