

FUKANZAZENGI

by Dogen Zenji

Black / bold is Rufu-bon (popular) used by DF. A dated version has not been found, but estimated 1242.

Blue / italic / not bold is Shinpitsu-bon (Chinese calligraphy) version. Dated 1233.

THE WAY IS BASICALLY PERFECT AND ALL-PERVADING. How could it be contingent upon practice and realization? The Truth-vehicle is free and untrammled. What need is there for one's concentrated effort? Indeed, the Whole Body is far beyond the world's dust. Who could believe in a means to brush it clean? It is never apart from one right where one is. What is the use in going off here and there to practice?

Upon investigation, the truth originally is all-pervasive: how could it rely on practice and experience? The vehicle of the fundamental exists of itself, what is the point of trying? Still more, the whole body is far beyond dust: who could believe in the means of sweeping dust away? In sum, it does not leave this place: of what use are the tiptoes of training?

And yet, if there is the slightest discrepancy, the Way is as distant as heaven from earth. If the least like or dislike arises, the mind is lost in confusion. Suppose one gains pride of understanding and inflates one's own enlightenment, glimpsing the wisdom that runs through all things, attaining the Way and clarifying the Mind, raising an aspiration to scale the very sky. One is making initial, partial excursions about the frontiers but is still somewhat deficient in the vital Way of total emancipation.

If, however, there is the tiniest gap, heaven and earth are far apart. If the least tendency arises to go against or conform, the mind is lost in confusion. Remember, successive kalpas of turning of the wheel originally stem from one endgaining idea. The deluded ways of the dusty world also derive from the restlessness of the intellect. Wanting to rise above perfection in ascending beyond, just understand the experience of a target, down here, being hit. If, proud of our understanding and full of enlightenment, we obtain a special state of insight, attain the truth, clarify the mind, and manifest a zeal that pierces the sky, even if we have the ability to put our head in, still we lack the road of getting the body out.

Need I mention the Buddha, who was possessed of inborn knowledge? The influence of his six years of upright sitting is noticeable still. Or Bodhidharma's transmission of the Mindseal? The fame of his nine years of wall-sitting is celebrated to this day. Since this was the case with the saints of old, how can people of today dispense with negotiation of the Way?

Moreover, the precedent exists already of the Old Teacher Sakyamuni, innate sage though he was, doing six years of upright sitting. Again, the traces remain of Great Master Bodhidharma, who transmitted the mind-seal, spending nine years facing the wall. The ancient sages were like that already: how could people today not make effort?

You should therefore cease from practice based on intellectual understanding, pursuing words and following after speech, and learn the backward step that turns your light inwardly to illuminate your self. Body and mind of themselves will drop away, and your original face will be manifest. If you want to attain Suchness, you should practice Suchness without delay.

Therefore, go in the opposite direction from the intellectual activity of studying sayings and chasing words. Take the backward step of turning light and luminescing. Spontaneously, body and mind will drop off and the original face will emerge. Wanting to get it, quickly practice sitting-zen.

For sanzen, a quiet room is suitable. Eat and drink moderately. Cast aside all involvements and cease all affairs. Do not think good or bad. Do not administer pros and cons. Cease all movements of the conscious mind, the gauging of all thoughts and views. Have no designs on becoming a buddha. Sanzen has nothing whatever to do with sitting or lying down.

In general, a quiet room is good for Zen practice, and food and drink are taken in moderation. Just abandon all involvements. Let the ten thousand things be. Don't think good, bad. Don't care right, wrong. Stop the driving movement of mind, will, consciousness. Quit weighing things up with ideas, thoughts, and views.

At the site of your regular sitting, spread out thick matting and place a cushion above it. Sit in a cross-legged position with your knees directly upon the mat. You should have your clothes and belt loosely bound and arranged in order. Then place your right hand on your left leg and your left palm facing upwards on your right palm, thumb tips touching. Thus sit upright in correct bodily posture, neither inclining to the left nor to the right, neither leaning forward nor backward. Be sure your ears are on a plane with your shoulders and your nose is in line with your navel. Place your tongue against the front roof of your mouth, with teeth and lips both shut. Your eyes should always remain open, and you should breathe gently through your nose.

When practising upright sitting, lay a thick mat and use a round cushion on top of that. Then sit in full lotus or sit in half lotus. To sit in full lotus first put the right foot on the left thigh and put the left foot on the right thigh. To sit in half lotus, just let the left foot press down on the right thigh. Let clothes hang loose and keep them neat. Then place the right hand over the left foot, and place the left hand over the right palm, with the thumbs meeting and propping each other up. Just sit upright, not leaning left, inclining to the right, slumping forward or arching backward. It is vital to bring about an opposition between the ears and the shoulders, and an opposition between the nose and the navel. Let the tongue rest against the roof of the mouth, with the lips touching and the teeth together. Keep the eyes open as normal.

Once you have adjusted your posture, take a deep breath, inhale and exhale, rock your body right and left and settle into a steady, immobile sitting position. Think of not-thinking. How do you think of not thinking? Non-thinking. This in itself is the essential art of zazen.

Having brought the physical form to stillness, let the breathing also be regulated. When an idea arises, just wake up. Just in the waking up to it, it ceases to exist. Taking plenty of time, forget all involvements and you will spontaneously become all of a piece. This is the vital art of sittingzen.

The zazen I speak of is not learning meditation. It is simply the Dharma-gate of repose and bliss, the practice-realization of totally culminated enlightenment. It is the manifestation of ultimate Reality. Traps and snares can never reach it. Once its heart is grasped, you are like the dragon when he gains the water, like the tiger when she enters the mountain. For you must know that just there, in zazen, Truth is manifesting itself and from the first dullness and distraction are struck aside.

What is called "sitting-zen" is just the great Dharma-gate of ease. If you get this point it naturally follows that the four elements are light, the spirit is quick, true consciousness is clear, the taste of Dharma soothes the soul, the quietness is pure and joyful, and daily use is natural and real. Having already realized this thoroughly for yourself, you may be said to be like a dragon that found water, or like a tiger before a mountain stronghold. Know exactly: when true consciousness is manifest, how can dullness and distraction intervene?

When you arise from sitting, move slowly and quietly, calmly and deliberately. Do not rise suddenly or abruptly. In surveying the past, we find that transcendence of both unenlightenment and enlightenment, and dying while either sitting or standing, have all depended entirely on the strength of zazen.

If you rise from sitting, move the body slowly and gradually. Rise with calm confidence -- not abruptly or violently. Preserve at all times the power of stillness. The process of investigating this [stillness] goes over the top of any barrier, so that there is originally nothing to depend on. To experience and let go of it is to be restricted by the self, which is why it never stops -- which is perfect realization of the way. Truly, Zen stillness is the single highest and most excellent gate. Setting out with one hundred per cent understanding, and then an experience or half of one rolling in: all it is, is this dharma. In all instances of a twirling flower and a face breaking into a smile, of performing prostrations and getting the marrow, they received the good energy of it and thereby attained great freedom. How could prajna-learning bodhisattvas fail to follow suit? We see in the past that those who transcended the ordinary and transcended the sacred invariably borrowed from quiet circumstances; and those who died while sitting or died while standing had completely given themselves over to the energy of stillness.

In addition, the bringing about of enlightenment by the opportunity provided by a finger, a banner, a needle, or a mallet, and the effecting of realization with the aid of a whisk, a fist, a staff, or a shout, cannot be fully understood by one's discriminative thinking. Indeed, it cannot be known by the practicing or realizing of supernatural powers, either. It must be deportment beyond one's hearing and seeing—is it not a principle that is prior to one's knowledge and conceptions?

Moreover, turning the pivot with a finger, a pole, a needle or a wooden clapper, or exact experience of the state in a whisk, a fist, a staff or a shout, can never be understood by thinking and discrimination. How could it be known through mystical powers or practice and experience? It may be dignified behaviour beyond sound and form. How could it be anything but a criterion prior to knowing and seeing?

This being the case, intelligence or lack of it does not matter; between the dull and the sharp-witted there is no distinction. If you concentrate your effort single-mindedly, that in itself is negotiating the Way. Practice-realization is naturally undefiled. Going forward is a matter of everydayness.

Therefore, we do not discuss intelligence as superior and stupidity as inferior. There is nothing to choose between a clever person and a dull one. Abandoning the six sense organs, we see and activate the whole truth. Having not a single idea, we sit away the ten directions.

In general, this world and other worlds as well, both in India and China, equally hold the Truth-seal, and over it all prevails the character of this school, which is simply total engagement in immobile sitting. Although it is said that there are as many minds as there are people, still all negotiate the Way solely in zazen. Why leave behind the seat that exists in your home and go aimlessly off to the dusty realms of other lands? If you make one misstep you go astray from the Way which is even now directly before you.

In general, whether in this world or in other directions, there is originally no law other than the Buddha-Dharma. In India and in China though the ancestral line ultimately opened into five lineages, they equally maintained the Buddha-seal and each indulged freely in the fundamental custom. They devoted themselves solely to that which is transmitted one-to-one and indicated directly; they made the matter of performing a somersault, of turning the head, into their sole task. Although there are a thousand differences and myriad distinctions, we should just rejoice in the happy experience of coming home. Why should we neglect our own sitting platform to go and come without purpose through the dusty borders of foreign lands? If we misplace one step we stumble through the moment of the present.

You have gained the pivotal opportunity of human form. Do not use your time in vain. You are maintaining the essential working of the Way. Who would take wasteful delight in the spark from the flintstone? Besides, form and substance are like the dew on the grass, destiny like the dart of lightning—emptied in an instant, vanished in a flash.

Having already received the intelligence which is a human body, do not pass time in vain. Being ever mindful of the actual conduct of the Buddha's truth, who could wish idly to enjoy sparks from flint? What is more, the body is like a dew-drop on a blade of grass. Life passes like a flash of lightning. Suddenly it is gone. In an instant it is lost.

Please, honored followers of Zen, long accustomed to groping for the elephant, do not be suspicious of the true dragon. Devote your energies to a way that directly indicates the Absolute. Revere the person of complete attainment who is beyond all human agency. Gain accord with the enlightenment of the Buddhas; succeed to the legitimate lineage of the Ancestors' samadhi. Constantly perform in such a manner and you are assured of being a person such as they. Your treasure-store will open of itself, and you will use it at will.

Noble friends in learning through experience, I implore you not, after long study under a fake elephant, to doubt the real dragon. Turn quickly toward the upright path which is directly indicated and to the point. Swiftly become a true person who is through with study and free of doing. Follow exactly the criteria of Hyakujo, and penetrate thoroughly the situation at Shaolin. There is no need to struggle in winds that sweep the ears. How much less need you be startled by the reverberations of a tongue? Just cause your own jewel-treasury to be well and truly open, so that you may receive and use at will.