

***ZAZEN PRACTICE
A GUIDELINE FOR BEGINNERS***



***the fire of emptiness
blazes out his beard***

A Note to Readers:

From May, 1999 to the present day, I have had many opportunities to talk to about five hundred persons who are interested in learning and practicing what the Buddha and Zen masters teach, and given answers to their questions about Buddhism and Zen on this website [Zenguide.com] on daily basis.

I saw the need for an introductory guideline on zazen practice that would help. Therefore, I have tried to put some words down here as a guideline for those who would like to see into their own nature or Buddha-nature, to free themselves from suffering caused by our own greed, anger, and ignorance, and would provide a guide to practicing the very first steps.

If he or she would like to help others wanting to achieve the same things, these guidelines will allow them to do this. Actually, most of what I put them together here already appear in the answers mentioned above.

What I put down in these guidelines, in the main part, I received from my own Zen teacher Thong Lac, under whom I practiced, and by his compassion and skillful teachings, my mind's eye opens at some degree. I deeply bow my thanks to him here.

This was about twenty-five years ago and I have kept doing it by myself so far. The other part I have gleaned from different books on Zen and zazen practice by other Zen teachers of both old and recent times, and also from the Buddhist Scriptures (Sutras and Sastras). So, it might be said that nothing here is my own.

As you already see, this guideline may be described as, 'Scratching the surface.' Therefore, it may be revised and added as and when needed. Any comments or suggestions from anyone of you will be welcomed and appreciated. You can forward them to me with the E-mail address below. Thank you in advance.

Finally, I would like to deeply say thanks to my friends John Charlson (U.K), Joeri Van den Broeck (Belgium), each of them with great heartedness and talent, helping in editing my English. All of these make this guide easier to read, understand, and practice to our readers. And I also deeply thanks to all the authors, the translators, and the editors of the sources that I quote and cite in this guide.

05/09/2001

Take care,

ChonTri

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MY DEAR FRIEND:

***BEFORE YOU CONTINUE TO READ WHAT IS
POSTED BELOW. PLEASE ASK YOURSELF:***

***“WHAT DO I REALLY WANT IN MY LIFE,
PRACTICE AND ENLIGHTENMENT?”***

***IF YOUR ANSWER IS “YES.” JUST KEEP
GOING ON. IF IT IS “NO.” PLEASE
DISREGARD IT.***



*Bodhidharma (ca. 470 - 543?)
Founder of Zen Buddhism.*

*“Not establishing words and letters,
Teachings transmitted outside the Scriptures.
Directly pointing to humans’ mind,
To see into their own nature
and attain the Buddhahood.”*



Master Thong Lac (photo 1985)

1. What is Zazen?

Zazen is a romanized Japanese term. “Za” literally means to sit or sitting; “zen” means to meditate or concentrate. Actually, “zazen” is much more than “sitting in meditation”. In short, “zazen” is a Buddhist practice to settle your mind in its original state: *purity and clarity*, and from that you can see everything in the world as it is.

“Zen” is a Japanese pronunciation for the Chinese word “Ch’an”, and “Ch’an” is in turn a Chinese pronunciation of the word “Dhyana” in Sanskrit or “Jhana” in Pali, the two ancient forms of the language used in India, in the time of the Buddha, more than 2,500 years ago.

It was also known as “Yoga”, another Sanskrit term, which is a method of mental practice used by Brahmins before the time of the Buddha.

Originally, “Dhyana” is a practice for settling the mind, which is usually wandering around at all time and leads us into confusion state. However, “Ch’an” or “Zen” is something more than meditation or concentration. It combines the threefold practice of Bodhisattva’s Way:

Observing *Sila* (Precepts)

Developing *Samadhi* (Power of Mind Focusing)

Practicing *Prajna* (Wisdom).

“Zen” is not simply a device for centering and calming the mind but also embracing the wisdom of enlightenment.

We also recognize the five different types of Zen. In his “*Ch’an-yuan-chu-ch’uan-chi*”, a collection of sayings of Chinese Ch’an masters and brief histories of various Ch’an sects, Tsung-mi (780-841), a Ch’an master and Hua-yen patriarch, listed the five different types of Zen as follows:

- (1) **non-Buddhist zen**: for example: the zen practiced in other religions than Buddhism like Brahmanism, Hinduism, Jainism, Confucianism, Sufism...
- (2) **Ordinary zen**: the zen as in haiku poems, William Blake’s poems, Henry D. Thoreau’s works...
- (3) **Hinayana Zen**: the zen which a Buddhist Elder practices to attain sainthood, often for the practitioner only.

(4) ***Mahayana Zen***: the zen which a Bodhisattva (a candidate of Buddhahood) practices to attain enlightenment not only for himself but also for others.

(5) The last one is the ***Zen of the Highest Vehicle***. It emphasizes on the quality and the characteristics of enlightenment achieved through the type of zen practice and the degree of wisdom embraced in that enlightenment. It includes the ***Zen of the Tagathatas*** and the ***Zen of the Patriarchs***, the Zen of the highest quality of wisdom emanating from the highest enlightenment. When asked about what is the difference between the Zen of the Tagathatas and the Zen of the Patriarchs, a Zen master replied:

“Mountain is blue; snow is white.”

For me, I would say: “The white cloud covering the snow mountain, their colors are not the same.”

2. Purposes in Zazen:

In his ***“Zen Fables for Today”***, Richards McLean retells the following story:

“Why must I meditate in order to achieve enlightenment?” demanded the prince of the teacher. “I can study, I can pray. I can think on issues clearly. Why this silly emptying of mind?”

“I will show you,” said the teacher, taking a bucket of water into the garden under the full moon. “Now I stir the surface and what do you see?”
“Ribbons of light,” answered the prince. “Now wait,” said the teacher setting the bucket down.

Both teacher and boy watched the calming surface of the water in the bamboo bucket for many minutes. “Now what do you see?” asked the teacher. “The moon,” replied the prince.

“So, too, young master, the only way to grasp enlightenment is through a calm and settled mind.”

This simple story is telling us the purpose and the way of zazen very clearly. To practice “Zazen” is to see into one’s “own nature” or Buddha-nature, which is from the very beginning, pure and calm, and every being in the world has it.

This is what the Buddha declared when he had just attained his Supreme Enlightenment and was recorded in the *Avatamsaka-sutra* (The Flower Ornament Scripture) and repeated in the *Mahaparinirvana-sutra*.

When you see into your own nature, you know who you are, you know what and how every thing and being in the world really is. From this, your action and reaction will be in harmony with the whole and in situations around you.

I have some words for you that will help you avoid the following situation:

You may have already heard someone who has misunderstood or mistaken the declaration of the Buddha about the Buddha-nature, and said: “We all are Buddhas, we are already enlightened...so, we do not need to practice zazen at all.”

This person might think himself or herself already enlightened, does not practice zazen, and indulges in many wrong things which he or she doesn't realize.

These words would be correct for anyone who already sees into his or her own nature, knows where it is, and what it looks like.

If anyone who does not yet see into his or her own nature, does not know where it is, what it looks like, and cannot prove this through his or her own experience of awakening before a real Zen teacher, then he or she is not an enlightened one. They just speak about something borrowed from the Buddha or a Zen master, not of his or her own experience of enlightenment.

This is considered the biggest type of zen-sickness. Words and experience are not in accordance.

Recently, there are people who did not have any experience of enlightenment but often criticized others: “You are attaching to enlightenment!” or “You are clinging to detachment!” when they heard someone said something about enlightenment or detachment. This is even more ridiculous than the ones who thought that “I am already a Buddha” or “I am already enlightened,” because they do not know what the true enlightenment is or what the real detachment is.

This is also called a zen-sickness of words and action do not match each other.

In case you really think you are an awakened one, test yourself with these questions:

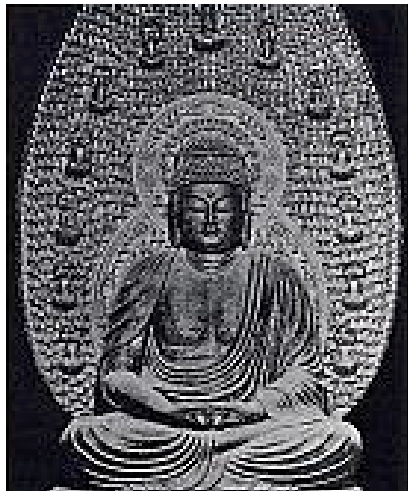
Master Yueh of Toushuai set up three barriers to question students:

Crossing rivers and passing through mountains to learn and search out the hidden, is only for seeing into the own-nature. Right now, where is your own nature?

Only when you know your own-nature then you can be freed from birth and death. When you are dying,, how will you be free?

When you are freed from birth and death, then you will know where you are from and going to. When the four elements [which composed your body] disintegrate, where do you go? ¹

Your answers should come out directly and spontaneously from your kensho and need the approval of a real Zen teacher. If not so, you need to put yourself into zazen practice until you are able to do so. Sit yourself like the Buddha did for six years long in the forests and 49 days and nights under the Sala tree at Bodh-gaya. Sit yourself like Bodhidharma did facing to the blue rock-wall for nine years long at the Shao-lin Monastery in Sung-shan Mountain in China.



Sit yourself like the Buddha...²



Sit yourself like Bodhidharma...

¹ (from **“Wu-men Kuan”** by Zen master Wu-men, the 47th koan, translated from Chinese text).

3. Sitting Postures: There are several sitting postures that were found and used in meditation long ago, thousands of years in before the Buddha in fact.

Following, are described the main and more popular ones. These have been used in meditation at least, from the time of the Buddha to present:

a. Full-lotus posture: This is the best sitting posture in zazen.

First, you have to put your right foot with the sole up on your left thigh and then put your left foot with the sole up on your right thigh. Your two knees touch the pad.

Next, with your two palms up, the left one upon the right one with the ends of two thumbs lightly touch each other and with the pointing fingers make a small oval circle, which lay on your lap and closed to the area under the navel.

Your backbone must be straight up but not stiff. Your nose should be in line with your navel; your left ear should be in line with your left shoulder and the same with your right ear and shoulder. In this position, your head is already in vertical position with your backbone. This posture will give you the most secure in sitting zazen. (See the Buddha or Bodhidharma in the pictures above).

b. Half-lotus posture: This is the second sitting posture.

It can be made in the same way with the full-lotus posture, except for one detail, one foot is placed on the opposite thigh and the other foot rests on the pad. Beginners will find the full lotus difficult, therefore the half-lotus posture is useful as you would not get pain as much as you might do in the full-lotus posture because one of your legs may rest on the pad.

² All the pictures in this section are from "*Buddhism, Flammarion Iconographic Guides*" by Louis Frederic, except for the picture of Bodhidharma which is from "*Bankei Zen*" tr. by Peter Haskell.



c. Leg-folding posture: This posture is similar to the two previously described postures, except that your legs are folded but only laid on the pad, neither of them need be placed on the opposite thigh.

Your palms, as in the above postures, rest on your lap. You might have little or no pain with this posture because both of your legs are on the pad. This method is called “leg-folding” in order to distinguish it from the two first postures which are called “leg-crossing”.

This posture is often called the “Burmese posture”. Actually, it is very popular in the south-east countries of Asia such as Burma, Vietnam, Thailand, etc...



d. Sitting on your feet: This posture is also called “seiza” meaning “sitting on feet” or Japanese traditional posture, because it is particularly used by Japanese people.



You will need a cushion to support your buttocks and feet when your two folded legs go backwards almost like kneeling. Your upper body rests on

your upper legs folding upon your lower legs which rest on the mat, meanwhile your buttocks are on a part of the cushion.

Of the four postures above, the best one is full-lotus posture. The second best one is the half-lotus posture, the third one will be the folding-leg posture, and the last one is the *seiza* because the two latter ones are less secure than the two first ones in zazen. However, you can use them interchangeably in a long period of zazen

e. Using a chair or a stool: This is the least secure posture in zazen. You may use this posture when you can not do any of the above ones, through a lack of flexibility or in case a health condition does not allow you to do so.

When you use a chair or a stool to sit zazen, the one thing which is different from the above postures is your feet rest on the floor and they should be in a parallel position and your back should not touch the back holder of the chair. A chair may be more secure than a stool, but a stool will alert you to a fall, helping you out of sleepiness.



4. Cushions and Pad:

You will need a cushion and a pad in sitting zazen. The pad is about 28 inches square, stuff with kapok or cotton batting so it will be about 1.5 inches thick. The cushion which is stuffed kapok or cotton batting, too, and about 12 - 18 inches in diameter and it flattens out like a pillow to set upon the pad. You may use a pillow if you wish.

5. Garments for Sitting:

You will not be comfortable with any kind of tight, heavy or hard fabric clothing when you sit in zazen. Therefore, any loose fitting garment made

of fine, soft fabrics will be better in sitting. When you do zazen, wearing garment is much better than wearing nothing.

6. What to Do in Sitting Zazen:

After positioning your pad and cushion on the floor, and placing yourself on the cushion, you need to bend your upper body forwards about 45 degrees, and push your buttocks backwards a little to make sure they are in a natural position on the cushion. This will prevent them from getting numb.

Next, bend your upper body to the left, making a 45 degree angle, and take it back to the straight middle position, then bend to the right in the same way. Repeat this move three times, gradually decreasing the angle until at last, your body returns to the straight middle position.

The final preparation is to exhale and inhale slowly, evenly and deeply through your nose three times. Inhale so that your breath comes to the *tanden* (the field of elixir: the abdomen area about three inches beneath the navel). After that, just let your breath goes naturally. You might want to set your tongue-tip against the palatial area or right at the roots of your upper teeth.

Now you are ready for your practice:

a. Breath counting: Counting your breaths out and in is often the first practice in zazen usually assigned by a Zen teacher to a beginner. This practice is done like this:

Start with your breath out counting “one,” then “two” for the next breath in, and so forth up to ten, then go back to one again. The second alternative is counting “one” for each breath out and skip the breaths in. Just say the number in your mind and not a loud voice.

Whenever you lose count, you simply start counting “one” again. When you lose your counting, this means, you were with random thoughts or random feelings.

b. Breath following: This is the second practice of zazen. In this practice, you just follow your breaths out and in with your mind's eye. This is very simple thing to do but it needs a great attention of your mind. In other words, your mind in general has been wandering anywhere it went. It is much like a monkey going from this tree to the other one, it never rests for a moment. With this practice, and the first one, too, your mind has only one thing to be with: *your breath*. By this, its wandering might be stopped and your mind's energy will not be wasted much like it did before.

The mind's energy saved in this way can be used in the way you want. However, do not confuse this power with enlightenment. When you lost your following, this means, you were with random thoughts or random feelings. Just resume the breath following.

Before standing up after a period of practice, you need to carry out the steps of readiness in reverse. This means leaning from side to side as before but commencing from the smaller angles up to the full 45 degrees.

Furthermore, you need to massage your body wherever it has become numb...knees, ankles, feet etc...until you feel fine. Then you stand up to walk zazen or *kinhin*, (See "*Walking Zazen*" below).

c. Silent Illumination ("Mo chao" (Ch.) or "Mokusho(Jap.): This practice often comes after you have been practicing the first two methods for a while, meaning you do not lose counting in the first one, or you are not distracted from following your breaths in the second, even in noisy circumstances.

This practice may be the most difficult one because your mind will not have anything like breath as in the breath counting and breath following or a koan as in the next practice which it may rely on.

In this practice, you just sit with your awareness, always be awake. You just sit like a mountain, immovable, with an immense faith in that your own nature or Buddha-nature is manifesting in itself and you will realize it at any moment.

If any random thought or feeling arises in your mind, just let it come and go as it does. Do not try to stop, get rid of it or cherish it. When you lost your awareness, this means that you were with random thoughts or random feelings and you need to regain it.

Out of the three essentials in zazen practice: strong faith, doubt-mass, and strong determination; strong faith is most needed in this practice. The faith in one's Mind or Buddha-nature.

This practice had been practiced by the Buddha himself, his disciples, and has been practiced by the practitioners of Soto Zen. It is also called "shikantaza" in Japanese by the Soto Zen practitioners.

d. Working with a koan: This is the main practice of the Rinzai Zen practitioners. In this practice, you do not have to count or follow breaths but you must be assigned a koan by your Zen teacher who has his own working experience with koans.

The Koan is usually from a saying of the Buddha, a Zen master, a conversation which happened between a student and a Zen master, or a story from the fact of everyday activity.

The Zen master picks it up and gives it to the student to work with as a means to concentrate his mind's power to break through his own deluded mind and get in the world of enlightenment. For example:

When a monk asked Joshu, one of the greatest Chinese Zen masters: "Has a dog a Buddha-nature?" Joshu replied: "No". This is one of the famous koan in the book "Mumonkan" (Gateless Gate), and was compiled by Zen master Mumon in the 13th century in China.

Another famous koan was devised by Hakuin, one of the greatest Japanese Zen masters, and is as follows:

"You can hear the sound of two hands clapping together. Can you hear the sound of one hand?"

There are more or less 1,700 koans, only a number of them are in use at the Zen monasteries or Zen centers around the world. All of them indicate the same thing in you: your Original Face or own nature or Buddha-nature.

When you work with a koan (Jap.) or *hua-tou* (Ch), you need to become one with it. Whenever the koan and yourself are separate there will be random

thoughts or feelings arising in your mind. In this case you need to become one with koan or hua-tou again. And this is the one way to work with it.

*One of the aims and effects of working with a koan is to exhaust your random thoughts and random feelings to set the mind free from them and become ready for **kensho** (seeing into one's own nature). (Actually, the other three practices: *breath counting*, *breath following*, and *silent illumination* do the same thing).*

Some following excerpts that I borrow from three different Zen masters will help you to understand better how to work with a koan. Koan practicing under a real Zen teacher's guide might be the shortest way to **kensho**. That's why they are also used by the Zen teachers who do not even belong to Rinzai Zen .

Out of the three essentials in zazen practice, doubt-mass is most needed in this practice. About this method of practice, there is a Zen saying that goes like this: "The bigger doubt, the bigger enlightenment." You should start your koan with a doubt-mass: "What is the sound of one hand?" or "What is it that hears sounds and sees colors?" or "What is my Original Face before my parents were not born yet?" Try one of these until you got it, if you really want to.

7. How to Work with a Koan:

a. Koan: Joshu's Dog, by Zen master Mumon Ekai:

A monk asked Zen master Joshu, "Does a dog have Buddha-nature?"
Joshu replied: "No."

Mumon's Comment:

To study Zen you must pass through the barrier of the Zen patriarchs; for wonderful enlightenment you must exhaust all your mental circuit. If you do not pass through the barrier of the patriarchs, and do not exhaust your mental circuit, you are like a shadow of a ghost leaning on leaves of plants and blades of grasses.

But what is the barrier of the patriarchs? This one word "NO" that is the very door to the source; so it is called the "Gateless Barrier of Zen."

Those who can pass through this barrier not only see Joshu in person but also will be able to walk with the patriarchs of all time hand in hand, be a part of each other, see the same eye, and hear the same ear. Would that not be joyous?

Isn't there anyone who wants to pass through the barrier?

Take all three hundred sixty bones in your body, forty-eight thousand pores on your body, and with your mind, too, make them all into a mass of doubt, inquiring the word No, bringing it to mind day and night. Do not understand the word No as the existence, do not understand it as the non-existence of something.

It will be like having to swallow a hot iron ball, which you cannot spit out no matter how hard you try. Wipe out all the previous misconceptions and misperceptions, eventually it becomes tamed, inside and outside become one

mass. It is like a dumb person who has had a dream, you can only see it for yourself.

When you suddenly break through, startling the heaven and shaking the earth, it as though you obtained the great sword of the General Kwan: meeting buddhas, you kill the buddhas; meeting Zen patriarchs, you kill the Zen patriarchs. On the shore of life and death, you are totally independent; in the midst of six realms of rebirths and four modes of existence, you walk freely and enjoy with samadhi.

But how do you bring it to mind? Using all of your energy day and night, bring up this word No. If you can keep it continuously, you will be like a torch of Dharma that lights up at the moment fire just set to it.

Mumon's Verse:

A dog Buddha-nature!

This is presentation of the whole, the absolute imperative.

As soon as you get into "has" or "has not"

You lose your body and forfeit your life.¹

¹ from "**Wu-men Kuan**" by Zen master Wu-men, the 1st koan, translated from Chinese text).

b. Koan “What Is It That Hears?” by Zen master Bassui Tokusho (Jap.):

In zazen neither despise nor cherish the thoughts that arise; only search your own mind, the very source of these thoughts grasping the source of the sounds of the world about him.

We must understand that anything appearing in your consciousness or seen by your eyes is an illusion, of no enduring reality. Hence you should neither fear nor be fascinated by such phenomena. If you keep your mind as empty as space, unstained by extraneous matters, no evil spirits can disturb you even on your deathbed.

While engaged in zazen, however, keep none of these counsels in mind. You must become the question “What is this Mind?” or “What is it hears these sounds?” When you realize this Mind you will know that it is the very source of all Buddhas and sentient beings.

The Bodhisattva Kannon [Avalokiteshvara] is so called because he attained enlightenment by perceiving that:

At work, at rest, never stop trying to realize who is it that hears. Even though your questioning penetrates the unconscious, you won't find the one who hears, and all your efforts will come to naught.

Yet sounds can be heard, so question yourself to an even profounder level. At last every vestige of self-awareness will disappear and you will feel like a cloudless sky. Within yourself you will find no “I.” Nor will you discover anyone who hears.

This Mind is like the void, yet it hasn't a single spot that can be called empty. Do not mistake this state for Self-realization, but continue to ask yourself even more intensely, “Now who is it that hears?” If you bore and bore into this question, oblivious to anything else, even this feeling of

voidness will vanish and you won't be aware of anything - total darkness will prevail. Don't stop here, keep asking with all your strength, "What is it that hears?" Only when you have completely exhausted the questioning will the question burst; now you will feel like a man come back from the dead. This is true realization. You will see the Buddhas of all universes face to face and the patriarchs past and present.

Test yourself with this koan: "A monk asked Joshu: 'What is the meaning of Bodhidharma coming to China?' Joshu replied: 'The oak tree in the garden.'" Should this koan leave you a lightest doubt, you need to resume questioning "What is it that hears?"

If you don't come to realization in this present life, when will you? Once you have died you won't be able to avoid a long period of suffering in the Three Evil Paths. What is obstructing realization? Nothing but your own haft-hearted desire for truth. Think of this and exert yourself to the utmost.¹

¹ from ***"Three Pillars of Zen"***, translated by Philip Kapleau, 1989.

c. How to Work with a “Hua-tou” by Zen master Hsu Yun :

When beginners first practice Zen, they always have difficulty in subduing their ever-flowing errant thoughts, and suffer the miseries of pains in their legs. They do not know how to work these matters out.

*The important thing is to stick to **Hua-tou** (Chinese word: the most important word or phrase to stick to in a koan, for example, the word “No” in the koan Joshu’s Dog) at all times, when walking, lying, or standing. From morning to night observing Hua-tou vividly and clearly, until it appears in your mind like the autumn moon reflected limpidly in quiet water. If you practice this way, you can be assured of reaching the state of Enlightenment.*

In meditation, if you feel sleepy, you may open your eyes widely and straighten your back; you will then feel fresher and more alert than before.

When working on the Hua-tou, you should be neither too subtle nor too loose. If you are too subtle you may feel very serene and comfortable, but you are apt to lose the Hua-tou. The consequence will then be that you will fall into the ‘dead emptiness’. Right in the state of serenity,

if you do not lose the Hua-tou, you may then be able to progress further than the top of the hundred-foot pole you have already ascended. If you are too loose, too many errant thoughts will attack you. You will then find it difficult to subdue them.

In short, the Zen practitioner should be well adjusted neither too tight nor too loose; in the looseness there should be tightness, and in the tightness there should be looseness. Practicing in such manner, one may then gain improvement, and merge stillness and motion into one whole.

I remember in the old days when I practiced the circle-running exercise in Golden Mountain Monastery and other places, the supervising monks made us run like flying birds! Oh! We monks really could run when the warning board suddenly sounded its stop-signal, everybody stopped and stood still like so many dead poles! Now think! Under these circumstances, how could any drowsiness or distracting thoughts possibly arise?

When you are meditating in the sitting posture, you should never bring the Hua-tou up too high; if you bring it up too much, you will get a headache. Nor should you place the Hua-tou in your chest; if you do, you will feel uncomfortable and suffer a pain there. Nor should you press the Hua-tou down too low; if you do, you will have trouble with your stomach and see delusive visions.

What you should do is to watch the word 'Who,' softly and gently, with smooth mind and calm, steady breath, like that of a hen as she hatches her eggs or a cat when she watches a mouse. If you can do this well, you will find that one of these days your life-root will suddenly and abruptly break off!"¹

¹ from "**Practice of Zen**" translated by Garma C. C. Chang, 1970.

8. Walking Zazen (Kinhin, Jap.):

You can do walking zazen after each time you do sitting zazen to refresh your body, lessen the feeling of numbness or sleepiness. You feel bored or tired because you are not some kind of machine which works at the same speed whole day and night.

Your continued practice from sitting to walking and from walking back to sitting means that if you do breath counting, for instance, keep going with it.

In walking zazen, you place your right fist with the thumb inside, on your chest and your left palm covers the right fist, with both elbows held to make right angles with your body. Your eyes rest at a point about two yards in front of the feet.

Start stepping forward with the left foot first. Your heel down to the floor first then the toes, step like your foot sinks into the floor. Do each step about 6 inches forward slowly with your breath in and out and with mindfulness.

You can walk briskly and with energy like a Rinzai does, or you can walk slowly and leisurely as a Soto does. Your walk might make a wide circle or a rectangle, it depends on the site you have. Each time will be about five to ten minutes after each sitting of twenty five to forty-five minutes.

9. Choosing the Place to Sit:

It will be best if you have a private room in your house. If not, you will need a separate corner to do zazen.

You might like to have a small statue or a picture of the Buddha or Bodhidharma or some other Zen master whom you like. Or if you like, you can do palms together and bow or do prostration (three times for each) before the statue.

When you do either of these, just do it and do not think you are asking any favor from them or “Why do I have to pay my respect to these statues?”

If you start thinking of something like that, then it is just your ego’s action. The statue or picture can be hung on the wall or placed on your desk. A couple of sutras like the “*Heart Sutra*”, the “*Diamond Sutra*”, the “*Platform Sutra of Hui-neng*”, or alternatively one of a selection of Zen masters’ records like Joshu Zen master’s Record, or any other Zen master’s you prefer.

If you like to have some sandalwood incense to burn or some kind of flower in a little vase, it would be fine. All of these will give you an atmosphere of dignity to do zazen.

The room or the corner should be not too dark or too bright when you sit in zazen. The temperature is not too hot and not too cold; if you can have some kind of clean and fresh air, it would be ideal for a rather long period of time. All of the above mentioned will make up a simple and serious atmosphere to zazen.

You will need to face a plain wall or curtain from about a distance of about one yard. Your eyes’ sight is neither set up high nor low. Your eyes should be just half-closed and alert. Your tongue-tip might be set lightly against the upper palate close to the upper teeth.

Note: Do not sit on a bed or a couch, except if you are sick or cannot move yourself.

10. Time to sit:

You can sit at some time in the early morning if your working schedule allows you to do so. In the early morning it is often less noisy than other times during the day and the atmosphere is still more pure than later in the day or in the evening.

You may sit in the evening about 9:00 P.M. or later. It would be better if you start to sit about two hours after your meal because if your stomach is still full it will be not good for sitting. What has just been said is for a beginner, and if your are an enthusiast practitioner, whatever time would be good for you.

11. How long to sit:

If you are a beginner, a 15 minutes serious sitting is enough for each time you sit. If the circumstances allow, you can sit two or three times a day.

When you are ready, you can increase the time to sit up to the maximum of 45 minutes each time. If you do more than 45 minutes a period, the effectiveness of your zazen will be decreased.

Of course, when you are training at some Zen monastery or center, you must follow its regulations. You will be sitting whole day and night throughout the week of *sesshin* (Japanese, lit.: focusing your mind), is held there.

Sitting zazen is needed to be done on a daily basis, if you want get some benefit from it. Do not sit too much or too long in a period of time then quit it for another period of time (weeks, months...or longer). This way won't work as you want.

12. Sitting by yourself:

Sitting by yourself at home or somewhere else will be good if you are used to the sitting posture you do. If not, you will need someone else tell you how to adjust your backbone and head into the correct position. You might use wisely a mirror to reflect and tell you how you are doing with the posture.

Moreover, you are supposed to know how to deal with some kind of problems might happen to you when you are in sitting, for instance, makyō or sometimes you might happen to fall into a state of unconsciousness or some kind of zen-sickness.

13. Sitting with other sitters in a group:

Sitting with other sitters in a small group will be of some benefit if your purpose in zazen is just for improvement of mental or physical health. This is particularly right if there is no real Zen teacher's guide in that group. Otherwise, if you really want to enlighten yourself then you need to see a real Zen teacher in person for his direct guide.

14. Sitting in Zendo at a monastery or a Zen center:

When you are training yourself at some Zen monastery or center, almost all the things that you need are already there, the guide of a Zen teacher, the support from other participants, and all other things. Of course, you should follow the flow of the monastery or center at that time.

However, the most important thing is your determination and efforts that you perform on the way to enlightenment. One thing to remember is that the way to enlightenment is usually rough, slippery, and long.

15. Treatment of what happens in sitting:

a. Pain at legs:

Pain and suffering in sitting zazen would be the first truth of Buddhism as the Buddha has taught for more than 2,500 years, especially to you as a beginner. So, if you like to walk the Way of the Buddha, you need to overcome pain at legs first.

Actually, it won't last as long as you think the first times you experience it. You can overcome it by your strong will, by doing some kind of physical exercises like yoga or massage for your legs before and after sitting on daily basis. You may want to sink the lower part of your body into warm water everyday about 20 minutes.

All of the things I have just mentioned will help you to overcome the "first truth". Do not think that maybe the Oriental people would not have this kind of problems. The fact is not what you thought. The older the harder in overcoming this problem. But anyone, including you, can do it, with a

strong will and continuous patience. You might ask: How long will it take? The quick answer is: It depends on the individual's efforts to overcome it.

b. Sleepiness :

It is very easy to fall into sleep or feel very sleepy in sitting zazen when your eyes are closed or your body is getting tired, either because you could not sleep well last night or have worked hard during the day. Sometimes you feel bored and you will fall asleep during zazen. If one of these things happen, what should you do to wake up and keep on doing zazen?

Here is a couple of things you can do to help yourself:

- (1) You might want to think about the death that may happen to you at any time, and time never waits for you.
- (2) You might need to get up and find some fresh air or cold water to splash into your face, etc...

c. Makyo:

This is another romanized Japanese word *Ma*, literally, meaning: bad or devil; *kyo* means images, picture or figures of beings and/or things that appear to the practitioner in sitting zazen. For example, you might see the Buddha and Bodhisattvas (candidates for Buddhahood) or Arahats (Buddhist saints who no longer have leaks of passions) and their retinues, walking around or giving discourses in front of you. You might feel like you yourself are flying in the air. You might hear some sound which other people do not hear. All of those things are a mixture of falsehoods and facts. The reason why you see them might be you made big efforts in sitting zazen which, in turn, impact upon your mind and your mind then created them, as the Buddha taught in the *Shurangama-sutra*.

The other reason might be your breathing was not in accordance with your mind, according to *Zazen Yojinki* (*Precautions for Zazen Practitioners*) by Zen master Keizan, the third Patriarch of Japanese Soto Zen, who lived in the 14th century. Therefore, it can be said that makyo are illusionary visions or sensations.

Makyo appearing means your efforts in sitting are effective and they are like some signs foretelling you about some world which you have not known yet.

In the *Shurangama-sutra*, the Buddha mentioned fifty common kinds of makyo that may appear to sitters.

He gave us the treatment for all of them like this: “Because you exerted some pressure on your mind in practice and you have them. Do not think you attained the Sainthood. If you think so, you get caught in the net of devils”. Some of them appear more often than the others. It depends on the personality of the sitter.

My teacher teaches: “Whether they look good or bad to you, as a sitter, do not pay attention to them and just keep going on with your practice.” Dreams would not appear to the person who has a sound sleep, makyo won’t appear to the sitter in true zazen.

d. Zen sickness:

In general, when we do zazen correctly, it could help us to prevent many popular illnesses, for example, tiredness, cold, headaches, etc.... Here, with “zen sickness” I mean some kind of sickness which may happen to you during the time you practice zazen.

It might be dangerous and harmful to you, some might even make you a man with some physical or mental defect afterward if you or your Zen teacher did not realize it, or did not prevent them before it would happen. Especially when it has just happened and you or your teacher do not get it cured. Then it will be with you in the rest of your life. For example, the serious sickness which Japanese Zen master *Hakuin* had for a long period of time when he was young and practiced zazen too much. In his autobiography, he himself told us his own story: *“Before the month was out, my heart fire began to rise upward against the natural course, parching my lungs of their essential fluids. My feet and legs were always ice-cold: they felt as though they were immersed in tubs of snow. There was a constant buzzing in my ears, as if I were walking beside a raging mountain torrent. I became abnormally weak and timid, shrinking and fearful in whatever I did. I felt totally drained, physically and mentally exhausted. Strange visions appeared to me during waking and sleeping hours alike. My armpits were always wet with perspiration. My eyes watered constantly. I traveled far and wide, visiting*

wise Zen masters, seeking out noted physicians. But none of the remedies they offered brought me any relief.”¹

Fortunately, he found the hermit *Hakuyu* who lived in a remote mountain cave in the Shirakawa District of Tokyo, who taught him the method of “introspective meditation” of Taoism, putting the mind at *tanden* (*field of elixir*: the abdomen area under the navel), the method of meditation of non-mediation to cure it. And thanks to these methods of meditation, Hakuin got himself cured.

Another case is the sickness which Chinese Zen master *Fa Kuang* had and could not be cured because it was too late when he realized it and his own teacher did not know about it.

In his autobiography, *Han Shan*, who was also a Chinese Zen master, had an opportunity to practice with master Fa Kuang and knew the situation well, told us about the zen-sickness of master Fa Kuang as follows:

One day the Master said to me, “It is not necessary for you to go away to a far place to seek a Zen teacher. I hope you will stay with this old man so that we can work together on subduing the Ox.” I said to him, “Your wit, eloquence, and understanding of Buddhism are in no way inferior to that of Tai Hui. However, there are some peculiarities in your manner that puzzle me. I am conscious that your hands are always waving and your mouth constantly murmuring as if reading or chanting something. In short, your manner seems rather like that of a lunatic. What is that reason for it?” Master Fa Kuang replied, “This is my zen-sickness. When the ‘Wu’ [Satori] experience came for the first time, automatically and instantaneously poems and stanzas poured from my mouth, like a gushing river flowing day and night without ceasing. I could not stop, and since then I have had this zen-sickness.” I asked, “What can one do when it first appears?” He replied, “When this zen-sickness first appears, one should notice it immediately. If he is not aware of it, a Zen master should correct it for him at once by striking severely and beating it out of him. Then the Master should put him to sleep. When he awakes he will be over the sickness. I regret to say that my Master was not alert and severe enough to beat it out of me at that time.”¹

¹ from “*Wild Ivy*” translated by Norman Waddell, 1999.

¹ from “*Practice of Zen*” translated by Garma C. C. Chang, 1970.

Zen master Han Shan himself also told us about his own zen-sickness. His zen-sickness was similar to that of Master Fa Kuang. However, at that time no one was around to help him, therefore, he chose to sleep and he slept very well all night long but this couldn't help him at all. Fortunately, next day, the layman Mr. Hu who was the householder, came home on time. Mr. Hu knew what to do in this case. He took a bell and made many sounds of the bell to Master Han Shan's ears. This action of Mr. Hu saved the master from his zen-sickness before it had been too long.

These kinds of sickness are really rare but actually happened, therefore, I mention here just as a caution. Do not think, "It's very dangerous to do zazen, so I'd rather not do that!" To me, this sounds like you are afraid of getting your legs broken if you jump into a car running. However, if you are so afraid to jump, then it is like your legs are already broken.

e. About Meat Eating and Vegetarianism:

This depends on the development of your wisdom and compassion generated from your practice. In practicing Zen meditation, your mind and body should be one. The purer the mind, the purer the body, and the purer the body, the purer the mind.

As you might realize, the food you eat everyday has some effect on your body, which in turn affects your mind, and vice-versa. When you eat meat or fish, your stomach will be working harder than when you eat vegetables.

Moreover, if your compassion develops to some deeper degree, you will not want to eat meat anymore, for example, because you know that an animal such as a cow or a pig also has its own life as you do.

***Note:** If you do not want to see doctors so often, just eat for 80% of the capacity of your stomach.*

16. Where a Real Zen Teacher Can Be Found and When He Is Needed.

If your purpose in zazen is to awaken and liberate yourself from suffering caused by greed, anger, and ignorance and then be willing to help other people who would like to do the same, then you will need to find a real Zen teacher. You will need his/her guidance as soon as possible when you start practicing zazen.

Where can a real Zen teacher be found? He/she can often be found anywhere you are, especially at a Zen monastery or center around the world. If you can obtain information about a Zen teacher from a friend or from a book which guides you about Zen centers or Zen temples around the world. One of these is *“A Complete Guide to Buddhist America”* edited by Don Morreale. Through the internet, using the keyword **“ZEN CENTRES”** follow its direction to find a center or a temple which you think would be better for you to find him there.

Of course, there are many other things beside the Teacher, but it is necessary to have him first. Saying this does not mean you will be enlightened right away, or that he will be able to give you enlightenment.

As I said above, the way to enlightenment is rough, slippery, and long. What a Zen teacher (often called Roshi in Japanese, lit.: “old teacher”) can do for you, is give you, first, some guidance in zazen practice and then he will try to do something or say some words in some circumstances in helping to wake you up. He can tell you how to treat some makyo, physical pain, sleepiness or drowsiness in zazen, and then when you have really had some experience of enlightenment, he will use some kind of tests and based on his own experience to make sure and tell you that are already there. That’s all he can do on his part.

Do not expect him to do anything more than that, and do not imagine enlightenment is something like a miracle or a supernatural power. You yourself are still the main character of your zazen practice, to awaken yourself or to enlighten yourself is your job, no one else can do it for you.

This is much like if you are hungry, you yourself have to eat the food. The fact is that no one else eats the food to make you full.

I would like to borrow the following saying of the Buddha to summarize what I have just said above:

*“You are your only master.
Who else?
Subdue yourself,
And discover your master.”¹*

However, until you find him in yourself, you still need to see a real Zen teacher. This sounds like something that happened in the story below when Zen master Ch’ing-yuan Hsing-ssu (660-740) asked his student Shi-t’ou Hsi-ch’ien (700-790) when the latter first came to see him:

- *Where are you from?*
- *I’m coming from Ts’ao-chi [Hui-neng, the Sixth Patriarch of Zen].*
- *What did you gain at Ts’ao-chi?*
- *I didn’t lack anything before I went to Ts’ao-chi.*
- *Then why did you go?*
- *If I wouldn’t have gone to Ts’ao-chi, how would I have known that I never lacked anything?¹*

17. Continuation of Your Practice:

The continuation of your practice is very important, it might be more important than the posture you are have been taking. Your continuation of zazen practice can be maintained through every activity in your daily life. This means both before and after you attain *kensho* (seeing into one’s own nature).

- You can do breath counting, or breath following, or shikantaza, or working with a koan while you are walking, or standing, or lying, or even running when your practice has matured, provided that your backbone is straight but not stiff in a natural way. Your breaths in harmony with your movement.
- The lying posture as done by the Buddha is like this: The head points to north and rests upon a pillow with the height holding it in

¹ (*“The Dhammapada, the Sayings of the Buddha”* translated by Thomas Byrom from Pali text)

¹ from *“Zen Speaks”* translated by Brian Bruya, 1994.

a way the neck will not bend to any direction. Both feet point south and the left leg should be straight, resting on the straight right leg. That is, your body leaning on its right side. The backbone from head to bottom should be straight naturally. The direction of this lying posture is in line with the magnetic field of the earth.

- If you can master your practice well and you sit without sleepiness, without makyo, then you also can do the same while you are sleeping or dreaming. This means when you sleep well, your mind is in a state that settles. If you have a sound sleep then you do not have any dreams at all. If you have in any case, a dream while you are sleeping, that is your mind did not settle, you need to awaken yourself in your dream. It's a dream and not real at all. You should master yourself in your dream. Do not let your dreams master you.
- The continuation of zazen practice can be done with any work you do in everyday life with one condition: *Do one job at a time with your whole attention*. This is considered equal to zazen. In this way, it is your mind that "sits" not your body in the formal postures. Just become one with what you are doing.
- "Not clinging" can be said to be one of the best zazen practices. It also can be said that the Way of the Buddha is the way of "no-clinging" or the way of "view-cutting".

What do these words mean? When your mind clings to any object outside or inside, for example: a beautiful flower, an attractive woman ... or a good feeling, a loving image, a high-minded thought or an image of the flower or of the woman, it is deluded with that object. You will get suffering, because everything changes, appears and disappears every time. Nothing will be with you forever. When you see something appear in front of you, you know it. And when it disappears, you also know that, and you let it go as it comes. When it disappears you no longer have its image in your mind.

This is like a mirror which reflects anything in front of it, and when the thing is gone, there is no trace left to the mirror.

You do not want it to stay with you because you like it. You do not want it come because you do not like it. This is called “no-clinging” or “view-cutting”.

This is what the Sixth Patriarch of Zen, Hui-neng once said in his **“Platform Sutra”**: “Do not cling to the emptiness inside, and do not cling to objects outside.”

In other words, I would like to say:

*“What is existent or what is not.
This depends on what you think.
It’s like the moon’s reflection in the water,
That’s why a man of true wisdom does not cling to it.”*

♠ **What is the enlightenment alike?**

One of the important questions you might want to ask may be like this: “What is the enlightenment alike?” or “What is the enlightenment?”

Hui-neng, the Sixth Patriarch of Zen School, said: “It is like a person who drinks the water will know it’s cold or hot.”

Thach Liem, a Vietnamese Soto Zen master who lived in the late 17th century, gives us an example to illustrate it as follows:

“It [enlightenment] is like a man who has a duel to death with another man. They dated to meet at some place to solve their life-and-death problem. Just before the daybreak, the man woke up and got things ready to go. When he put the socks on his feet, he was in such a hurry, he put one sock on one foot and then looked for the other one but he couldn’t find it.. He searched for it in many different drawers but he could not find it in there. He looked for it beneath his bed, then went over the shelves on the walls, but in vain. He started searching for it in other rooms and neither could he find it. He got very upset with it, then he sat down on a bed and thought. He kept thinking and thinking and searching for it. Suddenly his eyes looked down, its sight hit went to the sock on his foot and he recognized the two socks are on one foot! He immediately took one off and put it on the other foot and

felt so happy. He now knows that the sock was right here, on his foot. To be enlightened is also easy like that. Therefore, there is a Zen saying that goes like this: “When you were searching for it, even your shoes made of steel would be worn and torn by traveling long and far but you found nothing. Then when you suddenly see it, you realize that no hardworking is needed to seek and find.”¹

For me, it would be like this: “It’s like a person who was in a bad dream and felt very unhappy. Suddenly, his head fell off the pillow and he woke up. There is no more dream or unhappiness.”

♠ **What did Zen masters of old attain in Zen?**

Another question might be raised here because you, as a practitioner, need to know what or where you are going to get after all your trying and trying, sitting very hard day and night, or you are just curious about it, like a monk asked Lung-ya, a Chinese Zen master:

- *What did old Zen masters attain when they entered the ultimate stage?*

Lung-ya replied:

- *They were like burglars sneaking into an empty house.*

It is a queer answer, isn’t it? Try to prove it for yourself.

As we see so far, enlightenment is neither miracles nor supernatural powers. But why is it said that’s it’s very wonderful and lot of people wish to be enlightened? It sounds like what Zen master Lin-chi (Rinzai) once said:

*“When you get hungry, eat your rice;
when you get sleepy, close your eyes.
Fools may laugh at me,
But the wise will know what I mean.”²*

Latterly, a monk heard the words and said to another Zen master:

- Everyone does the same.

¹ translated from Vietnamese.

² from **“Lin-chi lu”** translated by Burton Watson, 1999.

The master said:

- No, not the same.
- What's the difference?
- When people eat, they do not only eat their rice but also think a lot of other things. And when they go to bed, they do not just sleep but they dream of many things."

Do you think you can do what Lin-chi means?

If you say: "I can" or "I cannot", you already miss what Lin-chi means.

♠ *The Process of Practice and Realization.*

Another important question you might want to ask is, "What is the process of practice and realization?" or "Where does a practitioner start, what phases will he go through and what state he will end up with?"

Ching-yuan Wei-hsin, a Chinese Zen master, tells us about what he had done in his autobiography like this:

"For thirty years in the past, this old monk [he called himself] before started to study Zen and had seen mountains were mountains and waters were waters.

Until when I met my good Dharma teacher showed me the entrance, then to me, mountains were not mountains and waters were not waters at all.

*Now in the state of joyfulness and solitude, everything-as it-is, I see mountains are just mountains and waters are just waters."*¹

I think these simple words of Zen master Wei-hsin described clearly the complete process of practice and realization in Zen. Would you like to put yourself in practicing and prove that if he were wrong?

17. Zazen vs. Reading Buddhist Scriptures and Zen Masters' Sayings:

¹ translated from Chinese.

As you might know, If there were not the Supreme Enlightenment of the Buddha and his Teachings in the Buddhist sutras handed down to the present, there would not be Buddhism or Zen or *zazen* at all. It can be said *dhyana* (in Sanskrit) or *zazen* (in Japanese) is the method the Buddha practiced at least in six years long before He attained Enlightenment when He saw the morning star.

If all of the sutras are the description of the Buddha's Enlightenment then *dhyana* practice is the means to prove the experience of that. The same way of speaking can be applied to Zen masters' records and *zazen*.

Zen masters' records are the description of their experience of enlightenment and *zazen* practice is the means to prove it. The Enlightenment of the Buddha and experience of awakening of Zen masters are the same in quality. If there is anything different, it will be the difference in the degrees of depth in experiences, and the way the Zen masters used to express their experiences and teachings.

The difference in the forms of expression is necessary, because if not, it will not be Reality. Truth cannot be a repetition of the same words all the time. And the Zen masters have shown their genius in their particular way of expression.

On the other hand, when a student practices Zen under the direct guide of a Zen teacher, especially when he is sitting in *zazen*, he is not supposed to remember any words, even though they are the words of the Buddha or of any Zen master he learned or knew. This is because he is doing the same thing the Buddha did more than 2,500 years ago.

He is discovering the truth for himself and by himself, and what he can find will be his own and not a thing he borrows from the Buddha or Zen masters.

More than that, he is becoming himself as a Buddha. This is the very thing the Buddha wants every being to do. This is called the Equality and Freedom in Buddhism and it makes Buddhism unique in this characteristic among the world religions.

However, after attaining *kensho* (seeing into one's own nature or Buddha-nature), the Zen student has to keep not only practicing *zazen* but also

studying the Scriptures, as he would be advised, to develop his own experience until to the Perfect One..

When a monk asked a Zen master: “What is the difference between the meaning of Zen patriarchs’ teachings and that of Buddhist sutras?” The master replied: “When it is cold, hens go to trees and ducks go to the lake.”

I think this answer describes perfectly how the difference is.

18. What is the Difference between Buddhism and Zen?

There is a question that is often raised by people who are interested in Zen Buddhism for the first time, “What is difference between Buddhism and Zen?” I have the main points for you here:

" After the Buddha passed away, not too long, a couple of centuries perhaps – his teachings were interpreted in many different ways. These depended on each individual’s understanding of his disciples.

Buddhism formed into two great systems:

Theravada or as it's often called Hinayana: the Small Vehicle, that is, the small car only can carry one person to nirvana, it’s ideal type of person is an Arahant (a perfect saint) and;

Mahayana or the Great Vehicle, that is, the bigger car that can carry many people at the same time to enlightenment, the ideal person of it is a Bodhisattva, a person who is on the way to the Supreme Enlightenment of the Buddha.

Then, about the first century A.D. came Nagarjuna, one of the greatest Buddhist masters of all times. His position is just after the Buddha himself. He founded the Madhyamaka (Middle Path) School with the Doctrine of Sunyata (Emptiness). Almost all Buddhist schools’ teachings based on this Doctrine, including Zen teachings.

What is the Sunyata?

Nagarjuna states it in his ***Mulamadhyamakakarika (The Middle Treatise):***

*Everything arises from its causes and conditions,
And I declare that they are Emptiness.
This is merely a pseudo-name
And also named the meaning of the Middle Path.¹*

And he describes the Sunyata as follows:

*No arising and no ceasing
No permanence and no severance
No identity and no difference
No coming and no going.²*

Is there any relation between this Sunyata and the Empty House which Zen master Lung-ya referred?

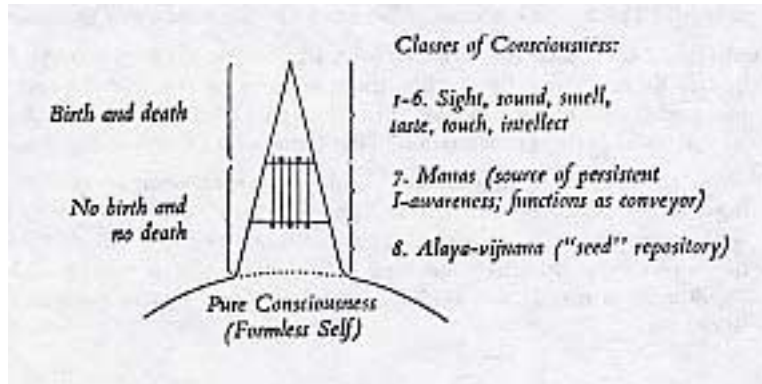
About two hundred years after Nagarjuna, another of the greatest schools was founded by Maitreyanatha, and it was called Yogachara school, then established by Asanga and Vasubandhu and it got a new name: Vijnanavada (Mind-only) school.

I would like to borrow the following diagram based on a scheme by Harada Sogaku Roshi, a famous and contemporary Japanese Zen master, to introduce you the main ideas of the doctrine of the Mind-only school and if you take a close look at the relation between the classes of consciousness you can figure it out yourself where we will start, go through, and end up with according to the teachings of this school.³

¹ *translated from Chinese version.*

² *translated from Chinese version.*

³ from "*The Three Pillars of Zen*" by Philip Kapleau.



The doctrine of this school can be summarized in this well known statement: “The threefold world (of desire, form, and formlessness) is mind-only; ten thousand things are consciousness-only.”

The teachings of these two greatest Indian Buddhist schools have remained and developed in many other Asian countries such as China, Tibet, Japan, Korea, Vietnam... and now at many places in the world, along with them, the Theravada system.

So far, there are at least ten great sects in Mahayana Buddhism such as Pure Land school with its main practice of praying in the name of Amita (i.e. Infinite Light or Infinite Longevity) Buddha who lives in the Western Paradise.

Another school is San-lun (Three Treatises) school, or the Madhyamika school in China, Japan, Korea, and Tibet. This school actually no longer exists in China... but still exists in Tibetan Buddhism and now is spreading strongly in the West, especially in America through many Tibetan Buddhist masters.

The third one is T'ien-ts'ai (Tendai, in Japanese) school which was founded by Chih-i (538-597), one of the greatest Chinese Buddhist masters, its doctrine based on the *Lotus-sutra* and its main practice is the *Samantha-vipashyana*, one of the Buddhist meditation methods.

The fourth one is Ch'an in Chinese (or Zen in Japanese) school. Its founder was Bodhidharma, an Indian Buddhist master who came to China about the latter half of the 5th century and the first half of the 6th century.

The main message which Bodhidharma sent to us, you already saw at the beginning of this guidelines:

*“Not establishing words and letters,
Teachings transmitted outside the Scriptures.
Directly pointing to humans’ mind,
To see into their own nature
and attain the Buddhahood.”¹*

To help people who would like to attain *kensho* (seeing into one's own nature), Zen masters have devised many different methods. The four main ones of them are: counting your breaths out and in, following your breaths with your mind's eye, *mao-chao* (silent illumination) or *shikantaza* (just sitting in your whole awareness), and working with a koan.

Actually, the practices of this school are grounded in the Way of the Buddha: *dhyana* (or meditation) which the Buddha did at least for six years until he became enlightened.

Its teachings are based on the teachings of the Buddha in the *Mahaprajnaparamita-sutra* (The Large Sutra on Perfect Wisdom) which the doctrine of emptiness of Nagarjuna is based upon, and the Teachings of the Buddha in the *Lankavatara-sutra* which the doctrine of Mind-only of *Vasubandhu* is based. Sometimes the teachings of the Buddha in the *Avatamsaka-sutra* can be seen in Zen, too.

Therefore, it can be said that the teaching system of Zen Buddhism is an integrity of the whole of Mahayana Buddhism. When the *Yogachara* school, (The precedent of the *Vijnanavada* school), was first brought by *Padmasambhava* to Tibet, it adopted some features of the native cult that existed there: the Bon religion of the Tibetan people and its associated mysticism was one of its characteristics.

In Tibetan Buddhism, there is another school called *Dzogchen* that has some characteristics somewhat similar to Zen.

Despite of how much different those schools seem to be in appearance, that is, the rituals and practices, they all have the same ultimate goal - to help anyone who likes to learn and practice what the Buddha taught: to become

¹ translated from Chinese.

enlightened, liberate oneself from suffering caused by greed, anger, and ignorance and then if he likes, he can help others do the same thing.

What I have just said above are just some simple words on some main ideas, and I won't go into the other sects of Buddhism because I think it is enough for now in this guideline. If you want to go further into them, you might need to read some books on them such as "*The Essentials of Buddhist Philosophy*" by Junjiro Takakushu.

There are a couple of things here I would like to make clear:

Firstly, there are many different methods of meditation which are used in the different Buddhist schools. For example, the methods that are used in the Tibetan Buddhist schools can be called "the methods of visualization" (except for Dzogchen), this means when a practitioner does one of these he needs something to rely on, usually an image or a sound.

In Zen Buddhism, the methods are different from these. This means the practitioner does not have anything to rely on, especially in shikantaza.

Secondly, when someone, a Westerner in particular, reads the teachings of the Buddha, for the first time, on the Four Noble Truth, they usually see that Buddhism shows us everything in this world is full of suffering, temporary, unreliable, deceitful ... Oh! too passive and too pessimistic... Yes, he is correct but this is just one step, or the First Truth of the Four Noble Truths. If he stops right there, he already misses the three more steps that he needs to go and see the whole thing.

Furthermore, all the teachings of the Buddha and Zen masters are for not only reading but also for practicing. Suppose you could read all the Buddhist Scriptures and remember them all by heart. It would be in vain because you might not be enlightened yourself by remembering words. Instead of that, you must practice them, and only through practicing might you really understand them and awaken yourself.

When you do awaken yourself entirely, you will not need to read or recite any Scriptures at all, because now, you are the source of all Scriptures. The same can be applied to the teachings of the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path. Even you if know them by heart but you do not practice them, they will be no meaning at all.

Finally, if Zen says something that seems to be against the Buddhist Scriptures or the concept of Buddha in the students' mind, that is Zen just wanting to wake up the deluded mind of the student. It has nothing to do with the historical Buddha or the Scriptures. Therefore, do not cling too much to the words and don't let them deceive you. You need to know where and what they are pointing to.

Actually they did not try to deceive anyone. However, when someone does not understand what they really mean behind the words, then he or she would be deceiving himself/herself.

Of course, words have some meanings in situations and they also have their own limits. This means words just play their role as a means of communication to some degree and not the Reality itself.

If anyone just likes reading a menu but never eats the food, then how could he be full. As the Buddha teaches us: "Do not take the finger as the moon itself" or "My words are like a raft helping you to get to the other shore. When you are already there, do not take the raft on your shoulder and walk."

If you like to experience something for yourself, you might want to practice one of the methods of sitting in meditation you have had described for you.

19. Zazen vs. the Methods of Meditation in Some Other Buddhist Sects.

a. The five meditations for settling the mind according to the Sarvastivadins.

Is an early Buddhism system after the Buddha. These five meditations are for settling the mind to get rid of the five illusory states of greed, anger, folly, egoism, and distraction. They are the supplementary practices to prepare the mind for intensive meditation.

1) *To overcome greed*, the practitioner meditates on the impurity of all things. For example, meditate on ten stages of decomposition of a corpse: discolored, putrefied, dismembered, devoured by birds and

animals, scattered, hacked and scattered, bloody, worm-infested, and skeletonized.

2) ***To overcome anger or hate***, the practitioner meditates on compassion by concentrating on the four immeasurable mindfulness: kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and disinterestedness.

3) ***To overcome folly***, the practitioner meditates on the twelve linked-chain of dependent origination:

From ignorance arises action

From action arises consciousness

From consciousness arise name and form

From name and form arise six sense organs

From six sense organs arises contact

From contact arises feeling

From feeling arises craving

From craving arises grasping

From grasping arises becoming

From becoming arises birth

From birth arise old age and death, sickness and suffering.

4) ***To overcome egoism***, the practitioner meditates on analysis of the four great elements: earth, water, wind and fire which compose our body and all things.

5) ***To overcome distraction***, the practitioner meditates on breathing, counting the breaths out and in or following them with his mind's eye.

b. The Four Dhyanas: All the five meditations above are just for the preparation of settling the mind to start the intensive meditation which will take you to the four stages the Buddha and his disciples practiced, attained and were described in the ***Sutra of Recital (Sangiti-suttanta)*** in the Digha-nikaya:

The first stage, the practitioner, free from sensuous desire, free from evil and blameworthy states of mind, but still exercising discursive thought and investigation, attains and abides in the first ***jhana***, which arises from seclusion and is characterized by delight and pleasure.

The second stage, with the cessation of discursive thought and investigation, the practitioner, serene of heart, concentrates the mind on one point and attains and abides in the second *jhana*, which arises from concentration and is associated with delight and pleasure, but with the absence of discursive thought and investigation.

The third stage, with the renunciation of delight, the practitioner abides in the equanimity, mindful and self-possessed, experiencing the pleasure in the body that the holy one spoke of as living in equanimity, mindfulness, and thus attains and abides in the third *jhana*.

The fourth stage, with the abandonment of pleasure and pain, and through the previous disappearance of delight and lamentation, the practitioner attains and abides in the fourth *jhana*, which is neither painful nor pleasant, and because of equanimity mindfulness is completely pure.¹

c. Dzogchen: A Tibetan term indicating an art of meditation which Padma Sambhava, the founder of Tibetan Buddhism, first brought from India to Tibet in the 8th century and was usually transmitted from teacher to student orally. It is called *Adi-yoga*. In Sanskrit, it means the highest yoga. It is also called the Natural Buddha Meditation or the Natural Great Perfection. These secret teachings had been handed down and established by several eminent Tibetan lamas through centuries. Recently they have been transmitted outside Tibet and especially to the West.

In his book “**Awakening to the Sacred**,” Lama Surya Das shows us several ways to practice it. Here is some of them:

1. Sky-gazing meditation: To begin the practice of Sky-gazing meditation, we simply need to look out into space, like a child looking up a heaven. Doing this, we free our minds of concepts, doubts, and hesitations. All that is required is that we are happy enough just being in that place at that time. Actually, we can do sky-gazing meditation at any time, we do not need a real sky at all. You can gaze at the expansive inner sky, the light behind your eyelids. You can mingle with that undifferentiated expanse, which reflects the empty, open, luminous, mirror-like nature of mind. You can do it even under the

¹ based on “**Essentials of Buddhism**” by Kogen Mizuno, 1996.

light or in the darkness. Sky-gazing mediation can be undertaken in a sitting posture. As it is said, in this way you can access directly into your true nature – the Buddha-nature in the natural state. This is the nirvana within each of us.

2. Natural walking meditation: To do this walking method, you do not have to choose any special place or road. What you need is a comfortable pair of shoes or no shoes at all, it depends on the condition of the road you are going to walk. Just relax and walk freely along the road, looking at everything and nothing particular, just drifting on the road. You can walk as long as you like.

3. Natural light energy meditation: To do this, you start by sitting yourself facing to the sun, the morning sun. You can sit in full-lotus or half-lotus posture or even on chair, a bench. With your hands on your knees, your palms up, each of them, with thumb and index finger lightly touch each other, making a little circle. With this position, you are ready to meditate by breathing in like you are taking in the light and energy of the sun. Breath it in through every pore and every part of your body. Breath out and in naturally like a plant. Make it out and in like a continuous circle. This is called the circle of luminosity. Keep breath going. Keep energy flowing. Do not let it stuck or become static. The sun's energy is inexhaustible and you, too. You can do this practice for fifteen to twenty-five minutes at a time.

The natural *Dzogchen* meditations are sometimes known as non-meditations because they are mostly formless and effortless. For me, they are like some kind of art to perform, not a technique to practice. A question might be raised here is: “How are you sure, or who will tell you the state of mind you were in at that time, by these methods of meditation, is your true nature or the Buddha-nature in the natural state? The book by Lama Surya Das does not tell. So, for the answer to this question, you need to see a real Lama.

20. Zazen and the Six Paramitas of Bodhisattva's Way:

It might be said that zazen is the background of the six paramitas and the six paramitas are the manifestation of zazen, from the point of view of the zazen practitioner. What is paramita?

Paramita is a Sanskrit word literally meaning, “Carrying to the other shore”. This means the six paramitas are expedient means, the way which leads the practitioner to enlightenment. The six paramitas are the practices of a Bodhisattva, a candidate of Buddhahood in Mahayana Buddhism which includes Zen Buddhism, they are as follows:

a. Practicing donation giving: There are two types of giving in this practice: (1) Giving what you have in material such as money, personal property, real estate, your time and labor to help people who are in need. (2) Giving the Buddha’s Dharmas. This is considered the best thing to give, if you can. The real spirit of giving, whatever you give, material or Dharma, must be in the action of giving in which there is no giver, no receiver, and no given things. This is the real Buddhist giving practice.

b. Observing precepts: There are ten grave precepts for Buddhist lay people (male and female) and Buddhist monks and nuns to practice what the Buddha and Buddhist masters teach. The ten grave precepts are

- 1) No killing
- 2) No stealing
- 3) No misuse of sex
- 4) No lying
- 5) No dealing in drugs
- 6) No speaking of faults of others
- 7) No praising of yourself while abusing others
- 8) No sparing of Dharma assets
- 9) No indulgence in anger
- 10) No slandering of the Three Treasures: the *Buddha*, the *Dharma*, and the *Sangha*.

There are many more complicated precepts for the monks and nuns at higher level to observe, but they are out of the scope of this manual and not listed here. The root of these ten grave precepts is in zazen and not from outside of you. This means if your mind ‘sits’ in zazen, there won’t be any problems in observing these precepts. In the contrary, if your mind is not in zazen, even if you try and try to keep them, it won’t work well for you.

This does not mean these precepts are useless or your efforts are in vain. As long as we are still in training ourselves, zazen and the ten grave precepts are

the way in which we can keep our practice continuously in good shape. (See also the Eightfold Path in the concepts section on this website).

c. Practicing Patience: To be patient is to endure whatever happens to you at any time or place and to treat and solve it wisely. Again, you can do this with your mind that “sits.”

d. Making Efforts: That is continuing to study and analyze the Dharma with wisdom, maintaining our efforts without flagging.

e. Practicing dhyana: Dhyana, a Sanskrit term, means to practice contemplation or concentrating your mind in a sitting posture to realize one’s own nature.

There is another Sanskrit term ***Samadhi*** which indicates a state of mind in zazen in which your mind stops its wandering and saves its own energy, no longer wasting it as it did before. The more doing zazen the stronger it is and it keeps yourself from many kinds of fear you might have had before. This is why there are the words “Fearless Mind Seal” in Buddhist teachings. There are many, many different methods to do this and some of them have illustrated for you.

f. Practicing Prajna: This practice aims to realize your wisdom which is already inside yourself. Use it instead of your reason, which by discursive thoughts have caused many problems and trouble for you and others many times in your life.

Prajna, another Sanskrit term, is often translated into English as “perfect wisdom”. However, this translation is not exactly what the word prajna means.

In Buddhism, ***precepts, samadhi, and prajna*** are a tripod of practicing Buddha-Dharmas. The three of them are the three faces of Buddhist practice. They are in one and cannot be separated. None of them can be lacked in practice. If one of them is lacking in your practice then your practice will become handicapped. They are also called the ‘Three Disciplines

All what has just been said here can be summarized in the Verse of the Seven Buddhas of the past:

*“Do not do any thing bad,
Do everything good,
Keep your mind clear and pure.
This is what the Buddhas taught.”¹*

21. Some Short Sutra and Zen Verses:

Following are some short Buddhist Sutra and Zen Verses easy to read and memorize which are for reciting or chanting at Zen monasteries and centers around the world and in America.

I think, they can give beginners of zazen practice some help or hint in practicing. This does not mean you have to take them with you when you are sitting in zazen. One thing to remember is that all of these here (without footnotes, interpretations or explanations) are not for praying because originally they are not prayers. They are just like something that you read sometimes; it suddenly knocks at the “doorless door” in you to open your no-mind.

They are all the excerpts from Buddhist Sutras or books on Zen. The source will be informed at the end of each. If any one of them is without its translator’s name, it means they are my own.

a. Four Universal or Bodhisattvic Vows:

*Beings in my own mind are numberless, I vow to save.
Blind passions in my own mind are endless, I vow to uproot.
Dharma-gates in my own nature are unmeasurable, I vow to penetrate.
Buddha-way in my own nature is supreme, I vow to attain.¹*

b. The Heart Sutra (Maha Prajna Paramita Hrdaya Sutra):

¹ translated from Chinese version.

¹ *The Platform Sutra of Hui-neng*, translated from Chinese.

*The Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara,
from the depth of perfect wisdom
clearly saw that all the five skandas are empty,
he overcomes all suffering and distress.*

*Shariputra,
Form is no other than emptiness, emptiness no other than form.
Form is only emptiness, emptiness is only form.
Feeling, thought, mental formation, and consciousness,
are also like this.*

*Shariputra,
All Dharmas are empty,
neither arise nor cease,
neither stained nor pure,
neither increase nor decrease.*

*So, in emptiness no form,
no feeling, thought, mental formation, or consciousness;
no eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, or mind;
no color, sound, smell, taste, touch, or object of perception;
no realm of sight to no realm of consciousness;
no ignorance and also no end of ignorance,
to no age and death and also no end of age and death;
no suffering, no root of suffering, no destroying of it, and no path;
no wisdom and also no attainment.*

*Because no attainment,
Bodhisattvas, grounded in perfect wisdom
then there is no hindrances for their minds;
Having no hindrances, there is no fear for them,
Far beyond perverted views, they realize perfect nirvana.
All Buddhas in the past, present and future
with perfect wisdom, attain full, right, and universal enlightenment.*

*Therefore, you know that
the perfect wisdom is the greatest dharani
the highest, unequal dharani, the destroyer of all suffering.
the truth beyond all doubt.*

Then the dharani of Prajna paramita should be proclaimed:

Gate gate para gate bodhi svaha

Gate gate para gate bodhi svaha

Gate gate para gate bodhi svaha! ¹

*c. “Affirming Faith in Mind” (Hsin-hsin-ming, Ch.,
Shinjimeji, Jap.) Verse by the Third Zen Patriarch Seng-
ts’an (Ch., Sosan, Jap.):*

*The Great Way is not difficult
for those who do not pick and choose.
When love and hate do not interfere
everything is clear as it is.*

*When a slight distinction is made,
then earth and heaven far apart.
If you would clearly to see the truth in front of you
just drop opinions of “pro” and “con”.*

*When like and dislike come to play
that is nothing but the mind’s disease.
And not seeing the deep Truth inside
it is in vain to ponder of purifying your mind.*

*The Great Way is perfect and like empty space,
none is lack and none is extra in there.
Because of grasping and releasing,
your seeing into the simple truth is prevented.*

*Do not cling to outside objects
Nor cling to emptiness inside.
Just let your mind be calm and clear itself,
then your perverted views by themselves will go.*

*When you attempt to stop your mind’s movements
you will find more movements of it.
If you still keep your views of duality
you will never know of unity.*

¹ translated from Chinese Version.

*And not knowing the unity
you get lost in duality.
When you insist that things are real
you miss their true reality.
When you insist that things are unreal
you also miss their true reality.*

*The more you talk and think of this
the further you are from the truth.
When useless thoughts and words are cut off,
there will be nowhere you cannot go through.*

*When you are at the root itself,
you'll know the meaning of all things.
If you run after appearances
you miss the primal source.
At the moment of awakening
Both emptiness and form are left behind.*

*All changes inside and outside of you
seem real because of your false views.
You do not need to search for truth,
just let your all perverted views go.*

*Do not abide in views of duality
and do not search at all for it.
If there is a trace of "right" or "wrong"
the True-mind is immediately lost.*

*Duality comes from One-mind,
But do not cling to the One.
When this One-mind gives no arising
then nothing in the world goes against.*

*And when nothing goes astray,
then no obstructions will arise in mind
When thoughts and the objects no longer exist
the known will fall away with the knower.*

*For the known exists because of the knower,
and the knower exists because of the known.
When you realize this is merely of interdependent origination,
then both at the source are just Emptiness.*

*In Emptiness these are not two,
in each are contained all different forms.
When coarse and fine are seen no more
how can there be taking sides?*

*The Great Way is limitless,
Without ease, without hard.
But those who hold to narrow views
are in doubt and worry,
That's why they're still behind in the back.*

*If you are clinging to anything
you surely will fall into wrong path.
Just let go of clinging mind
then all things will fall in their right places.
In essence nothing goes or stays.*

*When you see into the true nature of things,
your steps are with the Great Way,
thus you are taking a walk without any disturbs.
If you live in bondage to your thoughts,
you will be confused and unclear.*

*It is no good to live in bondage to thoughts,
what use are judgements of good and bad for?
If you want to walk the Way of Oneness,
Do not reject the objects of the six sense spheres.*

*When you do not reject those kinds of objects,
You are back with true enlightenment.
The wise will do nothing for anything,
but the fools put themselves in bondage.*

*By nature things are not different,
but the foolish cling to this and that.*

*To seek Mind with discursive thoughts
is certainly a grave mistake.
From deluded mind come rest and unrest,
but mind awakened goes beyond good and bad.
From delusion come all of sided-views
These dreams are nothing but the flowers of air,
why work so hard to seize them for what?
Both gain and loss, right and wrong,
Once and for all just let them go without hesitancy.*

*If your eyes are no longer in sleep,
All dreams will vanish away themselves.
If your mind does not discriminate,
All things will be as it is, as One.*

*Such-ness in essence is mysterious,
without any entanglements in it.
When all things are seen with non-discrimination mind
then you are back to your self-nature.*

*The non-discriminative mind goes beyond
All reasons and comparisons.
When stop movement, there is no movement to stop,
when movement stops, there is no stop of movement.*

*When both of them can't be established
how could the oneness can be?
In the ultimate truth,
is there any rule or standard can be used?*

*When your equal mind accords to the Way,
all ego-centered strivings cease.
doubts and confusions disappear;
and your faith accords to Truth.*

*There is nothing that leaves no traces to you
and nothing that is able to recall.
All is self-revealing, empty and clear.
without any exerting effort of mind.*

*This state of truth is the state of no thoughts
and no feeling can be available in here.
In the world of Such-ness,
There is neither self nor other.*

*To enter the world of Such-ness,
Just affirm “not-two”.
“Not-two” means all is the same,
Therefore, nothing is apart or outside of it.*

*The wise in ten directions
all enter to that source.
It’s not short or long,
One instance is ten thousand years.*

*Not here, not there
It’s right in front of your very eye.
The smallest equals to the large,
because their difference no longer makes any distinctions to you.*

*The largest equals the small,
there is no limitations to see .
That which is is not,
that which is not is.*

*If this is not clear to you,
Do not hesitate [to practice].
One is all and all is one....*

*If this is clear to you,
Do not worry that it won’t be finished.
Faith and mind are “not two”
“Not two” is faith and mind.*

*It is beyond words and thoughts
There is no yesterday, no tomorrow, no today.¹*

¹ translated from Chinese text.

d. Harmony of Difference and Equality (Ts'an-tung-ch'i (Ch., Sandokai, Jap.) Verse by Zen master Shi-t'ou Hsi-ch'ien, Ch.) (Sekito Kisen, Jap).:

*The mind of the great sage of India,
is secretly transmitted from west to east.
While human capacities of understanding are sharp or dull,
In the Way, there are no Ancestors of North or South.*

*The true source is bright and pure
The branching streams flow in the dark.
Clinging to things is delusion.
To recognize principle is not enlightenment.*

*The five sense gates and the five sense objects
Are interdependent and not interdependent,
Interdependent and bring involvement,
Yet each of them stays in its own position.*

*Form has various qualities and shapes
Sound is different from pleasure and suffering.
Superior and inferior words are not separated in the darkness,
Purity and impurity are apparent in the brightness.*

*The four elements return themselves to their nature,
Like a child gets back to his own mother.
Fire is hot and wind blows
Water wets and earth is solid.*

*For eyes there is colors and form, for ears: sound,
For nose: smell, for tongue: taste;
Everything is in its place,
And leaves come from the root.*

*Branches and trunk return to the source,
Superior and inferior have their own words.
In brightness there is darkness,
Do not take darkness to see someone.*

*Brightness and darkness are relative,
And are like the former step and the latter one.
Each and everything has its own merit,
Words should be used in the right place.*

*Things are like the lids fit the boxes,
Principles are like two arrows meeting head-on.
Hearing the words, understand the meaning,
Do not set up standards of your own.*

*If you do not see the way right in front of you,
How could you know the path as you walk.
Awakening is not far or near,
When you are in delusion, mountains and rivers block.*

*O students of the mystery! Please be advised:
Do not pass your days and nights in vain .¹*

¹ translated from Chinese text.

*e. Song of Zazen (Zazen Wasan, Jap.) by Zen master Hakuin
Ekaku:*

*All beings by nature are Buddhas,
as ice by nature is water.
Apart from water there is no ice;
apart from beings, no Buddhas.*

*How sad that people ignore the near
and search for truth afar;
like someone in the midst of water
crying out in thirst;
like a child of wealthy home
wandering among the poor.*

*Lost on a dark path of ignorance,
we wander through the Six Worlds;
from dark path to dark path—
when shall we be freed from birth and death?*

*Oh! The zazen of the Mahayana!
To this the highest praise!
Devotion, repentance, training,
The many paramitas—
all have their source in zazen.*

*Those who try zazen even once
wipe away beginningless crimes.
Where are all the dark paths then?
The Pure Land itself is near.*

*Those who hear this truth even once
and listen with a grateful heart,
treasuring it, revering it,*

gain blessing without end.

*Much more those who turn about
and bear witness to self- nature,
self-nature that is no-nature,
go far beyond mere doctrine.*

*Here effect and cause are the same;
The Way is neither two nor three.
with form that is no-form,
going and coming, we are never astray;
with thought that is no-thought,
even singing and dancing are the voice of the Law.*

*How boundless and free is the sky of Samadhi!
How bright the full moon of wisdom!
Truly, is anything missing now?
Nirvana is right here, before ours eyes;
this very place is the Lotus Land;
this very body, the Buddha. ¹*

¹ from "*Taking the Path of Zen*" by Robert Aitken, 1982.

f. Genjo Koan by Zen master Dogen Kigen:

When all dharmas are the Buddha-dharma, then there is delusion and realization, there is practice, there is life and there is death, there are buddhas and there are ordinary beings. When the myriad dharmas are each not of the self, there is no delusion and no realization, no buddhas and no ordinary beings, no life and no death.

The Buddha's truth is originally transcendent over abundance and scarcity, and so there is life and death, there is delusion and realization there are beings and buddhas. And though it is like this, it is only that flowers, while loved, fall; and weeds while hated, flourish.

Driving ourselves to practice and experience the myriad dharmas is delusion. When the myriad dharmas actively practice and experience ourselves, that is the state of realization.

Those who greatly realize delusions are buddhas. Those who are greatly deluded about the realization are ordinary beings. There are people who further attain realization on the basis of realization. There are people who increase their delusion in the midst of delusion.

When buddhas are really buddhas they do not need to recognize themselves as buddhas. Nevertheless, they are the buddhas in the state of experience, and they go on experiencing the state of buddha.

When we use the whole body-and-mind to look at forms, and when we use the whole body-and-mind to listen to sounds, even though we are sensing them directly, it is not like a mirror's reflection of an image, and like the water and the moon. While we are experiencing one side, we are blind to the other side.

To learn the Buddha's truth is to learn ourselves. To learn ourselves is to forget ourselves. To forget ourselves is to be experienced by the myriad dharmas. To be experienced by myriad dharmas is to let our body-and-mind, and the body-and-mind of the external world, fall away.

There is a state in which traces of realization are forgotten; and it manifests the traces of forgotten realization for a long, long time.

When people first seek the Dharma, we are far removed from the borders of the Dharma. [But] as soon as the Dharma is authentically transmitted to us, we are human beings in [our] original element.

When a man is sailing along in a boat and he moves his eyes to the shore, he misapprehend that the shore is moving. If he keeps his eyes fixed on the boat, he knows that the boat which is moving forward.

Similarly, when we try to understand the myriad dharmas on the basis of confused assumptions about body and mind, we misapprehend that our own mind or our own essence may be permanent. If we become familiar with action and come back to this concrete place, the truth is evident that the myriad dharmas are not self.

Firewood becomes ashes; it can never go back to firewood. Nevertheless, we should not take the view that ash is its future and firewood is its past. Remember, firewood abides in the place of firewood in the Dharma. It has a past and it has a future.

Although it has a past and a future, the past and the future are cut off. Ash exists in the place of ash in the Dharma. It has a past and it has a future. The firewood, after becoming ash, does not again become firewood.

Similarly, human beings, after death, do not live again. At the same time, it is an established custom in the Buddha-dharma not to say that life turns into death. This is why we speak of no appearance. And it the Buddha's preaching established in [the turning of] the Dharma wheel that death does not turn into life. This is why we speak of no disappearance.

Life is an instantaneous situation, and death is also an instantaneous situation. It is the same, for example, with winter and spring. We do not think that winter becomes spring, and we do not say that spring becomes summer.

A person getting realization is like the moon being reflected in water: the moon does not get wet, and the water is not broken. Though the light [of

the moon] is wide and great, it is reflected in a foot or an inch of water. The whole moon and the whole sky are reflected in a dewdrop on a blade of grass and are reflected in a single drop of water.

Realization does not break the individual, just as the moon does not pierce the water. The individual does not hinder the state of realization, just as a dewdrop does not hinder the sky and moon. The depth [of realization] may be as the concrete height [of the moon]. The longness and shortness of its moment should be investigated in large [bodies of] water and small [bodies of] water. And observed in the width and the narrowness of the sky and the moon.

When the Dharma has not yet satisfied the body-and-mind we feel already replete with Dharma. When the Dharma fills the body-and-mind we feel one side to be lacking. For example, sailing out beyond the mountains and into the ocean, when looking around in four directions, [the ocean] only appears to be round; it does not appear to have any other form at all. Nevertheless, this great ocean is not round, and it is not square. Other qualities of the ocean are inexhaustibly many: [to fishes] it is like a palace and [to gods] it is like a string of pearls. But as far as our eyes can see; it just seems to be round.

As it is for [the ocean], so it is for myriad dharmas. In dust and out of the frame, [the myriad dharmas] encompass numerous situations, but we see and understand only as far as our eyes of learning in practice are able to reach.

If we wish to hear how the myriad dharmas naturally are, we should remember that besides their appearance of squareness or roundness, the qualities of the ocean and qualities of the mountains are numerous and endless; and that there are worlds in the four directions. Not only the periphery is like this: remember, the immediate present, and a single drop [of water] are also like this.

When fish move through water, however they move, there is no end to the water. When the birds fly through the sky, however they fly, there is no end to the sky. At the same time, fish and birds have never, since antiquity, left the water or the sky.

Simply, when activity is great, usage is great, and when necessity is small, usage is small. Acting in this state, none fail to realize its limitations at every moment, and none fail to somersault freely at every place; but if a bird leaves the sky it will die at once, and if a fish leaves the water it will die at once.

So we can understand the water is life and can understand that sky is life. Birds are life, and fish are life. It may be that life is birds and that life is fish. And beyond this, there may be still further progress. This existence of [their] practice-and-experience, and the existence of their lifetime and their life, are like this. This being so, a bird or a fish that aimed to move through the water or the sky [only] after getting to the bottom of water or utterly penetrating the sky, could never find its way or find its place in the water or in the sky.

When we find this place, this action inevitably realized as the Universe [itself]. This way and this place are neither great nor small; they are neither subjective nor objective; neither have they existed since the past nor do they appear in the present; so they are present like this.

When a human being is practicing and experiencing the Buddha's truth in this state, to get one dharma is to penetrate one dharma, and to meet one act is to perform one act. In this state the place exists and the way is mastered, and therefore the area to be known is not conspicuous.

The reason it so, is that this knowing and the perfect realization of the Buddha-Dharma appear together. Do not assume that what is attained will inevitably become self-conscious and be recognized by the intellect. The experience of the ultimate state is realized at once. At the same time, its mysterious existence is not necessarily a manifest realization. Realization is the state of ambiguity itself.

Zen master Hotetsu of Mayoku-zan mountain is using a fan; A monk comes by and asks, "The nature of air is to be ever-present, and there is no place that air cannot reach. Why then does the Master use a fan?"

The Master says, "You have only understood that the nature of air is to be ever-present, but you do not yet know the truth that there is no place air cannot reach."

The monk says, “What is the truth of there being no place air cannot reach?”

At this the Master just carries on using the fan. The monk does prostrations.

The real experience of the Buddha-Dharma, the vigorous road of the authentic transmission, is like this. Someone who says that because [the air] is ever-present we need to use a fan, or that even when we do not use [a fan] we can still feel the air, does not know ever-presence, and does not know the nature of the air. Because the nature of air is to be ever-present, the behavior of Buddhists has made the Earth manifest itself as gold and has ripened the Long River into curds and whey.¹

¹ from "*Shobogenzo*" of Dogen, translated by Gudo Nishijima & Chodo Cross, 1994.

22. Some Books on Zazen Practice, Koans, Zen masters' Records, Sastras, Sutras Recommended to Read:

a. Books on Zazen Practice:

The Three Pillars of Zen by Philip Kapleau

Men Mind, Beginners' Mind by Shunryu Suzuki

Zen Practice by Garma C. C. Chang

Taking the Path of Zen by Robert Aitken.

b. Books of Koans:

Pi-yen lu (Hekigan-roku) of Zen master Fu-kwo Yuan-wu (Bukka Engo) translated by Thomas Cleary: "The Blue Cliff Record". Other English translations also available.

Ts'ung-jung lu (Shoyo-roku) of Zen master Wan-sung Hsing-hsiu (Bansho Gyoshu), translated by Thomas Cleary: "The Book of Serenity."

Wu-men kuan (Mumonkan) of Zen master Wu-men Hui-k'ai (Mumon Ekai) translated by Thomas Cleary: "Unlocking the Zen Koan", also can be found in "Zen Flesh Zen Bone" translated by Paul Reps. "The Gateless Barrier: Zen Comments on Mumonkan" by Zenkei Shibayama.

Denkoroku of Zen master Keizan Jokin, translated by Thomas Cleary: "Transmission of Light"; or by Francis Cook: "The Record of Transmitting the Light"..

Secrets of the Blue Cliff Record: Commentaries by Zen masters Hakuin Ekaku & Tenkei Denson translated by Thomas Cleary

The Iron Flute by Nyogen Senzaki

Zen Flesh Zen Bones edited & translated by Nyogen Senzaki & Paul Reps.

Zen Light Unconventional Commentaries on Denkoroku by Stefano Mui Barragato, Sensei.

Two Arrows Meeting in the Mid Air by John Daido Loori.

c. Zen Records or Writings:

Zen in China's Heritage translated by Andy Ferguson

Chao-chou lu (Joshu-roku) translated by James Green: *"The Recorded Sayings of Zen master Joshu"*.

Lin-chi lu (Rinzai-roku) translated by Burton Watson: *"The Zen Teachings of Master Rinzai"*

Yun-men lu (Ummon-roku) translated by Urs App from Chinese: *"Master Yunmen"*

Foyan lu translated by Thomas Cleary: *"Instant Zen"*.

Shobogenzo of Zen master Dogen Kigen, translated by Gudo Nishijima & Chodo Cross.

Zuimonki of Zen master Dogen Kigen translated by Reiho Masunaga: *"A Primer of Soto Zen"*.

Subtle Sound, *the Zen Teachings of Maurine Stuart* edited by Roko Sherry Chayat.

d. Sastras:

Ta-ch'eng ch'i-hsin lun of Ashvagoshā, translated from Chinese version by Yoshito S. Hakeda: *"The Awakening of Faith"*. Another translation can be found in "A Buddhist Bible" edited by Dwight Goddard.

Mulamadhyaṃakārikā of Nāgārjuna translated from Chinese version of Kumarajiva by Brian Bocking: *"Nāgārjuna in China: A Translation of"*

the Middle Treatise”; or translated from Sanskrit text by Kenneth K. Inada: *"Nagarjuna: A Translation of his Mulamadhyamaka-karika"*; or translated from Tibetan version by Jay L. Garfield: *"The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way"*.

e. Sutras:

Liu-tsu-ta-shi-fa-pao-t’an-ching translated by Thomas Cleary *“The Sutra of Hui-neng, Grand master of Zen”*. Another translation can be found in *“A Buddhist Bible”*

Vimalakirti-sutra translated from Chinese version of Kumarajiva by Burton Watson: *“Vimalakirti-sutra”*, or by Charles Luk : *“Vimalakirti Nirveda sutra”*; translated from Tibetan by Robert A. F. Thurman: *“The Holy Teachings of Vimalakirti”*.

Shurangama-sutra, translated by Tripitaka Master Hua. Another translation [not complete] can be found in *“A Buddhist Bible”*

Vajrachhedika Prajnaparamita–sutra translated by Wong Mou-Lam: *“The Diamond Sutra and The Sutra of Hui-Neng”*. Another translation can be found in *“A Buddhist Bible”*. There are also other English translations available.

Mahaprajnaparamita-sutra translated by Edward Conze: *“The Large Sutra of Perfect Wisdom”*.

Lankavatara-sutra translated by Daisetz T. Suzuki, also can be found in *“A Buddhist Bible”*.

Avatamsaka-sutra translated by Thomas Cleary: *“The Flower Ornament Scripture”*.

Dhammapada, The Sayings of the Buddha translated by Thomas Byrom. Many other English translations of it are available.

The Brahmajala Sutta and its Commentaries translated from Pali Text by Bhikkhu Bodhi: *“The Discourse on the All-Embracing Net of Views”*

ZAZEN PRACTICE

