

Selections from:

***Shōbōgenzō Zuimonki*¹: The Sayings of Dōgen Zenji**

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1-1

Being a child of the Buddha means following the Buddha's teaching and arriving directly at buddhahood. We must try to practice in complete accord with the Buddha's teaching. The true practice which accords with the Buddha's teaching is *shikantaza*, on which everyday practice in this community (*sōrin*)² is based. Consider this deeply.

1-2

Practitioners of the Way have to maintain regulations laid down by Zen Master *Hyakujō*.³ The form of maintaining regulations is simply receiving and observing the precepts and practicing *zazen*. The meaning of reciting the *Precept Sutra*⁴ day and night, and of observing the precepts single-mindedly is nothing but doing *shikantaza* in accord with the practice of ancient masters. When we sit *zazen*, what precepts are not observed, what merits are not actualized? The activities practiced by ancient masters have profound meanings. Without holding our individual views and preferences, we should go along with people in the community and rely on the Way of ancient masters, maintaining our practice.

1-4

For a Zen monk, the primary Way to improve oneself is to practice *shikantaza*. Without concern about being clever or stupid, you will naturally improve if you practice *zazen*.

1-14

Ejō asked, "In studying the Buddha Way, what practice should we choose to devote ourselves to?" Dōgen replied: "It depends upon one's character or capabilities. However, until now, *zazen* has been practiced

and handed down the communities of ancestors. This practice is suitable for all people, and can be practiced by those of superior, mediocre, or inferior capabilities. When I was in China in the assembly of my late master Tendō Nyojō, I sat *zazen* day and night after I heard this.

2-9

Once, while in China, I was reading a collection of sayings by an ancient master. At that time, a monk from Shisen (Shi-chuan) who was a sincere practitioner of the Way, asked me, “What’s the use of reading recorded sayings?” I replied, “I want to learn the deeds of ancient masters.” The monk asked, “What is the use of that?” I said, “I will teach people after I return home.” The monk asked, “What is the use of that.” I said, “It’s for the sake of benefiting living beings.” The monk asked, “Ultimately, what is the use?”

Later, I considered this and thought, “Learning the deeds of ancient masters by reading recorded sayings or *koans* or explaining them to deluded people; these are all ultimately of no use for my own practice and for teaching others. Even if I don’t know a single letter, I will be able to show the truth to others in inexhaustible Ways if I devote myself to just sitting and clarify the Great Matter.” This is why that monk said to me, “Ultimately, what is the use?” I thought this to be the truth. Thereupon, I gave up reading the recorded sayings and other texts, concentrated wholeheartedly upon sitting, and was able to clarify the Great Matter.

2-22

Sitting itself is the practice of the Buddha. Sitting itself is not-doing⁵. It is nothing but the true form of the Self⁶. Apart from this, there is nothing to seek as the buddha-dharma.

2-25

When I stayed at the Tendō⁷ monastery in China, while the old master Nyojō was the abbot there, we sat *zazen* until about 11 o’clock at night and got up at about half-past two in the morning to sit *zazen*. The abbot sat with the assembly in the monk’s hall, never taking even one night off. During sitting, many monks fell asleep. The abbot walked around, hit

sleeping monks with his fist or his slipper, abused and exhorted them to awaken from their sleep. If they continued to sleep, he went to the *shōdō*⁸, rang a bell, and called the attendants to light the candles. Suddenly he would give speech like this:

What is the use of sleeping wastefully? Why then do you gather in a monks' hall? Why did you become a monk and enter a monastery? Consider the emperor and government officials; who among them leads an easy life? The emperor governs with justice. The ministers serve with loyalty and so on, down to the commoners. Who leads an easy life without labor?

You have avoided these labors, entered a monastery, and spend your time wastefully. After all, what is the use of this? Life-and-death is the Great Matter. Everything is impermanent and changes swiftly. Both teaching schools and Zen schools emphasize this. This evening or tomorrow morning we may die or we may become sick. We do not know how death may come about, or what kind of sickness we may contract. While you are alive, for the time being, it is stupid to pass time meaninglessly, sleeping or lying down, without practicing buddha-dharma. Since you are like this, the buddha-dharma is dying. When people devotedly practiced *zazen*, the buddha dharma flourished throughout the country. As of late, the buddha-dharma is falling into decay because no one will promote *zazen*.

With my own eyes I saw him thus encourage monks in the assembly and make them sit *zazen*.

2-26

Is the Way attained through mind or body? In the philosophical schools, it is said that since body and mind are not separate, the Way is attained through the body. Yet, it is not clear that we attain the Way through the body, because they say "since" body and mind are not separate. In Zen, the Way is attained through both body and mind.

As long as we only think about buddha-dharma with our minds, the Way will never be grasped, even in a thousand lifetimes or a myriad of eons. When we let go of our minds and cast aside our views and

understanding, the Way will be actualized. Reiun⁹, for example, clarified true mind (the reality of life) when he saw peach blossoms, and Kyōgen¹⁰ realized the Way when he heard the sound of a piece of tile hitting bamboo. They attained the Way through their bodies. Therefore, when we completely cast aside our thoughts and views and practice *shikantaza*, we will become intimate with the Way. For this reason, there is no doubt that the Way is attained through the body. This is why I encourage you to practice *zazen* wholeheartedly.

4-14

When Zen-master Hōe of Mt. Yōgi¹¹ first became the abbot, the temple was dilapidated and monks were suffering. Therefore, an officer said it should be repaired. The master said:

“Even though the building is broken down, it is certainly a better place for practicing *zazen* than on the ground or under a tree. If one section is broken and leaks, we should stay where it does not leak and practice *zazen*. If monks can attain enlightenment by building a hall, we should construct one of gold and jewels. But enlightenment does not depend on whether the building is good or bad; it depends only upon our diligence in *zazen*”

5-23

The essence of learning the Way is the practice of *zazen*. In China, many people attained the Way entirely through the power of *zazen*. If one concentrates on practicing *zazen* continuously, even an ignorant person who does not understand a single question, can be superior to an intelligent person who has been studying for a long time. Therefore, practitioners must practice *shikantaza* wholeheartedly without concerning themselves with other things. The Way of buddhas and ancestors is nothing but *zazen*. Do not pursue anything else.

At the time, Ejo asked, “In studying, when I read the collections of old masters’ sayings or koans, I can understand one thing out of a hundred or a thousand words, yet I have no such experience in *zazen*. Should we still prefer to practice *zazen*?”

Dōgen replied; “Even if you may seem to have some understanding

while you read *koans*, such studies will lead you astray from the Way of buddhas and ancestors. To spend your time sitting upright with nothing to be gained and nothing to be realized is the Way of the ancestors. Although ancient masters encouraged both reading and seated *zazen*, they still promoted sitting wholeheartedly. Although there are some who have gained enlightenment using stories of the old masters, the attainment of this enlightenment is due to the merit of sitting. True merit depends on sitting.”

5-18

Do not think that you study buddha dharma for the sake of gaining profit as a reward for practicing the Buddha Way. Just practice buddha-dharma for the sake of the buddha-dharma. Even if you study 1,000 sutras and 10,000 commentaries, even if you have sat *zazen* until your cushion is worn out, it is impossible to attain the Way of buddhas and ancestors if this attitude is lacking.

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- 1 *Shōbōgenzō Zuimonki* is a collection of Dōgen Zenji’s sayings recorded by Ejō Zenji, Dōgen’s dharma heir. When these talks were recorded, Dōgen had just founded his first monastery, Kōshōji in Fukakusa, Kyoto. In *Zuimonki*, Dōgen repeatedly talks about *zazen*, pure poverty, being free from desire for fame and personal profit, parting from narrow personal views, and following one’s teacher as the basic attitude of a practitioner. Here, the sections in which Dōgen Zenji emphasizes the practice of *zazen* have been selected.
 - 2 *Sōrin* literally means a forest; a place where various kinds of trees live together.
 - 3 Zen-master Hyakujō (Baizhang Huaihai, 720–814), wrote the *Hyakujō Shingi*, the first recorded regulations for a Zen monastery. Consequently, he is regarded as the founder of the formal Zen monastery.
 - 4 This is the *Bonmōkyō* (Sanskrit; *Brahmajala Sutra*) which presents the

Mahayana precepts for *bodhisattvas*.

- 5 In Japanese, *fui*, (also *mui*), means not-doing or not-action; being natural without fabricating one's reality through discriminations or attachments.
- 6 Literally, the Japanese expression means the "true body of the self", that is, the reality of the self which precedes discrimination.
- 7 In Chinese, Tiantong.
- 8 A hall behind the monks' hall (*sōdō*) where the head monk gives talks on behalf of the abbot.
- 9 Lingyun Zhigin (?-?) was one of the disciples of Isan Reiyū (Guishan Lingyou).
- 10 Xiangyan Zhixian (?-840) was also one of the disciples of Isan Reiyū (Guishan Lingyou).
- 11 Yangi Fanghui (966-1049).