

Principles of Zazen  
(*Zazen gi*)

Notes

1. “Studying Zen is zazen” (*sanzen wa zazen nari* 參禪は坐禪なり): The term *sanzen* refers to training in the Zen form of Buddhism. The common term *zazen* (“seated *dhyāna*” or “seated meditation”), though sometimes particularly associated with the Zen tradition, is widely used in East Asian Buddhist texts for the practice of meditation; it has no exact equivalent in the Sanskrit.

“A quiet place” (*jōsho* 靜處): In traditional meditation literature, the term is defined as a mountain fastness, an isolated forest retreat or a pure monastery (see, e.g., the *Tiantai xiao zhiguan* 天臺小止觀, T.46:462c.)

“Drafts or vapors” (*fūen* 風烟): A similar warning against drafts during meditation appears among the teachings attributed to Dōgen’s master, Rujing 如淨, in Dōgen’s *Hōkyō ki* 寶慶記 (Ōkubo Dōshū 大久保道舟, *Dōgen zenji zenshū* 道元禪師全集 2:380).

“*Vajra*” (*kongō* 金剛, “grass” (*kusa* 草): See Supplemental Note 1.

2. “Cast aside all involvements and discontinue the myriad affairs” (*shoen o hōsha shite banji o kyūsoku subeshi* 諸縁を放捨し萬事を休息すべし): An expression taken from Changlu Zongze’s 長蘆宗曠 *Zuochan yi* 坐禪儀 (Kagamishima Genryū 鏡島元隆, *Yakuchū Zen’en shingi* 訳注禪苑清規, p. 279). Similar advice to the contemplative to avoid “worldly” entanglements occurs in many meditation texts. The *Xiao zhiguan*, for example, recommends avoiding four sorts of activities (*yuanwu* 緣務): occupational pursuits, social intercourse with laymen, arts and sciences, and scholarship (T.46:462c).

“Good is not thought of; evil is not thought of” (*zen ya fu shiryō aku ya fushiryō* 善也不思量なり悪也不思量なり): Variation on a passage in the *Zuochan yi* (Kagamishima, 281):

一切善惡都莫思量

Do not think about any good or evil.

The expression comes from a popular saying attributed to the Sixth Ancestor, Huineng 慧能 (*Jingde chuandeng lu* 景德傳燈錄, T.51:236a20; probably first appearing in Shenhui's 神會 *Nanyang heshang tan yu* 南陽和尚壇語 [Hu Shih, *Shenhui heshang yiji* 神會和尚遺集, 236]).

3. “It is not mind, intellect or consciousness; it is not thoughts, ideas or perceptions” (*shin i shiki ni arazu nen sō kan ni arazu* 心意識にあらず念想觀にあらず): The idiom “mind, intellect, and consciousness” (*shin i shiki*, in scholastic writing representing the Sanskrit *citta*, *manas*, and *vijñāna* respectively) is regularly used in Zen texts as equivalent to “thought” (*nen* 念). The expression “thoughts, ideas and perceptions” (*nen sō kan*) is rather less common and somewhat ambiguous: it likely refers here to discriminative cognition (*vikalpa*), but it can also represent various Buddhist contemplative exercises.

“Do not figure to make a buddha” (*sabutsu o zu suru koto nakare* 作佛を圖することなかれ): From the famous kōan known as “Nanyue polishes a tile” (*nangaku masen* 南嶽磨甎). See Supplemental Note 2.

“Slough off sitting or reclining” (*za ga o datsuraku subeshi* 坐臥を脱落すべし): Taking *zaga* here in the sense of the standard Buddhist list of the “four deportments” (*igi*, or *iigi* 威儀): walking, standing, sitting, and reclining (*gyō jū za ga* 行住坐臥); in the context, it might also be understood simply as “sitting still” (as, e.g., in the Chinese idiom *zuowo buning* 坐臥不寧, “restless”). The verb *datsuraku su* invokes the famous saying, “slough off body and mind” (*shinjin datsuraku* 身心脱落) that Dōgen attributed to his teacher, Rujing.

On the first three sentences of this passage, see Supplemental Note 3.

4. “Be moderate in food and drink” (*onjiki o setsuryō subeshi* 飲食を節量すべし): Variation on a passage in the *Zuochan yi* (Kagamishima, 279). In the *Hōkyō ki*, Ju-ching, gives a list of foods to be avoided (Ōkubo, 2:373-374).

“The Fifth Ancestor on Mt. Huangmei” (*Ōbai no goso* 黃梅山の五祖): Reference to Daman Hongren 大滿弘忍(601-674). The allusion here is

probably to a passage in the notice on Shenxiu 神秀 in the *Jingde chuandeng lu*, where Hongren is said to have “made *zuochan* 坐禪 his work” (T.51:231b).

5. “You should wear the *kesa*” (*kesa o kakubeshi* 袈裟をかくべし):

The *kesa* (Skt. *kaṣāya*, *kāṣāya*) is the outer robe, or suplice, worn by the monk especially during services. Note that Dōgen’s reference to this clerical garb makes it clear that the zazen instruction of the text is directed to those who have taken orders.

“Put down a cushion” (*futon o shikubeshi* 蒲團をしくべし): The *futon* (in modern usage, *zafu* 坐蒲) placed on top of the meditation mat is still a standard feature of Sōtō zazen practice. Keizan’s *Zazen yōjin ki*, which also emphasizes the need for such a cushion, gives its diameter as one *shaku* 尺, two *sun* 寸 (roughly fourteen inches) (*Sōtōshū zensho* 曹洞宗全書, *Shūgen* 宗源 2:426b). Despite Dōgen’s final remark here, the use of such a combination of cushion and mat does not seem to have been a universal practice. The *Zuochan yi*, for example, recommends simply spreading a single mat, a practice still commonly encountered in East Asian meditation halls.

6. “Sit in either the semi-cross-legged or fully cross-legged position” (*aruiwa han kafu za shi aruiwa kekka kafu za su* あるひは半跏趺坐しあるひは結跏趺坐す): For the positioning of the body in *zazen*, see Supplemental Note 4.

7. This and the following paragraph largely follow the text of the *Zuochan yi* (Kagamishima, 279), although Dōgen has added the information on aligning the hands with the navel.

8. In the *Hōkyō ki* (Ōkubo, 2:386), Rujing advises Dōgen that one may either press the tongue against the palate or the front teeth.

“The eyes should be open” (*me wa kai subeshi* 目は開すべし): On this practice, see Supplemental Note 5.

9. “Sitting fixedly, think of not thinking. How do you think of not thinking? Nonthinking.” (*gotsugotsu to zajō shite shiryō ko fushryō nari fushiryō tei nyoka shiryō kore hi shiryō nari* 兀兀と坐定して 思量箇不思量底なり不思量底如何思量これ非思量なり): The expression *gotsugotsu*, translated here as

“fixedly,” is a Chinese idiom indicating something “massive and immovable” (also “towering”); regularly used for a state of fixed concentration (and sometimes for a state of obliviousness).

For this famous passage, see Supplemental Note 6.

10. “This is the art of zazen” (*kore sunawachi zazen no hōjutsu nari* これすなはち坐禪の法術なり): Borrowed from the *Zuochan yi* (Kagamishima, 281).

“Zazen is not the practice of *dhyāna*” (*zazen wa shūzen ni arazu* 坐禪は習禪にはあらず): Likely an allusion to a passage in the *Linjian lu* 林間録 (ZZ.2B,21:295d), in which the author, Juefan Huihong 覺範慧洪, criticizes the association of Bodhidharma’s famous nine years of sitting before a wall at Shaolin with the practice of *dhyāna* — a practice he dismisses as “dead wood and cold ashes” (*kumu shihui* 古木死灰).

“The dharma gate of great ease and joy” (*dai anraku no hōmon* 大安樂の法門): A phrase borrowed from the *Zuochan yi* (Kagamishima, 281) that evokes the Sukhavihāra chapter of the *Lotus sūtra*, in which it is said that the bodhisattva’s life of ease and joy (Sanskrit *sukha*) consists in always enjoying zazen (Sanskrit *pratisaṃlayana*), retiring from the world to practice control of his mind (T.9:37b10). Dōgen gives this claim a more concrete sense in his *Bendō wa* 辨道話, where he uses it as a justification of the superiority of the seated posture itself (DZZ.2:470).

“Undefined practice and verification” (*fu senna no shushō* 不染汚の修證): One of Dōgen’s favorite expressions. For the source, see Supplemental Note 7.

11. This colophon, appearing on the Kenkon in 乾坤院 and several other early manuscripts of the *Shōbōgenzō*, is now widely accepted as accurate. Some other early manuscripts associate the work with Daibutsu ji 大佛寺, the monastery in Echizen where Dōgen taught from the autumn of 1244 to the summer of 1246.