

Principles of Zazen  
(*Zazen gi*)

Supplemental Notes

1. The reference to those who spread grass and sat on a *vajra* recalls the legend of the Buddha's enlightenment under the bodhi tree. According to the legend, at the time of Śākyamuni's enlightenment, a jewel-encrusted throne, known as the *vajra* ("diamond", or "adamantine") seat, arose from the earth beneath the tree. The Buddha is supposed to have been offered by the god Indra a sacred grass to spread on the seat, in accordance with the practice of all the past buddhas. The practice of meditation on a rock appears in several descriptions of Zen monks who practiced outdoors.

2. "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 a conversation between Nanyue Huairang (677-744) and Mazu Daoyi (709-788). Here is the version from Dōgen's *shinji* 真字 *Shōbōgenzō*, case 8 (DZZ.5:128).

洪州江西馬祖大寂禪師〈嗣南嶽、諱道一〉參侍南嶽、密受心印、蓋拔同參。住傳法院、常日坐禪。南嶽知是法器、往師所問曰、大德、坐禪圖箇什麼。師曰、圖作佛。南嶽乃取一甌、於師庵前石上磨。師遂問、師作什麼。南嶽曰、磨作鏡。師曰、磨甌豈得成鏡耶。南嶽曰、坐禪豈得作佛耶。

The Chan Master Daji, Mazu of Jiangxi in Hongzhou (descendant of Nanyue, named Daoyi), while attending Nanyue, secretly received the mind seal, for he stood out from his fellow students. He stayed at the Chuanfa Cloister, where he always practiced seated meditation.

Nanyue, recognizing that he was vessel of the dharma, went to the master's place and asked, "Great worthy, what are you figuring to do, sitting there in meditation?"

The master said, "I'm figuring to make a buddha."

Nanyue thereupon took up a tile and began to rub it on a stone in front of the master's hermitage.

The master then asked, "Master, what are you doing?"

Nanyue said, "I'm polishing this to make a mirror."

The master said, "How can you produce a mirror by polishing a tile?"

Nanyue replied, "How can you make a buddha by sitting in meditation?"

Dōgen often refers to this story and comments on it at length in the *SBGZ zazenshin* 坐禪箴 (DZZ.1:103ff).

3. This passage is reminiscent of a definition of the “sudden awakening teaching of the Mahāyāna” (*dasheng dunwu famen* 大乘頓悟法門) attributed to Baizhang Huaihai 百丈懷海 (749-814):

僧問、如何是大乘頓悟法門。師曰、汝等先歇諸緣休息萬事。善與不善世出世間、一切諸法、莫記憶莫緣念。放捨身心令其自在。

A monk asked, “What is the sudden awakening teaching of the Mahāyāna?” The master answered, “You should first stop all involvements and discontinue all affairs. Do not bear in mind, do not think of, any dharma — whether good or bad, mundane or transmundane. Cast aside body and mind and set them free.” (*Jingde chuandeng lu*, T.51:250a17-20.)

4. “Sit in either the semi-cross-legged or fully cross-legged position”: Dōgen’s directions here follow the recommendation of the *Zuochan yi* (Kagamishima, 279), but there is considerable difference of opinion within the Buddhist tradition on how to arrange the legs during meditation. The posture described here, with the left leg crossed over the right, is sometimes called the *gōma* 降魔 (“demon quelling”) position; the opposite form, in which the right leg is crossed over the left (the so-called *kichijō* 吉祥, or “auspicious” posture), is probably the more common in iconography and in many practice traditions. Though Dōgen’s style is sometimes considered standard for the Zen school, both forms can be found in the school’s literature. Similar disagreements over whether the left or the right should be on top can be found in descriptions of the semi-cross-legged posture and in the placement of the hands. In the *Hōkyō ki* (Ōkubo, 2:386), Dōgen reports that his teacher, Rujing, held that the position of the legs might be reversed if they become painful after long sitting.

In his *Fukan zazen gi* 普勸坐禪儀 (DZZ.5:6), Dōgen follows the *Zuochan yi* in recommending at this point that the practitioner stretch the body up and swing it back and forth to the left and the right. Keizan’s *Zazen yōjin ki* [*Sōtoshū zensho*, *Shūgen* 2:427a] explains that one should swing the body from side to side seven or eight times, gradually reducing the length of the arc, an exercise still widely followed in Sōtō practice.

5. “The eyes should be open”: The recommendation here to keep the eyes open during zazen follows the advice of the *Zuochan yi* (Kagamishima, 279), whose author goes on to argue for this practice, citing the precedent of past meditation adepts and quoting his own teacher, the Chan Master Fayun

Yuantong 法雲圓通禪師, who criticized the practice of meditation with the eyes closed as "the ghost cave of the black mountain" (*heishan gueiku* 黑山鬼窟). Not only, he says, does the opening of the eyes ward off drowsiness, but it can serve to enhance the power of *samādhi* (Kagamishima, 279). Other Buddhist accounts of meditation, however, sometimes favor closing the eyes completely. In the *Hōkyō ki* (Ōkubo, 2:386.), Rujing says that, while experienced meditators, not susceptible to drowsiness, may sit with eyes closed, beginners should keep them open. Dōgen reiterates his warning against closing the eyes in his discussion of night zazen in the *Bendō hō* 辨道法 (Ōkubo, 2:314).

6. "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): This passage is taken from the kōan known as "Yueshan's not thinking", which appears several times in Dōgen's writings. The story is found in a number of Chan sources (see, e.g., *Jingde chuandeng lu*, T.51:311c), as well as in Dōgen's *shinji Shōbōgenzō*, case ?? (DZZ.5:??). Here is the version of the story on which Dōgen comments at the opening of his *Shōbōgenzō zazen shin* (DZZ.1:103).

藥山弘道大師坐次、有僧問、兀兀地思量什麼。師云、思量箇不思量底。僧曰、不思量底、如何思量。師云、非思量。

Once, when the Great Master Hongdao of Yueshan was sitting [in meditation], a monk asked him, "What are you thinking of, [sitting there] so fixedly?" The master answered, "I'm thinking of not thinking." The monk asked, "How do you think of not thinking?" The Master answered, "Nonthinking."

Yueshan's first answer might also be rendered, "I'm thinking the unthinkable," and his final remark could be read, "It isn't thinking"; the translation chosen here follows the usual Sōtō interpretation. The use of Yueshan's words here to describe the practice of zazen accords with the vulgate text of Dōgen's *Fukan zazen gi* (DZZ.5:6), but the earlier, autograph text of the *Fukan zazen gi* uses instead a quotation from the *Zuochan yi* (Kagamishima, 281):

念起即覺、覺之即失。久久妄緣、自成一。片。

Whenever a thought occurs, be aware of it; as soon as you are aware of it, it will vanish. If you remain for a long period forgetful of objects, you will naturally become unified. (DZZ.5:11.)

7. “Undefined practice and verification” (*fu senna no shushō* 不染汚の修證):

Allusion to a conversation between the Sixth Ancestor and his disciple

Nanyue Huairang 南嶽懷讓, to which Dōgen often makes reference.

Here is the version of the story given in his *shinji Shōbōgenzō*, case 101,

DZZ.5:178.

南嶽山大慧禪師〈嗣曹溪、諱懷讓〉參六祖。祖曰、從什麼處來。師曰、嵩山安國師處來。祖曰、是什麼物恁麼來。師罔措。於是執侍八年、方省前話。乃告祖云、懷讓會得、當初來時、和尚接某甲、是什麼物恁麼來。祖云、爾作麼生會。師曰、說似一物即不中。祖曰、還假修證否。師曰、修證即不無、染汚即不得。祖曰、祇此不染汚、是諸佛之所護念。汝亦如是、吾亦如是、乃至西天諸祖亦如是。

The Chan Master Dahui of Mt. Nanyue (descendant of Caoxi, named Huairang) visited the Sixth Ancestor. The Ancestor asked him, “Where do you come from?”

The Master said, I come from the National Teacher An on Mt. Song.”

The Ancestor said, “What is it that comes like this?”

The Master was without means [to answer]. After attending [the Ancestor] for eight years, he finally understood the previous conversation. Thereupon, he announced to the Ancestor, “I’ve understood what you put to me when I first came: ‘What is it that comes like this?’”

The Ancestor asked, “How do you understand it?”

The Master replied, “To say it’s like anything wouldn’t hit it.”

The Ancestor said, “Then is it contingent on practice and verification?”

The Master answered, “Practice and verification are not nonexistent; they’re not to be defiled.”

The Ancestor said, “Just this ‘not defiled’ is what the buddhas bear in mind. You’re also like this, I’m also like this, and all the ancestors of the Western Heavens [i. e., India] are also like this.”