

Zazen-Yojinki: Points to Keep in Mind When Practicing Zazen (2)

By Zen master Keizan Jokin

Chant leader alone –

Points to Keep in Mind When Practicing Zazen

All together –

Zazen is not based upon teaching, practice or realization; instead these three aspects are all contained within it. Measuring realization is based upon some notion of enlightenment - this is not the essence of zazen. Practice is based upon strenuous application - this is not the essence of zazen. Teaching is based upon freeing from evil and cultivating good - this is not the essence of zazen.

Teaching is found in Zen but it is not the usual teaching. Rather, it is a direct pointing, just expressing the way, speaking with the whole body. Such words are without sentences or clauses. Where views end and concept is exhausted, the one word pervades the ten directions without setting up so much as a single hair. This is the true teaching of the buddhas and patriarchs.

Although we speak of “practice,” it is not a practice that you can do. That is to say, the body does nothing, the mouth does not recite, the mind doesn't think things over, the six senses are left to their own clarity and unaffected. So this is not the sixteen stage practice of the hearers. Nor is it the practice of understanding the twelve factors of inter-dependent emergence of those whose practice is founded upon isolation. Nor is it the six perfections within numberless activities of the bodhisattvas. It is without struggle at all so is called awakening or enlightenment. Just rest in the samadhi in which all of the buddhas receive and use themselves as buddhas, wandering playfully in the four practices of peace and bliss of those open to openness. This is the profound and inconceivable practice of buddhas and ancestors.

Although we speak of realization, this realization does not hold to itself as being “realization.” This is practice of the supreme samadhi which is the knowing of unborn, unobstructed, and spontaneously arising awareness. It is the door of luminosity which opens out onto the realization of the Buddha, born through the practice of the great ease. This goes beyond the patterns of

holy and profane, goes beyond confusion and wisdom. This is the realization of unsurpassed enlightenment as our own nature...

To practice sitting, find a quiet place and lay down a thick mat. Don't let wind, smoke, rain or dew come in. Keep a clear space with enough room for your knees. Although in ancient times there were those who sat on diamond seats or on large stones for their cushions. The place where you sit should not be too bright in the daytime or too dark at night; it should be warm in winter and cool in summer. That's the key.

Drop mind, intellect and consciousness, leave memory, thinking, and observing alone. Don't try to fabricate Buddha. Don't be concerned with how well or how poorly you think you are doing; just understand that time is as precious as if you were putting out a fire on your head...

Now think of what is without thought. How can you think of it? Be beyond thinking. This is the essence of zazen. Shatter obstacles and become intimate with awakening awareness.

When you want to get up from stillness, put your hands on your knees, sway seven or eight times in increasing movements. Breathe out through the mouth, put your hands to the floor and get up lightly from the seat. Slowly walk, circling to right or left.

If dullness or sleepiness overcome your sitting, move to the body and open the eyes wider, or place attention above the hairline or between your eyebrows. If you are still not fresh, rub the eyes or the body. If that still doesn't wake you, stand up and walk, always clockwise. Once you've gone about a hundred steps you probably won't be sleepy any longer. The way to walk is to take a half step with each breath. Walk without walking, silent and unmoving.

If you still don't feel fresh after doing kinhin, wash your eyes and forehead with cold water. Or chant the "Three Pure Precepts of the Bodhisattvas." Do something; don't just fall asleep. You should be aware of the great matter of birth and death and the swiftness of impermanence. What are you doing sleeping when your eye of the way is still clouded? If dullness and sinking arise repeatedly you should chant, "Habituality is deeply rooted and so I am

wrapped in dullness. When will dullness disperse? May the compassion of the buddhas and patriarchs lift this darkness and misery.”

If the mind wanders, place attention at the tip of the nose and tanden and count the inhalations and exhalations. If that doesn't stop the scattering, bring up a phrase and keep it in awareness - for example: “What is it that comes thus?” or “When no thought arises, where is affliction? - Mount Sumeru!” or “What is the meaning of Bodhidharma's coming from the West? - The cypress in the garden.” Sayings like this that you can't draw any flavour out of are suitable.

If scattering continues, sit and look to that point where the breath ends and the eyes close forever and where the child is not yet conceived, where not a single concept can be produced. When a sense of the two-fold emptiness of self and things appears, scattering will surely rest.

Arising from stillness, carry out activities without hesitation. This moment is the koan. When practice and realization are without complexity then the koan is this present moment. That which is before any trace arises, the scenery on the other side of time's destruction, the activity of all buddhas and patriarchs, is just this one thing...