



### Introduction to Dogen's Zen: *The practice of enlightenment*

The importance of this meditation practice is not how long you meditate, its not a matter of time, of how long, but that you are really meditating, really doing it thats what matters. This point is particularly important to Dogen Zenjis teachings, often the Zen school is understood as the meditation school or the dhyana meditation school, so theres this idea that the more you sit and meditate the more you develop some kind of state of mind, the more you sit the better you get but its not that kind of teaching and if you understand Dogen Zen in that way you miss the basic important point, you miss what Zen really means. You quickly conclude that Zen is simply meditation, a period of meditation and you split Zen practice, meditation practice apart from everything else.

Traditionally in Buddhist traditions there are three prongs to the teachings: the first part is the precepts, the second part is meditation, dhyana or samadhi, and the third part is wisdom. But if you understand Zen as meditation in that kind of narrow way then you end up believing that after meditation you attain wisdom or something like that! [laughing] Thats not what Dogen Zenji is talking about, thats not the way that Dogen is pointing out the practice zazen, sitting meditation is those three aspects in one practice, they are not separate.

Dogen Zenji introduced this practice, this meditation practice in his work *Fukanzazengi* The Universal Principles of Zazen and in this he clearly points out that Zen practice includes the three aspects of precepts, meditation, and wisdom, they are not separate or linear, one doesnt lead to the other they are a totality. Meditation isnt separate from wisdom, wisdom isnt separate from the precepts, in fact you can only practice in this way if the precepts are maintained. Precepts are to keep or maintain our ordinary functions, to keep body and mind in order.

In day to day life if we violate the precepts not to tell a lie, not to kill whatever then that affects your body and mind and causes obstacles. Of course, you cant sit in zazen with your back straight, just learning to settle within that, if you havent kept the precepts! If you havent kept the precepts then you cant sit. In zazen you may be very busy, your mind full of thoughts, thoughts coming and going but to be able to sit like that and to be able to settle in the midst of that means the precepts are being maintained or you are practicing the precepts. This meditation practice doesnt split, doesnt separate reality. To be able to sit like that you already have a kind of wisdom, a kind of insight, because you are overcoming all the difficulties that you have in your mind and without wisdom those difficulties cannot be overcome.

So to be able to sit this way with the back straight settling down is final, the final product, the complete form. Nowhere else to go. This is the way we settle down this is exactly the Buddha body although sometimes it doesnt look very fancy, it feels like I cant call this Buddha or something like that. We may feel very humble and modest but, actually, the exact mind and body we already have is the Buddha body. If you are able to practice then the exact mind and the thoughts you have are wisdom or at least the potential to be wisdom. If you are able to practice then the mind and the thoughts that you have naturally turn into wisdom and dualities drop naturally but it seems the obstacle is the seed of your awakening. Learn about your self, learn about your own ignorance, a person who learns about his own ignorance is one who is practicing enlightenment, knowing the self clearly, this is the path.

What I am pointing out is the kind of understanding that we need to have in meditation practice in Zen, especially in Dogen Zen. We dont need to try to shift or change anything that we have, actually this is impossible, we can not shift or change anything! What we need to do is learn to settle down with what we already have and whether this is a boon or a hindrance is up to you. Through this process of settling down we receive what we already have, fully. If this is received as a gift or if this is received as a hindrance is up to you. Its an indication of the depth of your practice when you can receive all these gifts without discrimination.

When duality drops then your practice is naturally undefiled. Undefiled or purity in Buddhist terms means non dual. If you engage in dualistic practice, if you try to change yourself because you dont like this or you want to throw that away and get some thing else then that is dualistic practice, that is defiled practice. That kind of practice only leads into a karmic cycle you never settle, you are just wandering all over but if we learn to practice in undefiled ways from the beginning, in other words, to take everything as it comes and to settle there and through that process to learn about yourself and to illuminate that light that shines in yourself then the darker spots start to shine and become clearer and once things become clearer wisdom arises. So, in other words, there is no wisdom if you dont have delusions or confusions. Theres no light if there isnt darkness. Theres no awakening if there isnt any darkness. From the darkness the whole world appears. We are fortunate to have this kind of practice because as an adult human we have developed deep ignorance and through clarifying this ignorance and learning about ourselves we have the opportunity to practice this process of awakening. This is what we mean by a spiritual path, a spiritual awakening.

So from the beginning practice should be based on this awakening, this process of awakening. Dogen Zenji calls this the practice of enlightenment so from the beginning you have to put your own feet in the shoes of the Buddha. It may be that in the beginning the shoes are too big, your feet seem so small and its hard to feel if practice is going well or not going well or not but through this process through practicing the practice of enlightenment reality becomes defined.

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