

## On Wanshi's 'Kindly Advice for Doing Seated Meditation'

(*Zazen Shin*)

**Translator's Introduction:** In this discourse Dōgen uses the term *zazen shin* in two different senses. The first is given as the title of this discourse and is the name for a poem by Meditation Master Wanshi that Dōgen quotes near the end of this work. The second sense is found at the very end of this discourse in the title of a poem by Dōgen, *The Needle of Seated Meditation*, which is based on Wanshi's poem. Dōgen's poem refers to the use of seated meditation to spur one on and to help trainees unblock themselves spiritually, just as an acupuncture needle would unblock them physically.

The word *zazen* is used by Dōgen in this discourse for two different states. The first refers to 'sitting in meditation', that is, physically sitting down in order to practice meditation. The second refers to 'seated meditation', that is, being spiritually centered no matter where one is or what one is doing, neither pushing away nor denying anything as it arises, nor clinging to anything, including some specific form of meditating. To truly do seated meditation is to be, as Dōgen says, seated Buddha.

*At Kannonōri, Kōshōhōrin-ji Temple.*

Right after Great Master Yakusan Igen had finished a period of meditation,<sup>1</sup> a certain monk asked him, "As you were sitting there all still and awesome like a mountain, what was it that you were thinking about?"

The Master answered, "What I was thinking about was based on not deliberately thinking about any particular thing."

The monk then asked, "How can what anyone is thinking about be based on not deliberately thinking about something?"

The Master replied, "It is a matter of 'what I am thinking about' not being the point."

Having heard about this state described by Great Master Yakusan, we need to investigate through our training what 'sitting as still as a mountain' means and directly Transmit this, for this is how the thorough exploration of sitting as still as a

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1. Yakusan would have been sitting together with his community of monks in the Meditation Hall.

mountain is passed on through the words and ways of Buddhas. Even though it is said that the way in which Buddhas think about things while being all still and awesome like a mountain differs, Yakusan's way of putting it is certainly one way among them. It is his 'thinking about' not being based on deliberately thinking about any particular thing. It includes 'thinking about' as his Skin and Flesh, Bones and Marrow, and it includes 'not thinking about' as his Skin and Flesh, Bones and Marrow.

The monk asked, "How can what anyone is thinking about be based on not deliberately thinking about something?"

Even though the condition of not thinking about anything in particular is of ancient vintage, how can one possibly think about it? How can thinking not go on while sitting ever so still, and why did the monk not pierce through to what goes above and beyond simply being ever so still? Had he not been as befuddled as some are in our more recent, degenerate times, he would have had the ability to persist in his inquiry into being ever so still.

The Master replied, "It is a matter of 'what I am thinking about' not being the point."

Even though his statement, "It is a matter of 'what I am thinking about' not being the point," is a gem of clarity, in our consideration of the condition of not deliberately thinking about anything in particular, we invariably employ what he described as "'what I am thinking about' not being the point." There is a someone involved in not deliberately trying to think about something, and that someone is maintaining and supporting an I. Even though being ever so still is synonymous with that I, meditation is not merely an I thinking about something; it is the I offering up its being as still and awesome as a mountain.<sup>2</sup> Even though its being ever so still is being ever so still, how can its being ever so still possibly think about being ever so still?

As a consequence, being as still as a mountain is beyond the considerations of Buddhas, beyond the considerations of Dharma, beyond the considerations of having awakened, and beyond the considerations of intellectual understanding. The Matter\* that Yakusan has directly Transmitted one-to-one in this way has been handed down for thirty-six generations, descending directly from Shakyamuni Buddha, and from Yakusan to Shakyamuni Buddha, there are thirty-six

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2. The 'I' to which Dōgen is referring here is not the egoistic false self, but a natural function of the right effort of sitting still.

\* See *Glossary*.

generations.<sup>3</sup> The practice of not thinking about anything in particular has been directly Transmitted in this manner.

Despite all this, there has been befuddled and unreliable talk in recent years, saying that if a person can fully eliminate all thoughts by devotedly sitting in meditation, this is the basis for true stillness.<sup>4</sup> This viewpoint does not even come up to that of scholars who study the Lesser Course.\* It is even inferior to the paths that the common and lofty people pursue, so how can we possibly speak of such befuddled people as folks who are exploring the Buddha Dharma? In modern-day Great Sung China, people devoted to such ways are numerous, which, lamentably, will be the destruction and ruin of the Way of the Ancestors.

Also, there is a type of person among the Chinese who says, “Doing one’s utmost to sit in meditation is the essential practice, whether as a beginner or as someone who has come to training late in life.” But this is not necessarily the daily behavior of the Buddhas and Ancestors. Actively walking about, as well as sitting, was Their meditation practice. Their body was quiet and tranquil whether They were speaking or silent, moving about or inactive, so don’t you depend solely upon that method just now quoted. Many of the folks who call themselves followers of Rinzai are of that limited view. Someone has been remiss in passing on to them the awakened life of the Buddha Dharma, and so they speak in that way. What is a ‘beginner’? What person is not a beginner? And where do such folks find a beginner’s attitude of mind?

Keep in mind that, in our thorough investigation of what has been established for exploring the Way, we do our utmost to put our seated meditation into practice. This practice has, as its main point, our “acting as a Buddha without pursuing ‘becoming a Buddha.’”<sup>5</sup> Moreover, because ‘acting as a Buddha’ is beyond ‘becoming a Buddha’, our spiritual question manifests before our very eyes. Again, our emulation of Buddha is beyond becoming a Buddha, so that when we break up the nets and cages that confine us, our sitting like a Buddha sits does not hinder our becoming a Buddha. Right at such a moment of sitting still, there is the strength that has been present for thousands of times, nay, for tens of thousands of times, to enter into being either a Buddha or a demon. And our stepping forward

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3. That is, when we look forward from Shakyamuni, Yakusan is an Ancestor, and when we look back to Shakyamuni from our present position, Yakusan is a Buddha.
  4. That is, such befuddled persons take ‘blissing out’ to be the true goal of meditation.
  5. ‘Acting as a Buddha’ implies living one’s daily life in accord with the Precepts and as a moment-by-moment meditation, without adding some goal like ‘becoming a Buddha’.

or stepping back is intimately connected with our capability to fill in the ditches, even to fill in the valleys.



While Baso Dōitsu was training under Meditation Master Nangaku Ejō, he privately received the Mind seal.\* One day while Baso was sitting in meditation, Nangaku came to where he was and asked him, “O great virtuous one, what is the aim of your sitting in meditation?”<sup>6</sup>

This question needs to be calmly, yet diligently, investigated, because we need to look in detail at what Nangaku might be asking. Does he have in mind that there is something above and beyond sitting in meditation? Or has there never been a practice that can be considered as more special than sitting in meditation? Or should we not aim at anything at all? Or, is he asking Baso whether some goal has manifested from his sitting in meditation at the present time? We should desire the True Dragon more than we desire the carved dragon. And we need to learn that both the carved dragon and the True Dragon possess the ability to summon up clouds and rain.<sup>7</sup> Do not esteem what is far off, and do not belittle what is far off; just acquaint yourself with what is far off. Do not belittle what is near at hand, and do not esteem what is near at hand; just acquaint yourself with what is near at hand. Do not treat your eyes lightly, and do not attach great importance to your eyes. And do not attach great importance to your ears, and do not treat your ears lightly. Just make your ears and your eyes sharp and clear.<sup>8</sup>

Baso responded, “My aim is to become a Buddha.”

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6. As other accounts of this kōan story make clear, the incident took place some considerable time after Baso had had a kenshō and had been Transmitted by Nangaku. During this interval, Baso had sat in his hut doing his meditation day after day regardless of the weather, even to the point of sitting in the deep snow that covered the floor of his hut.
  7. The allusion is probably to the story of a Chinese artist who was so skilled at fashioning carved dragons that they could summon up clouds and rain. One day, a real dragon showed up in his studio and the experience totally overwhelmed him. The carved dragon referred to here is an analogy for the skilled practice of sitting in meditation, whereas the appearance of the True Dragon would be associated with experiencing a kenshō, which goes beyond any notions one may have of what a kenshō really is.
  8. The eyes are associated with clearly seeing the way things are, whereas the ears are associated with accurately understanding what things truly are.

We need to arrive at a clear understanding of what Baso is saying here. When he speaks of becoming a Buddha, what exactly does he mean? Is he asserting that becoming a Buddha means being made into a Buddha by a Buddha? Or is he asserting that becoming a Buddha means making a Buddha into a Buddha? Or is he asserting that becoming a Buddha is the emergence of one or two aspects of a Buddha? Is his aiming to become a Buddha the result of his having dropped off body and mind, or is his aiming at becoming a Buddha itself the dropping off of his body and mind? Or is he asserting that aiming at becoming a Buddha is tangled up with one's aims, despite the fact that becoming a Buddha applies to all things?

Keep in mind that what Baso is saying is that his sitting in meditation is certainly done with the goal of becoming a Buddha, and that his sitting in meditation is certainly done with the wish to become a Buddha. Such a wish can precede becoming a Buddha, and it can arise after becoming a Buddha, and it can arise at the very moment of becoming a Buddha. To question a bit further, how many instances of becoming a Buddha has this single wish entangled? And this entanglement can become entwined with other entanglements. At such a time, the entanglements involved in cases of completely becoming a Buddha are, beyond doubt, directly related to 'completely becoming a Buddha', and, in every single case, they are due to having a goal. We should not try to avoid having a purpose. When we try to avoid having a purpose, we grieve for ourselves and lose our very life, and when we grieve for ourselves and lose our very life, it is due to our entanglement with having a goal.

Thereupon, Nangaku picked up a roof tile and began rubbing it on a rock. Seeing this, Baso asked him, "Reverend Master, what are you doing that for?"

Truly, who would fail to see that he was polishing a tile? Even so, the question meant, "What are you going to make from polishing a tile in that way?" What he is going to make is undoubtedly a polished tile. Here and in other worlds—different though they may be—Nangaku's polishing a tile will have a significance that will never cease. It is not simply a matter of taking one's own personal view not to be a personal view: we positively ascertain that there is a purpose to all our myriad activities which we need to explore through our training and practice. Keep in mind that, just as we might not recognize or understand a Buddha when we encounter a Buddha, so when we encounter the Water we may not recognize It, or when we see a 'mountain' we may not recognize it either. And jumping to the conclusion that there can be no pathway into the Dharma that is right before one's eyes is not the way to explore the Buddha Dharma.

Nangaku said, “I am polishing the tile to make it into a Mirror.”

We need to clarify the import of this statement. Nangaku undoubtedly has a reason for saying, “I am polishing the tile to make it into a Mirror,” for Baso’s spiritual question is fully manifesting and there cannot be false teaching. Even though a tile is a tile and a mirror is a mirror, keep in mind that there are ever so many factors involved when we strive to clarify Nangaku’s reason for polishing it. Both the Ancient Mirror and the Bright Mirror will be attained through polishing a tile to make a Mirror.<sup>9</sup> If we do not know that all such Mirrors come from polishing a tile, we will fail to grasp what the Buddha’s Ancestor was saying, we will not receive the benefit of what the Buddha’s Ancestor said, and we will not experience what the Buddha’s Ancestor breathed forth.

Baso then asked, “How can you possibly make a mirror by rubbing a tile?”

Truly it was the Iron Man polishing a tile,<sup>10</sup> without calling on the strength of anyone else, and, even so, polishing a tile does not make a mirror. Although he is just pointing to making a mirror, this pointing itself is the immediate making.<sup>11</sup>

Nangaku replied, “How can you possibly make yourself into a Buddha by sitting in meditation?”

It is evident that there is a reason for sitting in meditation other than ‘waiting to become a Buddha’: obviously, becoming a Buddha does not depend on sitting in meditation.

Baso asked, “Well, what then is the right way?”

Even though what is being said looks like an earnest question directly involving Baso at this very moment in time, it is also a question that refers to the way things are elsewhere at this very moment in time. For example, call to mind a time when a close friend encounters a close friend: his being my friend is also my being his friend. The “what?” of one and “the right way” of the other are the manifestations of both perspectives at the same time.<sup>12</sup>

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9. Dōgen explores this allusion in Discourse 19: On the Ancient Mirror (*Kokyō*).

10. The ‘Iron Man’ is a term used to portray the level of strength and determination one needs in order to be successful in one’s training.

11. That is, making a physical mirror takes time, whereas spiritually ‘making a mirror’ is instantaneous.

12. The ‘close friends’ are disciple and Master: when the disciple asks his or her spiritual question (the “what?”), the Master supplies the direction for the disciple to look in (the

Nangaku said, “It is like someone who has hitched up his cart. If the cart is not moving, is prodding the cart the right thing to do or is prodding the ox the right thing to do?”

Now then, as to his words “if the cart is not moving,” what does ‘the cart’s moving’ mean, and what does ‘the cart’s not moving’ mean? For instance, is the water’s flowing synonymous with the cart’s moving?<sup>13</sup> Is the water’s not flowing synonymous with the cart’s moving? We could say that flowing is the water’s not moving. It could even be that the water’s moving is beyond ‘flowing’. Thus, in our investigating his saying “if the cart is not moving,” even when there is ‘no movement’, we need to explore the Matter through our training with a Master, and even when there is not ‘no movement’, we still need to explore the Matter with a Master, because there will be a time for each situation. Nangaku’s words “if it is not moving” go beyond his having made a one-sided assertion that some thing is not moving.

In Nangaku’s saying “Is prodding the cart the right thing to do or is prodding the ox the right thing to do?” can there be both a prodding of the cart and a prodding of the ox? Will prodding the cart and prodding the ox be equivalent or not? There is no method for prodding a cart in the secular world. Although worldly people do not have a method for prodding their cart, we know that in the Buddha’s Way there is a method for prodding one’s cart: it is the very eyes of one’s spiritual exploration through training with one’s Master.

Even though we learn what methods there are for prodding a cart, they will not be the best ones for prodding an ox, a matter we should devote ourselves to examining in detail. Though methods for prodding an ox are common enough in the everyday world, we should ask about the Buddhist way of prodding an ox by exploring the Matter through our training with a Master. Is the ox we are prodding a water buffalo, or is it the Iron Ox, or is it an ox coated with mud? Will a riding crop be our prod, or will the whole universe be our prod, or will one’s whole heart and mind be our prod? Should we beat it till the Marrow gushes forth, or hit it with our Fist? There will be a Fist hitting a Fist and an Ox prodding an Ox.

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“right way”). Although this may appear as a sequence in a dialogue, according to Dōgen, the answer to the question of “what?” is the “What.”

13. Nangaku’s remark and Dōgen’s commentary on it are clearly not intended to be taken on a literal level, but to be viewed within the context of Buddhist training in meditation. One possible interpretation would equate the ox with the trainee’s will to train, the cart to his vehicle of training—namely, serene reflection meditation—and the water with what appears to be going on spiritually within his training.

Baso made no response to that last remark by Nangaku, something that we should not idly overlook. There was his casting aside the tile to catch a jewel: he was turning his head and changing his expression. Further, nothing and no one can rob him of his making no response.

Nangaku, again wishing to instruct him, said, “If, as you imply, you would explore ‘seated meditation’, explore ‘seated Buddha.’”

In exploring this statement through your training with a Master, you should, by all means, try to grasp what the pivotal moments were for the Ancestors in our lineage. If you do not know precisely what “explore ‘seated meditation’” means, well, Nangaku knew it as exploring ‘seated Buddha’. How could anyone possibly say that exploring ‘seated meditation’ is exploring ‘seated Buddha’ unless that person were a child or grandchild of a genuine heir? Truly, you need to recognize that a beginner’s meditation is their first time of doing seated meditation, and that one’s first time of doing seated meditation is the first instance of being seated Buddha.

To explain what ‘seated meditation’ meant, Nangaku said, “If you would explore what ‘seated meditation’ is, meditation is not simply a matter of sitting or lying down.”

What he is now saying is that seated meditation is doing seated meditation and is not a matter of, say, being physically seated or lying down.<sup>14</sup> Once we have received the direct, one-to-one Transmission that it is not a matter of sitting or lying down, our limitless acts of sitting and lying down are nevertheless what we are. What need do we have to search for whether our spiritual bloodline is within us or within someone else? Why get into discussions about delusion and enlightenment? Who would want to take up the matter of ‘how to cut off defiling passions by developing wise discernment’ merely as an intellectual pursuit?

Nangaku said, “When you would investigate ‘seated Buddha’, you need to know that Buddha is not some set form.”

When we want to express what this is getting at, this is the best way to do it. The fact that seated Buddha may manifest as one Buddha or as two Buddhas is because having no fixed form is one of Its glorious attributes. To state that Buddha has no fixed form is to state what the form of a Buddha is, and because a Buddha has no

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14. That is, the ‘seated’ in ‘seated meditation’ does not refer to a physical position during meditation but to a meditative state of mind. ‘Being seated or lying down’ implies all four of the modes of everyday human behavior: standing, moving, sitting, and lying down.



fixed form, it is difficult to avoid being seated Buddha. Thus, because the absence of any fixed form is one of Its glorious attributes, when you investigate doing seated meditation through practice, it is your being seated Buddha.

Who within the realm of non-abiding thoughts and things would choose not to be a Buddha, and who, pray, chooses to be a Buddha? By letting go of choosing before any choice arises, one becomes seated Buddha.

Nangaku said, “When you are seated Buddha, this then is your killing off ‘Buddha.’”<sup>15</sup>

In your exploring ‘seated Buddha’ through your training with a Master, there is the spiritually beneficial act of killing off ‘Buddha’. The very moment of our being seated Buddha is killing off ‘Buddha’. In our attempt to seek out the fine, distinguishing marks and brilliance from killing off ‘Buddha’, they will undoubtedly be due to our being seated Buddha. Although the term ‘to kill off’ may resemble the way we speak of killing in the world, it cannot really be the same. Also, you need to explore through your training the statement that seated Buddha is killing off ‘Buddha’ by asking what form this might take. Taking up the point that inherent within the spiritual activity of Buddha there is the killing off of ‘Buddha’, we need to explore through our training whether we ourselves have killed off our false self or have not yet killed off our false self.

“If you are clinging to some form of sitting, you will not arrive at the principle of killing off ‘Buddha.’”

‘Clinging to some form of sitting’ means throwing away and acting contrary to the aspect of being seated. This underlying principle, as Nangaku has already stated, is that when we are ‘practicing seated Buddha’, it is not possible for us not to cling to some form of being seated. Even though Nangaku’s saying ‘clinging to some form of sitting’ is a gem of clarity, when we do cling to some form of sitting, we will not arrive at the principle of killing off ‘Buddha’. To kill off ‘Buddha’ is what I call ‘the dropping off of body and mind’. Those who have not yet truly sat still do not possess this Teaching. This ‘dropping off’ is the moment of just sitting; it is the person who is just sitting; it is Buddha just sitting; it is learning seated Buddha. Sitting that is simply a person’s sitting down or reclining is not a Buddha’s just sitting. Even though a person’s sitting naturally resembles a seated Buddha or a Buddha sitting, there are those persons who are becoming Buddha and there are those persons who are engaged in ‘becoming a Buddha’. Even though there are

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15. “Killing off ‘Buddha’” would encompass dropping off any notion we might have of what Buddha really is.

people engaged in 'becoming a Buddha', not everyone has become a Buddha. A Buddha is not everyone, and because all Buddhas are not simply all people, a person is not necessarily a Buddha and a Buddha is not necessarily a person. The same holds true for being seated Buddha.

The same also holds true for Nangaku as an outstanding Master and Baso as a strong disciple. Baso is the one who realized 'becoming Buddha' by being 'seated Buddha'. Nangaku is the one who pointed to 'seated Buddha' for the sake of making a Buddha. In Nangaku's assembly, there was such marked devotion to effort, and in Yakusan's assembly, there was his Teaching concerning the nature of meditation. Keep in mind that Buddha after Buddha and Ancestor after Ancestor has taken being seated Buddha to be Their essential function, and They have wholeheartedly made use of this essential function. Those who have not used it are simply those who have not encountered it, not even in their dreams.

In broader terms, in both India and China, to say that the Buddha Dharma had been passed on invariably meant that seated Buddha had been passed on. This is because seated Buddha is the essential function. When the Buddha Dharma is not passed on, doing seated meditation is not passed on. What Successor after Successor has received is just this principle of doing seated meditation. Any who have not yet had this principle directly Transmitted to them are not Ancestors of the Buddha. Without illuminating this one Teaching, we will not illuminate the myriad Teachings or the myriad actions that They have taken. Whoever does not illuminate the myriad Teachings cannot be called clear and bright, and is not someone who has gained the Way, so how could such a one be an Ancestor of the Buddha either now or in the past? Therefore, we should have no doubt that the Ancestors of the Buddha have, without question, directly Transmitted, one-to-one, the practice of seated meditation.

To be illuminated by the radiance of the Buddhas and Ancestors is to devote ourselves to exploring through our training what this practice of seated meditation is. Befuddled people, misunderstanding what a Buddha's radiance is, wonder whether it could be like sunlight or moonlight, or like the play of light in a jewel, or even like the dancing of a flame. Sunlight and moonlight are merely karmic\* forms arising from the turning of the wheel within the six worlds of existence:\* they cannot compare with a Buddha's radiance. A Buddha's radiance is exhibited by accepting and keeping to a single verse of Scripture, by maintaining, supporting, guarding, and protecting a single Teaching, and by directly Transmitting, one-to-one, the practice of seated meditation. If people had never reached the point where they were illumined by His radiance, then maintaining and supporting this Teaching would not be possible, and no one would trust and accept It.



Thus, even in the past there were few people who recognized that to sit in meditation means doing seated meditation. On the mountains of present-day Great Sung China, many heads of top-ranking monasteries are ignorant of seated meditation and have not learned it. There are some who have a clear understanding of it, but they are few. In these temples, the times for sitting in meditation have always been set. And all the monks, from the Abbot on down, have taken sitting in meditation as a dutiful task. To spur their trainees on, they have advised them to sit in meditation. Yet those Abbots who have actually understood the practice are few. As a result, from past times to recent generations, there have been one or two veteran monks who have recorded their mottoes for sitting in meditation, one or two veteran monks who have compiled methods for sitting in meditation, and one or two veteran monks who have set down maxims for sitting in meditation. Yet among all their mottoes for sitting in meditation, nowhere are there any that we can adopt, as their methods for sitting in meditation are ill-informed in terms of their application to daily conduct. They have been set down by people who do not know seated meditation and to whom seated meditation has not been directly Transmitted, one-to-one. Their maxims for sitting in meditation are in the *Ching-te Era Record of the Transmission of the Lamp*, and their mottoes for sitting in meditation, among others, are in the *Chia-tai Era Record of the Lamp Whose Light Reaches Everywhere*. Even though these monks spent their whole lives making pilgrimages to Zen monasteries far and wide, how sad that they lacked the diligent effort to truly sit in meditation even once. To sit truly was not for them, and so their efforts did not lead them to encounter themselves. Their failure to truly sit in meditation was not due to any distaste for their body and mind, but to their unwillingness to make a genuine effort, so therefore they precipitously wandered off into delusion. The writings they have collected up are merely an outer show of 'coming back to the Source', or 'returning to the Origin', or convey useless methods for concentrating on one's breathing or for focusing on tranquility. These methods do not even approach the four steps of Tendai meditation: seeing into one's heart, training through meditation, taking delight in doing it, and putting it into one's daily practice. Nor do they approach the perspective of the ten bodhisattva\* stages leading to Buddhahood. So how could they possibly have received the direct, one-to-one Transmission of the seated meditation of Buddha after Buddha and Ancestor after Ancestor? Scribes in the Sung dynasty were wrong

to record such writings, and we present-day trainees should set them aside and not even look at them.<sup>16</sup>

Only the kindly advice for seated meditation compiled by Meditation Master Wanshi Shōgaku, the Abbot of Keitoku-ji Temple on Mount Tendō in Keigen Prefecture in Great Sung China, is the Teaching of a true Ancestor of the Buddha: it is the acupuncture needle of seated meditation and is right for realizing the Way. It alone has a radiance that lights up the inside and outside of the realms of thoughts and things. Wanshi is an Ancestor of the Buddha for past and present Ancestors of the Buddha. Earlier and later Buddhas have been spurred on by this needle of his. Ancestors of the present and Ancestors of the past have come forth from this needle. And here is this very needle of seated meditation.

***My Friendly Advice for Seated Meditation***

Compiled by Meditation Master Wanshi Shōgaku

*The important function for Buddha after Buddha  
And the pivotal moment for Ancestor after Ancestor  
Is to know It without 'stirring anything up'  
And to be illumined without setting up an opposite.*

*When one knows It without stirring anything up,  
Such knowing is naturally humble:  
When one is illumined without setting up an opposite,  
Such illumination is naturally subtle.*

*Since that knowing is naturally humble,  
There is never a discriminating thought:  
Since that illumination is naturally subtle  
There is never the least outward sign of It.*

*Since there is never a discriminating thought,  
That knowing is wondrous, with nothing left to be  
dealt with:  
Since there is never the least outward sign of It,  
That illumination is complete, with nothing left  
unrealized.*

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16. The works Dōgen is referring to all have the word *zazen* in their titles and might mislead his disciples to assume that 'seated meditation', as Dōgen is using the term, is what those works are talking about.

*The water is now so clear you can see to its depths,  
As fish swim by at their leisure:  
The sky is now so clear it is boundless,  
As birds fly off, leaving no trace.*

The point of this needle of seated meditation is the Great Function which manifests before our very eyes. It is our everyday behavior when we look beyond words and forms. It is our glimpsing That which existed 'before "father" and "mother" was born'.\* It is our seeing that it is good not to slander Ancestors of the Buddha. It is our never avoiding the chance to let go of self and to cast away body and mind. It is our having a head as large as a Buddha's seated upon the neck of an ordinary person.

*The important function for Buddha after Buddha*

Beyond doubt, Buddha after Buddha has treated Buddha after Buddha as the important function: when that important function has manifested, that is what seated meditation is.

*The pivotal moment for Ancestor after Ancestor*

My former Master went beyond using such words as these. The principle underlying this is just what 'Ancestor after Ancestor' means. It involves the Transmission of the Teaching and the Transmission of the robe. In general, every single instance of turning one's head and changing one's expression is what the essential function of Buddha after Buddha has been. And every single case of changing one's expression and turning one's head is what the pivotal moment has been for Ancestor after Ancestor.

*To know It without stirring anything up*

'To know' does not mean 'to perceive', for our perceptions are a small gauge of It. Nor is this the knowing associated with intellectual understanding, for intellectual understanding is but a mental construct. Hence, 'to know' is 'to not stir things up', for when we do not stir things up, we 'know'. Do not broadmindedly judge it to be something everyone knows and do not narrow-mindedly limit it to one's own personal knowledge. That phrase, 'not stirring things up', is equivalent to saying, "When clear-mindedness comes, be clear-minded, and when dark-mindedness comes, be dark-minded."<sup>17</sup> It is the same as saying, "By sitting, to break through the skin that our mother bore."

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17. 'Clear-mindedness' refers to those times when the darkness of ignorance has cleared away; 'dark-mindedness' refers to other times when we cannot see our way clearly.

*To be illumined without setting up an opposite*

This 'being illumined' is not the 'being illumined' associated with being completely out in the open, nor is it 'spiritual illumination'. Rather, it is our not setting up opposing conditions that constitutes being illumined. Illumination does not change into a condition, because conditions are the very things illumined. 'Not setting up opposites' means that, throughout the universe, there has never been anything hidden and that a shattered world does not stick out its head. It is what is humble, it is what is subtle, and it is what is beyond being interdependent or independent.

*Since that knowing is naturally humble,  
There is never a discriminating thought*

This means knowing what discriminating thinking is, without necessarily having to make use of some external assistance. This knowing is of a concrete form and that concrete form is of mountains and rivers. These mountains and rivers are humble. This humility is subtle. Our making use of this knowing is as lively and free-moving as fish swimming about in water. Our becoming a dragon does not depend on our being on one side of Emperor Yü's Gate or the other.<sup>18</sup> To straightaway employ even a single instance of this knowing is to make use of a pinch of the whole world with its mountains and rivers, and, exerting our whole strength, to know. If what we know lacks the familiarity of mountains and rivers, we will not have a single instance of true knowing or even half an understanding of It. We should not regret that discriminative wisdom has come to us late, since Buddha after Buddha has been fully manifested by means of it. 'There is never' means 'already'. 'Already' means 'discriminative wisdom has fully manifested'. Thus, 'there is never a discriminating thought' means that not even a single person has been encountered.<sup>19</sup>

*Since that illumination is naturally subtle  
There is never the least outward sign of It*

'The least' refers to 'the whole universe'. Even so, this illumination is naturally

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18. Emperor Yü's Gate—also known as the Dragon Gate—is a gorge on the Yangtze River. Legend has it that any fish swimming up through the gorge turns into a dragon. This was used as a metaphor for someone who succeeded in passing the difficult imperial civil service examination. To paraphrase Dōgen's remark, those who are truly doing seated meditation are 'seated Buddha', whether they realize it or not. They do not need to pass some examination to prove their being 'seated Buddha'.

19. That is, 'self and other' has been transcended.

subtle. This is why it is as if it had not yet come about. Do not doubt your eyes and do not trust your ears.<sup>20</sup> Clarify through direct experience what the Principle is that lies beyond deliberative thinking, and do not grab hold of some criterion of what It is by relying on how it is worded: this is what being illumined is. This is why there is no duality: this is why there is nothing to grab hold of. It is to say, in effect, “While keeping to the view that this experience is rare and relying on its being complete, I still harbor doubts.”<sup>21</sup>

*The water is now so clear you can see to its depths,  
As fish swim by at their leisure*

‘The Water is clear’ does not mean that the water connected with the sky is the Clear Water that one can see to Its very depths. Still less is the Water of ‘the Water is clear’ that which thoroughly cleanses things in the outer, material realm. The Water which is unbounded by any bank or shore, That is the immaculate Water which one penetrates to Its very depths. When fish swim by through this Water, there is nowhere that they may not go. Even though their swimming may progress for who knows how many myriad miles, It is immeasurable and It knows no limit. There is no bank to measure It by, and there is no space in which It floats. Being without a bottom to sink to, there is no one who can measure It. Even were one to discuss various ways of measuring It, It is simply the immaculate Water whose depths can be seen. The meritorious act of seated meditation is like this swimming of fish. Who can reckon what a thousand miles or ten thousand miles are? The action of going down to the very bottom is synonymous with our not trying to trace some bird’s trackless path.

*The sky is now so clear it is boundless,  
As birds fly off, leaving no trace*

‘The Sky is clear’ is something unconnected with the heavens. The emptiness connected with the heavens is not the Clear Sky. Even less does That which pervades everywhere—be it in this place or in that—refer to the clear sky. What is not hidden or revealed either inside or out is what ‘the Clear Sky’ is.

When birds fly through this Sky, this is just one method of ‘flying through the Sky’. The action of flying through the Sky is beyond anything we can measure. Flying through the Sky is the whole universe, because the whole universe is flying through the Sky. Even though we do not know what the extent of this flying is, in

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20. That is, do not doubt your direct experience of It and do not rely on your understanding of how someone else has described It.

21. That is, I doubt that I ‘know it all’.

asserting it with a statement that is beyond some form of reckoning, Wanshi asserted it as “flying off, leaving no trace.” It means “being able to go straight off, having no strings tying down one’s feet.”<sup>22</sup> When the Sky is flying off, the birds are also flying off. When the birds are flying off, the Sky too is flying off. Among the sayings which thoroughly explore ‘flying off’ is the one that says, “Only here do we exist.” This is the acupuncture needle of being ever so still. How many thousands of journeys have vied to tell us, “Only here do we exist?” This is Meditation Master Wanshi’s kindly advice for doing seated meditation.

Among the maxims for doing seated meditation by veteran monks over the generations, there have not been any like this one of his. If any stinking skin bags\* anywhere wished to state the Matter like this needle of seated meditation has, even if they exhausted their strength for one or two lifetimes, they would not be able to do so. Its likes are not to be seen anywhere today. Wanshi’s needle stands alone.

When my former Master was giving Teaching in the Lecture Hall, he would constantly be remarking, “My Old Buddha Wanshi!” He never spoke like this about anyone else. When we have the Eye to recognize ‘such a person’,\* we will also recognize the sound of an Ancestor of the Buddha. We need to remember that this Ancestor of the Buddha existed in Tōzan’s lineage.<sup>23</sup> It is now some eighty years since Meditation Master Wanshi’s death. Having encountered his kindly advice for doing seated meditation, I have compiled my own needle of seated meditation. It is now the eighteenth day of the third lunar month in the third year of the Ninji era (April 19, 1242). When I reckon the time from his death on the eighth day of the tenth lunar month in the twenty-seventh year of the Shōkō era (1157) to the present year, it is just short of eighty-five years. The needle of seated meditation that I have now compiled is as follows:

### ***The Needle of Seated Meditation***

*The important function for Buddha after Buddha  
And the pivotal moment for Ancestor after Ancestor  
Is to let It manifest without deliberately thinking about  
anything  
And to realize It without creating complications.*

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22. A quote from Master Tōzan, alluding to the practice of tying down the feet of captured birds to prevent their flying away.

23. Wanshi was a Dharma heir of Tanka Shijun, who was in Tōzan Ryōkai’s line. Dōgen’s Master was a direct descendant of Chōryō Seiryō, Tanka Shijun’s other Dharma heir.



*When one lets It manifest without thinking about anything,  
Such a manifestation is naturally close to us:  
When one realizes It without creating complications,  
Such a realization is naturally a direct experience.*

*When that manifestation is naturally close to us,  
There is not the least bit of defilement:  
When that realization is naturally a direct experience  
There is not the least difference between Host and guest.*

*When the closeness is without the least bit of defilement,  
That closeness is put aside and falls away:  
When one directly experiences that there is not the least  
distinction between Host and guest,  
Out of that experience come no set plans, as we diligently  
continue to train.*

*The water is so clear you can see down to the bottom,  
As fish swim by, just as fish do:  
The sky is now boundless, penetrating the heavens,  
As birds fly off, just as birds do.*

While Meditation Master Wanshi's advice for seated meditation is by no means incorrect, I just wanted to express the Matter in this way.

In sum, descendants of the Buddha's Ancestors need to explore through their training with their Master that seated meditation is undoubtedly the one Great Matter. This is the genuine seal that is Transmitted directly, one-to-one.

*Written down at Kōshōhōrin-ji Temple on the eighteenth day of the third lunar month in the third year of the Ninji era (April 19, 1242).*

*Given to the assembly at Kippō-ji Temple in Yoshida Prefecture, Etchū Province, during the winter of the eleventh month in the fourth year of the same era (December 1243).<sup>24</sup>*

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24. Dōgen's community was staying at Kippō-ji Temple while they were building Eihei-ji Temple.