

## On the Meditative State That Is the Lord of Meditative States

(*Zammai-ō Zammai*)

**Translator's Introduction:** A meditative state is a state of the mind in meditation. In this discourse, Dōgen explores the ultimate form of these meditative states, one that arises when one understands seated meditation as more than what the mind or body experiences during formal seated meditation.

Throughout this discourse he uses the term *kekkaфуza*, which is traditionally rendered as 'to sit in full lotus position', but such a translation is apt to be understood only on a literal, physical level. By contrast, when one's legs are folded into the lotus position, they indeed form a lotus, as the term implies. Hence one is, in effect, doing one's meditation while seated on a lotus. Iconographically, this is a traditional sitting place for Buddhas, and it is, more specifically, the meditation seat of Vairochana, the Cosmic Buddha, whom Scriptures describe as appearing atop Shakyamuni Buddha's head when He is doing seated meditation. Thus, to sit in meditation like Vairochana is to sit upon a lotus throne. This is true regardless of the physical posture of the body. To point to this non-physical aspect, the phrase *kekkaфуza* is rendered in the present translation as 'to sit as if sitting within a lotus blossom'.

Further, as Dōgen has pointed out already on a number of occasions, 'doing seated meditation' has a broader meaning than just doing formal meditation sittings. It also refers to maintaining the mind of meditation in whatever one does. Dōgen expresses this broader meaning in the course of this discourse.

Going beyond the whole universe at full speed and then living a valued and greatly honored life within the dwelling place of the Buddhas and Ancestors is what sitting as if sitting within a lotus blossom is all about. Leaping over the heads of non-Buddhists and gangs of bedevilers and then, within the inner chambers of the Buddhas and Ancestors, becoming someone who has realized the intent of the Buddha Dharma is what sitting as if sitting within a lotus blossom is all about. In order to go beyond the outermost limits, which is where the Buddhas and Ancestors are found, there is just this one method. Therefore, the Buddhas and Ancestors have engaged in this method without having any other practice.

By all means keep in mind that the universe of seated meditation is something a long way off from other universes. Having clarified this principle, the Buddhas and Ancestors have undertaken to do Their utmost to give rise to the intention to awaken, to do the training and practice, and to realize spiritual Wisdom

and the freedom of nirvana. At the very moment of sitting, you should thoroughly explore through your training whether the whole universe is that which is vertical or that which is horizontal.<sup>1</sup> At the very moment of sitting, just what is that ‘sitting’? Is it our mind doing somersaults? Or is it like a fish freely disporting in water? Or is it thinking about something? Or is it striving after something? Or not striving after anything? No, it is sitting within sitting, sitting within body and mind, dropping everything off within sitting and within body and mind, and just sitting! In this way, you need to thoroughly explore through your training the thousands of aspects, nay, the hundreds of thousands of aspects of just sitting. Your body should just sit as if you were sitting within a lotus blossom.



My late Master, an Old Buddha, once said:

Doing the practice of meditation is the dropping off of body and mind. To accomplish this, right off, is the purpose of seated meditation practice. “Just control yourself and sit there!”<sup>2</sup> You don’t have to offer incense, do prostrations, chant the name of Buddha, repent of anything, or read Scriptures.

It is clear that over the past four or five hundred years, only my late Master has scraped out the Eye of the Buddhas and Ancestors and just sat within this Eye. There have been few in China who stood head-and-shoulders with him. Few have clarified that ‘just sitting there’ was the method of the Buddha, whereas the Buddha Dharma is “Just sit there!” Even if some appear to understand physical sitting to be what the Buddha taught, they have not yet grasped that ‘sitting there’ means “Just sit there!”<sup>3</sup> Much less can they keep to and preserve the Buddha Dharma as the Buddha’s Teaching!

Hence, there is the mind’s just sitting there, which is not the same as the body’s just sitting there. And there is the body’s just sitting there, which is not the

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1. ‘Vertical’ refers to space, which at any given moment contains everything without anything being added or taken away, whereas ‘horizontal’ refers to time, which is the ever-changing flow of moments of now, wherein all is in constant flux. These two perspectives are explored in depth by Dōgen in Discourse 11: On ‘Just for the Time Being, Just for a While, For the Whole of Time is the Whole of Existence’ (*Uji*), which literally translates as ‘Existence and Time’.
  2. This is a translation of the oft-used Japanese term *shikan taza*.
  3. That is, neither trying to think nor trying not to think.

same as the mind's just sitting. There is 'just sitting there with body and mind having dropped off', which is not the same as 'just sitting in order to drop off body and mind'. To have already realized such a state is the perfect oneness of practice and understanding that the Buddhas and Ancestors have experienced. Maintain and safeguard your mind's functions of remembering, considering, and reflecting. Thoroughly explore through your training what mind, intent, and consciousness truly are.



Shakyamuni Buddha, in addressing His great assembly, once said:

If you sit as if sitting within a lotus blossom, you will experience a meditative state within your body and mind which will have such dignity and virtue that people will respect and venerate it. This meditative state will be like a sun illumining the whole world. It will eradicate sleepiness, laziness, and brooding from the mind. The body will become light, without creating a feeling of fatigue. And whatever arises as enlightenment will also be light and accommodating. Your sitting peacefully will be like a dragon's coiling up. Just seeing a picture of someone seated within a lotus blossom is enough to frighten the Lord of Demons, and how much more so, should he actually see someone who is experiencing the Truth whilst sitting peacefully without any agitation?

So, even the Lord of Demons is startled, troubled, and frightened when he encounters an illustration of someone seated within a lotus blossom.<sup>4</sup> How much more so were you to actually sit as if sitting within a lotus blossom, for the spiritual benefits from doing this cannot be measured. The joy and virtue of just sitting there on an everyday basis is beyond measure.



Shakyamuni Buddha, in addressing His great assembly, continued, saying, "This is why we sit as if sitting within a lotus blossom." The World-honored Tathagata then taught each of His disciples how they should sit in this way. Some non-Buddhists always stand on their tiptoes when seeking the Way, some always stand upright when seeking the Way, and some hike their feet up on their shoulders

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4. The Lord of Demons is often referred to as Māra and is the personification of the selfish self.

when seeking the Way. Confused and rigid minds like these sink into a sea of hindrances, their bodies knowing no tranquility. This is why the Buddha taught His disciples to sit as if sitting within a lotus blossom with their body upright. And why? Because when the body is upright, the mind is easy to set properly. When the body sits upright, the mind does not tire. Once the mind is regulated and its intent is proper, the mind is held to what is right before it. If the mind starts galloping off or becomes scattered, or if the body starts leaning or shifting about, sitting upright will remove these effects and bring you back. When you want to realize a meditative state and desire to enter into a meditative state, even if you are galloping off in all directions or are wildly scattered, sitting upright will bring all these completely back to normal. Doing the practice in this way lets you awaken to and enter the meditative state that is the lord of meditative states.

Be clear about this, sitting as if sitting within a lotus blossom is what the meditative state that is the lord of meditative states is; it is what entering into spiritual realization is. All meditative states are members of the family of the meditative state that is the lord. Sitting as if sitting within a lotus blossom means keeping your body upright, and keeping your mind upright, and keeping your body-and-mind upright, and keeping the Buddhas and Ancestors upright, and keeping your training and enlightenment upright, and keeping the crown of your head upright, and keeping the very pulse of your lifeblood upright.

Now, by forming a lotus with our human skin, flesh, bones, and marrow, we form a lotus within the meditative state that is the lord of meditative states. The World-honored One constantly maintained, and entrusted to us, the practice of sitting as if sitting within a lotus blossom, and Transmitted this ‘sitting as if sitting within a lotus blossom’ to His disciples, and had the practice of sitting as if sitting within a lotus blossom taught to ordinary people and to those in lofty positions. This is precisely what the Mind seal\* that the Seven Buddhas\* accurately Transmitted is.

Shakyamuni Buddha sat Himself under the Bodhi tree as if He were sitting within a lotus blossom as He let pass fifty small eons, then sixty eons, then immeasurable eons. Whether you sit as if sitting within a lotus blossom for three weeks or for a few hours, it is your turning of the wondrous Wheel of the Dharma and your lifelong edification of the Buddha. Further, when you do not flag or slacken, this will be your ‘yellowed scrolls with their red scroll rods’.<sup>5</sup> This is the

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\* See *Glossary*.

5. ‘Yellowed scrolls with their red scroll rods’ is a Buddhist reference to the Scriptures. It describes the form in which Scriptures were originally preserved.

occasion of Buddha meeting Buddha. This is the very moment when sentient beings become Buddhas.



After his arrival from the West, our First Chinese Ancestor, the Venerable Bodhidharma, sat as if he were sitting within a lotus blossom while facing a wall at Shōrin-ji Temple on a peak in the Sū mountain range for nine autumns. From that time up to this very day, the Eye atop the crown of his head has spread throughout the whole of China. The lifeblood of our First Ancestor is, simply, being seated as if sitting within a lotus blossom. Before our First Ancestor arrived in China, the people there had not yet heard of sitting as if sitting within a lotus blossom. They only learned about it after our First Ancestor came from the West.

As this is so, just control yourself and sit day and night as if you were sitting within a lotus blossom, for the whole of your life and for myriad lives to come, without leaving your monastery and without doing any other practice, for this is what the meditative state that is the lord of meditative states is.

*Delivered to the assembly at the Kippō-ji Temple in Echizen Province on the fifteenth day of the second lunar month in the second year of the Kangen era (March 25, 1244).*

*Written down in the quarters of the Abbot's assistant on the same mountain on the same night.*

*Ejō*

*Compared against the original and corrected on the first day of autumn in the first year of the Bun'ō era (August 9, 1260).*