

On the Model for Doing Meditation

(Zazengi)

To train under a Master is to do seated meditation. In doing seated meditation, a quiet place serves well. Spread out your meditation mat so that it lies thickly. Do not put it in a place that is windy or smoky, and do not expose it to rain or dew. Make the place where you sit secure for your body. There is the example from the past of Shakyamuni's sitting in a diamond-hard place under the Bodhi tree, seated upon a huge rock in the shape of a lotus, upon which He had spread out a thick cushion of dry grass. Your sitting place should be lit, without letting it be in the dark, day or night. Make 'warm in winter and cool in summer' your technique.

Set aside all involvements and give everything a rest. Do not think about what is good or what is bad. Do not exercise your discriminatory mind or weigh and judge your mind's remembrances, concepts, and reflections! Do not aim at becoming a Buddha, and drop off any concern with whether you are sitting or lying down. Eat and drink in moderation. Cherish the light of days and the dark of nights. Take to doing seated meditation as though you were extinguishing a fire upon your head. The Fifth Chinese Ancestor, Daiman Kōnin of Mount Ōbai, did not do anything particularly different: he just diligently did seated meditation.

When sitting in meditation, wear your kesa.* Spread out your mat and put your round cushion atop it. Do not sit in lotus position with the cushion supporting the whole of your legs, but put it well behind the back half of your legs. Consequently, the mat will be under your knees and thighs while the cushion will be under the base of your spine. This is the method for seated meditation that has been used by Buddha after Buddha and Ancestor after Ancestor.

Some people sit in the half lotus position and some sit in the full lotus position. When sitting in the full lotus position, we put the right foot atop the left thigh and the left foot atop the right thigh. The tips of our toes should line up

* See *Glossary*.

uniformly on our thighs and not lie unevenly. When sitting in half lotus position, we simply place our left foot on our right thigh.¹

We should drape our clothing in a loose-fitting manner, yet neatly. We place our right hand atop our left foot and our left hand atop our right hand. The tips of our two thumbs touch each other. Both hands are then held close to our body. The point at which the two thumbs touch should be placed opposite the navel.

You should sit with your body upright, that is, not leaning to the right, inclining to the left, bending forward, or arching back. You need to align your ears with your shoulders and your nose with your navel. Let your tongue rest in your mouth. Breathe through your nose. Your lips and teeth should be touching. Your eyes should remain open, but neither widely nor narrowly so.

With body and mind regulated in this manner, breathe out once. Sit with the stillness of a mountain, and let what you are thinking about be based on not deliberately trying to think about any particular thing. How can what anyone is thinking about be based on not deliberately thinking about something? Simply, by not making ‘what I am thinking about’ the point of your meditation. This, then, is the technique for doing seated meditation. Seated meditation is a practice and not something for intellectual study. It is the Dharma Gate to peace and joy. It is unstained training to realize the Truth.

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1. Readers who choose to follow Dōgen’s practice of sitting in full or half lotus are cautioned to alternate which leg is on top so as to avoid back problems that can develop over long-term practice. Also, to avoid putting injurious strain on the spine and knees, several other modes of sitting have developed in the Zen tradition, such as sitting in a chair or on a meditation bench. One may even meditate while lying down.