

ONE

Fukanzazengi

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(UNIVERSAL PROMOTION OF
THE PRINCIPLES OF ZAZEN)

Fukanzazengi is Dōgen’s first work. It was written in 1227, the year he returned from China. It is influenced by and in many ways resembles a number of similar tracts on zazen that existed in China, such as the one by tenth-century priest Chang-lu Tsung-tse. All are composed in a highly rhetorical, easily memorized style of Chinese prose.

Dōgen declares that he considered his master Ju-ching “the only person since the T’ang master Po-chang who truly understood the significance of zazen.” He praises Ju-ching for teaching that “sitting (zazen) is the Buddha Dharma and the Buddha Dharma is sitting.” *Fukanzazengi* is Dōgen’s first attempt to transmit this teaching to his countrymen.

Fukanzazengi has been recited at the regular night sitting and on other occasions in Sōtō Zen temples down through the centuries. Although it is not a part of the *Shōbōgenzō* collection, we have included it in the present book because of the important place it occupies in Dōgen’s Zen.

In *Fukanzazengi senjutsu yurai* [Reason for Composing *Fukanzazengi*], Dōgen explains why he wrote the work:

Since in Japan it has never been possible to learn about the “special transmission outside the scriptures” or the “treasure of the right Dharma eye,”

much less the principles of *zazen*, they are not transmitted here. So as soon as I returned home from the land of the Sung [China], and students began coming to me for instruction, I was obliged for their sakes to compile this work [*Fukanzazengi*] on the principles of *zazen*. Long ago, the Chinese Zen master Po-chang constructed a monastery with a hall set aside especially for *zazen* practice. In so doing he effectively transmitted the true style of the First Zen patriarch Bodhidharma. This style was distinct from the briars and brambles of word-attachment [of the Buddhist schools] that had preceded him. This is something that students should know and not be confused about.

There is a *Tso-ch'an i* (Japanese, *Zazengi*) by the priest Chang-lu Tsung-tse included in the *Ch'an-yüan ch'ing-kuei* [Pure Regulations for the Zen Gardens]. For the most part it follows Po-chang's original intent, but it also contains some additions made by Tsung-tse himself. This has resulted in errors of various kinds, as well as an overall lack of clarity. No one who does not already know the meaning behind the words can fully understand what he is trying to say. For that reason, I have now gathered together and written down the true principles of *zazen* that I learned [in Sung China] in hopes that they will transmit the inexpressible heart of the Buddha-patriarchs. (*Ōkubo*, vol. 2, 3–4)

A comparison of the *Fukanzazengi* with the *Tso-ch'an i* by Tsung-tse shows that while Dōgen often merely appropriated the text of the earlier work, he also changed and added portions to rectify what he regarded as mistakes or ambiguities in Tsung-tse's work.

FUKANZAZENGI

The Way is originally perfect and all-pervading. How could it be contingent upon practice and realization? The Dharma-vehicle is utterly free and untrammelled. What need is there for our concentrated effort? Indeed, the Whole Body is far beyond the world's dust. Who could believe in a means to brush it clean?¹ It is never apart from you right where you are. What use is there going off here and there to practice?

1. *The Whole Body* [of reality] (*tathatā*) refers to the totality of things in their suchness; the Buddha-nature. The world's "dust," giving rise to illusions, defiles the original purity of the Buddha-nature.

A means to brush it clean is an allusion to the famous verse contest by which the Sixth Zen Patriarch Hui-neng received the Dharma transmission from the Fifth Patriarch Hung-jen. The verse of Shen-hsiu, Hung-jen's chief disciple, was: "This body is the Bodhi tree; the mind like a bright mirror on a stand. Constantly strive to brush it clean. Do not allow dust to collect." Hui-neng responded with the verse: "Basically, Bodhi is not a tree. Neither does the mind-mirror have a stand. From the first there is not a single thing, so where can dust collect?" (*CTL*, ch. 5).

And yet if there is the slightest discrepancy, the Way is as distant as heaven from earth. If the least like or dislike arises, the mind is lost in confusion.² Suppose you gain pride of understanding, inflate your own achievement, glimpse the wisdom that runs through all things, attain the Way and clarify your mind, raising an aspiration to escalate the very sky. You are making an initial, partial excursion through the frontiers of the Dharma,³ but you are still deficient in the vital Way of total emancipation.

Look at the Buddha himself, who was possessed of great inborn knowledge—the influence of his six years of upright sitting is noticeable still. Or Bodhidharma, who transmitted the Buddha’s mind-seal—the fame of his nine years of wall sitting is celebrated to this day. Since this was the case with the saints of old, how can people today dispense with negotiation of the Way?

You should therefore cease from practice based on intellectual understanding, pursuing words and following after speech, and learn the backward step that turns your light inward to illuminate your self. Body and mind will drop away of themselves, and your original face will manifest itself. If you wish to attain suchness, you should practice suchness without delay.

For the practice of Zen, a quiet room is suitable. Eat and drink moderately. Cast aside all involvements, and cease all affairs. Do not think good, do not think bad. Do not administer pros and cons. Cease all the movements of the conscious mind, the gauging of all thoughts and views. Have no designs on becoming a Buddha. The practice of Zen (*sanzen*) has nothing whatever to do with the four bodily attitudes of moving, standing, sitting, or lying down.

At the place where you regularly sit, spread out a layer of thick matting and place a cushion on it. Sit either in the full-lotus or half-lotus posture. In the full-lotus posture, you first place your right foot on your left thigh and your left foot on your right thigh. In the half-lotus, you simply press your left foot against your right thigh. You should have your robes and belt loosely bound and arranged in order. Then place your right hand on your left leg and your left palm facing upwards on your right palm, thumb-tips touching. Sit upright in correct bodily posture, inclining neither to the left nor the right, leaning neither forward nor backward. Be sure your ears are on a plane with your shoulders and your nose in line with your navel. Place your tongue against the front roof

2. From the Zen verse *Hsinhsinming*: “If there is the slightest discrepancy, the Way is as distant as heaven from earth. To realize its manifestation, be neither for nor against. The conflict of likes and dislikes is in itself the disease of the mind. . . . Do not dwell in dualities, and scrupulously avoid pursuing the Way. If there is the least like or dislike, the mind is lost in confusion.”

3. Dharma (*hō 法*): Truth, Law, the doctrine and teaching of the Buddha, Buddhism. Through-out this translation, “Dharma” refers to Truth, and “dharma(s)” refers to things, the elements of existence, phenomena.

of your mouth, with teeth and lips both shut. Your eyes should always remain open. You should breathe gently through your nose.

Once you have adjusted yourself into this posture, take a deep breath, inhale, exhale, rock your body to the right and left, and settle into a steady, unmoving sitting position. Think of not-thinking. How do you think of not-thinking? Nonthinking.⁴ This in itself is the essential art of zazen.

The zazen I speak of is not learning meditation. It is simply the Dharmagate of repose and bliss. It is the practice-realization of totally culminated enlightenment. It is things as they are in suchness. No traps or snares can ever reach it. Once its heart is grasped, you are like the dragon when he reaches the water, like the tiger when he enters the mountain. You must know that when you are doing zazen, right there the authentic Dharma is manifesting itself, striking aside dullness and distraction from the first.

When you arise from sitting, move slowly and quietly, calmly and deliberately. Do not rise suddenly or abruptly. In surveying the past, we find that transcendence of ignorance and enlightenment, and dying while sitting or standing, have all depended entirely on the strength gained through zazen.⁵

Moreover, enlightenment brought on by the opportunity provided by a finger, a banner, a needle, or a mallet, the realization effected by the aid of a fly whisk, a fist, a staff, or a shout, cannot be fully comprehended by human discrimination.⁶ It cannot be fully known by the practice-realization of supernatural powers.⁷ It is activity beyond human hearing and seeing, a principle prior to human knowledge or perception.

4. These words appear in a dialogue that Dōgen makes the subject of *SBGZ Zazenshin*: A monk asked Yüeh-shan, "What does one think of when sitting motionlessly in zazen?" Yüeh-shan replied, "You think of not-thinking." "How do you think of not-thinking?" asked the monk. "Nonthinking," answered Yüeh-shan.

5. According to the Zen histories, Bodhidharma and the Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth Chinese patriarchs died while seated in zazen. The Third Patriarch died standing under a large tree.

6. These are allusions to the means that Zen masters use to bring students to enlightenment. Chü-chih's "One-finger Zen" is the subject of Case 3 of the *Wu-men-kuan*. When Ananda asked Kashyapa if the Buddha had transmitted anything to him besides the golden surplice, Kashyapa called out to him. When Ananda responded, Kashyapa told him to take down the banner at the gate, whereupon Ananda attained enlightenment. The Fifteenth Indian Zen Patriarch, Kanadeva, paid a visit to Nagarjuna. Nagarjuna, without saying a word, instructed an attendant to place a bowl brimming with water before his guest. Kanadeva took up a needle and dropped it into the bowl. As a result of this act, Nagarjuna accepted him as his disciple. One day when Shakyamuni ascended to the teaching-seat, the Bodhisattva Monju (Manjushri) rapped his gavel to signify the opening of the sermon, declaring, "Clearly understood is the Dharma, the royal Dharma. The Dharma, the royal Dharma, is thus," words usually uttered at the close of a sermon. Shakyamuni, without saying a word, left the teaching seat and retired.

7. The supernatural powers (*jinzū* 神通) are possessed by beings of exceptional spiritual attainment, enabling them unrestricted freedom of activity, eyes capable of seeing everywhere, ears of hearing all sounds, and so on. Dōgen says that the means used by a master in bringing

This being the case, intelligence, or lack of it, does not matter. No distinction exists between the dull and sharp-witted. If you concentrate your effort single-mindedly, you are thereby negotiating the Way with your practice-realization undefiled.⁸ As you proceed along the Way, you will attain a state of everydayness.⁹

The Buddha-mind seal, whose customs and traditions extend to all things, is found in both India and China, both in our own world and in other worlds as well. It is simply a matter of devotion to sitting, total commitment to immovable sitting. Although it is said that there are as many minds as there are people, all of them must negotiate the Way solely in zazen. Why leave behind your proper place, which exists right in your own home, and wander aimlessly off to the dusty realms of other lands?¹⁰ If you make even a single misstep, you stray from the Great Way lying directly before you.

You have gained the pivotal opportunity of human form. Do not let your time pass in vain. You are maintaining the essential function of the Buddha Way. Would you take meaningless delight in the spark from a flintstone?¹¹ Form and substance are like dewdrops on the grass, destiny like the dart of lightning—vanishing in an instant, disappearing in a flash.

Honored followers of Zen—you who have been long accustomed to groping for the elephant—please do not be suspicious of the true dragon.¹² Devote

students to enlightenment are not only beyond human thought, they are also beyond such super-normal powers. Moreover, there is nothing mysterious or supernatural about it; it is normal, everyday activity.

8. Since negotiating the Way (practice-realization) in zazen is practice-realization of ultimate reality, it is beyond all the defiling distinctions and dualities arising from conscious striving.

9. This is an allusion to a dialogue between Chao-chou and his master Nan-ch'üan. Chao-chou asked, "What is the Way?" Nan-ch'üan said, "Your everyday mind, that is the Way." "Well, does one proceed along it, or not?" asked Chao-chou. "Once you think about going forward, you go wrong," replied Nan-ch'üan (CTL, ch. 8).

10. An allusion to the parable of the lost son from the *Lotus Sutra*. An only son left his home and family to live in a distant land. He experienced great hardship, totally unaware of the increasing wealth his father was accumulating in the meantime. Many years later, the son returned home and inherited the great treasure that was his original birthright.

11. *Spark from a flintstone* is a metaphor often used to describe the brevity of human life.

12. An allusion to the well-known story from the *Nirvana Sutra* of a king who brought an elephant before a group of blind men and had them touch different parts of it. When he asked each of them to describe the beast, they gave widely diverse answers due to the limited nature of their individual experiences.

The true dragon is an allusion to a story in the *Latter Han History* about a man named Yeh Kung-tzu who had a passion for dragons. He had paintings and carvings of dragons throughout his house. One day a real dragon, hearing about Yeh's obsession, descended from the sky to pay him a visit. It poked its head through Yeh's front window, scaring him witless. Dōgen is insinuating that the Japanese of his time, ignorant of the true Dharma, had acquired a passion for false teachings. He tells them that now that he has brought them the real Dharma, they should not doubt its truth.

your energy to a Way that points directly to suchness. Reverend the person of complete attainment beyond all human agency.¹³ Gain accord with the enlightenment of the Buddhas. Succeed to the legitimate lineage of the patriarchs' samadhi. Constantly comport yourselves in such a manner and you are assured of being a person such as they. Your treasure-store will open of itself, and you will use it at will.

13. Since zazen is the practice of total reality, everyone who engages in it is a "person of complete attainment beyond all human agency" (*zetsugaku mui nin* 絶学無為人), a descriptive phrase from the *Cheng-tao ko*.