

PART I

THE PRACTICE OF ZAZEN

"Zazen practice is the direct expression of our true nature. Strictly speaking, for a human being, there is no other practice than this practice; there is no other way of life than this way of life."

Posture

" These forms are not the means of obtaining the right state of mind. To take this posture is itself to have the right state of mind. There is no need to obtain some special state of mind. "

This morning I would like to talk about our ~~taizen~~ posture. When you sit in the full lotus position, your left foot is on your right side, and your right foot is on your left side. When we cross our legs like this, even though we have a right leg and a left leg, they have become one. The position expresses oneness of duality: not two, and not one. This is the most important teaching: not two, and not one. Our body and mind are not two and not one. If you think your body and mind are two, that is wrong; if you think that they are one, that is also wrong. Our body and mind are both two and one. We usually think that if something is not one, it is more than one; if it is not singular, it is plural. But in actual experience, our life is not only plural, but also singular. Each one of us is both dependent and independent.

After some years we will die. If we just think that it is the end of our life, this will be the wrong understanding. But if, on the other hand, we think that we do not die, this is also wrong. We die, and we do not die. This is the right understanding. Some people may say that our mind or soul exists forever, and it is only our physical body which dies. But this is not exactly right, because both mind and body have their end. But it is also true at the same time that they exist eternally. And even though we say mind and body, they are actually two sides of one coin. This

is the right understanding. So when we take this posture it symbolizes this truth. When I have the left foot on the right side of my body, and the right foot on the left side of my body, I don't know which is which. So either may be the left or the right side.

The most important thing in taking the zazen posture is to keep your spine straight. Your ears and your shoulders should be on one line. Drop your shoulders, and push up towards the ceiling with the back of your head. And you should pull your chin in. When your chin is tilted up, you have no strength in your posture; you are probably dreaming. Also to gain strength in your posture, press your diaphragm down towards your 'hara', or lower abdomen. This will help you maintain your physical and mental balance. When you try to keep this posture, at first you may find some difficulty breathing naturally, but when you get accustomed to it you will be able to breathe naturally and deeply.

Your hands should form the 'cosmic mudra'. If you put your left hand on top of the right, middle joints of your middle fingers together, and touch your thumbs lightly together, (as if you held a piece of paper between them), your hands will make a beautiful oval. You should keep this circle mudra with great care, as if you were holding something very precious in your hand. Your hands should be held against your body, with your thumbs at the height of the naval. Hold your arms freely and easily and slightly away from your body, as if you held an egg in each arm pit.

You should not be tilted sideways, backwards, or forewards. Your spine should be perfectly vertical. This is not just form. It expresses the key point of Buddhism.

This posture is the perfect expression of your Buddha nature. If you want true understanding of Buddhism, you should practice ^{IN A WAY} this practice. These forms are not the means of obtaining the right state of mind. To take this posture itself is the purpose of our practice. When you have this posture, you have the right state of mind, so there's no need to try to attain some special state. When you try to attain something, your mind starts to wander about somewhere else. When you do not try to attain anything, you have your own body and mind right here. A zen master will say, "Kill the Buddha!" Kill the Buddha if the Buddha exists somewhere else. Kill the Buddha, because you should resume to your own Buddha nature.

To do something is to express our own nature. We do not exist for the sake of something else. We exist for the sake of ourselves. This is the fundamental teaching expressed in the forms we observe. Just as for sitting, when we stand in the zendo we have some rules. But the purpose of these rules is not to make everyone the same, but to allow each to express his own self most freely. For instance, strictly speaking each one of us has his own way of standing. So our standing posture is based on the proportions of our own bodies. When you stand, your heels should be as far apart as the width of your own fist, your bigtoes inline with the center of your breasts. As in zazen, put some strength in your abdomen. Here also your hands should express yourself. Hold your left hand against your chest with fingers encircling your thumb, and put your right hand over it. Holding your thumb in this way, you feel as if you have some round pillar

here - a big round temple pillar. So you cannot be slumped or tilted to the side.

The most important point is to own your own physical body. If you slump, you will lose your self. Your mind will be wandering about somewhere else; you won't be in your body. This is not the way. We must exist right here ! Right now ! This is the key point. You must have your body and mind. Everything should exist in the right place, in the right way. Then there is no problem. If this microphone exists somewhere else, it won't serve its purpose. When we have our body and mind in order, everything else will exist in the right place, in the right way.

But usually, without being aware of it, we try to change something other than ourselves, we try to order things. But it is impossible to organize things if you yourself are not in order. When you do things in the right way, at the right time, everything else will be organized. When the boss is sleeping, everyone is sleeping. When the boss does something right, everyone will do everything right, and at the right time. That is the secret of Buddhism.

So try always to keep the right posture, not only when you practice zazen, but in all your activities. Take the right posture when you are driving your car, and when you are reading. If you read in a slumped position, you cannot stay awake long. Try. You will discover how important it is to keep the right posture. This is the true teaching. The teaching which is written on paper is not the true teaching. It is a kind of food for your brain. Written teaching is a kind of food for your brain. Of

course it is necessary to take some food for your brain, but it is more important to be yourself by practicing the right way of life.

That is why Buddha could not accept the religion existing at his time. He studied many religions, but he could not be satisfied with their practices. He could not find the answer in their asceticism or in their philosophies. He was not interested in some metaphysical existence, but in his own body and mind, here and now. And when he found himself, he found that everything that exists has Buddha nature. That was his enlightenment. Enlightenment is not some good feeling, or some particular state of mind. You must believe that the state of mind that exists when you sit in the right posture is, itself, enlightenment. If you cannot be satisfied with the state of mind you have in zazen, it means your mind is still wandering about. Our body and mind should not be wobbling or wandering about. In this posture there is no need to talk about the right state of mind. You already have it. This is the conclusion of Buddhism.