

## A few views around *shikantaza*.

Zazen is fundamentally a useless and pointless activity.

*Zoketsu Norman Fischer*

One way to categorize the meditation practice of shikantaza, or “just sitting,” is as an objectless meditation. This is a definition in terms of what it is not. One just sits, not concentrating on any particular object of awareness, unlike most traditional meditation practices, Buddhist and non-Buddhist, that involve intent focus on a particular object. Such objects traditionally have included colored disks, candle flames, various aspects of breath, incantations, ambient sound, physical sensations or postures, spiritual figures, mandalas, teaching stories, or key phrases from such stories. Some of these concentration practices are in the background of the shikantaza practice tradition, or have been included with shikantaza in its actual lived experience by practitioners.

But objectless meditation focuses on clear, nonjudgmental, panoramic attention to all of the myriad arising phenomena in the present experience. Such objectless meditation is a potential universally available to conscious beings, and has been expressed at various times in history. This just sitting is not a meditation technique or practice, or any thing at all. “Just sitting” is a verb rather than a noun, the dynamic activity of being fully present.

... it is objectless not only in terms of letting go of concentration objects, but also in the sense of avoiding any specific, limited goals or objectives... just sitting is not a technique or a means to some resulting higher state of consciousness, or any particular state of being...

... [for Dogen] simply just sitting is expressed as concentration on the self in its most delightful wholeness, in total inclusive interconnection with all of phenomena...

*Taigen Dan Leighton*

Jap. Lit. “nothing but (*shikan*) precisely (*ta*) sitting (*za*)”; a form of the practice of *zazen* in which there are no more supportive techniques of the type beginners use, such as counting the breath or a *koan*. According to Dogen-Zenji, *shikantaza*—i.e., resting in a state of brightly alert attention that is free of thoughts, directed to no object, and attached to no particular content—is the highest or purest form of *zazen*, *zazen* as it was practiced by all buddhas of the past.

*Shambhala Dictionary of Buddhism and Zen*

The prototype for the unity of practice and enlightenment, as all Dogen students know, is “zazen-only” (*shikan taza*). In a nutshell, it consists of four aspects: (1) It is that seated meditation which is objectless, imageless, themeless, with no internal or external devices or supports, and is nonconcentrative, decentered, and open-ended. Yet it is a heightened, sustained, and total awareness of the self and the world. (2) It seeks no attainment whatsoever, be it enlightenment, an extraordinary religious experience, supernormal powers, or buddhahood, and accordingly, is non-teleological [lacks “purposeful development towards a final end”] and simply ordinary. (3) It is “the body and mind cast off” (*shinjin datsuraku*) as the state of ultimate freedom, also called “the *samadhi* of self-fulfilling activity” (*jijuyu zammai*). And (4) it requires single-minded earnestness, resolve, and urgency on the part of the meditator.

*Hee-Jin Kim*

For Dogen, seated meditation, or *zazen*, was the very essence of the Buddhist religion... the practice of this *zazen* was not simply an important aid to, nor even a necessary condition for, enlightenment and liberation; it was in itself sufficient: it was enough, he said, “just to sit” (*shikan taza*), without resort to the myriad subsidiary exercises of Buddhist spiritual life. Indeed (at least when rightly practiced) *zazen* was itself enlightenment and liberation: it was the ultimate cognition, the state he called

“nonthinking” (*hi shiryo*) that revealed the final reality of things; it was the mystic apotheosis [exalted or glorified example], the “sloughing off of body and mind” (*shinjin datsuraku*), as he said, that released man into this reality. Such practice, then (at least when rightly understood) was its own end, as much the expression as it was the cause of transcendence: it was “practice based on enlightenment” (*shojo no shu*); it was the activity of buddhahood itself (*butsugyo*). As such, this was, ultimately speaking, no mere human exercise: it was participation in the primordial ascesis (*gyoji*, continuous practice) of being itself, that which brought forth matter and mind, heaven and earth, the sun, moon, stars, and constellations.

... For Menzan [1683-1769, “the chief architect of modern Soto dogmatics”] and his church, Dogen’s zazen is like no other: it is the practice of “nonthinking,” a subtle state beyond either thinking or not thinking and distinct from traditional Buddhist psychological exercises of concentration and contemplation; it is “just sitting,” a practice in which... all striving for religious experience, all expectations of *satori*, is left behind. This zazen is nothing but “the mystic practice of original verification” (*honsho myoshu*), through which from the very start one directly experiences the ultimate nature of mind.

*Carl Bielefeldt*

Shikantaza... is the mind of somebody facing death. Let us imagine that you are engaged in a duel of swordsmanship of the kind that used to take place in ancient Japan. As you face your opponent you are unceasingly watchful, set, ready. Were you to relax your vigilance even momentarily, you would be cut down instantly. A crowd gathers to see the fight. Since you are not blind you see them from the corner of your eye, and since you are not deaf you hear them. But not for an instant is your mind captured by these impressions.

When you thoroughly practice shikantaza you will *sweat*—even in the winter... Sit with such intensely heightened concentration, patience, and alertness that is someone were to touch you while you are sitting, there would be an electric spark! Sitting thus, you return naturally to the original Buddha, the very nature of your being.

*Hakuun Ryoko Yasutani*

*Shikan* is translated as wholeheartedness, which seems to be sort of a psychological state or pattern. But shikan is not a psychological pattern. Shikan is exactly becoming one with the process itself. Literally, *za* of *taza* is *zazen*, and *ta* means to hit; so, from moment to moment, we have to hit the bull’s-eye of *zazen* itself. This is not a technique... Shikan is exactly *taza*—full devotion to *zazen* itself, that is, to the process itself and not to a concept.

*Dainin Katagiri*

The style of meditation called “silent illumination” [Ch. *mozhao*, Jap. *mokusho*; the early Caodong/Soto meditation practice that Rujing and Dogen came to call shikantaza] is one of the great practices of the Chan tradition... This practice originated in India, where it was called *shamtatha-vipashyana*, or serenity-insight. The aim of this practice is a mind unburdened with thoughts. This leads the mind to profound awareness about its own state...

Silent illumination is a very peaceful style of meditation in which there is not one thought, yet your mind is extremely clear. I use three phases to describe this state: first, “bright and open”; second, “no scattered thoughts”; and third, “not one thought.”

When the mind drops all use of words, it becomes bright and open; this is the first characteristic. Next, “no scattered thoughts” refers to single-mindedness—total concentration on the method. But when you finally forget the method itself, and no one thought remains, that is genuine serenity. Ultimately, Silent Illumination is the method of no method... Silent illumination is just dropping all thoughts and words and going directly to the state of Chan.

I do not recommend this method to people too often... You can be just idling, having very subtle thought, and believe you are practicing Silent Illumination. You can be silent without illuminating anything.

*Sheng Yen*

[Shikantaza—just sitting] is zazen based fundamentally on faith—faith in the Buddha’s enlightenment, faith in one’s own buddha nature, faith in the process of practice itself...

... Unfortunately... shikantaza became identified exclusively with the Soto School, while koans were thought to be used only by those in the Rinzai School of Zen. This simplistic view, however, can be easily refuted by the fact that Hongzhi was also the compiler of the *Book of Equanimity*... while Dogen himself collected three hundred koans in his Chinese *Shobogenzo*... Furthermore, after students finish koan study, they then take up the practice of shikantaza. So it is obvious that practitioners in either one of these schools make use of both sitting techniques during the course of their training.

... On the one hand, koans harness doubts so we can smash through our conditioned way of thinking. On the other hand, shikantaza is based on our own faith that practice and enlightenment are one. Koans can be seen and passed through, but shikantaza cannot be gauged by any standard. Students who do shikantaza and ask, “Where am I? How far am I from realization?” miss the vital point of shikantaza... For students working on koans... I need to speak about kensho... but when I mention breakthrough, all the shikantaza people say, “When am I going to see it?” Shikantaza can’t be measured the same way, but this doesn’t mean that one technique is better than the other.

*John Daido Looi*

Suzuki Roshi always talked about shikantaza as one’s day-to-day, moment-to-moment life of selflessness...

Suzuki Roshi’s simple day-to-day activities—the way he would sit down and stand up, eat his dinner, walk, put on his sandals—this was his expression of shikantaza. Everyday activity with no selfishness—just doing the thing for the thing—this was his shikantaza. We usually say that shikantaza means “just sitting.” And that’s true. Just putting on your shoes, too. But this “just” has a special meaning. It means “without going any further” or “without adding anything extra.”

... But the shikantaza, or the “just doing,” is the selfless activity of just doing *within* the dream...

I think about shikantaza as a state in which our thought and our activity have no gap...

*Sojun Mel Weitsman*

The teaching of thusness has been intimately communicated by buddhas and ancestors. The meaning of this practice of suchness is not in words, and yet it responds to our energy, it responds to our effort. It comes forth and meets us. We sit here and the blue jays sing it to us, the stream sings it to us, because we come and listen. This is our practice of sitting, just sitting. It is a themeless meditation, a seamless meditation. It has no form, no beginning, and no end, and it pervades everything completely. It leaves no traces, and if I try to trace it, it’s not that I trace it, but that it generously and compassionately responds to my tracing, to my speaking, and to your listening...

When you’re just sitting, you can’t get a hold of anything, because you’re just sitting. You’re not sitting and getting a hold of something...

In the term shikantaza, the word *shikan* is sometimes translated as “just,” or “only.” *Ta* means “hit,” and *za* means “sit.” It literally means “hit sitting,” but the *ta* really intensifies “sitting.” So it means “sitting.” *Shikan* means “just,” but it also means “by all means do it,” or “get on with it.”...

*Tenshin Reb Anderson*

Neuroscientists use these words to describe what we call shikantaza: panoramic receptive non-judgmental attention. This is different than focused attention, which includes such practices as breath

meditation, where the attentional field is narrowed and "pointed" toward an object. Different parts of the brain are activated during these two types of meditation.

*Roshi Joan Halifax*

Some folks who say shikantaza is nothing in particular & can't be identified with any "state" that can be done right or wrong, and is not to be identified with concentration or samadhi – turn around and use wholeheartedness to mean a particular state of absorption or non-separation with the activity at hand. So instead of emphasizing a particular state of mind on the cushion, they kick it upstairs to a particular state of mind during activity.... You don't do that do you? How do you prevent your students from falling into this mistaken assumption?

Me, I just quote Woody Allen about showing up. If anxious, bow anxiously, if tired bow tired. Don't try to be "mindful" or anything else. Be what you are; stay aware of what/who you are moment to moment; just do it with the mind/body you already have....

*Barry Magid*

Katagiri used to say shikantaza isn't anything in particular and that also fits for the Soto school's lack of single view on the issue. Katagiri also called following the breath shikantaza but once I could follow the breath, told me to not attach to anything. At least several of his successors, though, just teach following the breath as shikantaza.

Dogen's brilliant reframe on this practice and reconstruction of the tradition was based on adding "wholeheartedness" which changed silent illumination into "earnest vivid sitting" (literal trans. of shikantaza).

RE: "wholeheartedness," what I encourage is full devotion to no particular thing. That's a little different from seeing wholeheartedness as a state. For one thing, I emphasize the "whole" and "heart" parts of wholehearted – nothing left out, including the flowing emotions. Nothing left out includes samadhi states, dhyanic states, and insight/realization as well. But like a falling maple leaf, showing front, showing back.

*Dosho Port*

In Barry Magid's e-mail he suggests that [wholehearted shikantaza] is nothing special, not doing anything extra on and off the cushion, no need to add the extra "wholehearted" involvement in what ever you're doing. Just do as you do. I wholeheartedly (or maybe "halfheartedly") agree. But I think we have to be careful not to make "not doing anything special" into something special, or "trying not to do anything extra" into a new spiritual endeavor.

Do we see this slipping through inadvertently in Barry's "not trying?" *"If anxious, bow anxiously, if tired bow tired. Don't try to be 'mindful' or anything else. Be what you are; stay aware of what/who you are moment to moment."*

Notice the "stay aware" that sneaks in. Is that different from being "mindful?" Is that an invitation to do something different than just being anxious without awareness? Do we even need to be aware? If we do need to be aware, what part of the anxiety should we be aware of, just a little, out of the corner of one's attention (halfheartedly) or with "wholeheartedness?" If we aren't aware, is there Zen? If we "try" to be aware is there Zen?

It also seems that "don't try" is to invite some sort of trying even though the trying is to not try. It is just as problematic to "not try" as to try and doing something.

The modern koan may go something like: If you try to do something in shikantaza you loose your life as it is right now. If you don't make some effort at awareness you continue in your samsara, not doing shikantaza. How do you do shikantaza?

*Larry Christensen*

I would say shikantaza is natural awareness as is (so that the just sitting is indeed “just” “sitting”). Awareness is being human, so there is not a need to “stay aware” (or a particular state that we need to add). Likewise, it is not a matter of making “effort at awareness.”

*Elihu Genmyo Smith*

When we sit facing the wall, there is nothing in front of us as object. There is only the wall. We have no object in our mind because we don't visualize anything, don't concentrate on a mantra, and don't pay any special attention to the breath. We just sit. Still many different kinds of thought come and go naturally. It is very clear that thoughts, emotions, and daydreams are illusions like bubbles rising in water. We let go of them. No clinging to them, chasing after them, or pushing them away. We really do nothing but sit.

This is what Dogen Zenji meant when he says, “thinking of not-thinking.” We cannot say that there is no thinking. And we cannot say that we are thinking. “Thinking of not-thinking is the precise expression of the reality of mind in zazen. It is like a car engine idling. When the transmission is in neutral, even though the engine is moving, the car does not move. Even though thoughts are coming and going, we take no action based on those thoughts. Thoughts are simply idling. We don't create karma. This is what Dogen Zenji meant in *Zuimonki* when he said zazen is the true form of the self and non-doing or not action...

In *Shobogenzo Zazenshin*, Dogen Zenji said, “In order to think (*shiryō*) of not-thinking (*fu-shiryō*), we use beyond-thinking (*hi-shiryō*). This means that what is happening in our zazen is not a matter of thinking or not-thinking. We “do” nothing; neither “to think” nor “not to think.” We put our entire self on the ground of beyond-thinking. On that ground, sometimes many thoughts come up, sometimes, no thoughts arise...

In our daily lives, we try to study from teachers and books to correct the distortions of self-centeredness. But in zazen we let go of all thoughts, even thoughts of making corrections...

Our practice of just sitting is the practice of the bodhisattva vows and repentance. Buddhas and ancestors' zazen is the vow to save all living beings...

*Shohaku Okumura*

Do not concentrate on any particular object or control your thought. When you maintain a proper posture and your breathing settles down, your mind will naturally become tranquil.

When various thoughts arise in your mind, do not become caught up by them or struggle with them; neither pursue nor try to escape from them. Just leave thoughts alone, allowing them to come up and go away freely. The essential thing in doing zazen is to awaken (*kakusoku*) from distraction and dullness, and return to the right posture moment by moment...

Dogen called his meditation practice *shikantaza*, which literally means “just sitting.” In *shikantaza* we sit without the koans used in Rinzai Zen. In our zazen, body and mind sit without any techniques—koans, mantras, visualizations, and so on. we find an upright posture, breathe through our nose quietly and deeply from our abdomen, and keep our eyes open. We let go of whatever thoughts arise within our mind. It is simply sitting upright without any expectation or gaining idea. Dogen's essential teaching is that practice and enlightenment are one. Practice is not a method to make a deluded person into an enlightened being. Practice without self-centeredness is itself enlightenment.

This kind of zazen practice teaches us to sit upright wherever we are. Sometimes our mind is calm and sometimes our mind is busy. Sometimes we feel peaceful, and sometimes we are in the midst of a storm. We neither cling to nor avoid any condition, but keep sitting in an upright posture. We try to live in this upright manner, not only in zazen but in our daily lives. When we deviate from uprightness, we are aware of it and return to it.

*Soto Zen Buddhism International Center (Sotoshu Shumicho)*

The zazen in which you do nothing is best. When we do something, it is usually a matter of being forced to do it by some demon.

What is the use of doing zazen? Zazen is good for nothing. Unless you hear more than enough of that, and you just do what is good for nothing wholeheartedly, your practice is really good for nothing.

*Homeless Kodo Sawaki*

In short, doing zazen is to stop doing anything, to face the wall, and to sit, just being yourself that is only the Self. While doing zazen we should refrain from doing anything, yet, being human, we begin to think; we engage in a dialogue with the thoughts in our mind. 'I should have sold it that time; no, I should have bought it', or 'I should have waited for a while.' If you are a stockbroker you will think like this.

If you are a young lover, you may find that your girlfriend inevitably appears all the time. If you are a mother-in-law who doesn't get along with your daughter-in-law, you will think only of your son's wife. Whatever situation you are involved, thoughts will arise of their own accord while you are doing zazen.

Once you realize that you are thinking when you are supposed to be doing nothing, and return to zazen, the thoughts which appeared as clearly before as if they were pictures on a TV. screen, disappear as suddenly as if you had switched off the TV. Only the wall is left in front of you. For an instant... this is it. This is zazen. Yet again thoughts arise by themselves. Again you return to zazen and they disappear. We simply repeat this; this is called kakusoku (awareness of Reality). The most important point is to repeat this kakusoku billions of times. This is how we should practice zazen.

If we practice in this way we cannot help but realize that our thoughts are really nothing but secretions of the brain. Just as our salivary glands secrete saliva, or as our stomachs secrete gastric juices, so our thoughts are nothing but secretions of the brain.

*Uchiyama Kosho*

We say our practice should be without gaining ideas, without any expectations, even of enlightenment. This does not mean, however, just to sit without any purpose. This practice free from gaining ideas is based on the *Prajnaparamita Sutra*. However, if you are not careful, the sutra itself will give you a gaining idea. It says, "form is emptiness and emptiness is form." But if you attach to that statement, you are liable to be involved in dualistic ideas: here is you, form, and here is emptiness, which you are trying to realize through your form. So "form is emptiness, and emptiness is form" is still dualistic. But fortunately our teaching goes on to say, "Form is form and emptiness is emptiness." Here there is no dualism.

When you find it difficult to stop your mind while you are sitting and when you are still trying to stop your mind, this is the stage of "form is emptiness and emptiness is form." But while you are practicing in the dualistic way, more and more you will have oneness with your goal. And when your practice becomes effortless, you can stop your mind. This is the stage of "form is form and emptiness is emptiness."

To stop your mind does not mean to stop the activities of mind. It means your mind pervades your whole body. Your mind follows your breathing. With your full mind you form the mudra in your hands. With your whole mind you sit with painful legs without being disturbed by them. This is to sit without any idea of gain...

Practice does not mean that whatever you do, even lying down, is zazen. When the restrictions you have do not limit you, this is what we mean by practice. When you say, "Whatever I do is Buddha nature, so it doesn't matter what I do, and there is no need to practice zazen," that is already dualistic understanding of our everyday life. If it really does not matter, there is no need for you even to say so. As long as you are concerned about what you do, that is dualistic. If you are not concerned about what you do, you will not say so. When you sit, you will sit. When you eat, you will eat. That is all. If you say, "It doesn't matter," it means that you are making some excuse to do something in your own way with

your small mind. It means you are attached to some particular thing or way. That is not what we mean when we say, “Just to sit is enough,” or “Whatever you do is zazen.” Of course whatever we do is zazen, but if so, there is no need to say it.

Strictly speaking, any effort we make is not good for our practice because it creates waves in our mind. It is impossible, however, to attain absolute calmness of our mind without any effort. We must make some effort, but we must forget ourselves in the effort we make. In this realm there is no subjectivity or objectivity. Our mind is just calm, without even any awareness. In this unawareness, every effort and every idea and thought will vanish. So it is necessary for us to encourage ourselves and to make an effort up to the last moment, when all effort disappears. You should keep your mind on your breathing until you are not aware of your breathing.

*Shunryu Suzuki*

... These sages universally maintain that absolute reality and the relative world are “not-two” (which is the meaning of “nondual”), much as a mirror and its reflections are not separate, or an ocean is one with its many waves. So the “other world” of Spirit and “this world” of separate phenomena are deeply and profoundly “not-two,” and this nonduality is a direct and immediate realization which occurs in certain meditative states—in other words, seen with the eye of contemplation—although it then becomes a very simple, very ordinary perception, whether you are meditating or not. Every single thing you perceive is the radiance of Spirit itself, so much so, that Spirit is not seen apart from that thing: the robin sings, and just that is it, nothing else. This becomes your constant realization, through all changes of state, very naturally, just so. And this releases you from the basic insanity of hiding from the Real.

But why is it, then, that we ordinarily don’t have that perception?

All the great Nondual wisdom traditions have given a fairly similar answer to that question. We don’t see that Spirit is fully and completely present right here, right now, because our awareness is clouded with some sort of avoidance. We do not want to be choicelessly aware of the present; rather, we want to run away from it, or run after it, or we want to change it, alter it, hate it, love it, loathe it, or in some way agitate to get ourselves into, or out of, it. We will do anything except come to rest in the pure Presence of the present. We will not rest with pure Presence; we want to be elsewhere, quickly. The Great Search is the game, in its endless forms...

... it becomes obvious that you are not entering this state, but rather, it is a state that, in some profound and mysterious way, has been your primordial condition from time immemorial. You have, in fact, never left this state for a second...

But if that is so, then why even do spiritual practice? Isn’t that just another form of the Great Search? Yes, actually, spiritual practice is a form of the Great Search, and as such, it is destined to fail. But that is exactly the point. You and I are already convinced that there are things that we need to do in order to realize Spirit. We feel that there are places that Spirit is not (namely, in me), and we are going to correct this state of affairs. Thus, we are already committed to the Great Search, and so nondual meditation makes use of the fact and engages us in the Great Search in a particular and somewhat sneaky fashion...

The essence of Dzogchen... in a nutshell: If Spirit has any meaning, it must be omnipresent, or all-pervading and all-encompassing. There can’t be a place Spirit is not, or it wouldn’t be infinite. Therefore, Spirit has to be completely present, right here, right now, in your own awareness. That is, your own present awareness, precisely as it is, without changing it or altering it in any way, is perfectly and completely permeated by Spirit.

Furthermore, it is not that Spirit is present but you need to be enlightened in order to see it. It is not that you are one with Spirit but just don’t know it yet. Because that would also imply that there is some place Spirit is not. No, according to Dzogchen, you are always already one with Spirit, and that

awareness is always already fully present, right now. You are looking directly at Spirit, with Spirit, in every act of awareness. There is nowhere Spirit is not.

Further, if Spirit has any meaning at all, then it must be eternal, or without beginning and end. If Spirit had a beginning in time, then it would be strictly temporal, it would not be timeless and eternal. And this means, as regards your own awareness, that you cannot become enlightened. You cannot attain enlightenment. If you could attain enlightenment, then that state would have a beginning in time, and so it would not be true enlightenment.

Rather, Spirit, and enlightenment, has to be something that you are fully aware of right now. *Something you are already looking at right now...*

Meditation rearranges the puzzle; Dzogchen doesn't touch a thing. Thus the pointing-out instructions usually begin, "Without correcting or modifying your present awareness in any way..."...

*Ken Wilber*

Some types of meditation are aimed at promoting a sense of confidence and well-being in everyday life, while other types focus on producing altered states of consciousness, transcending the world, or developing skills for serving other people. The instructions in this book [Minding Mind] focus on the highest type of all, "pure, clear meditation": a state of true objectivity that enables the practitioner to use all the other types of meditation freely and consciously, without becoming fixated or obsessed.

*Thomas Cleary*

There is nothing on my mind, no unrest. This is, this is to say there is no thing. Nothing on your mind means that you are holding on to nothing. Cleanly, sharply letting go, freshly breathing this breath. Nothing bring, nothing grasp. This is all that I can teach you. Of course, it's even better if you can come to me and say: "Even if I want to hold on to something, can't. Even if I wanted to grasp something, I can't." There is no grasping. But as long as you are holding on to the notion of me, the notion of I, the notion of mine, then you are most certainly holding something.

*Harada Tangen*

...sometimes called choiceless awareness. Once you have achieved a certain calm by following the breathing, you sit in the middle of your experience just as it is. You have no agenda regarding what to be mindful of, and you are not for or against whatever turns up.

I don't recommend this practice for beginners because it is too easy to fool yourself, to keep getting caught up in thought and believe you are practicing. But once the mind has learned to rest in the breathing and developed some stability, you open up the field to whatever is there. More and more you do less and less, until finally you're doing nothing...

The attitude to sit with is one of total receptivity and openness. You lay the calculating mind to rest and allow life to come to you, without reaching out for anything at all...

*Larry Rosenberg*

Some meditators... try to step immediately to the stage of non-fashioning without first having gained the inner sensitivity to cause and effect, action and non-action, that comes from developing concentration. In practice, though, this doesn't work. Only through that sensitivity can the basic causal relationships of dependent co-arising and this/that conditionality be discovered. This discovery is needed to give rise to a sense of dispassion, as one grows more and more disenchanted with the inconstant and artificial nature of all mental phenomena and develops a strong desire to gain release from them. It is also needed to uncover the precise point of non-fashioning between becoming and non-becoming where that release can be found.

*Thanissaro Bhikkhu*

In recent times, however, the Zen schools have been engaging in the practice of “silent illumination,” doing nothing but sitting lifelessly like wooden blocks. What, aside from that, do you suppose they consider their most urgent concern? Well, they whither on about being “men of nobility” who have “nothing at all to do.” They proceed to live up to that self-proclaimed role. Consuming lots of good rice. Passing day after day in a state of seated sleep...

*Hakuin Ekaku*

Please train yourself thus: In the seen, there will be just the seen. In the heard, there will be just the heard. In the sensed, there will be just the sensed. In the cognized, there will be just the cognized. When for you, in the seen there is just the seen, in the heard just the heard, in the sensed just the sensed, in the cognized just the cognized, then you will not identify with the seen, and so on. And if you do not identify with them, you will not be located in them; if you are not located in them, there will be no here, no there, or in-between. And this will be the end of suffering.

... In this way he abides contemplating the body as body [feelings as feeling, mind as mind, mind-objects as mind-objects] internally, or he abides contemplating the body as body externally, or he abides contemplating the body as a body both internally and externally. Or else he abides contemplating in the body its arising factors, or he abides contemplating in the body its vanishing factors, or he abides contemplating in the body both its arising and vanishing factors. *Or else mindfulness that “there is body” is simply established in him to the extent necessary for bare knowledge and mindfulness....*

*Shakyamuni Buddha*

**Nanyueh polishes a tile.** *(trans. Carl Bielefeldt)*

When the Chan master Ta-chi of Chiang-hsi (Mazu, Baso) was studying with the Chan master Ta-hui of Nan-yueh (Nanyue, Nangaku), after intimately receiving the mind seal, he always sat in meditation. Once Nan-yueh went to Ta-chi and said, “Worthy one, what are you figuring [striving] to do, sitting there in meditation?”

Chiang-hsi said, “I’m figuring to make a Buddha.”

At this point, Nan-yueh took up a tile [brick] and began to rub it on a stone. At length, Ta-chi asked, “Master, what are you doing?”

Nan-yueh said, “I’m polishing this to make a mirror.”

Ta-chi said, “How can you produce a mirror by polishing a tile?”

Nan-yueh replied, “How can you make a Buddha by sitting in meditation?”

Ta-chi asked, “Then, what is right?”

Nan-yueh replied, “When a man is driving a cart, if the cart doesn’t go, should he beat the cart or beat the ox?”

Ta-chi did not reply.

Nan-yueh went on, “Are you studying seated meditation or are you studying seated Buddha? If you are studying seated meditation, meditation is not sitting still. If you’re studying seated Buddha, Buddha is no fixed mark [form]. If you’re studying seated Buddha, this is killing [or, kill] Buddha. If you grasp the mark [form] of sitting, you’re not reaching its principle.”

**Nansen's "Ordinary Mind Is the Way".** (trans. Sekida)

Joshu (Zhaozhou) asked Nansen (Nanquan), "What is the Way?"

"Ordinary mind is the Way," Nansen replied.

"Shall I try to seek after it?" Joshu asked.

"If you try for it, you will become separated from it," responded Nansen.

"How can I know the Way unless I try for it?" persisted Joshu.

Nansen said, "The Way is not a matter of knowing or not knowing. Knowing is delusion; not knowing is confusion. When you have really reached the true Way beyond doubt, you will find it as vast and boundless as outer space. How can it be talked about on the level of right and wrong?"

With these words, Joshu came to a sudden realization.

**Yaoshan's Non-Thinking.** (trans. Looi)

When Yaoshan (Yakusan Igen) was sitting in meditation, a monk asked, "What do you think about, sitting in steadfast composure?"

Yaoshan said, "I think not-thinking."

The monk said, "How do you think not-thinking?"

Yaoshan said, "Non-thinking."

**Key texts for shikantaza class.**

Daido Looi, ed.: *The Art of Just Sitting*

Dogen Zenji: Zazenshin, Fukanzazengi, Zazengi, Bendowa, Zanmai o Zanmai

(various translations available; a few of these are compiled in a pdf file at

[www.upaya.org/uploads/pdfs/shikantazanreadergeren.pdf](http://www.upaya.org/uploads/pdfs/shikantazanreadergeren.pdf))

(for comments on Dogen, we will also look at

Carl Bielefeldt's *Dogen's Manuals of Zen Meditation* and  
Hee-Jin Kim *Dogen on Meditation and Thinking*)

Keizan Zenji: Zazen Yojinki (various translations)

Hongzhi: *Cultivating the Empty Field* (trans. Taigen Dan Leighton)