

EIHEI DOGEN-ZENJI ON BREATH

(from Eihei Koroku, vol. 5, #390)

(trans. Leighton/Okumura pg. 348-350)

(also appears in "Soto Zen: An Introduction to Zazen" pg. 35)

In the zazen of patch-robed monks, first you should sit correctly with upright posture. Then regulate your breath and settle your mind. In the lesser vehicle originally there were two gateways, which were counting breaths and contemplating impurity. In the lesser vehicle, people used counting to regulate their breath. However, the buddha ancestor's engaging of the way always differed from the lesser vehicle.

A Buddha ancestor [Nagarjuna; Nagyaharujuna Daiosho] said, "Even if you arouse the mind of a leprous wild fox, never practice the self-regulation of the two vehicles." The two vehicles refer to such as the school of the four-part Vinaya and the Abhidharma Kosa school, which have spread in the world these days. In the Mahayana there is also a method for regulating breath, which is knowing that one breath is long, another breath is short. The breath reaches the tanden and comes up from the tanden. Although exhale and inhale differ, both of them occur depending on the tanden. Impermanence is easy to clarify, and regulating the mind is easy to accomplish.

My late teacher Tiantong [Rujing; Tendo Nyojo Daiosho] said, "Breath enters and reaches the tanden, and yet there is no place from which it comes. Therefore it is neither long nor short. Breath emerges from the tanden, and yet there is nowhere it goes. Therefore it is neither short nor long."

My late teacher said it like that. Suppose someone were to ask Eihei, "Master, how do you regulate your breath?"

I would simply say to him: Although it is not the great vehicle, it differs from the lesser vehicle. Although it is not the lesser vehicle, it differs from the great vehicle.

Suppose that person inquired again, "Ultimately, what is it?"

I would say to him: Exhale and inhale are neither long nor short.

Someone asked Baizhang [Hyakujo], "The Yogacarabhumi Shastra and the Jewel Necklace Sutra contain the Mahayana precepts. Why don't you practice according to them?"

Baizhang said, "What I take as essential is not limited to the greater or lesser vehicles, and does not differ from the greater or lesser vehicles. I condense and combine the extensive scope [of regulations] to establish standards for appropriate conduct."

Baizhang said it this way, but Eihei is certainly not like this. It is not the case that it is not limited to the great or small vehicles, or not different from the great or small vehicles. What is this small vehicle? The affairs of the donkey are not complete. What is this great vehicle? The affairs of the horse have already arrived. Not the extensive scope means the extremely great is the same as the small. Not condensed means the extremely small is the same as the great. I do not combine, but gallop over and drop away great and small. Already having accomplished this, how shall we go beyond?

After a pause Dogen said: When healthy and energetic we do zazen without falling asleep. When hungry we eat rice, and know we are fully satisfied.

[The Jingde Record of Transmission of Lamps recounts: A monk said, "What is the meaning of Buddha-Dharma?" The master (Lingyun Zhiqin) said, "While the donkey has not yet left, the horse has arrived."]

KEIZAN JOKIN-ZENJI ON BREATH

(excerpts from Zazen Yojinki: Things We Should Be Careful about Regarding Zazen)
(trans. Shohaku Okumura, "Soto Zen: An Introduction to Zazen" pg. 87-92)
(also translated in "The Art of Just Sitting")

Zazen allows a person to clarify the mind-ground and dwell comfortably in one's original nature. This is called revealing the original Self and manifesting the original-ground.

In zazen both body and mind drop off. Zazen is far beyond the form of sitting or lying down. Free from considerations of good and evil, zazen transcends distinctions between ordinary people and sages, it goes far beyond judgments of deluded or enlightened. Zazen includes no boundary between sentient beings and buddha. Therefore, put aside all affairs, and let go of all associations. Do nothing at all. The six senses produce nothing.

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Now, zazen is entering directly into the ocean of buddha-nature and manifesting the body of the Buddha. The pure and clear mind is actualized in the present moment; the original light shines everywhere. The water in the ocean neither increases nor decreases, and the waves never cease. Buddhas have appeared in this world for the sake of the One Great Matter; to show the wisdom and insight of the Buddha to all living beings and to make their entry possible. For this, there is a peaceful and pure way: zazen. This is nothing but the jijuyuzanmai of all buddhas. It is also called zanmai-ozanmai. If you dwell in this samadhi for even a short time, the mind-ground will be directly clarified. You should know that this is the true gate of the buddha-way.

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During zazen, your body may feel hot or cold, rough or smooth, stiff or loose, heavy or light, or astonishingly wide-awake. Such sensations are caused by a disharmony of mind and breath. You should regulate [or, "harmonize"] your breathing as follows: open your mouth for a little while, letting long breaths be long and short breaths be short, and harmonize it gradually [or, "it will harmonize gradually"]. Follow your breath for a while; when awareness [kakusoku, "awakening as in from dullness"] comes, your breathing will be naturally harmonized. After that, breathe naturally through your nose.

Your mind may feel as though it is sinking or floating, dull or sharp, or as though you can see outside the room, inside your body, or the body of buddhas or bodhisattvas. Sometimes, you may feel as though you have wisdom and can understand the sutras or commentaries thoroughly. These unusual and strange conditions are all sicknesses that occur when the mind and breath are not in harmony. When you have this kind of sickness, settle your mind on your feet. When you feel dull, place your mind on your hairline [three inches above the center of the eyebrows] or between your eyes. When your mind is distracted, place it on the tip of your nose or on your lower abdomen, one and a half inches below the navel. Usually, place your mind on the left palm during sitting. When you sit for a long time, even though you do not try to calm your mind, it will, of its own accord, be free of distraction.

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Vow to cut off all delusions and realize enlightenment. Just sit without doing anything. This is the essence of sanzen.

Always wash your eyes and feet, keep your body and mind at ease and tranquil, and maintain a proper demeanor.

Throw away worldly sentiments, yet do not attach yourself to a sublime feeling of the way.

Though you should not begrudge anyone the dharma, do not preach it unless you are asked. Even if someone asks, keep silent three times; if the person still asks you from his or her heart, then teach him or her. Out of ten times you may desire to speak, remain silent for nine; as if mold were growing around your mouth. Be like a folded fan in December, or like a wind-bell hanging in the air, indifferent to the direction of the wind. This is how a person of the Way should be. Do not use the dharma to profit at the expense of others. Do not use the way as a means to make yourself important.

These are the most important points to keep in mind.