

Zoom Zazen - Saturday 19 March 2022

In the last part of the *Zazen Yojinki*, Master Keizan makes a set of recommendations on the practice of zazen. You are probably familiar with them if you regularly attend a dojo or go to a sesshin. They are often repeated by Zen teachers, and yet there are many common mistakes, which don't take into account the physiology of the body and the individual possibilities of each practitioner. Everyone's body is different. There is an ideal posture, relaxed and flexible, which the Buddha practiced. But no standard pattern of posture should be imposed that ignores the actual capabilities of each individual.

The immobility of zazen is not easy for people who are used to moving and it ends by becoming incomprehensible when it leads to pain. Of course one must be patient, but this is only possible if one understands why.

Zazen is considered hard because it is often badly taught and because those who claim to be Awakened, on the one hand, don't always exhibit deep motivation, and on the other hand, because they aren't sustained by example, or because people don't receive the teachings appropriate to their level of understanding.

First of all, Master Keizan gives advice on the posture of the body during zazen. He is talking to monks, so this advice should be adapted for lay people. I give you this information again because it's part of Master Keizan's text:

"When you do zazen, put on the kesa (except in the first part of the night, or the last part, when the daily program is not or is no longer in effect). Do not neglect this!

"The zafu typically measures 30 centimeters in diameter and 90 cm in circumference. "

I add that the zafu must be filled according to each person's specific body size and shape. That's essential!

"The zafu is not under the thighs, but only halfway up the thighs so that the pelvis and the spine are in the center of the zafu. This is how the Buddhas and Patriarchs have always sat.

"You can adopt the lotus or half-lotus posture. Loosen your clothes but keep them in order. Then put the fingers of your left hand on the fingers of your right hand and put your wrists on the top of your thighs, the edges of your hands pressed against your belly. Your thumbs are touching horizontally, about the height of the navel. Sit upright, without leaning to the right or left, forward or backward.

"The ears and shoulders are in the same vertical plane; the nose and the navel are too. The tongue is against the palate, breathing is done through the nose, silently. The mouth is closed and the eyes are half closed, neither too open nor too closed. When you feel in agreement with all these points, breathe deeply several times, then swing from left to right in smaller and smaller oscillations until you really feel your verticality. Finally, stay upright in total attention."

It is always useful to keep reminding yourself of these simple recommendations, because with time, habits soften the most upright and determined posture, and they wear away the firmest motivation. The posture then ceases to be the home of a living Presence and becomes the playground of demons playing with our egos in a perpetually restless mental 'concert'. Our meditation can easily become this new illusion where the 'me' [self] values itself, inflates and justifies all its own distractions and its efforts to seem to be this or that.

During zazen, we must SEE the play of impermanence and illusions in our own minds and awaken to the true nature of things, which is emptiness. Paying attention to everything that appears in the mind is the only practice that will lead us to the other shore.

"This is no small matter," said Master Dogen. "How could you take it carelessly? Don't think that what you do, the way you practice, the way you work, the way you play, is not itself - at every moment - the practice of the Buddhas."
