

## Settling in the vast openness of the sky

We receive a lot of information and thus have many things to deal with in our lives. This creates problems for us. Look at how much information just comes from your head as soon as you sit down to do zazen. Your head is not small. It extends into the past, present, and future. So as soon as you sit down, your head starts to spin, and soon it's lost in thought. Information keeps coming so quickly that we can't stay with any one piece for very long. It just keeps coming up—one thing after another. So, what good is zazen when your head always spins like that? Even just sitting, you're completely carried away. It leaves you thoroughly confused. This is why in zazen we must throw away all judgments and evaluations—all thoughts of good and bad, pros and cons. All we have to do is just sit down and completely open ourselves to right now, right here, without being carried away by all the information in our heads. In Zen we often compare the thoughts in our heads to clouds in the vast openness of the sky. Clouds come and go, often in fascinating ways. Sometimes black clouds run wild in the sky, and heavy storms, even tornadoes, appear. Other times the clouds rise to lofty heights and shine in dazzling brightness. Occasionally our thoughts are so wonderful that they put all the buddhas and bodhisattvas to shame. At still other times, our thoughts are so horrible that we hide them in the shadows. The sky embraces any kind of cloud and lets them all play freely. Unlike the way we try to deal with our thoughts, the sky is never carried away by the clouds. To live our lives fully from moment to moment, we must learn to settle into the vast openness of the sky. This is zazen. To live fully is not to be puffed up with pride just because we see some cloud that looks like the Buddha's face. Nor should we be discouraged just because things don't turn out as we wish. In zazen we keep our posture straight, and we see both sides of every experience—enlightenment and delusion. Real zazen is when our bodies and minds are completely balanced. So put yourself in the vast openness of the sky. Don't be tossed away by thoughts of enlightenment or delusion. Such thoughts are just information coming up from the past, present, and future. Our problem is not in the thoughts or the information: the problem is in us. We have to take care of this information and not be tossed away by it. First, we must settle ourselves in the vast openness of the sky. Then we can see the fascinating clouds—both stormy and bright—in this vast and beautiful sky.