

JUST TO SIT AS YOURSELF

Just to be yourself is no problem whatsoever. This is what is meant by "just to sit."

I would like to explain *shikantaza*, what it means just to sit.

A monk said to a Zen master, "It is very hot! Is it possible to sit somewhere where there is no heat or no cold?" The master answered, "When it is hot you should be hot Buddha. When it is cold you should be cold Buddha." This is Dogen Zenji's understanding of the story. In the usual story, the master said, "When it is hot you should be killed by the heat. When it is cold you should be killed by the cold." But if you say "killed," the "killed" is extra. If you say to "attain" enlightenment, the "attainment" is extra. Dogen Zenji was very direct when he said, "When it is hot you should be hot Buddha. When it is cold you should be cold Buddha." That is the meaning of *shikantaza*, just to sit.

When your practice is not good, you are a poor Buddha. When your practice is good, you are a good Buddha. "Poor" and "good" are themselves Buddhas; "poor" is Buddha and "good" is Buddha and you are Buddha also. Whatever you think or say, every word becomes Buddha. I am Buddha. "I" is Buddha and "am" is Buddha and "Buddha" is Buddha. Buddha. Buddha. Buddha. When whatever you say is Buddha, there are no problems: Buddha Buddha Buddha Buddha. There is no need to translate it into English, no need to be bothered with fancy explanations of Buddhism. If you say, "Buddha Buddha Buddha Buddha," that is the way. Everything is Buddha: sitting is Buddha, lying down is Buddha, each

word is Buddha. That is our way. That is shikantaza. When you practice zazen with this understanding, that is true zazen.

We say just to sit, but to understand this is rather difficult. That may be why Dogen Zenji left us so many teachings. This does not mean that his teachings are difficult; when you sit, you know what he means without thinking or expecting anything. When you accept yourself as a Buddha—or understand everything as an unfolding of the absolute teaching, the truth, the first principle, or as part of the great being—then whatever you think or see is the actual teaching of Buddha, and whatever you do is the actual practice of Buddha. Problems arise because you are trying to do something, or because you think that it doesn't matter whether or not you do something.

Before you attain enlightenment, enlightenment is there. It is not because one attains enlightenment that enlightenment appears. Enlightenment is always there, and to realize this is enlightenment. If you think that enlightenment is some particular thing you can reach or attain sometime, you will be discouraged, because you are seeking for it. But if you feel that it is not possible to attain enlightenment, you will also be discouraged, and will give up your practice, or will try to find some other teaching which is more worthwhile and can be achieved. In this way you will move from one teaching to another and will have no time to realize your true nature, which is the true nature of everyone.

So whether or not you realize your true nature or attain enlightenment is a minor problem, not the big problem! It is all the better if you do attain enlightenment, but even if you don't, there is no need to go looking for another teaching, because the true teaching is always right here. This kind of understanding may be difficult to accept. You may give up if you don't think you have made some progress after practicing for one or two months. But true religion cannot be obtained by seeking for some good thing; that is only the way to attain something in a material sense. The way to work on spiritual things is quite different. Even to talk about spiritual things is not actually spiritual but a kind of substitute.

That you are here means that you will vanish. Things that exist are bound to vanish, and things which you attain cannot be perpetually retained. The only thing that exists forever is that which exists before anything else appears.

As long as you seek for something, you will get the shadow of reality and not reality itself. Only when you do not seek for anything will you find it, and only when you do not strive for enlightenment will you have it. Because you try to attain something, you lose it.

Because A tries to be C or D, there are problems. Renunciation is that A is just A, and A is bound to disappear. To practice renunciation is to be beyond forms and colors. We have full appreciation of forms and colors, but they are bound to disappear and we should not be caught by them. We do not give them up, but we accept that they go away: that is renunciation. If A always tries to remain A, that is attachment to something which does not exist—it is delusion and not renunciation. A should just be A, and A should vanish in the form of A, though it will appear again in some form of C or D. But C or D should not try to be something different from C or D.

When I was young, the other students and I used to discuss the goal of practice. We knew that the idea of the goal could not be the reality of it, and we wondered whether maybe practice was the bridge between the idea and the reality. We had this kind of discussion. But according to Dogen Zenji, practice is just practice Buddha, bridge is just bridge Buddha, reality is just reality Buddha, and idea is just idea Buddha. There is no problem. When you say, “I am a human being,” that is just another name for Buddha: human being Buddha. So there is no need to have a bridge to the other shore. Other shore is other shore Buddha. This shore is this shore Buddha. Everything is Buddha, just the names are different. Renunciation is attained by this shore being this shore and the other shore being the other shore. Only when A is A—only when we are satisfied with ourselves as A, or as I—is there a chance to have renunciation, a chance to vanish. If A could be something else, then A might be a permanent being, but no such permanent being exists. Only when A is just A is it possible for A to vanish. Everything that exists must vanish. If you didn’t vanish, you would not exist; you would be a ghost.

So we say “just to sit,” or “A should be just A,” and this “just” directly points out liberation from A. You only lose your reality because you try to be something else. Do you understand? I should be just A, just I. Then I have liberation, enlightenment. I am not caught. I am not a ghost. I exist here. I am Buddha.

This is not some fancy teaching. No teaching could be more direct than just to sit. You cannot say anything about it, not even “yes” or “no.” This is not something you should believe in because I say so or because Buddha says so; this is the truth that is waiting to be found by you. It is the only way to attain renunciation without causing any problems for yourself or anyone. Just to be yourself is no problem whatsoever. This is what is meant by “just to sit.”

Moment after moment you will find your own way when you just sit, when you are simply you yourself.