

Zazen Manual

Bodhisattvas aspiring to prajna-wisdom should first arouse great compassion, take the Four Great Vows, and cultivate samadhi- concentration. Vowing to set all beings free, do not seek liberation for yourself alone.

Then let go of all conditions and put all concerns to rest, with body and mind one, and no separation between movement and stillness. Be moderate with food and drink, taking neither too much nor too little. Regulate sleep, neither depriving nor indulging.

For zazen, spread a thick mat in a quiet place, loosen your clothing but maintain proper bearing, and sit in full-lotus. First place right foot on left thigh, then left foot on right thigh. Or sit in half-lotus, placing left foot on right thigh.

Next, place right hand on left foot, left hand on right palm, thumbs touching. Raise torso and stretch it forward, rock side to side, then sit erect. Do not tilt to one side, forward or backward. Align hips, spine, and head like a stupa. But do not strain to make your body erect, as this will constrict breath and cause discomfort. Ears in line with shoulders, nose in line with navel, tongue resting on upper palate, mouth gently closed, eyes slightly open to prevent drowsiness.

This is best for sustaining the concentrated power of dhyana. In former times, eminent monks adept in this practice always sat with eyes open. Zen master Fayun Yuantong scolded those sitting with eyes closed, like a ghost cave in a dark mountain. There is good reason for this, which adepts know well.

With body settled, regulate breath and relax abdomen. Do not give rise to any thoughts, good or bad. If a thought does arise, be aware of it. Once you're aware of it, it disappears. Eventually conditions are forgotten, and all is naturally unified. This is the essence of zazen.

Zazen really is the dharma gate of ease and joy. If people become ill from it, they are not doing it with proper care. Done properly, your whole body naturally becomes light and at ease, spirit fresh, mind clear. The flavor of dharma sustains, and you are calm, pure, and joyful.

If you've already had a realization, it is like a dragon entering water or a tiger roaming mountains. If you have yet to realize it, use the wind to fan the flame; great effort is not needed. Just confirm it yourself and you will not be deceived.

Where the path is lofty, however, demons abound and there are all sorts of experiences, agreeable and disagreeable. Just maintain mindfulness and none of this can obstruct you. The Surangama Sutra, Tiantai Chih-kuan, and Guifeng's Manual for Cultivation and Realization describe in detail these demonic states, so you can be prepared in advance.

Coming out of meditation, move slowly and rise calmly, without haste or roughness. Then at all times use appropriate means to protect and sustain the concentrated power of dhyana, as if caring for a babe in arms. Thus it develops easily.

This is the most urgent task. If you don't practice calmly and quietly, in the end you'll be completely lost. To search for the pearl, it's best to calm the waves. With the water of concentration still and clear, the mind-pearl reveals itself.

Thus The Perfect Enlightenment Sutra says that unhindered and pure wisdom arises from dhyana. The Lotus Sutra says that in a quiet place one should cultivate the mind and let it settle, so that it is as still as Mt. Sumeru. Thus, to transcend secular and sacred, quiet meditation is necessary; to freely pass away sitting or standing is dependent on the concentrated power of dhyana.

Even if you devote your life to it, be wary of falling short. And if you waste your time, how in the world will you overcome your karmic hindrances? Thus an ancient has said that without the concentrated power of dhyana, you will cower at death's door. With eyes covered, you end your life in vain like a vagabond.

Fortunate dharma friends! Please read this manual again and again. For the benefit of oneself as well as others, let us all together fully awaken.