



IMPORTANCE OF ZAZEN / MEDITATION



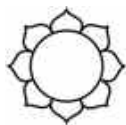
MEDITATION

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HOW TO MEDITATE



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ABOUT 坐禅 ZAZEN / 黙想 MOKUSŌ OR समाधि SAMĀDHI (MEDITATION 冥想)

HOW TO MEDITATE CORRECTLY

Close your eyes and breathe deeply and slowly through your nostrils; concentrate on your breath and you will use your diaphragm (丹田 Tanden: one's Core). Your mind will race with thoughts, but do not fixate on them, instead let them go and focus on breathing and those thoughts will stop by themselves. "When your mind 'stops' to question or decide or judge—when you are concentrating on that, you lose track of what is still going on. When you have guilt or fear or anxiety or regret or nervous anticipation, you are living in the past or the future; you must live in the now, in the present; in this moment! (xxii)" - 宮本 武蔵 Miyamoto Musashi (*The Book Of Five Rings*).

In other words, one's thoughts truly do not cease, but rather, one stops clinging to them and thus, does not demonstrate a stagnant mind that is ruminating or reflecting on abstract secretions of the brain or thoughts, also known as delusion, which in turn creates suffering or संसार Samsāra (Continuous Flow or Cycle of Life). And since all thoughts are abstract (non-reality), if one takes them as factual or black and white, then one develops anxiety, which manifests neuroses, and psychosis; and all of it based on one's own thoughts of non-reality. Hence, the imperativeness of one performing meditation to some level; this way, one will calm their bodies and still one's minds and find a peace that transcends oneself.

Accordingly, for beginners, focus on counting one's exhalations, slowly and "relaxingly." Traditionally, one mediates or practices with no noise around one, that is why it is suggested to be in a quite and almost secluded room, where no one else can interrupt one. It also is mindful to have the place or room be cool or not hot and also where one can relax without being interrupted by whatever externals that can. But that is not etched in stone, meaning, try to find a room that one can be secluded and is fairly quite, but in today's world, that is hard, so do not beat oneself up over not finding the "perfect" room and the "perfect" time; that is getting caught up in the idiosyncratic gestures and vapidness. That is what Eihei Dōgen Zenji 永平道元禅師 refers to as "being a 100,000 miles away from the truth"; thus, one should pick a time of day, as in the morning before starting one's day, maybe while the sun has not risen, and just sit or as Dōgen says, "Shikantaza." And if one prefers to keep one's eyes open as the traditionalists do, then fine, or mostly closed, but one might find that they start that way or end that way, which is of no consequent or concern, remember, "Shikantaza!" 只管打坐 (just sit). It is the same if one chooses to listen to music, such as chanting (Nembutus) or gongs or bells or Shakuhachi (Japanese flute). All of the aforesaid can be of great assistance to induce relaxation and for one to practice Zazen comfortably/enjoyably.

Furthermore, it is not about "good" or "bad" or "right" or "wrong" Zazen; that is a Subject versus Object paradigm and laden in Ego or self-attachment via comparison (Ego), so do not fall into the stagnant/static

abstract delusions of the brain. Instead, let them drift by and do not cling or attach oneself to them; this allows them to pass by without one's mind becoming fixated on it or them. Having said that, it is the same for one's Altar or Shrine, including the lighting or the burning of incense, as well as the offering of water, rice, flowers, fruit, etc.; therefore, one should not get caught up in the paraphernalia or customs or once again, one is far from Zazen 坐禪 and the true meaning of Buddhism 仏教. All of the aforementioned is just a symbolic reminder of one's practice, or Zazen, and nothing more; needless to say, one is not "evil" if one does not possess these materialistic things. Further, one does not need to spend hundreds, much less thousands of dollars on these items including one's garb or attire. i.e., Kāṣāya काषाय (Buddhist Robe). Consequently, one can meditate as Dōgen Zenji did in ripped or "holey" and not "Holy" pants, and a t-shirt. Thusly, one needs to only feel comfortable in loose-fitting clothing, which is pants, socks (if one prefers), and a loose shirt of sorts. Tight clothing or layers are not good (unless it is very cold). However, when it is cold, it is easier to mediate, because when it is hot, one sweats a lot and thus, becomes uncomfortable, thus making Zazen more difficult and taking more concentration, per se. One will notice that one sweats and becomes warm when doing or practicing Zazen as well as Nembutsu 念仏 (chanting).

Suffice it to say, the Buddha 仏 (Jap.) 佛 (Chin.) or Siddhārtha Gautama Buddha सिद्धार्थ गौतम बुद्ध, also known as Shākyamuni/Sākyamuni idol or statue need not be expensive either. Just something that represents one's practice symbolically. This of course relates to one's Mālās माला too. One can wear them, but to wear them as jewelry as if a fashion statement is Ego-laden, because it is not something to "show off," rather, again, a reminder of one's practice and nothing more. They can be worn outside of one's clothing as one sees Buddhist Monks demonstrate, but again, it is not something to contrast other clothing off with. Nevertheless, all of the above is great to partake in and have as long as one does not lose one's Way or Dō (path or road/ journey) and go astray with items and gestures, etc., i.e., taking them as one's practice instead of Zazen.

Additionally, one should purchase an inexpensive Zafu 座蒲 (little thick-padded seat/cushion) and possibly a Zabuton 座布団 (padded mat that the Zafu rests on top of), because the Zafu allows one to be in the correct posture, in which one's pelvis is tilted forward on an angle, which thusly allows one to align one's spine correctly in a line, as well as breath correctly; then align one's nose in-line with one's navel and one's ears in-line with one's shoulders. This posture is difficult to keep (maintain) or stay (sit) in and takes practices long with the mental focus to stay in it, but the benefits afterwards are immeasurable. So, now matter how much pain, realize it is worth it and it is for you, so some pain or suffering is worth it, because "Everything Contains Suffering"; one of the four Buddhist's percepts.

Of course sitting in Full-Lotus पद्मासन style/position (both feet onto one's thighs) is the best to achieve or practice Zazen, but Half-Lotus or सिद्धासन Siddhasana (one foot onto one's thigh) or Burmese (cross-legged) is

also fine as is sitting in 正座 Seiza (formal/ traditional sitting position) in a kneeling manner with a bench to support one's buttocks and pelvic region; and one can also use a chair, albeit it is not the best for the above mentioned, however, it still IS beneficial, as long as one uses a Zafu to tilt one's pelvic region or use a towel folded up, so that one can be in the correct posture with one's hand forming a circle or Mudrā मुद्रा (seal, gesture/posture), in which one takes one's left hand and places one's right hand on-top of it (fingers onto one another) and align one's thumbs to touch at their tips. this is known as the Cosmic Mudrā (hand posture).

Once all the above is achieved, then one just sits, breathes, and relaxes. Notwithstanding, it is not easy; i.e., sitting in the correct posture is hard and can be painful, especially for beginners, due to the proper alignment of one's hips/pelvis and the alignment of one's head, nose, and ears too. A lot of times, one's legs will fall asleep or one will get the tingles or shooting pains in one's lower extremities, but one must keep pushing past that, and in time, the pain subsides and one's posture in sitting improves due the strengthening and usage of one's core muscles; this will be noticed by one when one stands or sits in general, because one's overall posture improves greatly due to one's practice of Zazen.

And the more one practices, the more one will be able to let thoughts flow into and out of one's mind without holding or clinging to them at all. Then one reaches a high-state of Zazen, in which one will also be able to calm oneself down and lower one's heartbeat overall. This is great, i.e., Zazen for when one is upset with anything. If one is troubled, bothered, or angry, after doing Zazen, one will feel a thousand times better; this holds true with Nembutsu as well. The chanting or recitation of सूत्र Sūtras (Buddhist Chants from texts) or aphorism, is wonderful for one's mind, heart, and soul; and this is without fail! One will only feel this once one actively does it (practices it); there is no need for convincing; i.e., "Shikantaza!" Just do!

And finally, do not get comparative or discriminatory in one's practice; i.e., do not say "today's practice was good or yesterdays was not," that is delusion and one is caught up in abstract thought or in subject versus object, and again, that is 100,000 miles away, do you understand? So, just sit, relax, and breath, and the universe will open or express itself to you. Thusly, one sees one's True Nature or Original Face, which is also known represented in the famous adage, "What was your face before your parents were born," so remember, one cannot answer that logically, and that its purpose; so, if you can understand that, then you are practicing correctly and surely, keep practicing.