

Self-Enjoyment Samadhi

Excerpts from “Jijuyu Zammai” (Self-Enjoyment Samadhi) by Menzan Zuiho Osho (1682-1769)
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This wondrous mind of nirvana (nehan myoshin) is the Tathagata’s true enlightenment which precedes language, discrimination and illusory mind. This is also called Self-Enjoyment Samadhi (jijuyu zammai) which has been transmitted for fifty-one generations from the Buddha to Bodhidharma in India, down through the Sixth Ancestor Huineng in China, and to Eihei Dogen in Japan. The simultaneous practice-verification (shusho) of this samadhi is nothing other than sitting in the lotus posture (kekkaфуza) which we practice today. Tentatively, this samadhi is called sitting meditation (zazen).

The buddha’s awareness, called “the wondrous mind of nirvana,” is perfect and always quietly illuminating itself. Therefore, you must understand that “concentration” (zen) is just a provisional name. Self-Enjoyment Samadhi is the “true Dharma eye treasury, the wondrous mind of nirvana” (shobogenzo-nehanmyoshin, of Wumenguan Case 6) and “unsurpassed complete perfect enlightenment” (anuttara-samyak-sambodhi). This is also called the “treasury of great radiant light” (daikomyozo, of Ejo). It is also referred to as “Limitless Meanings Samadhi” (muryogisho-zammai, of the Lotus Sutra), “Precious Mirror Samadhi” (hokyo-zammai, of Dongshan), “King of Samadhis” (zanmai-o-zammai, of the Great Perfect Wisdom Sutra), and “The Treasury of Vairochana Samadhi” (birushana-zo-zammai, of the Flower Ornament Sutra). This is “essential function of all buddhas and the functional essence of all ancestors” (of Hongzhi). Understand this clearly and believe that this Self-Enjoyment Samadhi is “dropping off body and mind, body and mind dropped off” (shinjin daturaku, daturaku shinjin, of Rujing). All of these terms, taken from the various teachings of the Buddhas and Ancestors, are names for the zazen we practice.

Although a great many people practice zazen, almost all of them practice in the way of ordinary people, shravakas or pratyekabuddhas, or bodhisattvas with provisional mahayana understanding. Those who understand Self-Enjoyment Samadhi as the true enlightenment of all buddhas are very few. That is why some hurry on their way to gain enlightenment by wrestling with koans. Some struggle within themselves, searching for the true person that sees and hears. Some try to rid themselves of delusory thoughts in order to reach a pleasant place of no-mind, no-thought. Many other methods of practicing zazen were advocated by various teachers in the Song, Yuan, and Ming dynasties in China. But it appears that fewer than one in a hundred knew the true samadhi transmitted by the buddhas and ancestors.

This awareness transcends the ranks of ordinary people, shravakas and pratyekabuddhas, the ten stages of bodhisattvas and (the eleventh stage of) equal enlightenment. Therefore it is said, “Directly enter into the stage of the Tathagata. Just take the essence; do not worry about trifling things.” The practice of the six paramitas of a bodhisattva and all of the eighty-four thousand Dharma gates [of the Buddha] are without exception included within this Self-Enjoyment Samadhi. This is why it is said that “as soon as you clarify Tathagata Zen, the six paramitas and all other practices are complete within yourself” (from Yongjia’s Zhengdaoge). It is also said in another sutra (Samantabhadra Meditation Sutra) that when you “sit upright and are aware of reality, all evil melts like frost or a drop of dew”; if you settle in this samadhi, all evil will disappear as promptly as frost or a drop of dew disappears under the sun.

In the Song of Attaining the Way (Zhengdaoge) we find the expression, “Being aware of reality there is neither subject nor object, and we are immediately released from the karma of the Hell of Incessant Suffering.” When you sit in this samadhi, you will enter directly into the realm of the Tathagata. Therefore, this samadhi is endowed with the limitless virtue of the roots of goodness, and the limitless obstructions of one’s evil deeds caused by evil karma will disappear without a trace. As this samadhi is truly the incomparably great Dharma wheel, and the practice of ever going beyond buddhahood (butsu-kojo), it is beyond words and discriminating thoughts.

If you were to encounter such a true Dharma in the infinite eons of transmigration in the rounds of birth-and-death, even one day of your life would be more precious than millions of years without the true Dharma. So devote yourself diligently to this samadhi, cherishing every second.

Now I will explain in detail the way to clarify and rely on this samadhi. This is done simply by not obscuring the radiant light of the Self (jiko komyo). When the radiant light of the Self is clear, you follow neither dullness nor distraction. The Third Ancestor said (in Xinxinming), “It is empty, clear, and self-illuminating, with no exertion of the mind’s power.” This is the vital point of the practice-verification of this samadhi. “It is empty, clear, and self-illuminating” means the radiant light of the Self shines brightly. “No exertion of the mind’s power” means not to add the illusory mind’s discrimination to this reality. When you make mental struggle, the light becomes illusory mind, and brightness becomes darkness. If you do not make mental struggle, the darkness itself becomes the self-illumination of the light. This is similar to the light of a jewel illuminating the jewel itself. For example, it is like the light of the sun or the moon illuminating everything – mountains and rivers, human beings and dogs, etc., equally, without differentiation or evaluation. Also, a mirror reflects everything without bothering to discriminate. In this Self-Enjoyment Samadhi, just keep the light unobscured, without being concerned with the discrimination of objects.

This is the meaning of Hongzhi’s expression in his Acupuncture Needle of Zazen (Zazenshin): “The essential function of all buddhas and the functional essence of all ancestors; it is knowing without touching things, illuminating without facing objects.” When you practice and learn the reality of zazen thoroughly, the frozen blockage of illusory mind will naturally melt away. If you think that you have cut off illusory mind, instead of simply clarifying how illusory mind melts, illusory mind will come up again, as though you had cut the stem of a blade of grass or the trunk of a tree and left the root alive. This is very natural. For this reason, when you practice the Buddha-Dharma, you must study and clarify the essence of practice-verification of the buddhas and ancestors under the guidance of a true teacher to whom the Dharma has been properly transmitted; otherwise you will be wasting your time, no matter how long or hard you practice.

Shakyamuni’s six years of sitting, Bodhidharma’s nine years of facing the wall, Tiantong Rujing’s “just sitting” (shikantaza) are all examples of the practice-verification of this samadhi. Practice-verification beyond thought and no-thought can be compared to the function of a mirror. A mirror reflects both beautiful and ugly things without distinguishing them. This is the natural function of a mirror. But the reflection, which may be beautiful or ugly, is not the mirror itself. The reflection is just an image of what is in front of the mirror. If you only see the distinction between good and bad thoughts and think it is your original mind, it is the same as if you were to grasp the reflection in the mirror and think it to be the mirror itself. This is a mistake. This analogy admonishes you not to get caught up in the distraction of thoughts. And yet, if you think that no-thought is your true mind and become attached to the condition of no-thought where neither good nor bad arises, it is the same as thinking that where no reflection exists is the mirror itself, and thus becoming attached to the backside of the mirror. If the mirror reflects nothing, it is the same as if it were a piece of stone or tile; the function of the light of the mirror is lost. This analogy admonishes you not to get caught up in the dullness or neutrality of no-thought. As you know, neither the reflection nor the backside of the mirror is the essential function of the mirror which, like that of the light, illuminates itself clearly. You must realize that buddha’s wisdom, like a great perfect mirror, is far beyond the dichotomy of thought and no-thought. For example, when you sit zazen, if your mind does not arise and function, and if you do not see anything, hear anything, or feel any pain or itch, you just stagnate in emptiness. On the contrary, if you see or hear something outside and think of it, or feel pain or itch, you just stagnate in the distraction caused by the dichotomy of subject and object. Both conditions are limited by delusory thoughts. Therefore, the Third Ancestor said, “Neither follow after objects nor dwell in emptiness.” You must study this point closely and understand this clearly. Just illuminating color, shape, and sound, etc., and not adding any discrimination, is the buddha’s wisdom.

Since this samadhi cannot be grasped by discriminatory thoughts, no commentators on the sutras and other scriptures, who only try to interpret the meaning of the words, can fathom it even in a dream no matter how intelligent they are. Only when we sit zazen in our daily life are our eyes opened to the reality outside of the domain of thoughts and discrimination. We just illuminate our thoughts which moment to moment come up and go away, refrain from fabricating adoption or rejection, and hatred or love. As with the Tathagata, what we do in our zazen is expressed as radiating the great light, illuminating the whole universe in ten directions, and releasing all sentient beings from suffering.