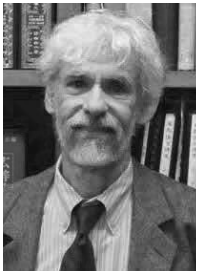


Treasury of the True Dharma Eye Book 12



Lancet of Seated Meditation *Zazen shin*

Translated by
Carl Bielefeldt

Introduction

This essay is preserved in an early manuscript, belonging to Kōfuku ji, in Kumamoto, that is thought by some to be in Dōgen's own hand. The manuscript does not bear a colophon, but the versions appearing in the 75-fascicle redaction of the *Shōbōgenzō* list the work as number 12 and assign its composition to the spring of 1242 at the Kōshōji, its author's monastery on the southern outskirts of the capital at Heian-kyō. A second colophon states that it was subsequently presented to the monastic assembly in the winter of 1243-1244 at Yoshimine shōja, the monastery where Dōgen taught following his move to Echizen province in the summer of 1243. The work is treated as number 27 in the vulgate Eihei-ji edition.

The *Zazen shin* represents one of the most important texts for the study of Dōgen's views on Zen meditation. It is divided into three major sections. The first is devoted to the famous kōan known as "thinking of not thinking," a saying of the early eighth-century master Yaoshan Weiyuan. Although the discussion of it here is very brief, this kōan is central to the Sōtō understanding of Dōgen's meditation; for it appears as a description of (or perhaps prescription for) the practice

in his *Fukan zazen gi*, a manual recognized by the school as the chief source for its style of meditation teaching. This section concludes with a sharp criticism of those in Chinese Chan who do not understand seated meditation.

In his second section, Dōgen turns to another famous story, known as "Nanyue polishes a tile," in which the eighth-century master Nanyue Huairang likens his disciple Mazu Daoyi's attempt to "make a Buddha" by sitting in meditation to someone's trying to make a mirror by polishing a tile, or trying to drive an ox cart by whipping the cart instead of the ox. On the face of it, the story would seem to be a criticism — often in fact seen in the sayings of the masters — of the view that meditation practice is central to Zen soteriology. But Dōgen's commentary here goes through the story to bring out in each line of the dialogue his own vision of a higher understanding of the practice.

The final section of the essay opens with a return to Dōgen's lament over the benighted Chan understanding of seated meditation. After dismissing most of the literature on the practice, he introduces with high praise the verse from which our essay takes its name: the "Lancet of Seated Meditation" (*Zuochan zhen*) by Hongzhi Zhengjue, most famous master in the recent history of Dōgen's Caodong lineage and former head of the Tiantong monastery where he had studied in China. After commenting on the lines of Hongzhi's piece, Dōgen offers in closing his own version of the poem.

Lancet of Seated Meditation

Kannon Dōri Kōshō Hōrin-ji

Once, when the Great Master Hongdao of Yaoshan was sitting, a monk asked him, “What are you thinking of sitting there so fixedly?”

The master answered, “I’m thinking of not thinking.”

The monk asked, “How do you think of not thinking?”

The master answered, “Nonthinking.”¹

Verifying that such are the words of the Great Master, we should study fixed sitting; we should correctly transmit fixed sitting. This is the investigation of fixed sitting transmitted in the way of the buddhas. Although he is not alone in “thinking fixedly,” Yaoshan’s words are singular: he is “thinking of not thinking.” [These words] have what is the very “skin, flesh, bones, and marrow” of “thinking,” the very skin, flesh, bones, and marrow of “not thinking.”

“The monk asked, ‘How do you think of not thinking?’” Indeed, though “not thinking” may be old, going further, this is “how do you think?” Could there be no “thinking” in “sitting fixedly”? How could it not pass beyond “sitting fixedly”? If we are not the sort of fool that “despises the near,” we ought to have the strength, ought to have the “thinking,” to question “sitting fixedly.”²

“The master answered, ‘Nonthinking.’” Although the employment of “nonthinking” is “crystal clear,” when we “think of not thinking,” we always use “nonthinking.” There is someone in “nonthinking,” and [this] someone maintains us. Although it is we who are “sitting fixedly,” “sitting fixedly” is not merely “thinking”: it presents “sitting fixedly.” Although “sitting fixedly” is “sitting fixedly,” how could “sitting fixedly” “think” of “sitting fixedly”?³

Therefore, sitting “fixedly” is not the “measure of the buddha,” not the measure of the dharma, not the measure of awakening, not the measure of understanding. Such single transmission by Yaoshan represents the thirty-sixth generation directly from the Buddha Śākyamuni: if we trace beyond Yaoshan thirty-six generations, we come to the Buddha Śākyamuni. And in what was thus properly transmitted, there was already “thinking of not thinking.”

Recently, however, some stupid illiterates say, “Once the breast is without concerns, the concentrated effort at seated meditation is a state of peace and calm.”⁴ This view does not reach that of the students of the Lesser Vehicle; it is inferior even to the Vehicle of Humans and Devas. How could one [who holds such a view] be called a man who studies the buddha dharma? At present, there are many such practitioners in the Land of the Great Song; it is lamentable that the path of the ancestors is overgrown.

Then there is another type [which holds] that to pursue the way through seated meditation is a function essential for the beginner’s mind and late student, but it is not necessarily an observance of the buddhas and ancestors. “Walking is Zen, sitting is Zen; in speech or silence, motion or rest, the substance is at ease.”⁵ Do not [they say] adhere solely to the present concentrated effort. This view is common among those calling themselves a branch of Linji. It is because of a deficiency in the transmission of the right life of the buddha dharma that they say this. What is the “beginner’s mind”? Where is there no “beginner’s mind”? Where do we leave the “beginner’s mind”?

We should realize that, in the established [means of] investigation for studying the way,

one pursues the way in seated meditation. The essential point that marks this [investigation] is that there is a practice of a buddha that does not seek to “make a buddha.” Since the practice of a buddha is not further to make a buddha, it is the “realization of the kōan.” The embodied buddha does not further make a buddha; when “the nets and cages” are broken, a seated buddha does not interfere with making a buddha. At just such a time — “from a thousand ages past, ten thousand ages past,” from the very beginning — we have the power “to enter into buddha, to enter into Māra.” In stepping forward and stepping back, its measure “fills the ditches, fills the gullies.”⁶

* * * * *

When the Chan Master Daji of Jiangxi was studying with the Chan Master Dahui of Nanyue, after intimately receiving the mind seal, he always sat in meditation. Once, Nanyue went to Daji and said, “Great Virtuous One, what are you figuring to do, sitting there in meditation?”⁷

We should quietly make concentrated effort at the investigation of this question. Does it mean that there must be some “figuring” above and beyond “seated meditation”? Is there no way that should be “figured” outside of “seated meditation”? Should there be no “figuring” at all? Or does it ask what kind of “figuring” occurs at the time he was practicing “seated meditation”? We should make concentrated effort to understand this in detail. Rather than “love the carved dragon,” we should go on to love the real dragon. We

should learn that both the carved and the real dragons have the ability [to produce] clouds and rain. Do not “value the distant”; do not despise the distant; become completely familiar with the distant. Do not “despise the near”; do not value the near; become completely familiar with the near. Do not “take the eyes lightly”; do not give weight to the eyes. Do not “give weight to the ears”; do not take the ears lightly. Make your eyes and ears clear and sharp.⁸

Jiangxi said, “I’m figuring to make a buddha.”

We should clarify and penetrate the meaning of these words. What does it mean to speak of “making a buddha”? Does it mean to be “made a buddha” by the buddha? Does it mean to “make a buddha” of the buddha? Does it mean that “one or two faces” of the buddha emerge? Is it that “figuring to make a buddha” is a sloughing off, and it is a sloughed off “figuring to make a buddha”? Or does “figuring to make a buddha” mean that, while there are ten thousand ways to “make a buddha,” they become “entangled” in this “figuring”?

It should be recognized that Daji’s words mean that “seated meditation” is always “figuring to make a buddha,” “seated meditation” is always the “figuring” that is “making a buddha.” This “figuring” must be prior to “making a buddha”; it must be subsequent to “making a buddha”; it must be at the very moment of “making a buddha.” Now what I ask is this: How many [ways of] “making a buddha” does this one “figuring” entangle? These entanglements further intertwine with entanglements. At this point, entanglements,

as individual instances of the entirety of “making a buddha,” are invariably the direct expression of the entirety of “making a buddha” and are all instances of “figuring.” We should not seek to avoid this one “figuring”: when we avoid the one “figuring,” we “forfeit our body and lose our life.” When we forfeit our body and lose our life, this is the entanglement of the one “figuring.”

At this point, Nanyue took up a tile and began to rub it on a stone. At length, Daji asked, “Master, what are you making?”

Who could fail to see that he was “polishing a tile”? Who could see that he was “polishing a tile”? Still, “polishing a tile” has been questioned in this way: “What are you making?” This “what are you making?” is itself always “polishing a tile.” This land and the other world may differ, but the essential message of “polishing a tile” never ceases. Not only should we avoid deciding that what we see is what we see, we should be firmly convinced that there is an essential message to be studied in all the ten thousand activities. We should know that, just as we may see a buddha without knowing or understanding him, so we may see rivers and yet not know rivers, may see mountains and yet not know mountains. The precipitate assumption that the phenomena before one’s eyes offer no further passage [for understanding] is not Buddhist study.

Nanyue said, “I’m polishing this to make a mirror.”

We should clarify the meaning of these

words. There is definitely a principle in his “polishing this to make a mirror”: there is the “kōan of realization”; this is no mere empty contrivance. A “tile” may be a “tile” and a “mirror” a “mirror,” but when we exert ourselves in investigating the principle of “polishing,” we shall find there are many examples: the “old mirror” and the “bright mirror” [often talked of in the Zen texts] — these are “mirrors” made through “polishing a tile.” If we do not realize that these “mirrors” come from “polishing a tile,” then the buddhas and ancestors have nothing to say; they do not open their mouths, and we do not perceive them exhaling.

Daji said, “How can you produce a mirror by polishing a tile?”

Indeed, though [the one who is] “polishing a tile” be “a man of iron,” who does not borrow the power of another, “polishing a tile” is not “producing a mirror.” Even if it is “producing a mirror,” it must be quick about it.

Nanyue replied, “How can you make a buddha by sitting in meditation?”

This is clearly understood: there is a principle that “seated meditation” does not await “making a buddha”; there is nothing obscure about the essential message that “making a buddha” is not connected with “seated meditation.”

Daji asked, “What is right?”

While these words may resemble a simple question about this, they are also asking about

that “is right.” We should understand [that the relationship between “what” and “right” here is like], for example, the occasion when one friend meets another: the fact that he is my friend means that I am his friend. [Similarly, the meanings here of] “What” and “right” emerge simultaneously.

Nanyue replied, “When someone’s driving a cart, if the cart doesn’t go, is beating the cart right, or is beating the ox right?”⁹

For the moment, [let us consider,] when he says, “the cart doesn’t go,” what is the “cart going” or the “cart not going”? For example, is water flowing the cart going, or is water not flowing the cart going? We might say that flowing is the water not going, and there should also be [cases where] water’s going is not its flowing. Therefore, when we investigate the words, “the cart doesn’t go,” we should study that there is “not going,” and we should study that there is no “not going”; for it must be time. The words “if it doesn’t go” do not mean simply that it does not go.

“Is beating the cart right, or is beating the ox right?” Does this mean that there should be “beating the cart” as well as “beating the ox”? Are “beating the cart” and “beating the ox” the same or not the same? In the mundane world, there is no method of “beating the cart”; but, though the common folk have no such method, we know that on the way of the buddhas there is a method of “beating the cart”; it is the eye of study. Even though we study that there is a method of “beating the cart,” we should give concentrated effort to understanding in detail that this is not the same as “beating

the ox.” And even though the method of “beating the ox” is common in the world, we should go on to study the “ox beating” on the way of the buddhas. Do they “ox-beat” the water buffalo? Or “ox-beat” the iron bull? Or “ox-beat” the clay ox? Is it the whip beating? Is it the entire world beating? Is it the entire mind beating? Is it beating out the marrow? Is it the fist beating? There should be the fist beating the fist; there should be the ox beating the ox.

That Daji had no reply we should not overlook. There is “tossing out a tile and taking in a jade”; there is “turning the head and changing the face.” We should not further violate his silence here.¹⁰

Nanyue went on, “Are you studying seated meditation or are you studying seated buddha?”

Investigating these words, we should distinguish the essential function of the ancestors. Without knowing the actual meaning of “studying seated meditation,” we do know here that it is “studying seated buddha.” Who but a scion of direct descent could say that “studying seated meditation” is “studying seated buddha”? We should know indeed that the beginner’s “seated meditation” is the beginning “seated meditation”, and the beginning “seated meditation” is the beginning “seated buddha.”

In speaking of “seated meditation,” he said, “If you’re studying seated meditation, meditation is not sitting or reclining.”

The point of what he says here is that “seated meditation” is “seated meditation”; it is

not “sitting or reclining.” From the time the fact that it is not “sitting or reclining” has been singly transmitted to us, our unlimited “sitting and reclining” is our own self. Why should we inquire about close or distant blood lines? How could we discuss delusion and awakening? Who would seek wisdom and eradication?¹¹

Nanyue said, “If you’re studying seated buddha, buddha is no fixed mark.”¹²

Such is the way to say what is to be said. The reason the “seated buddha” is one or two buddhas is that he adorns himself with “no fixed mark.” Saying here that “buddha is no fixed mark” is describing the mark of a buddha. Since he is a buddha of “no fixed mark,” the “seated buddha” is difficult to avoid. Therefore, since it is adorned with this [mark of] “buddha is no fixed mark,” “if you’re studying seated meditation,” you are a “seated buddha.” “In a nonabiding dharma,” who would “grasp or reject” anything as not the buddha?¹³ Who would “grasp or reject” it as the buddha. It is because it [i.e., seated meditation] has sloughed off all “grasping and rejecting” that it is a “seated buddha.”

Nanyue said, “If you’re studying seated buddha, this is killing buddha.”

This means that, when we further investigate “seated buddha”, [we find that] it has the virtue of “killing buddha.” At the very moment that we are a “seated buddha” we are “killing buddha.” When we seek them, the marks and signs and radiance of “killing buddha” are always a “seated buddha”.

Although the word “kill” here is identical with that used by ordinary people, it is not the same. Moreover, we must investigate in what form it is that a “seated buddha” is “killing buddha”. Taking up the fact that it is itself a virtue of a buddha to “kill buddha,” we should study whether we are killers or not.

“If you grasp the mark of sitting, you’re not reaching its principle.”

To “grasp the mark of sitting” here means to “reject the mark of sitting” and to touch “the mark of sitting.” The principle of this is that, in being a “seated buddha,” we cannot fail to “grasp the mark of sitting.” Since we cannot fail to “grasp the mark of sitting,” though our “grasping the mark of sitting” is crystal clear, we are “not reaching its principle.” This kind of concentrated effort is called “sloughing off body and mind.” Those who have never sat have no words like this: they belong to the time of sitting and the one who sits, to the “seated buddha” and the study of the “seated buddha.” The sitting of a human’s “sitting and reclining” is not this sitting buddha. Although human sitting may naturally resemble a “seated buddha,” or a buddha’s sitting, it is like a human’s “making a buddha,” or a human who makes a buddha: there may be humans who make buddhas, but not all humans make buddhas, and buddhas are not all humans. Since all buddhas are not simply all humans, a human is by no means a buddha, and a buddha is by no means a human. The seated buddha is also like this.

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Here, then, in Nanyue and Jiangxi we have a superior master and strong disciple: Jiangxi is the one who verifies “making a buddha” as a “seated buddha”; Nanyue is the one who points out the “seated buddha” for “making a buddha.” There was this kind of concentrated effort in the congregation of Nanyue and words like the above in the congregation of Yaoshan.

We should know that what buddha after buddha and ancestor after ancestor have taken as their essential function is the “seated buddha.” Those who are buddhas and ancestors have employed this essential function; those who are not have never even dreamt of it. In general, to say that the teaching of the buddha has been transmitted from the Western Heavens [i.e., India] to the Eastern Earth [i.e., China] necessarily implies the transmission of the “seated buddha,” for it is the essential function [of that teaching]. Where the teaching of the buddha is not transmitted, neither is seated meditation. What has been inherited by successor after successor [in this transmission] is just this message of seated meditation; those who do not participate in the single transmission of this message are not buddhas or ancestors. When they are not clear about this one teaching, they are not clear about the ten thousand teachings, they are not clear about the ten thousand practices. Without being clear about each of the teachings, they cannot be said to have a clear eye. They have not attained the way; how could they represent the present or past of the buddhas and ancestors? By this, then, we should be firmly convinced that the buddhas and ancestors always singly transmit seated meditation.

To be illumined by the radiance of the buddhas and ancestors means to concentrate one’s efforts in the investigation of this seated meditation. Some fools, misunderstanding the radiance of the buddha, think it must be like the radiance of the sun or moon or the light from a pearl or fire. But the light of the sun and moon is nothing but a mark of action within transmigration in the six destinies; it is not to be compared with the radiance of the buddha. The radiance of the buddha means receiving and hearing a single phrase, maintaining and protecting a single teaching, participating in the single transmission of seated meditation. So long as we have not been illumined by the radiance, we lack this maintaining [a single teaching], we lack this faithfully receiving [a single phrase].

This being the case, from ancient times there have been few who understood seated meditation as seated meditation. And at present, in the “mountains” [i.e., monasteries] of the Land of the Great Song Dynasty, many of those who are heads of the principal monasteries do not understand, and do not study, seated meditation. There may be those who have clearly understood it but not many. Of course, the monasteries have fixed periods for seated meditation; the monks, from the abbot down, take seated meditation as their basic task; and, in leading their students, they encourage seated meditation. Nevertheless, the abbots who understand it are rare. For this reason, although from ancient times to the present there have been one or two old worthies who have written “Inscriptions on Seated Meditation,” one or two old worthies who have composed “Principles of Seated Meditation,” one

or two old worthies who have written “Lancets of Seated Meditation,” among them there is nothing worth taking from any of the “Inscriptions on Seated Meditation,” and the “Principles of Seated Meditation” are ignorant of its observances. They were written by those who do not understand, do not participate in, its single transmission. Such are the *Zuochan zhen* (“Lancet of Seated Meditation”) in the *Jingde chuandeng lu* and the *Zuochan ming* (“Inscription on Seated Meditation”) in the *Jiatai pudeng lu*.

What a pity that, though they may spend their lives passing among the “groves” of the ten directions [i.e., the monasteries throughout China], they do not have the concentrated effort of a single sitting — that sitting is not their own, and concentrated effort never encounters them. This is not because seated meditation rejects their bodies and minds but because they do not aspire to the true concentrated effort and are precipitately given over to their delusion. What they have collected is nothing but models for “reverting to the source and returning to the origin,” vain programs for “suspending considerations and congealing in tranquility.” They do not approach the stages of [meditation known as] “observation, exercise, infusion, and cultivation,” or the understandings of the “ten stages and virtual awakening” [on the bodhisattva path]; how, then, could they represent the single transmission of the seated meditation of the buddhas and ancestors? The Song-dynasty chroniclers were mistaken to record them, and later students should cast them aside and not read them.

Among the *Lancets of Seated Meditation*, only that composed by the Reverend Zhengjue, the

Chan Master Hongzhi of the Jingde monastery at Tiantong, renowned Mt. Dabai, in the district of Qingyuan in the Land of the Great Song, is by a buddha and ancestor, is a “lancet of seated meditation,” has said it right. It alone is a light throughout the surface and interior of the dharma realm, is by a buddha and ancestor among the buddhas and ancestors of past and present. Prior buddhas and later buddhas have been lanced by this Lancet; present ancestors and past ancestors appear from this Lancet. Here is that “Lancet of Seated Meditation.”¹⁴

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Lancet of Seated Meditation

by Zhengjue, by imperial designation the Chan Master Spacious Wisdom

Essential function of every buddha,

Functioning essence of every ancestor —
It knows without touching things;

It illumines without facing objects.

Knowing without touching things,

Its knowing is inherently subtle;

Illumining without facing objects,

Its illumining is inherently mysterious.

Its knowing inherently subtle,

It is ever without discriminatory thought;

Its illumining inherently mysterious,

It is ever without a hair’s breadth of sign.

Ever without discriminatory thought,

Its knowing is rare without peer;

Ever without a hair’s breadth of sign,

Its illumining comprehends without grasping.

The water is clear right through to the bottom;

A fish goes lazily along.

The sky is vast without horizon;

A bird flies far far away.

The “lancet” in this “Lancet of Seated Meditation” is the “manifestation of the great function”; it is the “deportment beyond sound and sight”; it is the “juncture before your parents were born”; it is “you had better not slander the buddhas and ancestors”; it is “you do not avoid forfeiting your body and losing your life”; it is “a head of three feet and neck of two inches.”¹⁵

“Essential function of every buddha.”

Every buddha always takes “every buddha” as the “essential function”; the realization of that “essential function” is “seated meditation.”

“Functioning essence of every ancestor.”

“My master had no such words” — this principle is “every ancestor.” They have the transmission of the dharma, the transmission of the robe. In sum, every face of “turning the head and changing the face” is the “essential function of every buddha”; every head of “changing the face and turning the head” is “the functioning essence of every ancestor.”

“It knows without touching things.”

“Knowing” is not the knowing of perception: the knowing of perception is of little measure. The knowing of comprehending is not “knowing”: the knowing of comprehending is constructed. Therefore, this “knowing” is “not touching things,” and “not touching things” is “knowing.” We should not measure it as universal knowledge; we should not reduce it to self-knowledge. This “not touching things” is

“When the bright comes, I hit the bright; when the dark comes, I hit the dark.” It is “sitting and breaking the skin born of mother.”

“It illumines without facing objects.”

This “illumining” is not the “illumining” of “luminous comprehension” or of “spiritual illumination”; he takes “without facing objects” as “illumining.” “Illumining” does not change into the “object,” for the “object” itself is “illumining.” “Without facing” means “throughout the realms it has never been hidden”; “it does not emerge when you break up the realms.” It is “subtle”; it is “mysterious”; it is “interacting without interacting.”

“Its knowing inherently subtle, it is ever without discriminatory thought.”

That “thought” is itself “knowing” is not necessarily dependent on the power of the other: “its knowing” is its form, and its form is the mountains and rivers. These mountains and rivers are “subtle”; this “subtlety” is “mysterious.” When we put it to use, it is “brisk and lively.” When we make a dragon, it does not matter whether we are inside or out of the Yu Gate. To put this single “knowing” to the slightest use is to take up the mountains and rivers of all realms and “know” them with all one’s power. Without our “knowing” intimately the mountains and rivers, we do not have a single knowing or a half understanding. We should not lament that “discriminatory” thinking comes later: every buddha who has ever discriminated has already appeared. “Ever without” is “previously”; “previously” is “ap-

peared.” Therefore, “ever without discrimination” is “you don't meet a single person.”

“Its illumining inherently mysterious, it is ever without a hair's breadth of sign.”

“A hair's breadth” here means all the realms. Yet it is “inherently mysterious”; it is inherently “illumining.” Therefore, it is as if it has never been brought out. The eyes are not to be doubted; we should not trust the ears. “Clarify the meaning apart from the sense; don't look to words to grasp the rule” — this is “illumining.” Therefore, it is “without peer”; therefore, it is “without grasping.” This has been upheld as “rare” and maintained as “comprehending,” but I still have my doubts about it.

“The water is clear right through to the bottom; a fish goes lazily along.”

“The water is clear.” The water that rests in space does not get “right through to the bottom” of “clear water”; still less is that which forms clear, deep pools in the vessel world the “water” of “the water is clear.” Having no shore as its boundary — this is what is meant by “clear water” “right through to the bottom.” If a “fish” goes through this “water”, it is not that it does not “go”; yet, however many myriads the degree of its progress, its “going” is immeasurable, inexhaustible. There is no shoreline by which it is gauged; there is no sky to which it ascends, nor bottom to which it sinks. And therefore there is no one who can take its measure. If we try to discuss its measure, it is only “clear water” “right through to the bottom.” The virtue of seated meditation is like the “fish

going”: who can calculate its degree in thousands or tens of thousands? The degree of the “going” “right through to the bottom” is the body as a whole does not “go” on “the path of the birds.”

“The sky is vast without horizon; a bird flies far far away.”

“The sky is vast” does not refer to what hangs in the heavens: the “sky” that hangs in the heavens is not the “vast sky”; still less is that which extends everywhere here and there the “vast sky.” Without surface or interior either hidden or manifest — this is what is meant by the “vast sky.” When the “bird” flies this sky, it is the single truth of “flying” the “sky.” This conduct of “flying” the “sky” is not to be measured: “flying” the “sky” is all realms; for it is all realms “flying” the “sky.” Although we do not know how far this “flying” goes, to express what is beyond our calculations, we call it “far far away.” It is “you should go without a string at your feet.” When the “sky” flies off, the “bird” flies off; when the “bird” flies off, the “sky” flies off. In an expression of the investigation of this flying off, it is said, “they're right here.” This is the lancet of sitting fixedly. Through how many myriad degrees does it express “they're right here”?

Such, then, is the “Lancet of Seated Meditation” of the Chan Master Hongzhi. Among the old worthies throughout the generations, there has never been another “Lancet of Seated Meditation” like this one. If the “stinking skin bags” throughout all quarters were to attempt to express a “Lancet of Seated Meditation” like this one, they could not do so though they

exhaust the efforts of a lifetime or two. This is the only “Lancet” in any quarter; there is no other to be found.

When he ascended to the hall, my former master always said, “The Old Buddha Hongzhi.” He never said this about any other person. When one has the eye to know a person, he will also “know the music” of the buddhas and ancestors.¹⁶ Truly, we know that there are buddhas and ancestors [in the lineage] under Dongshan. Now, some eighty years and more since the Chan Master Hongzhi, reading his “Lancet of Seated Meditation,” I compose this “Lancet of Seated Meditation.” It is now the eighteenth day of the third month of *mizunoe-tora*, the third year of Ninji [19 April 1242]; if we calculate back from this year to the eighth day of the tenth month in the twenty-seventh year of Shaoxing [11 November 1157, the date of Hongzhi's death], there are just eighty-five years. The “Lancet of Seated Meditation” I now compose is as follows.

Lancet of Seated Meditation

Essential function of all the buddhas,
Functioning essence of all the ancestors —
It is present without thinking;
It is completed without interacting.
Present without thinking,
Its presence is inherently intimate;
Completed without interacting,
Its completion is inherently verified.
Its presence inherently intimate,
It is ever without stain or defilement;
Its completion inherently verified,
It is ever without the upright or inclined.
Intimacy ever without stain or defilement,
Its intimacy sloughs off without discarding;

Verification ever without upright or inclined,
Its verification makes effort without figuring.
The water is clear right through the earth;
A fish goes along like a fish.
The sky is vast straight into the heavens,
A bird flies just like a bird.

It is not that the “Lancet of Seated Meditation” by the Chan Master Hongzhi has not yet said it right, but we can go on to say it like this. Above all, descendants of the buddhas and ancestors should study seated meditation as “the one great matter.” This is the orthodox seal of the single transmission.

Treasury of the True Dharma Eye
Lancet of Seated Meditation
Number 12

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NOTES

1. “Great Master Hongdao of Yaoshan” is the posthumous title of the Yaoshan Weiyān (751-834). This dialogue is one of the prime sources for Dōgen's meditation teachings and is cited

several times in his writings. The translation here adopts the usual Sōtō interpretation of the passage; but Yaoshan's first answer might also be rendered, "I'm thinking the unthinkable," and his final remark could be read, "It isn't thinking."

2. "The sort of fool that despises the near" reflects the the old Chinese saying, "The ordinary person values the distant and despises the near." Dōgen will allude to this saying again below.

3. This section is one of the more obscure arguments in the text. A possible paraphrase might look something like the following.

Although nonthinking is an awakened activity, free from all obstructions to knowledge (as in the Zen expression, "all eight sides are crystal clear"), it is a distinct act of cognition, with its own agent (the enlightened "someone" who is present in all our cognitive states). But the activity of nonthinking in meditation ("sitting fixedly") is not merely a matter of cognitive states ("thinking"): it is the act of meditation itself ("it presents sitting fixedly"). When it is just the act itself ("sitting fixedly" is "sitting fixedly"), it is not thinking even of itself.

4. Dōgen here shifts into Chinese, as if quoting a text; but the passage has not been identified as a direct citation from any known source. The "Vehicle of Humans and Devas" in the next sentence refers to the lowest level in a popular schema of five levels of Buddhist teaching, that emphasizing the laws of karma

and the keeping of the precepts.

5. From the "Song of Awakening" (*Zheng dao ge*), attributed to the early eighth-century figure Yongjia Xuanjue.

6. Here and in the previous sentence, Dōgen probably has in mind the words of Yuanwu Keqin (1063-1135):

From a thousand ages past, ten thousand ages past; the blackness is everywhere.

It fills the ditches and clogs the gullies; no one understands it.

7. One of Dōgen's favorite conversations, between Mazu Daoyi (709-788) and his teacher, Nanyue Huairang (677-744).

8. "Do not take the eyes lightly" is from the Chinese saying, "To give weight to the ears and take the eyes lightly is the constant failing of the common person."

9. The analogy of the ox and cart is taken from the story of a Buddhist nun who criticized a brahmanical ascetic for his physical austerities, saying that punishing the body instead of controlling the mind was like beating the cart instead of the ox.

10. To "toss out a tile and take in a jade" refers to the give and take of Chan dialogue; "to turn the head and change the face" expresses the fact the face turns with the head.

11. "Close or distant blood lines" here is usually taken to mean the relationship between seated meditation and our "sitting and reclin-

ing.” “Wisdom and eradication” refer to the attainment of bodhi and the elimination of the defilements, the two goals of Buddhist spiritual training.

12. “No fixed mark” alludes to the famous teaching of the *Diamond Sūtra* that the true mark of a buddha is no mark, because he transcends all phenomenal characteristics. The English “fixed” here loses a play on a term used in the Buddhist lexicon for “meditation” (from *samādhi*: “to hold [the mind] steady”); hence, the secondary sense here, “buddha is not marked by meditation.”

13. Dōgen here introduces material from Nanyue’s answer to Mazu that he does not bother to quote: “In a nonabiding dharma, there should be no grasping or rejecting.”

14. “The Reverend Zhengjue” refers to Hongzhi Zhengjue (1091-1157), a leading figure of Dōgen’s Caodong lineage and former abbot of the Tiantong monastery, where Dōgen studied.

15. Here and below, Dōgen will give a series of familiar expressions from the Zen literature.

16. To “know the music” means to another’s true heart, from the Chinese story of the man who knew his friend’s state of mind from the sound of music.



My Footnotes on Zazen (6) The Buddha’s Sitting Under a Tree 2

Rev. Issho Fujita

Director of Soto Zen Buddhism
International Center

I understand that the Buddha’s (first) sitting under a tree was an embodiment of a “middle way,” which avoids two dead ends. The first is living in fundamental ignorance and the second is living by controlling oneself artificially. “Fundamental ignorance” means that we just live driven by the power of habits with no awareness, without noticing how our body-mind is functioning. I use “body-mind” here because I want us to think of body and mind as one. “Artificial control” means that we try to unilaterally force our body-mind to follow some method or technique that we have decided on. The Buddha discovered a third way, in which we deeply experience the natural functioning of our body-mind without consciously manipulating it. For example, if we are watching our breath according to the Buddha’s third way, we will carefully notice our spontaneous breathing without interfering in its natural flow. We will neither be unaware of our breath, nor will we try to consciously control it.

Let’s consider the relationship between the body-mind and consciousness under these conditions. In the case of fundamental ignorance, consciousness does not pay any attention to the body-mind’s functioning. Therefore, there is little possibility for body-mind to improve its function, and it only repeats habitual patterns. In the case of artificial control, consciousness is