



Excerpt

Living the Season

Zen Practice for Transformative Times

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Taken from Chapter 1: Bringing Forth That Which is Within

The wonderful thing about Zen practice is that everyone has the capacity to awaken. As Jakusho Kwong Roshi, a contemporary Zen master says, “Whatever clarity, wisdom, insight we are looking for is already there. We just have to know it is there.”

Meditation practice is a practice of trusting our own eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, mind—our own deepest experience. As we bring unconditional awareness to this moment, our mind and body become one; inside and outside become one; we and our life become one. We touch our ground of being which, in Zen tradition, we call Buddha-nature. However, that place of stillness cannot be described in words. It is beyond any name we can give it. This still point is something we touch in moments of awe, when we look out at the Sierra mountains or watch the stars at night. We also source from this still point when we are engaged in everyday activity—washing the dishes, folding laundry, making tea—and give ourselves to those actions with wholehearted attention. That experience of being awake to our life is our essence, our true nature. Practice is an act of trusting that essential nature, and resting in that wholeness which we are. It is this intention to see that wholeness which then brings it forth in ourselves and others.

One element of this trust is developing an ability to rest the mind in the present moment. We are practicing being with ourselves as we are, and the moment just as it is. Woven into this is an element of letting go: letting go of our need to do something, our restlessness, our tendency to fill empty space with something—*anything*. We are nurturing calmness and self acceptance. By creating this space within, our mind becomes clear like a mirror. This makes room for new ways of seeing, and the wisdom which is uniquely ours to emerge. In the Gospel of Thomas, there is a beautiful teaching attributed to Jesus:

If you bring forth that is within you, what is within you will save you. If you do not bring forth that which is within you, what is within you will destroy you.

As we gain more confidence in our original nature, we are able to bring forth the insight and energy that is our treasure. This act of seeing the luminosity within is also the way that luminous awareness is cultivated. The seeds of wisdom and compassion awaken: we find our way.

Exercise: Centering.

Placing your feet a shoulder's- width apart, stand in your natural, fully aligned posture, feeling your presence within the body. Breathe fully through the body: through the lungs, and deeply through the lower abdomen. Place one hand three fingers below the navel, sensing the breath and its movement through the fingers of the hand. Let the outbreath be slightly longer than the inbreath, breathing in to a count of eight, and breathing out to a count of ten.

Notice whether the breath is flowing freely, or if it is constricted in any way. Where it is, try to breathe through that. See if you can relax and soften that area as well. Rest in that awareness for a few minutes. Then place the hands palm-to-palm, at heart level, near the chest. Breathing in, bring these arms up above the head, taking a gentle stretch. Breathing out, bring the arms down in a big circle as if you are embracing a huge orange, or a beach ball, letting the fingers be slightly extended. As the arms move, continue to keep awareness on the breath, rising and falling in the lower abdomen. Let the movements of your arms follow the natural rhythms of your breath. Notice any physical sensations that arise. Notice that sense of wholeness that has arisen: know that you can connect to that at any time using the breath. This is the beginning of Zen practice.