

TRANSLATIONS

The King of Samadhis Samadhi Dōgen's *Shōbōgenzō Sammai Ō Zammai*

TRANSLATED BY NORMAN WADDELL & ABE MASAO

To sit crosslegged¹ is to make a leap straightaway transcending the entire world and find oneself exceedingly sublime within the quarters of the buddhas and patriarchs. To sit crosslegged is to trample over the heads of heretics and devil legions and become the Person within the buddhas' and patriarchs' inmost precincts. For transcending the highest heights of the buddhas and patriarchs, there is only this one Dharma. Therefore, buddhas and patriarchs practice it, and they never exert efforts elsewhere.

You should know that the total realm of sitting is far different from all others.² By penetrating the true nature of this difference, you discern and af-

* Translated from Ōkubo Dōshū, *Dōgen zenji zenshū* v. 1 (Tokyo, Chikuma, 1969), pp. 539–541. In Nāgārjuna's *Mahāprajñā pāramitā sāstra* (C. *Ta chi tu lun* 大智度論 J. *Daichidoron*) the “King of Samadhis Samadhi” (*Sammai Ō Zammai* 三昧王三昧) is described: “It is called the King of Samadhis Samadhi because all the various kinds of other samadhis are included in it. It is like all the rivers and myriad rivulets of the human world flowing into the great ocean. Or like the fact that all men are vassals of the King of the realm.” Quoted from the *Sōtō-shū seiten* (Kokuyaku daizōkyō, shūten-bu 5), p. 543.

¹ To sit crosslegged—*hekkō fuza* 結跏趺坐, i.e., zazen in the full lotus position.

² This is literally, “the total realm of sitting is far different from all other total realms.” *All others*, i.e., the total realm of non-Buddhists and also of those Buddhists who do not practice crosslegged sitting and realize the King of Samadhis Samadhi. The total realm the zazen sitter attains is beyond them.

firm the arising of the religious mind, the practice, enlightenment, and nirvana of the buddhas and patriarchs.³

At the very time of your sitting, you should examine exhaustively whether the total world is vertical or horizontal.⁴ At that very time, what is this sitting itself? Is it wheeling about in perfect freedom? Is it like the spontaneous vigor of swimming fish? Is it thinking? Or not thinking? Is it doing? Is it non-doing? Is it sitting within sitting? Sitting within body and mind? Or is it sitting which has cast off sitting within sitting, sitting within body and mind, and the like? One should in this way examine exhaustively thousands or tens of thousands of such details. It should be a body sitting crosslegged. It should be a mind sitting crosslegged. It should be body and mind cast off sitting crosslegged.

My late master the old buddha said:⁵ “*Sanzen* is body and mind being cast off. It is attained only in singleminded sitting. There is no need for incense-burning, homage-paying, nembutsu, penance disciplines, or sutra-readings.”

In the past four or five hundred years it is my late master alone who decisively plucked out the eye of the buddhas and patriarchs and sat within its core.⁶ There have been few in China who could compare to him. Rare are those who have understood that sitting is the Buddha Dharma and the Buddha Dharma is sitting. Even though some may have known experientially that

³ *discern and affirm . . . patriarchs*—In *zazen*’s total realm one realizes the truth that the arising of the religious mind, practice, enlightenment, and nirvana are not relative stages of a religious process (as is usually thought by those confined to “all other realms”); each of the four is absolute and includes the other three as well. Simultaneously, this truth is affirmed or confirmed in the sitter.

⁴ *vertical or horizontal*—the SBGZ commentary *Monge* 明解 has: “Sitting crosslegged, . . . there is no vertical time division of past, present, future; horizontally, the world of all the ten quarters disappears. All is cast off. ‘Vertical’ and ‘horizontal’ are provisional names. They do not really exist.” *Sbōbōgenzō chūkai zensho* v. 8, p. 164.

⁵ The “old buddha” is Dōgen’s Chinese master Ju-ching 如淨 (J. Nyojō). While he studied under Ju-ching, Dōgen kept a record of some of his conversations with his master. These notes, later edited by Dōgen’s disciple Ejō, comprise the work which has come to be known as the *Hōkyō-ki* 寶慶記. These particular words appear in the 15th section of that work. *Dōgen zenji zenshū* v. 2, p. 377.

⁶ I. e., since the time of the T’ang Zen master Po-chang (J. Hyakujō, 720–814). See the introduction to the translation of *Fukanzazengi*, *Eastern Buddhist* VI, 2 (Oct. 1973), pp. 116–118.

sitting is the Buddha Dharma, no one has known sitting as sitting. [This being so,] how could there have been anyone to protect and uphold the Buddha Dharma as the Buddha Dharma?

Therefore, there is a mind sitting and it is not the same as a body sitting. There is a body sitting and it is not the same as a mind sitting. There is sitting with body and mind cast off, and it is not the same as sitting with body and mind cast off.⁷ Once one has attained to this suchness, one attains the buddhas' and patriarchs' harmonious unity of act and understanding. We must protect and uphold the mind, thought, and perceptions, and examine exhaustively all the thoughts and views of this attainment.⁸

*Sākyamuni Buddha preached to the assembly of monks:
If one sits crosslegged
Body and mind realize samadhi;
Great virtue, revered by all, is achieved,
One is like the sun illuminating the world.
Mind-covering sleepiness and sloth are eliminated
And the body is light and untiring.
Even awakening to enlightenment comes quickly and easily
Sitting serenely like a dragon coiled.
When he sees depictions of crosslegged sitting,
King Mara⁹ himself is filled with surprise and fear.
How could he not recoil in even greater terror
At the sight of a Waysfarer sitting calm and immovable?¹⁰*

⁷ For a mind sitting there is nothing apart from mind, and thus it is different from a body sitting. The same is true of a body sitting. Sitting with body and mind cast off is also similar; though in a relative sense it might be said to be beyond the two above mentioned, as soon as it is differentiated as such it is no longer truly "sitting with body and mind cast off."

⁸ Commentaries stress that the "protecting and upholding" and "exhaustive examination" referred to here are something that takes place after "one has attained to this suchness," and thus they do not contradict similar words in *Fukanzazengi* to "cease all the movements of the conscious mind, the gauging of all thoughts and views" (*op. cit.*, p. 122), which Dōgen directs *prior to their attainment* to those who would "attain to . . . suchness."

⁹ *King Mara*: "The Destroyer," or Evil One.

¹⁰ This verse appears in slightly different wording in the *Ta chib tu lun*, 7.

Thus, even King Mara, coming upon pictorial depictions of crosslegged sitting, is amazed, distressed, and filled with fear. So imagine his terror when faced with actual crosslegged sitting itself, the merit of which cannot be fully measured. Therefore, whenever there is sitting crosslegged there is bliss and virtue beyond measure.

Śākyamuni Buddha then told the assembly of monks:

“It is because of this that I sit crosslegged.”

He thereupon instructed all his followers that they should sit just like this. Non-buddhists seek the Way in continual tiptoe-standing, or in constant standing, or by entwining their legs about their necks. Such mentalities are overzealous.¹¹ They are sunk in a sea of falsehood. The configuration of such practitioners is unstable. That is why the Buddha taught his disciples to sit crosslegged in upright posture. Why? Because with an upright body, the mind is easily rectified. In upright sitting the mind does not grow slothful. With upright mind and right thought, mental activity is concentrated right before you. If the mind strays, if the body starts to waver, you put them to rest and into your command again. If you wish to realize samadhi, if you wish to enter samadhi, put all your wandering thoughts and various discords and disorders to rest. Practice in this way and you enter into realization of the King of Samadhis Samadhi.¹²

Now we know, without any doubt, that sitting crosslegged is in itself the King of Samadhis Samadhi. It is entering into realization. All samadhis are subordinates of this King of samadhis. Crosslegged sitting is the body of suchness, the mind of suchness, the body-mind of suchness, the buddhas and patriarchs in their suchness, practice-realization in its suchness, the crown of the head in its suchness,¹³ the Dharma lineage in its suchness.

¹¹ The translation *overzealous* for 狂狷 was suggested by a note in Arthur Waley's translation of the Confucian Analects (London, 1938, p. 260): “狂 and 狷 are complementary and not contrasted terms.”

¹² Also from the *Ta chih tu lun*, 7, where it immediately follows the preceding verse quotation.

¹³ This expression occurs often in SBGZ and in Zen literature in general. Here, the *crown of the head in its suchness* 直頂圓 connotes the Buddha Nature or Buddha Dharma as each (and all) living being.

Bringing this present human skin, flesh, bone, and marrow together, one forms the King of Samadhis Samadhi. The World-Honored One always upheld and observed crosslegged sitting. He rightly transmitted it to his disciples as well, and taught it to men and to devas. This is, in and of itself, the Seven Buddhas' rightly transmitted mind-seal.¹⁴

While Śākyamuni Buddha engaged in crosslegged sitting beneath the Bodhi tree, a period of fifty small kalpas elapsed; sixty regular kalpas, incalculable kalpas passed. [But] regardless of whether he sat crosslegged for twenty-one days or sat for only a short time, he turned the wondrous Dharma Wheel.¹⁵ This was his whole life's teaching for the purpose of enlightening others, and it is in no way lacking. This crosslegged sitting is in itself the Buddhist sutra writings. It is at the time of crosslegged sitting that one buddha encounters another. It is just then that all beings attain to buddhahood.¹⁶

After the first patriarch Bodhidharma came from the west, there was a passage of nine years during which he sat facing a wall at the Shao-lin monastery in Sung-yo¹⁷ in crosslegged zazen. Ever since then, to this very day, crowns of heads and clear eyes have been ubiquitous in the land of China.¹⁸

The lifeblood of the first patriarch's Dharma artery is simply crosslegged sitting. Before he came from the west, none in the east had yet known of sitting crosslegged. After he arrived, it was made known.¹⁹

¹⁴ The (Buddha) mind-seal is what is transmitted in face to face encounter from buddha to buddha; here, Dōgen equates it with crosslegged sitting. *Seven Buddhas* refers to Śākyamuni and the six buddhas that appeared in succession prior to him.

¹⁵ A kalpa is an inconceivably long period of time. There are different kinds of kalpas and different methods of expressing their lengths. Here the point is that it does not matter whether the Buddha sat for many kalpas or for 21 days (as various traditions have it), or for even only a very short time. Crosslegged sitting is beyond all such relativities. At each and every moment the sitter turns the Dharma Wheel.

¹⁶ This entire paragraph may be read profitably together with the opening portion of *Bendōwa*; *Eastern Buddhist* IV, 1, May, 1971, p. 134.

¹⁷ In full, Sung-yo shao-shih-feng shao-lin ssu 嵩嶽少室峯少林寺, J. Sūgaku shōshitsu-hō shōrin-ji.

¹⁸ *Crowns of beads*—see footnote 13. *Clear eyes*—*ganzei* 眼晴—an expression more or less synonymous here with crowns of heads.

¹⁹ Seated meditation was practiced in China prior to the time of Bodhidharma, but, according to Dōgen, it was not authentic zazen. Cf. above, page 119, line 15.

THE KING OF SAMADHIS SAMADHI

For this reason, when for one lifetime or ten thousand, from beginning to end, one does not leave the monastery and does singleminded crosslegged sitting from morning to night to the exclusion of all else—that is the King of Samadhis Samadhi.

Delivered the 15th day, the 2nd month, the 2nd year of Kangen (1244), at Kippō-shōja, in the province of Echizen.²⁰

²⁰ Written when Dōgen was 44 years old. Later the same year he is thought to have moved into the newly completed Daibutsu-ji from his temporary residence in Yoshimine-dera (Kippō-shōja).