

The Art of Just Sitting: Essential Writings on the Zen Practice of Shikantaza

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This comprehensive and unparalleled volume brings together a wealth of writings, from Bodhidharma and Dogen to the most prominent modern teachers, collecting the substantial core of centuries of Zen teachings.

John Daido Looi was, until his death in 2009, the spiritual leader and abbot of Zen Mountain Monastery in Mt. Tremper, New York. Trained in koan Zen as well as in the subtle school of Master Dogen's Zen, he was the Dharma heir of Hakuyu Taizan Maezumi Roshi. Devoted to maintaining authentic Zen training, he developed a distinctive style, called the Eight Gates of Zen, based on the noble eightfold path. Drawing on his background as scientist, artist, naturalist, and Zen priest, Abbot Looi was an American master who spoke directly to students from the perspective of a common background. His books include Mountain Record of Zen Talks and The Heart of Being.

Taigen Dan Leighton, Soto Zen priest and successor in the Suzuki Roshi lineage, received Dharma Transmission in 2000 from Reb Anderson Roshi and is Dharma Teacher at Ancient Dragon Zen Gate in Chicago. After residing for years at San Francisco Zen Center and Tassajara monastery, Taigen also practiced for two years in Kyoto, Japan. Taigen is author of Zen Questions: Zazen, Dogen, and the Spirit of Creative Inquiry, Faces of Compassion: Classic Bodhisattva Archetypes and Their Modern Expression, and Visions of Awakening Space and Time: Dogen and the Lotus Sutra. He has edited and co-translated several Zen texts including: Dogen's Extensive Record: A Translation of Eihei Koroku, Cultivating the Empty Field: The Silent Illumination of Zen Master Hongzhi, Dogen's Pure Standards for the Zen Community, and The Wholehearted Way, and has contributed to many other books and journals. Taigen teaches online at Berkeley Graduate Theological Union, from where he has a PhD. He has taught at other universities including Saint Mary's College, the California Institute of Integral Studies, and in Chicago at Meadville Lombard Theological Seminary and Loyola University Chicago. Taigen has long been active in social justice programs, including Peace and Environmental Activism. When Looi, now abbot of Zen Mountain Monastery, began his Buddhist practice, he couldn't find much written on the subject of zazen (sitting meditation). This anthology's 22 selections seek to fill that perceived void. Eight ancient voices such as the Fourth Ancestor of Chinese Zen Great Master Dayi (A.D. 580-651) and Eihei Dogen (A.D. 1200-1253), the most important Japanese Zen master, are translated by accomplished scholars such as Thomas Cleary. Beyond a half dozen supporting texts in the glossary, the other selections are by contemporary authors such as Shunryu Suzuki (Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind). Taken together, the writing spans 1,500 years, all pointing to the practice of "just sitting," whereby no object (breath, candle, mandala, mantra, etc.) is used as a meditation focus. Differing from the other type of zazen wherein koans are studied, shikantaza-just sitting-is less pointed in its intent and methods. There are specific instructions here for location, posture and mental state, which will be helpful for beginners. Advanced practitioners can benefit from the more esoteric thoughts about "non-thinking." Minor flaws include repetitions about technique and contradictions about breath, the need for a teacher and so on. In the main, however, Looi has compiled a useful guide to "just sitting," promising "if you were to live for a hundred thousand years, you would never find in this life anything more powerful, more healing, [and] more empowering..

- more empowering."

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