

Dogen taught that there are no steps in practice. If there were steps, there would be deluded people and enlightened people, and there would be a step from the deluded to the enlightened stage of mind. There would be a separation between delusion and enlightenment, and between deluded and enlightened people. This separation is itself delusion, because in the absolute realm there is no such step, no discrimination between delusion and enlightenment. . . . In unity or emptiness, delusion and enlightenment are not different, nor are samsara and nirvana, or deluded human beings and buddhas. That's the teaching of emptiness. Our practice does not proceed step by step. With this body and mind we sit in both individuality and universality. We are often pulled by our egocentricity. When we sit in this posture and let go of thought in our zazen, we have no technique. We have no object of meditation or contemplation. We don't concentrate our mind on anything particular. We don't pay special attention to our breathing. We don't count breaths. We don't visualize anything. We just sit in this upright posture, breathe through the nose, quietly, deeply, and smoothly, and let go of thought. To let go of thought means to allow whatever comes in to go out. We let any idea, desire, or imagination come up and then go free. Nothing stays forever. We don't try to control our mind. We simply keep our body straight, breathe quietly, and let go of thought. This is our zazen based on Dogen Zenji's teachings.

Within this zazen individuality is not lost. This is my practice; no one else can sit for me. My sitting is mine alone. And yet within this sitting practice we let go of our egocentricity. This body and mind is really part of buddha-nature, not something separate. . . . Both sides arise naturally in this simple practice. That's the meaning of Dogen's expression "practice and enlightenment are one." Practice is my own individual practice, and enlightenment is universal. There is no separation between my enlightenment and your enlightenment, but practice is individual. I cannot practice for you. Practice is my personal activity, which manifests the universal reality of life. This zazen is itself the merging of difference and unity, not a step-by-step meditation practice. When we sit, we just sit.

--Shohaku Okumura in "Living By Vow"