



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

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Shikantaza--or "just sitting"--is one of the simplest, most subtle forms of meditation, and one of the most easily misunderstood. This peerless volume brings together a wealth of writings, from the Buddha himself to Bodhidharma and Dogen and many of modern Zen Buddhism's most influential masters, all pointing directly to the heart of this powerful practice. Edited by one of America's pre-eminent Zen teachers, this book is a rich resource for wisdom seekers and scholars alike.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

When Loori, 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, Loori 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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Review

"At last a book that brings together writings on the subtlest and most fundamental Zen practice: just sitting. For the first time, now gathered in one volume, we can read 1500 years of the discovery of true path of discovery and realize what it means to be truly present for life as it is. Zen Master Daido Loori has gathered the essence of true meditation into this jewel of a book. We should not miss it." (Joan Halifax Roshi, Head Teacher, Upaya Zen Center)

"When Daido Loori, now abbot of Zen Mountain Monastery, began his Buddhist practice, he couldn't find much written on the subject of sitting meditation. Taken together, the writing in his *The Art of Just Sitting* spans 1,500 years, all pointing to the practice of 'just sitting,' whereby no object is used as a meditation focus. There are specific instructions here for location, posture, and mental state, which will be helpful to beginners. Advanced practitioners can benefit from the more esoteric thoughts about 'non-thinking.' Loori has compiled a useful guide, 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.'" (*Publishers Weekly*)

"A valuable collection from an authority on this subtle and profound form of Zen. We have needed a book like this for a long time." (Professor Francis Dojun Cook, author of *How to Raise an Ox*)

"This is the single most comprehensive treasury of writings on the subject in English. It is likely to remain the most important collection for many years to come. Often misunderstood, the practice of shikantaza is authoritatively presented and carefully examined in two dozen essays by Chinese, Japanese, and American masters, along with an appendix of six seminal classic texts. This volume, spanning the centuries since Shakymuni Buddha to the present day, will prove indispensable to meditators and scholars alike. Roshi John Daido Loori has given us a rare treasure." (John Daishin Buksbazen, author of *Zen Meditation in Plain English*)

"'Just sit' is one of the most commonly heard --and least understood--phrases associated with Zen Buddhism. And yet 'just sitting,' or shikantaza--along with koan practice--is one of the two primary methods of Zen meditation. Zen master John Daido Looi brings together teachings of some of the most prominent ancient and modern teachers, including Dogen Zenji, Shunryu Suzuki, Sheng-yen, and Maezumi. The book also includes an appendix of foundational texts relating to the practice of shikantaza." (*Tricycle*)

"Wisdom is putting out good, interesting books, and here is one devoted to the meditation of just sitting, edited by John Daido Looi, who has done a fair amount of it. It's a cool book, an anthology drawing from a variety of authors, and it takes the risk of going deep." (John Tarrant, author, Zen teacher and director of the Pacific Zen Institute [excerpted from *Buddhadharma*])

About the Author

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.

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