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My Encounter with Baikaryu Overseas

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My first encounter with Baikaryu overseas dates to 2020.

When the world was hit by a pandemic, we were forced to limit our outings, and interactions with people rapidly became scarce. It was during this time that I was approached by the Association of Soto Zen Buddhists a.k.a. Soto Zen Buddhism North America Office to see if I could teach Baikaryu to people overseas online.

At the time, I was restricted from going to Buddhist services and other outside activities due to the pandemic, and I had been studying hard on how to use internet technology to make offerings remotely. I had also studied abroad and taught zazen to people from overseas in Japan. So, I decided to use Zoom to teach Baikaryu to people overseas.

At first, I had only somehow thought that Zen was popular abroad and that there were people who stoically practiced zazen and so on in response. I also had only a limited knowledge of the Nikkei community, where people interact with each other using temples as a place of refuge.

However, when I started lecturing, I still remember being very surprised that there were more people interested in Buddhism, music and the Baika School than I had imagined. I was very nervous the first time, but as the lectures went on, I could feel the enthusiasm of the students on the computer screen. I responded by relearning English and creating materials with plenty of diagrams and other information to help bridge the language barrier.

People from overseas tend to try to grasp things logically, so I wanted to teach them theoretically, systematically and comprehensively, even to a specialized level. So, from the initial stage, I tried to teach the difficult parts as carefully as possible, taking time to teach in easy-to-understand language.

Lessons via Zoom have their pros and cons. The pros are that you can connect with the world instantly and in real time at no cost. Here's a funny story. When I was in high school (about 35 years ago now!) I had studied in Australia. Back then, you had to have a lot of coins ready to make a single international call, and every few seconds the dimes would run down. And it was voice only. The greatest benefit of the internet is that we can now connect to the world in real time via video and audio.

The cons are that although many people's faces can be seen in a small window on the display, it is difficult to grasp each person's facial expressions and gestures. The quality of the presentation will be lower than if you were to explain it face to face, looking at each person's facial expression. Also, although it is possible to communicate with people even if they cannot speak a few words by using gestures and facial expressions, Zoom often resulted in “one-way” communication. Because of the slight time lag, it was difficult to chant at the same time or listen to each other, so I would only play a “one-way” voice, and others would mute themselves.

However, the advantages were so great that I saw considerable potential in this. To compen-

sate for the disadvantages, I prepared as many illustrations as possible using PowerPoint. In the past, I would have had to spend a lot of time creating documents by hand, but with PowerPoint, I could create a lot of them in a few minutes. I also spent a great deal of time explaining the lyrics so that the participants would understand the meaning of the lyrics before reciting them. Of course, I included the Japanese translation of each lyric, but I also carefully conveyed the meaning of each word. I was reminded of the rich expressions and meanings contained in a single Japanese word.

Baikaryu is composed of "*Tanka*" or "*Renka*," short lyrics with very limited words. Therefore, there are very few words used, but by savoring and interpreting every one of them, an infinite world opens.

For the students to embody the unique worldview of the Japanese language and the power of the "Words and Words" as actually read by the patriarchs, I placed emphasis on chanting in Japanese and having the students deeply understand the meaning of the words.

In the meantime, two years passed in the blink of an eye. The Corona disaster, which had been such a big deal, was over. In May 2023, the 100th anniversary of the founding of Zen Buddhism in North America was celebrated at the Zenshuji Temple in Los Angeles, and I was able to make my long-awaited trip to the United States. I still remember the excitement I felt when I was able to meet the participants in person, whom I had only been able to meet online.

The Baikaryu National Convention was held on May 15 in Okinawa Prefecture. I think it was very significant that our friends from overseas participated in this convention, which was held to commemorate the 80th anniversary of the end of World War II and to pray for peace.

Recently, I heard that there are several overseas Zen centers that have established Baikaryu groups. Baikaryu overseas has only just begun to sprout, but I am sure that the trunk of the Baikaryu will grow thicker and branch out to bear many fruits because of the ties among many people. I will continue to make efforts for the development of Baikaryu in the world to be a part of it.

Practicing Together: Impressions from the Baikaryu's National Convention in Okinawa

Michaela Mross
Stanford University

On May 15, 2025, over 3,000 Soto Zen practitioners came together in Okinawa to attend the national convention of the Baikaryu, the Soto school's lineage of chanting eisanka hymns. International practitioners were also invited, and I along with fourteen fellow practitioners traveled to Okinawa to attend this major gathering. We came from various locations: eight of us came from Hawaii, four from Los Angeles, one from Europe, one from Hokkaido, and I came from Tokyo, where I am currently conducting research, but I am based in the San Francisco Bay Area.[1]

It was a warm, humid morning with a refreshing breeze when Rev. Shinryu Okuma, a specially dispatched Baikaryu teacher, awaited six of us international participants in front of the Okinawa Suntory Arena. I had met Rev. Okuma first at the 100th anniversary celebration of Soto Zen in North America commemorated at Zenshuji in Los Angeles in 2023. A year later, he taught a workshop at Sokoji in San Francisco, which I was able to attend. He also visited Stanford University to give a lecture on Baika, and my students thoroughly enjoyed singing the *Japanese Hymn of the Three Treasures* (*Sanbō gowasan*) with him. I was delighted to see Rev. Okuma now in Okinawa.

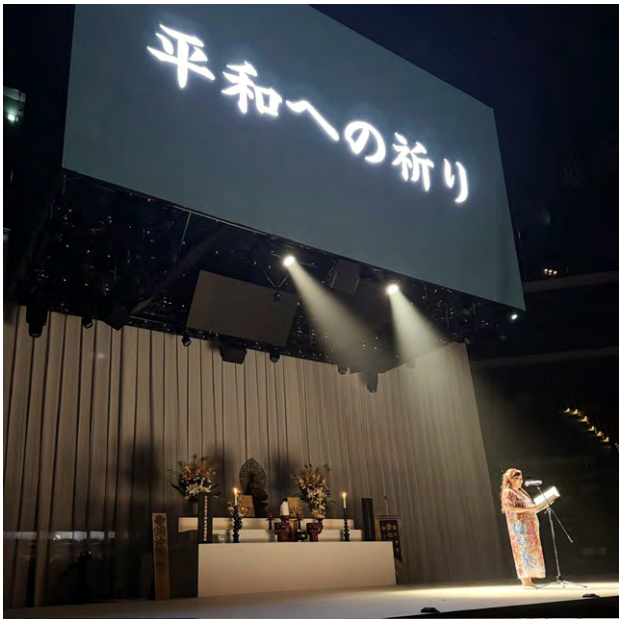
We arrived early. The other participants had not arrived yet, but the staff members hustled around to prepare for this large event. Rev. Okuma guided us to our assigned seats in the first row, right next to the VIP seats. We were struck by the grand venue: we faced a large stage and looking backward we saw countless empty seats, which were soon to be filled with thousands of attendees.

There was a reason why we arrived early: the Soto school's headquarters had organized for us to take an exam as Baikaryu practitioners. Baikaryu exams are usually not given outside of Japan, and thus three participants from Los Angeles and I took our first exam together. We had never sung together before, but we supported each other when performing the hymns, embodying the spirit of the Baikaryu. Taking any exam naturally induces nervousness in examinees, but the examiners kindly encouraged us to demonstrate what we had practiced in preparation for the exam. Relieved and with a sense of accomplishment, we all gratefully passed the exam.

Having returned to our seats, we waited for the start of the convention. Groups from all across Japan started to arrive and the arena slowly filled. Attendees used the time to connect with old friends. Especially the priests seemed to reconnect with their colleagues whom they have met during their training or on other occasions. It was a bustling scene. I also connected again with some friends from my long-term stays in Japan and briefly greeted members of the Baika group of the head temple Sojiji, of which I am currently a member. The chatter of happy voices

filled the hall. The Hawaii members of the international group arrived, and we prepared for our upcoming performance.

Then, the deep sound of a large temple bell resounded throughout the hall. The venue became quiet. The light was darkened, and so the professionally staged convention started. On the large screen above the stage, the script "A Prayer for Peace" appeared. An Okinawan woman read a statement expressing a wish and prayer for world peace from Okinawa, the location of the bloodiest battlefield of the Asia-Pacific War where over 200,000 people had died.



It was a moving statement that reminded all of the sufferings induced by the warfare; a somber feeling that was underscored by the darkness in the hall. Praying for peace was the main theme of the convention because this year, 2025, marks the 80-year anniversary of the end of the Asia-Pacific War. The theme resonates with the memoirs of early Baikaryu founders that I have read. Niwa Butsuan (1880-1955), who inspired the founding of the Baikaryu, for example, wanted to create a Soto Zen hymn chanting practice in order to heal the hearts of people after the long and devastating war.[2] It felt to me that healing also lay at the center of the convention in Okinawa through offering sincere prayers for a world without war.

After the opening statement, three lay practitioners from Kagoshima entered the stage to lead all attendees in reciting the Baikaryu's vows: "Through Baikaryu hymns, we will live according to proper teachings. Through Baikaryu hymns, we will live in harmony with others. Through Baikaryu hymns, we will create a cheerful world around us." Then, Minamizawa Donin Zenji (97), the abbot of the head temple Eiheiji, who had traveled all the way from Fukui to Okinawa to attend the national Baika convention, officiated over two solemn ceremonies: first, a rite for peace on the occasion of the 80th anniversary of the end of the war and second, a memorial ritual for victims of wars and natural disasters. When the priests entered the stage to perform the rituals, all attendees intoned the *Japanese Hymn of the True Teaching* (*Shōbō gowasan*). The voices of the 3,000 participants harmonized in offering prayers for peace. When we later recited together the *Japanese Hymn for the Memorial Service of War Victims* (*Sensai shōrei kuyō gowasan*) and the *Devotional Song for the Ancestors' Memorial Service* (*Tsuizen kuyō goeika*) the atmosphere deepened and added weight to the wish of peace. Singing in unison created a community of fellow Baikaryu practitioners and established a harmony between the attendees, in accord with the Baikaryu vows. After the rites, Minamizawa Zenji, addressed the audience, and remembering the suffering of the war with deep pain, he expressed his gratitude

for being able to pray for peace together with the attendees on this occasion.

Next was one of the main parts of the program: local groups of Baika practitioners were to perform a hymn assigned to them by the headquarters on stage. Hundreds of people attended from each local area and therefore, 150 singers were selected to represent each group. The others from a respective local area sang from their seats in the arena, supporting their fellow singers on the stage. Our group, the international one, had only 15 participants, and therefore we all had a chance to perform on stage. Probably like all singers, we had intensively prepared before, and Rev. Okuma had given us an online workshop on how to sing the hymn assigned to us.

Seeing all the practitioners from all across Japan entering the stage and wholeheartedly performing their songs was deeply moving. The MCs provided an entertaining moderation when they introduced the groups and the songs to be performed. After each performance, they explained points that singers should pay attention to. People enjoyed their moderation, and especially the discussion of the melodic embellishment like aya created reactions in the audience. It was also beautifully set up with the lyrics displayed on the large screen on top of the stage, and we were able to follow the hymns along.

Our group sang last. After entering the stage and having taken a seat, we carefully set up our bells and hymn books. When I looked up into the audience, I was struck by the large number of listeners I saw and, while also feeling nervous, I felt a deep gratitude for the chance to join the Japanese practitioners on this occasion. It was probably not a coincidence that the hymn that was assigned to us was the *Japanese Hymn of Practicing Together* (*Dōgyō Gowasan*). We intoned: "We are the pure friends who bond with each other as the disciples of the Buddha. Encouraging and caring for each other, we walk the path of the same practice and the same cultivation."[3] We harmonized our voices and coordinated our movements with the singers next to us, many of whom we had just met for

the first time; but we also harmonized with all attendees in the audience, whose performances we had just witnessed. Thus, we international participants were able to practice together with Japanese Baikaryu practitioners, and the hymn expressed our gratefulness and delight about this opportunity.

After lunch, a contrasting program followed. Kids of a kindergarten in Okinawa performed traditional dances, including a fun lion dance. Their performance was joyful, and the audience clapped their hands while their faces lit up with smiles. Their heartwarming performance brought a light atmosphere to the arena.

Then the arena was darkened again. The Soto school's specially dispatched Baikaryu teachers entered the stage. The hall became quiet. When they started singing the Japanese Hymn on Peace Memorial (Heiwa kinen gowasan), we international attendees in the first row were deeply moved: the priests sang very beautifully while conveying the meaning of the lyrics – and their bells were so well coordinated. Then they sang *Song of the Three Treasures* (*Sanbō sanka*), based on *Sanbō gowasan*, the hymn some of us had just performed during the exam in the morning, but they sang it in an arrangement with harmonies. It was a stunning performance. We international participants just looked at each other expressing awe for this impressive performance that fully displayed the beauty of the Baikaryu hymns.

The quietude continued with all sitting in zazen while one priest solemnly sang the *Devotional Hymn of Zazen* (*Zazen goeika*). After closing words, all sang together the cheerful song, *Living with Sincerity* (*Magokoro ni ikiru*) celebrating the end of this wonderful convention. It was a grand finale, leaving smiles on the faces of attendees.

The convention showcased the important role of music in Zen practice. The meeting was professionally organized and carefully staged with the effective use of light and sound engineering, entertaining moderation, and a diverse program ranging from cheerful songs to solemn prayers for world peace to sitting in quietude. And so the vows of the Baikaryu became alive during this occasion, creating a harmonious and cheerful world.

There is a growing interest in Baikaryu among Zen practitioners in Europe and North America, and our participation at the national convention is a sign that the Baikaryu is taking root outside of Japan. We were able to share the practice of singing hymns together with the Japanese attendees and thus "walked the path of the same practice and the same cultivation together."

1. I have conducted research on the history and practice of the Baikaryu. See, for example, the following articles: Mross, Michaela (2024). "The Founding of the Baikaryu: *Goeika* Hymn Chanting in the Postwar Sōtō School." *Journal of Religion in Japan* 13/1: 26-61; and Mross, Michaela (2024). "Singing and Zen are One: The Sōtō School's Baikaryu." *The Eastern Buddhist*, Third Series, Volume 4/1: 53-88.

2. Niwa Renpō (1980). *Baika kai*: *Waga hanshō* (Shizuoka: Tōkeiin), p. 156.

3. Translation from the English Baikaryu handbook: *Soto Zen Buddhism Baikaryu Eisanka* (2018). *Encounter with the Buddha* (Tokyo: Sotoshu Shumucho), 54.

A Biography of Ejo Zenji, Second Abbot of Eiheiji (Part 1)

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I. Introduction

Various biographical materials have been compiled about Ejo zenji, the second abbot of Eiheiji Temple. In this series, I will use the following ancient biographical sources:

- "*Chronicle of the Three Ancestors of Eiheiji*" - Chapter on "The Second Ancestor Ejo"
- "*Record of the Actions of the Three Great Revered Ones*" - "Record of the Actions of Ejo, Second Abbot of Eiheiji"
- "*Denkoroku*" - "Chapter on the Fifty-second Ancestor"
- "*Tokokuki*" - "A Brief Record of the Five Elders of Tokoku Dento-in and Their Enlightenment and Actions"

Currently, in the "Fifty-seven Buddhas" chanted during the dedication portion of the "Ancestors Hall Sutra Chanting" in the morning service, we chant "Great Teacher Koun Ejo." However, none of the ancient biographies mentioned above record that he had the Dharma name "Koun," only indicating that his personal name was "Ejo." Since "Koun" appears only in relatively recent biographies from the Edo period onward, in this series I will not use "Koun" but will refer to him as Ejo zenji of Eiheiji.

II. Birth

According to ancient traditions, Ejo zenji's

birth is described as being from "Rakuyo" (the capital), so he is believed to have been born within the former Heian-kyo [present-day Kyoto]. His family name is given as "Tōshi," indicating he was from the Fujiwara clan. His birth year is recorded as "Kenkyu 9," which corresponds to 1198 CE, making him two years older than Dogen zenji (1200-1253), the founding abbot of the great head temple Eiheiji.

The Fujiwara clan of his birth family was the clan that occupied the center of politics during the Nara and Heian periods, when Japanese politics centered around the emperor and nobility. The origin traces back to Nakatomi no Kamatari (614-669), who acted together with Prince Naka no Ōe (later Emperor Tenji, 626-672) in the "Isshi Incident" of 645, which was a coup against the Soga clan. Due to his achievements, Kamatari was granted the surname "Fujiwara" by Emperor Tenji on his deathbed, and among the Nakatomi clan, only Kamatari's direct descendants took the name "Fujiwara."

According to ancient legends, he was "the great-grandson of Kujo Chancellor Itsu and grandson of Torikai Middle Counselor Ijitsu." This Kujo Chancellor Itsu refers to Fujiwara no Koremichi (1093-1165), who served as Grand Minister and was called "Kujo Great Chancellor" because he had a residence in the Kujo area of Kyoto. This lineage of Fujiwara no Koremichi belonged to the lineage of the nobleman Fujiwara no Michinaga (966-1028), who was best known in the middle to late Heian period, continuing from Michinaga's second son Fujiwara no Yorimune (993-1065) through Yorimune → Toshiie → Munemichi → Koremichi.

Fujiwara no Koremichi's second son was Fujiwara no Korezane (1123 or 1125? -1160), who is introduced in the ancient biography of Ejo zenji as "Torikai Middle Counselor Ijitsu." In the "Tale of the Heike" and "Genpei Josuiki," which describe the "Genpei War" - a power struggle between warrior clans - he was referred to as "Torikai Middle Counselor." Since Korezane died in his late thirties, Ejo zenji's birth family apparently faced considerable hardship during the period when the warrior Taira no Kiyomori (1118-1181) was rising to power. The person presumed to be Ejo zenji's actual father was Korezane's son, Fujiwara no Koresuke (1155-1218), who was only six years old when his father Korezane died. Around Kenkyu 9 (1198), when Koresuke obtained the position of "Kurodo no Kami" under Emperor Tsuchimikado (1195 or 1196? -1231), Ejo zenji was born. Koresuke later advanced in his career serving Retired Emperor Go-Toba (1180-1239) but took monastic vows in the fourth month of Joei 1 (1206) and died in the third month of Kenpo 6 (1218).

Therefore, during Ejo zenji's upbringing, his birth family did not enjoy the former glory they once boasted, and many of his uncles and brothers became monks. While having many monks in the clan was certainly not unrelated to the family's circumstances, it could also be evaluated as evidence of deep faith.

III. Taking Monastic Vows

Regarding Ejo zenji's taking of monastic vows, ancient legends state that "he paid respects to Hoin Enno of Enryakuji Temple and had his head shaved, and likewise at the Kaidan-in of Enryakuji, in Kenpo 6 (1218) he

received the Bodhisattva precepts and became a monk." First, Enryakuji is the head temple of the Japanese Tendai school's Sanmon branch, a temple built on Mount Hiei (Shiga Prefecture) by Dengyo Daishi Saicho (766 or 767? -822). From the late Heian through the Kamakura periods, Mount Hiei produced the founding masters of Buddhist schools that now represent Japan. Masters such as Honen, who established the Jodo school; Shinran shonin, who established Jodo Shinshu; Eisai zenji, who transmitted Rinzai Zen; and Nichiren shonin, who established the Nichiren school, were all from Mount Hiei. Dogen zenji, who transmitted Soto Zen to Japan, also took monastic vows and practiced on Mount Hiei.

Hoin Enno (1152-1220) was a person who lived at Sonsho-in in Yokawa at Enryakuji and, according to contemporary noble diaries, was recognized as a lecturer for sutra lectures and debates. The document "Kacho Yoryaku," which collects Tendai school records, contains records of successive abbots of Sonsho-in, and Hoin Enno was from the same Murakami Genji clan as Dogen zenji (a branch of the Genji clan descended from Emperor Murakami, the 62nd emperor, which gained great power in the early Kamakura period).

There is also a record that Ejo zenji's head-shaving occurred at age 18 ("*Denkoroku*"), and afterward, in Kenpo 6 (1218), he received the Bodhisattva precepts at the Mahayana ordination platform on Mount Hiei and became a monk. At the time he became a monk, Ejo zenji was 21 years old, which gives a somewhat late impression compared to Dogen zenji, who became a monk at age 14. Considering that his actual father died in Kenpo 6 (1218), it's possible that his father's death influenced Ejo zenji's monastic ordination, though the biographies record nothing about this. On the other hand, Ejo zenji's mother, in one admonition, spoke about "my intention in having you become a monk" ("*Denkoroku*"), suggesting that his mother's intention may have influenced his ordination. However, it's unclear how Ejo zenji received his mother's intention, so the details are unknown.

IV. Studies

Ejo zenji began studying on Mount Hiei, and according to ancient traditions, "he studied the two teachings of Kusha and Jojitsu, and later studied the "Maka Shikan" ("*Denkoroku*"). In other words, he studied the teachings of the "Abhidharma Kossa" and "Satyasiddhi" treatises, which were sectarian Buddhist treatises studied in the scholarly lineage of Nara Buddhism. He also studied the teachings of Sanron and Hosso (Yogacara) that existed in Nara Buddhism ("*Record of the Three Ancestors' Actions*"), but he understood all these as being "conditioned (impermanent and transient teachings)." In other words, he seems to have considered them unsuitable for advancing on the Buddhist path, and later studied the Tendai priest Zhiyi's "Maka Shikan," which discusses Tendai meditation. However, the details of how he studied are not transmitted, but since it also states that he "abandoned the method of learning and understanding through letters" ("*Record of the Three Ancestors' Actions*"), at this stage he may have already turned his heart toward Zen Buddhism, known for "not founded on words and letters, a transmission separate from the teachings." At

Mount Hiei, it is believed that Eisai zenji (1141-1215) and Kaku'a shonin (1143 - year of death unknown) had acquired a certain level of knowledge and understanding through their studies in China. Although [the establishment on] Mount Hiei, which in Kenkyu 9 (1198) felt a crisis from the rapid expansion of Zen Buddhism and issued an imperial decree to halt Zen Buddhism, they may have gradually accepted Zen Buddhism through the influence of Eisai zenji's "The Promotion of *Zen for the Protection of the Country* (*Kozen Gokoku-ron*)", which refuted this.

Moreover, while ancient legends state that Dogen zenji also studied Tendai esoteric Buddhism (*Taimitsu*) on Mount Hiei, there is no record of Ejo zenji studying esoteric Buddhism. Since Hoin Enno, who is considered his teacher at this time, was known as a lecturer in debates and such, it appears that Ejo zenji did not practice esoteric Buddhism. Hoin Enno died in 1220, three years after Ejo zenji entered Mount Hiei, so it's unclear how much teaching he received from him.

At an unknown time, Ejo zenji was admonished by his mother: "My intention in having you become a monk is certainly not that you should attain high rank on Mount Hiei and have relationships with nobles. I only think that you should proceed on foot, aiming for the truth" ("*Denkoroku*"). When Ejo zenji accepted his mother's feelings, he changed his robes (changed sects), left the Tendai school, and never returned to Mount Hiei again.

Afterward, he studied Pure Land Buddhism and the Daruma school, which I would like to examine in future installments.

My Footnotes on Zazen (29) Viewing Zazen Through the Lens of the Alexander Technique (4)

Rev. Issho Fujita

Let's return to the lesson scene [where Rev. Fujita was receiving an Alexander Technique lesson from Meredith]. I was somewhat able to understand that what Meredith was trying to say pointed in the same direction as the previously introduced "Zen-like" expressions such as "be movable without moving" or "be still without holding." Essentially, it was about "whether one can relax while remaining vigilant." However, I wasn't confident whether I was actually embodying what she was describing, so I honestly had to say, "I sort of understand, but also don't... Am I doing it correctly?"

She then responded, "Don't receive what I said as a 'task' to accomplish or not accomplish. What's important is how much you can feel, as a sensation, the state of your body-mind without excess tension, and how consciously you can distinguish between a relaxed state and an unrelaxed state. What I said was to invite you to feel your body from the inside. Were you able to experience the 'undoing' of what you're doing unnecessarily?"

"When you try too hard to sit or concentrate, using incorrect effort, your body becomes constricted. To avoid this, are you aware of the larger environment surrounding your body, your breath, the room, sounds, light, the presence of

other people, all these things?"

When I asked, "Meredith, could you give me some advice about my breathing?" she placed her hands on my back, sides, and ribs. "Yes, as I mentioned earlier, allow your ribs to move more freely forward and backward, left and right, up and down. You're still tensing your chest too much... Yes, that's it, you can feel it moving just a little bit, can't you? And with your exhalation, without forcing it out, let it release completely. Notice the pause that comes after the exhale. Let the inhalation come in by itself. Don't try to inhale actively..."

In the Alexander Technique, it's considered incorrect to think that "I am doing the breathing." It's said that breathing naturally improves as a secondary result of improving the Primary Control (the specific dynamic relationship that the head has with the neck and back, called "Primary Control" because this relationship has fundamental significance for all uses of the body). Therefore, intentional exercises or methods that directly try to change breathing interfere unnecessarily with the natural ability of "breathing coming to the organism." The principle of the Alexander Technique is that if you stop doing the wrong thing, the right thing happens naturally. Alexander said, "Actually, when the parts of my body work in perfect harmony according to its needs, breathing functions by itself as a subordinate movement." From this perspective, Dogen zenji's only reference to breathing in *Fukanzazengi*, "breathing gently through the nose," can be understood as a quality of breathing that should naturally be realized through a sequence of: properly functioning Primary Control → spine lengthens → all muscles attached to the spine gently stretch → intervertebral discs between the vertebrae expand and stretch further → the entire torso is released → ribs open → ribs move freely, and breathing becomes easier. In other words, we do not directly control the breath with our consciousness to make it "gentle breathing through the nose."

Perhaps the essentials of zazen – whether "sitting with the body upright" (adjusting the body), "breathing gently through the nose" (adjusting the breath), or "think of not-thinking" (adjusting the mind) – are not things to be "accomplished by direct engagement" but rather things that should be naturally realized through indirect engagement. Could this indirect engagement be what Dogen zenji expressed as "When we just cast aside and forget about our own body and mind, throwing ourselves into the house of the buddhas, letting the buddhas act and according with them?" Translating this into Alexander Technique terminology, "casting aside and forgetting body and mind, throwing ourselves into the house of the buddhas" would correspond to inhibiting and undoing the misuse of body-mind, while "letting the buddhas act and according with them" would mean that through the natural functioning of the Primary Control, the use of the self improves qualitatively, causing positive changes in all aspects of life. Dogen zenji expressed this fundamental change as "then without exerting ourselves, without expending our minds, we are free from birth and death and become a buddha."

Meredith said, "Well, that's enough talk for now. Let's sit zazen for a short time. Feel as

though you're continuously making subtle movements rather than fixing your body in a rigid position. A state where stillness exists within movement. If you feel tension arising within yourself, stop, let it go, and begin again. Continue to quietly observe both yourself and your environment..."

After sitting like this for a while, she said, "It's time to wrap up this lesson. Let's end with a Conscious Constructive Rest (CCR) lesson. You already know about CCR, right? Yes, it's also called 'semi-supine' in the Alexander Technique world, but I call it this based on a particular philosophy. Now, please lie on your back. Take your time. No need to rush. How you enter the CCR position is very important. If you lie down hurriedly and tensely, your body contracts, twists, and your spine shortens, and just undoing that might take up all our time... Yes, that's good. I'll place this cushion under your head... Is this height alright? Neither too high nor too low?... Now, I'm going to move your arms, legs, and head, so don't resist or move by yourself. Just relax and let yourself be moved. And don't focus only on the places being touched, but feel what's happening throughout your entire body..."

Saying this, Meredith lifted my left leg, carefully and slowly bent the hip and knee joints, rotated them several times at the hip joint, and then stabilized my leg with the foot on the floor and the knee raised. After doing the same to my right leg, she then took my left arm, slowly pulled out the shoulder blade while rotating it several times, then placed it on the floor, saying, "Think of rotating the upper arm outward from the elbow, and the forearm inward from the elbow..." as she gently placed my left palm on my stomach. After doing the same with my right arm, she came to my head, sat down, lifted my occiput (the back part of the head or skull) slightly with both hands, gently rolled my head right and left, and then replaced my head on the cushion while slightly pulling the occiput. During this time, I remained as relaxed as possible, allowing myself to be moved. Her touch and movements were extremely careful, and I felt comfortable entrusting myself to her. It felt as if she was feeling and searching for the most comfortable and easiest place for my limbs, neck, and head to settle. When this was done, I could feel myself lying with my arms, legs, head, and neck extended outward, and my torso elongated. The arching in my lower back and neck had relaxed, and I felt my body's weight sinking deeply into the floor. I could feel the floor's firm support.

"How is it? Can you feel your body settling? CCR is a position that maximizes rest for the spine. Lying down like this once or twice a day is highly recommended for health because it stops the process of depletion and begins the process of recovery."

"Normally, from here, we would scan the body in this CCR position and work on the 'directions' that are important in the Alexander Technique, but we're out of time today, so let's finish here. Now, get up. Just as you carefully lay down, get up slowly and carefully from CCR... Yes, that's good..."

I often practice getting up from a supine position with minimal effort in my zazen

groups. First, I look to the left side where I want to roll my body, then guided by this, my head turns left, followed by my neck and torso rotating to the left. I bring my right hand along my torso to the floor on the left side, then my lower body turns left until I'm lying on my side. Pushing the floor with my right hand raises my upper body slightly, creating space between me and the floor, so I can also push with my left hand, which naturally lifts my hips into a crawling position. By bringing my hips closer to my heels, I move into the seiza position. From there, as my head leads my entire body upward, I rise to a kneeling position, and further guided by my head extending upward, I step forward with my right leg and stand up... Thus ended Meredith's very rich hour-and-a-half lesson. I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to her here.

It is absolutely impossible to convey the essence of the Alexander Technique in writing. I wrote this poor report simply to let zazen practitioners know that resources (information resources) useful to us exist outside of Buddhism, such as the Alexander Technique. I hope this will inspire some people to actually take lessons and apply them to their zazen practice.

Postscript: Many Alexander Technique videos are uploaded on YouTube, so those interested can refer to them (search for "Alexander Technique"). They will supplement my description of the lessons. For CCR, the following video shows how to lie down and get up, which might be helpful:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4IYxprxDol8

NEWS

April 29, 2025
South America Soto Zen Conference was held on Zoom.

April 30. May 21. July 2. 23. August 20. September 17, 2025
Online Baika classes hosted by the Soto Zen Buddhism Europe Office were held via Zoom.

June 13~22, 2025
Dharma talks by Sotoshu Specially Dispatched Teacher were held at eight places in North America.

September 18~October 1, 2025
Dharma talks by Sotoshu Specially Dispatched Teacher were held at six places in South America.

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