



## USING SPACE AND DEFINITION TO ENRICH YOUR LIFE

Zen Buddhism's most notable figure is probably Dogen Zenji, who lived in the 11<sup>th</sup> century. One of his most useful and applicable teachings is to 'complete that which appears'. An appearance is anything that appears in our field of awareness. One could say appears in mind, but thoughts can happen without any awareness. Becoming cognizant of how our mind works is huge step. I mean, you shouldn't just be a pawn that's being dragged around by all of your concerns and thoughts, right?

In the midst of confusion, we crave connection and nice states of mind while searching for creative ways to bury our fear. Thank goodness there are many sites/teachings that are out there to soothe us, but if you really want to cultivate a deeper practice, learning how to become familiar with your mind in an accepting kind way is, in my opinion, essential. Then, we can change and transform. Working with Dogen's teaching can really help.

So, when I sit, many times I just let my breath come to me and focus on my inhale and exhale. Like **everything**, our inhales and exhales have a beginning and end, they have a duration, and they change. Sometimes I pay attention to the gaps at the top and bottom of the breath.

Creating the intention to keep your attention on the breath is an advanced yogic skill, and as the skill develops, it becomes easier to notice how our thoughts, emotions, and stories/concerns appear. Noticing intense physical rhythms and sensations, or a strong emotion such as anger or ecstasy without attachment or aversion is very enlightening. The commitment to keep coming back to the breath helps to see how thoughts come and go (once again noticing the beginning and finding a way to 'complete' (not resolve necessarily) it).

A Zen master taught me something I do frequently both on and off the cushion. I think of myself as *just* a location and observe what comes into my awareness as if it were the future moving towards me encased in a bubble like a taste treat: a sight, a sound, an emotion, a self-criticism. I observe it within the bubble as it moves closer, and then 'POP', it disappears (a completion). Then out of that space a new taste treat appears and it pops. If you try this, you may find that you can walk around it and let the content really emerge....and pop. Dogen also said to let *things* come forward and reveal themselves to you. Instead of projecting your definition onto a tree, let the tree reveal itself to you. Artist's and poet's do this well.

Does the future move towards us this way? Who knows, but I do know that it really changes my experience. Just for the fun of it use your vision wherever you are to try this bubble exercise. Encase an object and hold it, and then shift to something else. Millions of taste treats appearing. How do you pick and choose? You can expand it to include thoughts and emotions. True mindful meditation practice is a tool to help pull you into your experience without criticism.

Creating space and definition while simultaneously feeling flow is an art. An activity or thought-stream is comprised of many consecutive moments. When you are able to stop/complete an unproductive thought or feeling, it brings you back to an open spaciousness. That is also a part of the beauty of making lists. When you cross off even something silly like 'get out of bed' there is a sense of completion which creates a pleasant momentary sense of clear open space. Meditating with awareness on clear open space is Samadhi.

In this very strange time, we've all observed how ourselves and others' lives and nervous systems have been affected. Our karma is like our shadow; when we stop, it slams into us. All of our unfinished business is there glaring at us: the clutter in the garage, stacks of papers, and every critical thought we harbor against ourselves. Meditation reveals this. It teaches you organically why it is important to live responsibly and tie up loose ends as they appear.

So, I'm suggesting that we can all use this time to practice completions (consciously) whether it is turning off the light switch, bringing your hands together in gratitude, or stopping a thought. As you do this more, you will notice how so many of us are spilling/rambling all over the place with no definition. As you learn to pause, you will become comfortable with space instead of rushing in to fill it. The beautiful ironic thing, is 'finding pauses and noticing completions' actually makes you much more productive. You hear more. You see more. Kindness, gratitude, and compassion can be felt more fully and more frequently. Namaste

