

## Notes and Quotes For September 12, 2021 Dharma Reflections:

### How Might Reading (study, listening) and Analytical Meditation Support Zen Practice?

The [Abhidharma-samuccaya](#) states:

What is the path of [accumulation]? ... It is also the merit acquired through other practices, wisdom acquired through listening (study, teaching) (*śrutamayīprajñā*), wisdom acquired through reflection (*cintāmayīprajñā*) and wisdom acquired through mental cultivation (*bhāvanāmayīprajñā*). Through the development of these qualities one obtains receptivity to comprehension [of the Truth] and liberation.

([Asanga](#) (2001), p. 141, *Abhidharmasamuccaya: The Compendium of the Higher Teaching (Philosophy)*, translated by Boin-Webb, Sara; Rahula, Walpola, Asian Humanities Press)

In the [Abhidharma-kosa](#), Vasubandhu states:

Observing discipline, and having heard and contemplated the teachings,  
One applies oneself intensively to meditation.<sup>[1]</sup>

([Vasubandhu](#) (1991, VI, 5 *Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam*, Volume 1-3, translated by [Pruden, Leo M.](#); [de La Vallée Poussin, Louis](#), Asian Humanities Press)

[Ashvaghosha](#) said:

The man of little learning is as if born blind.  
How can he meditate? On what can he reflect?  
Study then with diligence, reflect and meditate;  
Through this, vast wisdom will arise.

(*Treasury of Precious Qualities*, p. 246)

(Notes: Thanks to [https://encyclopediaofbuddhism.org/wiki/Main\\_Page](https://encyclopediaofbuddhism.org/wiki/Main_Page) for these citations. Ashvaghosha and Vasubandhu appear in the RZC's *Ancestral Line* chant.)

### Possible Discussion Starting Points

1. When Bodhidharma came to China, the Dharma had been present there for centuries. When what became Zen or Seon, respectively, came to Japan or Korea, the Dharma had also been present in those cultures for centuries. Practitioners in Asia thereafter had grown up with Buddhism being a part of their family life, community life, and national history. Does it make more sense to tell Asian novices, who are familiar with Buddhist principles, to avoid reading and study, than it does to tell this to Western beginners? Would it help at least some of us to study and reflect on the meaning of some of the “basics”?

Similarly, many of the great ancestors we hear about in *teisho* spent years or decades at the beginning of their religious careers being steeped in the *Vinaya*, the precepts and ethical teachings of Buddhism. Is it possible that Westerners could benefit from familiarization, at some point, with these teachings?

2. It has been recognized in recent years that Zen's introduction to the West had a pronounced emphasis on the importance of *kensho*, which unfortunately overshadowed two other critical

elements of practice: “the long maturation” (to use the phrase popularized by Hakuin Zenji’s principal Dharma Heir, Tōrei Enji), and the peril of “spiritual bypassing” (to use the phrase coined by John Welwood). Additionally, Zen teachers have often emphasized the essential “next step” after awakening — “coming down from the mountain” training, or integrating one’s insights into daily living so as to make them fruitful and helpful.

Do reading, study, contemplation, and reflection have a place in providing balance in these areas?

3. Teachers in our own school have given a seemingly hesitant nod toward reading, if it is reading that “sends one back to the meditation mat.” But we’ve also often been told that sitting is only part of Zen training, and that the awareness and concentration we find on the mat must be carried into our daily activities.

What about kinds of reading that can help us with our daily lives and our relationships?

4. Some folks come to a Zen Center with only a vague notion of why they are giving zazen a try.

Have there been books, Buddhist principles, Dharma teachings, etc. that have helped you become more clear about why Zen practice is for you? Were some of them not directly related to sitting?

5. Which of these topics are you most interested in reflecting together on first? Are there some you would add to the list?

- The Four Noble Truths
- The Two Truths (relative and absolute)
- The Twelve Links of Interdependent Co-arising
- The Four Heavenly Abodes (Equanimity, Great Compassion, Loving-Kindness, Delight in Others’ Happiness)
- The Three Marks of Existence (No-self, Impermanence, Suffering) – or expanded, to the Four Seals of Dharma to include Nirvana is Beyond Extremes
- Emptiness (*shunyata*)
- Bodhicitta and the Bodhisattva Path
- The Six (or Ten) Paramitas
- The Three Yanas (or Vehicles, or major Streams of Buddhism), and a bit of the world’s history around them
- Taking Refuge and the Precepts