

JOSHUA SHAPIRO

# The Life & Times of Okada Torajiro

and his Seiza approach to self-harmonization



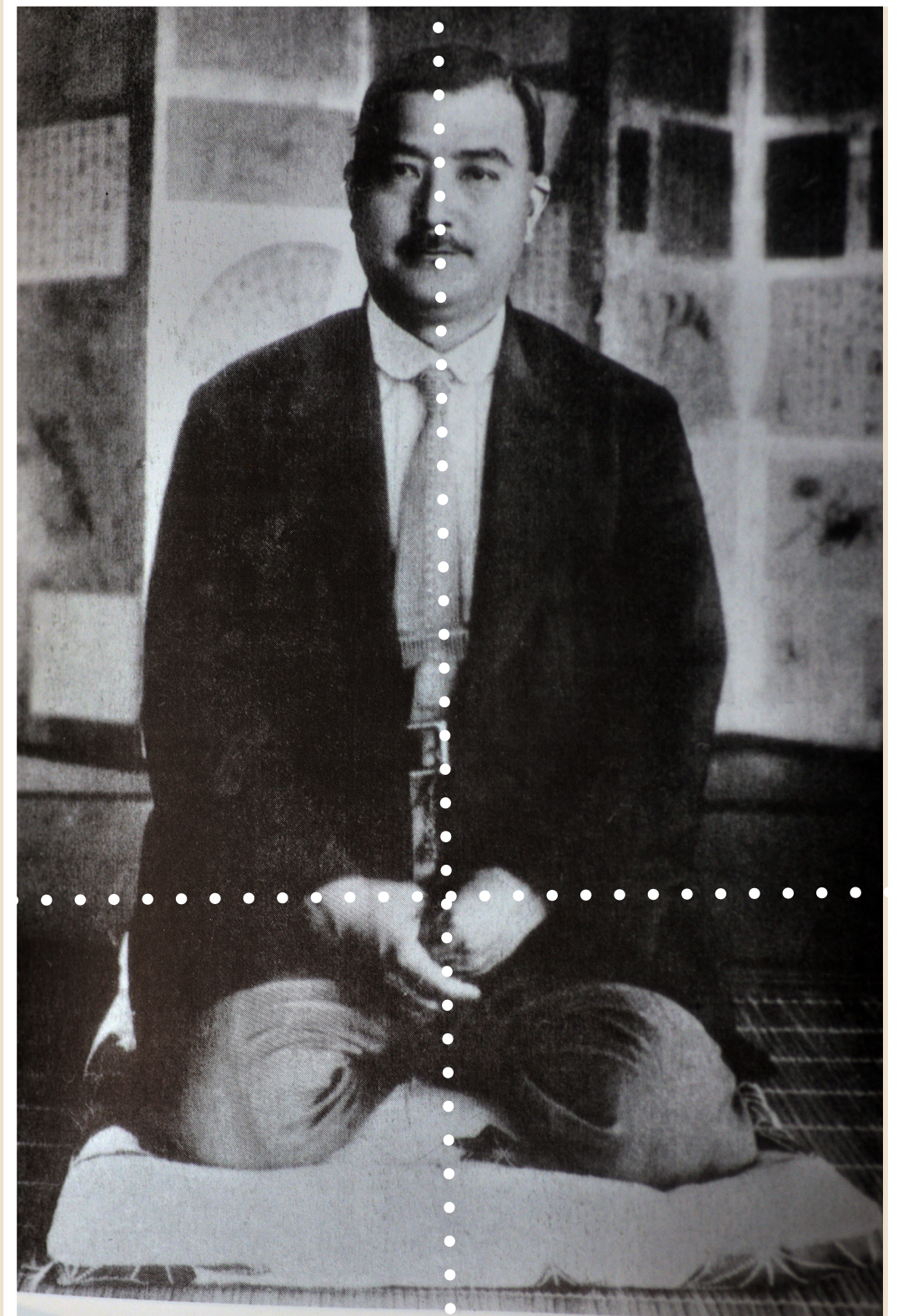
*The way that can be told, is not the true way...*

*He who knows, doesn't talk;*

*he who talks, does not know.*

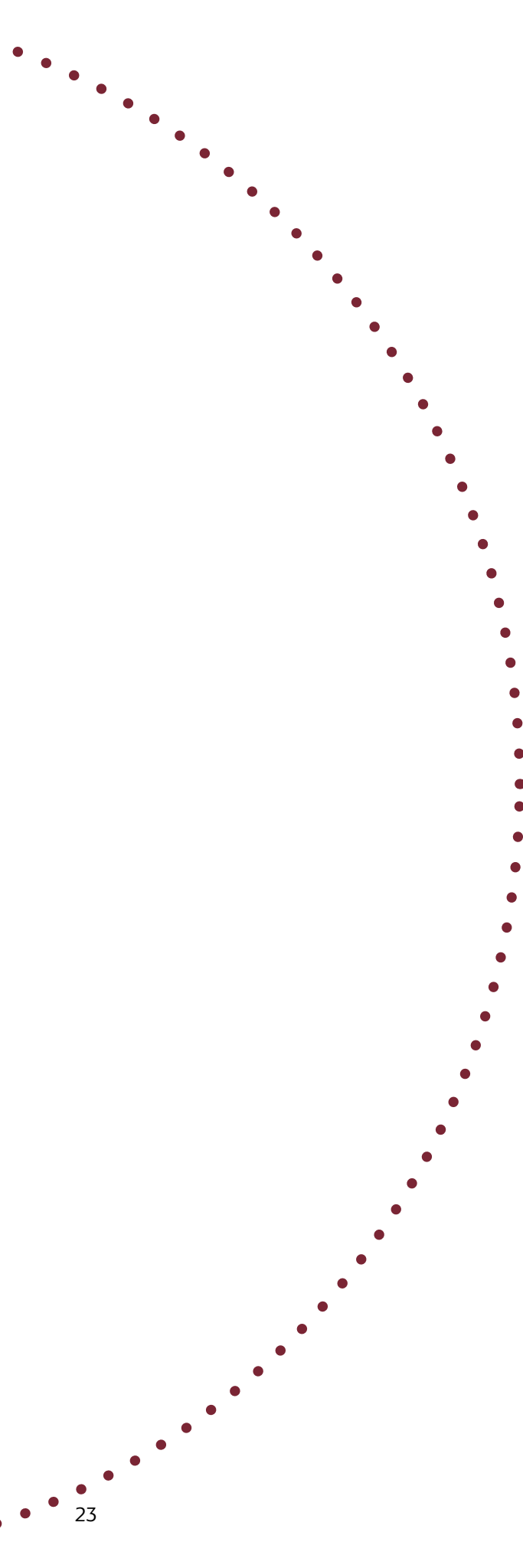
—Lao-Tzu

Much like the Tao, the work of Okada Torajiro (1872-1920) is perhaps more easily defined in terms of what it isn't. Okada offered the world *Seiza* (静坐), a simple means of self-development, founded on a proper sitting posture and a correct breathing method.



OKADA TORAJIRO IN 1920, AGE 49





Seiza is totally experiential. Okada didn't boast or make promises. Long before Nike existed, he told people, "Just do it."

If religion is really all about salvation, then Seiza (literally "quiet sitting") is religion devoid of trappings. Hyper-minimalistic, it eschews external organization, temples, tithing, dogma, theory, canon, worship, beliefs, literature, scriptures, calendar, prayers, hymns, priesthood, hierarchy, relics, icons, saints, homage, cults of personality, holidays, myths, cosmology, symbols, architecture, laws, commandments, uniforms, or costumes.

Seiza is not tied to the intellectual, rational, or medical. It does not depend on emotion, *bhakti* (piety), or devotionism. Neither is it otherworldly, mystical, or renunciatory. It is not tied to a particular race, ethnicity, or culture. It is not congressional and needs no pilgrimage. It does not proselytize or support military aggression. To actually practice Seiza, one needs no group or leader, no visualization, vocalization, counting, or mantra repetition, and no special symbolic objects, apparatus, or vestments. Seiza is truly more zen than Zen.

For someone who was in the public eye, eighteen hours a day, seven days a week for over a decade, Okada remains an enigma—a public figure with virtually no well-documented backstory or salient personality. Much has been inferred, and some surmised about his life and past, but facts

are few and grasping his particulars is like bottling smoke.<sup>1</sup>

At the end of March, 1906, Okada literally just appeared in Tokyo, having walked the entire way from his home in Toyohashi, one hundred seventy-seven miles away. For 10 days he had slept out in the open and fasted. He was near starving and had lost significant weight. He made his way to the home of his elder brother, Okada Tōjuro, visited a short while, and then went on to stay at the residence of Matsui Yuzuru, the former county executive of Atsumi-gun. He lived in a room there for the next two years, eschewing most outside contact.

It is thought<sup>2</sup> that Okada was born in 1872, the fifth year of the Meiji era, and grew up in Tahara-machi in Aichi-ken. The second son of Okada Nobukata, of a minor samurai family, as a youth, he attended school and labored in the family rice fields. Prematurely born, he was a delicate child subject to childhood disease and interested in physical culture. From his teens, he was a seeker on the path, interested in both agricultural innovation and human development of mind and

1. Much as with the eighteen (between 12-30) "unknown years of Jesus".

2. The following narrative and dates regarding Okada are drawn primarily from: 岡田虎二郎 その思想と時代 *Okada Torajiro sono shiso to jidai* (Okada Torajiro, his thought and time) written by 小松幸蔵 Komatsu Kozo, 10/10/2000, 創元社 Sogensha and 岡田虎二郎先生 生誕百四十年記念 静坐創始者 岡田虎二郎 *Okada Torajiro sensei seitan hyakushijunen-kinen, Seiza soshisha Okada Torajiro* (Commemoration of the 140th of his birth; Okada Torajiro, the Founder of Seiza) edited by 田原静坐会 Tahara Seiza-kai, 6/17/2012, 田原静坐会 Tahara Seiza-kai

body. He studied the educational ideas in Japanese translations of Rousseau's *Emile or On Education* and Plato's *Republic*. He also read the teachings of Confucius, Jesus, Lao-Tzu, Buddha, Mencius, Shinran, and Hakuin.

At fourteen, while sitting by a rice field, watching the sun set, he experienced a self-awakening.<sup>3</sup> He sought out renowned priests and received spiritual training in *zazen* meditation. He made pilgrimages to meet notable Edo-era thinkers, philosophers, and statesmen, searching for answers. He visited Buddhist temples, observing the Buddha's posture in statues. Each day, he bathed in cold water.

Ninomiya Sontoku (1787-1856), a practical agronomist, clear-eyed regional administrator, economist, philosopher, and moralist, was a particularly strong influence on Okada and a great teacher by example. Ninomiya, who grew up orphaned and destitute, sustained severe hardships as a youth, but by intelligent hard work, and sound judgement, was able to restore his fortunes.

Seeing his example, local lords assigned Ninomiya the mission to rescue regions in their dominion that had fallen into moral decline and agricultural neglect. Ninomiya practiced frugality and benevolence, sacrificing himself to save others. He lived on a diet of rice and vegetable soup, sleeping only four hours a night.

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3. It is interesting to note that the spiritual awakening experiences of his contemporaries, Swami Vivekananda and DT Suzuki, first took place in their mid-twenties.

## *Sayings of Okada Torajiro*

Our human vices, the sorrows of humanity, are caused by external matters that undermine emotional balance. To be saved from these vices, one must have a healthy body and upright heart. These can be achieved only 'on the way' 道 (*michi* ≈ Tao). To reach the way means *seiza* 'sitting.' If you sit for two or three years, you will understand naturally.



Just sitting *seiza* alone is not sufficient; all our behavior—walking, standing, sitting, reading, writing, working, even cutting tofu must come from *hara* 腹. Our entire daily lives must reside in *tanden*.

Once, Ninomiya sequestered himself at a temple to pray for guidance, fasted twenty-one days, then, with seemingly superhuman endurance, returned on foot the fifty miles to his village in a single day. Okada sought out his followers to gain guidance. Much of Okada's later life was foreshadowed by this powerful role model of selflessness, duty, and rigorous self-discipline.

Like Ninomiya, Okada believed that agriculture was the foundation of Japan. Okada became an agricultural researcher seeking to improve rice yields. He graduated first in his class from agricultural college. Studying rice, he came to better understand its nutritive requirements. He also found natural ways to exterminate insect pests that blighted crops. His results were published in national agricultural journals. At twenty-six, he was appointed as head of the agricultural extension service of Atsumi-gun county in Toyohashi, where he worked for three years.

Okada took his work seriously. He made friends and he made enemies. He was brash, outspoken, and didn't suffer fools lightly. In a conformist society, where a decisive principle was *deru kugi wa utareru* ("the peg that sticks up will be pounded down"), his evident traits did not sit well with the mayor—who fired him.

Finding Japan too narrow and confining, Okada set sail for the U.S., a more open society, to find answers to his questions in entomology, eugenics, lit-



Do not dare to strive. Sit down quietly in the country of no seeking. If there is but a space three feet square to sit, the spring (season) of heaven and earth will fill this space and the vital life power (人生の力 *jinsei no chikara*) and joy (悦楽 *etsuraku*) of our lifetime arise within it. Seiza is truly a gate (門 *mon*) into great rest and happiness.



Ordinary people breathe eighteen times a minute. Fewer than ten breaths are enough for those who practice *seiza*. But it is excellent if one can manage with three a minute. An exhalation should last four times the length of the inhalation.

erature, and philosophy.<sup>4</sup> Kanahara Akiyoshi, a very wealthy businessman and founder of Kanahara Bank, gave Okada 3000 yen to fund his travel and living expenses.<sup>5</sup>

His three-and-a-half year stay in America is similarly opaque, but through sometimes conflicting accounts, pieces can be patched together, while still leaving giant gaps and uncertainties. He arrived in San Francisco on July 9th 1901, where he took lodging at 935 Sacramento Street. He was diligent, driven, and widely read, studying from dawn to midnight. He acquired a reading knowledge of English, German, and French. He seriously investigated the thought of Plato, Homer, Jesus, Luther, Shakespeare, Rousseau, Goethe, Beethoven, Swedenborg, Longfellow, Irving, and Emerson.<sup>6</sup>

He met Eugen Sandow, the father of modern body-building. He attended Quaker “waiting worship” meetings. He visited Luther Burbank, the pioneering botanist, at his experimental station in Sonoma County, California. He traveled to Palo Alto to meet Vernon Lyman Kellogg, the entomologist and expert on silkworms, and perhaps also David Starr

The aim of *seiza*  
is to do *seiza*.

Don't think of results.

4. One of the core mandates of the Meiji Charter Oath of 1868 was to seek knowledge outside of Japan. But no one knows how Okada decided to leave Japan or prepared for his journey.

5. While hard to quantify, this was an enormous sum, more than \$60,000 in today's currency. One yen could purchase 42 pounds of rice.

6. Okada ultimately formed a personal library of 247 books in Western languages, that still survives.







Dōgen Zenji taught us that *zazen* (坐禪) is not the practice of Zen as an ascetic practice, but the dharma gate, the way of peace and happiness. However, many followers of Dōgen Zenji are doing *zazen* as ascetic practice. Therefore, the appearance of practice is similar but the slight difference within the mind creates the difference between the heaven and the earth.



The true meaning of education is to draw out the original nature of the individual. This leads also to the perfecting of the personality and the awakening of the soul. Knowledge of the ways of the world cannot be attained by ordered, logical thinking. If one can 'look' into that true knowledge that arises from the body's center, one will understand the ultimate meaning of all the world's appearances.

Jordan, the Stanford University president, eugenicist, and peace activist. He might have visited Salt Lake City where the grand temple of the Latter Day Saints had recently been completed.

America appeared to agree with him and he expected to continue studying there. However, an arranged marriage thoroughly disrupted his plans. In 1904, he was engaged to Yamamoto Kiga, the 23-year-old daughter of a Toyohashi banker. Okada returned to Japan via Europe at the beginning of 1905 and married her at the end of March. In March the following year, Michiko, their first child, was born. At that point, instead of joy, an unbridgeable gap arose.

Okada had a utopian streak and envisioned creating an ideal, self-governing village. His ambition was to start a school and devote himself to spiritual education for human development. This clashed with the intent of the wealthy Giichiro, his practical father-in-law, who expected him to take over and grow the family businesses. When their differences could not be reconciled, Okada was ordered to divorce Kiga, give up the Yamamoto name, and exit the Yamamoto house immediately. As he embarked at midnight, Okada insisted that Kiga stay with her family, to take care of her newborn daughter. He then set off into the night, bereft of food or money.



Careening from the Tokugawa period into the Meiji, Japan entered an extended identity crisis. The Tokugawa Shogunate had blessed Japan with over two hundred years of sustained peace. The Meiji era was not as benign. A national conscript army, established in 1873, fought recalcitrant samurai for several years and was then sent into battle overseas in Taiwan, Korea, China, and Manchuria.

The Russo-Japanese war of 1904-05 was particularly significant as it established Japan as a Great Power. Sometimes considered World War Zero, it was noteworthy for its horrific precedents of sustained trench warfare and deadly naval battles, augmented by technological advances in killing, that would reappear in Europe a decade later. The first time that an Asian nation had defeated a Western country, it highlighted Russian incompetence—resulting in the subsequent decline and overthrow of the Romanov dynasty—challenged the notion of white supremacy, and stimulated anti-colonial feeling throughout Asia.

Japan basked in its newly-won prestige, albeit at significant cost. Japan lost nearly 100,000 lives, gained little territory, and did not receive financial reparations for the substantially borrowed ¥2.15 billion<sup>7</sup> it expended, leaving the Japanese public feeling ill-treated by the peace process. Riots in Tokyo alone, immediately following the Treaty of

Portsmouth, left over 1,000 casualties and substantial animosity towards America.

IN THE MEIJI, everything was in play. The abolition of feudalism made possible enormous social and political changes. Social relationships shifted. The nameless could take surnames. Caste-based occupational and marriage limitations were abolished. Millions of people were suddenly free to choose their occupation and move about the country without restriction. By providing a new environment of political and financial security, the government encouraged investment in new industries and technologies.



A humorous diplomatic map from 1904 depicting the Russian Black Octopus engulfing Europe and Asia.

7. In current (nominal) Yen.





*Seiza* seeks the perfection of the human being. The achievement of health and the acquisition of healing powers are only secondary. Even if the body is changed in *seiza*, the deepest inner state does not change as quickly. You sit for one year, two years, three years, and you think that you are like one born anew. In truth, however, you are just a little shoot on the way to the development of your being. It takes ten to twenty years to become like the noble cedars and cypresses rising to heaven. A cypress increases its rings even as a very old tree. One should continue to grow up until the very moment of death.



The essence of seiza is not limited to the sitting form. I introduced this kneeling style because it's well suited to the Japanese sitting custom. Were I European, I would teach with dance. We cannot dance if our center is not stable, firm, and balanced.



You have compassion for the poor and laborers but no sympathy for the wealthy. This is not true love. I feel pity for those with fame and fortune. From the viewpoint of self-cultivation, they are inferior to poor people. Many feel pity for the poor, few feel sorry for the wealthy. This thinking is not true love.



A man of strong body and peaceful feeling will certainly have a cool head and warm feet.

With new opportunity came new insecurity. Edo-era traditional relationships, reciprocal obligations, and social support structures crumbled. Physical and psychological dislocation followed. Millions left close-knit rural communities for urban crowding, anonymity, and isolation. Fealty and duty to feudal lords were replaced by commitments to factory owners. Industrial progress and military prowess gained preeminence over agricultural productivity. Alien culture, religion, science, literature, and politics became forces to be reconciled, as Japan traded more with Europe and America.

Serious questions of identity loomed large. *National* identity—what was Japan's true national essence (*kokutai*)? A relevant slogan of the times was *wakon yōsai* (Japanese spirit, Western intellect). Could Japan maintain its culture under the onslaught of Westernization? *Individual* identity—how could one shape a personal identity without reference to the state? What were the legitimate rights of an individual and how might they supersede an individual's debt to society? Should one be patriotic or pacifistic? *Asian* identity—how could Japan justify and sustain wars and colonies with its Asian neighbors? Was Japan culturally superior to other Asian countries? *World* identity—in what manner was Japan to be a Western power? How much interdependence via alliances and trade could it accept? Could it be both politically bold and culturally derivative? *Social* identity—how could the educated classes deal with the rapidly rising working class, freed



from feudal bounds? How could the nation maintain any cohesion between the stable countryside and the rapidly growing cities? *Family* identity—could youth respect and benefit from their elders' hard-wrought experience during a time of radical transition? Could multi-generation rural living arrangements survive divisive urbanization and industrialization? Should women have the same rights and opportunities available to men?

Nowhere did these issues become more apparent than with students who while growing up needed to define themselves as autonomous individuals and navigate the shoals of competing ideas, movements, and dogma. They were the ones called to fight and die. Anguished youth suffered from isolation and loneliness, having broken ties with traditional values, their families, and society. Conflicting stresses on their identity manifested in multiple youth cults of hedonism, existentialism, patriotism, socialism, anarchism, spiritualism, and angst. In these matters of self, youth were called to choose a polarity or resolve the duality.

Staying physically healthy was also a widespread social concern. Annually, 100,000 Japanese died of tuberculosis. Every decade or so, Japan experienced a massive cholera epidemic decimating tens of thousands. Famines were not a distant memory. On a less lethal level, but still very debilitating, a new disease



If one separates people into ranks(高下 *kouge*), the lowest class trusts their heads. They endeavor only to gather information and amass as much knowledge as possible. Their heads grow larger and are easily toppled, like a pyramid standing upside down. They can imitate other people, but they never do original, creative, or inventive work or become great entrepreneurs.



For the middle rank, the chest (胸 *mune*) is most important. People with discipline, endurance, and abstinence are of this type. They display outward courage but lack real strength. Many of the well-known, great men are of this type. Yet, they are not so great.





But those who regard the lower belly (下腹 *kahuku*) as the most important part, and so have built the palace where the Divine nature thrives—these are the people of the highest rank. They have developed their minds, as well as their bodies correctly. They emanate strength and reside in ease and equanimity. They act in good faith without violating any law.



Those in the first category think that Science (科学 *kagaku*) can rule Nature (自然 *shizen*). Those in the second have apparent courage and discipline and know how to fight. Those in the third know what Reality (アラヤ識 *arayashiki*) is.

appeared, a critical loss of vitality—neurasthenia, a condition characterized by physical and mental exhaustion, accompanied by headaches, insomnia, and irritability. Attributed to psychological issues like weakness of spirit, depression, emotional stress, or conflict, it was considered a root cause of personal failure.

It was into this tumultuous flux that Okada walked.

When Okada first formulated Seiza is unknown, but he researched and practiced breathing and posture over the two years he was sequestered at the Matsui<sup>8</sup> residence, refining what was to appear as his Seiza methodology. The traditional Japanese posture used in the tea ceremony or martial arts, also called *seiza* “right sitting,” morphed into Seiza (“quiet sitting”)<sup>9</sup> Okada’s approach to self-awakening.

Okada preferred this archetypal, informed form to harmonize body, mind, & breath. The body assumes a stable pyramid, plumb and erect, with the xiphoid<sup>10</sup> pointing down into the center of the triangle formed by the two knees and the perineum, opening the door to the mind and centering the sitter within a radiant sphere. Seiza posture promotes the efferent parasympathetic nervous system, which governs the “rest & digest” response, by aligning the skeleton to ease passages of the cranial and sacral parasympathetic nerves. Activating the parasympathetic aspect of the autonomic nervous system, deactivates the sympathetic nervous system governing “fight or flight,” and so facilitates the body achieving a deeply relaxed, rested, and rejuvenated state.


When Okada emerged from his self-imposed chrysalis, his cat-

8. As the go-between between the Okada and Yamamoto families, Matsui Yuzuru bore some responsibility for the lack of clear communication of their intentions, and therefore the ultimate failure of the marriage.

9. While pronounced the same, the *kanji* are different: 正座 “proper sitting” as found in the tea ceremony or martial arts versus 静坐 “quiet sitting” as taught by Okada.

10. xiphoid process—the little “arrow” of cartilage extending below the sternum.





Like a five-story pagoda (*gojū-no-tō*)  
supported by a massive center column  
(*shin-bashira*), so faultless should your  
posture be. Seiza posture parallels nature.  
Why does a five-story pagoda not collapse?  
Because it maintains physical balance.  
If one sits in the *seiza* posture one does not  
topple over no matter from which side one  
may be pushed.





This calligraphy by Okada, read from the right, is 静楽 *seiraku* which means “enjoying in stillness.” The signature at the left side is 塵奴 *jindo*, which Okada called himself and it means “a man like dust,” that is to say, a worthless man filled with 煩惱 *bonno* defiled passions. However a homonym for *jindo* means “humanitarian”—“a man like dust” is one who has extinguished his passions and attained true humility as in verse 39 of the *Tao Te Ching*.

erpillar had lost its brashness and restlessness. In its place was a butterfly radiating healthy vitality, peaceful tranquility, and gentle love for all. Having transformed himself, he was ready to share with others of the same mind. He taught things that were so easy, they were hard to accept. His point was if you do the practice, you get the results. Books are easily misunderstood. The universe offers direct revelation; one doesn’t need books have an epiphany. You can’t ask someone else how things taste; you must taste them yourself. It’s not about discussion, reading, studying, or praying; just practicing the practice.

He did not pose as a teacher, nor did he preach. He was simply the exemplar for his method, just a co-learner.<sup>11</sup> People saw someone who was solid, rooted, centered, balanced, and grounded, but still flexible, resilient, supple, and elastic. Someone agile, nimble, and alert. Someone clear of eye and clear of voice. Someone with a shining countenance, like Prince Genji, engorged with life force, so filled with energy, his vigor altered people’s perception. People who sat Seiza with him felt better. They healed themselves.<sup>12</sup> Japanese doctors even adopted Seiza as part of their regimens.

11. This section draws on The Okada Method of Seiza Culture for Mind and Body, The Okada Science Society, 1918.

12. Okada healed by teaching the patient seiza and sitting with them. He reportedly completed cured one of Matsui’s sons who was considered ‘insane’ by sitting with him for a week. Koeda Heijiro, a Japanese diplomat serving in Vienna, Austria, was recalled to Japan when he contracted serious *pulmonary apicitis*, an extreme form of bronchitis. He recovered by doing Seiza with Okada.



His Seiza practitioners witnessed a indefatigable man, like Ninomiya Sontoku, devoid of leisure, devoted to his mission, working dawn to midnight<sup>13</sup>, seven days a week, without interruption or vacation, yet without haste, fatigue, or irritability. Each day, he would rise before dawn, take a cold bath, eat a breakfast of rice with pickles, and set out to visit a dozen Seiza meetings held all over Tokyo in different private homes, halls, and temples. In each session, he would guide from a few people to a few hundred, from forty minutes to an hour, at each successive venue. Most of each sitting was in total silence. Okada might gently touch someone to adjust their posture. Afterwards, he would stay to quietly answer a few questions. From this interaction, collections of sayings were compiled and some anecdotal personal history was collected.

Diverse notables and commoners within urban Japanese society—the Imperial family, former daimyo, military officers, bankers, businessmen, diplomats, politicians, professors, physicians, scientists, artists, university students, but also housewives, and farmers in the countryside—came to sit with him. He appealed to such a varied mix

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13. His Wednesday schedule, for example, started at 6AM with sitting at Nippori Hongyo-ji temple, then holding successive meditation sessions at the residences of Itsume, Kuga, Fukahara, Okuma, the sculptor, Kawada, the Hosokawa (former daimyo family) palace, the Kyozen-ji temple, and finally the residences of Kyogoku, Iwaki, Minegishi, Eguchi, and Suzuki.



Insisting on loyalty and patriotism will destroy the country. Respect for the emperor, love for the country, reverence for a religious founder are not true love only relative. Forcing these thoughts on others is dangerous. Big pure true love equally covers all heaven and earth, class, rich or poor, high or low, citizen or foreign, human or animal.



If you come and practice with me, it is true, you will not accumulate knowledge, but you will learn to understand the speech of birds.

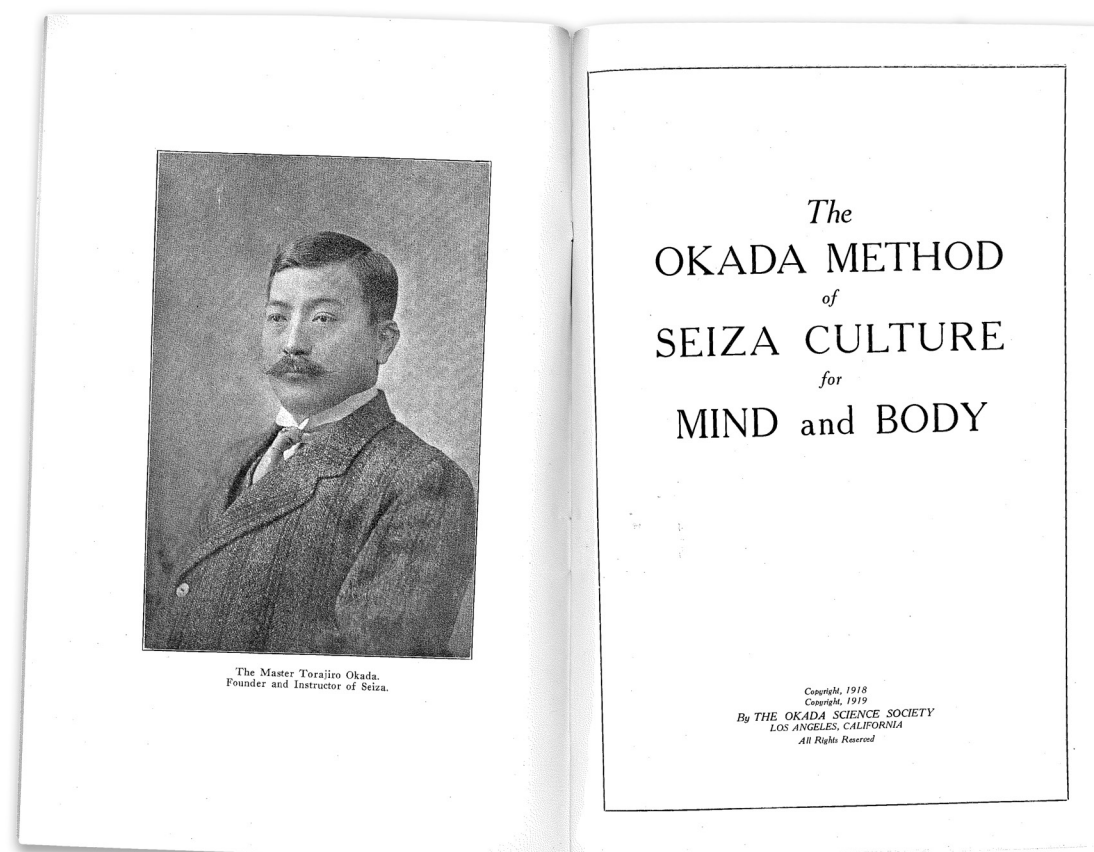


by providing a uniquely individual path that was outside and above the polarities of the economic, political, and social pressures they confronted. He also attracted those troubled by illness or infirmity, for whom neither Western medical science or traditional Asian cures yielded results. By 1918, without social media, over 20,000 Japanese were practicing Seiza.

Okada taught silently by example. He walked the walk, content without fancy food, stylish clothes, or comfortable lodging. Back in his simple room at Matsui's home, he would record his day, take another cold bath, and be asleep after midnight. He achieved this routine, not through austerity, but by impartiality.<sup>14</sup> He didn't counter nature with penance, as much as blend his actions with nature in a relaxed, pleasant, and easy manner. Likewise, he sought to steer people away from the competitive industrial environment and nationalist military path that Meiji rules promoted, typified by the popular slogan *fukoku kyōhei* (rich country, strong army). He understood that so-called heroism was false courage and unsupported bluster.

Okada had exemplary health. However, in 1920, when he moved in with his wife and daughter, his health declined precipitously. His close followers attributed his illness to overwork. He burned all

14. By not holding to an idea that one thing, situation, or person is should be preferred over another. Relinquishing duality is attaining impartiality (平等心 *byōdoshin*, equal heartedness).



his diaries, his small self (小我 *shoga*), that he had meticulously kept for over a decade, preventing access to them while he was out of the house, traveling, or after his demise.

Many expected that Okada would live forever and were dismayed and disillusioned by his death (diagnosed as acute renal failure) at 49. All he left in writing from his life's work was a scrap of paper found in his pocket that hinted at his final act of impartiality and self-sacrifice:

Man has a more important job (*shokubun*) than supporting a wife & children. What is this occupation? To sacrifice oneself for the liberation of the Japanese race (*yamato minzoku*) from the restraint (*sokubaku*) of conscience (*ryōshin-teki*) and to lead it to the freedom of heaven and earth (*jiyu no tenchi*).



A cadre of his most devoted students maintained his teachings and issued books of his sayings that they had collected. Okada himself never published his teachings, started a school, sought fame or fortune, or was at all self-aggrandizing. He was never recognized as the great Taoist master that he was, a simple man who sought, found, and shared the Way. He did his thing and left the scene. His achievement was in the simple but effective method he developed. He pointed to the door and beckoned people to enter. While few now know of Seiza or practice it,<sup>15</sup> its value is undiminished. A diamond recovered from the muck retains its radiance and lucidity, and is as valuable today as when it first appeared.<sup>16</sup>



15. Perhaps fewer than one thousand people regularly practice Seiza today.  
16. Acknowledgements: Producing this article would have been impossible without the sustained, generous, and patient help afforded me by Rev. Miki Nakura, Buddhist Priest of the Higashi Honganji Temple, and Seiza teacher, who worked with me to access and translate most of the primary source material on Okada Torajiro. He also rigorously checked my manuscript for accuracy. Any textual errors or opinions are mine alone.

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# Fundamentals of Seiza, Sitting-in-Stillness

*A simple sitting and breathing method established by Okada Torajiro*

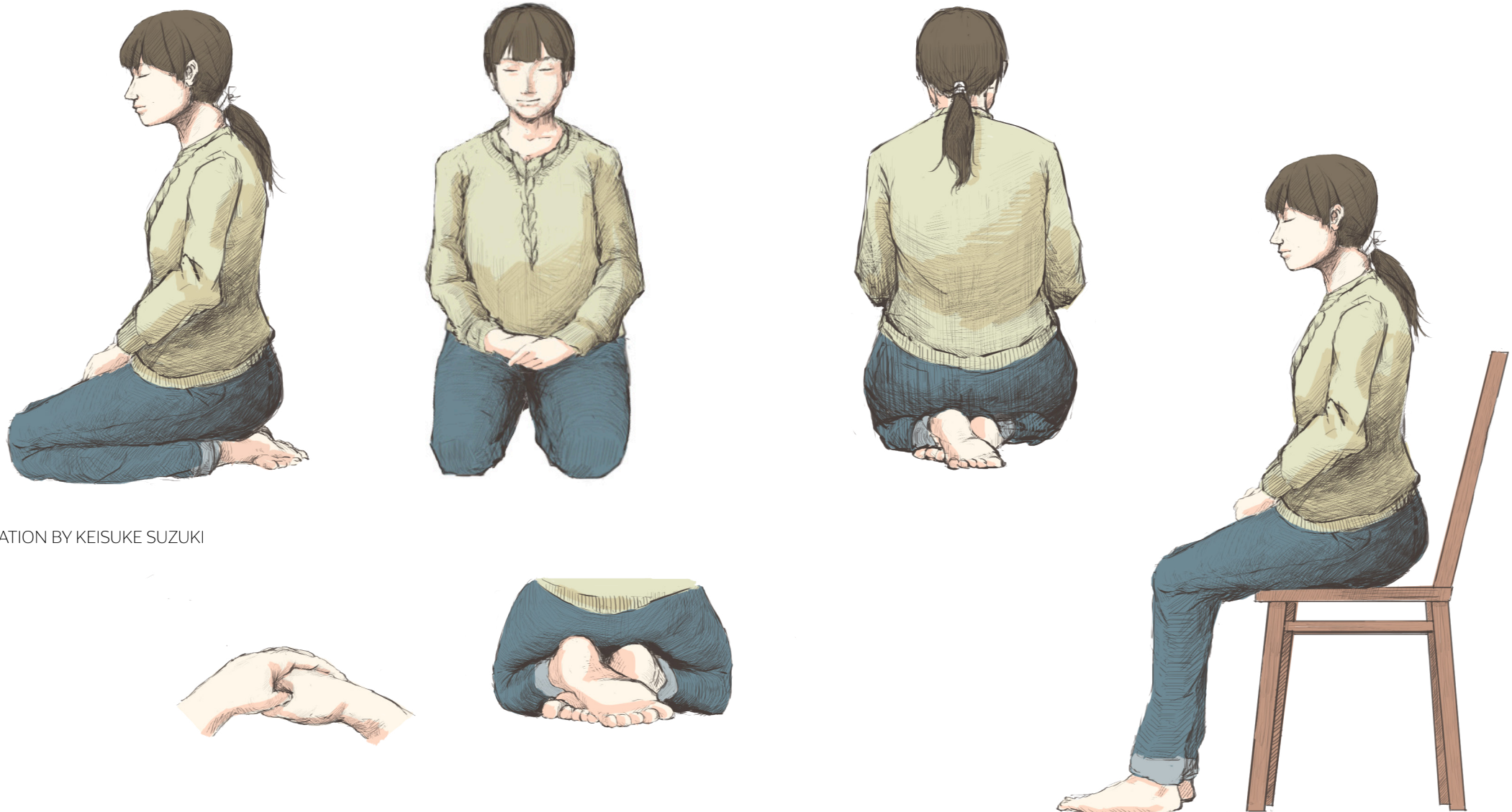


ILLUSTRATION BY KEISUKE SUZUKI

**1. On any level,** flat surface, like tatami, a flat zabuton cushion, or a resilient carpet, kneel on bended knees, with the feet crossed deeply behind the insteps and tucked under the buttocks. Separate the knees by about two fist-widths for men or one for women. Rest the buttocks on the insteps and the ankles on the floor. Thrust the buttocks back.

**2. Sit up with good posture,** straightening the lower back. Keep the lumbar vertebrae upright and stable whether sitting, standing, or walking. Neither slump nor clench. Keep the lower back erect and buoyant all the time, not allowing it to bend under the weight of the upper body. Maintain this positive carriage consistently, everywhere, all the time, and in any situation.

**3. Fold the hands on the lap.** Clasp them loosely with one hand holding the thumb of the other, resting them comfortably below the abdomen with the palms turned down. Drop and retract the arms to body. Tuck in the elbows.



**4. Lift the head up** and imperceptibly forward. Align the earlobes over the shoulders. Touch the back of the collar with the neck. Slightly incline the spine forward in a “S” shaped curve, concave at the small of the back, and convex at the shoulders, which are gently loosened and rotated forward. Relax the solar plexus (the pit of the stomach). Gently collapse the xiphoid process at the base of the sternum in and down.

**5. Gaze at a spot on the floor about three feet away** and then fully close the eyes. Place the tip of the tongue lightly on the roof of the mouth. Lower and retract the chin slightly. Keep the eyes and mouth gently closed.

**6. Breathe.** Breathe only through the nose, softly and completely silently. Prolong the exhalation. Release the breath and automatically sufficient air will momentarily flow back up through the nostrils. Breathe out slowly and gently, for as long as possible. Again, effortlessly inhale naturally filling the vacuum. Continue breathing out and in this manner. Breathe from the belly or lower abdomen, not the chest. Never hold the breath.

**7. Focus all attention and power into the lower abdomen** during exhalation, to a spot behind and about two inches below the navel. This spot, known as the **tanden** or dantian (丹田) in Asia or the hypogastrium in Western anatomy, is the center of the body. Withdraw all mental energy from the head and channel it into lower abdomen. Concentrate the mind here; breathe from this point.



**Sometimes the mind** will drift back up to the head. Gently return the mind back to the tanden, the lower abdomen. Eventually, it will sit there, the mind and body as one. Sitting happens; conscious effort is unnecessary. Should the feet go numb, lift the buttocks off the ankles and stand on the knees for a few minutes to restore circulation. If one can't comfortably assume a kneeling position, sit on the front third of a chair, and maintain the rest of the posture.

Start practicing this breathing method for 10 minutes, twice a day. Work up to 30 minutes on arising and 30 minutes before retiring to bed.

Once entering a state of calmness, maintain this state during the daily routine. Live a quiet but active life in this peaceful state to be truly happy. Practice. Seiza is the fundamental work of a lifetime.

JOSHUA SHAPIRO & MIKI NAKURA

[BACK TO CONTENTS](#)