

Selected quotes from Kodo Sawaki Roshi

You can't even trade a single fart with the next guy. Each and every one of us has to live out his own life. Don't waste time thinking about who's most talented.

The eyes don't say, "Sure we're lower, but we see more."

The eyebrows don't reply, "Sure we don't see anything, but we are higher up."

Living out the buddha-dharma means fulfilling your function completely without knowing that you're doing it. A mountain doesn't know it's tall. The sea doesn't know it's wide and deep. Each and every thing in the universe is active without knowing it.

The bird's singing and the flower's laughter appear naturally, completely independent from the person sitting in zazen at the foot of the cliff.

The bird doesn't sing in honor of the person in zazen. The flower doesn't blossom to amaze the person with her beauty. In exactly the same way, the person doesn't sit in zazen in order to get satori. Every single being simply realizes the self, through the self, for the self.

Religion means living your own life, completely fresh and new, without being taken in by anyone.

Hey! What are you looking at? Don't you see that it's about you?

The asshole doesn't need to be ashamed of being the asshole. The feet don't have any reason to go on strike just because they're only feet. The head isn't the most important of all, and the navel doesn't need to imagine he's the father of all things.

What's zazen good for? Absolutely nothing! This 'good for nothing' has got to sink into your flesh and bones until you actually practice what is truly good for nothing. Until then, your zazen is just good for nothing.

Zazen is unsatisfying. Unsatisfying for whom? For the ordinary person. People are never satisfied. Unsatisfying: simply practicing zazen. Unsatisfying: realizing zazen with this body. Unsatisfying: absorbing zazen into your flesh and blood.

Birth, old age, sickness and death – we can't fool around with these ultimate facts.

Reality: getting a handle on this must be our goal. Don't get stuck in categories.

It's strange that not a single person seriously considers his own life. For ages, we've been carrying around something uncooked. And we comfort ourselves with the fact that it's the same for the others too. That's what I call group stupidity: thinking that we just have to be like the others. Satori means creating your own life. It means waking up from group stupidity.

We don't practice in order to get satori. It's satori that pulls our practice. We practice, being dragged around by satori. You don't seek the way. The way seeks you.

A person with big desires is easily fooled. Even the greatest conman can't profit from a person with no desires.

Buddhism means no self, nothing to gain. You must be one with the universe and all living beings.

All beings are mistaken: we see as happiness that which leads to unhappiness, and weep over an unhappiness which isn't unhappiness at all. We all know the child whose tears suddenly turn into laughter when you give him a cookie. What we living beings call happiness isn't much more than that.

In the world you'll find all kinds of rewards. But is there any reward that could make you happier than settling your ass onto your sitting cushion and having the privilege to practice zazen?

When you practice zazen, completely renew yourself. It has to be here and now, it has to be about yourself. Don't let Zen become a rumor that has nothing to do with you.

Zazen is the buddha that we form out of our raw flesh. Just sitting [shikantaza] is the greatest thing that we can make out of the raw flesh of an ordinary person.

Birth, old age, sickness and death – we can't fool around with these ultimate facts.

Reality: getting a handle on this must be our goal. Don't get stuck in categories.

It's strange that not a single person seriously considers his own life. For ages, we've been carrying around something uncooked. And we comfort ourselves with the fact that it's the same for the others too. That's what I call group stupidity: thinking that we just have to be like the others. Satori means creating your own life. It means waking up from group stupidity.

Eat in order to do zazen, sleep in order to do zazen. This means that eating and sleeping are also part of zazen.

In our practice, there is no object of worship beyond zazen. For it is zazen that saves us suffering beings by re-forming our raw flesh and making us practice.

Often people ask me how many years they have to practice zazen before it shows results. I say that zazen has no results. You won't get anything at all out of zazen. And then some say that in that case they'd rather stop with zazen . . . But what is running around looking for satisfaction good for? What is gambling good for? And dancing? What is it good for to get worked up over winning or losing in baseball? It's all good for absolutely nothing! That's why nothing is as sensible as sitting silently in zazen. That something is good for nothing means, in worldly terms, only that it doesn't bring in any money.