

Dogen said that we should practice zazen like a person trying to extinguish a fire engulfing their head.

A lazy or stupid teacher might parrot this at his unfortunate students. I certainly have. The intention is to impart a sense of urgency. But it's false. We need to pay attention to the actual words, the actual image.

First, why is it engulfing only the head? Because it is the fire of the self. It can't be extinguished by the puny efforts of the self.

Second, the person is trying. He doesn't succeed. There isn't an end point. It is a continual effort. It is dropping off body and mind.

Third, the effort is made by the vigorous activity of the body. But whose body?

Which person? The person of all being. The body of all things.

It is not your effort, because that would be feeble. It is the effort of the whole Universe, like the pouring of a vast and endless river through an infinity of dharma gates.