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What is Big Mind?®

The Big Mind Process™ was developed by Zen Master Dennis Genpo Merzel after thirty years of formal Zen training and twenty-five years of Zen teaching. The technique comes out of both the Western psychological tradition and the Eastern Zen tradition, a philosophy of self-realization and actualization. The Big Mind technique is a very simple, yet powerful and rapid way to help a person shift perspective and realize the wisdom that may take a meditator many years to accomplish. After experiencing this initial shift in perspective, each person needs the ongoing practice of meditation, or zazen, in order to deepen the realization.

Dennis Genpo Merzel began his training in Gestalt therapy in 1967 and in 1983, studied the Voice Dialogue technique. In 1999, after extensive experience teaching traditional Zen, as well as working with individuals and groups using Voice Dialogue, Genpo Roshi developed a method of working with people that bridged Eastern and Western approaches. Working with students in both a “traditional” Zen approach, and by exploring growth using Western therapeutic techniques, he was able to discover a way to allow the person to put their ego aside and reveal their true nature or “Big Mind.”

It has taken the 2600 years since the time of the Buddha’s original realization of Big Mind for humanity to arrive at the present crossroads of consciousness. Now East is meeting West and large numbers of people are ready to appreciate this wisdom. The power of the Big Mind technique is that it enables participants to make a non-threatening, swift shift from a narrow, ego-centric position to an open, clear and free perspective that identifies with all people and all things.

The Big Mind technique works for any Westerner who is open to the process. This method can be used as a tool in work-
ing with oneself or others to resolve problematic perspectives or behaviors that have been resistant to change, enabling people to take greater responsibility for their lives and their choices. It also serves to increase compassion, and the capacity to identify with all sentient beings. Finally, when used properly, the Big Mind technique will allow one to access the non-egoistic perspective at will in daily life, and function freely in ordinary life situations with less ego-attachment.
Big Mind Workshop Objectives

Introduction to Big Mind as a method for increasing awareness and enhancing meditation

Expand awareness of the self, including recognizing and appreciating its different aspects

Glimpse Big Mind — opening to aspects of self beyond the personal

Integration of personal and transpersonal awareness into everyday free-functioning

Learn to facilitate individuals and small groups in the Big Mind process
Big Mind Facilitator Skills

Process Explanation

Ground Rules

Building Rapport with the Group

Reflective Listening Skills

Use of Questions

Balancing Participation

Working with Resistance

Holding the Big Mind Space

Process Closure
Process Explanation

The explanation of the Big Mind process is the first opportunity the facilitator has for creating a strong group experience. The explanation should be clear, concise, and most importantly, give participants confidence in the skills of the facilitator and in their own ability to experience Big Mind. Some points to be included in the opening:

1) Developed by Genpo Roshi

Big Mind was synthesized by Genpo Roshi after 30 years of teaching Zen. Earlier in his life he had studied Voice Dialogue with Hal and Sidra Stone, and one day used the Voice Dialogue method to ask Zen related questions. The Big Mind process was born out of this synthesis. Roshi has found it to be uniquely effective in helping participants glimpse Big Mind, and it has re-energized his Zen teaching.

2) Zen Insights for the Western Mind

Because the technique uses a psychological framework and a dialogue format, it is appealing to the Western mind. It also appeals because the ego is honored throughout the process; in fact, the ego is invited to help out. In that way, the deep insights of Zen can be revealed without threatening it. The process also teaches great flexibility of mind, and values all aspects of identity, including the ego.

3) A Simple Process — Anyone Can Do It

The process is extremely simple. The facilitator will ask the group to set the ordinary identity aside, and speak to different aspects of the self. All participants need to do is identify as a voice, and respond genuinely to the questions they are asked. They will then experience a shift in identity.

4) The Role of Meditation Practice

After experiencing this shift, each person will need to practice zazen or meditation in order to sustain and deepen the realization brought about by the Big Mind process.
Ground Rules

After completing the explanation, the facilitator should establish several important ground rules which help the process to succeed.

1) Chair Shift
When the facilitator asks to speak to a particular voice, participants will shift in their seat. This indicates to the facilitator that they are participating in the process. It also assists the participants to make the shift in perspective.

2) Trust
When the facilitator asks to speak to a particular voice, participants may not recognize the voice or understand what it will say. The facilitator will ask participants to trust in the process, (i.e., suspend needing to know the voice), and make the shift anyway. Participants will then learn the nature and function of the voice, and what it has to say by listening to it as it emerges.

3) Permission
For the process to proceed, participants need to give their consent. The facilitator will always ask for permission to speak to a voice. Participants should feel free to agree to allow the facilitator to speak to it, or to drop back and observe as others go through the process.

4) First Person
The ground rule most critical to the success of the Big Mind process is speaking in the first person. When participants move from the ordinary identity to any voice, they should experience themselves speaking directly as that voice, using the pronoun “I.” They should refer to their ordinary self in 3rd person. The facilitator should be rigorous with this ground rule because experiencing the transpersonal voices depends on complete identification with them.
Building Rapport with the Group

The ability of the participants to have a Big Mind experience is due to their innate capacity to experience Big Mind; Big Mind is their true nature. It is also due to the rapport and trust the facilitator builds with the group. To the extent the facilitator is relaxed, open, and confident about the process, participants will experience these qualities and resistance to it will be reduced. Big Mind facilitators should develop the ability to:

- Be completely present and relaxed with the group;
- Engage authentically and spontaneously with participants;
- Flow with whatever comes up, including resistance or criticism;
- Appreciate and see the validity of all expressions;
- Include emotional expressions such as humor, empathy, and compassion, in their reflections to the audience;
- Help participants be clear about their perceptions;
- When the facilitator is unclear about what is being said, work to clarify his or her own understanding;
- Be familiar, comfortable, and affirming of all voices;
- Understand the workshop format, including order of voices and sequences of questions.
- Be congruent in body, speech, and mind. (Avoid distracting behaviors, e.g., fidgeting, etc).

Note: Shikantaza is the best practice for cultivating presence. Experience in front of a group is the best practice for reducing anxiety and working on interactive skills.
Reflective Listening Skills

One way the facilitator builds rapport with the group and elicits their participation is through reflective listening. Reflective listening, or bare attention, is a powerful communications tool because the use of it consistently reduces the barriers between the facilitator and the participants until trust is established between them. Resistance to the facilitator and to the process is reduced, and a willingness to respond and to participate freely occurs.

1) **Encouraging**

*Purpose:*
- To convey interest
- To encourage expression
- To convey empathy and build trust

*To Do This:*
- Make eye contact.
- Show attentive body posture.
- Use receptive tone of voice.
- Use supportive phrases ("Yes," "Uh-huh," and "I see").

2) **Clarifying**

*Purpose:*
- To check accuracy of your understanding
- To get more information

*To Do This:*
- Ask further questions.
- Restate wrong interpretation to get participant to further explain.

3) **Restating**

*Purpose:*
- To show you are listening
- To demonstrate your understanding of the communication
To Do This:

Restate the basic ideas and perceptions as you heard them.

4) Reflecting

Purpose:

To express understanding for feelings, both type and intensity of feeling
To mirror the emotion

To Do This:

Paraphrase the emotion and feed it back.
Listen for words or phrases that capture the feeling and repeat those.
Mirror the intensity of the emotion.

5) Summarizing

Purpose:

To demonstrate that the speaker’s message has been heard
To pull important ideas, perceptions, and feelings together
To establish a basis for moving on

To Do This:

Restate major ideas in their sequence including feelings.

6) Validating

Purpose:

To acknowledge the person’s perceptions
To legitimize the expression of emotion
To further trust

To Do This:

Acknowledge the value of their experience.
Show appreciation for their willingness to disclose.
Affirm whatever has been expressed.
Do not argue with or deny the participant’s experience.
An Obstacle To Reflective Listening

The greatest obstacle to good reflective listening is failing to genuinely connect with what is being said. In other words, reflecting a participant’s words and phrases while not receiving their actual meaning.

When this happens, participants will immediately feel this incongruity, and it will create anxiety in them and in the facilitator. Sometimes the lack of genuine exchange will evoke aggression in the audience, so it is extremely important for the facilitator to slow down and make sure that he or she really understands what the participant is saying. If the facilitator is unclear or confused by something, he or she should say that they are unclear or confused, and ask the speaker to clarify their statement. This might be as simple as saying, “Tell me more about that...” or “Would you rephrase your comment?” This kind of authentic communication builds trust between the facilitator and the participants.

Use of Questions

One of the key components of the Big Mind process is the questioning of the participants by the facilitator. Questions serve to help participants establish the identity of each voice, see what role the voice plays, and what its qualities are. The inquiry also shows participants whether a voice is prominent in their life or whether the voice is disowned. Finally, questions help to establish the role of the voice in the world of the self, and how it can serve in the psychological and spiritual process.

1) Name

After the facilitator asks to speak to a particular voice, he or she always confirms the presence of that voice by asking:

“Who am I speaking to?”
Participants should respond very simply with the name of that particular voice. For example, if the facilitator is speaking to the voice of the controller, participants will respond to the question by saying “the Controller.” If the participants respond indirectly (e.g., instead of saying Controller, they say, “the boss,” or “the person in charge,” etc.), the facilitator may help participants identify the voice by asking, “To whom did I ask to speak?”

2) Role or Function
The second question posed by the facilitator always establishes the role or function of the voice.

“What do you do as (Desire)?
“What is your function as (the Seeking Mind)?”
“Why are you called (Big Heart)?”
“What is your role?”

3) Characteristics and Concerns
When the role or function has been clarified, the facilitator will then ask more questions to draw out the characteristics or qualities of the voice. These questions also include identifying the concerns or objects of interest to the voice. Most of these are open-ended questions like:

“Tell me about you?”
“If you could, what would you (control)?”
“What are you (skeptical) of?”
“What do you (desire)?”
“What else can you tell me about you?”

This series of questions is extremely important when moving from the dualistic to the non-dualistic voices. For instance, when speaking to Big Mind, each question serves to elicit and reveal Big Mind to the participants. So an entire series of questions about qualities are asked, designed to allow Big Mind to manifest more clearly.
“How big are you?”
“What do you embrace?
“When did you begin?” or “Do you have a beginning?”
“When will you end?’
“What is your shape? What color are you?”
“Do you have preferences?”

4) Particulars
Next, inquire into the particular qualities of the specific voice. These questions are either narrow or closed-ended questions. For example:

“If I want to speak to other voices, is it true that it could be helpful to talk to you first ” (Controller)
“As (Desire), will you ever be satisfied?”
“If I come back in 20 years, will you still be damaged?” (to the Damaged Self)
“If everything were fixed, what would you do?” (to the Fixer)
“As (Big Heart), is there anything that you don’t care about?”
“Who do you serve?” (to the Master)

5) Serving the Self
Questioning of the voice concludes with examining its relationship to the self, how it serves or might serve the self. For the dualistic voices, ask how the voice serves the self and whether the voice is appreciated by the self. Then validate the voice for its role and what it offers to the self.

“How do you serve the self?”
“Where would the self be if it weren’t for you?”
“Are you appreciated by the self?”
“Would you like to be more appreciated by the self?”

When facilitating the non-dual voices, inquire how the self may be further served by cultivating awareness of the voices.
Balancing Participation

Ensuring that the entire group stays engaged with the Big Mind process is one of the important functions of the facilitator. Because it is a facilitated dialogue, there is always a danger that the more extroverted or enthusiastic members of the group, or those who are more familiar with Big Mind, will dominate the process. There is also the risk that those who may not be as clear or confident in their perceptions will pull back, and become passive participants.

If a participant becomes too passive, the entire process can feel contrived or inauthentic. It can also appear as though peoples’ responses to the facilitator’s questions are scripted or intended only to please the facilitator. It is the facilitator’s role to guard against this, and to make sure that everyone is having a full, genuine, and engaging experience.

Some ways to ensure balanced participation include:

- Request that those who are new to the process sit in the front, nearer to the facilitator.
- Expand your awareness to include the entire group.
- Ask questions by scanning the group from one side to the other and back again to be sure that you are including everyone.
- Intentionally look to those people who are not speaking up, making eye contact and exchanging non-verbally with them so that they feel seen and included in the process.
- Occasionally prompt a more introverted participant to share their experience. You may have to slow down the pace and allow a bit more time for them to gather their thoughts. (Remember extroverts think out loud; introverts have to formulate their thoughts before speaking.)
- Ask periodically if anyone has fallen behind or is not connected to the voice, particularly when facilitating the transpersonal voices.
- Remember that when a participant needs help connecting to or clarifying the voice, their challenge is actually contributing to the learning of the entire group.
Working with Resistance

The facilitator's greatest challenge always comes when resistance arises. For instance, a participant fails to engage with the process, challenges the facilitator, or withdraws. Resistance can take many forms including:

- Doubting the integrity of the process
- Challenging the facilitator
- Becoming confused
- Attempting to analyze or becoming overly rational
- Refusing to make the shift or believing that they are unable to make the shift
- Withdrawal from the process

While the forms of resistance (sometimes referred to as disowning a voice) are many, the approach to working with it is simple and straightforward. In whatever way resistance arises, the facilitator must work to validate the emergence of the resistance, while helping the participant move forward when he or she is ready. Do not make the person wrong or feel bad.

Sometimes resistance is relieved by speaking with certain voices, like the skeptic, the protector, or fear. Acknowledging these voices initially and giving them an opportunity to speak will often take care of much of the resistance in the group.

Sometimes the facilitator can help the participant who is struggling return to one of these voices, allowing it to speak again. In fact, it is very important for the facilitator to return to the voice of the Controller periodically to check in and ensure that no anxiety is building in the controller, and he/she is not feeling threatened.

Sometimes the facilitator can simply acknowledge the resistance and allow it to remain until the participant feels a shift. The main point is to support the participant in feeling that whatever is arising is perfectly okay.
Most importantly, whatever the form of the resistance, the facilitator’s response should be to receive and work with it. This is particularly important when the resistance comes in the form of a challenge to the facilitator. Any sign of defensiveness, justification or explaining on the part of the facilitator will only serve to intensify it. The facilitator should always move with the resistance, as in Aikido, never against it. In other words, **NEVER RESIST THE RESISTANCE.**

**Holding the Big Mind Space**

The Big Mind facilitation process requires a full awareness of the identity of absolute and relative. On one hand, the facilitator needs all the relative skills of a good facilitator: presence, flexibility, clear communications, etc.

On the other hand, the facilitator him/herself must inhabit each of the voices while the group explores them. This is especially true as the group moves into the non-dual voices, most particularly into Big Mind. To help the group access the experience, the Big Mind facilitator must inhabit and manifest the Big Mind space while functioning fully as the facilitator. If the facilitator is not grounded in Big Mind, the group will have a difficult time stabilizing in the experience.

It is quite obvious to a participant when the facilitator is not resting in Big Mind. He (she) may suddenly appear to the audience hurried and overly talkative. He (she) may appear to be asking too many questions of a voice that has no need for questions or answers. By comparison, the facilitator may appear fidgety and restless, lacking the stillness of the Big Mind. And the facilitator can seem to have an agenda, or a desire for the audience to have a certain experience, where the Big Mind space is empty of preference and desire. All of these characteristics stand out in stark contrast to the open, spacious, and completely-at-one Mind.
Big Mind facilitators should be deeply grounded in shikantaza as the practice for establishing themselves in the non-dual experience. Training as a Big Mind facilitator requires a commitment to zazen or sitting meditation as an on-going aspect of training. But because the Big Mind is ever-present, the facilitator, like the participant, should not worry that the Big Mind awareness will elude them. The following suggestions may help the facilitator make the transition into the non-dual voices more completely:

- Remain in deep silence and stillness.
- Slow down the pace of the facilitation.
- Enjoy the open space and quiet as fully as the questions and responses.
- Allow the participants to take their time sitting with, exploring and answering questions.
- Take time with exploring paradoxes as they arise. (For example, unborn, undying, but being born and dying at each moment.)
- Remember that everything that arises is a manifestation of and is not separate from Big Mind.

**Process Closure**

The journey through the Big Mind process is extremely full, compelling, and complete. Unlike many other kinds of dialogues or group processes, it may be enough to end the workshop by simply thanking the group for its participation. Most often, at the conclusion of Big Mind, there is a quality of full-heartedness in the room that does not need explanation.

As a way of closing the process, the facilitator has the discretion to explore voices like that of Joyous Mind or Gratitude, and finish up with Integrated Free-Functioning or Ordinary Mind. By this point in the session, the group has begun to understand how the journey from dualism through the non-
dual arrives at the doorstep of the integrated free-functioning human being. They can also see very clearly how the wisdom and compassion of the non-dual states has been obscured by the over-identification with the controlling and rational aspects of mind.

Sometimes there will be questions at the end of the session about the technique or form. It is a good idea to keep these questions to a minimum because the group will very quickly return to using the analytic mind to evaluate the process, and the energy that has been built up by exploring the non-dual and integrated voices may quickly dissipate. These questions are often better handled privately when the workshop has ended. It is a good idea to make Big Mind information, books, and DVD’s available so that the group is provided with ways to follow-up with Big Mind after the workshop has ended.

One final note: the facilitator may spontaneously express appreciation to Genpo Roshi, Maezumi Roshi, and all of the Zen ancestors for their depth of practice, commitment, and generosity in sharing these teachings.
Key Voices in the Big Mind Process

**Dualistic Voices**
- Protector
- Allies of the Protector:
  - Controller
  - Skeptic
  - Fear
  - Anger
  - Damaged Self
  - Victim
  - Fixer
- Vulnerable Child
- Desire
- Seeking Mind
- Mind that Seeks the Way
- Follower of the Way

**Non-Dualistic Voices**
- The Way
- Big Mind
- Big Heart
- Yin Compassion
- Yang Compassion
- Yin/Yang Compassion
- The Master

**Integrated Voices**
- Integrated Free Functioning Self / Ordinary Mind
Dualistic Voices

Protector

The Big Mind process begins when the facilitator asks to speak to the Protector.

May I speak to the Protector, please?

The group responds by making a physical shift. The facilitator then asks:

To whom am I speaking?

Everyone in the group should respond by identifying as the Protector. Next the facilitator asks:

As the Protector, what is your function?

Different participants will answer in different ways, including: to protect the self from others; to protect others from the self; and to protect the self from the self. It’s important for the Facilitator to draw out all the ways in which the Protector protects the self, including withdrawal, aggression, building up boundaries, creating strategies for survival and success.

The Facilitator can validate the role of the Protector and assure the Protector that it can continue to perform its function during the process. The process will only proceed with the Protector’s consent.

These are the first three questions posed by the facilitator when beginning to explore any voice. It is crucial to establish the identity and function of each voice.
Controller

May I speak to the Controller, please?

The group responds by making a physical shift. The facilitator then asks:

To whom am I speaking?

Everyone in the group should respond by identifying as the Controller. Next the facilitator asks:

As the Controller, what is your function?

Some answers will include: to keep things under control; to protect the self, and to make sure the self gets what it needs

Controller, who decides which voices are allowed to speak?

Even if you have covered this point in the introductory remarks, be sure the participants get it while they are speaking from the Controller voice.

This function makes it crucial for the facilitator to have an alliance with the Controller before speaking with any other voices. If no one mentions this aspect of the Controller’s function, the facilitator should specifically ask,

If I would like to speak to others would it be helpful to get your consent?

Next, ask for the Controller’s help during the workshop. Be sure to make these requests respectfully, in full recognition of the Controller’s power:

Controller, I would like to ask two things of you to assist us with what we are going to do during this workshop. First, when I ask to speak to a voice, will you give me a clear channel to that voice and keep all other voices from interrupting?
The facilitator will gain consent from the participants, and work through any objections from the Controllers in the room. Usually these objections will lead directly to the second request:

Second, if you become concerned about what is happening, or another voice such as Fear or Doubt tries to break into the process, will you intervene and let the facilitator know what is happening so that it is always clear which voice is speaking.

Gaining the trust and cooperation of the Controller at the beginning, rather than trying to wear the Controller down by years of sitting, is an essential reason why the Big Mind process work so quickly. The success of the process is completely dependent and proportional to the facilitator’s confidence in every participant’s capacity to experience Big Mind.

Skeptic

To whom am I speaking?
The skeptic

What is your function?
To be skeptical.

What is your purpose?
To protect; to provide clarity.

What are you skeptical of?

Fear

To whom am I speaking?
Fear.
What is your function?
To be afraid

What purpose do you serve?
Protection; watch for potential danger.

Are you appreciated?

Anger

To whom am I speaking?
Anger

What is your function?
To be angry

What makes you angry?

Tell me about your energy?

Does the self recognize and acknowledge you?

What do you offer the self?

Damaged Self

To whom am I speaking?
The Damaged Self.

What is your function?
To be damaged.

What is your purpose?
To absorb damage and allow the self to function. I collect damage so the other voices can be true to themselves.
Who are you protecting?
The core of the self – the Vulnerable Child. Whatever the Protector misses, I absorb.

When did you first appear?

When will your job end?

Victim

To whom am I speaking?
The victim

What is your function?
To feel victimized

How are you different from the Damaged Self?

What do you offer the self?

Fixer

To whom am I speaking?
The Fixer

What is your job?
To fix things.

What is your purpose?
To help the self keep things going smoothly.

What if you do not see something broken?

When does your job end?
Vulnerable Child

To whom am I speaking?
The vulnerable child

What is your function?
*To be vulnerable and childlike*

What is your purpose?
To keep the self innocent and open. Without me the self couldn’t be fully human. I am cute, curious, trusting, open, and can feel love.

What is it like to be you?
Is the self in touch with you?

Desire

To whom am I speaking?
Desire.

What is your function?
I desire, I want.

What do you desire?
What happens when you succeed in getting the object of your desire?

What is your energy like?
As desire, can you be satisfied?

What do you offer the self?
Seeking Mind

To whom am I speaking?
Seeking Mind.

What is your function?
To seek

What do you seek?

How are you different from Desire?

What happens when you get what you are seeking?

Mind that Seeks the Way

To whom am I speaking?
Mind that seeks the Way.

What is your function?
To seek the Way.

How are you different from the Seeking Mind?

When did you first appear in the life of the self?

What other names do you have for yourself?

When will you stop seeking the Way?

Follower of the Way

To whom am I speaking?
Mind that follows the Way.

What is your function?
To follow the Way.

How are you different from the Mind that Seeks the Way?

What is it like to be you?
Non-Dualistic Voices

The Way

To whom am I speaking?
The Way.

What is your function?
To be the Way.

As the Way, what do you notice?
As the Way, can you get off the path or lose your way?
What do you offer the self?

Big Mind

After concluding the exploration of the Controller, while the participants are still in that voice, the facilitator asks to speak to Big Mind.

I would now like to speak to Big Mind, please.

The participants’ ability to do this is equal to the degree to which the facilitator believes they can do it.

Then ask: Who am I speaking to?

Everyone should reply,

Big Mind.

When everyone is in Big Mind, ask a series of questions to clarify the nature of Big Mind (following the exact order of these questions is extremely important to unlock the door):
Crucial first question: “How big are you?” Participants will respond with descriptions like:
Limitless, Vast, No size, Infinite, Boundless, etc.

Next questions: When did you begin? When will you end? When were you born? When will you die? What do you embrace? Is there anything you do not embrace? What is your relationship to everything?
No beginning, always have been, don’t know. No ending; always will be, don’t know, can’t find an end. Not-born, unborn, can’t find any birth, don’t know, never born. No death, undying; endless, eternal, timeless. Everything is part of me, an extension of me; everything is me.

Is there anything that is not a manifestation of you?
No, I include everything.

What manifestations do you prefer over others?
I have no preferences, since it’s all me…

The answer to every one of the questions should now be, “Me!” or “I am!” If not, again ask, “Who am I speaking to?” and continue to explore the fears that cause participants to shift out of the Big Mind perspective.

Clarifying resistance to manifesting Big Mind is very important so that participants can see why people ordinarily have to work very hard over a long period of time even to get a glimpse of it.

Once everyone is in Big Mind, ask a series of questions that clarify the nature of reality from a non-dualistic perspective:

Do you suffer?
No, I do not suffer; but I am suffering.

What is the ego?
I am it, but it is not me.
Do you exist?
No, I do not exist, but I am all existence.

So, therefore, you exist and yet you do not exist?
Yes, that is true.

In this state of Big Mind, are you thinking in a dualistic way?
No, I am not.

Are you conceptualizing?
No, I am not.

Who is responsible for the way thing are?
I am!

Who is the cause of problems?
The ego, which is also me.

Who is to be blamed?
There is no one to blame.

For thousands of years, human kind has been searching for the meaning of life, the purpose — the point. What is this point?
I am! It is me!

Are you a point?
No, I am the point and I am all points, but I am not a point.

So why have human beings, with the exception of a very few, been unable to find this point?
Because they have been looking outside themselves for a point.

Will one find the answer by looking within?
No, because I am not inside either, I just am.
As Big Mind, what is there for you to realize?
Nothing; I am it. Myself. Everything.

(You are now in a position to point out to the group the irony and futility of the spiritual search for what, we already are!)

How can Big Mind help the self?
To get unstuck, to become more flexible, to incorporate a larger more inclusive perspective, and to embody wisdom and compassion.

Looking at the Self from Big Mind

The purpose of this segment is to help participants experience how and why the self tries to keep us from accessing Big Mind.

First, make sure everyone is still in Big Mind. Then ask Big Mind,

How does the self keep you from coming out?

The answers you hear will guide you in working with other voices, such as Fear and Judgment. This part of the workshop can go in many directions; depending on how the participants respond, so the facilitator needs to be flexible and flow with the process.

Below are listed some of the observations and discoveries that will come up, along with questions the facilitator can pose to bring out these observations.

As Big Mind, how are you different from the self?
Big Mind sees that the self sees itself as separate and creates preferences, and thereby suffering.

Does that mean that the self is distinct from you (Big Mind)?
Big Mind includes the self but is not limited by its narrow perspective.
Why does the self resist Big Mind?
Ego (the self) wants to control things and survive. It would like either to avoid Big Mind or take it over in order to aggrandize itself. Since Big Mind is far more vast than the self, the self cannot swallow it and has to stifle it instead, out of fear of death.

What is Big Mind afraid of?
Big Mind is not afraid of anything because Big Mind includes everything and nothing can kill or destroy it.

As Big Mind, do you know when the self takes over?
Yes.

Is this a problem for you, Big Mind?
No. Small mind is part of me.

Who decides whether Big Mind or the self is allowed to speak?
The Controller.

Thank the Controller for doing what you requested at the beginning of the process. Point out that nobody stays in Big Mind constantly; it is only a matter of time before we trade in Big Mind for the limited self. It is useful to observe when we make that shift and what brings it about.

Observe that it is easier to stay in Big Mind when alone, sitting in zazen, or not occupied with a task. Point out there is nothing bad or wrong about the self. The absolute (Big Mind) and relative (the self) are like two sides of the same coin. Both are needed. The key is not to get stuck in either perspective. Wanting to stay in Big Mind can create as much suffering as any other desire or attachment.
Big Heart

Big Mind, I would like to speak with an aspect of yourself, Big Heart. Who am I speaking to now?

Everyone should respond, “Big Heart.”

As with Big Mind, there are questions that need to be asked to clarify the nature of Big Heart.

How big are you? Do you have any limits, any boundaries?
I am unlimited, unbounded.

How are you different from Big Mind?
Big Mind observes, witnesses events in the absence of judgment. I care.

What is your function?
I see pain and suffering and respond to it.

What are some of the other names you go by?
Kanzeon, Avalokitesvara, Kwan Yin.

What is the limit on your caring, on your ability to feel suffering?
I have unlimited capacity.

Is there anything you do not care about?
I care about everything.

What are the conditions for your caring?
There are none.
Yin/Feminine Compassion

Thank you. Big Heart, you have yang and yin sides, masculine and feminine qualities.

Please tell us about your yin or feminine side.

Have participants say “I am” as they name the attributes:

I am softness, warmth, loving-kindness, tenderness, caring, nurturing, empathy, all-embracing receptivity, unconditional acceptance. I am a perfect listener, totally present and open. I am patient, creative, limitlessly generous.

From a place of unconditional love and compassion, I give birth to what is truly alive by wielding my life-giving sword.

Yang/Masculine Compassion

Thank you. And what are the attributes of youryang/masculine aspect?

Have participants say “I am” as they name the attributes. (This may be tougher for the participants, as most people are conditioned not to associate compassion with tough love.)

I am power, strength, clarity, discrimination decision-making action. I am assertive, direct, cutting, and ruthlessly compassionate. I am vigorous, purposeful, disciplined, discriminating, fierce in the face of blindness and cruelty. I create boundaries and limits. I use my outrage against harmfulness to stamp out ego, fear, greed, self-delusion and arrogance.

I penetrate to the source and correct ignorance by using my killing sword to destroy it! I do not hesitate to chop away all illusions and dead concepts.”
Yin/Yang Compassion

Now, may I speak to Yin/Yang Compassion?

So, as the whole and integrated Big Heart, where would you be without one or the other of these aspects?
I would be ineffective. I need both aspects to function.

What would be lacking if you had only a feminine side?
I would be unable to uproot delusion, stamp out ignorance, and get rid of that which is illusion.

And what would happen if you had only a masculine side?
I would lack the capacity to support and nurture the life of the true self.”

The Master

May I speak to the Controller?
(Chairs move).

Am I speaking to the Controller now?
Yes!

Good. Controller, would you please give me a clear channel to the voice of the Master?
(Chairs move).

Who am I speaking to?
The Master!

Master, what is your function? How do you serve the self?
I oversee the Controller and all the other voices. My job is to be the bridge between Big Mind and the self. I guide and give direction to the self. I help the self set and hold intentions. I help to bring Big Mind into form-through the self and its activities.
Master, what is your intent?
To guide the self in manifesting Wisdom and Compassion.

What are your characteristics?
I am fearless and timeless, but I operate in time and I can manifest and deal with fear when necessary. I use skillful means to guide the self and others.

And whom do you serve?
Big Mind!

Who helps you do your job?
Wisdom and Compassion!

What happens when the self doesn’t listen to you?
The Controller takes over.

Who does the Controller serve then?
Small mind! Ego!

Give the example of Zuigen calling out every day, “Master, are you in?” “Yes, I am!” “Are you awake?” “Yes!” “Do not be deceived by anyone!” “No, I will not!”

Use Buddha’s allegory to make the point about the absent Master. If the Head of a large household goes off on a journey, he may leave his head servant (Controller) in charge of the house while he is away. This arrangement works fine as long as the Controller remains clear about his servant role. If, however, the Head stays away too long, the Controller may forget that he is there to serve the Master and he may begin to act as if the ego, or the self, were the Head of the house. When the true Master returns, he may need to set things right by putting the Controller back in his proper role as the Master’s servant.

For most of us, the Master has been away for a long time. By bringing the Master home, we realign ourselves with Big Mind and take the ego out of the driver’s seat.
Integrated Voices

Integrated Free Functioning Self/
Ordinary Mind Is The Way

What is your purpose?
To function freely. I have no need to try to integrate. I am.

Experiencing the Big Mind process gives us a glimpse of where Zen practice is taking us. Sitting in Big Mind and listening to our inner Master allows us to free ourselves up and find a balance among all our voices. Gradually, the Integrated Self becomes wiser and more mature and compassionate.

Remember, we need to listen to both Big Mind and the limited self. Over and over again, we start in our conventional dualistic awareness, then shift into Big Mind and/or consult the Master, then go back to the self to implement what we have learned in a practical way. Through practice, this process leads to integration of the Big Mind perspective into our daily lives and brings our functioning into greater alignment with Wisdom and Compassion.

The perspective that encompasses both Big Mind and the limited, dualistic mind and has the freedom to move back and forth freely between them could be called Transcendental Mind, or in Zen, One Mind. This degree of flexibility is the culmination of Zen practice and takes a lifetime to cultivate. In time, the Integrated Self learns to function effortlessly as Ordinary Mind.

The question we need to ask ourselves over and over again is, “Where am I stuck?” We become the Master of our life by facing our attachments and going beyond them, again and again and again.

Remember that all our inner voices have something to say that we need to hear. All of them are part of Big Mind, even the ones we don’t like, and need to be heard by the Integrated Self.
Voices for Shikantaza

Non-seeking
Non-grasping
Non-thinking
Non-desiring
Non-attached
Non-abiding
Non-doing
Non-striving
No mind
Dropped-off body/mind
Not Mind/Not Body
The Way
The Big Mind Certification Process

BIG MIND WORKSHOP PARTICIPANT: Anyone who attends a Big Mind workshop is encouraged to use what they learn in their work and life. Those who have attended a workshop should feel free to work informally with individuals and friends and family according to their own comfort level.

BIG MIND CERTIFICATE OF COMPLETION: The “Big Mind” name and the “Big Mind” logo are trademarked and only those people to whom Genpo Roshi has given explicit permission will be authorized to use the Big Mind name in their advertising and presentations. This permission must be in writing and will require execution of an agreement governing the use of the name and logo for trademark protection purposes. The Certificate of Completion of 18 days of Big Mind Facilitator Training allows recipients to be listed on the Big Mind website, to use the Big Mind process in their specialty, and asks them to state in advertising they are using “the Big Mind process created and developed by Genpo Roshi”.

BIG MIND FACILITATOR: The title of “Big Mind Facilitator” is reserved for those who have trained intensively with Genpo Roshi in the Big Mind process, and who he considers fully capable to facilitate large groups and carry out this form of teaching. Again, this is a title that will be evidenced in writing, for trademark protection purposes. Big Mind Facilitators are allowed to use the Big Mind title and logo, and are allowed to conduct Big Mind workshops, especially introductions to Big Mind.

Big Mind Facilitators will be listed on our website, and will contribute an agreed-upon percentage of their Big Mind earnings back to the organization. They will also be asked to attend one Master’s training with Genpo Roshi every year to stay current with developments in the Big Mind process. Big Mind Facilitators will also be encouraged to host Big Mind practice groups in their local areas.
BIG MIND SUCCESSOR: The category of Big Mind Successor is in every way equivalent to a Dharma successor in the lineage and is a Zen teacher qualified to lead or facilitate Big Mind workshops.

ZEN TEACHERS: It is expected that Zen teachers who have trained in the Big Mind process will use it in their teachings. If, however, they would like to use the name and trademark of Big Mind in their advertising and representations, they would be expected to participate in training as a Big Mind Facilitator with the attendant benefits and obligations.

If you have an interest in becoming a Big Mind Facilitator or Successor, please contact Genpo Roshi with your request. You will then be included on the list of Big Mind trainees.

As in Zen, the training process is highly personal. Your progress will depend on your individual situation, the number of workshops you attend, and your ability to create practice opportunities for yourself. Your strengths and weaknesses as a facilitator will be evaluated to determine what next steps are most appropriate for your training in Big Mind.

Genpo Roshi is very pleased to have Big Mind dispersed as widely as possible in private settings and in small groups. At the same time, because of the depth of the teaching and practice, he is committed to providing the best possible Facilitators under the name of Big Mind, persons he is confident can hold the space for large groups, who can work with a variety of personalities, and whose facilitation skills make accessing the Big Mind a simple and direct experience for participants.
About the Author

Dennis Genpo Merzel Roshi is a revolutionary in the tradition of the old Zen Masters who so embodied Buddhist teaching that they were able to revitalize and transform it for their own day and age. As Buddhism moved from India to China to Japan and other Asian cultures, it found unique expression in each culture that made its fundamental teachings resonate for a new time and place. Genpo Roshi is working to transmit the essence of the Buddha’s teachings in a way that is readily accessible to Westerners and relevant to our everyday life.

The core of Genpo Roshi’s teaching is the unshakeable and contagious certainty that every one of us, regardless of our socio-economic, cultural or religious background, can instantly awaken to our true nature, like the great masters of old — like the historical Buddha himself, whose essential teaching was nothing less than this. This experience helps us shed anxiety and fear and learn to live more purposeful, compassionate and joyful lives. Roshi combines Zen tradition with the insights of such visionary western figures as Carl Jung, Fritz Perls, and Hal Stone, enabling virtually anyone to realize their true nature, a realization they can further deepen through meditation.

Dennis Genpo Merzel comes from a long line of Rebbes. Born in Brooklyn NY, he grew up in Southern California where he was a high school champion swimmer and All-American water polo player. He earned a Masters degree in education from the University of Southern California and was a teacher and lifeguard before ordaining as a Zen monk under Zen Master Taizan Maezumi in 1973. Completing formal Koan study in 1979 he became Maezumi Roshi’s second Dharma Successor in 1980, the
first being Bernie Tetsugen Glassman. He received Inka (final seal of approval as Zen Master) from Roshi Glassman in 1996, thereby becoming one of a small group of Westerners recognized as lineage holders in both the Soto and Rinzai Zen traditions.

In 1982 he began teaching throughout Europe and founded the international group he named the Kanzeon (Love and Compassion) Sangha, centered in Salt Lake City, Utah, with affiliates in France, Holland, Poland, Belgium, Germany, England, and Malta. For ten years, until 2007, he was the President of the White Plum Asanga, the worldwide community comprising all the Dharma heirs of Taizan Maezumi Roshi, their successors, and the many groups they lead. Genpo Roshi has seventeen Dharma Successors and has given Inka to fourteen Zen teachers.

Roshi’s published works include *The Eye Never Sleeps; Beyond Sanity and Madness; 24/7 Dharma; The Path of The Human Being; To Study the Self* (6 volumes of DVDs); *The Fool Who Thought He Was God* (eBook). His book, *Big Mind/Big Heart: Finding Your Way*, published in 2007, has been published in translation in fourteen languages. His most recent book is *Spitting Out the Bones, A Zen Master’s 45 Year Journey*. 