

Ocean Zendo

Zazen Instructions

“For studying Zen, one should have quiet quarters. Be moderate in food and drink. Cast aside all involvements and discontinue all affairs. Do not think good or evil; do not deal with right and wrong. Halt the revolutions of mind, intellect, consciousness; stop the calculations of thoughts, ideas, and perceptions. Do not intend to make a Buddha, much less be attached to sitting still.”

Eihei Dogen’s “Fukanzazengi”

Co-founder of the Soto School of Zen 1200-1253 C.E.

Zen teachers often describe three aspects of zazen (zen meditation) that can be helpful in refining and focusing one’s attention in practice. These are *the body, the breath, and the mind.*

The Body

One of the key elements for entering into deep concentration is the ability to sit still for relatively long periods of time. Stillness of body facilitates stillness of mind. Two thousand years ago, the Buddha and descendants developed sitting postures that have stood the test of time. We encourage you to try each to find the best fit for your body.

The Full Lotus:

Right foot rests on left thigh. Left foot rests on right thigh.

Though very stable, this position is difficult and often painful for most people.

•• Other options include ••

The Half-lotus: Left foot rests on right thigh. Right foot tucked under left leg.

Burmese: Right foot tucked heel to perineum. Left foot rests on ground close to right leg.

A seiza bench or cushions: Kneeling and supported by bench or cushions.

Chair: When proper posture is maintained, a chair can also be used.

What is important in any posture is that the body is upright, balanced, and at ease, without slouching.

Sit on the forward one-third of the cushion or chair and allow the spine to be straight and extended, but not rigid.

Extend the head upward, and tuck the chin in slightly.

Imagine crown of the head reaching towards the sky while the base of the spine is rooted to the ground.

Allow the lower back to be flexed comfortably forward and the belly to relax and protrude.

Let the mouth be closed and the tongue rest on the upper palate behind the teeth.

Allow the eyes to remain half-open with the gaze lowered to a 45 degree angle, not focused on anything.

Rest your hands in front of your lower abdomen, with the left hand resting palm up on the right palm, and the thumb tips forming an oval, lightly touching. You can place a small pillow or support under your hands to protect your neck from strain.

Once you have established your posture, rock from side to side and settle into a well-balanced, centered position. Remain as still and silent as possible. When you experience discomfort, continue to bring your

attention to your breath -- often pain will disappear in a few minutes. If you must move, do so quietly.

The Breath

Once you have arranged the body, take a few deep breaths, inhaling and exhaling fully. Then let your breathing settle into its own rhythm without superimposing depth or rate. Allow the breath to enter and expand the abdomen on inhalation, and contract on exhalation. Bring your attention gently to the breath, allowing it to become your focus.

The Mind

One of the most striking things that we find when we first begin zazen practice, is how busy the mind is -- worrying about the past, planning for the future, and full of preferences and opinions!

The way we work with this is to focus the mind on an object -- most often the breath -- and as the mind drifts away, to bring it back to our object of focus.

When using the breath, *the first method* is to simply follow the breath, bringing your full attention to each inhalation and exhalation. When the mind wanders, gently return your attention to the breath.

The second method is to count the breath -- each exhalation is counted until you reach ten, and then you return the count to one again. When the mind wanders and you lose your count, return to one and begin again.

Remember, this is a practice...not a competition!

Zazen is an activity which is done solely for its own sake. Don't be concerned with getting "better" or achieving anything. Simply allow yourself to be present and aware of your life, *as it is...moment after moment, breath after breath.*

As Zen master Dogen said, "Do not seek to become a Buddha."