

Introduction

The meditation hall (Japanese: *zendō*) is the focus of our group (Sanskrit: *sangha*). Observing etiquette helps us be mindful with our practice and supportive of others in theirs. These are guidelines for practice. Forgetting them or making mistakes doesn't warrant humiliation or embarrassment. We consider our practice to be an opportunity to learn more about ourselves, others in the sangha, and our world. It's not faultlessness that counts – it's effort and attitude. Mindfulness with our practice transfers to the world outside of the zendō.

Preliminaries

- Be on time. Arrive ten minutes before sitting meditation (Japanese: *zazen*). Not being hasty helps create an atmosphere of calmness that helps everyone settle into zazen and allows mindfulness to develop.
- Remove your shoes. Stockings are optional. Some people prefer to sit without socks, because they find that cross-legged positions are easier without them.
- Wear loose-fitting clothing so that you can sit and breathe comfortably.
- Clothing colors should be muted so as not to be distracting. Clothing with words, pictures, etc., should not be worn, as they distract others.
- Avoid distracting jewelry and scents.
- It's better not to wear a watch; leave it in your car or pocket. The monitor (Japanese: *ino*) will keep track of time.
- Turn off cell phones and pagers or other devices that might disturb meditation.
- Please keep talking to a minimum before meditation.
- You will often see others bowing with palms together (Japanese: *gasshō*). This is a sign of respect and gratitude.

The Zendō

- When entering the zendō, bow in *gasshō* at the threshold. In this way we show gratitude to the room for sheltering us while we practice the Buddha way. We also offer gratitude to the Buddha for showing us the path.
- Find a place to sit. Bow in *gasshō* to your cushion. We show gratitude for having a place to sit.
- Turn clockwise. Bow in *gasshō* to the others in the room, even if it is empty. We bow in gratitude for the sangha which supports our practice.
- Sit in meditation posture until the bell sounds to signal the start of formal zazen.
- Rise from your seat and stand with palms together, facing the group.
- An attendant (Japanese: *jikijitsu* or *jikka*) will give you a sūtra card, should you need it.
- Bow when you hear the gongs and bells.
- Chant on a comfortable low pitch, breathing low and deep.
- After the *Heart Sūtra*, the *Devotional*, and the *Three Treasures Bows*, cards will be collected by the Jikka.
- After cards have been collected, turn clockwise, and face your seat. Bow in *gasshō* at the bell. Turn clockwise again, bow in *gasshō* at the sound of the bell to the sangha. Turn clockwise again and be seated for zazen.
- When everyone is settled, the ino will ring the large gong to indicate the beginning of formal zazen. Make a bow and begin zazen.
- Zazen usually lasts for twenty-five minutes.
- At the end of zazen, the gong will sound. Bow in *gasshō*, rise *SLOWLY* from your seat. Take your time, as your legs might have fallen asleep. Stand facing the sangha with your palms together.

Walking Meditation (Japanese: *kinhin*)

- At the hour or half-hour, the gong rings to signal the end of zazen. Place your palms together and bow in gratitude.
- Rise from your seat as you are able to prepare for *kinhin*. Face the sangha with your palms together and wait for others to stand.
- At the sound of wooden clappers (Japanese: *hyōshigi*), turn a quarter turn to your left. Place your hands in *shashu* (passive hand in a fist at heart level, fingers around the thumb, thumb pointing away – the dominant hand covers the passive hand). Distribute space evenly around the zendō.
- At the second sound of the *hyōshigi*, begin *kinhin*.

- Five minutes later, the bell will sound. Bow with palms together. Walk at a normal speed back to your seat and face it.
- Bow in gasshō to your cushion at the bell. Turn clockwise, bow at the sound of the bell to the sangha, then be seated for zazen.
- When everyone is settled, the ino will ring the large gong to indicate the beginning of the next twenty-five minute round of zazen. Bow and resume zazen.

End

- The large gong rings to signal the end of the last round of zazen. Place your palms together and bow.
- Rise slowly from your seat and prepare to chant *The Four Great Vows*. Stand, facing the sangha, and wait with your palms together as everybody rises.
- The jikka will give you a chant card, if you need it.
- Bow when you hear the gongs and bells.
- Chant on a comfortable low pitch, breathing low and deep.
- After the *Vows* and *Three Treasures Bows*, cards will be collected by the jikka.
- The ino will rise and bow to the group. Please bow in harmony with the ino.
- If there is a reading or teaching, the ino will invite you to sit comfortably and listen. If you must leave early, you may.
- At dismissal, please brush the lint and dust from your cushions. Fluff the round cushion and place it on the near edge of the rectangular one.
- When leaving the zendō, turn clockwise at the threshold, face the zendō, bow in gasshō, and exit.

General Considerations

- Do not enter the zendō after zazen has begun. Enter only at the hour or half-hour (during walking meditation). You may enter immediately after the *Heart Sūtra* has been chanted, when people are seating themselves for zazen.
- Do not leave during zazen, unless absolutely necessary. If you must leave, do so as quietly as possible. Please reenter only when walking meditation begins.
- You may leave and return during walking meditation as necessary, such as a bathroom break. Please do this mindfully and without hurry.
- Bells and gongs are rung in the place of verbal instructions. Our practice values silence.
- We aspire to sit in stillness without restlessness. If you must move or readjust a little, do so as quietly as possible.
- If you are allergic to incense, let the ino know. It will be extinguished immediately.
- Please leave valuables in your locked car.
- If you wish to be on our mailing list, please give us your name, address, phone, and email. You do not have to be on our list to participate. However, we do require this information if you want to check out library materials.

The Encouragement Stick (Japanese: Kyōsaku)

- *Nobody* is struck with the stick, unless he or she specifically requests to be struck. People will request to be struck to release the tension in their shoulders and back or to ward off drowsiness. On occasion during formal zazen, you may hear a loud “crack!” as a person who requested the kyōsaku is struck. Don’t be alarmed!
- To request to be struck by the stick, meditators raise their hands, palms together, above their heads. Please speak with one of the leadership if you desire more information about the request to be struck.
- *Posture Correction*: On occasion the ino will place the kyōsaku against your back to help you feel a straight, erect spine and tall posture. First the ino will touch your left shoulder to let you know that he or she is behind you. Then the ino will place the kyōsaku against your back. Do your best to be flexible and adjust to the stick. Hold this posture as long as you comfortably can.

Library

The Southwind Sangha Library is available to all who sit with us. It is “self-serve.” We observe the honor system; we trust everyone to return his or her materials in a timely manner. If you wish to borrow from the library, we need: *Your Name – Address – Telephone – Optional: Email*

Finally

“Those who come are welcomed. Those who leave are not pursued.”