

## INTRODUCTION TO ZEN PRACTICE AT ZDS

### *WELCOME to Zen Desert Sangha!*

This sheet offers basic instruction for newcomers to ZDS.

We invite you to participate in a full orientation at your earliest convenience.

To schedule, please leave a message at (520) 319-6260 or e-mail us at [zds@zendesertsangha.org](mailto:zds@zendesertsangha.org)

*If you feel you made a "mistake" don't worry - we were all newcomers at one time.  
Relax and watch what others do and simply follow along as best you can.*

Please remove your shoes when entering the Zen Center. Shoe shelves are provided outside the front door. Either socks or bare feet are fine.

Cell phones should be silenced completely.

Personal belongings (purses, backpacks, coats, etc.) may be stored on shelves in the back room which is located off the fireplace room, to the right of the fireplace.

Please wear loose-fitting, dark, solid-colored clothing that covers the knees and shoulders. Please avoid wearing jewelry and strong scents.

It is traditional not to extend social greetings or make eye contact during practice -- however, form follows function: those unfamiliar with procedure are encouraged to look around in order to follow along.

### **ZENDO FORM**

The entrance to the *zendo* (meditation hall) is through the wooden double-doors to the right as you enter the Zen Center.

Make sure you are seated at your place before the end of the *densho* sequence. The *densho* sequence is a timed sounding of the gong located just outside the zendo, which lasts 10 minutes and 'counts down' to the beginning of the sitting.

Feel free to sit on a chair, a *seiza bench* (low bench), or on a *zafu* (cushion) as you prefer. You may sit anywhere in the zendo except on the cushions at the four corners of the room or the single cushion directly in front of the altar. These seats are reserved for service positions.

Additional support cushions and other sitting aids are available directly outside the zendo doors to the right.

Upon entering or leaving the zendo, bow with hands in *gassho* towards the altar. This represents bowing to the Buddha Nature that we all share.

Bow next with hands in *gassho* to your cushion before sitting down. This represents bowing to the *Dharma* (the teaching).

Finally, turn at your cushion and bow in *gassho* across the room. This represents bowing to the *Sangha* (the community of practitioners).

Sit facing the wall unless otherwise directed or before a tea service. Participants seated on the middle cushions always face outward, with the back to the middle of the room.

Whether you are seated in a chair or on a cushion, please settle into an erect posture that you can maintain for 25 minutes. Below are illustrations of four ways to sit:



**Gassho:** Hold the palms and fingers of both hands together, top of fingers about level of your nose. Arms should be slightly away from the chest, and elbows should extend outward from your sides in a straight line parallel with the floor.



*Burmese*



*Full Lotus*



*Half Lotus*



*Seiza*

The standard sequence of practice consists of two 25-minute periods of *zazen* (sitting meditation), followed by a 5-minute period of *kinhin* (walking meditation).

There also may be recitations of *sutras* (the words of the Buddha and his disciples) and *gathas* (verses) at the beginning and/or end of the session on Wednesday and Saturday.

Participants have the opportunity for *dokusan* (a private interview with the teacher) during a *zazen* period (usually Wednesday and Saturday) if the *Roshi* (teacher) is present. Talk to a senior student if you are interested and they will explain the procedure to you.

On Saturday morning before the first early morning round of *zazen*, a tea service is held. Please take a cup, which will be on a small table just outside the zendo doors and bring it in with you. Sit facing in to the center of the room with the cup on the floor directly in front of your sitting mat. There will a series of claps and strikes of the bell – it is best to watch and follow along with the others at this point.

When the service is complete, simply place the cup behind you close to the wall. The first round of zazen will then begin with the sound of three bells.

*If you don't feel comfortable with any procedure or with bowing, please feel free not to do it!  
Simply stand or sit quietly and follow along as best you can.*

## ZAZEN FORM

The *Jiki-jitsu* (timekeeper) will strike the wooden clappers, followed by three closely-spaced bells to signify the start of zazen; two bells will signal the end of the period.

Sit with your spine erect, head upright and shoulders relaxed, with chin slightly tucked in. Eyes may be slightly opened or half-closed, lightly gazing downward a few feet in front of you.

Hands rest on your lap with palms up, just touching your belly with elbows projecting a bit. The *mudra* (hand position) is to hold the right hand below the left with thumbs lightly touching.



*Sitting mudra*

The basic breath meditation is to silently count your breath from one to ten, then repeat. Start with an in-breath/one, out-breath/two... and so on.

If you lose track, just begin again with the next in-breath/one. For more detailed instructions, please talk to Roshi during a private interview (dokusan) or see Robert Aitken's book, *Taking the Path of Zen*, in our library and/or often available for sale on the table beneath the large bulletin board near the kitchen.

## KINHIN FORM (walking meditation)

Two closely spaced bells will indicate the end of zazen and the start of *kinhin*. When the bell rings, bow at your seat, stand, turn and face the center of the room. When the Jiki sounds the clappers, bow, turn to your left and follow the person in front of you.

If you find that your feet are numb or you are unable to stand when the bell rings, it is fine to remain seated to massage or straighten your legs. When you feel ready, simply join the end of the *kinhin* line.

Hand position during *kinhin* is the *shashu mudra*: right hand wrapped lightly about the thumb with left hand covering the right resting at the solar plexus. Elbows project slightly, with forearms parallel to the floor. This is also a standard position to assume when standing or walking in the zendo.



*Shashu mudra*

Please walk one arm's length behind the person in front of you so that there are no gaps. If someone leaves the line, walk quickly to close the gap.

The sound of the wooden "clap" during *kinhin* indicates that the walking pace will increase as you return to your seat. Continue to maintain one arm's length distance from the person in front of you. Once

everyone has reached their seat, the Jiki and participants bow in unison to the center of the room. Then turn and bow inward toward your seat and begin the next period of seated meditation.

The second period of zazen will begin as before with the wooden clapper and three bells. At times, for the final period of zazen, the Jiki will make an announcement to please face sitting inward to the center of the room.

If you need to use the restroom or leave the zendo, step out of the kinhin line as you pass the doorway. Bow as you exit and again if you re-enter. To re-enter the zendo during kinhin, join at the end of the moving line. If the clappers have already sounded to end kinhin, wait at the door until everyone begins to take their seat, then enter and take your place.

Please consider kinhin as a continuation of your meditation practice rather than as a “break.” The meditative practice of kinhin is to “just walk” completely.

### **DOKUSAN FORM** (private interview with the teacher)

Dokusan will take place during rounds of zazen. When the time comes for dokusan, the *Jisha* (Roshi’s attendant) will enter the zendo and announce ‘Dokusan’. If you would like to go to go, slide out the white file card from under your sitting mat so the Jisha can see it. You will be tapped on the shoulder to indicate you are to leave the zendo and join in the dokusan line.

When you are tapped, make a seated bow, stand and leave the zendo. Do not bow when you cross the threshold and take a seat where indicated by the Jisha. When you move to the head of the line, you or the Jisha will tap the bell twice in response to Roshi’s hand bell and proceed to the Dokusan room. The Jisha will help you with this if you are unsure of the procedure.

Wait for the door to open and for the previous person to leave the room then step across the threshold and bow towards the altar. Enter the room, close the door, stand in front of the mat and bow towards Roshi. Sit on the cushion or chair provided and with hands in gassho, state your name and your practice (for example, counting breaths, just sitting or koan study). The interview proceeds from there.

When Roshi feels the interview is complete, he or she will ring the hand bell again. Bow with your hands on your thighs (this is called a tea bow), stand and bow towards the altar and exit the room, leaving the door open for the next person. Try not to turn your back to Roshi as you do so. Quietly return to your place in the zendo, bowing when you enter and making the usual bows across the room and to your place before you take your seat.

*Note: At ZDS, dokusan typically takes place Wednesday evenings and Saturday mornings.*

### **SUTRA SERVICE (chanting)**

The Sutra Service will begin with three profound bows (*raihai*) which are full bows with forehead to the floor and open palms raised above the ears. If you are unable to make a full bow, you may make a

standing bow or simply stand at your place facing the altar.

Chant books will be handed out, the *Ino* (lead chanter) will indicate the beginning page number and the sutras are followed sequentially. Follow along as best you can, since some chants are intoned in sino-japanese and may take some practice.

Chant books are held open with both hands and held at chin level. Please do not place Chant Books on the floor – when not in use, simply place them on your cushion. Please do not fold back the cover of the book. The Ino will intone the introduction and the assembly joins in, selecting a note in unison or harmony. Follow the pace of the Ino and perceive the sound of your own voice while perceiving the voice of others.

#### **AFTERWARD –**

Questions? Ask freely! The Jiki-jitsu (timekeeper) or another member will usually be able to answer questions after the last round of sitting. Please feel free to visit with us after the last round of zazen. ***Taking the Path of Zen*** is one of several books written by Diamond Sangha founder Robert Aitken Roshi. This introductory book is highly recommended and available at cost in our library.

***Again, WELCOME!***