

## *How to Sit Zazen*

*Cease from practice based on intellectual understanding, pursuing words and following after speech, and learn the backward step that turns your light inwardly to illuminate your self. Body and mind of themselves will drop away, and your original face will be manifest.*

Zen Master Dogen

Below are some basic instructions for sitting meditation (zazen) in the Soto Zen tradition. It is helpful to check in with a teacher periodically to discuss your practice. In establishing a regular practice at home, it helps to have a regular time and place for zazen. It is better to be consistent with shorter sitting periods (even ten minutes a day is good), than to try for long periods, and only sit occasionally or get discouraged and stop.

- If you use a cushion (zafu), sit on the forward third. If you use a seiza bench (kneeling with legs tucked under the bench), adjust the height with a flat cushion as necessary. If you use a chair, sit forward on the seat, unless you have a back problem which requires support.
- If you use a zafu, sit in full or half-lotus position, or cross-legged in a way that is comfortable for you. The important thing is to have a stable three-point base for your zazen. If one or both knees do not touch the sitting mat, use support cushions to support the knees. If you use a chair, sit with both feet on the floor, about shoulder width apart.
- Lift up gently from the top of your head, so that the chin is slightly tucked in, not jutting out, the chest is open, and the pelvis tipped a little forward. Sway from side to side a few times to find your balance, centering in the lower abdomen.
- Sit with your eyes half open, with a soft gaze cast about one meter (three feet) ahead.
- Keep your lips and teeth gently together, with the tongue placed against the roof of your mouth.
- Place your hands in your lap with the right palm up and the left hand, palm up, resting on the right hand, thumb tips lightly touching about even with your navel, forming an oval. This mudra expresses unity and harmony, and is a wonderful mindfulness aid.
- Take a few deep breaths, exhaling fully, and then let your breath settle into a natural rhythm, without trying to control it. As mind and body settle, the breath will naturally become longer and deeper.
- Bring your attention to the sensations of the breath, starting where it is easiest to feel, perhaps at the nostrils, or in the chest or abdomen, noting the in-breath and the out-breath. When the attention wanders, bring it gently and patiently back to the breath, over and over again.

- As the mind and body become quiet the awareness can expand to include sensations, perceptions, emotions and thoughts, as they arise and pass. Our practice is not to try to hold on to what is pleasant or push away what is unpleasant, but to be full, vitally present to each moment of our experience.
- In doing this practice we come to see and experience the true boundless nature of existence.



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