**BEGINNER’S GUIDE TO ZAZEN**

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**ZAZEN** (seated contemplation) is an ancient meditation practice that unites physical, physiological, emotional and spiritual stabilization with the ability to see deeply into one’s life. In zazen, practice and realization are one.

**PREPARATION:** Set up a clean, quiet place. Use cushions or a chair that give you a stable posture. You might also want to place a Buddha or inspiring picture, a candle, or flowers close by, to set the tone. Use the toilet if necessary, wash your face, hands, and feet, and arrange your clothes so you can sit comfortably.

**LEGS:** Any balanced, stable and peaceful position of the legs is suitable. You may sit on a chair with the feet under the knees, in a simple cross-legged position, kneel using a bench or cushion, place one lower leg in front of the other, or place the legs in half- or full- lotus. If you cannot sit, find an experienced teacher to show you a reclining zazen position.

**TORSO:** In all zazen positions, maintain an erect spine with tall, natural curves. Balance on the points of the buttock bones, and do not lean. Once height is established, maintaining the support of the hips and shoulder blades, open the front chest. Finally, deepen the areas of breath.

**SENSE ORGANS:** Eyes half-open, enough to see light, gently lowered gaze. Ears neither listening nor shutting out sounds. All sense organs quiet and calm. Lips gently touching, tongue-tip at front roof of mouth.

**MUDRA:** The entire posture is called *buddha-mudra* (Buddha Seal). Hands make a mudra called *dhyana-mudra* (Concentration Seal), with left fingers on right fingers, palms long and open, and thumb tips gently touching. The oval of the hands encircles an area of energy on the lower abdomen.

**BREATH & MIND:** Breathe gently through your nose. Count or follow breaths to enter concentration. Letting the breath follow the breath, will introduce you to the mind.

**AWAKENING:** Just sitting upright, with perfect attention on posture and breathing and great, pure effort, is a rare opportunity to become yourself.

**ZEN PRACTICE, ON & OFF THE CUSHION**

**THIS WEEK:**

* Set an intention for your sitting practice, that you will be able to do. For instance, to sit for five minutes.
* Refine your sitting place. Ask yourself what you really want and need in the place where you will discover yourself. Make a simple place that can be sacred for you.
* Find a time that is manageable, such as the five minutes in the morning while your tea steeps or your cereal cooks.
* Set an intention for the next month, maybe to attend another zazen instruction at a Zen temple, to attend a lecture, or to check your posture with a teacher.

**IF YOU WISH TO DEEPEN YOUR EXPERIENCE OF ZEN PRACTICE:**

* Visit the websites or locations of Zen centers, such as:
* Berkeley Zen Center, 1929 Russell Street, Berkeley, CA 94703, (510) 845-2403, <http://berkeleyzencenter.org>
* San Francisco Zen Center, 300 Page Street, San Francisco, CA 94102, (415) 864-2813, <http://sfzc.org>
* Oakland Zen Center (Ko Jin An), <http://oakland-zencenter.org/welcome-to-kojin-an/>
* Read texts such as *Zen Mind, Beginner’s Mind* by Shunryu Suzuki Roshi, widely available; or “Fukanzazengi”, concise meditation instructions by Eihei Dogen Zenji, <https://sanfranciscozencenter.blob.core.windows.net/assets/21_Fukanzazengi.pdf>
* Study Zen and everyday life, with the help of resources such as the books *Taking the Path of Zen* by Robert Aitken Roshi and *Zen at Work* by Keido Les Kaye, or visit a website such as Norman Fischer’s <http://everydayzen.org> or Leo Babauta’s <http://zenhabits.net>
* Study the values of the Zen Path, encapsulated in the Sixteen Bodhisattva Precepts, [www.sfzc.org/teachings/the-sixteen-bodhisattva-precepts](http://www.sfzc.org/teachings/the-sixteen-bodhisattva-precepts)