

# Basic Instructions for Zen Meditation

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## Basic Instructions

All are welcome to sit *Zazen*, Zen sitting meditation. Do not allow your mind to attach to any particular stream of thought, impression or feeling. There is no goal. Just sit, breathe, and be mindful.

Feel free to leave or pause at any time. If you need to use the restroom, get a tissue, or a drink of water. While the ideal is to sit straight through, you can come and go for any reason. Feel free to change positions slowly and quietly for comfort. Sit to be comfortable and alert.

Meditation unites the whole person: **body, mind and spirit**; or body, thoughts and breath.

## Body

Meditation is not about a special sitting technique. Mindfulness extends beyond sitting into every activity of day to day life. Positions include Full Lotus, Half Lotus, Burmese, Seiza, or on a chair. One may recline or lie down as required for certain medical conditions.

- Full Lotus: Legs intertwined with both feet resting on the opposite thigh.
- Half Lotus: Usually the right foot rests on the left thigh, but it can be vice-versa.
- Burmese: Both feet and ideally, both knees, rest on the floor in front of the body, feet crossed.
- Seiza: Sit on the heels with knees in front, with both shins resting on the floor.
- Chair: Sit on the edge or lean on the back of the chair to keep a straight spine.

It is helpful to sit on a cushion or two. Sit with a straight back, ears in line with shoulders, shoulders down, chin tucked down slightly. Hands are together, left in right, thumb tips touching. Tongue touches the front roof of the mouth; teeth and lips are shut. Eyes gaze downward at a 45 degree angle with a soft focus.

## Breath

Take three deep breaths to begin meditation, breathing in through the nose and out through the nose or mouth. Regular breathing is done only through the nose. Visualize the body's center of gravity, called the *hara*, which is about two or three fingers below the navel.

One method is to keep the mind on the breath throughout the meditation. Gently return awareness to the breath when the mind wanders. Breathe fully but steadily and naturally, at your own pace, allowing the breath to slow as you relax. You can count full breaths up to ten if it helps you to focus. Ideally, though, the mind is not attached to anything.

## Mind

There is no special state of mind in Zen meditation. Everyone keeps a beginner's mind. Enlightenment experiences will only come naturally. Just be mindful in the present moment.

There is no need to judge good or bad during meditation. There is no goal, no winning or losing. Whatever is happening is meditation.

Sensations, emotions, memories and thoughts will arise and depart throughout meditation. We don't focus our attention on such distractions.

These motions of the body and mind may slow or even fade away during meditation, but we do not attempt to subdue them, stop them or transcend them.

All of the contents and movements of the mind are like clouds passing through an empty sky.

\*Disclaimer: Please check with a licensed physician before attempting any new posture or exercise that might affect your health or wellbeing.

Thanks to the Iowa City Zen Center and Guiding Teacher Rev. Daiken Nelson for instruction guidelines. These instructions were created independently from any individual or organization and responsibility for any errors rests solely on the author.

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