



Guide to Zendo Forms and Etiquette

In Zen, we traditionally observe ritualized elements of our meditation sessions as a means of supporting the stilling of our bodies, hearts, and minds. Embodied rituals can help us soften our attachment to ego and excessive discursive thinking, but these formalities can seem frustrating or even irrelevant at first. Most who engage with these practices over time tend to observe a deepening sense of meaning, ease, and art in them.

Wherever you fall on this spectrum, you are warmly invited to experiment with the traditional frameworks provided below. Observing these practices will also likely prepare you to visit a more established (and likely more traditional) Zen center if you ever choose to do so. Please feel free to ask the facilitator about our Zendo forms and etiquette in-person or via email.

Arriving

- At this time, please start to quiet your body and mind with more mindful movement and softer, limited conversation.
- Please remove shoes and jackets at the door and place them in the cubbies offered (please do not bring them with you into the Kiva Zendo).
- Turn your phone all the way off and also leave that with your things in the cubbies. If you brought a water bottle or other similar items, please also leave those in a cubby.
- Please sign in on the sheet provided by the door to the Kiva. We ask that you include your email address if you have not done so before so we can include you in our *Weekly Announcements* newsletter.
- When you cross the threshold into the Zendo, it is customary to bow to the room to honor your community and your participation in it. It is also customary to make a small bow whenever you exit the Zendo.
- When walking to your seat, and other times walking in the Zendo, it is customary to place your hands in *shashu* – making a fist with your dominant hand and wrapping your other hand around it, resting gently about where the top of your belly meets your chest.
- If you cross in front of the altar, it is customary to pause and bow before advancing. Bowing to the altar is not intended to connote faith or subservience toward external or supernatural entities; it is expressing reverence for your own inherent wisdom and compassion and that of all beings. On our altar, this spirit is represented by the archetype Kuan Yin, the feminine bodhisattva of compassion who “hears the cries of the world.”

- Please approach your place via the interior of the rows, rather than looping around to the back of it.
- When you arrive at your place, it is customary to pause and make a bow to it to honor your practice. Then turn – in the Zendo, whenever we turn, it is customary to do so facing the altar (i.e., not turning our back to it) – and bow across the room to the sangha and all beings. Then take your seat.

Zendo Forms During Meditation Session

First Round of Zazen

- The practice leader will ring the small *keisu* bell 5, 2, and 1 minute before the session begins.
- There will be a brief welcome and instruction to pull out the handout under your seat that provides the recitation text.
- The practice leader will then intone the title of the chant (Hakuin's *Song of Zazen* on Monday morning and the *Prajnaparamita Heart Sutra* on Wednesday) and ding the (higher pitched) *inkhin* bell.
- All participants are then invited to recite the respective chant.
- At the end of the recitation, the practice leader will then intone the "return of merit," a traditional Buddhist chant indicating that we practice for the sake of all beings, not just ourselves.
- The *inkhin* bell will then ding and all participants are invited to join in reciting the extension of merit to all beings, which is included at the end of the handout.
- When that brief recitation is complete, the practice leader will ding the *inkhin* bell once and all are invited to make a small bow in their seat before standing.
- When you stand up, please place your hands in *gassho* (prayer hands).
- The *inkhin* bell will ding and we all bow.
- The leader will then deadbeat the bell, indicating it is time to sit back down. Please turn and bow to your seat and get settled into your meditation posture.
- The practice leader will strike the small *keisu* bell three times, allowing the tone to resonate completely before striking it again.
- We will sit in silent stillness for about 25 minutes.

Kinhin [Walking Meditation]

- At the end of the first round of zazen, the practice leader will strike the small *keisu* bell in fairly rapid succession. Please make a small bow at your seat and then stand, facing each other, with hands in *gassho*. Please take care standing up because your legs or feet may have fallen asleep.
- The small *keisu* will ring once and we are all invited to bow. The leader will then deadbeat the small *keisu*, indicating to place your hands in *shashu* (again, one hand enclosing the opposite fist at the upper belly/lower chest).
- The practice leader will then clap the wooden *taku* clappers, inviting everyone to turn 90 degrees to their right, with those sitting in chairs behind the main line of cushions stepping into line with everyone else.
- We then begin *kinhin*, walking meditation, which proceeds at a slow, mindful pace. The typical suggestion is to inhale with one step and exhale with the other. We will walk this way in an oval in between the rows of cushions in a counterclockwise manner. The practice leader will set the pace; please just follow the person in front of you.

- After about five minutes, the practice leader will clap the *taku* again and we will proceed quickly in the same pattern back to our places. When you reach your place, please remain standing, facing in toward each other, with hands in *gassho*.
- The *taku* will clap yet again to indicate an invitation to bow. After our bow, please turn to your seat, make a small bow, and then sit and take up your meditation posture.

Second Round of Zazen

- The practice leader will again strike the small *keisu* bell three times to begin the round.
- We will sit in silent stillness for another 25 minutes.
- At the end of the round, the practice leader will strike the *inkhin* bell steadily three times and then make a deadbeat. As the bell rings, please take out your recitation text handout.
- The practice leader will then announce “Great Vows for All” and everyone is invited to intone this classical Buddhist chant.
- At the end of the chant, the practice leader will strike the *inkhin* bell to invite us all to make a small, seated bow and then stand facing each other with hands in *gassho*.
- The *inkhin* bell will ding again and we make a deep bow.
- The practice leader will then deadbeat the bell to indicate that the program has concluded. They may make some announcements about upcoming events. If you have any questions or comments, you are welcome to share them at that time.
- We then work together to put away our meditation cushions in the hallway outside the Kiva.

Traditional Zendo Etiquette During the Meditation Session

- Most of our participants are relatively new to meditation and Zen. Therefore we honor the need and tendency we all have to move when discomfort arises. As we continue with Zen training, we can engage with the practice of observing discomfort as it arises before making the conscious decision whether or not to move. A component of our practice is being with the experience of mild discomfort without feeling a need to fix or change it.
- In this vein, we request that all who practice with us commit to sitting still and silently to the best of your ability during rounds of meditation. Our prioritization of stillness and silence is not intended to be constraining or disciplinarian. It is to honor our mutual, collective practice and shared intention to cultivate the stillness of our bodies, hearts, and minds.
- Having said this, if bona fide pain arises that is difficult to bear, you are welcome to shift your posture mindfully to mitigate it. Please make a small bow before moving and then settle into your new position with an intention to stay in that posture as best as you can for the remainder of the round. If you find it difficult to remain relatively still in a posture for an entire ~22-minute round, you are welcome to use a chair as you continue to cultivate your practice. The facilitator is very happy to work with you to find a posture that will be more comfortable for you.
- We begin each meditation session with a short ritual drawn from the Zen tradition. The texts we use for recitations and associated chants have been passed down to us from as long ago as pre-CE India (as is the case for the *Heart Sutra* that we recite on Wednesdays) to medieval Japan (as is the case for Hakuin’s *Song of Zazen* on Mondays). These recitations and chants are intended, as with all of the other forms we observe, to support the awakening of your body-heart-mind. They are also completely optional. You will find them printed out on your chair or under your cushion, near the corner closest to the altar.

- When we are done reciting the texts, please return the handout back under your seat so that it is out of your and others' view. This is in the spirit of maintaining a clean, simple Zendo that can best support our stillness.
- If you need to use the bathroom or get a sip of water during our meditation session, the opportunity to do that is after we stand and bow after the first round of meditation is complete (before the first clap of the *taku* to start walking meditation). After the deadbeat at the end of the bow, you can exit the Zendo (making a small bow as you cross the threshold into the hallway). When you return (bowing as you cross back through the threshold into the Zendo), please stand by the door until *kinhin* is over. When *kinhin* participants have returned to their places and the *taku* is clapped for a bow, please join us in bowing and then return to your place.
- Here and every time we return to our place, as with the first time, we are invited to make a small bow to it, turn in the direction of the altar and 180 degrees around to face across the room, make another small bow, and then sit.

These forms represent millennia of evolution of practices that have supported the awakening experiences of millions of sincere practitioners – your dharma siblings across space and time. While they are offered to you as support for your own personal journey, we take up the Great Way together.