

Burning House Zendo Instruction Manual

jeff covey

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This manual offers beginners instruction on the traditions of the Zen practice at Burning House Zendo.

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1 About This Manual

This manual was written to provide guidelines for sangha members who offer instruction to new members of the community, in order that all of the necessary information will be shared with them. It is not expected that an instructor will read this verbatim, but that, by hitting all of the topics contained in it, he or she will not forget to mention anything that students need to know. After the training class, the instructor may wish to give a copy of this manual to all of the students, so they can refer to it to refresh their memories on anything they've forgotten.

One note for instructors: You are providing a great service to our community by giving your time to teach and welcome new members. Your goal is to help people join our practice by telling them what they need to know as simply and clearly as possible, so please feel comfortable with your own practice and speak honestly and directly from your own experience. If someone asks a question and you don't know the answer, please say "I don't know" or "I don't know, but this is what I've read...".

2 The Practice at Burning House

Burning House Zendo is the home of a Rinzai Zen Buddhist community. Buddhism was founded by Shakyamuni Buddha in India 2,600 years ago. Bodhidharma, one of the teachers who brought Buddhism to China, founded a practice that became known as "Cha'an" in China and "Zen" in Japan. The name "Zen" has remained as the practice has moved to other parts of the world. The form of Zen we practice is named after Rinzai Gigen, a Zen teacher who lived in the ninth century C.E. Our style of practice is based on the tradition of *Dai Bosatsu Zendo* <<http://www.daibosatsu.org/>> , a monastery in the Catskill Mountains of New York.

3 Terms

You may hear a number of unfamiliar terms used in the zendo. You should at least be familiar with these most common ones to understand what follows:

Zendo

A zendo is a hall with rows of cushions on which we do zazen, or sitting practice.

Sangha

The sangha is the community that practices in the zendo (and, more generally, the universal community of all beings).

Zazen

Zazen is Zen sitting practice.

Zafu and zabuton

A zabuton is a square flat cushion that is used as a supporting base in zazen. A zafu is a thicker round cushion that sits on a zabuton.

Kinhin

Kinhin is walking practice.

Gassho

Gassho is the position taken by bringing the palms of your hands together in front of your chest with the fingers pointing up.

Jikijitsu

The jikijitsu is the zendo officer who is in charge of starting and ending sitting periods and maintaining order in the zendo.

4 Zazen – Sitting Practice

The heart of Zen practice is zazen, or sitting practice.

At Burning House, each of our zazen periods lasts 40 minutes. If you're just starting zazen practice, this may be too physically or mentally demanding. Some people may find that their minds are so scattered and anxious that even five minutes seems like an eternity. That's perfectly fine. In the beginning, how long you sit is not as important as the fact that you sit regularly. If you can only sit for five minutes a day, that's ok, but make sure you sit for five minutes **every** day. As your mind settles down and your body becomes more flexible and resilient, gradually extend the length of your sits. When you can sit for 40 minutes at home, join us for a sit at the zendo. We sit in groups of three sitting periods, but you're welcome to stay for just one or two sits until you can sit for three in a row.

If you arrive before a group of sits, you can tell the jikijitsu that you're new to zazen and can't sit for the full period. He or she will half-strike a bell 20 minutes into the sit. At that time, you can change your position or stand and face your cushions. When the bell is struck again, sit down for the rest of the sit.

4.1 Posture

Good posture is the fundamental, indispensable, prerequisite element of sitting practice.

A certain amount of discomfort is inevitable when a body is kept still long enough to do the work of zazen. A teacher once said "Leg pain is the taste of Zen." However, Zen is not a masochistic practice, and there is no merit in suffering needlessly. If you are sitting through great pain simply because you did not adopt a proper posture, you are not benefiting your practice and will not be awarded any medals. The purpose of adopting a sitting posture is to arrange your body in such a way that only those muscles are engaged which are essential to breathing and holding your body erect. When the rest of the body is allowed to relax, it will not feel pain from accumulated stress.

We will discuss posture in some detail, but you should be aware that working on your posture can be a long – perhaps endless – process of refinement, not something that is learned in an afternoon. Here are three resources you can turn to for help:

Books

A number of books have been written about Zen practice which contain detailed explanations of sitting postures and problems, with useful illustrations. Three to look at are "Zen Training" by Katsuki Sekida, "The Posture of Meditation" by Will Johnson, and later editions of "The Three Pillars of Zen" by Philip Kapleau Roshi. If, as your practice progresses, you find yourself having recurring pain in a certain part of your body, it may be helpful to refer to one of these checklists of common problems for ideas about what you may be doing wrongly.

Sangha members

Other sangha members may notice ways that you're hurting yourself, and offer advice. They're often speaking from painful experience and trying to help you avoid what they've gone through, so listen carefully. Make sure you understand why what you're doing is a problem and why any proposed solutions should fix it.

Yourself

You are the only one who can feel what is going on in your own body. At first, you may not be listening well to what it's telling you, and may even misdiagnose yourself and come up with the wrong solution for the wrong problem. At that time, what others have to say will be very important. You may also find it helpful to sit in front of a mirror from time to time. If you look up after 15 or 20 minutes (after your body has settled into the consequences of whatever you initially asked it to do), you may find yourself looking at someone performing remarkable contortions.

However, what's most important in the end is how you **feel**. The physical realization that you have pain in your left side and that you can feel that your center of gravity is out of balance because you're leaning to the right will make a greater impression on you than anyone telling you about it, or even seeing it for yourself.

Your comfort with sitting will also be influenced by your general physical state; get enough exercise and try to have a good, relaxed posture in your day-to-day life. Yoga can be great help, and is worth exploring if you don't practice it already.

A final bit of good news is that discomfort in the body is often linked to or enhanced by discomfort in the mind. As your practice deepens and your mind becomes more at rest, your physical pain will decrease.

4.1.1 Basics of good posture

Although you may sit in one of several different postures, you will have certain common goals to apply to all of them. When you reduce posture to its basics, you have two goals:

1. Place yourself in a position that requires the least possible effort to maintain.
2. Relax all voluntary muscles that aren't essential to maintaining the position.

In theory, this should be simple, but in practice, you'll find that adopting a correct posture requires careful attention and mindfulness. Even though you're trying to find the most natural position, we're so used to doing things in an unnatural way that what's natural may seem unnatural, and vice versa. Like many aspects of your practice, your posture will evolve over time as you become more and more sensitive to it. You'll make ever smaller and more subtle refinements. Follow the example of cellist Yo-Yo Ma, who tries to find a new muscle to relax every day.

No matter what posture you use, you should sit with a straight back with your upper body centered over your pelvis.

Your pelvis should be gently tilted forward so you're sitting right on top of your sitting bones or a little on the front of them. Your lower body should be arranged to provide the most stable support possible, and your upper body should be placed squarely on top of it. Imagine that a string is running from the top of your head and lifting you toward the ceiling. Lift up, then gently set your torso back down. Position yourself so gravity is pulling you with equal force from all sides. If you lean in one direction, the muscles on the opposite side of your body will have to work to hold you erect. The longer they have to work, the more tired and sore they'll become. Keep your center of gravity right in the middle of your body. Try swaying from side to side until you come to rest at the center, then doing the same from front to back.

Please note that sitting with a straight back does not mean sitting with a straight spine. Your spine is not perfectly straight. The curvature of the spine differs from person to person, but in general, you should feel your spine coming out from your pelvis, curving inward in your lower back, curving out in your upper back, and curving back in as it goes into your neck. Make sure you're not making it do anything unnatural. If you experience pain in your lower back, you may find that you're letting your back collapse so that the lower back is thrust out instead of in. Pain in the upper back may be caused by tilting the head back and compressing the neck and upper spine. When you sit down, follow the path of your spine up from your seat, tucking it in all the correct directions. You'll generally find that your head wants to be turned slightly toward the floor rather than perfectly parallel to it.

You should let your eyes unfocus and relax, and let your eyelids close part of the way. Don't close your eyes completely, or you'll tend to daydream or fall asleep. Let in enough light to keep you alert, but not enough to distract you. You'll have to experiment with this; in darker settings, you may need to let in more light.

Once your upper body is in position, be careful in the placement of your arms. If your arms are long enough, you should place your hands in your lap with the palms upward and the left hand on top of the right. Let the tips of your thumbs come together as though you were holding a jewel. Make sure the upper hand is slid far enough into the palm of the right. If it's not, this will push your arms out and lift your shoulders. Your shoulders should always be pushed back and relaxed. Also, make sure that your elbows sit close to your body. Holding your elbows out will cause pain in the upper arms.

Once you've achieved this position, you should be able to let most of your muscles relax. The only ones that will be gently engaged are those in your lower torso that help keep your body erect. When you're in this position, gravity will be doing most of the work, and these muscles can work for a very long time with no discomfort. Check your whole body from time to time and see whether anything's tightened. If it has, locate it and relax it immediately. Even small tensions become huge over time.

The various sitting postures differ mainly in the arrangement of the lower body.

4.1.2 Crosslegged postures

Crosslegged postures are practiced on at least two cushions. The knees rest on a wide, flat, square cushion called a zabuton, and the seat rests on a thicker, round cushion called a zafu, which sits on the zabuton.

When you sit on the cushions, your base will be created by a triangle formed by your two knees and your sitting bones. When the weight of your body comes down into your seat and spreads out to the legs, you have a wide, solid area of support with no single place bearing all the burden.

The importance of getting your knees down on the cushion cannot be emphasized enough. If your knees are

off the cushion, the muscles in your legs are holding them up, and fatigue and pain will not be far behind. It may take some time to develop enough flexibility in your legs to get the knees down (Yoga can be helpful here), but until you do, your upper body will be supported only by the muscles in your lower torso and by leg muscles that are already busy supporting the legs. Your knees **must** be down on the cushion, supporting your weight. There is no option to this. If your knees cannot rest on the zabuton, you will need to place support cushions between the zabuton and your knees to avoid injury.

Your pelvis must be higher than your knees, and will be tilted forward so that you're sitting right on the bottom or slightly on the front part of the sitting bones. Tilting the pelvis forward enables it to provide good support to your torso and locks your lower back into its natural curve.

You will need to experiment to find out how high you need to sit. If your zafu is too thin or you sit too low on it, your pelvis will not be tilted far enough to provide support to the upper body, and the muscles of your back will become sore from having to take over the work of keeping you erect. If you sit too high, your base will be tipped too far forward, and your back will sway backwards out of its normal position to compensate.

Place your zafu far enough back on the zabuton so you can fit both knees on the zabuton with room to spare in front of them. Check that a line drawn between your knees would be parallel to the front edge of the zabuton. If the front side of your triangle base is twisted to one side, you will still naturally tend to look forward, toward the person across from you. With your base out of alignment, the only way you will be able to look forward is by twisting your torso, creating muscular tension.

Be careful that your knees are not too far apart, causing extra strain in the knees and upper legs, and providing less support for the torso.

Try changing the position of your legs with every sit. If your left leg is on the bottom during one sit, put your right leg on the bottom during the next sit. This will prevent excess strain on one side.

It may be helpful to get your legs in position first, then bend all the way forward from the waist, almost touching your head to the floor. Lift up slightly, reach back, and pull the cushion under you, so that your sitting bones land squarely on it. Rise from the waist vertebrae by vertebrae, letting the head come up last. This will get you solidly seated, with your back aligned and supported so you can sit up straight. After checking your center of gravity and the position of your arms, you should be ready to sit.

Full lotus The traditional posture for Zen practice is the full lotus. To enter full lotus, take one foot and place it on the thigh of the opposite leg, close to the groin, then take the other foot and place it in a complimentary position on the opposite thigh.

This position offers an exceptionally stable base. The pressure of the crossed lower legs drives the knees into the cushion while lifting the pelvis into its proper position, supporting the back and allowing it to relax.

While the full lotus is the most advantageous posture for zazen, it can also be the most difficult for new students. To be able to sit comfortably in it, you will need to work on opening the knees, relaxing and extending the thigh muscles, and increasing flexibility in the ankles (the ankle of the lower leg will have to relax and bend to accommodate the upper leg). Stretching exercises to help with these goals can be found in many books on Zen and on Yoga. You may want to practice sitting in half lotus first, alternating legs to stretch each side, then sit in full lotus for short, gradually-increasing periods.

Make sure that your knees are close enough together and your feet placed high enough on your thighs to be secure. Practice barefooted; the fabric of a sock pressed against the fabric of your pants can let the upper foot slide off the leg, while the foot's flesh will grip and hold. Watch for and relax any tension in the legs and especially in the knees.

Half lotus In the half lotus posture, only one foot is brought onto the thigh of the opposite leg, and the other foot is placed **under** the thigh of its opposite.

This can be easier than the full lotus position, but it is asymmetrical and can lead to misalignment of the spine. The adjustments needed to compensate for this can lead to unnecessary stress. It does not provide a stable base for the upper body and is not recommended as a posture for regular use, but it can be helpful in stretching the leg muscles in preparation for full lotus.

Be careful that you don't place too much weight on the lower foot, restricting its circulation and causing it to fall asleep.

Burmese The Burmese posture places both legs flat on the cushion with the ankle of one leg in front of the ankle of the other. Pull your inner foot in tightly against the cushion so you have room to pull the outer foot against it. Getting the feet and lower legs in will let you angle the upper legs so the knees can go down.

In the Burmese posture, you must be especially conscious of getting your knees down on the cushion. Crossing your legs in full or half lotus naturally pushes the knees down, but it's much easier to leave them up in the Burmese posture. If your knees come up, you may find all your weight being carried down onto your bent ankles, which will quickly tire of the load.

You have to get your knees down and your legs in and flat on the cushion so the weight of your body is supported by your knees and the outer sides of your calves. The weight will then be distributed across a wide space, instead of running into a single spot.

Also, notice that the knee of the inner leg bears more weight and is more easily pushed down. You may need to place a small support cushion under the knee of the outer leg.

4.1.3 Seiza

Seiza is a kneeling position in which your seat is supported by a pair of zafus, a zafu turned on its end, or a bench. In seiza, your base will be formed by your seat, your knees, and the fronts of your lower legs, which rest on a zabuton.

The most common complaint people make about seiza is that their legs fall asleep. It may help to sit far enough back on your zabuton that your feet are past its edge and bend down towards the floor, instead of being bent flat at the ankle.

As with crosslegged postures, you will need to experiment with the height of your supporting cushion or bench. If it's too high, it will tip your body forward and drive too much weight into your knees. If it's too low, your pelvis will not be in a good position to support your torso.

4.1.4 Chairs

On a chair, your base will be formed by your seat and your feet.

Don't sit back in the chair; sit on the front edge, with your pelvis tilted forward and your sitting bones making contact with the seat as in any other posture, so your back can be straight and supported as usual. If the chair is too low, you may need to lift your pelvis with a zafu or a support cushion. Carefully place your feet so that your upper legs are parallel to the floor and your lower legs are perpendicular to it. If your feet are too close to the chair, your body will be positioned as though it is going to topple forward, and you will have to strain to remain upright.

Keep the feet far enough apart to provide a wide, firm base. As with the knees on a zabuton, make sure that a line connecting your toes would be parallel with the front edge of the chair so your whole body is facing forward without a twist in the neck or back.

Sitting on a chair is not recommended, as it is difficult to support the body and allow it to relax properly in a chair. The base that is formed by your feet is not as supportive as that formed by your knees when you sit on a cushion. Instead of the weight traveling directly down your legs and into your knees as in a position on a zabuton, the weight of your torso will be borne almost entirely by your pelvis, with very little of it traveling out the upper legs, around the knees, and down into the lower legs and feet.

However, if a medical condition requires the use of a chair or you need to change postures for a zazen period during a retreat, chairs are available. As always, use your own judgment. Don't take up a chair just because you think it's going to solve problems that you'll actually face in any position, and don't sit on a cushion going through hell with a sprained ankle out of misguided pride.

4.1.5 Getting into position

It's good to develop a checklist to run down when you hit the cushion – "Ok, knees down to the cushion, feet in, pelvis up and tilted, spine lifted, shoulders down, head up, arms back, head tilted, looking down at the floor...", etc. You have to get in as good a position as you can at the start of a sit, since your body will have to live with it until the end. However you set yourself up at the start is what you're stuck with, so get it right. Get settled in your place quickly but mindfully. Don't be afraid to take the time to get into the correct posture, and don't dally so much that you're still squirming around after everyone else is already sitting. There's plenty of time before the bell rings, but use it well. There will be plenty of time to sit after the bell rings; don't be in such a rush to get started that you hurt yourself in the long run.

4.2 Practice

Once you've attained a proper posture, you will be ready to begin your zazen practice. Your practice will evolve over time, and may involve a number of different methods over the years. You should eventually seek the help of a qualified teacher who can offer guidance on what you're doing and what you should be doing. For now, we recommend the practice of counting your breaths.

Begin by breathing fully, deeply, and naturally. Breathe through your nose and from your abdomen, not from your chest, feeling your abdomen expand and contract. You should feel your center of energy shift to your abdomen as it becomes the focal point of both your posture and your breath. You should not hear yourself breathing (and neither should anyone else).

Once your breathing is relaxed and regular, you'll silently count each exhalation, counting up to ten and then starting over at one. Each count should last the full exhalation; instead of a short "One", you should count "Oooooooooone", "Twooooooooo", etc.

This practice will help you focus and relax your mind. You'll soon discover that your mind wanders or is busy with other thoughts. You'll suddenly realize that you've stopped counting and started daydreaming or thinking about something that's troubling you, or you may still be counting but have no idea what number you're on. You may find that you've gone right past 10 and counted to 27. When this happens, just go back to one. Don't get angry or frustrated with yourself, just start again. Every time you get lost, go back to the beginning, without blame. Thoughts and feelings will come; just let them go, and take yourself back to one.

If you return to counting your breaths again and again and again, everything else will settle down and stop bothering you quite naturally. Always gently and firmly come back to the practice with all your energy.

5 Kinhin – Walking Practice

We practice kinhin, or walking practice, between sits.

5.1 Procedure

At the end of a sit, the jikijitsu will strike a bell. You should then bring your hands into gassho and bow. After you rise from your bow, stand up and put your hands in gassho. The jikijitsu will strike a pair of clappers twice, and you will bow again. Continue to stand with your hands in gassho as the jikijitsu leads the kinhin line out of the zendo. Each person in the jikijitsu's line of cushions will fall in behind the jikijitsu in turn. The head of the second line will fall in behind the last person in the jikijitsu's line, and each person in his or her line will join in turn.

If your legs have fallen asleep during a sit and won't support you, just remain seated. After the kinhin line has left, stretch your legs until they come back to life, then join the kinhin line in your place.

As you join the kinhin line, lower your hands to your navel. Grasp your left thumb in your right hand and enclose the right hand with the fingers of the left. Walk naturally and mindfully. As you practice just sitting, practice just walking. Keep with the pace the jikijitsu sets; don't collide with the person in front of you or let too much space grow between you.

If you need to use the bathroom, you can bow briefly and step out of the kinhin line as it comes past the bathroom area. When you return, stand with your hands in gassho. When the line comes past you, bow briefly to the person who was behind you in line. He or she should return your bow and let you resume your place in line.

If you aren't staying for the next sit and need to leave the zendo entirely, bow and step out of line, and put on your shoes and leave discretely.

The jikijitsu will strike the clappers once to signal that kinhin is ending and the kinhin line is entering the zendo for the next sit. When you hear the clappers struck, place your hands in gassho. The jikijitsu will lead the people in his or her line to their places, and the leader of the other line will lead everyone else to their places on their side of the room. If everyone has remained in the correct position in line, this should be quick and easy, with no one needing to move past anyone else. All zendo procedures are designed to make everything work smoothly.

The jikijitsu will strike a bell. Bow and take up your zazen posture for the next sit.

5.2 Practice

Kinhin gives you a chance to stretch your legs between sits, but it is not "break time". It gives you the chance to continue your practice as you perform a more active task. Ultimately, your Zen practice will have to be integrated into your daily life. Kinhin is a transition stage. When you sit silently on the cushion, your body is relaxed and your mind is not distracted by demands from other people. The circumstances are ideal for Zen practice, but we can't sit on a cushion forever. As we walk silently and mindfully, we have the opportunity to continue our practice under just slightly more demanding circumstances. On a longer day

of practice, we continue to eating mindfully and working mindfully before moving back into regular daily interaction. If you carry your practice with you through each stage, it becomes a habit, and it's easier to bring the mindfulness you find on the cushion into your daily life.

6 Chanting

As with kinhin, there are at least a couple of reasons why we chant. Physically, it relaxes and invigorates the abdomen, the center of our posture and heart of our zazen. It also gives us a chance to thank our teachers and to announce their teachings. We should do this with our whole heart and energy.

A sutra book containing the texts of all the chants can be found behind your cushion, at the edge closest to the altar. Ideally, you should know all of the chants by heart so you can sit and chant them with hands in gassho. For those chants which you don't know, you should still sit with hands in gassho, with the sutra book held between your thumbs and first fingers. If you'd like to review the chants at home, recordings of the monks and nuns chanting at Dai Bosatsu Zendo are available.

6.1 A note about chanting

Some Americans feel uncomfortable about chanting, bowing, etc. because they associate it with divinity worship in other traditions. Shakyamuni Buddha was insistent about the fact that he was not a god and shouldn't be treated as one. "Buddha" is simply a title which means "awakened person". When we talk about "buddha", we're not just referring to the specific person Shakyamuni Buddha, but to anyone who is being his or her natural self. When you bow to the buddha, you're not only showing respect to Shakyamuni as a teacher, but respecting and cultivating in yourself the same thing he found in himself. Bowing to the buddha means bowing to your awakened self. Bowing to the person across from you is bowing to that person's true nature. Chanting in honor of the buddha is celebrating what you discover in your zazen; it's just a continuation of your sitting practice.

6.2 Lineage Chanting

The lineage chant is a recitation of the names of the teachers in our lineage. The chant leader will announce the name of the chant, and everyone should begin chanting together on the first line. The names are chanted on a single tone. Syllables which have accent marks over them are chanted longer than other syllables. The last syllable is chanted like a sigh, with the voice trailing off.

6.3 Morning Service

Unless otherwise stated below, the chant leader will announce the name of the chant, and everyone will begin chanting together immediately.

Atta Dipa

Atta Dipa is chanted with the voice starting low at the beginning of each line and rising for the last two syllables. The first line is chanted only by the chant leader, and everyone else joins in on the second line.

Vandana (Pay Homage)

Vandana is chanted on a single tone until the last syllable, during which the voice lowers as in a sigh and trails off.

Tisarana (Three Refuges)

Tisarana is chanted similarly to Vandana.

Purification

Purification is chanted in slow but natural English cadences.

Opening This Dharma

Opening This Dharma is chanted similarly to Purification.

The Heart Sutra

The Heart Sutra is chanted with the aid of a mukugyo, a drum that is beaten to help keep everyone together. The chant leader will chant the first line, then everyone begins together on the second line with the mukugyo. Please stay as close to the beat of the mukugyo as you can.

The last three syllables of The Heart Sutra are held longer than the others (listen carefully to the mukugyo), and the voice trails off on last syllable.

The Heart Sutra is chanted first in English, then in Japanese.

Sho Sai Shu

The first five words of Sho Sai Shu are chanted by the chant leader only. Everyone then joins in immediately with the mukugyo. Sho Sai Shu is chanted three times with no breaks between repetitions (and everyone chants the words that were chanted only by the chant leader the first time). The last three syllables are held longer than the others, and the voice trails off on last syllable.

Dedication

Dedication is chanted only by the chant leader, except for the three closing lines. If you are holding a sutra book, you should set it down and sit with hands in gassho during Dedication. In the closing lines, the last three syllables are held longer than the others, and the voice trails off on the last syllable.

Dai Hi Shu (The Great Compassionate Dharani)

The chant leader chants the first line of Dai Hi Shu alone, and everyone joins in on the second line with the mukugyo. The last three syllables are held longer than the others, and the voice trails off on last syllable.

Dedication

The second Dedication is chanted similarly to the first.

Enmei Jukku Kannon Gyo (Ten Phrase Life Prolonging Kannon Sutra)

Enmei Jukku Kannon Gyo is chanted 21 times, with the mukugyo. It begins slowly and quietly, and becomes faster and louder as it progresses. Bells are struck at various times during the chant. As you near the end of the repetitions, you should listen for the bell. It is struck the next-to-the-last time through and the last time through, to signal that the end is coming. Be aware of this because the last three syllables are held longer than the others, and the voice trails off on last syllable.

After the last syllable, everyone takes in a deep breath and bellows "mu" with his or her full strength, bending forward at the waist until the head is to the floor and the voice trails off as the breath is fully expelled. You should then sit up with your hands in your lap for a few minutes of zazen.

Bodhisattva's Vow

Bodhisattva's Vow is chanted in slow but natural English cadences.

Shigu Seigan (Great Vows For All)

Shigu Seigan is chanted four times, three times in Japanese and once in English. The first time through, the chant leader chants the first line alone. The last three syllables are held longer than the others, and the voice trails off on last syllable.

Prostrations

After Shigu Seigan, a bell is struck and everyone bows. A series of strikes are then made on the bell to signal everyone to stand in preparation for prostrations. Everyone stands facing the altar with hands in gassho. When a bell is struck, you should bow toward the altar, then kneel and touch your forehead to the floor, placing your hands at either side of your head with the palms toward the ceiling, and raise your hands. When a bell is half-struck, you should stand with hands in gassho again. Two more prostrations follow similarly. The fourth bow is a greeting bow instead of a prostration toward the altar. You should bow toward the altar as before, but then turn and face the person across from you. Kneel, place both hands on the floor in front of you with the left hand on top of the right, and touch your forehead to your hands. When the bell is half-struck, stand with hands in gassho, and wait for the jikijitsu to signal the start of kinhin.

7 Zendo Etiquette

7.1 Entering and exiting the zendo

Try to arrive 10 minutes before all events. If you arrive prior to the beginning of a group of sits, you can enter the zendo whenever you wish. You should enter with your hands in gassho and briefly bow to the altar as you enter. Take the next available place closest to the altar. Walk to your place with your hands still in gassho, and bow to the altar again, then bow to the place across from you before sitting. You should settle into your zazen posture before the jikijitsu begins striking the bell.

You should never enter the zendo while a sit or service is in progress, or leave before it is over, so that you don't cause a disruption. If you arrive during a sit or service, you should silently enter the building, quietly remove your shoes, sit quietly on a stool or cushion in the entrance area, begin zazen, and wait until you hear the bell and clappers announcing the beginning of kinhin. You may then stand in place and take the end position in the kinhin line.

Never enter the zendo and take a seat while a sit or service is in progress.

7.2 Sitting still

You should sit still in the zendo. If your posture is good, the only voluntary muscles that need to be (mildly) engaged are those that hold your torso erect. Don't join a sit late or leave the zendo during a sit. Don't change positions, stretch, scratch yourself, blow your nose, etc.

It may be difficult to sit still at first, but you will eventually find that it's essential to your practice. If your body is not calm, it will be extremely difficult to relax your mind. If the mind is anxious, the body will be tensed, and the tension will lead to pain and fatigue. You have to let the one feed the other until you reach the state of "body and mind fallen off".

Some allowances can be made for people who are new to the practice. If you absolutely must move, do so as slowly, quietly, and discretely as possible. When you sit in the zendo, you are not only cultivating your own practice, but supporting the practice of everyone around you, so you should cause as little disturbance as you can. Most importantly, be aware of the difference between a genuine need to move a part of the body that is in pain and a desire to move which is actually an excuse to run away from boredom or other mental discomfort, instead of confronting it and sitting with it.

If you have to cough, cough. You'll probably make more of a disturbance trying to suppress a cough than you will by just coughing.

7.3 Personal effects

Be mindful of the effect of the things you bring into the zendo with you. Put your shoes, coat, and umbrella in the appropriate places. Stow your personal belongings away neatly so others won't trip over them. Turn off your cellphone, pager, and other electronic devices that could make noise while you're sitting.

Dress conservatively in neutral colors so you don't attract attention, and don't wear strong perfumes. Take off your watch and put it in your pocket. The jikijitsu has a clock which he or she will use to keep track of the time. Watching the clock is just a way to avoid your practice. Take off any jewelry that you would normally fidget with nervously. Don't make hand gestures or chant during zazen. Remove all the devices that you use to distract yourself from the work you need to do. When you sit, sit.

8 Other opportunities

Lending library

We have a lending library made up of books, audio tapes, and video tapes on loan from sangha members. Please borrow one item at a time and return it before taking another. You can add your own items to the collection if you have something you'd like to share.

Special events at Burning House

We offer occasional opportunities for intensive practice, from all day sits to weekend retreats and week-long Rohatsu celebrations. All events will be announced on our calendar and mailing list.

Dai Bosatsu Zendo <<http://www.daibosatsu.org/>>

Though Dai Bosatsu is a monastery, it offers many opportunities for participation by lay practitioners, from weekend workshops to week-long sesshins and three-month kesseis. See their calendar for details about upcoming events.

Ka Shin Zendo <<http://dczen.homestead.com/>>

Ka Shin is a zendo in Washington, D.C. which also bases its practice on the Dai Bosatsu tradition. It has been in existence since 1969, and offers periodic retreats with teachers.

Wild Goose Zendo <<http://wildgoosezendo.org/>>

Wild Goose Zendo is a practice center in Sturbridge, Massachusetts. The abbot is Jiro Osho Fernando Afable, a Dharma Heir of Eido Shimano Roshi who has led several retreats at Burning House. An active retreat schedule is available at Wild Goose.

Endless Mountain Zendo <<http://www.endlessmountainzendo.org/>>

Endless Mountain Zendo is a practice center in Stillwater, Pennsylvania. The abbot is Sensei Genro Lee Milton, a teacher acknowledged by Jiro Osho.

The Zen Center of Syracuse <<http://www.zencenterofsyracuse.org/>>

The Zen Center of Syracuse is a lay community led by Roko Ni-Osho Sherry Chayat, a Dharma Heir of Eido Shimano Roshi. They welcome your participation in periodic retreats.

The Buddhist Network of Greater Baltimore <<http://bngb.org/>>

The Buddhist Network provides opportunities to learn about Buddhist practices from many traditions in the Baltimore area.

9 Conclusion

Please see *our website* <<http://burninghousezendo.org/>> and join our mailing list to receive announcements about upcoming events.

Thank you for joining our practice. Let true Dharma continue.

10 Bibliography

There are many excellent (and as many not-so-excellent) books on Zen practice in your local libraries and bookstores. They can be invaluable guides, but never forget that they are only guides, not the practice itself. A book about sailing may be filled with information that will be useful once you're out on the water, but sitting at home reading is not the same as setting out in your boat.

Nothing that you read (this instruction manual included) becomes true until you discover the truth or falsehood of it for yourself in your own practice. While books can offer much useful advice and encouragement, please remember that reading a book is not a substitute for sitting. You cannot practice Zen vicariously.

Some of the better books that you may want to read are:

Taking the Path of Zen

by Robert Aitken Roshi

A concise introduction to zazen.

Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind

by Shunryu Suzuki Roshi

A collection of talks about Zen practice.

The Three Pillars of Zen

by Philip Kapleau Roshi

One of the most famous books about Zen in English.

Zen Training

by Katsuki Sekida

An excellent, detailed guidebook on how to approach Zen practice.

The Posture of Meditation

by Will Johnson

A slim volume with a world of thoughts about how to sit and the effects and meaning of posture.