

Practice Guidelines

Zen practice and inquiry

Welcome!

The zendo atmosphere arises from the attitudes of the participants. We share this space not only to advance our own practice, but to support each other. We gain strength in our practice when we sit together. Common courtesy and consistent procedures promote awareness, stillness, and calm. Zen training requires flexibility, not rigid attitudes or actions. Guidelines are intended to support our practice.

Sitting periods (Zazen)

Sitting periods are 30 minutes each. Please be seated at least five minutes before the start of the first sitting period, when the wooden clappers are sounded. The bell will sound three times for the start of the sitting period, and again to signal the end of a sitting period. Between two sitting periods there is a period of mindful walking practice, called *kinhin*, signaled by two bells, or a short interval for stretching or changing position signaled by a single bell.

Stillness

Please sit physically still, not moving or blowing the nose; breathe in an ordinary manner (not loudly); do not look around or talk. Rest in the deep stillness that is within you.

Quiet and calm

Wear clean, dignified, and comfortable clothing. Please do not wear shorts or sleeveless tops in the zendo. Please also avoid perfume, flashy or noisy jewelry, distracting prints, or loud colors. Silence watches, pagers, and cell phones—anything that may make noise.

In the Zendo

Keep your eyes down; do not look about as this is distracting for yourself and others. There is no talking in the zendo; please signal the practice leader and leave the zendo for instructions or help that requires talking.

Please do not enter or leave the zendo during a sitting. If you arrive late, please use the back door and take a seat in the study, then enter at the break between sitting periods.

Bowing

Start with palms together, hands in front of your mouth, then bow at a 45-degree angle. We bow to express our respect and appreciation. Bow as you

1. Enter the zendo (not as you leave)
2. Sit down (arrange your cushion, bow to it, bow in the opposite direction; sit, turn toward the wall)
3. As a person next to you bows and sits (only before the first sitting)

Walking practice (kinhin)

Kinhin is walking meditation between sittings. Make mindful transitions from sitting to walking, as a continuation of zazen. At the bell to end the period, stand with palms together; at the first clapper, bow, turn to the left, form your left hand into a fist with thumb inside and place right hand over it at chest level. Space yourself evenly in the room. On the second clapper, begin slow kinhin, and at the third, faster kinhin; on the fourth clapper, continue walking briskly until you reach your seat, bow, and be seated. You may use the rest room during kinhin; please wait to leave until the second clapper sounds to signal the beginning of the walking meditation, unless it is an emergency.

Discussion

At the end of Sunday zazen, there will usually be a short service including a reading or talk followed by an informal discussion period. This is a good opportunity to raise any questions you have about practice issues, as well as issues related to practice in everyday life. We finish by repeating the practice principles three times and doing three full bows to the room, a standing bow to the altar, and a standing bow to the room.

For the beginning Zen student

Welcome to the Zen path of inquiry and transformation! Probably the most difficult part of early practice is simply giving yourself permission to do it. We are all very busy people, with many distractions, responsibilities, and

commitments to others around us. However, if we are not grounded in real life, we diminish our ability to provide for ourselves and for others. Our efforts to “help” may cause more damage than good. Without true awareness, we are caught in our self-centered fantasies about ourselves and our relationships, and we miss our real opportunity to intimately experience life exactly as it is—true liberation. This practice is not easy, but it is consistent and it is sane. As Joko says, it has been around for over two thousand years, and the kinks have been worked out of it. The changes in our lives are not always obvious; but with intelligent practice, day by day we are being transformed from the cellular level. If we are patient with ourselves, we will see the rewards in our everyday lives. Joko Beck calls this an empirical practice: All we can do is try the experiment, and observe the results.

Practice verses

Verse of the robe

Vast is the robe of liberation,
a formless field of benefaction;
wearing the universal teaching,
I realize the one true nature,
thus harmonizing all being.

Repentance

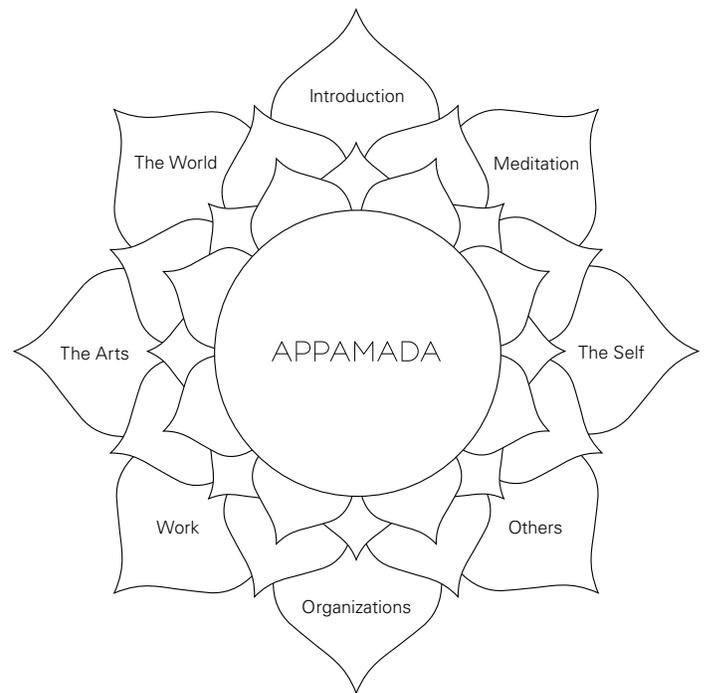
All my ancient twisted karma
from beginningless greed, hate, and delusion,
born through body, speech, and mind
I now fully avow.

Refuges

I take refuge in Buddha
I take refuge in Dharma
I take refuge in Sangha.

I take refuge in Buddha,
immersing body and mind deeply in the Way,
awakening true mind;
I take refuge in Dharma,
entering deeply the merciful ocean of Buddha’s Way;
I take refuge in Sangha,
bringing harmony to everyone, free from hindrance.

Now I have completely taken refuge in Buddha,
Now I have completely taken refuge in Dharma,
Now I have completely taken refuge in Sangha.



Bodhisattva vows

Beings are numberless, I vow to free them;
Delusions are inexhaustible, I vow to end them;
Dharma gates are boundless, I vow to enter them;
Buddha’s way is unsurpassable, I vow to become it.

Four practice principles

Caught in the self-centered dream, only suffering;
holding to self-centered thoughts, exactly the dream;
each moment, life as it is, the only teacher;
being just this moment, compassion’s way.

Zazen

Monday-Friday 6:30-7:30 AM
Sunday 8:00-10:45 AM, informal brunch follows
Wednesday 7:30-8:30 PM, informal tea follows

Inquiry

Tuesday 12:30-1:30 PM

More information can be found here:
<http://www.appamada.org>

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