

Guide to Terminology Used in Soto Zen

Note: Many of the Japanese forms in traditional Soto Zen are not practiced by Joko's followers, and some other terms have been rendered in English. We speak of *practice discussion* or *practice interview* rather than *dokusan* or *daisan*, for example. However, you may be curious about these terms, some of which you might encounter when visiting more traditional Zen centers.

<i>Altar</i>	A focus for mindfulness and appreciation, a way of dedicating a space for the practice of Zen. Most altars in our tradition include a central figure or image, a candle, an incense burner, fresh flowers, and a small bowl of water, symbolizing life. Your home altar might include anything special to you, including photos or names of loved ones or teachers, artifacts from nature, or whatever will support your practice. Ordinary objects support and illuminate our spiritual journey through the care with which they are treated.
<i>bodhisattva</i>	A bodhisattva refers to anyone who has generated <i>bodhicitta</i> , a spontaneous wish and compassionate mind to attain Buddhahood for the benefit of all sentient beings.
<i>Bodhisattva Vow</i>	The Bodhisattva Vow arises naturally when <i>bodhicitta</i> is awakened: the determination to serve the aspiration for the safety, well-being, and liberation of all beings without exception, through this lifetime and any lifetimes beyond.
<i>Buddha</i>	Gautama Siddhartha, the historical figure who realized enlightenment, and whose teachings are the foundation of Buddhism.
<i>buddha</i>	Any fully enlightened being, not necessarily a Buddhist practitioner or student.
<i>Buddha nature</i>	The inherent quality of being a buddha, always already present in every sentient being.
<i>Buddhadharma</i>	The teachings of Buddha; the path or lived experience of Buddhism.
<i>chiden</i>	One who takes care of the altars, cleaning the incensors, trimming the candles, tending the flowers, and making sure there are supplies available.

<i>dharma</i>	the teachings of Buddha. the path or way taught by Buddha, or the teachings of the enlightened ones who have followed Buddha.
<i>doan</i>	literally, one who takes care of the temple. In practice, the person who keeps the time and rings the bells to signal the beginning and end of zazen periods. The doan also lights candles and rings the bells for service.
<i>dokusan/daisan</i>	one-on-one meeting with a Zen teacher to discuss practice. Different teachers have more or less formal meetings with students. Topics range widely from managing physical pain in zazen to integration between practice and daily life, techniques for developing awareness, koan study, and so on.
<i>doshi</i>	the Zen priest officiating at a service or ceremony.
<i>duhkha</i>	literally, "wheel out of kilter," also translated as stress, suffering, dissatisfaction, dis-ease. Buddha's first noble truth states that all existence is marked by duhkha.
<i>fukudo</i>	technically, the assistant to the doan. The fukudo strikes the han to signal the beginning of zazen, hits the mukugyo (small drum) for Japanese chants during services, and strikes the time drum and the densho bell when needed.
<i>gassho</i>	a formal position of the hands in which you bring the hands together a few inches in front of your nose, palms flat and pressed together. For a gassho bow place your hands in gassho position and bow from the hips.
<i>han</i>	a flat wooden board that is struck with a mallet to signal the beginning of zazen. Originally it served to summon the monks from the fields and far reaches of the monastery. There are three sequences of hits, each one followed by a rolldown. Zen practice is to be seated in your place by the second rolldown.
<i>jukai</i>	A formal ceremony in which a Zen student receives the precepts and a Buddhist name, and commits to following the Buddhist path
<i>karma</i>	the traces or consequences of every thought, word, and action
<i>kesa</i>	the formal robe worn by a Zen priest, representative of Buddha's robe

<i>kinhin</i>	walking meditation, most often between periods of zazen, sitting meditation. In kinhin, the left hand is folded into a fist with the thumb inside, pressed close to the solar plexus, and the right hand rests on top of it.
<i>koan</i>	a story or saying, typically paradoxical or puzzling, used for teaching and practice, often to generate “great doubt,” and to demonstrate the limitations of our conventional ways of thinking
<i>kokyo</i>	the person who announces and leads the chants during services
<i>mudra</i>	generally, any one of a number of special positions of the hands, held still. In zazen, the left hand is cradled in the lap with the right hand resting in it. The two thumbs are lightly touching, so that the hands form an oval. This position provides an alive, steady, and calm resting posture for the hands.
<i>mukugyo</i>	a small wooden drum, often shaped like a fish, that is used to keep time for Japanese chants during services
<i>oryoki</i>	a formal meal that also serves as mindfulness practice in eating. Special bowls and utensils are used, food is formally served, and meal verses are chanted. Oryoki developed as an efficient and mindful way to serve and clean up after meals in monasteries with many monks.
<i>practice period</i>	a period of time in which Zen practitioners have an opportunity to explore a deeper commitment or dedication to their practice, through attending sesshins or classes, more frequent participation in zazen and other sangha activities.
<i>rakusu</i>	A small, symbolic version of Buddha’s robe, sewn by a Zen student while undertaking formal precept study. A rakusu is worn around the neck, like a bib. On the back of the rakusu, the Zen teacher writes the student’s Buddhist name and the date of the formal ceremony, jukai, when the student officially receives the precepts and commits to the Buddhist path. The teacher signs the rakusu and sometimes adds a verse or saying.
<i>Rinzai, Rinzai Zen</i>	One of two major branches of Zen; the other branch is Soto. Rinzai Zen is commonly held to have originated with Lin Chi, Rinzai in Japanese.

<i>samadhi</i>	a state in deep meditation, marked by profound clarity, equanimity, awareness, and egolessness
<i>samsara</i>	the world of suffering, delusion, old age, birth and death, and everyday phenomena, conditioned existence; an illusional experience masking ultimate reality
<i>sangha</i>	a community of Buddhist practitioners. Any group of people who practice regularly together, who share an aspiration to realize the awakened life, and who support each other in this aspiration.
<i>seiza</i>	a sitting position that can be used for meditation, during talks, while waiting for practice interviews, or eating oryoki. In seiza you sit upright in a kneeling position, sometimes supported by a zafu or a small bench.
<i>sesshin</i>	a period of intensive Zen practice, lasting anywhere from three days to a month or more. Zen practitioners come together in silence, doing zazen, eating, working, taking breaks, meeting with a teacher for practice discussion, listening to talks, and having services.
<i>shashu</i>	A formal position of the hands in which the left hand is folded into a fist with the thumb inside, pressed close to the solar plexus, and the right hand rests on top of it. This forms a quiet, steady posture. This position is used in kinhin and also when walking about in the Zendo or monastery.
<i>shuso</i>	Shuso is the Japanese term for the Head Student for a Practice Period.
<i>Soto, Soto Zen</i>	One of two major branches of Zen; the other branch is Rinzai. Soto Zen is commonly held to have been brought to Japan from China by the great Zen teacher, poet, and philosopher Dogen.
<i>tokudo</i>	literally, "home leaving." The formal ceremony in which a Zen priest is ordained.
<i>zabuton</i>	the large rectangular mat used for zazen, sitting meditation. The zafu—small round cushion—is placed on top of the zabuton
<i>zafu</i>	the small cushion used in sitting meditation, most often round
<i>zazen</i>	the practice of sitting meditation; still, relaxed, silent, mindful awakeness

<i>zen</i>	Historically, a form of Buddhism that originated in China, where it is called ch'an. Zen is the Japanese term. It is distinguished by its emphasis on sitting meditation and direct experiencing as the path to enlightenment, rather than the study of scriptures, mediation by priests, or practice of rituals. Zen is also marked by directness, curiosity, spontaneity, and immediate experience of the present moment. It is remarkably free of dogma or doctrine, and is fundamentally grounded in the practice of wisdom and compassion. It is based on inquiry, not institutions or authorities. Thus it is a practice, rather than a faith or a set of beliefs.
<i>zendo</i>	The meditation hall; any room that is being used for zazen

The Chain of Dependent Arising

This “chain” described by the Buddha is actually more like a web, in that it arises at once and together, but it is mutually dependently arisen. It is like a chain in the Buddha’s metaphor, because if you cut any link, the whole chain drops away. And it is like a chain in that we are all chained within it, quite blind about its workings, until we are liberated. There is no such thing as “partial freedom.” There is, however, a process for the realization of complete freedom. It is called the Buddha Way.

The typical formulation the Buddha used for describing this chain was “dependent on this, that arises.” We can think about this through the example of the whole miserable complex of poverty, drug abuse, gang violence, child abuse, crime, and depression. It comes into being all together, in a web of mutual causation. For this reason, there are no simple solutions. Here is the great chain of being as the Buddha taught it:

The Twelve-fold Chain of Causation (Paticca-samuppada)

Short Form:

When this is, that is.

When this arises, that arises.

When this is not, that is not.

This ceasing, that ceases.

1. Through ignorance is conditioned volitional actions or karma formations.
2. Through volitional actions are conditioned consciousness.
3. Through consciousness is conditioned mental and physical phenomena.
4. Through mental and physical phenomena are conditioned the 6 faculties.
5. Through the six faculties are conditioned (sensory and mental) contact.
6. Through (sensory and mental) contact is conditioned sensation.
7. Through sensation is conditioned desire.
8. Through desire is conditioned clinging.
9. Through clinging is conditioned the process of becoming.
10. Through the process of becoming is conditioned birth.
11. Through the process of birth is conditioned
12. Decay, death, lamentation, pain

Steve Hagen's teaching on dependent arising:

Bondage is...

- 1...to ignore the Reality of this moment. It is blindness to the direct perception that this moment neither arises, persists, nor perishes.
- 2...instability of mind, caused by ignorance, that sets the mind to leaning. All actions produced by such a mind are willed.
- 3...to discriminate between separate objects of mind, and to see them as persisting from moment to moment.
- 4...to see distinct, persistent, self-identical mind and body supporting consciousness. Thus a subject is discerned, along with its objects.
- 5...to conceive a world of mind objects, external to body and mind, as being taken in through the windows of the senses.
- 6...to conceive that through sensation the subject makes contact with an objective world, "out there."
- 7...to react emotionally to the objects of mind, while remaining isolated from them.
- 8...to experience wanting and craving, since mind objects are conceived as being apart from "me," the subject.
- 9...to grasp at what appears "out there." It's the hopeless wish that this moment will either vanish or last.
- 10...to conceive (believe in) the persistence (existence) of self and other.
- 11...to conceive (believe) that all beings have come into existence.
- 12...to conceive (believe) that all beings will die.

Liberation is...

- 1...to *see* the reality of this moment. It is to perceive directly that this moment neither arises, persists, nor perishes.
- 2...to *see* no substance in any object of mind. Hence the mind leans neither toward nor away. All actions produced by such a mind are unwilled.
- 3...to *see* all mind objects as momentary and conditional.
- 4...to *see* no persistent mind or body – no subject – since there are no distinct and persistent mind objects available to perception.
- 5...to *see* sensation as a function of Mind alone – that the objects of Mind are never external to Mind, but are always Mind itself.
- 6...to realize there's no connection or disconnection between the senses and a world external to Mind.
- 7...not being swept away by emotion. Since nothing is perceived as external to Mind, feeling is ever intimate.
- 8...not to want. Since nothing is perceived as being "out there," there's no sense that anything is lacking.
- 9...to *see* all of experience as utter fluidity and, therefore, as nothing to grasp, own, or fear.
- 10...to *see* all as stream.

11...to see that nothing is born.

12...to see that nothing dies.

Steve Hagen, *Buddhism Plain and Simple*