

1. Position of the hands

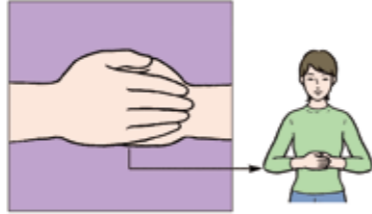
Gassho

Gassho is an expression of respect, faith, and devotion. Hold the palms and fingers of both hands together. The tips of your fingers should be approximately the same level as your nose and held about 10 centimeters away from your nose. Your arms should be held slightly away from your chest, your elbows extending outward from your sides in a straight line parallel with floor.



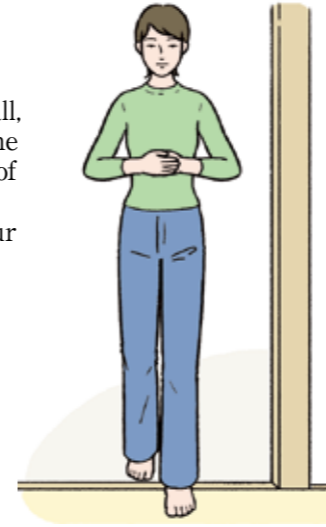
Shashu

Shashu is the way to hold your hands when you stand and walk. Put the thumb of your left hand in the middle of the palm and make a fist around it. Place the fist in front of your chest. Cover the fist with your right hand. Keep your elbows away from your body forming a straight line with both forearms.



2. Entering the zendo

Hold your hands in shashu position and step forward with your left foot at the left side of the entrance. If you are carrying a zafu when you enter the hall, hold it in both hands. After entering the hall, bow in gassho toward the statue of Manjushri Bodhisattva. Then put your hands in shashu again and walk to your seat, beginning with the right foot. As a sign of respect, you should refrain from walking in front of the statue of Manjushri Bodhisattva. Rather, you should walk around behind the altar.



3. Arriving at your seat

Rin'i-monjin

This is a greeting to the people who are about to do zazen with you. When you arrive at your seat, face the seat and bow in gassho. The people sitting next to you do gassho.



Taiza-monjin.

This is the greeting to the people sitting across from your seat. After you do rin'i-monjin, turn clockwise until your seat is behind you, and bow again to those people sitting opposite your seat. The people sitting on the opposite side of you also do gassho.



4. Sitting positions

First, position your buttocks in the center of the zafu and cross your legs. Sit in a way that is neither too close to the rim of the zafu nor too far back. Regardless of whether you sit in Kekkafuza or Hankafuza, the important thing is that your knees and buttocks form an equilateral triangle that supports the upper body. Each person has a different physical form and constitution, so it's best to find a way to sit without straining too much.



Kekkafuza (Full-lotus position)

Place your right foot on your left thigh, and then your left foot on your right thigh. Cross your legs so that the tips of your toes and the outer edge of your thighs form a single line. The order of crossing the legs may be reversed.



Hankafuza (Half-lotus position)

Simply place your left foot on your right thigh. Raising the opposite leg is acceptable.



Sitting in a chair

Sit upright in a chair as you would on a zafu. Do not lean backwards. Use a square support cushion on the seat and/or under your feet as needed to find a comfortable upright posture. Hold your hands in your lap in the Hokkai-join (Cosmic Mudra).

5. Hokkai-join (Cosmic Mudra)

This is the way to hold your hands when you do zazen. Place your right hand, palm-up, on your left foot, and your left hand, palm-up, on your right palm. The tips of your thumbs should be lightly touching each other. This is called hokkai-join (Cosmic Mudra). Place the tips of your thumbs in front of your navel and your arms slightly away from your body. Don't exert too much force and push your thumbs together tightly or let the thumbs move apart.



6. Posture

Pull in your chin and extend your neck as though reaching toward the ceiling. Your ears should be in a line parallel to your shoulders, and your nose should be in line with your navel. After straightening your back, relax your shoulders, back, and abdomen without changing your posture. Sit upright, leaning neither to the left nor right, neither forward nor backward.

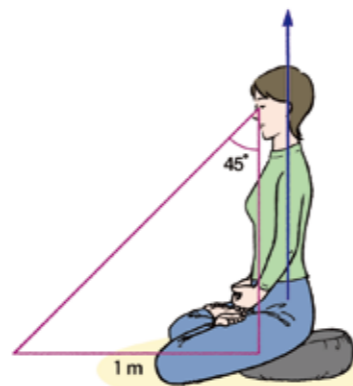


7. The mouth and breathing

Keep your mouth closed, placing your tongue against the roof of your mouth just behind your teeth. Don't let the breath get trapped inside your mouth.

8. The eyes

Keep your eyes half open. Cast your sight downward at a 45-degree angle looking out about one meter's distance. Without focusing on any particular thing, let everything have its place in your field of vision. If your eyes are closed, you will easily drift into drowsiness or daydreaming.



9. Kanki-issoku (Exhale completely and take a breath)

When your zazen posture is settled, quietly breathe in and out deeply several times. Then, breathe quietly and slowly through the nose entrusting yourself to the natural movement of the breath.

10. Sayu-yoshin (Swaying the body)

Sway the upper half of your body from left to right a few times like a pendulum. This swaying motion begins with bigger movements, gradually becoming smaller. Steady yourself finally in a straight and proper sitting form that is leaning neither to the right nor to the left.



11. The art of Zazen

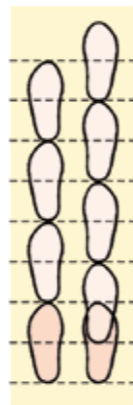
Do not concentrate on any particular object or try to control your thoughts. When you maintain the proper posture and your breathing settles down, your mind will naturally become tranquil. When various thoughts arise in your mind, do not become caught up in them or struggle with them; neither pursue nor try to escape from them. Leave thoughts alone, allowing them to come up and go away freely. The essential thing is, by neither falling into distraction (thinking) nor dullness (drowsiness), to let zazen sit zazen.

12. Shijosho (Bells for beginning of zazen)

This is the signal for the beginning of zazen. When everyone is in their sitting place, the resident priest enters the hall and makes one round inside the hall to see if everyone is sitting properly. When the resident priest passes behind you, hold your hands in gassho. Put your hands back in hokkai-join after the resident priest passes by. A bell is rung three times to signal the beginning of zazen after the resident priest has finished walking round the zendo.

14. Kinhin

After one period of zazen (approx. 40 minutes) is finished and there will be more zazen, kinhin (walking zazen) is practiced. Kinhin is to walk silently in the zendo. When the bell is rung twice at the end of a period of zazen, bow in gassho, place your hands palms-up on your thighs; sway your body a few times, first a little, and then in bigger movements. Unfold your legs. Turn clockwise slowly, especially if your legs are asleep. Do not stand up abruptly. When you are standing, plump up the sitting cushions. Bow to the persons next to and opposite you. (rin'i-monjin, taiza-monjin). Hold your hands in shashu, stand straight and steady your breath for a moment. Then begin to do kinhin. From the waist up, your posture should be the same as that in zazen. Take the first step with your right foot. Advance by taking only half a step for each full breath (one exhalation and inhalation). When kinhin is finished, the bell will be rung once. Align your feet and bow, with your hands still held in shashu. Then, return to your seat at a normal pace.



13. Kyosaku

To be hit with the Kyosaku is to receive the encouragement of Manjushri Bodhisattva. There are two ways to receive the kyosaku. If you are drowsy or are daydreaming and want to be struck by the kyosaku, you put your hands in gassho and receive it. In the other case, the person carrying the kyosaku gives notice by hitting your right shoulder lightly. Hold your hands in gassho and lean your head to the left. After you are hit on the shoulder, straighten your head again and bow. The person using the kyosaku also bows to you as he or she stands behind you, holding the stick with both hands.

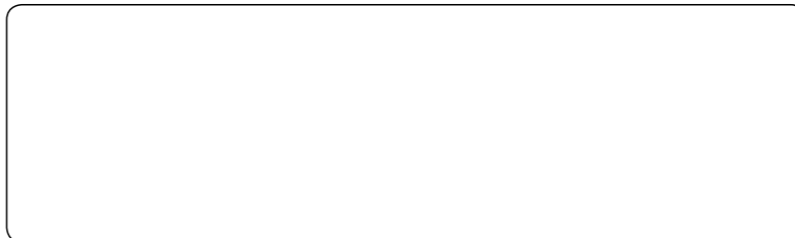


15. End of zazen

When the bell is rung once, bow in gassho, place your hands palms-up on your thighs; sway your body a few times, first a little, and then in bigger movements. Unfold your legs. Turn clockwise slowly, especially when your legs are asleep. Do not stand up abruptly. Then, after you are standing, straighten up the sitting cushions. Bow to the persons next to and opposite you. (rin'i-monjin, taiza-monjin).



*Protocol in the zendo may vary in small ways, depending upon the temple. Only the basic protocol regarding zazen and kinhin are described here.



THE PRACTICE OF ZAZEN

<http://global.sotozen-net.or.jp/>

