

Guidelines for In-person Sesshin

Introduction

The purpose of these rules and formalities, which have grown out of decades of sesshin experience, is to establish an atmosphere most conducive to practice. Remember that a sesshin is a group effort involving a large number of people who must carry on their activities in close quarters. Every participant who follows these guidelines will be contributing greatly to the strength of the sesshin. Please read them carefully.

Zendo Etiquette

When entering and leaving the zendo, pause and bow to the altar. Exceptions: kinhin and going to dokusan (but when returning, remember to bow at the zendo entrance). Also, when leaving the zendo together as we do for meals or after evening sitting, don't pause to face the altar and bow; simply place your hands palm-to-palm as you leave.

Wear a robe at all times (except for work and exercise).

No watches are to be worn in the zendo except for yaza, but do wear a watch if you go for a walk during a break. It's your responsibility to be in the zendo in time for formal sittings. No one should enter the zendo after the 3rd bell has been struck. If late, sit in the cushion storage room and rejoin the sitting during kinhin.

If disruptions occur in the zendo, there's no need to be concerned during formal rounds. (Examples include someone fainting or crying). It's the monitors' job to take care of such things. But **DO RESPOND** to any emergency situation when the monitors are NOT around (e.g. yaza).

Dokusan

The primary purpose of dokusan is to bring before the teacher the results of your work on your practice and any questions you may have about it. This may mean simply presenting yourself to check in with the teacher. Even if you have no questions or problems or anything specific to discuss, the teacher may have a question or advice for you. You don't need to go to every dokusan, but neither is it advisable to go less frequently than every few dokusans.

Whatever goes on in dokusan is solely a matter between the teacher and the student and must be kept confidential. This is true in or out of sesshin.

During sesshin do not ask to see the teacher outside of dokusan; he or she is often occupied during break periods. Also, do not leave notes for the teacher. Any questions or emergency situations that come up are to be directed to the monitors, not the teacher. Leave any notes on the head monitor's cushion, which is the first one on your left as you enter the zendo. Don't forget to *include your name*.

If you are invited by the monitors during kinhin to go to dokusan, you may go or not, as you wish. Do not feel any pressure to go; it usually means that the monitors need to fill the waiting line.

Take a formal zazen posture in the dokusan waiting line and maintain it without moving except when the line advances. Do not sit in the line with your knees up.

Once your dokusan is over, return promptly to the zendo. Use the bathroom or get a drink of water if you need to, but do not go to your room or otherwise delay coming back into the zendo.

Teisho

Listening to teisho is another form of zazen. Just continue concentrating on your practice. However, if you cannot simultaneously listen to the teisho and concentrate on your practice, then the listening takes precedence.

Early Morning (Outdoor) Kinhin (4:25 a.m.)

If you're already in zendo, leave your rakusu there, otherwise wear it for outdoor kinhin and remove it after kinhin, as you enter the zendo. Don't go to the zendo just to drop your rakusu at your mat.

When the kinhin ends, take care not to block the door to others entering behind you.

At the start of the first round, people with rakusus place them on their heads after the wooden block plays. Start the verse at the deadbeat; others just continue sitting.

Yaza

To reserve your seat in the zendo during yaza (late night sitting), place your round cushion or bench towards the front of the mat (that part closest to the divider or wall). Reserve your cushion only if you will be returning fairly soon (within 20 minutes).

You may sit in the main zendo, the piano room, Kannon room, or anywhere outside. In warm weather it is all right to take a chair onto the porch. If you take a chair outside, carefully wipe any dirt off its feet before bringing it back into the retreat center. If you take a mat outside, protect it with a ground cloth, which you can find in the front entryway. There is also an outdoor yaza deck, the door to which is located on the left side of the hallway that runs between the water table and the big bell.

Be aware that the sound of the bathroom fans can be disturbing to sitters on the yaza deck as well as to people resting in their rooms. Whenever possible use the light over the sink, which does not turn on the fan.

If you are doing kinhin on the porch at any time, do not pound your heels or wear hard shoes. Kinhin after 9:45 p.m. may be done in the exercise room downstairs, or quietly in the east

corridor (the wide hallway between the water table and the big bell). Kinhin during yaza may also be done in numerous places outside.

Mats and Cushions

Be mindful in handling zazen mats and cushions. Cushions should not come in contact with the bare lower body.

Extra cushions or a bench may be stored under the tans when not in use. However, during the work period all cushions under the tans are cleared out for cleaning. Any cushions that you wish to keep at your seat should be placed on your mat before the work period.

If you are using certain cushions and benches only occasionally, return them to the cushion storage area outside the zendo so others may use them. Do not hoard cushions. Cushions found under the tans during the work period will be returned to cushion storage. For kinhin, make sure your cushions are fully on your mat and out of the way of the kinhin line.

When leaving the zendo for meals, during breaks, or at the end of the day, smooth out your mat and arrange your cushions neatly. Be sure that the back edge of the mat is lined up with the mats to either side of it. You don't need to do this at the beginning of each kinhin.

Work

If you have a question about your work, write your supervisor a note or, if absolutely necessary, speak to them out of the earshot and vision of others. If you finish your assigned work early, *check in with your work supervisor for more work.*

Bedroom Manners

If sharing a bedroom, turn on the small nightlights provided there (unless all roommates agree otherwise before sesshin). Turn them on when it gets dark each night and turn off after breakfast. In winter, windows may be opened a crack for ventilation, but to avoid wasting heat, close them when the room is unoccupied. Bedroom windows and radiator settings are adjusted by the person whose name appears at the top of the list of room occupants.

If someone in your room is snoring loudly and disturbing you, it is all right to gently turn them over into a side-sleeping position. (Snoring is often caused by sleeping on the back.) Let the monitors know if the snoring continues to be a disturbance.

Beds do not need to be formally made, but pull the covers up neatly and keep the bedrooms in order. Do not sleep directly on your mattress or pillow. Bring your own bedding if you drive to sesshin (or use the sheets and pillowcases provided) to protect mattresses and pillows from being soiled.

Do not use a personal alarm clock in your bedroom, except the type that vibrates quietly. Even a vibrating alarm can wake others, so if you use one, keep it somewhere, like under your pillow, where only you will hear it. Do not use the alarm clocks provided in the room as they are very

loud. During rest periods and at night be mindful of others who share your room but not your schedule, and rise and leave the room as quietly as possible.

Take care with closing and opening doors (your bedroom door, as well as bathroom doors and fire doors). It is possible to move through the building almost completely silently if you pay attention. In the same vein, if you are taking vitamins or other pills during sesshin, be sure they are in containers that don't make noise, or else take them out when others are not resting or sleeping. Also be careful and attentive when you close drawers, especially those under the beds. Unless you're careful, they're likely to slam shut, and the noise can wake people even in other rooms.

If anyone in your room does not hear the wake-up moktok or warning bell, wake them up before leaving.

Bedroom doors should be kept closed at all times. Lights off, except for nightlights. (Turn off nightlights after breakfast.)

If using a sleeping bag, use a fitted sheet on the mattress to protect the mattress cover. (Sheets are in the linen closet.)

Bathrooms and Personal Hygiene

Men, please use the urinals when you can to free up other bathrooms. Three men at a time may use urinals in the bath just off the water table area. Two at a time may use the urinals in the bath that is opposite the soaking baths in the southeast basement.

Use only your own towel and your own toilet articles, including toothpaste. (Keep toilet articles in your room.) Sanitary products are provided by the Center. As a courtesy to the teacher and others, brush your teeth before the morning rounds.

Sesshin frees us up to drop the ordinary concerns and distractions of daily life. In keeping with this, do not shave or use cosmetics (except perhaps a moisturizer). Similarly, there's no need to shampoo your hair more than once or twice. If you have long hair, keep it tied back to facilitate use of the kyosaku.

The close quarters of the zendo make strong body odors and perfumed shampoos, oils, lotions, and powders distracting to others. In hot weather be sure to shower every day and use a deodorant.

If you need to blow your nose, do it outside the zendo. During formal zazen, this means waiting until kinhin and then leaving the line, although it is all right to wipe your nose quietly and infrequently if necessary. Cover your mouth with your robed elbow when coughing or sneezing. Washing your hands and using a hand sanitizer will help reduce the spread of colds, making you both less likely to get a cold and less likely to transmit one. The monitors have a supply of over-the-counter medications if you need some.

Be sure to let the monitors know if any of the toilets are clogged or overflowing.

Avoid touching your nose, mouth or eyes with your hands

If your nose is really running, it's OK to wipe it discreetly and infrequently. If necessary, it's also OK to quietly blow your nose, when the zendo and dokusan line are in motion (e.g., when everyone is entering, or after kinhin and before 3 bells are struck). During yaza, leave the zendo to blow your nose. The halls echo, so go past the water table to East hallway.

Hot weather: Be considerate of others by washing thoroughly each day and using deodorant. Wear an under-robe or T-shirt under your robe; no tank tops.

Cold weather: If concerned about wet hair in cold weather and wish to use a hair dryer, there are two set up in basement shop area (across from the base of the main stairs). You may ask a monitor to show you where. Do not use a personal dryer.

Soaking Baths. If using soaking tub, make sure you thoroughly clean yourself and rinse off soap before entering. (Water is shared, like a swimming pool.)

Fire

R.A.C.E. *RESCUE*, *ALARM* (pull boxes at exit doors call 911), *CONTAIN* (close doors), *EXTINGUISH*.

If the fire is small, extinguishers in stairwells and kitchen. Pull the pin, aim at the base, squeeze & sweep).

If you hear an alarm, go outside to the area in front of the main entrance of the retreat center. One of the monitors will take a head count there. To ensure that the head count is accurate, stay there until released by the monitors.

There are two means of exit for every room. Check out the exits for your room. If, when leaving the house during a fire, you find an escape route blocked or filled with smoke or a closed door that is warm to the touch, immediately take the alternate route. If you must go down a smoke-filled passageway, stay low, breathe shallowly, and cover your nose and mouth with a damp cloth.

Smoking is not permitted in or around the building at any time. Incense is not to be used outside the zendo except at Roshi Kapleau's gravesite.

Exercise

Exercises are to be done only in the small exercise room off the dining room or in the large exercise room on the lower level below the dining room. (See the maps posted in the entry foyer.) You may also exercise in your bedroom between morning wakeup and outdoor kinhin.

Exercises in bedrooms must be done quietly and inconspicuously; don't for example, stand on your head in the bedrooms, as this can be distracting to your roommates. Exercises done in the exercise rooms are limited to yoga and callisthenic stretches. T'ai chi, qi gong, and other eye-catching types of exercise may be distracting to other participants and so are not to be done indoors, though they may be done at a remote spot outdoors, out of sight of others.

Everyone is required to attend the afternoon exercise period. If for medical reasons you cannot participate, talk to the monitors before sesshin. During the exercise period wear clean, dark, solid-colored clothing that is loose and ample enough not to be revealing. Tight or very short shorts, tank tops or tattered clothes are not acceptable. Be mindful of what could be distracting to others.

Outside the Zendo

Aside from during formal rounds, in the event of an emergency situation of any kind (fire, accident, someone in distress, etc.) respond as needed and notify the monitors at once.

Do not leave the grounds of Chapin Mill under any circumstances. If you feel you need to leave for some reason, talk to a monitor. Be careful not to wander off so far during a break that you can't get back in time for the next block of sitting. Take a watch with you; it is your responsibility to be back in time. If you get back after a round has started, do zazen in the cushion storage room until the next kinhin.

During hunting season, be sure to wear an orange vest if walking in the woods. The vests are available in the coat area of the main building.

If a stranger approaches you, neither ignore the person completely nor get involved in a lengthy conversation. In most cases you can simply nod if a person greets you. If the person asks you a question, answer briefly. If the person is a tradesman, direct them to the appropriate location and/or find the caretaker or a monitor. If you see someone suspicious on the grounds, or something that causes you concern, especially at night, tell the monitors immediately.

Winter: Do not attempt to walk on the pond even if it appears to be frozen. (It has thin ice as the pond is spring-fed.)

Miscellaneous

For those not familiar with the chants, copies of the chanting booklets are given out before each chanting service. They will be collected afterwards. Further chanting instruction will be given the first day.

If you do not wear a rakusu, do not put your hands in gassho during the rakusu ritual first thing in the morning.

No blankets, shawls, scarves, or hoodies are to be worn in the zendo. Only people whose duties require it should wear a watch during formal zazen.

The water table near the zendo may be used throughout the day. Use the cup marked with your zendo seat number.

If you feel faint during zazen, put your head down between your knees.

Do not open or close windows in the zendo, chair zendo, or the dining room. Do not loiter outside the zendo, on the stairs, or elsewhere. Do not read posted sesshin rosters or schedules unless you need to.

At the end of the evening sitting, once the Four Vows have been recited, place your hands in your lap for the closing ritual (“Even as night…”).

No notes are to be sent out of sesshin or phone calls made without the monitors’ approval. Do not write any notes except to obtain or convey necessary information. All notes (except for ones between workers and supervisors or, occasionally, between roommates) must be given to the monitors for distribution, regardless of whom they are for. Don’t forget to sign your note. As a rule, try to keep note-writing to a minimum, and do not indulge in writing angry notes.

No reading, letter-writing, or journal-writing is permitted during sesshin.

Cell phones should not be used at all during sesshin without consulting the monitors.

In order to make the most of sesshin, don’t pack your bag or strip your bed until after sesshin is over. That means *after the closing ceremony*.

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