

How to do Zazen

Kando Inoue Roshi



The Form of Sitting

Zafu (a cushion for sitting) • Chair

First of all, there is "Za-so" (the form of sitting.) Spread a thick futon and place a zafu (a round shape cushion for zazen) to sit. Use the front half part of it. If for some reason you have difficulty sitting on a zafu, you can use a chair.

How to cross your legs

I'd like to start setting up from the bottom. On the way of crossing your legs, if possible, the one called Kekkafuza; the lotus position, both legs are placed on your thighs may be ideal. Generally, if you cross both of your legs, first you place the right leg on the top of left thigh and next place the left leg on the right thigh. That is the form transmitted. Depending on your physical condition, you may find it easier to put your legs together in the opposite direction. Please try it. Also, Hankafuza; the half lotus position, the form to cross one leg has been transmitted. When raising only one leg, the left one should be placed at the top of the right thigh, this is how it is described. The key is to have the three points of the buttocks and both knees form an isosceles triangle in diagram, which is ideal. The angle of about 120 degrees is the most stable. And the knees do not float. The three points of the knees and the buttocks should be properly grounded. If you feel pain in your legs, just fold your palms together in prayer gently and replace your legs.

Posture of upper body

Next comes the posture of upper body. Keep your back and hips straight. The five joints above the sacrum and the coccyx are called the lumbar vertebrae and this part will be stretched when you put your navel in a forward position. If this part is down or crooked, it is not good. Please stretch it. Then place your body and head on top of that straight up. Keep the shape as it is, and release the tension as much as possible. If this heavy head goes forward even a little, quite a lot of force will be applied to the various parts of the body. When you keep the head on it straight up, it will take the least amount of pressure, and you can do it comfortably and easily. Some people say that sitting causes stiffness in the

shoulders, but if you do this and pull your chin back properly, you will not get stiff shoulders. If you have stiff shoulders, there is something wrong in your posture.

How to join your hands

Next the form of hands. You will be asked to form Hokkai Join; the Dharma-realm meditation mudra. With your hands palms up, place your left hand on top of your right hand and lightly touch the tips of your thumbs to make a nice oval shape there. If possible, you are supposed to feel like all four fingers are properly aligned. I would say you have some awareness at the tips of your fingers. If you let this go at all, the power of the tip of the finger will be relaxed and it will become lazy. It's not that, it's about keeping the shape intact.

This is what I mean.

How to close your mouth

How to treat the mouth, press the tip of the tongue slightly against the base of the upper teeth. Then close your mouth.

Position of eyes

As for handling the eyes, from what I have just seen, about half of the people close their eyes. "Your eyes should always remain open." That's how it's indicated. It means that we are strongly urged to pay attention to opening eyes. Eyes close quickly if you're not careful. Zazen is not meditation. We sit with our eyes open. So, if I say where we direct our eyes, it's about a meter away, and when you drop your eyes to the floor, they're half-lidded. It is written "not strain, not squint". This is the best way to avoid fatigue. And, of course, you keep your eyes open, so you can see what's going on in front of you. That's what's important.

At the very least, there are three sets of points to maintain awareness of: whether Hokkai Join the Dharma-realm meditation mudra is not broken, whether the tip of your tongue is placed against the roof of your mouth and whether your eyes remain open.

How to regulate breathing

Once your body is adjusted like that, open your mouth slightly and exhale all the way, called "Exhale in a breath." At that time, I ask you to relax the tension in your body and exhale all the way, like a balloon deflating, if you like. That's the way I want you to breathe. I want you to exhale all the way through. Naturally, when you exhale, you can breathe in a huge amount of breath. If you repeat this two, or three times, your breathing will become very calm.

Swaying your body to the left and right to the side.

Now once place your hands palms up on your knees, and slowly sway your body to the left and right. Lean your body to the side. Bend your body slowly while exhaling, feeling as if you are going to keep leaning with the weight of your own head. Bring the body back to the original position while breathing in, and then bring it down again while exhaling all the way to the other side. What we are aiming for is, when we make the form, there is excess force in various parts of the body and one of our purposes is to remove it. Therefore, if you don't do it with that in mind, just moving your body from left to right is meaningless. The excess force of your body has to be removed. You will be asked to take away the strain and tension of your body so that you can sit at ease and comfort. Another hidden benefit of this left-right swaying is that it tightens the anal sphincter muscles. If you sit without tightening this, you are likely to get hemorrhoids. There are many people who have been doing zazen for a long time and have suffered from hemorrhoids since ancient times. When you get used to it, you will suddenly sit down and continue sitting down, which means that you will be sitting with your anus open. Swaying from side to side will naturally tighten the sphincter muscle and prevent hemorrhoids. The word hemorrhoid is written in Chinese character, as Tera (temple); the right hand radical of the character, in Yamai-dare; the left-hand radical.

Then, gradually decrease the width of the swing, and when it stops at the center, form your hands Hokkai Join; the Dharma-realm mudra and go back to sitting. When we form posture as instructed, I think it is the most natural form. This is

the best way to release tension. Sitting like this, (Roshi shows a relaxed posture,) it is tiring to be like this, isn't it? Being so, if you are asked to sit in cross-legged position for one hour, it is quite a challenge. It is also hard to sit in formal seiza position; kneeling with your buttocks on your heels and your body upright. Seiza is very disagreeable when you sway it from side to side. You immediately touch your hands to the floor. But when you are sitting in the full lotus position, like Daruma's self-righting doll, the center of gravity is very solid and you don't fall down. There is no such stable way to sit after all. When you can do the full lotus position, it's comfortable. However, I don't say that you should bend your legs and cross them, because it is a pain for those with stiff hip joints. Zazen is not only about making forms. It does not mean that if you sit in pain, it becomes zazen. Even if you cannot cross your legs, or if you have no legs, you can still do zazen. Or, if the person lives lying in bed and is unable to get up, he or she can do zazen. It may be a little different from what you think zazen is.

What is essential is the way we are sitting. How do we spend the time? If it were not for that, it wouldn't be zazen. If you are not careful, you will end up spending the time sitting and thinking about the thoughts that come out of your mind. It is just you have been thinking all through the time, you haven't been sitting. Seen from the outside, it is zazen-like in shape, so it looks like one is sitting, the content is that he is just thinking about all the time. The person himself does not know it. He doesn't know, so he thinks this is zazen and says he has been doing zazen. It is true that he must have made a form of sitting and sat, but what he is doing is exactly the same as usual. You're doing nothing different from spending all your time thinking about this and that in your head. Then there is no meaning of doing zazen. About zazen, that kind of thing is not really well known to the people.

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How to be when you are sitting

So how do we spend our time when we are sitting? As the way to be when you are sitting, the problem is thinking or discretion, there are many things that come to mind, or come out, or you think (intentionally). In general, they are all thoughts. During zazen, we don't let those things get in the way. Don't discriminate the thoughts that come up, right or wrong, with your own views. You ought not to judge so called goods or wrongs. It means that you should not do things like "this is good, this is bad, this is right, this is wrong."

To be more specific, when we are sitting and things come up, the human beings have a lot of things that bother them. Being so, we usually start playing things in our minds to try to solve what is bothering us. You should not do this anyway. Therefore, no matter what comes up, no matter what you remember or what you think is bothering you, you don't try to do anything about it or spend time with dealing with it. Also, we do not do anything to prevent the things that come up from coming up. We sit without doing anything to change it by making any kind of work. That is the way of practice when doing zazen, which is called Kufuu; contrivance or ingenuity.

As we sit here like this, we can hear the sound of cars. Even if you don't think to listen to it, when you hear the sound of a car sound, it sounds like "buzz-buzz." You don't try to listen yourself, do you? We don't do not to hear. If you sit there and do nothing, it is formed that the sound will always be there when it sounds. That is expressed "**Give up the operation of Shinisiki (sensation, discrimination and recognition)**" "**Stop measuring with Nensokan (consciousness, thoughts, views.)**" In a nutshell, it means not to deal with or process what comes out in our way of thinking. It's the same thing, but it means to "learn" in the way which is not the way of thinking, which is called "non-thinking." (In general, "learning" refers to using the way of thinking to understand an object, but here, as mentioned above, it refers to being a "buzz-buzz" when there is a "buzz-buzz.") To say it a little differently, it means that we do not really use the things we have acquired since we were born. Be as you were born. In this way, we can get in

touch with the essence of human beings. It is the practice of doing this kind of thing. So, these are the important ways of spending time during zazen. The reason why it is difficult for people to accept this is because they are not sure whether they can really leave it alone, even though it is something they are concerned about or something that has become an issue. Normally, we would take up something that is bothering us, something that is a problem, and try to solve it. But if you do that, it is not zazen.

The big reason why we should leave things alone is to verify the truth, the real state of things. One of the first things to remember is that if we allow human thoughts and opinions to be inserted into anything we touch, it will distort the reality. That's why we don't deal with human viewpoints or thinking in any way. If you do this, you will be able to receive the truth and facts of things as they are. That's what we want you to do. One more thing is that people's worries, pains, and problems are phenomena that occur based on their thoughts. Therefore, I want you to experience what happens to us when we don't deal with the way of thinking. In fact, people can live without dealing with it and there is no problem. But once something comes up that is bothering you, you think you have to do something about it, otherwise, you will not be able to cope with it. That's generally what people believe. This is what I would like to say in theory. So, what happens when we do not take up such things at all? If they come out, such things just move when they come out. Just move. It is not that we keep thinking continuously. Thoughts disappear as soon as they come out. They are made to disappear when we don't deal with them ourselves. If you try it, you will know. Also, in the beginning, I would like you to be especially careful about not to sleep. To stay awake, **"Eyes should always remain open,"** sit with eyes open. When you come to close your eyes, you will definitely be pulled around by thoughts and things that come up. If you can see something there when you close your eyes, it is your imagination that is doing the work, you are treating what you are thinking in your heads. That is not zazen at all from the beginning. So, please keep your eyes open. When you keep your eyes open, you should be

able to see the state in front of you as they are. I think the difference between what is right in front of you and what you are picturing in your head will become clear, so I want you are the state being right in front of you without dealing with that you are picturing in your head. In addition, there are various functions in the body, such as ears, but they all remain as they are. When you are sitting like this, everything is active, so even if you don't do anything in your direction, you are touching conditions and doing various activities. Please try to be just that. First of all, please try to do that carefully. Anyway, please go ahead and actually practice it. In addition, if you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to come and talk frankly during the time we have set aside for 独参 ; solo consultation. I would like to reiterate that "sitting" is not a way of dealing with the way of thinking or what come out. You do not do that.

Afterword

The original booklet, "How to Do Zazen," was compiled from the instructions of Kando Inoue Roshi at the Kobe Zazenkai in 2014-2015, which was edited by Rena Sugita and included in ["What is Truth, What is Enlightenment, What is Practice, What is Zen" by Kando Inoue.](#)

I translated it into English with the permission of Kando Roshi. Kando Roshi always gives zazen instruction at one-day zazen meetings or at zazen meetings with newcomers. He speaks carefully and clearly about the form of sitting and about "how to be when sitting".