

COLUMBIA ZEN BUDDHIST PRIORY
A TEMPLE OF THE ORDER OF BUDDHIST CONTEMPLATIVES
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GUIDELINES FOR MEDITATION



The purpose of Serene Reflection (Sōtō Zen) Meditation is to come to know and live from the Unborn, the Buddha Nature within ourselves and all things. All of us have an intuitive knowledge of the Buddha Nature, therefore meditation is not a means to an end but rather a harmonization of oneself with the Source of compassion, love and wisdom. Meditation is the foundation of Buddhist religious practice.



Meditate in a quiet, well-ventilated room. The room should be neither too bright nor too dark. Wear clean clothing that does not restrict the waist or the legs. Find the most stable position for you, sitting on a chair or meditation bench. If you are extremely flexible you can use a meditation cushion, sitting in the cross-legged position. If using a cushion, sit on the forward third, and with each meditation period alternate the leg you place in front or on top. Do not persist in using a meditation cushion if you find the position painful.



To center yourself, you may sway the body gently from left to right, and backwards and forwards. Allow the two natural curves of the spine to form at the neck and small of the back. The head should be held upright, its weight balanced on the shoulders and the chin slightly tucked in. The tongue is held lightly against the back of the top teeth with the lips and teeth closed. Breathe normally.

Rest the right hand in the lap with the left hand in the palm of the right hand (some left-handed people find it useful to do the reverse). The tips of the thumbs touch lightly and form an oval. Keep the eyes open and lowered, allowing the gaze to fall gently on the wall or floor in front of you. Be aware of what you see, but do not deliberately study it. If you wear glasses, you may leave them on.



Slowly take two or three breaths through the nose, follow the breath up the back on inhalation and down the front of the body on exhalation, thus describing a circular flow. Then don't continue to deliberately follow the breath, just breathe normally for you. Sit steadily with an alert and bright mind, neither suppressing nor indulging thoughts that may arise. Allow thoughts and sensations to arise and pass naturally, neither holding onto them, nor pushing them away. Do not engage in deliberate thought. When the mind wanders, just notice, and bring yourself back to being still, mindful, and present. Sitting still with no deliberate thought is the important aspect of Serene Reflection meditation.



Meditate regularly, every day if possible, if only for a few minutes. Mornings and evenings or a quiet time in your schedule are best. Do not meditate in the formal positions directly after meals, or when physically exhausted, or in extremes of temperature. It is good to meditate for a specific length of time and stick to it, be it five, ten, or thirty minutes. Do not exceed forty-five minutes at one sitting period without walking meditation or relaxing the body for at least ten minutes. Meditating with a group can be very helpful.

You are welcome to contact us to check details of your meditation, both formal meditation and the practice of meditation in daily life.