



The Zen Group of Western Australia (The ZGWA)

Orientation Notes

The Zen Group of Western Australia
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Introduction

Welcome to the Zen Group of Western Australia (ZGWA). The ZGWA is a community - a Sangha - that follows the Great Way of the Buddha in the tradition, teachings and cultural heritage of Zen Buddhism. This booklet provides an overview of the rituals and meditation practice of the Diamond Sangha lineage as performed in the meditation hall and within the lives of the Sangha in Western Australia. These notes are not intended to be an introduction to the philosophy of Buddhism. They are practical instructions for the practice of Zen within a committed Sangha and with authorized teachers.



Sitting with us

Anyone is welcome to do *zazen* (literally: seated meditation) with us, and we suggest that you read these notes and come to an orientation first. This is because a shared ritual form is part of our practice. Orientation is usually held before our regular meditation on Thursday evenings at our *dojo* (meditation space) in the hall of St Paul's Church, 162 Hampton Road, Beaconsfield. When you attend for the first time, we request that you come at 6:30pm, so that one of the group's leaders can give you an orientation. Please contact us if the time does not suit you. We ask that you wear loose-fitting clothing as it is more comfortable for meditation and that your clothes be plain and dark in colour, as is customary in the tradition in which we meditate. We also ask all attendees for a donation to help with the cost of the hall rental and to provide a stipend for our teacher; the suggested donation is \$10 per night.

Our origins and history

The Zen Group of Western Australia started in 1983, with a small group of people sitting in a private home in Perth. It is affiliated with the Diamond Sangha tradition of Zen Buddhism, which was founded in Hawaii in 1959, by Robert Aitken and his wife Anne Aitken. Robert Aitken's book: *Taking the Path of Zen* is a wonderful introduction to Zen practice, and is available for purchase on Thursday evenings at the dojo.

Our lineage comes from the Sanbo Kyodan (the Order of the Three Treasures), which was started by Yasutani Haku'un in Japan, in 1954, and was grounded in the vision of Yasutani's teacher Harada Daiun Sogaku, a Soto priest who had studied with Rinzai teachers. Harada and Yasutani amalgamated the heart teachings of the two main schools of Japanese Zen, Soto

and Rinzai, to make a practice suitable for lay students. The core teachings are those of Mahayana Buddhism as they come down through India, China and Japan. Diamond Sangha communities integrate the Zen Way into lay life.

Robert Aitken, the founding teacher of the Diamond Sangha lineage, was one of the early Western students of Zen Buddhism. Initially, he studied with Nyogen Senzaki in the late 1940s.

Subsequently, he trained with Nakagawa Soen and completed his formal Zen training with Yamada Ko'un. In 1974 Robert Aitken was authorized to teach by Yamada Koun. Yamada gave Robert Aitken full Dharma transmission in 1985.

Robert Aitken and his successor John Tarrant both taught in Western Australia and fostered the group over many years. The ZGWA now has a resident teacher: Ross Bolleter, was authorized to teach in 1992, and received transmission from Robert Aitken and John Tarrant in 1997. Ian Sweetman, was authorized as a teacher in 2000 by Ross Bolleter, and was given transmission by him in 2006. Ian taught in the ZGWA between 2001 and 2012. Dr Mari Rhydwen, who was authorized to teach by Ross Bolleter in 2005, and given Transmission by him in 2014, visits on a regular basis to lead Intensive Practice Periods and co-teaches with Ross Bolleter at Sesshins. Currently, Ross Bolleter offers *dokusan* (personal interviews), and gives Dharma talks on a regular basis.

What is Zen Buddhism?

Zen, or Chan as it is called when referring to its history in China, is one branch of the great tree of Mahayana Buddhism. Chan Buddhism – a confluence of Indian Buddhism as it stems from the Buddha and his twenty-eight Indian ancestors and Chinese Daoism – began its growth in China during the sixth century. It flourished there during the Tang and Song dynasties most particularly through the genius of a multitude of great teachers, including Dajian Huineng (638-713), Mazu Daoyi (709-88), Linji Yixuan (d.866) and Dongshan Liangjie (807-69). Zen took root in Japan in the twelfth century, and developed there through the inspiration provided by great Japanese masters such as Dogen Kigen (1200-1253) and Hakuin Ekaku (1689-1769) – to name but two. In the early twentieth century, Zen Buddhism came to the United States, and from there it has spread to Europe, Australia, New Zealand, and throughout the world.

Zen Buddhism is a path of liberation that emphasizes awakening to our true nature and to the incorporation of that awakening into our daily life, most especially for the benefit of others. This is the Bodhisattva ideal where we enlighten others and ourselves in the midst of the passions and suffering of the world.

Central to Zen Buddhism is the practice of *zazen*. The various modes of *zazen* are: breath counting, experiencing the breath, *shikantaza* (literally “nothing but precisely sitting”), Silent Illumination, and koan study. These meditation practices variously enable us to develop concentration and awareness, and ultimately to awaken and to learn to express, embody, and ultimately to live our awakening. At the same time *zazen* is not a means, any more than eating, sleeping or hugging your children is a means. As Dogen said, “*Zazen* is itself

enlightenment.” This unity of ends and means, effect and cause, is the practice of enlightenment, the Way of the Buddha.

Zen practice encourages us to engage with whatever presents – including the inevitable difficulties that we encounter in our lives – and to find our true home there with them, as them. Indeed, we find that, mysteriously, the great blue sky, the laughter of children, the pine tree, the crow, and indeed all beings, are right there with us – *as us*. This is intimacy. Robert Aitken considered the experience of intimacy to be the central matter of Zen.

Although sincere practice is itself the teacher, we are fortunate to have two teachers, who offer dokusan. Ross Bolleter is the ZGWA’s resident teacher and we also have a regularly visiting teacher, Mari Rhydwen who offers dokusan during Intensive Practice Periods and Sesshins. Dokusan supports the student’s efforts and is a source of guidance and encouragement for the Way. The Sangha and teacher together help a new student begin a life-long journey of growing insight and understanding. Please discuss your zazen practice with your teacher.

Why do Zazen?

The practice of *zazen* develops:

- effortless concentration and the ability to focus on whatever arises;
- a richer and deeper experience of everyday life because things are set right at the centre;
- an increasing ability to trust our own depths, and to come to know ourselves.

Zen practice promotes courage and stickability in difficult circumstances, and encourages us not to sweat the small stuff. Zen readily embraces doubt; indeed the three requisites for Zen practice are great faith, great doubt and great determination. Finally, maturity in Zen finds its expression in open-heartedness, flexibility and lightness of touch in our dealing with others. We also find abundant humour in accepting our own foibles.

In a world of rapidly increasing change and flux, Zen practice is as relevant and dynamic today as it was 2,500 years ago, when Shakyamuni Buddha taught in northern India. Through time and place, the essence of Zen remains vital and immediate, relying as it does on personal experience and encounter rather than on scriptures or dogma.

Some general matters relating to Zen Buddhism

At the stage of Orientation, we discover the Way and realize that it is for us. We embark into it and begin to see the world and ourselves through the eyes of the teachings. Intimations gather, and we are allured and drawn in. The qualities necessary for walking the Way are integrity - which means that we are consistent in our practice and in holding the form of practice as it comes down to us - rigour and perseverance. Yet at the same time we soften our mind and body to allow what is and to open to it. This reflects in our relations with other people, which is to say having integrity in our dealings with them, while showing grace, courtesy, and generosity towards them. On the one hand we learn to hold the line, and cleave

to principle; on the other we give people a better than even break. We turn towards the Way, and that is the Way in its turning.

Awareness of the body and its sensations play an important part in Zen practice. Zen's various practices integrate the body, the physical world and the senses such that body and mind become one. As expressed in Sengcan's poem, "Affirming Faith in Mind":

*If you would walk the highest way,
do not reject the sense domain;
for as it is, whole and complete,
this sense world is enlightenment."*

Jianzhi Sengcan (d. 606)

The practice of zazen encourages us to be present to each moment and brings us into intimate contact with the things of the world, these being none other than our true nature.

*muffled
through dishpan suds
the sound of crystal*

Irina Harford

Intimate contact with what presents brings with it freedom and potency. As Shunryu Suzuki (1904-1971) expressed it: "In the zazen posture your mind and body have great power to accept things as they are, whether agreeable or disagreeable."

The process of accepting reality, working with difficulty, and commitment to renewal and openness to change are central to Zen practice. It is often said that the goal of Zen is not to reach some particular experience in meditation but is simply to follow the path. The Chinese Zen teacher Huanglong Huinan (1002-1069) expressed this as: "You walk on the Way at every step, beyond that there is no Way to seek." It was written of Linji "He's always at home, yet forever on the way." Also, "As the pines grew old and the clouds idled, he found boundless contentment within himself."

See *Taking the Path of Zen* by Robert Aitken (1917-2010), especially the chapter on Method (pp.13-25) and "Lecture on the Theory and Practice of Zazen" by Yasutani Hakuun (1885-1973), pp. 27-67 of *The Three Pillars of Zen* (ed. Philip Kapleau (1912-2004)). The reading of these notes, some of which are drawn from Aitken's and Kapleau's books, is no substitute for studying their books, each of which provides an excellent introduction to Zen practice. Another important introductory book is Shunryū Suzuki's *Zen Mind: Beginner's Mind*.

How to do Zazen

Posture

Posture is key to practising zazen. It is important to find a posture in which you maintain your upper body in an upright position while being softly relaxed. Several postures can be used: full or half lotus, Burmese, *Seiza* – kneeling astride a *zafu* (cushion) or sitting on a meditation stool or a chair.

The following diagrams and instructions are intended as a guide to the postures utilized when practicing zazen. If you have any medical problems that might cause you concern about sitting for long periods you should consult with the appropriate medical professional.



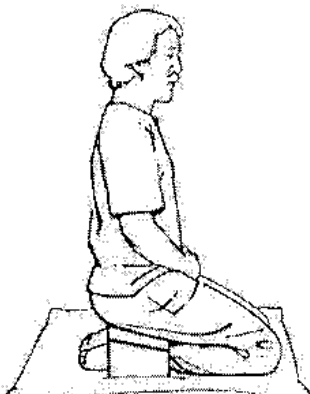
Full Lotus



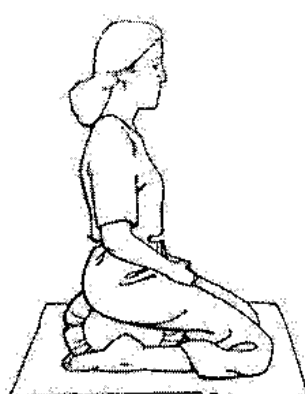
Half Lotus



Burmese



On a stool



Seiza



On a chair

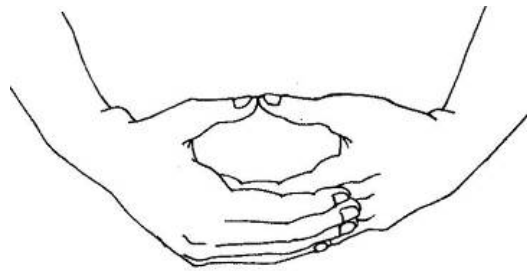
1. Your knees should be lower than your hips when sitting on a *zafu*.
2. We take as our model the posture of a one-year-old child sitting upright, except that the spine curves forward slightly at the waist, the belly is relaxed, while the bottom is thrust back.
3. No belts or constricting clothing should be worn during zazen.
4. The upper body is erect, but relaxed; ears are in line with the shoulders, and shoulders line with the hips.

5. Eyes are cast down and slightly open to allow in a little light, but they are not focused.
6. Your legs can be folded in various ways. It is a matter of finding a position which suits you. Great care needs to be exercised in the early stages not to injure your legs. If you are stiff, spend some time doing stretching exercises. This is especially necessary if you are doing the full lotus position (see Taking the Path of Zen, p.17)

Beginning practice

1. When you sit down, place your feet in position, thrust your bottom back and sit up. Rock in ever decreasing arcs and rock back and forward until the body feels balanced. Check your head position.
2. Your eyes should be cast down, about 2/3 closed, and focused on a point about a metre in front of you ("hooded gaze"). After a while your eyes may go out of focus - this is normal. If your eyes are closed you become dreamy. If your eyes are wide open you can become distracted.
3. Place your left hand on your right with the thumbs just touching, forming an oval (the *zazen mudra*). Your hands should rest in your lap and your elbows should project a little. The *zazen mudra* is very important because it reflects the condition of your mind during meditation. When your attention strays your mudra tends to collapse.

Zazen Mudra



4. Take three deep breaths to begin a round of *zazen*. Then begin your practice, allowing the breath to breathe itself.
5. At the end of a round of *zazen* (25 minutes) come out of your meditation very gently and carefully stand up. If your foot is asleep wait until you can stand safely.

Methods of Zen meditation

Counting the breath

After taking three deep breaths at the beginning of the sitting round, place your attention in the *hara*, which is located about 2-3cm below your navel, inside your body. In Japanese traditions, this spot is called the *hara*. When you cultivate bringing your attention back to your *hara*, over time you transform your practice, and your life.

Count "one" for the inhalation, "two" for the exhalation, "three" for the next inhalation, "four" for the next exhalation, and so on up to "ten." Then return to "one," and repeat for the duration of the round. Each breath is allowed to be just as it is. Some are long, some are short, some are deep, and some are shallow. Don't try to make the breath regular or rhythmic.

Although breath counting seems simple, you cannot dream at it, or just let it happen. To truly meet the challenge of your rampaging mind, you must devote all your attention just to "one," just to "two." When you are breathing "one," that is all there is; when you are breathing "two," everything gathers as "two!" When (not if!) you lose the count, and you finally realise that you have lost it, you are home. Return gently to "one," and continue as before.

When thoughts and feelings arise, return to the breath count; zazen involves neither the annihilation, nor the indulgence of thoughts and feelings. Sounds pass right through. Zazen is an open practice; it goes on in the midst of daily life, and is sustained by it. When you feel confident with counting "one" for the inhalation and "two" for the exhalation, try counting only the exhalations, and then only the inhalations.

After even a month of breath counting practice we can focus more clearly on work, study and recreation. The blue of the sky is bluer, the taste of orange is more so. With breath counting we begin the task of keeping ourselves undivided, for it is thinking of something other than the matter at hand that separates us from reality and dissipates our energies. Breath counting is the first, and fundamental, practice of Zen. At the same time, it can be the practice of a lifetime.

Experiencing the breath

Now we cultivate awareness of the breath without counting. This is the practice of following, or experiencing, the breath. Maintain your awareness at the focal point of your breath practice, the hara. Now you simply experience the in-breath as in-breath, the out-breath as out-breath, without allowing your attention to become diverted. You bring your full attention to your breathing in, then your full attention to breathing out.

Working on a koan

One of the most alluring and striking aspects of the Zen Way is the practice of koans. It is fair to say that koans characterize the Zen Way, and distinguish it from other Buddhist paths. A koan can be a word, verse or story from the Zen tradition that is used as a means of awakening to our deepest nature. Koans sometimes develop out of a dialogue between Zen teachers, or between a Zen teacher and a student. Sometimes they assume the form of a question, such as "Who is hearing that sound?" The use of a question encourages us to develop the necessary inquiring spirit to continue, deepen, and finally to resolve the koan. Koans cannot be resolved by logical reasoning, but only by awakening to a deeper level of mind. The koan path continues after awakening so that we can embody, express and finally transcend our initial awakening experience.

A student doing koan study normally works with a teacher. The chapter "The Koan Mu" in Robert Aitken Roshi's book *Taking the Path of Zen* is an excellent introduction to koan study.

Shikantaza

The term *shikantaza* can be translated: as “Nothing but precisely sitting.” We can break this translation down as follows. Nothing but (shikan) precisely (ta) sitting (za). The sense of “ta” translated here as “precisely,” means “strong,” “active,” “to hit,” “to hit on,” “to be on the knocker.” It is helpful to think of the word shikantaza as a verb rather than a noun, for it is the dynamic activity of being fully present to what arises in your meditation, and in your life. The practice of shikantaza continues off your cushion.

We focus selectively when we count the breath or work with a koan. However, in shikantaza the aperture of consciousness is wide open. All that arises: breath, sounds, the body and its sensations, feelings, and thoughts are the content and territory of shikantaza. As practitioners, our job is to be fully attentive to breath, sound, body, feelings and thoughts as they arise in the moment. In this, we should be clear about the details of what is happening, yet not pulled about by them, especially by our thinking about them.

In shikantaza we do not strive for enlightenment, but rather manifest our inherent enlightenment, even as we take the posture and are fully present to whatever arises.

Silent Illumination

The practice of Silent Illumination can be traced back to the Buddha, but was most clearly articulated by the Chan master Hongzhi Zhengjue (1091-1157). In recent times this important and much misunderstood practice, where the practitioner does not strive to gain enlightenment or to get rid of delusion— rather, naturally opening to the essential and eternal within this moment— has been brought to the West by the contemporary Chan Master Sheng Yen (1930-2009) in his book *The Method of No-Method: The Chan Practice of Silent Illumination*. Here is his account of Silent Illumination. “The genuine state of Silent Illumination is none other than the function of enlightened mind. Silence means being free from words and language, which is to say not being led about by the activities of the discursive mind, while illumination refers to clarity and expansiveness of mind. When Silent Illumination is fully realized one can respond to the myriad things free from ideation. This is wisdom.”

The prerequisite for Silent Illumination is to relax one’s body and one’s mind. This does not mean that one is lackadaisical. On the contrary, the effort should be seamless, fusing into one continuous flow. The body and the attitude should be relaxed, but the practice is taut and without gaps.

Beginning Silent Illumination

Once relaxed, you begin Silent Illumination by being aware of your body just sitting. Just feel the presence of your body sitting there, always returning to it, no matter what happens. Simplify and reduce all complications to this single act of just sitting. However, if you're too absorbed or too scattered and are no longer aware that you're sitting, then bring your awareness back to your body sitting again.

If at some point you no longer feel bodily sensations, even then, you must continue being aware that the body is sitting there. Not having bodily sensations means that your body is no longer a burden. You feel at ease, but your awareness must continue without any gaps. This takes diligence. Even though your approach is relaxed, your effort must be very spirited, and you should continue in this way.

See Sheng Yen's *The Method of No-Method: The Chan Practice of Silent Illumination*, for a detailed account of how to do Silent Illumination practice. There is a useful overview of the "stages" of Silent Illumination practice on pp. 120-123 of Sheng Yen's book, from which these notes are primarily taken.

With devoted practice we lose our isolation from stars and earth. Each thing is, and all things are, obviously and helplessly us, as they have always been. Although this experience is personal, we also sense that it isn't just our matter: a cat, an earthworm, even a clump of wild oats, are thus.

When we realize that the source of our being is no source at all, grief and pain are carried differently, if indeed it is proper to speak of "being carried" at all. Awakening thus, we are released a little, or a lot, from the confining stories that close us down. Everything breathes a little deeper, and we find a measure of spaciousness and ease.

When and where to practice Zazen

Daily zazen in a set place at a set time is essential for Zen practice. This is the root from which other aspects of Zen life grow and develop.

Sit at least once a day. In the beginning, sit for short periods to allow your body to become accustomed to the posture. Practice zazen in a clean, tidy room or space, not too hot or too cold, nor too dark or too light. Zen is not asceticism. Zazen does not aim at rendering the mind inactive but at calming and focusing it in the midst of activity.

There are opportunities to practice away from your sitting space. Giving attention to walking, standing, sitting or to any task at hand is practice. When you are at one with the breath, at one with your steps, at one with the person to whom you are speaking, or at one with a task, your true nature is always revealing itself. When you unite with the object or task at hand you lose your separation, and confirm your intimacy with the whole of reality.

Teacher and student

The ZGWA offers dokusan which is an opportunity for open and honest dialogue in a personal and confidential interview process with an authorised teacher. In this, there is growth and insight through encounter. Robert Aitken Roshi has said:

The heart of Zen Buddhism ... lies in dialogue. Such dialogue is designed for the purpose of awakening ... It is not designed to support the self-esteem of either party.

This dialogue is one where spontaneity and honesty are paramount. One of the most important words in Zen texts is *shin* which means heart/mind, and suggests spontaneity and honesty in thought, speech and behaviour.

Zen students are encouraged to form a direct and personal relationship with their teacher. In time the bond may deepen, and in acknowledgment of this the two may enter a formal relationship called *shoken*. A shoken student has a permanent bond with a particular teacher: a bond based on Zen practice and the determination of the student to follow the Zen Way as taught by that teacher.

Students may also request to take the *Jukai* ceremony with a teacher. Jukai is the ceremony in which a student publicly accepts the Buddha as his or her teacher and the Bodhisattva Precepts as guidance. The student studies these precepts with the teacher and writes personal vows for each one.

Teachers of the Zen Group of WA

Ross Bolleter Roshi

Ross Bolleter Roshi is a Zen teacher in the Diamond Sangha lineage. He teaches primarily in the Zen Group of Western Australia. Ross was authorized to teach in 1992 by John Tarrant Roshi, and received transmission from Robert Aitken Roshi and John Tarrant Roshi in 1997. He has taught extensively in Australia and New Zealand and has successors in both places.



Ross's first book *The Five Ranks of Dongshan: Keys to Enlightenment* was published by Wisdom Publications, Massachusetts, USA in 2014, and his second book: *The crow flies backwards: Western koans with commentaries* will be released by the same publisher in 2018.

Ross has two grown children, Amanda and Julian, and is a grandfather twice over. He is also well known as a musician, composer and poet.

Mari Rhydwen Roshi

Born in Wales, Mari Rhydwen began her Zen training in Japan under Yamada Roshi. There she met Robert Aitken Roshi, founder of the Diamond Sangha, and when she arrived in Sydney the following year, she found that the Aitken Roshi had agreed to visit Australia to teach and she became his student.

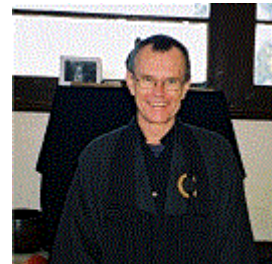


Later, moving to Perth, she continued her training under Ross Bolleter Roshi. Since being invited by him to teach in 2005, she has maintained regular sitting nights wherever she lived, and has co-taught sesshin in New Zealand with Arthur Wells and in Western Australia with Ross Bolleter and Glenn Wallis of New Zealand. She received transmission in 2014.

Mari's focus has been on combining Zen practice with engaging work as a linguist specialising in Aboriginal languages, community involvement and family life. During early sesshin with Aitken Roshi in Sydney, Mari and her partner were among the pioneers in attending with children. Now Mari is coordinating an Aboriginal community language centre where she continues exploring Hakuin's dictum that says, more or less, that practice amidst the unpredictable chaos of ordinary life is much better than practice done in the midst of tranquillity.

Ian Sweetman Roshi (Teacher 2000 – 2012)

The ZGWA is deeply grateful to Ian Sweetman for the inestimable ways in which he contributed to the establishment and continuation of Zen practice in Western Australia between 1985 and 2012. Ian was born in Brisbane, Queensland where he lived for 21 years.



He moved to Darwin NT and lived there for about 10 years before moving to WA. Ian sat his first sesshin with Aitken Roshi in 1985. He was also a student of John Tarrant Roshi and Ross Bolleter Roshi who gave him permission to teach in 2000 and transmission in 2006. While he is not presently teaching within the group, Ian taught intensively between 2000 and 2012. He currently works as a clinical psychologist in a mental health service in Western Australia.

Rituals and practices

The Dojo

The dojo has an altar at the front on which there is a statue of Shakyamuni Buddha or Kuan Yin, a bowl of water, flowers, two candles, one of which is lit during sitting periods, and the second that is also lit during chanting, reading and talks; an incense bowl; and a wooden *kyosaku* (literally: wake-up stick), which symbolises the sword of cutting off delusions. In each corner of the dojo there is a leader sitting facing into the room while all other students sit along the sides of the room, and face the wall

Entering and leaving the Dojo

Step into the dojo with your hands in *gassho* (palm to palm), make a standing bow in the direction of the main altar (the Buddha), and walk briskly around the perimeter of the room to your seat with your hands in the *kinhin* position - right thumb in the closed palm of the right hand, and this fist covered lightly by the left hand at the level of the solar plexus, forearms held parallel to the floor. Bow in the direction of your *zafu* (cushion), stool or chair (the Dharma). Then turn in the direction of the altar and with your back to your seat, bow across

the room (the Sangha). Now turn around again and sit down. When leaving the dojo, turn and face into the room at the door and gassho, then leave briskly. Whenever you turn in the dojo, turn in the direction of the altar.

Full bows

Full bows (*rahai*) are performed at the end of the evening sutra service, and in dokusan with a teacher. First make a standing gassho bow. Then straighten up and go down on your elbows and knees, forehead on the floor, with your hands resting palm-side up. Raise your palms above your bent head. (There are two stories told here. One is that we raise the Buddha above our prostrate form. The other is that we prostrate ourselves, and give up all delusions and false concepts by this gesture of throwing them away.) Then get up from your knees to a standing position, with your hands again in gassho. Bows are done in threes in the dojo and in the dokusan room

Kinhin: moving zazen

After twenty five minutes of zazen, the *Jiki-Jitsu* strikes the *Shijo* (literally: cease and be quiet) bell, twice on the rim. Stand up and face in. Do not stand if your foot is asleep. Wait until you have sensation and join the line when your place comes round. When the clappers are struck, gassho, turn left and begin your moving zazen, which is called *kinhin*. Maintain the distance between you and the person in front of you.

Hands are held in the kinhin position – right thumb in the closed palm of the right hand, and this fist covered lightly by the left hand at the level of the solar plexus, forearms held parallel to the floor. Keep your hands in the kinhin position when walking in the dojo. Your head is held erect, but your eyes are cast down as in seated zazen. You continue your zazen during kinhin. It is good practice to key the steps with the breath.

Sutras: chanting

The ZGWA sutras or chants are in English, Pali, and Sino-Japanese. A sutra book can be found under your *zabutan* (sitting mat). Sit facing in for chanting holding the sutra book at eye level with the thumbs and little fingers inside the book and the three middle fingers of each hand on the outside. The seiza position is the most suitable posture for chanting. Zen chanting is another form of zazen. Conscious awareness of the meaning of the words is unimportant. Of primary importance is the state of the mind created by the chanting.

We chant on Thursday evenings and during all formal ceremonies.

Postural adjustment

Your posture may be adjusted by a leader in our dojo. If you do not wish to have your posture adjusted, please let the leaders know in advance. You may have a particular reason for sitting as you do, for example, for health reasons.

Acupressure

You may notice that occasionally in a round of *zazen* during *Zazenkais* and *Sesshins* acupressure is offered by a dojo leader. Acupressure can help relieve tension in the shoulders, clear the mind and aid awareness of posture. To request acupressure perform a tea ceremony bow by placing your hands on your thighs and leaning forward as the leader walks behind you. After the acupressure is over, *gassho* and continue your *zazen*.

Engaging with a teacher: Dokusan

Dokusan, a personal interview with a teacher, is a chance for creative interaction and mutual deepening. It is the teacher's intention to guide us towards realisation, not to judge us. You don't need a reason to go. Say what is in your heart. If you have nothing to say, say so; that is your presentation. All dokusan interviews are completely confidential. Please resist the temptation to discuss your dokusan with others. The teacher's words to you may be inappropriate and confusing to someone else.

The procedure for dokusan is as follows:

There is a formal queue for attending dokusan called the dokusan line. You can join the line at the following times:

- after the bells sound at the beginning of dokusan
- when someone returns from dokusan to the dojo
- at the beginning or end of *kinhin*
- when the *jisha* taps your shoulder signalling for you to join the dokusan line

Take your cushion or stool with you when you join the dokusan line. Chairs will be placed next to the line for those who need them. After putting your cushion / stool on the dokusan mat, do a standing bow to your place and sit down. When you are at the head of the line, wait in place and do not walk *kinhin* or go to the toilet. You may stand if *kinhin* occurs while you are at the head of the line. When the teacher's bell rings it's your turn. *Gassho* and strike the *Kansho* (literally: shout) bell twice on the rim, stand and proceed briskly to the dokusan room, placing your cushion or stool near the exit. On entry, step inside the screen and do a first full bow to the altar (the Buddha). Step sideways to stand in front of the teacher and do a second full bow on the mat to the teacher (the Dharma). Take your seat on the mat. When the teacher rings the bell for you to leave, do a tea ceremony bow (while seated, lean forward to bow from the waist with hands on thighs) and then stand. Do a standing bow and tidy the mat and cushion for the next student. Step sideways to where you did the first full bow and do a third full bow in the direction of the altar (the Sangha). Open the door and stand in half *gassho* for the next person to enter and close it after them as you leave with both hands in *gassho*.

If you need to speak to the *jisha* for any reason while you are on the line, *gassho* to the *jisha* who will take you to a quiet spot so you can speak without disturbing the others. During *zazenkais* and *sesshins* dojo leaders and cooks have priority as they need to get back to their jobs. If someone stands beside you at the head of the line, ring the bell for them and let them go first. Sit down again if you wish.

The ZGWA's Activities

Weekly zazen

The ZGWA holds sitting meditation every Thursday evening from 7.00 to 9.00pm in the hall behind St Paul's Anglican Church at 162 Hampton Road, Beaconsfield, W.A. On the first Thursday of the month there is a Dharma talk by the teacher or a Sangha member. On the second and fourth Thursdays of each month there is zazen and dokusan is offered, and on the third Thursdays all present sit four rounds of *zazen* and participate in chanting. When there is a fifth week in the month students have the opportunity to engage a Dharma sharing.

Zazenkais: days of extended practice

The Zen Group of Western Australia holds regular *zazenkais* throughout each year. They commence at 10am on Saturday mornings and conclude at 6pm on the same day. The schedule includes opening words by a teacher, zazen, dokusan, chanting and a Dharma talk by a teacher.

Sesshins

Sesshin is a Japanese term meaning to settle the mind, to touch the mind and to convey the mind. It is used in Zen Buddhism to describe intense periods of zazen meditation and dokusan that take place over a period of days, traditionally seven. Presently, the ZGWA holds two sesshins each year: the non-residential Summer Sesshin in the city of Perth and the residential seven-day Spring Sesshin in Balingup, in the South West.

Intensive Practice Periods

Intensive Practice Periods, led by Mari Rhydwen, allow for extended practice amidst the activities of everyday life. They are non-residential and held within the environs of Perth city. In addition to the regular Thursday zazen at St Paul's dojo in Beaconsfield, participants gather on a number of evenings after work and attend zazenkais on weekends. The schedule during the Intensive Practice Period includes formal zazen with dokusan, chanting, as well as talks, discussion groups and workshop activities which include homework!

Bushwalking retreats

At times the ZGWA provides wonderful opportunities for Zen practice while walking and camping in a beautiful area of nature. As well as walking, preparing meals and camping in silence, the retreat includes periods of zazen, dokusan and a Dharma talk.

Library access

The ZGWA has a good range of books in its library cupboard at the back of the dojo at St Paul's Church Hall, in Beaconsfield, for use by members who have paid their annual subscription.

Social gatherings

The ZGWA nurtures and celebrates its sense of community with regular social gatherings. These include screenings of Zen-related films with shared refreshments, as well as soirées, which are evenings of music, poetry and stories performed and enjoyed by Sangha members.

Fundraising

Samu or work practice is an integral part of Zen training and there are many ways in which to offer time and effort to help the group. One major way is to assist with planning and organisation as well as volunteering at occasional fundraising events which keep membership and retreat fees at a minimal.

Registering for the ZGWA Activities

To find out more about any of the ZGWA events, go to www.zgwa.org.au and click on the menu bar. You can also register to receive monthly newsletters and a quarterly journal on the website.

Membership of the ZGWA

Becoming a member or renewing your annual membership of the group helps to sustain Zen practice in WA. Fifty percent of the funds raised through membership go into a Dana fund for our teacher(s) and the balance goes towards covering the rental and maintenance of the dojo at St Paul's as well as the subsidy of zazenkais, sesshins and other activities.

As a member you have a right to a reserved place and discount for zazenkais and sesshins and the use of the group's library. Moreover, you also have the opportunity to offer your ideas, creativity and energy to the group as you can opt to be on the ZGWA Council for a term of two years and you can vote at general meetings. The annual membership fee is due by the 31st of July. If you would like to join but cannot afford the fees please contact the ZGWA Treasurer.

We have a group of members who pledge monthly, over and above membership. These pledges are vital to maintain the zendo and our teacher, and keep the doors open for everyone. If you can afford it please consider. Pledges can be made throughout the year, or in a lump sum. But this is different from a donation. Pledges are a scheduled payment, and the

Treasurer is notified in advance of your commitment. Regular payments can be made by direct debit into the ZGWA bank account or by cheque or by arrangement with the ZGWA Treasurer.

To become a member or friend of ZGWA, and or to register your pledge, complete a membership form which you can download from the website or collect at the dojo. Please send or give your form and payment to a ZGWA Council member at the dojo or pay through electronic funds transfer. The ZGWA's postal address and bank account details are provided on the form.

Further information and learning about Zen

While training with a teacher and practice within the Sangha is the foundation of Zen practice, there are other sources of information that may be helpful to you in getting started. The Zen Group has available for sale copies of *Taking the Path of Zen*, which is required reading before sitting your first retreat.

Recommended reading list

We recommend that you begin by reading the following books, and any of the other publications by these authors.

Introductions to Zen

Robert Aitken, *Taking the Path of Zen* (North Point Press, San Francisco, 1982)

Shunryu Suzuki, *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind* (Shambhala, Boston/London, 2006)

Charlotte Joko Beck, *Everyday Zen* (Thorsons, London, 1989)

Philip Kapleau (editor): *The Three Pillars of Zen: Teaching, Practice and Enlightenment* (Anchor Books, New York, 2000)

Ross Bolleter, *Dongshan's Five Ranks Keys to Enlightenment* (Wisdom Publications, Boston, 2014)

Learning specific forms of Zen meditation

John Daido Looi (ed.), *The Art of Just Sitting: Essential Writings on the Zen Practice of Shikantaza* (Wisdom Publications, Boston, 2002)

John Daido Looi (ed.) *Sitting with Koans: Essential Writings on the Practice of Zen Koan Introspection* (Wisdom Publications, Boston, 2006)

Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Long Road Turns to Joy: A Guide to Walking Meditation* (Parallax Press, Berkeley, 1996)

Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Miracle of Mindfulness: A Manual of Meditation* (Beacon Press, Boston, 1999)

Sheng Yen, *The Method of No-Method* (Shambhala, Boston, 2008)

Important collections of stories, koans and the history of Zen

The Hidden Lamp: Stories from Twenty-Five Centuries of Awakened Women, edited by Florence Caplow and Susan Moon (Wisdom Publications, Boston, 2013)

Chang Chung-Yuan, *Original Teachings of Ch'an Buddhism* (Pantheon Books, New York, 1969)

Nelson Foster and Jack Shoemaker (editors), *The Roaring Stream* (Ecco Press, New York, 1996)

Andy Ferguson, *Zen's Chinese Heritage: The Masters and their Teachings* (Wisdom Publications, Boston, 2000)

Kazuaki Tanahashi, *Moon in a Dewdrop: Writings of Zen Master Dogen* (North Point Press: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, New York, 1985)

Books on the Bodhisattva Precepts

Robert Aitken, *The Mind of Clover: Essays in Zen Buddhist Ethics* (North Point Press, San Francisco, 2000)

Thich Nhat Hanh (ed.), *For a Future to be Possible: Buddhist Ethics for Everyday Life* (Parallax Press, Berkeley, 1998)

Zen and Poetry

Robert Aitken, *A Zen Wave: Bashō's Haiku and Zen* (Shoemaker & Hoard, San Francisco, 2003)

Two commentaries on the koan collection 'The Gateless Barrier'

The Gateless Barrier The Wu-men Kuan (Mumonkan) translated, and with a Commentary, by Robert Aitken (North Point Press, San Francisco, 1991)

Zenkei Shibayama, *The Gateless Barrier: Zen Comments on the Mumonkan*, translated by Sumiko Kudo (Shambhala, Boston, 2000)

We also have an extensive book and tape library of talks by our teachers that are available to members.

Conclusion

We hope these notes will help you in understanding the practices, forms and rituals of the Diamond Sangha Zen Way. Each and all, they help us to dedicate our whole attention to the real task at hand, which is to become completely intimate with the true matter of our lives.

*Though we find clear waters ranging to the vast blue sky in autumn,
How can it compare to the hazy moon on a spring night?
Some people want to have it pure white,
but sweep as you will, you cannot empty the mind.*

Keizan Jokin
(1268 – 1325)