

Basic Zendo Etiquette¹

Zendo etiquette and forms are offered with the intention of allowing our every activity in the zendo to be an expression of zazen. This practice helps us to support an atmosphere of harmony and mindfulness. Our forms are not meant to be restrictive; in fact, many practitioners find zendo forms and zendo etiquette to be aids in the practice of studying the self.

- Do a gassho bow² after entering zendo³.
We honor the space that supports our practice, and acknowledge our unity with it.
- Always walk with your hands in the shashu⁴ position when entering or exiting the zendo.
This is an expression of reverence for our practice space and for fellow practitioners.
- Walk to your cushion⁵ and do a gassho bow towards your seat. While keeping your hands in the gassho position, turn to the right in the opposite direction and bow again.
The bow towards the cushion is in acknowledgement and greeting to the people already sitting to the immediate right and/or left of your cushion. The bow to the opposite side of the room is done to the person across from you. Even if no one is sitting at these positions, the bow is still done. It can be thought of as a bow to those who have sat in these positions in the past and who will sit in them in the future. It is also an expression of gratitude for the support we receive, and it acknowledges that our practice is done in support of others as well.
- Sit down on your cushion and adopt the zazen posture.
- During the day's first period of zazen, hold your hands in gassho⁶ when the officiating priest walks behind you during the morning greeting. Watch others sitting in the zendo to see when to do this.
- Three rings of the bell indicate the beginning of zazen. One ring (or two rings) indicates the end of zazen.⁷

¹ This text was written as a guide for those practicing in person at Gyobutsuji, but it can also be used by online practitioners as an aid in adopting forms to support practice in their own particular home settings.

² Bow holding both hands together, with arms slightly away from the chest and fingertips aligned with the end of the nose; fingertips are held at about the same height as the nose.

³ Meditation hall.

⁴ Wrap the fingers of the left hand around the left thumb; place the right hand over the left hand and hold the hands next to the place where the ribs meet below the chest, with arms parallel to the ground. See figure 10 below.

⁵ Avoid crossing in front of the altar. We do this out of respect for the enshrined image, which represents our practice done together with all beings. If it is not possible to avoid crossing the altar because of the zendo layout, one should mindfully bow to the altar whenever crossing in front of it.

⁶ Hold both hands together, with arms slightly away from chest and fingertips aligned with the end of the nose; fingertips should be held at about the same height as the nose. Just stay in gassho until the priest passes and do not bow.

⁷ Two rings indicate the beginning of kinhin (walking meditation). There will be only one ring to end zazen if there is no kinhin

- When you hear the bell(s) to end zazen, do a gassho bow while sitting at your seat.
- Stand up, fluff your cushion, and again bow towards your cushion and to the opposite side of the room.
- Holding the hands in shasu, stand in front of your cushion facing towards the center of the zendo.
- When everyone is standing in front of their cushions, turn 90 degrees to the left and begin kinhin⁸ (walking meditation). Practitioners space themselves evenly apart in the zendo, walking slowly with hands in isshu.⁹ If you need to use the bathroom or leave the zendo for any reason, now is the time to exit.¹⁰
- When you hear the bell to end kinhin, walk back to your seat at a normal pace. As before, when you reach your seat, bow towards your cushion and then towards the other side of the room before sitting down for zazen.
- After the bell rings for the final period of weekday morning zazen, all chant the Robe Chant while sitting at their cushions in gassho.¹¹
- After the final period of zazen (and chanting, if applicable), stand up, again fluff your cushion and bow towards it, and then bow towards the other side of the room. Stand in shasu in front of your cushion, facing the center of the zendo.
- With hands in gassho, all chant the four Bodhisattva Vows.¹²
- After chanting and before exiting, all do a bow with their hands in shashu. The person farthest from the door exits first, followed by the next closest and so on.

Robe Chant

Great robe of liberation,
Formless field of virtue,
Wearing the Tathagata's teachings,
We vow to free all beings.

DĀI ZĀI GE DĀ PU KŪ
MU SŌ FU KU DĒN Ē
HI BU NYO RĀI KYŌ
KŌ DO SHO SHU JŌ

⁸ See "About Kinhin" below for detailed instructions on how to do kinhin

⁹ Isshu is the same as shashu but the left fist is turned thumb side toward the chest. The left fist and the thumb are parallel to the floor and not vertical as in shashu. See figure 9 below.

¹⁰ As others move into position to do kinhin, do a bow with your hands in shasu and exit the zendo. You can return to the zendo anytime before the three bells ring to do zazen.

¹¹ If you have a rakusu or okesa, place it on top of your head while doing the Robe Chant. After the chant, put on your rakusu or okesa.

¹² See below for the text of these chants. The chants are done in English one day and Japanese the next.

Bodhisattva Vows

Beings are numberless, I vow to free them.
Delusions are inexhaustible, I vow to end them.
Dharma gates are boundless, I vow to enter them.
Buddha's Way is unsurpassable, I vow to realize it.

SHU-JŌ MU-HEN SEI-GAN-DŌ
BON-NŌ MU-JIN SEI-GAN-DAN
HO-MON MU-RYŌ SEI-GAN-GAKU
BUTSU-DŌ MU-JŌ SEI-GAN-JŌ

How to Do Kinhin

From Opening the Hand of Thought by Kosho Uchiyama

[With your hands in the isshu position] straighten your posture, making sure your neck is also straight. With your line of vision falling about five or six feet in front of you, walk clockwise quietly, starting with your right foot. Take one step for each complete breath.

One step, however, actually means advancing only about half the length of your foot, as shown in Figure 11 [below]. Don't slouch or look up and down or to the left and right. Don't shift your shoulders and chest. Your walking posture should appear as if you were standing in one place. Walk quietly without dragging your feet.

Always look straight ahead, and when you have to turn due to the configuration of the room, always turn to the right. Just as zazen is the way the Buddha sits, kinhin is the way the Buddha walks.



Figure 9
Isshu



Figure 10
Shashu

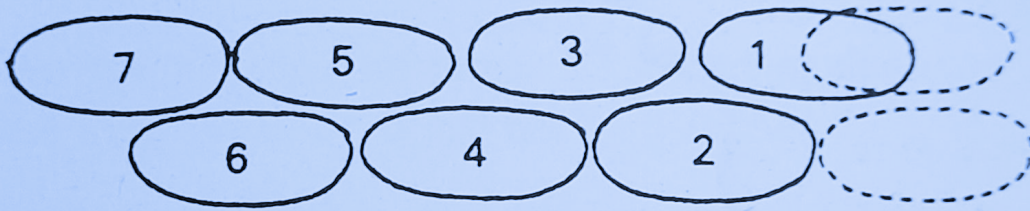


Figure 11