

Instructions for beginning *zazen*

It may seem unusual to find instructions for Zen meditation (*zazen* in Japanese) in a cookbook. But that's unusual only if you don't recognize that *zazen* is the essential ingredient in everything that the *tenzo* cooks. If you want to get the full spirit into the food, this is your starting point.

Why do *zazen*? One answer is that the work of Zen training is to resolve all forms of duality, including our false sense of separation. Such training changes, for example, how a cook connects with ingredients, with kitchen equipment, with the weather of the day, with the people to be fed. Resolving duality doesn't happen just by thinking about it. But you can ask your body to figure this out. Have your breath and bones become the instrument for doing the work.

I have never seen a student yet who sits down for their first experience with *zazen* and says, "Wow, this feels so natural." Expect some degree of discomfort; we don't usually sit cross-legged on the floor without moving. My goal here is to get you started so that your body can learn *zazen* over time in the most efficient way possible.

There are dozens of critical elements to the dynamics of meditation we could talk about, but most likely your breath, your muscle and bone, are not yet ready to understand many of the things that will develop over time. If you stick with it, you'll need conversations with senior students and teachers to guide you further.

The essence:

- 1) Use your body to create a pyramid, a stable base, on the cushion.
- 2) Generate a physical sensation that your whole body is suspended from the ceiling
- 3) Exhale long and inhale short, counting those exhalations physically but silently up to the count of 10 and then repeating the count.

More specifically:

Base: Sit on a small cushion atop the bigger cushion such that your hips are slightly elevated. Build a stable position so that your body feels balanced in the field of gravity as much as possible. Create a base for the pyramid: coccyx/tailbone and two knees. If your knees can't yet land firmly on the big cushion, place extra cushions under them so you feel as solid in front as you feel behind.



For your hand position: the right hand grabs the joint of left thumb. Then roll the two hands together and let them come down and rest below the belly button. It may feel odd at first, but this hand position eventually ties together breath and body. Keep your eyes open in a panoramic view and your senses alert.



step 1

step 2

step 3

Suspension: Feel a slight lift from the crown of your head as if suspended by a wire from the ceiling. Then ask your body how that sense of suspension relaxes and lengthens your neck and back, and how it rotates your pelvis.



not suspended



suspended

Once you begin sitting, keep this base and suspension, without allowing other movements.

Physical breathing: The work of *zazen* is in the breathing. Emphasize making a long exhalation. Make it as long as comfortably possible and no longer. Then steal an inhalation as you would when singing. Lips are closed, breathing in and out through nose. Count each exhalation, starting from one and going to ten. When you lose your count, come back to one.

As you exhale, count it physically in your body, a different sensation than just thinking about your count. All this is done silently but if you are alone, it is useful

to first start counting/ exhaling aloud – loudly – to feel the sound in your body. Then re-create that feeling without sound internally, breathing in and out through the nose.

This can be your starting point.

The basic introduction shown here was written by Gordon Greene and is taken from the book *A Feast of the Senses* by Patricia Greene, published privately in 2017. You can find a much more detailed explanation in Chapter Three of *Introduction to Zen Training* by Omori Sogen.