

WHAT TO EXPECT IF YOU ARE NEW TO RING OF BONE ZENDO

If it's your first visit to Ring of Bone Zendo, this document should help you get oriented and enjoy your time with us. Those who are new to Zen practice will encounter many new terms and forms, and it can feel confusing. Just do your best, and follow along with what others are doing. Don't worry about getting the forms "right" your first time. Everyone here was once a beginner.

If you're interested in coming to visit the Ring of Bone Zendo, the first step is to contact one of our members at 530-346-7782 or by email at members@ringofbonezendo.org. They can answer questions and tell you how to locate us. We don't publish our address because we share property with others and want to protect their privacy.

Let's start at the parking area. We park in the upper parking lot and walk down to the zendo, unless we have physical conditions that prevent us from doing so; in that case, there's a lower parking area that can be used. As you walk down the hill, you'll come to a turn for a residence on your left. Continue past the turn, and the zendo will be visible to your left as you continue down the hill another hundred yards or so. The zendo sits at the edge of a large meadow.

A deck wraps all the way around the zendo. Remove your shoes before stepping up onto this deck, and place them on the shoe rack located at the front of the building. If it's your first time at the zendo, arrangements have most likely been made to give you an orientation. If for some reason that hasn't happened, here's what to expect:

When You Arrive

Longtime members of the group usually arrive early to get the buildings and grounds ready for ***zazen*** (sitting practice). People will likely be sweeping the decks, raking the grounds, cleaning, and getting a fire ready in the ***dojo*** (sitting hall) and ***hojo*** (teacher's hut) when the weather is cold.

Start of Sitting

A loud ***densho*** (bell) will begin ringing ten minutes before the scheduled time to begin zazen. We cease our conversations and socializing and observe silence once this bell starts to ring. This is the time to finish up whatever task you are doing and take a seat in the dojo.

Finding Your Seat

As you enter the dojo, pause just inside the door and do a standing bow towards the altar. Find a seat and bow toward it, then turn and bow facing the room before you sit down. There are extra sitting cushions and support cushions in the back corner of the dojo, as well as chairs on the east deck if you prefer to sit in a chair.

Leaders

We have four leaders in the room to help us in our zazen and chanting practices. There is a **Tanto** who serves as our practice leader, a **Jikijitsu**, who keeps the time for our zazen periods and leads us in **kinhin** (walking meditation), a **Jisha** who serves as our teacher's attendant and facilitates our individual time with our teacher, and an **Ino** who leads our chanting.

Zazen

Our sitting blocks are divided into half-hour periods, with 25 minutes of zazen followed by five minutes of *kinhin*. The Jikijitsu will ring the **shijo** three times to begin the 30-minute round of practice.

Kinhin

After 25 minutes, the timekeeper will ring the bell twice to signal the beginning of kinhin. Bow, rise from your seat, and stand in front of your cushion. The timekeeper will clap wooden blocks once to signal the beginning of kinhin. You will then bow, and immediately turn to your left and follow the person in front of you in a line. Space yourself about an arm's length away from the person in front of you. Continue your meditation practice as you walk. The jikijitsu will clap the clappers again, and the line will speed up. Stop in front of your seat. At a silent signal from the jikijitsu, the group will bow together. Sit back down for another 25-minute period. Sometimes we face the wall and other times face the center of the room; just follow what others are doing.

Bathroom

If you need to relieve yourself or get a drink of water, kinhin is the time to do so. Begin the walk as described above, and the first time you come to the main door, give a quick bow and step out the door. When you return to the dojo, wait at the door until the jikijitsu gives the silent signal for everyone to bow. Bow with the group and return to your seat.

Wednesday Evenings

On Wednesday evenings, we do zazen starting at 7:00 PM, ending at 9:00 PM. We end the evening with the chanting of sutras.

Sunday Mornings

On Sundays we have sutra service during the first sitting period (9:30-10:00 AM). Zazen ends at noon. You will be given a sutra book so that you can follow along with the chants we do.

Dokusan

Some members have established a working relationship with our teacher, Nelson Foster. If he is attending zazen that day, he will almost always offer **dokusan**. Dokusan is an opportunity for a brief one-on-one meeting with the teacher. You'll notice folks leaving and returning to the dojo during some of the periods when this is occurring, as they depart to or come back from dokusan.

Our Practice Forms

If you are new to a meditation practice, or just new to the Ring of Bone Zendo forms, give yourself time to learn the forms. We use the forms so that we can maintain silence and settle into our meditation practice. If you have questions, we have members who would be happy to meet with you to answer any questions you may have.

WHAT TO EXPECT DURING THE PANDEMIC

*We are conducting most of our activities outside during the pandemic. As you approach the zendo, you will notice pallets on the ground in the area in front of the zendo. You will need to bring a tarp, pad, and cushion to sit on or can use chairs we have available. We have modified our forms somewhat to work in this outside setting. We maintain at least six feet of social distancing, and rain cancels our normally scheduled zazen. For more details, see our **Pandemic Protocols**.*