

# Zazengi: How to Sit

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Studying Zen means practicing zazen. A quiet room is good for zazen. Spread out a thick mat. Do not let drafts or vapours enter. Do not let rain and dew leak in. Take care of the space you are in. There are traces of those who have sat on the Diamond Seat and those who sat on slabs of stone, but all of them used a mat of wild grasses.

The place for zazen should be bright, not dark, both day and night. It should be warm in winter and cool in summer. Shed all entanglements and stop doing this and that, the ten thousand things. Don't think of good. Don't think of bad. It is not a matter of mind, intention, or consciousness; it is not a matter of thoughts, ideas, or perceptions. Zazen is not self-consciousness or self-contemplation. Don't sit to become a Buddha. Release ideas of sitting and lying down. Eat and drink moderately. Do not waste time but practise zazen as if your hair were on fire. Study the example of the Fifth Ancestor on Huangmei shan, who did nothing other than simply practice zazen.

When you practice zazen wear the kesa and use a round cushion. The cushion does not go under the thighs; it goes under the buttocks. Place the front edge of the cushion under your buttocks so that when you cross your legs they rest on the mat. This is the way that the Buddhas and Awakened Ancestors have all sat in zazen. Sit in either the full or half lotus posture. In the full lotus, the right foot is placed on the left thigh and the left foot on the right thigh. The toes of each foot should be aligned with the thighs, not extending past or slid down. In the half lotus just put the left foot on the right thigh.

Loosen your robe and belt and keep them neat. Place the right hand on the left foot, the left hand over the right hand. Then put your right hand palm up on your left foot and put your left hand in the palm of your right, the tips of the thumbs touching lightly. The top of the thumbs should be level with the navel. Sit up straight, leaning neither to right nor left, forward or back. Your ears should be aligned with your shoulders, and from the front, your nose in a direct line with your navel. Place your tongue against the roof of your mouth keeping mouth and lips closed. Your eyes should be open and you should breathe gently through your nose. Having aligned body and mind, exhale deeply. Sitting in balance and stillness like a mountain, think of "not-thinking." How? Be "Before Thinking."

This is the essence of zazen. Zazen is not meditation. It is the Dharma Gate of great ease and joy. It is stainless realized-practice.

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