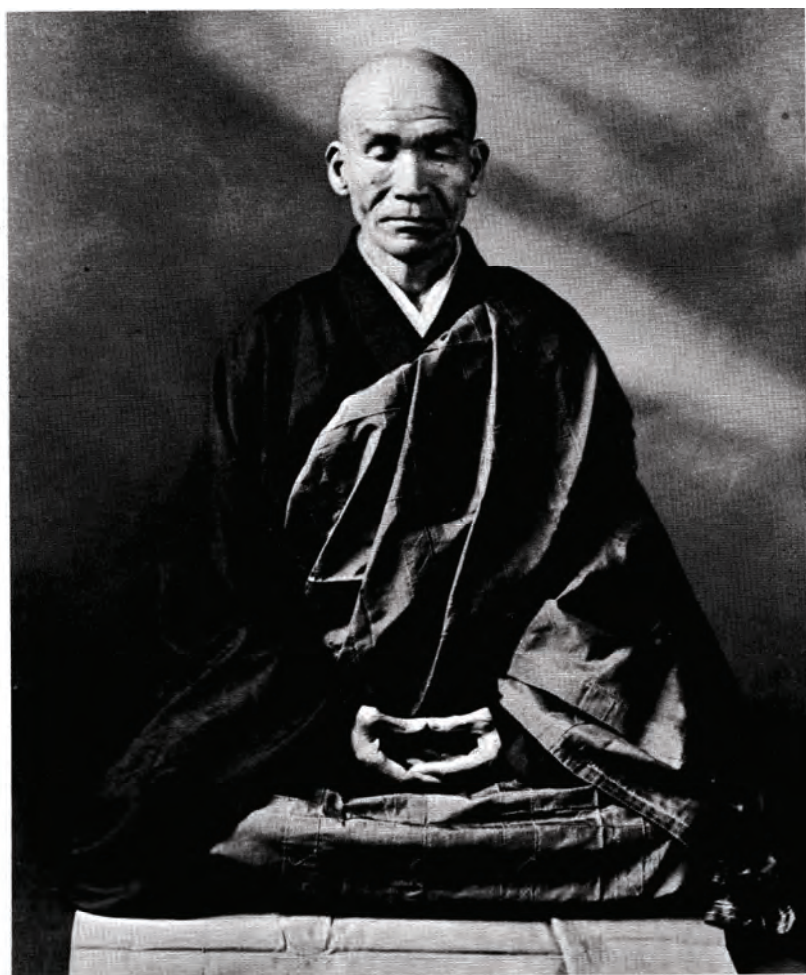


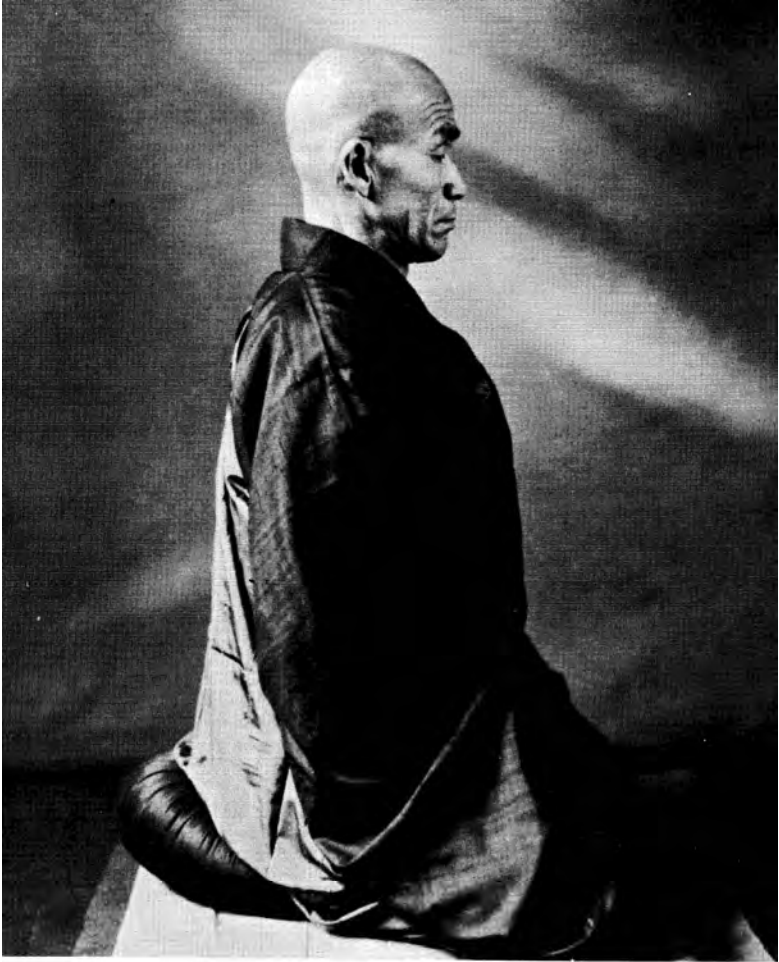
APPENDIX

How To Practice Zazen

(Based on extracts from the book of the same name
by Gudo Nishijima and Joe Langdon)



Master Kodo Sawaki (1880—1965)



Master Kodo (the side)

I. What you Need to Practice Zazen

A. A place to sit

One advantage of Zazen is that it doesn't require much space to practice; one square meter per person is adequate. In his book *Shobogenzo*, Master Dogen said that the following conditions are good for Zazen:

1. Quiet places are better.
2. Wind or smoke should not intrude.
3. Dark places are not suitable: average illumination is best.
4. The temperature should be comfortable; that is, warm in winter and cool in summer.

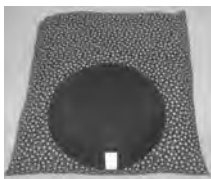
B. A Zafu (a cushion for practicing Zazen)



A zafu is a round cushion which is used for Zazen. Zafus may be of various sizes, but an average sized zafu has a diameter of about 14 inches. The zafu is usually packed with kapok or buckwheat so that it can hold its height of about 2 to 4 inches even when you sit on it. It's possible to buy a zafu in some stores or from shops selling zafus on the Internet.

But a zafu is not always necessary to practice Zazen, and you can use any adequate substitute for a zafu. Folded up blankets, a rolled bed spread, or a fairly hard ordinary cushion can be used instead of a zafu, and many people seem to start that way.

C. A Zabuton



A zabuton is a rectangular mat that is used under the zafu to cushion the knees and legs. A thick carpet or a blanket folded up once or twice and placed under the zafu should also be sufficient for cushioning your knees and legs while you're sitting. The zabuton or blanket should be big enough to comfortably fit your knees.

II. How to Practice Zazen

A. Half lotus posture

Traditionally, there are two styles to practice Zazen: the half lotus style and full lotus style. The half lotus style is easiest for beginners.

First, sit on the zafu with your buttocks resting on the center of it. Then, bend and turn one of your legs so that its outer side is touching the surface of the mat or carpet and the foot is as close to the zafu as is comfortable.

Next, put the foot of your other leg on the opposite thigh. This may be rather difficult for beginners, so if it is too painful, place your foot on the opposite calf or even in front of your other leg at first. As you practice regularly, your legs will become more flexible and loose, and this posture will become easier.

The most important part of Zazen is holding your spine (vertebrae) and neck bones straight up vertically. If you've been sitting for a few minutes, thoughts will naturally arise and you may find yourself bending forward or to the side during Zazen. If this happens, straighten your spine again and try to maintain that posture. This may happen several times while you sit.

Half lotus posture (1)—*Gomaza* (Devil defeating posture)



Half lotus posture (2)—*Kichijozza* (Getting fortune posture)



B. Full lotus posture

The full lotus posture, or lotus posture, is the standard advanced posture for *Zazen*. First, get into the half lotus posture. Then hold your upper foot in place on your thigh and, lifting your upper knee slightly, place the lower foot in front of your other leg. Then, gripping the lower foot with your hand, pull it up onto your upper thigh. Then your legs will be crossed with each foot on the opposite thigh.

This position will be uncomfortable and seem unnatural for most beginners, but with practice it will come to be quite comfortable. It will be easier to sit in this position after practicing the half lotus often to loosen your legs and ankles.

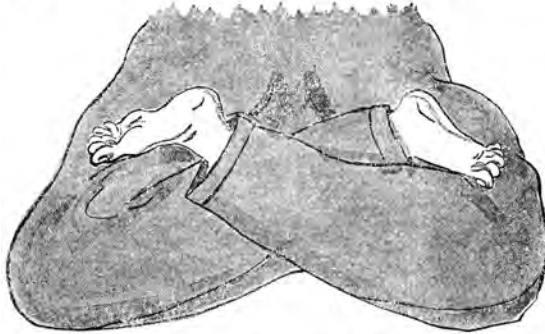
How to cross legs (1)



How to cross legs (2)



Full lotus posture (1)—*Gomaza* (Devil defeating posture)



Full lotus posture (2)—*Kichijoza* (Getting fortune posture)



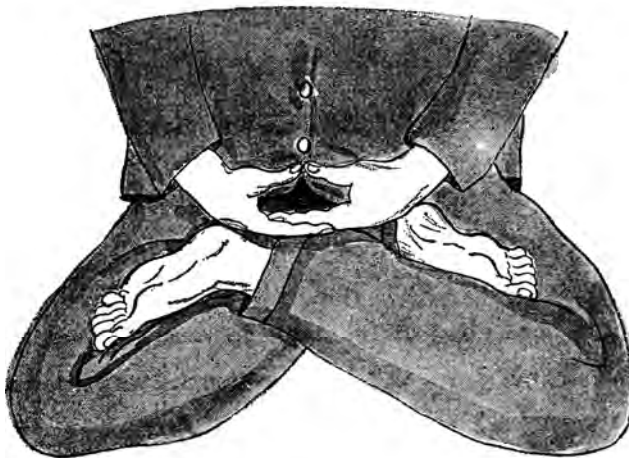
C. Hand placement

The specific position for your hands during Zazen is the same for both postures. When you are sitting in the half or full lotus posture, place the hand that is opposite to the upper leg onto the heel of the upper leg, so that the palm faces up. For example, if your right leg is your upper leg, place your left hand on top of the heel of your right foot, with the palm facing up. Then place the other hand (in this example, the right hand) palm up on the lower hand so that the fingers of the upper hand cover the fingers of the lower hand. Curve your hands so that your thumbs touch and form an oval (thumbs on top and fingers on bottom). Generally, your thumbs will meet at around the height of your navel.



Relax your shoulders, and hold your elbows away from your side, so that your hands, arms, elbows and shoulders are roughly in the same plane.

Full lotus posture (the front)



D. Vertebrae and neck bones

After your legs and arms are in position, make your vertebrae (spine) as erect as possible. You may feel as if this is pushing your buttocks out backwards a little and may cause some non-harmful strain on your hip muscles.

Also, try to hold your neck vertebrae erect. To do this, pull your chin back a little and pretend that you are trying to stretch the top of your head to the ceiling. While doing this, keep yourself as relaxed as possible.

When we are doing Zazen our vertebrae should not be bent forward, backward or to the left or right. To check this, you can make sure that your nose is roughly on the same line as your naval, and your ears are roughly on the same line as your shoulders.

To keep your vertebrae and neck bones straight vertically is the most important matter in Zazen and is, in fact, the essence of Zazen.

E. Mouth

Close your mouth, fix your tongue to the roof of your mouth and keep your lips and teeth together. Breathing should be done through the nose.

F. Eyes

Keep your eyes open naturally; there's no need to open your eyes unusually wide or to half close your eyes. Keep your eyes focused naturally about one meter or so in front of you.

G. Beginning Zazen

We usually practice zazen facing a wall. Place your zafu on your zabuton or folded blanket so that your head and shoulders are about one arms length from the wall. After you've crossed your legs and placed your hands in the traditional style, take a deep breath and sway your upper body two or three times to the right and left. Then make your vertebrae erect and start Zazen.

When many people have come together to practice Zazen, traditionally a bell is struck three times as a sign to begin. If you're practicing at home, you may want to use a watch or timer or burn a stick of incense to keep time.

Sometimes people recommend us to practice abdominal breathing or to deliberately count the number of breathes when we do Zazen. But these methods are usually unnecessary and may interfere with the natural situation of Zazen.

H. Finishing Zazen

When you finish Zazen, just remain quiet and calm for a few moments. Don't be in a hurry to stand up. If your legs have gone to sleep, move them enough to cure them completely and then stand up slowly. If you're practicing with a group, the bell will be struck once to signal the end of Zazen.

III. Some Comments about Zazen

A. Zazen is enlightenment itself

Some schools of Buddhism teach that Zazen is a method to reach enlightenment. But actually, when we do Zazen we immediately sit in the same condition of body and mind as Gautama Buddha, the founder of Buddhism, and in a sense there is no difference in this condition between experienced Zazen practitioners and beginners. Master Dogen said in his book *Shobogenzo*, “Zazen by a beginner is also the whole experience of the fundamental truth.”

A person who is practicing Zazen will acquire confidence in him or herself through Zazen. When we sit in Zazen for one minute, we have already become Buddha for one minute.

B. Don't worry about your thoughts or images

The substance of Zazen is not to think. So we should avoid having intentional thoughts and images. But when we practice Zazen we will often find ourselves thinking or imagining something. We need not worry about this. As soon as we find that we are thinking or imagining, we should just try to stop doing so. Master Dogen said: “When images occur, stop them immediately. And that is all.”

There are two sides to our thinking during Zazen. First, the fewer thoughts we have the better our condition feels. On the other hand, thoughts arise from our unconsciousness when we have let go of our mental restraints in Zazen. Therefore, the arising of thoughts is useful in liberating us from unnatural conditions of our body and mind and restoring our natural balance. However, at the same time it would be misunderstanding this process to deliberately pursue our thoughts or fantasies during Zazen.

IV. Zazen and Daily Life

A. Practice Zazen everyday

Correct posture and regular daily practice are the keys to a healthy *Zazen* practice. The effect is greatly reduced if there is an interval of a few days between practice days. Sometimes people will practice *Zazen* rigorously for 10 to 20 days at a temple; and while it is of great value to wholeheartedly and deeply experience *Zazen*, the true meaning of *Zazen* emerges only from our everyday practice.

If you practice *Zazen* before going to bed, your sleep will be more comfortable and you'll wake up more refreshed the next day. If you then do *Zazen* just after getting up or washing your face in the morning, and continue this practice every day, you will be building your life as a Buddhist.

Of course it is also beneficial to practice *Zazen* if you have free time during the day (for example, on Sundays or holidays). People who are busy in the morning and at night may find it easier to practice *Zazen* when they have some free time during the day.

It's also good to adopt the erect posture of *Zazen* during your daily life, that is, when sitting at your desk, drinking, or even while watching TV (without crossing your legs). The essence of *Zazen* is correct posture and so you can greatly increase the benefits of your Buddhist practice in this way.

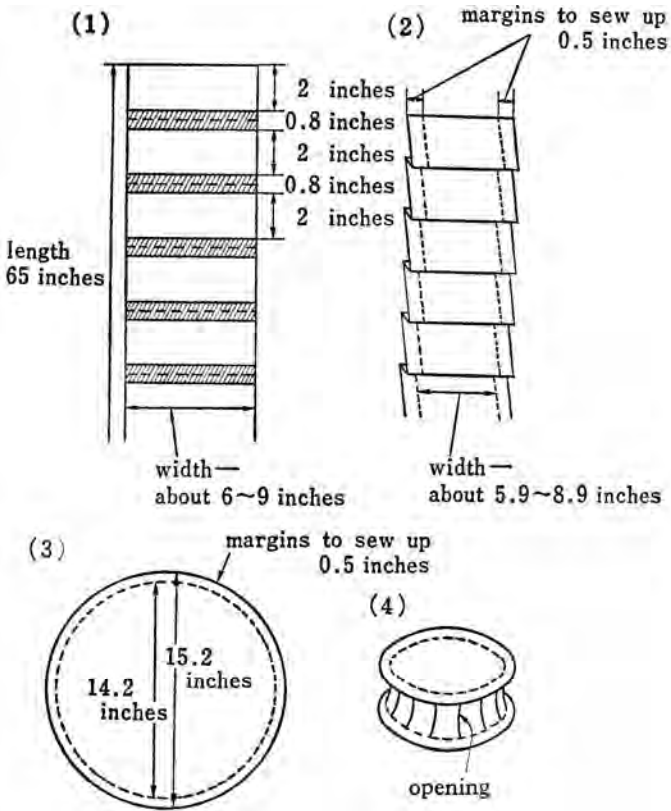
Practicing *Zazen* regularly is the one and only standard for a Buddhist life. In modern society, though, sometimes it can be difficult to find time to practice *Zazen*. But even if we only have a few minutes in a day to practice *Zazen*, the result of practicing *Zazen* for even a short time is infinitely greater than omitting *Zazen*. Regular daily practice is the best way to experience the same mental and physical state as Gautama Buddha.

B. Zazen is not an ascetic practice

Zazen is sometimes considered a kind of ascetic practice, and people feel they should practice under difficult conditions and cut down on their food intake and sleep. But Buddhism is not a form

of asceticism. Gautama Buddha realized that asceticism was not the way to the truth and he discarded it. We can also learn from Dogen's words: "Eating and drinking should be done in moderation," and "to make the room warmer in winter and cooler in summer is very beneficial for Zazen."

V. How to Make a Zafu



Cloths needed

1. A sheet of long cloth – 65 inches in length, about 6-9 inches in width. The width depends on the length of the user's thigh.
2. Two sheets of round cloth – about 15 inches in diameter. A non-slippery cloth is best.

Instructions

- (1) Fold and tack the sheet of long cloth as shown in the diagram.

- (2) Keep both edges of the long cloth (0.5 inches wide each) as margins for sewing up as shown in the diagram.
- (3) Keep the edges of the two round cloths (0.5 inches wide) as margins for sewing up as shown.
- (4) Stitch the three pieces of cloth together as shown, but leave an opening in the long cloth through which to pack kapok or other material as filling for the zafu.
- (5) Turn the bag you have made inside out. Pack it up with kapok or other material so tightly that it holds its height of about 2 to 4 inches when you sit on it.
- (6) If necessary, sew up the opening in the long cloth to prevent the kapok or other material from coming out.