

BRIGHT WAY ZEN CLOUD ZENDO RETREAT GUIDELINES

When doing sesshin from home, you have more flexibility. This can allow you to take care of health issues and/or responsibilities you can't leave behind while you immerse yourself in deep practice. Such flexibility can also be a challenge, though, as you don't have the same kind of support for your practice that you would in the Dirt Zendo, where you are surrounded by others doing the same thing and you support one another with mutual accountability.

It is likely you will have to adapt these guidelines to suit your circumstances, and that's fine. However, these retreat guidelines are meant to help you create a sesshin container at home. Ideally, you can relax within this container - letting go of the judging and decision-making that is necessary in other areas of your life. You can allow the mind to rest. If you can simply accept the forms and guidelines for this short time, the retreat itself will support you: your life will be a potent mix of zazen, mindful activity, discipline, nourishment, rest, challenge and affirmation. The ritual of retreat reminds us that ultimately, we lack for nothing.

Silence

Sesshin is a silent retreat. It is an opportunity to leave our regular demanding work and routines behind and immerse ourselves in silence. There are many different ways to practice silence. We remain silent inside, letting the mind settle for our own benefit. We keep silence outside by not talking or making eye contact. It is important that we keep these types of silence for the benefit of those around us.

Please allow silence to be the rule at all times of the day, including during work periods and breaks. Discuss the importance of silence with others in your household before the retreat; if silence is not possible for the entire household, agree to some house rules that will allow you to practice silently. Before speaking with others in your household during sesshin, consider carefully whether it is absolutely necessary. Write notes instead of talking whenever it is reasonable to do so.

Please keep yourself muted on Zoom for the duration of the retreat.

If there is a problem with the Dirt Zendo audio or visual, go ahead and send a message to the Dirt Zendo Zoom host via the Zoom Chat. If you have other issues or concerns about the sesshin, text the Shuso (their number will be in the welcome email you received about the retreat). Please keep communications to only those that are necessary.

Cell Phones and Electronic Devices

Please use only what is necessary to maintain your Zoom connection. Do not check email or social media. This is suggested not only to give yourself a break, but this gives you the opportunity to watch your mind when you do not have access to your usual activities and distractions. Use a watch or your computer clock to keep time, or just follow along with the signals you can hear from the Dirt Zendo.

Schedule

The main form of practice during this retreat is keeping the schedule and moving together in harmony as a community. Try to be on time for all practice activities and enter the Zoom meeting room muted. Consult the [retreat schedule](#) before joining.

Watching how you react to the schedule can be very helpful; when you are able to surrender to it, you may find your mind and heart become very still. Whether in work, rest, or eating, apply the same diligence you apply to zazen.

In the Cloud Zendo

Setting Up a Meditation Space at Home: Find a quiet place where you can sit without disturbances. Avoid extremes: not too bright nor too dark; too warm nor too cold. Your meditation space should be neat and clean. Use a zafu (round cushion), seiza (kneeling) bench, chair, zabuton (large square cushion), or other materials of your choosing for zazen at home. Place the zafu, bench, or chair on top of the zabuton. It is customary to face a wall during zazen in a zendo, but you can sit anywhere you will not be disturbed.

Please allow yourself to be visible on Zoom at all times you are present unless you have a strong objection to this. Your perceptible presence is a support to others and encourages your own stillness and discipline. During zazen, turn somewhat so you are not facing the camera and your device directly. During chanting, turn and face the Zoom screen that shows other retreatants.

Please chant along with those in the Dirt Zendo. Although Cloud Zendo participants have to remain muted (slight delays in Zoom means your audio isn't synchronized with the Dirt Zendo), the practice is chanting together, not listening to others.

A note on disturbances during zazen: If children or pets enter your zazen space – perhaps they even want to share the zabuton with you – respond skillfully. You may adjust your posture, if necessary, and resume zazen with your visitor. Elevate your camera if necessary to prevent the movement of pets being visible and distracting to others.

Review Your Zoom Setup: Are visual distractions (flickering candles, moving ceiling fans, etc.) visible to others? Face the camera away from any direct light sources. Arrange your camera so you are viewed in profile (from the side) or the back during zazen, so you don't give others the sense you are watching them.

Home Altar: An altar is not required for Zen practice, but it may be helpful to have a focal point for your aspirations. Soto Zen altars usually include a Buddha figure, a candle, a container for burning incense, and flowers. The standard placement is as follows: Buddha in the center;

candle to the right of the Buddha; flowers to the left of the Buddha; incense in the center, in front of the Buddha. You can personalize your altar in any ways you choose: add items with sentimental value, photos, etc. You may also choose to add offerings such as water or food to your altar. Be aware of children and pets: use a rechargeable LED candle, use lavender or other herbs instead of burning incense, and choose non-toxic flowers.

Attire: If you will keep your camera on during zazen, please choose clothing that is not distracting to others; avoid wearing tank tops or clothing with words or pictures on it. Choose loose, comfortable clothing. Before entering your meditation space, take off and neatly arrange your shoes or slippers as we would in the Dirt Zendo.

Be on time: By being on time, we practice gratitude and willingness with our bodies. Aim to join the Zoom meeting room and be in place for all scheduled practice activities a few minutes before they begin (although it is acceptable to join the Cloud Zendo at any time, you may want to practice timeliness as part of your retreat discipline). Please remain muted on Zoom at all times to minimize disruption to others.

Moving in the Cloud Zendo: When practicing in our homes, we determine our level of participation in Zen forms. You may choose to bow as you enter your meditation space, as we would bow entering the Dirt Zendo. You may also choose to bow once at your meditation seat and turn to bow to the sangha (toward your camera) before sitting. When walking through your home, you may choose to maintain shashu hand position (thumb inside left hand, right hand cupped over the left) as is common in the Dirt Zendo when hands are not in use.

Once a period of zazen has started, please try to stay as still as possible. The quiet of the mind is in part dependent on the quiet of the body. However, feel free to adjust your position as necessary to prevent pain or injury. Plan your adjustment carefully so that there is one complete change of position rather than a lot of small adjustments. You are welcome to stand up at your seat for part or all of a meditation period in order to relieve discomfort or drowsiness, but try to stay still while you do so.

Some zazen periods will consist of two 20 or 25-minute periods with a posture adjustment bell in the middle. Posture adjustment will be marked by two quick rings on a higher-pitched chime, and at that point you're welcome to take a minute to change your sitting position. When it's time for kinhin, the timekeeper will ring a lower-pitched bell once and announce "kinhin." The end of zazen is marked with two rings on the bell as usual.

Keep your zazen area neat; the cleanliness of the sitting area is meant to be a reflection of a clean and clear state of mind. Tidy your sitting area every time you leave it, except when you get up for kinhin. (Kinhin is a continuation of formal meditation, so you are not officially leaving the zendo at this time.) When you leave the Cloud Zendo (leave the meeting room), place sitting equipment on top of your zabuton, along with neatly folded blankets or personal items. We should take care of our home sitting area as we would in the Dirt Zendo.

After practice, the Shuso will announce a formal exit from the Dirt Zendo or other instructions. At the end of zazen or chanting, straighten your sitting area by brushing off your cushion and stacking items neatly. You may choose to bow to the sangha (toward your camera) before leaving the Cloud Zendo if you are leaving the Zoom meeting room.

Chant book: The full BWZ chant book and other chants are available for download here: [Our Chants - Bright Way Zen](#). Links to chants used specifically for sesshin can be found here: [Sesshin Schedule and Resources for Participants](#)

If you have a chant book or print any chants to use during sesshin, treat the texts with the same reverence you have for the teachings: Hold them in both hands while chanting, or place neatly next to or under your chair if you are not using them.

Meals

Unfortunately, it does not work well for the Cloud Zendo to join the Dirt Zendo during meals, as the Dirt Zendo meals take a long time due to passing food and oryoki items in a large group (you would end up sitting watching your food grow cold).

You are encouraged, however, to eat your meals silently and formally. You may wish to use the oryoki style; see the Cloud Zendo Retreat Guidelines for more about assembling your oryoki set. You can also view a full video demonstration of oryoki by Domyo ([click here](#)).

Oryoki at home: Oryoki practice requires us to eat everything we place in our dishes; plan your meals at home accordingly. Prepare ingredients or full meals in advance. Unwrapping the oryoki set and serving food is part of the practice; wrap your home oryoki set in advance and use separate serving dishes. Use a separate small dish for food offerings at lunch. Use a small spatula and rag for cleaning the bowls after eating; also prepare warm water in advance and keep it in a thermos/pitcher during the meal. After washing your bowls and utensils, drink the wash water or empty it into the water offering bowl. After the meal ends, you may use the wash water for plants and compost the food offering.

Home oryoki equipment list: cloth to wrap bowls and utensils; utensils (fork/chopsticks, spoon, spatula); 3 bowls (preferably large, medium, and small); napkin; drying cloth; serving dishes (already filled with prepared food); offering plate for food; offering cup for water (large enough to contain wash water); insulated container for warm water; cup for drinking water/tea.

Breaks

During breaks, feel free to rest or go outdoors. Participants are strongly encouraged to take up the practice of letting go of words, including reading and writing. If you choose to read, please read only Dharma material that keeps you focused on the present moment. Practice mindful awareness and silence even during breaks, trying to maintain inner stillness even between sessions in the zendo.

Thanks for coming together for sesshin. Sit well.