

Dharma Field Sesshin Orientation

Genzo-e 2008 • September 10–14

What is Sesshin?

Sesshin is an extended meditation that includes sitting meditation, chanting, oryoki (a formal, meditative way of eating), daily talks by the sesshin leader, and a meditative work period. During this Genzo-e (study) sesshin, time will be allowed for reading and studying “Bussho” from Dogen Zenji’s *Shobogenzo*.

Sesshin literally means, “collecting the mind.” During sesshin, or at any time in our daily lives, turning our full attention to the activity of the moment is to collect the mind. This means when it’s time to eat, just eat, and when it’s time to sit, just sit. Usually when we do a given activity, our attention is elsewhere. The quiet environment and simplified schedule of sesshin is conducive to mindfulness and concentration.

Sesshin is an opportunity to cultivate concentration and awareness. It is an opportunity to step back and slow down from our usual busy lives, to engage with full attention, whatever it is that we are doing.

Sesshin Activities

The building will be unlocked at 5:00 a.m.

The first morning, please arrive by 5:10 a.m. This will allow sufficient time for participants to select and label oryoki bowls, and place them at their mats.

Participants who arrive the first morning with bedding and toiletries are encouraged to arrive at 5 a.m. so that there is sufficient time to store these items.

Morning Greeting

The morning greeting occurs at the beginning of the first zazen period of each day.

Please take your place in the zendo (meditation hall) before the five-minute bell (5:25 a.m.).

After the doshi, Shohaku Okumura, enters the zendo, starting at the altar, he will walk around the room in a clockwise direction behind the participants with his hands in gassho (palms together). Raise your hands in gassho prior to the doshi passing behind your cushion. Place your hands back in the mudra after the doshi passes.

Kinhin

Kinhin is scheduled walking meditation and is practiced *as* a group. There are two types of kinhin practiced, traditional and fast. The kinhin before each meal is a fast walk, indicated by a quelled bell.

- Be mindful of those around you. Move forward or backward so there is sufficient spacing.
- You may exit for restroom use. Please return to your place in moving line, whenever possible.

Chanting

Hold the chant book in your hands until you’ve memorized the chants.

Chant with your ears.

- There is a meal chant at breakfast.
- *The Heart Sutra* is chanted before lunch.
- There is no chanting at supper.
- Dogen Zenji’s *Fukanzazengi* is recited near the end of the final zazen period on Day 4.
- *The Four Vows* will be sung after the talk on the final day. This will end the sesshin.

Breaks

There are breaks after each meal and following the work meditation.

- You may read, study, and quietly discuss the Genzo-e topic during breaks.
- Do not sleep or lie down during breaks.
- Refrain from going on walks off the Dharma Field premises to avoid interaction with others. Please do not wear robes when outdoors during break.
- Please refrain from elaborate physical exercises. A moderate level of stretching away from public display is fine.

Work Meditation

Work meditation is practiced after the lunch break. Please report to the zendo for work assignments.

Zazen Study Period

The meditation period following the supper break is an optional study period. Please limit study and discussion to the classroom area or out in the garden.

Showers (Day 2 & Day 4)

If you have requested to be on the shower schedule, please bring with you to sesshin, a bath towel and shower toiletries.

Each day that showers are available, a shower schedule will be posted.

The showers are located in the basement of the house immediately to the north of Dharma Field. The shower area has two private showers, each with its own changing room. In addition, one private restroom is located in the shower area.

After your shower, bring your belongings back to Dharma Field. Hangers will be available for drying towels.

Please be mindful of water usage. Showers must be brief so that those who follow will have hot water. Please follow the posted instructions for shower room clean-up.

Please use your time efficiently so that you are on time for the next sesshin activity.

Spending Nights at Dharma Field

The floor in the downstairs classroom is available for men who are spending the night. Women may sleep on the floors in the zendo or library. Please bring your own bedding, sleeping mat, toiletries and towel. Zabutons may be used for matting.

When the wake-up bell sounds at 4:45 a.m., immediately arise. Restrooms should be put to use immediately. Participants not using the restrooms will change clothes and put belongings away, while being mindful of restroom availability.

Women. Please store bedding in the coat room on the shelf above the coat rack. Please make the zendo and library area available by 5 a.m.

Men. Please store bedding underneath the benches in the classroom. Please make the classroom available by 5 a.m.

Use restrooms briefly. Additional grooming may take place during the morning break. When using the restrooms for grooming, please be considerate of those who are waiting.

Please take your place in the zendo (meditation hall) before the five-minute bell (5:25 a.m.).

Additional Information

Sesshin is a group activity; therefore, we require that you stay for the entire duration. If you become ill and must leave, please alert the practice director.

Engage fully in each activity as the schedule dictates.

Please take care of outside personal business before taking up this sesshin opportunity. Except in cases of emergency, please do not make phone calls.

During this sesshin, quiet discussion of the Genzo-e topic is permitted during breaks. Practice questions should be quietly raised with the practice director.

Avoid making eye contact with others during the sesshin.

Wear modest, loose, comfortable clothing of subdued colors. Darks and earth tones are recommended.

We strongly recommend that you do not wear a time piece.

A limited number of community meditation chairs are available for periodic relief. They cannot be reserved. If you must switch to a chair for the remainder of sesshin, please see the practice director during a break.

Practice good hygiene:

- Wash hands after using the bathroom, before food prep, and before meal serving. Please bring a towel for drying hands after washing. You will have a place to label and hang your towel.
- Cover your mouth and nose in the crook of your arm if you cough or sneeze. This will muffle the sound and prevent germs from spreading.
- Please store your tissues in your pocket or sleeve while in the zendo. Please do not leave them sitting on the floor or on your cushion. If using many tissues due to an illness, please consider not attending sesshin.