



Ordinary Mind Zen Brisbane Guide for New Participants

Welcome to Ordinary Mind Zen. This document seeks to answer some common questions about our group and how we organise our practice. Initially when you contact us, please tell us about any previous practice experience you might have and any other relevant information about yourself.

Orientation

When you are ready to come to a group sitting, we will arrange to offer you a short in-person orientation. Orientations are held before an evening sitting by arrangement. You will be introduced to the sitting place and its facilities, how the zendo is arranged, and how to conduct yourself in the zendo. Please ask questions during the orientation, which will be conducted by an experienced member of the group. If joining us by Zoom, we will provide you with guidelines for Zoom participation.

Sitting Times

Our main weekly sitting is held on Sunday evening starting at 6.30 pm and ending around 8.15 pm. Sittings are conducted simultaneously in-person and via Zoom but please attend in-person unless you are in a more distant location. The evening consists of three periods of sitting (*zazen*), separated by short periods for walking meditation (*kinhin*), and concludes with a closing service. Short Dharma talks are given during the second sitting period from time to time. Most sitting periods are 25-30 minutes long and mindful walking practice (*kinhin*) 5 minutes.

Location and parking (in-person sittings)

We meet in the Group Room at the Bardon Counselling and Natural Therapy Centre in Bardon, about 4 km from the CBD. Parking is on the street outside the centre. We will provide more details when your first attendance is arranged. Zoom login details will be provided to those who need to join us remotely.

How to dress

It is best to wear comfortable, loose-fitting clothing in dark or neutral colours, consisting of long pants or skirt, and a shirt or top with sleeves. Avoid wearing shorts, very short dresses, tank or string tops, or shirts with printed messages, bright colours or highly patterned designs. Socks are optional.

Formalities of sittings

The physical Zendo (sitting hall) is a mindful space and following zendo formalities involves mindful attention to what we are doing at each moment. In this way, the sitting practice is supported by watchful attention to our physical actions. Be ready for sitting 5 or 10 minutes early. You can begin sitting as soon as you arrive (whether attending in person or on Zoom) or wait until the wooden clappers announce the start of sitting (the clappers sound for 5 minutes before the start of sitting).

Ways of sitting

In Zen practice, we give attention to sitting posture. You may sit on one or more cushions (*zafu*) in a formal cross-legged position, or in a kneeling posture with use of a kneeling bench or cushions, or in a chair (see the accompanying document on how to begin zazen for illustrations). In all sitting positions, try to cultivate an upright but unstrained posture. In cross-legged positions, it is best if the knees are touching the ground or supported by cushions rather than being held up in the air. The hands form the zazen mudra (left hand cradled over right palm, thumb tips touching). If needed, we can assist you to find a suitable way of sitting. At the physical Zendo we have sitting cushions, benches, and chairs you can use. If participating via Zoom, please give some thought to how you can best sit.

Other principles of sitting

As well as posture, two cardinal principles of sitting are *silence* and *stillness*. Try to observe these to the best of your ability. If you need to move during a sitting, do so quietly and mindfully. The body may take time to adjust to this kind of sitting practice and a little physical discomfort may occur, but do not try to endure excessive discomfort – just move. On Zoom, avoid unnecessary movement or adjustment of your Zoom device.

Is Zen practice appropriate for me?

Since we have a duty of care towards participants, please understand that Zen is not a therapy or a replacement for therapy or for other forms of ongoing treatment. You may speak with our teacher about any condition that might affect or limit your participation, so we can advise you appropriately.

About practice

There are various practices for newcomers in Zen, but basic practice always involves establishing a stable and correct sitting posture (whether on cushions, a bench or chair), cultivating outward stillness and silence in sitting, and directing attention to the inner activity of body and mind. You will find many books that outline the basic principles of Zen sitting, or we can provide you with a set of basic sitting instructions. Soon after commencing sitting with us, we suggest that you arrange a practice conversation with our teacher, Gregg Howard, to individually discuss your practice.

Our Teachers

Gregg Howard is a Dharma Successor of Charlotte Joko Beck and is our resident Guiding teacher. He offers regular one-on-one practice conversations for participants (see below), gives dharma talks, and directs the practice activities of the group. Associate teacher Vince Jensen is a Dharma Successor of Gregg Howard, and leads the Bellingen Zen Group in NSW. He gives talks and co-teaches some events in the Brisbane group.

About Practice Conversations

In Practice Conversations (also called *Daisan* or *interviews*) you will have the opportunity to meet with the teacher to discuss your practice in a short meeting, of up to 15 minutes. This is an opportunity for dialogue, clarification, and guidance. It is best if you come with a question or topic you wish to discuss. Interviews are offered in person on some Sunday evenings during sitting and at Silent Practice Days, and also by arrangement on Zoom at other times.

Silent Practice Days (SPD) and Sesshins

We conduct Silent Practice Days several times a year. These run from 9.00-4.00 on a Sunday with a break for lunch, and include periods of sitting, a Dharma talk, and practice conversations with the teacher if desired. Sesshins are multi-day events, sometimes held in Brisbane and sometimes at a retreat centre outside Brisbane. SPDs and Sesshins are intended for those who have been practising with us for a while and may not be suitable for you in the early stages of your practice. If you have any questions about this, please talk to us.

What commitments do I need to make?

Zen practice requires steady effort and most people find their practice is renewed and strengthened by sitting with others. Particularly during your first six months with the group, we encourage you have practice conversations with the teacher, either in person or via Zoom. It's best if you can establish a regular pattern of attendance, but we recognise that family and work commitments may affect what is possible for you.

Daily or regular sitting practice (zazen) at home is also strongly recommended. At first this might be 10-15 minutes a day, and later on, 20-30 minutes or so.

Cost?

There is no charge for attending the group's regular Sunday sittings, but you wish to put something in the donation (dana) box just near the entrance to assist with rental costs for our sitting room. Those participating via Zoom are also invited to make an occasional donation if you can. After some months of participation, you may want to become a member of the group, with payment of an annual membership fee. We charge for our practice events on a cost recovery basis, but no one is denied access for inability to pay.

Our legal status

Ordinary Mind Zen Brisbane Inc is an incorporated association in Queensland governed by its members. We are registered with the Australian Charities and Not-for-Profits Commission (ACNC) with the charitable purpose of advancing religion.

Keeping the Zendo Healthy

In the interests of everyone, we ask you to attend only if you have no cold or flu symptoms. We encourage participants to be vaccinated and boosted against Covid and Flu. Attending via Zoom is an alternative attendance option.

Recited Text

At the start of the evening sitting, we together recite the "Practice Principles" (see below), and at the end of the evening, there is a short closing service during which a number of texts are read and we dedicate our sitting to others in need.

Caught in the self-centred dream, only suffering.
Holding to self-centred thoughts, exactly the dream.
Each moment, life as it is, the only teacher.
Being just this moment, compassion's way.
(3 times)

We look forward to welcoming you to our group.