

SESSHIN GUIDELINES & INFORMATION

You are receiving this information because you have been accepted to an upcoming sesshin. You should also have received an e-mail with details specific to the particular sesshin, including information about rides, help with set-up, etc. If this is your first sesshin, or you haven't done one in a while, please carefully read through this material. There is also information at www.aucklandzen.org.nz/Home/AZC-Activities/sesshin. If you have any questions contact the Centre.

SESSHIN FEE

Payment is due in full before the start of sesshin unless special arrangements have been made. If you wish to pay via the internet, the AZC account number is 38 9005 035812500. Please add a note specifying what the amount is for, especially if you add a donation for the TSF (see below). **N.B. Our bank no longer accepts cheques.**

Fee for sesshin at Bella Rakha, Aio Wira, (or another rented venue):

Casual Participants, Waged: \$105/day if full- or short-time or \$32/section (if part-time)

Casual Participants, Unwaged: \$90/day if full- or short-time or \$27/section (if part-time)

Supporting Members, Waged: \$95/day if full- or short-time or \$30/section (if part-time).

Supporting Members, Unwaged: \$80/day if full- or short-time or \$25/section (if part-time).

Fee for 2-day sesshins held at Zen Centre:

Casual Participants: \$50/day (\$100 total) or \$20/section (if part-time)

Supporting Members: \$40/day (\$80 total) or \$15 /section (if part-time)

Supporting Members in financial difficulty may apply to Sensei for help with sesshin costs from the Teacher's Scholarship Fund (TSF). Donations to this fund may be made when sending in your fee, and are much appreciated.

CANCELLATION POLICY

Except in cases where urgent medical, personal or business circumstances prevent you from attending sesshin, the sesshin fee will not be returned unless a cancellation is made at least four days before sesshin begins.

PREPARATION

Gradually building up the amount of daily sitting you do before sesshin is a good way to prepare. Regular stretching, yoga or qigong is also helpful. Some people prefer to taper off drinking coffee prior to sesshin to avoid withdrawal symptoms. No coffee is served in sesshin, though black tea is available.

GENERAL GUIDELINES

Introduction

The purpose of these rules, which have grown out of many decades of sesshin experience, is to establish a harmonious, quiet atmosphere conducive to sustained practice. Sesshin is a concerted effort. We work together on the Great Matter, often at close quarters. Every participant who follows these guidelines will be contributing to the strength of the sesshin.

Sesshin Commitment

All sesshin applicants undertake to complete the entire sesshin (or if short- or part-time, the portion of sesshin for which they have applied) when filling out the application form. Please take this commitment to complete the sesshin seriously, both for your own sake and for the sake of others in sesshin. Participants are expected to attend all formal sittings unless sick. If you are too ill to attend a sitting, please ask someone to get word to the Head Monitor. If you feel that you need to leave the sesshin please do not do so before speaking to Sensei in dokusan.

This commitment also applies to part-time participation. If for some reason you are unable to complete the parts of sesshin that you signed up for, please let the Head Monitor know beforehand, preferably prior to the start of sesshin.

Dokusan

The focus of dokusan is your work on the practice and any questions you may have about it, but it is not necessary to have a question. Go to dokusan if you feel it could be helpful, even if you have nothing to say. Dokusan is beyond words. In any event, even if you have nothing specific to discuss yourself, Sensei may have something to say to you. Dokusan is offered 3 times a day and you may go whenever your group is called. It is recommended that during sesshin you go to dokusan at least once a day, as it is, along with zazen and teisho, an indispensable part of sesshin.

Whatever goes on in dokusan is solely a matter between teacher and student and must be kept confidential. This is true in or out of sesshin.

During sesshin do not ask to see Sensei outside of dokusan. She, like everyone else, needs rest. Also, do not leave notes for her. Any practical questions or emergency situations that come up are to be directed to the monitors, not the teacher.

If you are signalled by the monitors during kinhin to go to dokusan, you may or may not go, as you wish. Do not feel any pressure to go; the signal simply means that you may go to dokusan at that time, if you want to.

Take a formal zazen posture in the waiting line and maintain it without moving, except when the line moves up. Sitting in the dokusan line with the knees up is not permitted. A chair in the dokusan line can be arranged if necessary.

Once your dokusan is over, return promptly to the zendo. If you need to use the bathroom or get a drink of water you may do so, but do not go to your room or otherwise delay coming back into the zendo.

Teisho

Listening to teisho is another form of zazen and one should continue concentrating on one's practice. However, if you cannot simultaneously listen to the teisho and concentrate on your practice, then the listening takes precedence. It is OK to move once or twice during teisho.

Kyosaku (stick)

During sesshin the stick is used at the monitors' discretion. If there is any problem with the stick (such as being hit inaccurately, too hard, too soft, too infrequently, etc.) write a note to the Head Monitor. The stick is offered as an aid, and the monitors are grateful for feedback so they can adjust to sitters' needs. If the stick is unhelpful, then you may ask not to be hit.

Yaza

To reserve your seat in the zendo during yaza (late night sitting), place your round cushion towards the front of the mat (that part closest to the wall) with the support cushion on top. Please reserve your cushion only if you will be returning fairly soon, and not while sleeping.

At Bella Rakha kinhin may be done at night inside the hall (exercise space), or anywhere outside, except on the paths under bedroom windows. If you are sitting outside on a mat, be sure to put plastic under it to protect it from dirt.

In the city, outdoor night sitting may only be done in the garden of the Sangha House. Kinhin may be done in the driveway alongside the Centre.

Mats and Cushions

Please be mindful when handling zazen mats and cushions. Cushions should not come in contact with the bare body – always have at least your robe between you and the cushion or mat.

If you are using certain cushions and benches only occasionally, return them when not in use to the cushion storage area so others may use them. You may keep an extra cushion or a bench on the floor in front of you if you are using it every other round. For kinhin make sure your cushions are fully on your mat and out of the way of the kinhin line.

When leaving the zendo for meals, during breaks, or at the end of the day, smooth out your mat, plump up your cushion, and arrange your cushions neatly. Be sure that the near edge of the mat is lined up with the mats to either side of it. You don't need to do this at the beginning of each kinhin, only at the end of a block of sitting.

Work

If you have a question about your work, write your supervisor a note, or if absolutely necessary, speak to him or her out of the earshot and vision of others. If you finish your assigned work early, always check in with your work supervisor for more work.

Bedroom Etiquette

Bedroom windows are adjusted by the first person on the list of room occupants. In winter, windows may be opened a crack for ventilation, but be sure to close when the room is unoccupied so as not to waste energy.

If someone in your room is snoring loudly and disturbing you, it is all right to gently have them turn over onto their side. Since snoring is often caused by sleeping on the back, this may alleviate the problem. However be sure to let the monitors know if the snoring is an ongoing disturbance.

Keep the bedrooms reasonably neat and tidy. Do not sleep directly on your mattress or pillow. If you forgot to bring your own sheets, please ask for some. Bella Rakha charges us for bedding hire, so please cover this.

Do not use a personal alarm clock in your bedroom, except the type that vibrates only, as the normal kind would disturb others. During rest periods or at night be mindful of others who share your room but not your schedule, and enter and exit the room as quietly as possible. Take care with closing and opening doors (your bedroom door, as well as bathroom doors and hall doors); it is possible to move around almost completely silently if you pay attention.

In the same vein, if you are taking vitamins or other pills during sesshin, be sure they are in containers that don't make noise, or take them out when others are not resting or sleeping.

If anyone in your room does not hear the wake-up moktok or warning bell, wake him or her up.

Bathrooms and Personal Hygiene

Please bring your own towel and toilet articles.

Sanitary products are available if needed, and are located in the two main bathrooms in plastic containers with green lids.

In sesshin we do our best to create an environment in which the ordinary concerns and distractions of daily life can drop away. In keeping with this, no one is to shave or use cosmetics (except maybe a perfume-free moisturiser) during sesshin. Similarly, hair should not be shampooed more than once or twice. Hair dryers should not be used as the noise could wake people resting. Keep the hair tied back and off the shoulders. Keeping the eyes down during sesshin plays a huge part in reducing distractions. This also applies to mirrors – avoid looking in them.

Be aware that the close quarters of the zendo make strong body odours and perfumed shampoos, oils, lotions and powders distracting to others. In hot weather be sure to wash each day, use a deodorant and have plenty of changes of clean clothing.

If you need to blow your nose, do so outside the zendo. During formal zazen, this means waiting until kinhin and then leaving the line, although it is all right to wipe your nose quietly and infrequently if necessary. Cover your mouth with the sleeve of your robe when coughing or sneezing. Wash the hands frequently to help reduce the spread of infection, use the sanitiser in the zendo after using a tissue, and dispose of the tissue in the bin provided.

Fire

If the fire is very small, get a fire extinguisher and put it out. There is a fire extinguisher in the kitchen and others throughout the buildings. Check where they are located before sesshin. To use them, pull the pin on the side, aim the nozzle at the base of the flames, and squeeze the handle. Do not use a fire extinguisher on flaming oil on the stove. Simply put a lid, wet teatowel or large flat object on it to cut off the oxygen supply, and turn off the heat source.

If the fire is unmanageable, sound the alarm and get out of the building. At Bella Rakha the alarm is activated by pulling on one of the red alarm boxes near the exits. If the alarm should fail, or at other locations, the alternative signal would be continuous loud strikes on the loudest available object. If possible shut doors behind you to contain the fire.

If you hear an alarm, go outside to the phoenix palm where the outdoor kinhin is done (Bella Rakha), on the lawn outside the hall (Aio Wira), or on the footpath in front of the building (Sangha House or 52 Princes St). One of the monitors will take a head count there. To ensure that the head count is accurate, stay there until released by the monitors.

If when leaving during a fire you find an escape route blocked or filled with smoke, or a closed door that is warm to the touch, immediately take an alternate route. If you must go down a smoke-filled passageway crawl fast and low, breathe shallowly, and cover your nose and mouth with a damp cloth if possible.

Because smoking is a fire hazard as well as a damaging to the body-mind, smoking is not permitted anywhere during sesshin. The smell of cigarette smoke can also be very distracting to your neighbours in your room and in the zendo.

Incense and candles are not to be used anywhere outside the zendo, unless needed due to a power cut (and then only when authorised by the monitors).

Exercise

Exercises are to be done only in the designated exercise area, with the exception of bedrooms between wakeup and morning kinhin, or when all roommates are absent. It is also OK to find a remote spot outdoors, out of sight of others, to do exercise needing more space, such as tai qi.

Everyone is required to attend the afternoon exercise period. If for medical reasons you cannot participate, talk to the Head Monitor before sesshin. (Sometimes an announcement will be made that the exercise period is optional – but assume it's required until you hear otherwise.) During the exercise period wear clothing that is loose and ample enough not to be revealing. Be mindful of what could be distracting to others.

Outside the Zendo

In the event of an emergency situation of any kind outside of formal rounds (fire, accident, someone in distress), respond as needed and notify the monitors at once.

Do not leave the grounds of Bella Rakha/ Aio Wira or the environs of Princes Street/Normans Hill Road (unless you are by prior arrangement sleeping at home). If you feel you need to leave for some reason, check with a monitor first. Be careful not to wander off so far during a break that you can't get back in time for the next

block of sitting. Take a watch with you; it is your responsibility to be back in time. If you get back late, do zazen outside the zendo until the kyosaku is used or until the next kinhin, and then enter the zendo quietly.

If a stranger approaches you, neither ignore the person completely nor get involved in a lengthy conversation. If the person is a tradesman, direct him to the appropriate location and/or find the caretaker or a monitor. If you see someone suspicious on the grounds, or something that causes you concern, especially at night, tell the monitors immediately.

Miscellaneous

Robes are to be worn at all times in public areas, except for work and exercises.

For those not familiar with the chants, copies of the chant booklets are given out before each chanting service. They will be collected afterwards. Further chanting instruction will be given the first day.

Only people whose duties require it should wear a watch during formal zazen.

Water is available during kinhin. Use the cup marked with your zendo seat number.

Leave the adjustment of zendo and dokusan line ventilation to the monitors. Write a note to them if you feel there is a problem with ventilation.

From the second night, after the Four Vows have been recited at the end of the evening sitting, place the hands in the lap for the closing ritual ("Even as night...").

Do not write any notes except to obtain or convey necessary information. All notes outside of routine ones (such as between workers and supervisors, or, occasionally, between roommates) must go to the monitors for distribution, regardless of whom they are for. As a rule, try to keep note-writing to a minimum. If you do need to write a note, print clearly and sign with your first name and surname.

Reading, letter- or journal-writing, texting and phone calls are not permitted during sesshin.

Mobile phones and all other electronic devices must be turned off and put away. Be sure that your family knows that you will not be checking for messages, and give them the emergency contact number, 027 314 9440 (and see website for other numbers). This number will be checked regularly *except at Aio Wira, where there is no mobile coverage*. If you feel like you might be tempted to use your mobile (this includes text messaging), hand it in to the monitors.

As much as possible avoid bringing valuables to sesshin, as the rooms remain unlocked while everyone is in the zendo. If necessary the monitors can arrange for an item to be locked up. at the least be sure items such as mobiles, keys and wallets are out of sight.

The Last Day

There are two dokusans on the last day, in the early morning and mid-morning after teisho. Everyone will get a chance to go to the final dokusan.

Don't pack your bag or strip your bed until after sesshin is over – that means after the Closing Ceremony.

Sesshin ends with the post-lunch samu to clean up the rooms, pack up the kitchen, return everything to the Centre and set up so it is ready for the next sitting. The samu period is an integral part of the sesshin, and usually finishes between 4:30 and 5 p.m. after a 7-day sesshin (or a bit earlier for shorter ones), so please plan to participate in this.

There will be an opportunity at the end of sesshin to anonymously offer Sensei *dana* for her efforts, if you wish. If you would rather do this through internet banking, her personal bank account number is 03 0259 0166261 25.

The Day After

The morning after a 7-day sesshin there is usually an informal sitting 8:30 to 9:30, followed by brunch at a local café. Family members are welcome.

WHAT TO BRING TO SESSHIN

For the zendo bring a sitting robe (and rakusu) if you have them. If you don't have a robe, there are loaner robes available. Pick one out at the Centre **before** sesshin, so you get one that fits well. If you have your own robe, be sure it is clearly labelled with your name, and collect it from the Centre prior to sesshin. N.B. It is up to you to make sure your robe and rakusu get to sesshin.

Be sure that the clothes you bring to wear under the robe are suitable. In hot weather you should have at least a t-shirt on so the stick doesn't sting. In the winter avoid scarves, hooded sweatshirts or very thick fleece, as they will make it hard for the stick to be used accurately. The zendo is kept cool in winter so be prepared with plenty of layers. Pants should be loose-fitting so circulation is not restricted. If clothing is visible, subdued colours are preferable. Robes are worn at all times except for work or exercises. Shawls and hats or other head covering are not permitted in the zendo (a shawl or blanket may be used during yaza only, but the head should be bare).

Clothing with bright or busy patterns, pictures, or writing is not suitable for sesshin work or exercise periods, nor is anything tight-fitting or revealing.

If you need to wear socks in the zendo, make sure they are dark (not white or brightly coloured or with writing on them).

Bring a separate set of old clothes and boots or sturdy shoes for the work period (the work may be dirty). Baggy shorts are OK for work.

Kitchen workers must wear shoes (with covered toes) while working in the kitchen.

Other items to bring: sunhat, umbrella, raincoat, sheets and pillowcase, towel, personal toiletries (no strong perfumes please) including toothpaste, torch, insect repellent (odourless). Also highly recommended: slip-on shoes, gumboots or other waterproof footwear (slip-on is preferable), and eye mask and earplugs if you are a light sleeper. Do also bring one or two containers for taking home left-over food at the end of sesshin.

No extra food or drinks should be brought to sesshin, and no food should be kept in your room. The only exceptions are items absolutely necessary for health reasons, and anything you wish to bring must be OKed by the Head Monitor.

N.B. If you are taking any prescription medicines during sesshin, please remember to bring them, and let the monitors know what you are taking if it is different from what you put on your application.

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