

GREENVILLE ZEN CENTER · ZEN PRACTICE



A Beginner's Guide to Zen

*What to expect, how to sit, and how to begin practice at
Greenville Zen Center*



GREENVILLE · SOUTH CAROLINA · MMXXVI



You are welcome here.

If you are new to Zen, meditation, or sitting in silence with other people, you are welcome here. Greenville Zen Center is forming as a simple Zen practice community in Greenville, South Carolina. We sit, walk, learn, and practice together.

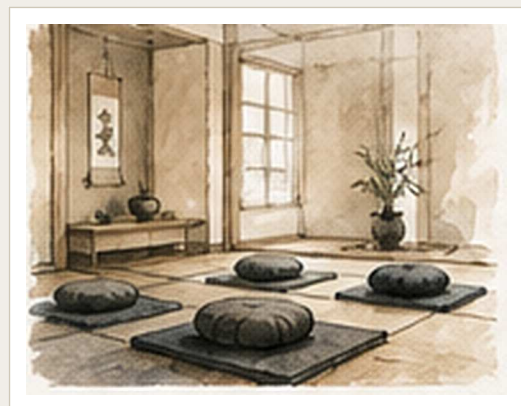
Come exactly as you are. Every background and every level of experience is welcome here, and we will show you what to do.

You can arrive with questions, or unsure, or simply curious. The first step is showing up — and this guide is here so that when you do, you will know just what to expect.

— *The founding circle, Greenville Zen Center*

PRACTICE NOTE

Practice begins with sitting down.





What is Zen?

Zen is a tradition of Buddhist practice centered on *zazen*, or seated meditation. For many centuries it has been passed along in the same simple way — person to person, sitting together.

At Greenville Zen Center, we practice sitting, walking meditation, simple instruction, dharma reflection, and community. The heart of the practice is simple:

Sit upright. Breathe naturally. Let go.

That is the whole shape of it — understanding can come later, because practice begins with sitting down.





What is zazen?

Zazen is seated meditation, the center of Zen practice.

We sit upright, breathe naturally, and allow the mind and body to settle. The eyes stay softly open or lowered. Thoughts, sounds, and sensations come and go, and all of it is normal, all of it is welcome.

To practice shikantaza is to just sit. As Suzuki Roshi put it, when you are sitting, “do not try to stop your thinking. Let it stop by itself. If something comes into your mind, let it come in and let it go out. It will not stay long.” Let thoughts come, without judgment or desire, and let them go. Stay upright, breathe, and let go. Just sit.

PRACTICE NOTE

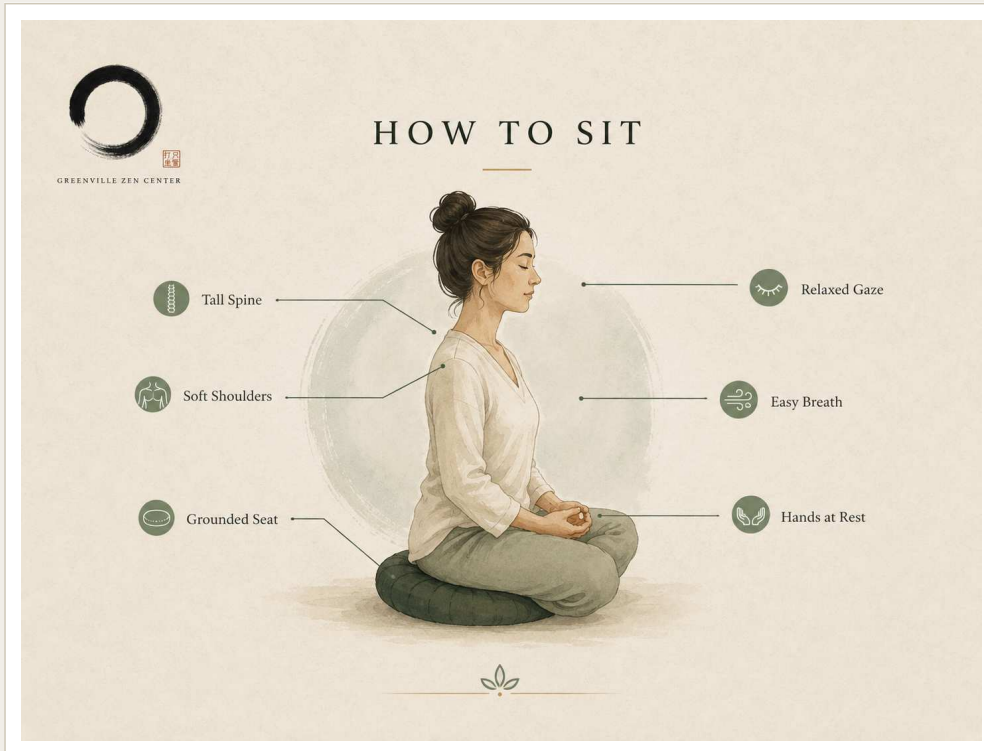
Just remain on your cushion, without expecting anything.





How to sit

Six points of posture: tall spine, soft shoulders, grounded seat, hands at rest, relaxed gaze, natural breath. Settle into each, then let the posture hold you.



CHAIRS ARE WELCOME

Every way of sitting is equally complete — a steady, upright, comfortable posture is the aim.

What to expect on your first visit

Arrive a few minutes early. Someone will greet you at the door, show you the room, and help you find a seat — cushion or chair, whichever suits you.

If you are new, you will receive a short, simple orientation: how we enter, how we sit, what the bells mean. It takes a few minutes, and questions are welcome.

The room may be quiet when you arrive. Silence here is ordinary and friendly — it is part of the practice, and there is room in it for you.

Sittings are free to attend, and everything is volunteer-run. Afterward there is time for tea, conversation, and questions.

PRACTICE NOTE

The forms are simple to learn, and we will show you each one when you arrive.





A morning at Greenville Zen Center



1 ARRIVE QUIETLY

Come in, take your place, and settle.



2 BRIEF ORIENTATION

If you are new, someone will show you where to sit and what to do.



3 SIT ZAZEN

Silent seated meditation.



4 WALKING MEDITATION

Kinhin — a slow, quiet walk between sitting periods.



5 SIT AGAIN

Return to the cushion or chair.



6 TEA AND CONVERSATION

A simple chance to connect afterward.

FORMING NOW

Greenville Zen Center is forming carefully. The intended rhythm is first and third Sunday mornings. Join the interest list for confirmed dates and location updates.





What to wear and bring



CLOTHING

Wear comfortable, loose-fitting clothing. Soft, dark colors are best, without distracting patterns or designs. Please avoid perfume and strong scents, which carry easily in a quiet room.



YOUR PHONE

Silence it before you enter — the room will help you forget it.



SEATING

Cushions or chairs may be available; details will be confirmed as the schedule forms. A chair is always a complete way to sit.



WHAT TO BRING

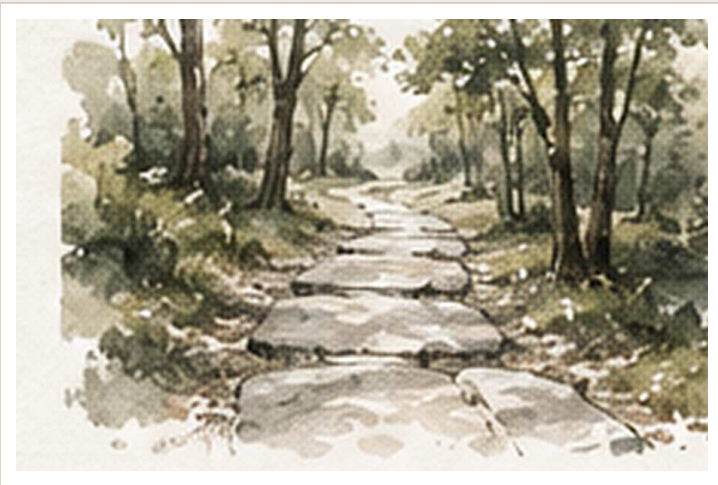
Curiosity, patience, and a willingness to learn. Everything else can be borrowed or taught, and attendance is always free.

Walking meditation

Kinhin is walking meditation, woven between the periods of sitting.

The pace is slow — slower than ordinary walking. The posture is upright, the hands rest together, and the attention stays with the body, the breath, and each step as it meets the floor.

Someone will show you the simple form on your first visit. Until then, it is enough to know: when the bell rings and people stand, you stand too, and walk with everyone else.



PRACTICE NOTE

Walking meditation is practice in motion.

Practice in ordinary life

Zen continues well beyond the cushion.

The sitting room is a place to practice returning. Ordinary life is where returning continues. Zen practice lives in washing a dish, answering an email, listening to someone speak, and taking the next breath.

Many people find that sitting regularly supports a kind of steadiness — a little more room around things. That modest promise is the only one we make — the practice is its own reason.

“To study the Way is to study the self.”

DŌGEN · GENJŌKŌAN



The ensō and the seal

Two small marks appear throughout this guide — a hand-drawn circle, and a red stamp. Each is a quiet reminder.

The circle is an *ensō*, drawn in a single breath of the brush. In Zen it is a quiet expression of the whole — complete, imperfect, and unrepeatable, like a moment of practice.

The red stamp is a seal, the way a calligrapher signs a finished work. Ours reads *shikantaza* — “just sitting.” Wherever the circle and the seal appear, they say the same thing: everything you need is already here. Just sit.



THE VERSE ON THE HAN

In many zendos, *zazen* is announced by the *han* — a wooden board struck with a mallet. On its face, a traditional verse is often written:

*Great is the matter of birth and death.
Life is fleeting, swiftly passing.
Awake, each one — awaken!
Do not waste this life.*

時	光	無	生	Shōji jidai
不	陰	常	死	Birth and
待	可	迅	事	death are the
人	惜	速	大	great matter
				Mujō jinsoku
				Impermanence
				is swift

Kōin oshimu beshi — Time is precious ·
Toki hito o matazu — Time waits for no
one

Common questions

Do I need meditation experience?

Everyone begins somewhere — many people sit for the very first time here, and we will show you what to do.

Do I need to be Buddhist?

People arrive from many backgrounds and traditions, and all of them are welcome. Curiosity is enough.

Can I sit in a chair?

Yes — chairs are welcome, and every way of sitting is equally complete.

What if my mind is busy?

A busy mind is welcome. In zazen we let thoughts come and let them go, without chasing them or pushing them away. A wandering mind is simply part of sitting.

Does it cost anything?

Sittings are free to attend, and Greenville Zen Center is volunteer-run. Any future donations will always be optional.

What if I feel awkward?

Most people do at first, and it passes. The room is quiet, everyone is settled into their own practice, and small stumbles are an expected part of learning.

Is there chanting?

Some gatherings may include a short, simple chant or verse. You are welcome to join, or simply to listen.

Can I come just once?

Yes — come once and see how it feels. You are free to simply visit, and always welcome back.

How do I learn the forms?

Slowly, by doing them alongside others. Newcomers receive a simple orientation, and questions are always welcome after sitting.



A simple practice at home

You can begin before you ever visit. Five minutes is plenty.

- 1 **Choose a quiet place.** Anywhere you can be undisturbed for a few minutes.
- 2 **Sit upright** on a chair or cushion — tall spine, soft shoulders.
- 3 **Let your hands rest** in your lap.
- 4 **Breathe naturally.** Through the nose, unforced.
- 5 **When thoughts come, let them come.** Let them pass through, without chasing them or pushing them away.
- 6 **Come back to posture and breath, gently.** As many times as you like, with nothing to measure.
- 7 **End simply** — one small bow, or a moment of gratitude, if that feels right.

PRACTICE NOTE

Five honest minutes are enough to begin.



About Greenville Zen Center

Greenville Zen Center is a Zen sitting group forming in Greenville, South Carolina — carefully, and in the open.

We are beginning the way most sanghas begin: a few people, a quiet room, a shared intention to practice in the Zen tradition and to learn it honestly. We are lay practitioners, and we draw on the established forms, texts, and teachers of Zen rather than inventing our own. As the community grows, we intend to deepen our ties to experienced teachers and, in time, to be a community that outgrows its founders.

Everything here is volunteer-run, and sittings are always free to attend. Beginners are the point of this community — everything about it is shaped with the first-time sitter in mind. The intended rhythm is sitting together on the first and third Sunday mornings of each month, with dates and location confirmed through the interest list as they settle.

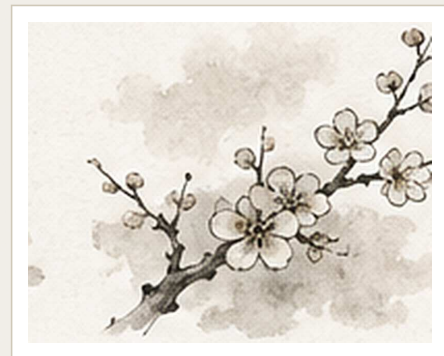


Come sit with us.

- 1 **Join the interest list** — the simplest way to hear when and where we first sit.
- 2 **Read the Start Here page** on our website for more first-visit detail.
- 3 **Attend an upcoming sitting** when dates are confirmed — free, always.
- 4 **Bring questions.** There is time for them after every sitting.
- 5 **Begin where you are.** Five minutes at home counts.

JOIN THE INTEREST LIST

greenvillezen.org · hello@greenvillezen.org



A place to return

Zen practice is simple, and that simplicity runs deep. A quiet room, a cushion or chair, a few instructions, and a community can become a place to return. You are welcome to begin with us.



Meditation practice is not a substitute for medical or mental health care. If you are in crisis or need clinical support, please contact a qualified professional or emergency service.