

幽谷寺

Hidden Valley Zen Center Guidelines for Sesshin

Sesshin is a unique opportunity to bring the mind to a depth unprecedented in normal daily life and offers the potential for clarifying the mind and letting go of attachments even to the point of Awakening. In order to provide such an enhanced environment so conducive to our inner search for true liberation, these guidelines have been established. Please honor them, for the sake of everyone's practice in sesshin.

1. SMOKING is not allowed at any time during sesshin. This means ANYWHERE during sesshin. Smoking immediately before a sesshin **leaves the clothing and skin of the sesshin participant reeking of cigarette smoke and carrying toxic particles into the zendo.** In consideration of others at the sesshin, PLEASE DO NOT SMOKE ON YOUR WAY TO SESSHIN.

2. PLEASE DO NOT USE FRAGRANT SOAPS OR SHAMPOOS DURING OR IMMEDIATELY BEFORE SESSHIN, and REFRAIN FROM COMING TO SESSHIN WEARING PERFUME OR COLOGNE. There are a number of Center members – many of whom come to sesshin – with serious enough sensitivities to odors that it causes these people health problems, including asthma, if you do.

2. PLEASE DO NOT TALK during sesshin. It adds noise to the very mind we are seeking to quiet down. Pads and pencils are placed conveniently about the Center; if you have anything you NEED to communicate, please use them. MINIMAL speech DIRECTLY PERTAINING TO WORK DUTIES is ok. Random comments or general conversation only drags you and others – in or out of earshot – away from their practice and is counter to the purpose of sesshin.

Although during a work sesshin, minimal talking is accepted, DURING THE LONGER SESSHIN IT IS NOT, and if you indulge in talk at the dinner hour, for example, you will only be destroying the hard work you have done on your practice earlier that day, as well as distracting other participants from their precious time to practice.

3. It is the duty of the *jisharyo* and the *jikijitsu* to deal with ventilation, room temperature, and lighting. Do not open or close windows, adjust thermostats, or change lighting unless you are one of the *jisharyo* or have been asked by one of

them to do so. For the rest of us, it is part of our practice to accept the environment and use whatever challenges that may lay in it as stepping-stones to deeper practice.

4. Be on your cushion in the zendo *at least five minutes before the beginning of each formal sitting.*

5. During the break between zazen rounds, please do not stretch your legs out **in front of you**; in Asian countries it is considered insulting to point your feet towards others. Because we have Asian members and because we have a deep connection with Sogen-ji in Japan, this is being asked. You can stretch your legs to the side or stand up to stretch.

6. Do not shave during sesshin. Abandon makeup and hair styling as well. However, please take care of normal body hygiene. Especially in hot weather, the use of deodorants is encouraged in the interest of limiting distractions to fellow sesshin participants. Further, please do not wear jewelry other than wedding rings.

7. Water is expensive and scarce in our area. Please be aware and thoughtful in water use. We have had extremely high water bills and have received letters of concern from the water company regarding our water use. Because of the very serious need to conserve this precious resource, showers are limited to TWO per SEVEN-DAY SESSHIN, and ONE per FOUR-DAY SESSHIN. During WORK SESSHIN showers may be taken BUT ONLY IF TRULY NECESSARY; during other TWO-DAY SESSHIN, NO SHOWERS unless absolutely necessary. When showering, please turn off the water while soaping up, and shower as quickly as possible.

When BRUSHING TEETH, please DO NOT LEAVE THE WATER RUNNING.

When WASHING DISHES, please DO NOT LEAVE THE WATER RUNNING. It is possible to get dirty dishes quite clean and well-rinsed without using very much water at all. For years we had to haul water for kitchen use at Mountain Gate, and we learned how easy it is NOT to waste water.

8. Sesshin is cloistered in order to offer the very best environment for practice. Do not leave the property during sesshin.

9. We try to provide meals that are nutritious and tasty. Any food taken into our bowls must be eaten. Bringing extra food to sesshin and/or keeping our own “stash” of private food is not allowed, except in the case of true physical need, in which case it must be discussed with Sensei beforehand and her approval received in order to do so. Part of our practice is to resist our habit patterns of greed, anger, and delusion. The food in the refrigerators is available **ONLY** for the Tenzo’s use in preparing meals. Any food available for supper will be set out in the dining hall. Please respect this and do not raid the refrigerators. Tea, coffee, and macha (green tea for whisking) will be available, and when possible, fruit or juice – especially during hot weather sesshin.

10. Be mindful when closing doors, especially the heavy door at the entrance to the zendo. It is very easy to slam this door, which unduly disturbs the sesshin. If you’re uncertain as to how to close the door without slamming (it can be a challenge), practice beforehand. Attention and awareness go along way in our practice and your fellow sesshin participants as well as your own practice will be grateful to you.

11. Please do not wear a watch during sesshin, unless you are one of those very few people who have certain sesshin duties that require this.

12. The exercise period is **ONLY FOR EXERCISING**, and it is for exercising for the whole period. *This is an important activity for refreshing, regenerating, and deepening our practice.* Recognizing that there’s no “one size fits all” exercise, each person is free to do whatever exercise works for him or her to refresh and center the practice. It can be aerobic or non-aerobic exercise done outdoors: walking, running, calisthenics, tai chi; it can be yoga or stretching done indoors in the zendo. Please do not exercise in the dining hall during this period, as supper is being prepared and set out., and please do not exercise in your room except for early morning yoga stretches.

Thank you for respecting and keeping these guidelines. In this way everyone’s sesshin experience will be enhanced.