

Welcome to O-An Zendo

A Handbook for Zen Practitioners



“The way of O-An is in the falling leaves of autumn
and the bitter winter wind.

It passes, too, through the bloom of spring and a
drop of summer rain.”

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Welcome

Greetings!

Welcome to O-An Zendo. We hope this handbook will serve to introduce you to our sangha (spiritual community) and our form of practice. O-An means “Hut of Harmony” and we hope this beautiful “hut” will be a welcoming, and harmonious, space for you to engage in Zen practice. Within this handbook, we explain how O-An functions spiritually and materially so that you can become familiar with what takes place at O-An. We hope understanding our practices will serve to make the space more welcoming. You are invited to visit the O-An website for additional information: <http://www.oanzendo.org> We look forward to practicing alongside you and working together to sustain this practice and place.

~O-An Board of Directors

Our Mission, Administration, Resident Teacher, and History

Our Mission

O-An Zendo was established in 2003. O-An’s mission is:

- to cultivate the teachings of Zen Buddhism, adapting them to the American culture and experience
- to provide a supportive community and peaceful setting suited to the teaching and practice of Zen Buddhism

- to provide opportunities to apply the teaching and practice of Zen Buddhism to building a more just, beautiful, and sustainable world

Our Administration

O-An Zendo is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. It is financially sustained by the sangha which meets costs for all ongoing activities and for the upkeep of the buildings and grounds. The zendo is available for use by the larger community and those interested in hosting related activities should contact Meido Barbara Anderson at 814-441-9497.

O-An is governed by a three to five member Board of Directors. A list of Board members and officers is posted in the entryway of the zendo. Anyone who has a concern or question about the zendo or its programs is welcome to contact any member of the Board.

O-An is committed to complete transparency in all of its operations and activities. Minutes of each Board meeting are posted in the entranceway, and our by-laws and budget are available for review by sangha members. Board members are members of the O-An sangha who volunteer and serve two-year, renewable terms.

Our Resident Teacher

Zen practice at O-An is largely informed by the training of our resident teacher, Meido Barbara Anderson. She began practicing meditation in 1967 soon after receiving her doctorate in philosophy from Penn State University where she worked as a professor, Director of the Peace Studies

Program, and founder and first Director of the Penn State Center for Sustainability.

Meido began her formal study and practice of Zen with the Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh, receiving the Five Precepts from him in 1994. Thereafter, she studied and practiced in the Soto and Rinzai styles with Dai-en Bennage NiOsho, Genro Lee Milton Sensei, and Jiro Andy Atable Osho.

She has practiced annually at San Francisco Zen Center and has been a resident caretaker and practitioner at Jikoji Zen Center in Los Gatos, California. In the fall of 2010, at O-An Zendo, she received the Ten Buddhist Precepts from her guiding teacher Shoho Michael Newhall, abbot of Jikoji and Dharma heir of Kobun Chino Roshi. She was ordained as a Zen priest in the Soto lineage of Kobun Chino Roshi in April 2011. O-An is one of several Zen centers that are connected through Kobun's lineage. Since Meido's ordination in 2011, five of her students have received the precepts through a lay ordination ceremony called Jukai. Preparing for Jukai involves the sewing of a rakusu, a miniature version of Buddha's robe, intensive study of Zen teachings, and deepening personal practice with the resident teacher. The wearing of a Rakusu during meditation practice is an expression and a reminder of the vow to pursue the Buddha Way.

Our History

In 1978, Meido formed the Extemporary Dance Theatre and taught classes in improvisational movement in her home studio. Meditation and the discipline of being fully present in the moment, which is at the core of Zen practice, was the perfect complement to the study of improvisational dance. Thus, once a week, the dance studio was transformed into a meditation hall and became

home to five Buddhist friends practicing as the Happy Valley Sangha.

As the years went by and the dancers grew older, the emphasis shifted seamlessly from dance to meditation. In 2000, when Meido's home was to be replaced by a highway, she decided to build a zendo as a part of a new life at a new location.

Taking salvaged windows, doors, cherry trees and flat rocks from her home of 25 years, she moved to Julian Woods Community. The dream of building a meditation space was actualized in 2003 when it was appropriately named O-An, or "hut of harmony" and dedicated by her Zen teacher, Genro Lee Milton Sensei.

More About O-An

O-An is a distinctive Zen practice center in that:

- its sangha (spiritual community) is central. Zen practice here aims to meet the ever-changing needs of practitioners.
- it values the traditions of self-reliance and rootedness in nature, celebrates diversity and emphasizes personal freedom.
- it is rooted in the Soto Zen tradition but welcomes a diversity of meditation styles and practice traditions.
- it is situated in the Julian Woods Community, one of five intentional communities in the Mid Atlantic School of Living Land Trust, sharing the a commitment to the health and well being of the entire community of life.

- it is not only situated in the woods, but makes use of natural and environmentally healthy materials and processes in its structures and operation.
- it serves the local community by providing a space for meditation and a venue for: weddings and memorials, community gatherings and celebrations, yoga, t'ai chi, health/healing classes, art workshops, house concerts, and personal retreats.

Arriving at O-An

Please arrive at O-An in comfortable clothes. We encourage unobtrusively colored, simple and message-free clothing, so as to minimize distraction.

Buildings

There are two buildings on the property. The building on the left is a private residence. The building on the right houses the meditation hall, library and small bedroom on the second floor, and an entryway, restroom and residential/social space on the ground level.

Entryway

Please observe silence when entering the zendo. Shoes and all personal belongings (including electronics) can be safely left in the entranceway. You are invited to use the restroom on the lower level prior to and after service, and during walking meditation (kin hin).

Sitting Room and Library

The sitting room is a place for reading, quiet contemplation and personal meetings. It houses an extensive library of books, tapes and periodicals. Sangha members are welcome to borrow materials on the Honor System. After the service, we often have discussions, tea,

and treats in this space when it is too cold to be outside on the attached deck

We encourage the study of Zen Buddhist texts but emphasize the direct, personal experience of zazen (sitting) practice.

Zendo

The zendo, or meditation hall, is the space where the Sunday service, retreats, and other spiritual activities take place. Upon entering the meditation hall, it is customary to bow (gassho) by putting your hands together mid-chest and bowing slightly from your waist. Gassho is a way of honoring the space, acknowledging Buddha nature, and greeting one another from our true selves.

Our regular Sunday service includes incense lighting, bowing, chanting, seated meditation and indoor and outdoor walking meditation (kin hin). The Soto form of practice and its protocols are simple, and we advise coming to a session of Newcomer's Instruction before you begin meditating with the sangha on Sundays.

Sundays at O-An

Practice Team

At 9:40am, 20 minutes prior to the Sunday service, the practice team meets in the zendo to discuss and finalize plans for the day. You are welcome to join this meeting and to learn how to serve in one or all of the practice roles. Each role offers a unique opportunity to deepen practice and offer service to Buddha, Dharma and Sangha.

Doan: The doan is the timekeeper, and, with the help of bells and a wooden drum (mokugyo), orchestrates the service.

Doshi: The doshi at O-An is commonly, but not exclusively, the resident teacher. The doshi leads the service by offering incense, full prostrations and bows. At O-An, the doshi offers a dharma talk to inform, encourage and inspire the sangha.

Han Player: The han player strikes the wooden gong according to a traditional score to call everyone into the zendo for Sunday service.

Jisha: The jisha is the personal attendant to the doshi, and is responsible for taking care of the altar by cleaning, replenishing supplies, and arranging flowers. The jisha also offers incense to the doshi for the incense offering

Tenzo: The tenzo is the head cook and is responsible for snacks on Sundays and for oryoki meals during sesshins (retreats). Dogen, the founder of the Soto school of Zen, considered serving as tenzo to be a special honor.

Sunday Service

The service begins at 9:50 AM with the striking of the han, a wooden gong played with a mallet.

At 10 AM the doan rings the bell to start the service. The doshi will enter and circle the zendo greeting all those present.

Next comes the incense offering, followed by short readings and recitations. Sutra books placed under each cushion include complete instructions for the service.

After the service has concluded, you will be seated for the first period of zazen. The doan will ring the bell 3 times indicating the start of zazen. Thirty minutes later the doan will ring the bell twice indicating the end of the period. Upon hearing the bell, it is customary to gassho at your seat before getting up slowly and mindfully. The next period is fifteen minutes of kin hin, or walking meditation.

Kin hin offers an opportunity to bring meditation into action as we develop awareness of the way our body moves, and maintain awareness of those around us. Kin hin ends with one bell, a standing bow and then a return to our cushions, returning “home,” making a bow to them, then a bow to the sangha, followed by a fifteen minute period of seated meditation.

Following the second round of zazen the Doshi will offer a dharma talk.

After the dharma talk, we prepare to go outdoors to walk on the meditation trail. Outdoor kin hin has a more expansive feel and a faster pace, but you are encouraged to bring the same kind of mindful attention to this practice as to indoor kin hin. The trail ends, and we form a circle for closing dedications of practice, announcements, and chanting the Three Refuges. The closing circle ends with a bell and maintaining our silence. We return to the zendo for a more social and informal discussion, sharing tea, and snacks.

Supporting O-An Zendo

In addition to Samu (work practice) you are invited to share in the care and maintenance of O-An Zendo through formal membership and/or Dana (generosity). O-An functions solely on the financial contributions of its sangha, and so appreciates all monetary contributions in addition to contributions of time, labor, and supplies.

Dana

“Dana” is a Sanskrit word meaning generosity. It is customary to leave dana whenever you visit the zendo. We are gifted with a priceless practice: No dana is requested. No dana is refused. When visitors/practitioners ask for a

recommendation we suggest a weekly donation of at least \$5. Our resident teacher receives a small yearly stipend. We encourage you to supplement this amount at your discretion, but especially in cases of beginner's instruction and private meetings (dokusan). Donations of supplies, including candles and incense for the service and cleaning supplies for building maintenance are most welcome. A "Wish List" of current needs is posted in the entranceway, and members of the practice team are available for advice.

Caring for O-An

Samu (work practice) is an important part of Zen life. All activity to support the care, beauty and tidiness of the zendo and grounds is done silently, mindfully, and without focus on gaining ideas (results). There is always a need for cleaning the zendo, preparing the space for Sunday service, attending to minor repairs and caring for the grounds. A sign-up sheet for preparing the zendo for Sunday service is posted in the entranceway. A member of the practice team is always available to provide instruction and guidance, especially for the first experience.

Membership

Anyone is welcome to become a formal member of O-An. Individuals who have been attending services at O-An for three months will be invited to join. Memberships are annual commitments which express a deep support for the gift of O-An and its future health and well-being.

Regular memberships are \$300/year, payable monthly (\$25), semi-annually (\$150), or annually (\$300); student memberships are \$180/year or \$15/month; and family memberships are \$480/year or \$40/month. Members are eligible for discounts on the cost of zendo activities such as full-day sittings and workshops.

Our Spiritual Practice

Zen became Zen one night in the 5th century B.C.E. when, upon seeing the morning star rise in the sky in India, the Buddha attained his supreme insight into the mystery of life. That moment of awakening or “enlightenment” was transmitted down a line of 28 teachers until it reached Bodhidharma, who traveled to China in the sixth century C.E. Though legends abound, very little is known about the life and teaching of this man who had a profound impact on the spread of Buddhism throughout the East.

Zen became a spiritual practice as a consequence of the experiences of the Buddha and Bodhidharma. Zen focuses on a direct experience of awakening through practice, particularly zazen. Zen practice is a journey which each individual makes for him/herself in the silent stillness of meditation and in following the Buddha Way.

Buddhist practice is many-layered and multi-dimensional. It can take many forms, and involve many different levels of commitment. Each person enters the doors of O-An as a unique individual, and each journey will be full of unique surprises!

In addition to daily and Sunday meditation at O-An, we also hold special seasonal celebrations. These include: Rohatsu: a celebration of the Buddha’s Enlightenment in the winter; the Buddha’s Birthday: a celebration of the Buddha’s birth in the spring; Udumbara: the Flower Ceremony marking the first transmission of the Buddha’s teachings to the monk Mahakasyapa in the summer; and O-Bon: remembrance of the spirits of the departed in the fall.

Instructions for Sitting Meditation by Kobun Chino Roshi

What is zazen, shikantaza? What kind of sitting are we doing here? There is a little misunderstanding about so-called Zen or Buddhist life; I'd like to clear it up a little bit, and reassure your sense of basic confidence that however you are is the way it should be. I mean daily life, however you manage your daily life, that is how it should be. For a long time this sitting was done only in a closed society like a monastery. It was the traditional way of protecting the quality of this practice.

My basic intention is to really open this sitting opportunity to everybody who is ready to do it and enjoy it. No division between monks and nuns, young and old. I want you to understand this kind of practice. Some people trained in a monastery or communal situation with well set schedules and regulations may have a quite a difficult time with almost no rules. People come and go and there is no scolding and no one carrying a stick to beat you like an old rug or dumb man. Many people say that's not sitting, but I believe this is the real sitting!

Whoever sits, that person's mind embraces the whole situation, centered by that person. So each person has full responsibility and full understanding by themselves for what sitting means to them. The teaching is within that person. Each person's sitting includes how they live, how they think things, where they came from. Nothing is missed, nothing is needed to change from how you are actually living to how it should be. There is no "should be" kind of thing. In one sense, it's a terrible state, the hardest kind of operation. There is no crunch, nothing to hang onto to order your mind.

I say you cannot call this Zen or Buddhism. Then what is it? People get mad at me! They ask, "Then what are you?"

To have no identification is so insecure in one sense; people are very shaky sometimes. But as you notice, no one forces you or orders you to do this. My great hope is for success in a real sense, for satisfactory practice in this sitting.

I would like to reveal the natural nature of sitting fully as it is. If I put some concept on this and make you understand what I think is an ideal way to sit, I would be a kind of special gardener who fixes boxes and lets you go through to become square bamboo. Or I would be an automatic newspaper man who runs a newspaper, whoever comes, I would just put you in the machine and make you flat and you would come out a squished being, or something like this!

In Japan there is still a strong force of tradition where monasteries closed people out from sitting. Now it is like a secret teaching has been brought to us from a deep secret place; no one knows how valuable it is. People in Japan still feel strongly that sitting shouldn't be done so easily. A sort of hoarding of teaching is going on. But even if this treasure is brought to us, this kind of treasure is not seen by people, so there is actually no danger. The only danger is if you guide people the wrong way with it. In this sense, Dogen Zenji was very right, if you want to do zazen or any kind of practice properly, the only way to master it is to study with the right teacher.

Too much talk about zazen or shikantaza is not so good for you. It's impossible to teach the meaning of sitting. Until you really experience and confirm it by yourself, you cannot believe it. It has tremendous depth, and year after year this gorgeous world of shikantaza appears. It's up to you to cultivate it. Because you are Buddhas yourselves, you can sit. Dogen named this sitting "great Gate of Peace and Joy". Simply, it is peaceful, eternally peaceful, pleasurable and joyful. Shikantaza doesn't have the name

of any religion, but it is, in its quality, a very true religious way to live.

Shikantaza

The great pleasure, the great accomplishment of your way-seeking is in the realization of sitting. This form of sitting, this place to sit on this earth, this time to sit, the twentieth century, all have lots of problems. The shikantaza way is giving birth to the Buddha seed. It is not a person becoming a better person, it is the actualization of what we are.

To sit in shikantaza is very uncomfortable at first. It's rather more peaceful to sink into a warm soft couch and have a nice drink. That's peace, we may say. But to recover our basic view of sanity and clarity, to see how everything actually arises and falls moment after moment is how take this sitting posture.

Awakening, continuous awakening is nothing but our basic nature. Putting that awakening into some form as so-called being, as a man or a woman, explains what shikantaza is. When you jump into the Buddha's world, you place yourself in the center of annuttara-samyaksambodhi. That is shikantaza's real meaning, real action. Shikantaza is immeasurable, it's unthinkable. You can use your entire system of knowing, but it is impossible to completely understand it.

Shikantaza sounds very strong. Shikan is understood as identical to zaza. Shikan means "pure", "one", "only for it". Ta is a very strong word. It shows moving activity. When you hit, that movement is called ta, so "strike" is ta. Za is the same as in the word zazen, sitting. To express the whole character, shikantaza is actually quite enough, but not enough until you experience it. Shikantaza is sitting for itself. You may say pure sitting for itself, not for something

else.

Shinjin datsu raku is the same as shikantaza. Shinjin is "body/mind". Body/mind is nothing but our whole life. This cannot be seen in two ways; body/mind is one thing. Datsu is "to refrain", and "to drop from". When you are dreaming some terrible dream, and the dream is cut off, that is called datsu. When you get rid of that dream, that also is called datsu. When you have a sword, the action of pulling a sword from its sheath is called datsu. So datsu has a very strong meaning of freeing from something. Another way to express it is: to have conquered something which hindered your existence, like attachments, delusions, or misunderstandings. Zazen itself is cutting off those conditions.

When we are dreaming, even if it is later called a dream, while we are dreaming it is a real thing. This night is almost the same as last night, but you cannot call last night back. You can remember how you were yesterday, but at this point, we don't have yesterday. Yesterday only gave time and space for now, so we can be completely in present time. Datsu is the succession of time from today to tomorrow; datsu of now is the next moment. This moment is the next moment. This is the way our life is going on. It sounds like an intuitive, ordinary philosophy of life. Everyone can feel it: "Oh, it is, it is!" Usually no one pays attention in that way, being with the present and seeing and feeling that yesterday is behind us like a rope. We are on top of the rope, or karma, and it just goes on and on like knitting. So last year someone might have said, "You are crazy", and you thought there was something to it. A strong impression makes unreal existence real and real existence unreal.

Shikantaza is not what we usually think, it is truly personal

deeds, because only if one decides to sit does it appear. Sitting cannot be fully experienced by imagination. Shikantaza has a kind of slippery feeling to it. This means that it is easy to slip off of it. It's quite slippery because it relates to your everyday condition. In each sitting you have to sense it without anyone's help. There are no techniques; there is no measuring stick with which to evaluate it. There is no way of knowing what it is or what you are doing. All kinds of conceptualizations, ideas, hopes fall away from it. They cannot stay in your meditation.

Sitting on your cushion is not relaxation, it is the result of all your knowledge. Every experience you have come through sits there each time. It is very serious. Otherwise, you sit because it feels good, and you are comfortable, and once in a while you feel an ecstatic sensation in your body. You feel calmness, stillness, clarity, and forget there are hungry people on this earth. You forget there are lots of diseases which are killing people. If you do not observe that in your sitting, you are just escaping into your desire. It happens if you mistake or limit the focus of your sitting practice.

Sitting shikantaza is the place itself, and things. The dynamics of all Buddhas are in it. When you sit, the cushion sits with you. If you wear glasses, the glasses sit with you. Clothing sits with you. House sits with you. People who are moving around outside all sit with you. They don't take the sitting posture!

Sitting shikantaza does not depend on human intellect. It is not something you understand. It's indescribable. We say the contents of sitting are beyond our thinking system or our sensations. Belief or confidence is not what we usually think it is. Doing shikantaza shows utter trust and belief in it. If you explain shikantaza it becomes something which

you don't understand, but you can experience sitting with everything with the understanding that everything is there, is there with you.

Buddha's sitting is way beyond purity and impurity, holiness and unholiness. It is beyond Bodhisattva's sitting, which is endless. Bodhisattva's sitting is like a seed which never stops flourishing; it always come back.

We sit to make life meaningful. The significance of our life is not experienced in striving to create some perfect thing. We must simply start with accepting ourselves.

For more of Kobun's writings about Zazen/Shikantaza, see <http://www.jikoji.org/intro-aspects/>

Sitting Postures



Full Lotus

Half Lotus

Burmese



On a stool

Seiza

On a Chair

Glossary of Terms

Here are some brief interpretations of some terms you may find in Zen literature :

- *Buddha*: The Awakened One. Actually you!
- *Bodhisattva*: An enlightened being who, through the virtues of wisdom and compassion, renounces personal enlightenment in order to serve in the liberation of all beings.
- *Dharma talk*: A talk given by an experienced Zen practitioner which expands upon the Buddhist teachings, often by applying them to practical, everyday situations.
- *Doan*: the timekeeper and leader of services.
- *Dokusan*: A private meeting of a student with a Zen teacher; an opportunity to discuss issues of practice.
- *Doshi*: At O-An, most commonly, but not exclusively, the resident teacher. The doshi is typically an ordained priest who also offers the dharma talk..
- *Gassho*: a bow from the waist with palms together.
- *Han Player*: One who strikes the wooden gong according to a traditional score, to call everyone into the zendo.
- *Jukai*: The lay ordination ceremony in which Zen practitioners receive the Ten Clear Mind Precepts.
- *Kinhin*: Walking meditation, done usually between sitting periods, but can be done anytime,

anywhere. Slow, small, mindful steps, done in the spirit of not going anywhere.

- *Dana*: Generosity. One of the most important of the Buddhist virtues. The act of voluntarily giving of materials, energy, wisdom to others out of gratitude for what has been received. A means of overcoming greed and egoism.
- *Dharma*: The teachings of the Buddha and the path of practice that leads to awakening. Also, the truth of the way things are; all the specific phenomena of experience, and the natural laws that govern experience. Dharma is all-inclusive.
- *The Four Noble Truths*: The basic teaching of the Buddha which explains the existence and cause of suffering, that we can be freed from suffering and that there is a path to achieve freedom from suffering.
- *Jisha*: The personal attendant to the doshi, and responsible for taking care of the altar by cleaning, replenishing supplies, and arranging flowers. The jisha lights and presents incense to the doshi during the incense offering
- *Mudra*: Symbolic gesture of the hands, which helps to actualize in physical form, certain inner states. In standing meditation and for kin hin, we use the mudra *shashu*; in seated meditation, we use the “cosmic mudra” in which the right hand is placed in the palm of the left and the thumbs are joined together to form an oval.
- *Rakusu*: A miniature version of the Buddha’s robe. It is sewn by hand and worn by sangha members who have received Buddhist Precepts in the Jukai ceremony.
- *Samu*: The meditation practice of mindful care and attention in the midst of everyday work. At O-An, samu takes the form of voluntary service caring

for the zendo building and grounds. It is an important part of Zen life.

- *Sangha*: The community of Zen practitioners.
- *Sesshin*: A retreat of consecutive days (weekend, week, month, 3 months) of especially intensive practice of zazen which may include daily dokusan with a teacher.
- *Shikantaza*: “just this” or “just sitting”; a form of zazen particular to the Soto Zen school.
- *Sutras*: The oral record of Buddha’s teachings, portions of which are chanted during meditation services.
- *Tenzō*: The head cook, responsible for snacks on Sundays and for oryoki meals during sesshins (retreats).
- *The Three/Jewels*: The Buddha (an awakened being), the Dharma (the Buddhist teachings, all phenomena), and the Sangha (the Zen practice community). To practice Zen is to take refuge in Buddha, Dharma and Sangha.
- *Zabuton*: The square sitting mat.
- *Zafu*: A round sitting cushion.
- *Zazen*: Seated meditation.

The way is not in the sky.

The way is in the heart.

-The Buddha