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Zen



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Practising at Bristol Zen Dojo

Welcome to Bristol Zen Dojo. This leaflet is intended to provide some practical information for people who are beginning the practice of Zen with us.

Arrivals

Please try to arrive 10 minutes before the sit starts. When the wood sounds, roughly 5 minutes before, please preserve silence.

You may enter the dojo at any time. You don't need to wait for the sound of the wood.

At the introduction, you will have been shown how we move around the dojo, when we bow etc. This comes easier for some than for others. The purpose is to develop awareness of what we are doing, to harmonise with the others present, and to encourage us to let go of our everyday preoccupations. If you are unsure, then please follow someone else in and copy them.

What to wear

Please wear dark, loose comfortable clothing. If you choose, you can wear a black kimono - they are available to buy or borrow. It is best to practise in bare feet.

When we enter the dojo, we put aside our daily lives for a bit. For this reason, it is best to take off jewellery, watches etc. Leave money, wallets, handbags and mobile phones in the changing area. The entrance door is locked while we practise.

Switch mobile phones to silent before sitting

Sitting

At most sessions, we sit for an hour divided into two sits of 25 minutes with 10 minutes of kinhin (walking) between them. On Sundays we sit for longer - 1 1/2 hours. This is usually divided into 2 sits of 40 minutes with kinhin between, but if a less experienced person is present it can be 3 sits of 25 minutes with kinhin between each.

BRISTOL ZEN DOJO

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Zafus

Zafus, zen cushions, are different heights, and over time you will find what is the right height for you. You can borrow one while in the dojo, but please don't remove it. If you want your own, which you can stuff to exactly the right height for you, both zafu covers and stuffing (kapok) are for sale in the dojo.

Kinhin

Kinhin is walking zen, between periods of sitting. Before starting, please place your zafu and anything else you have against the wall so it is not in your way or anyone else's.

Walking in the Dojo

When we walk in the dojo to enter, leave, and after kinhin, we walk in shashu: The hands are clasped in front of the body, forearms horizontal. Walk silently, straight, and turn corners ninety degrees.

The Kyusaku

The kyusaku is the stick of awakening and is an aid to zazen. During some sits, it is offered and given only to those who request it. It is used by giving a blow to the trapezius muscle on each shoulder, and helps to awaken and focus the mind. It is given and received in a particular way.

If you want to learn how to receive it please ask.

Ending the sit

At the end of most sits, we have the 'kaijo', the opening of the dojo. This involves the beating of the time on the drum, and the sounding of the wood. While this takes place, everyone remains sitting except those playing the instruments, until the final gong goes. In the morning, we also chant a short sutra (the Kesa sutra) 3 times before the end of sitting. It is fine to hold the sutra sheet when you do this.

Chanting

After most sits, we chant the Hannya Shingyo (Sutra of Great Wisdom), the four Boddhisattva vows, and the Eko (dedication). The Hannya Shingyo is a mixture of Sanskrit, Chinese and Japanese, while the Eko is in Japanese.

Please take a chanting leaflet into the dojo with you. Some people know the chants off by heart, and hold their hands in the zazen mudra and gassho. However, if you are using the leaflet it is fine simply to hold it up to eye level rather than trying to read it on the floor.

When chanting, find your own tone which harmonises with the others. Focus on breath and sound, and treat it as a practice in awareness and being present.

On Sundays, we often chant for longer and conduct a ceremony, including doing san pai (3 bows). When you come for the first time, let us know and someone will guide you through what we do.

Teaching in the dojo

The godo, who is responsible for leading a session, may give kusen - a short verbal teaching during zazen. In addition, after some sits and on zen evenings and half-days, there may be mondo (question/answer sessions) or teisho (verbal teaching on some aspect of zen). Adrian and Chris are also happy to meet for 1-1 sessions should there be a specific aspect of your practice or relationship with zen that you would like to discuss.

Our dojo mentor is Guy Mercier, a senior monk and teacher in the Association Zen Internationale who has received shiho (dharma transmission) in the Soto Zen lineage.

He visits Bristol once or twice a year to run days and weekends, and Adrian and Chris meet with him regularly at other days and sesshins (extended practice periods) in the UK and France.

Ordination

You will see some people wearing the kesa - a sewn garment wrapped around the body - or rakusu - a smaller version worn around the neck. These are people who have received ordination in the zen lineage. This primarily represents a commitment to practice and to support others through this practice, and is not about rank or hierarchy.

Special events

BZD has regular extended sits on Sunday mornings, roughly once a month, and some evenings. We also have days of zen practice with visiting teachers, and workshops focused on specific aspects of practice such as chanting and ceremonies. As part of the UK branch of the International Zen Association, BZD helps organise and participates in sesshin - residential periods of intensive practice. We have 3-4 of these in the UK each year, and also participate in sesshin elsewhere in Europe.

Bristol Zen Dojo Online

Our website: www.zenbristol.co.uk provides photos, articles, background information and dates of upcoming events online. We have a mailing list, which announces special events and occasional closures at the dojo.

If you wish to be on it, either give your email to Chris or send an email to: bristol-announce-subscribe@izauk.org

We also have a facebook page: www.facebook.com/zenbristol which provides a stream of informal news and chat from BZD, and interesting Zen snippets from around the web.

Money

Bristol Zen Dojo is a charity, and the teachers and organisers here give their time voluntarily. Money collected at the dojo is used to pay for the space and its upkeep, and to fund special events such as days with visiting teachers. We also accept the Bristol Pound.

The Library

BZD has a large collection of Zen and Buddhist books available for loan. If you wish to borrow something, speak with Adrian or Chris.