



heart circle sangha

Information For Newcomers

Welcome to Heart Circle Sangha!

You have found a group of Zen Buddhist practitioners committed to making a positive difference in the world through personal realization and service to the wider community. We hope that you will soon feel at home among us.

If you are new to Zen, even if you have done other forms of meditation, we suggest that you take an introduction to Zen meditation. Prior to visiting the first time, please call ahead, so that we can arrange for a senior student to greet you when you arrive at the zendo. You may wish to review the following information prior to your first visit so that you may feel more at home when you arrive.

Practice Schedule

Our main practice is Sunday: 9 am to 12 noon

We have 3 – 30 minute zazen (sitting meditation) periods
each followed by a 10 minute kinhin (walking meditation) period,

9:00 am zazen, 10 minutes kinhin

9:40 am zazen, 10 minutes kinhin

10:20 am zazen

During the 2nd and 3rd zazen periods, the teacher (sensei) is available for individual interviews and instruction (dokusan). Your senior student mentor will explain how to get on the interview schedule. After the final zazen period, we hold service and Sensei gives a dharma talk, except for the first Sunday of each month when we hold council. All members and visitors are invited to participate in services and council.

Monday Evening: 7:30 pm to 9:10 pm
Zazen and dokusan with Sensei

Wednesday morning: 7:00 am to 8:10 am
Zazen and dokusan with Sensei

Visitors are welcome at any practice time but if convenient, we recommend that your first visit be to our Sunday practice program.

First-Time Visitors

On your first visit, we ask that you arrive no later than 8:45 am. You will be greeted by one of our senior students who will show you around and provide initial meditation instruction.

What to Wear

At the Heart Circle Sangha we do not wear robes. Please wear loose, comfortable clothing. Please avoid revealing clothing and other distracting attire. When weather permits, kinhin takes place in the back yard – so wear comfortable walking shoes that can be easily slipped on and off.

What to expect on your arrival

Our current practice space is in the Sensei's private residence. Our main sitting room (zendo) and service room (Buddha hall) are located on the second floor. The interview (dokusan) room is located on the first floor. The reception space is in the dining room. There are restrooms on the first and second floors. Please use the bathroom facilities before the first sitting or during the kinhin periods.

Upon arriving, remove your coat and shoes in the foyer. You will be introduced to other members and to Joan Sensei. Then a senior student will conduct an introduction to Zen practice during the first meditation period usually in the downstairs study.

Introduction to Zen

During this introduction period the senior student will provide an overview of Zen as practiced at HCS. Please use this time to ask questions that you may have. Also, please discuss any physical limitations or other issues with your instructor so that (s)he can offer suggestions and adjustments. There will also be a short (5 or 10 minute) sitting to acclimate you to sitting and to provide advice on correct, comfortable posture.

Kinhin

After this introduction period, you will wait by the door and join the other meditators in the first kinhin. Kinhin is a walking meditation. Place your hands in shashu* position. As the line passes, join them at the end of the line and proceed downstairs. Follow the person in front of you closely, keeping the eyes lowered. We walk together as One. Toward the end of the walk, the clapper will sound. Place your hands in gassho** and proceed back upstairs to the sitting room (zendo).

Zazen

As you enter the zendo find an empty cushion, stand facing the wall and bow once. Turn around and face the center of the room. The bell will sound and we bow together to the center of the room. Now sit down, in the position of your choice, facing the wall. Make any final adjustments and come to stillness. The bell will sound 3 times, signifying the beginning of the sitting period. You may find it difficult to sit still for the entire period but try to remain still, as every movement of the body creates disturbance in the mind. If you need to change leg positions, bow once, change your position, bow again, then continue sitting.

After 30 minutes, the bell will sound twice. This signifies the end of the sitting period. Bow to the wall, hands in gassho. Take your time getting up, as your legs may have gotten stiff, and your feet may even be numb. Do not attempt to rise until you've regained circulation in your feet.

When you rise, face your cushion and bow once. Then turn and face the center of the room and stand with your hands in gassho. The clapper will strike, and we bow together to the center of the room. Now turn to your left. When the clapper strikes again, you place your hands in shashu and start walking very slowly in a mindful manner. The pace is one short step per breath. The clapper will strike once again, you bow and walk downstairs at the leader's pace.

For your second visit: On entering the zendo for the first sitting period, select a seat, bow once to your cushion, turn and bow to the person sitting across the way and take a seat facing the wall.

Dokusan

You may notice during the second and third sittings, meditators leaving and returning to the room. They are going to and from interview (dokusan) with the Sensei. When you arrive at the zendo, there will be a dokusan sign up sheet on the dining table. Please take note of the names of the two people before you on the schedule. When the person two in front of you returns to the zendo, rise, bow to your cushion, turn and bow to the person across from you, and quietly move downstairs to the waiting chair.. You will hear a hand bell ring, which signifies that the Sensei is ready for the next student. At the door, bow to the teacher, bow again behind the student zabuton, take your seat, and bow again to Sensei. When your interview is complete, bow to the Sensei, get up, walk to the door and do a final bow.

Service / Dharma Talk / Council

At the end of the third sitting, the time-keeper (jikydo) will sound the bell twice as usual and announce "Prepare for service (or council)" at which point students will proceed to the Buddha hall. The service includes chanting of sutras and the offering of incense. After the service, the Sensei will give a dharma talk which is a discourse on a particular theme or point of practice.

During council, the sangha sits in a circle. We light a candle and place it in the middle of the room with a talking stick. Someone will offer an intention for the council meeting. When new members are present, we will do introductions. The main purpose of council is for each participant to share their practice. The idea is to speak and listen from the heart. Anything that is said in council is held in confidence. When you want to speak, pick up the talking stick. When finished speaking place the stick back in the center.

To conclude council, a participant will offer a dedication of merit. At the end of council and dharma talk, we chant the Four Vows, then stand, one gong will sound and we bow to each other.

Completing your first visit

We hope that you will find or have found your first visit a welcoming and enriching experience. Please complete the New Student information sheet, including your email address and/or phone number. The senior student who gave you the “Introduction to Zen” will be assigned as your mentor. Please feel free to contact your mentor regarding any further questions that you may have about your first visit, about Buddhism in general, or Zen practice in particular.

Lastly, since this is a self-sustaining organization, we hope that you can make an offering in the dana bowl before you depart.

We hope that you will practice with us regularly and consider becoming a member. Information on membership in Heart Circle Sangha may be found on our website at www.heartcirclesangha.org.

* **Shashu** is performed by placing the tip of the left thumb as close to the left palm as comfortable and making a fist around it. Place the fist in the center of the chest and cover it with the right hand. Keep the elbows away from the body with the forearms parallel to the floor.

** **Gassho** is performed by placing the hands palm to palm slightly in front of the chest with the arms parallel to the floor.

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