

Start a Zen Practice

A Self-Paced Course

Study Guide

A MZMC Correspondence Course

“Bringing the Resources of the MZMC to the People
of Minnesota, the Region, and Beyond”

Start a Zen Practice: Course Outline

Part 1: The Nature of Zen

- What is Zen?
- Discovering Reality Within
- How Zen Began
- The Essence of Meditation

Part 2: The Zen Vision

- Zen and Nature
- The Zen Garden
- Zen and the Art of Painting
- Capturing the Essence in Words: Haikus

Part 3: Entering the Path

- Starting Formal Meditation
- How to Sit
- Meeting Your Own Mind
- The Practice of Mindfulness

Part 4: Walking On

- Deepening Awareness
- Form is Emptiness, Emptiness is Form
- The Zen Retreat
- Zen and the Art of Paradox

Part 5: Completing the Circle

- Master and Pupil
- Zen and the Bodhisattva Ideal
- Zen and the Concept of No-self
- Joy in the Morning, Sleep at Night – What Else?

Part 6: The Journey in Pictures

- The 10 Ox-herding Pictures
 - The Search for the Ox
 - Catching the Ox
 - The Ox Transcended
 - Reaching the Source

Exercises:

The numbers refer to the page in the textbook on which the exercise occurs.

1. Experience the Here and Now (17)
2. Cultivate Your Zen Qualities (23)
3. See with Zen Eyes (27)
4. Experience Life and Death in Each Moment (33)
5. Move Beyond the Self (35)
6. Find Laughter in Pretension (39)
7. Discover Harmony in All Things (43)
8. Tune in to the Seasons (51)
9. Understand Form and Emptiness (55)
10. Express "Catness" of Cat, "Treeness" of Tree (61)
11. Compose a Haiku (63)
12. Just Sit and Breathe (69)
13. Create a Zen Ritual (77)
14. Monitor Your Thoughts (79)
15. Explore Your Emotions (81)
16. Watch the World (85)
17. Practice Walking Meditation (89)
18. Sense Your Inner Energy (91)
19. Scoop the Stream (93)
20. Ride a Zen Horse (95)
21. Contemplate an Object (103)
22. Face the Wall (105)
23. Discover the Koan (113)
24. Consider "Nansen's Goose" (123)
25. Ask "What Am I?" (131)
26. Find the Answer to Yourself (135)
27. Understand Your Own Search (142)
28. Grasp Your True Nature (146)
29. Assess Your Progress (151)

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Introduction to the Course

Start a Zen Practice is a self-paced course that provides an introduction to Zen as a meditation practice, rather than as a religion, set of rituals, or spiritual philosophy. Its purpose is to introduce Zen to you as a way of being in the world. You do not have to be a Buddhist to appreciate this practice, for many core principles of the practice as presented here are now being widely used in healthcare facilities, schools at all levels, and by members of a wide variety of faiths.

Since Zen meditation is an experiential way of being in the world, the course emphasizes exercises that will help you become more intimately aware of both the world inside you and the external environment in which you live. It is for this reason that we have chosen as a text David Fontana's *Discover Zen: A Practical Guide to Personal Serenity* (2001, Chronicle Books, San Francisco), for the text contains 29 step-by-step meditation exercises that accompany a gentle and fun introduction to Zen as a way of life for all of us.

Where appropriate throughout the course we call your attention to resources on the Web or elsewhere that supplement the content of Fontana's text. These resources include both pictures and forums where you can find additional information about Zen practices. You can dip into these resources during the course or when you have time in the future. We have found that an illustration or two can greatly enliven our Zen practice, especially as we begin to develop that practice. These resources will be provided depending on your interests.

Purchasing Course Materials. You will receive the course study guide by email soon after you enroll in the course. Fontana's *Discover Zen* can be ordered through most bookstores or purchased on the Web. List price is about \$15, but you can find the book for half that price if you explore purchasing options.

Working Your Way Through the Course. The study guide for each of the six parts of the course, which correspond with the six chapters in the text, contains a short list of questions that you are to answer and return to the instructor. Each question contains page numbers in *Discover Zen*, so you do not have to hunt for the answers. Make your answers short and to the point; you don't need to write whole sentences or long essays. The goal of the questions is to familiarize you with the content of a chapter and to make you think about that content. Write your answers out on your computer so that you can email your answers to the instructor. Feel free to contact the course instructor if you have questions about the content of the course.

A very important part of the course involves your exploration of the exercises in each chapter. For the most part these exercises will take only 10 to 15 minutes. Write your experience during each exercise down and send those experiences as

well to the instructor. Although this is a correspondence course, sharing your experience with a teacher will enrich your Zen practice. This is especially useful when you have questions about your experience and an exercise, which is quite normal when developing a Zen meditation practice.

Your Correspondence Course Instructor. The course guide was prepared by Guy Gibbon. Guy is a retired professor of anthropology at the University of Minnesota and a Zen priest in the Katagiri Roshi-Tim Burkett lineage. He and his wife Ann live at the MZMC in Minneapolis. Guy and others will make comments on your assignments.

Submitting Your Assignments. The easiest way to submit an assignment is via email. Guy's email address in gibbo001@umn.edu.

Other Contact Information. The address of the MZMC is 3343 East Calhoun Parkway, Minneapolis, MN 55408. Direct contact with the Center can be made by calling 612-822-5313 or emailing info@mnzencenter.org. The Web site for the Center is www.mnzencenter.org.

No Exams, But There are no exams in this course, for it is not for credit. Nonetheless, we assume you are taking this course with the intention of establishing a Zen meditation practice. Your motivation to complete the course should be based on that intention.

Form Your Own Zen Practice Study Group. A fun and productive way to take a correspondence course like this is to form a study group of like-minded people who can explore the questions and exercises together. Most people who have a regular meditation practice sit (meditate) in a group setting, such as at the Minnesota Zen Meditation Center. If there is not a center nearby, forming your own sitting group is a wonderful way to learn the basics of Zen practice. After the course, your study group may become the nucleus of an on-going Zen practice group.

Visit the MZMC. If possible plan to visit the Minnesota Zen Meditation Center. Since the Center is not always open, contact the office to set up a visit. You might also consider participating in one of our half-day or full-day retreats, take a class at the center, or participate in one or more of the many activities at the Center.

Study Tips. Many people who start a correspondence course do not finish it because life gets in the way. So here are a few tips on how to work your way through the course with the least amount of stress.

- Set realistic goals. Plan an initial routine and establish how long it will take you to complete each of the six parts, based on your experience with the first part.
- Make contact with the instructor. Don't be afraid to email your instructor if you have questions about the material or comments on the homework. If you

are familiar with the Skype function on your computer, a face-to-face conversation with the instructor is a wonderful way to communicate.

- Most of us travel or have other time-consuming activities in our life during which we do not have the time to work on an assignment. Just relax and pick the course up when that activity is over. Remember: there are no exams. You are taking this course to explore the possibility of developing a long-term Zen meditation practice. That intention does not have to be satisfied within a month or two.
- Perhaps most important: have fun, approach the course with a spirit of inquiry. Mindfulness (meditation) practices are being widely adopted in our health care centers, schools and universities, and businesses. A regular meditation practice will make us more familiar and comfortable with ourselves, and enliven the life of the people we come into contact with.

Start a Zen Practice is a practical guide to Zen Buddhist thought and practice. It is intended to be both informative and engaging. So Enjoy!