

Instructions for Zazen in Eight Verses

By Domyo Burk

Sit in a balanced, stable position with your spine erect.

Body and mind are one and posture is dynamic; proper sitting requires your full attention.

Be alert and appreciative, because your life may end tomorrow and everything you love is changing.

Energized by not-knowing, devote yourself to the sacred act of being present for each moment without agenda.

Do not brace yourself against thoughts or feelings; simply sit wholeheartedly and they will come and go like clouds in a clear sky.

Do not struggle against forgetfulness; the instant you awaken, be grateful and throw away past and future.

Sink below the level of thinking and be aware of your direct experience, realizing it can never be grasped, but flows endlessly.

Settle into your true nature: boundless, selfless, joyous, and ready to respond with wisdom and compassion.

Anchoring Your Zazen with the Instructions for Zazen in Eight Verses

1. Ideally, **memorize the verses**. Before you have them memorized, or if memorization is difficult, keep the instructions in front of you.
2. When you first begin zazen, **recite the verses silently** to yourself. Move through them fairly quickly, without giving your mind a chance to wander between verses. When you reach the end of the instructions, start over.
3. **Enact each line** as you recite it. Notice the subverbal “feeling” or experience evoked by each verse: embodiment, appreciativeness, not-knowing, devotion, non-struggle, settling, awareness...
4. As you settle into zazen, **recite the verses more slowly**. Allow the feeling each verse evokes linger for a while before going on to the next.
5. Whenever you find your mind has wandered, just **go on to the next verse**, and leave a little less space in your recitation until you have built up some zazen momentum again.
6. When/if you feel able to, **stay with one verse** as long as you can, concentrating on the overall feeling/experience it evokes rather than thinking about its meaning.
7. Alternatively, **allow words to start falling away**. For example, perhaps you can sum up the first two verses for yourself with the words, “Body and mind,” and next two verses with the word, “impermanence.”
8. If you feel alert and present within your direct experience, feel free to **drop any sense of “method”** and continue the feeling as long as you can. When you lose the thread of zazen, simply return to the verses.