

Retreat at the Montreal Zen Center

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Introduction

Please bring a light meal for the first evening.

Please read these instructions carefully. Your participation in the retreat implies that you have read them and are willing to observe them. During a retreat, we work for the benefit of all participants, including ourselves.

These guidelines are the result of many years of experience in Japan, the United States, and Canada. We have kept them to a minimum and formulated them as concisely as possible. Please respect not only the letter but also the spirit of these guidelines. If you need clarification, ask your host for help.

Silence

You must remain silent and be calm and discreet in your movements. If you must communicate with someone, do so in writing. If you receive a note while in the zendo, leave the zendo before reading it.

Keep your eyes lowered throughout the retreat; this reduces distractions and promotes concentration. However, make sure your head remains upright, even if your eyes are lowered (you may, of course, look up during the work period if your safety requires it).

Reduce Distractions

All visible clothing, such as T-shirts, pants or socks, should be white, dark, or neutral in color. T-shirts with writing are inappropriate during a retreat, as they are a significant source of distractions. Feet are more noticeable when looking down. It is therefore recommended not to wear colored nail polish if walking barefoot. Do not wear earrings or necklaces, as they can interfere with the application of the kyosaku. It is best not to wear a watch, unless required for your task. Odors can also be very disturbing. You are therefore requested to refrain from wearing perfume, cologne, or aftershave lotion.

Entering the Zendo Building

Do not walk on the carpet in the vestibule with your shoes or boots. Take off and put on your shoes while standing on the metal grid at the entrance. In summer, if it is raining or if there is a hint of rain, cover your feet when entering the Zendo.

Entrance to the Zendo

Upon entering the upper floor of the zendo, bow and then walk slowly and calmly to your mat, placing your hands in the kinhin position. There is no need to rush. If you are standing in the entrance at the end of a kinhin, remain there until the bell rings a second time, and then walk to your seat.

Punctuality

To maintain an atmosphere of sustained intensity, it is essential that everyone arrives on time for zazen sessions. Three audible reminders are used during a retreat: the warning bell, rung ten minutes before the end of rest periods, the gong, rung five minutes before the start of zazen, and the han, one minute before. If you see someone still asleep after the warning bell, please wake them. That said, punctuality remains everyone's responsibility. Everyone must attend regular zazen sessions.

Kyosaku

During a retreat, the use of the kyosaku is at the discretion of the instructor. If you do not wish to receive the kyosaku, you may indicate this at the beginning of the retreat. If you have long hair, tie it up or use a dark-colored hair tie to prevent the kyosaku from getting tangled in it. During a retreat, it is not necessary to raise your hands in gassho after receiving the kyosaku, as a short ceremony takes place on the last day so that instructors and participants can express their mutual respect and gratitude.

Teisho

We strongly encourage you to maintain your usual zazen posture during teishos or dharma words, although you may move around a little to rest. If you do so, do so discreetly. However, at no time should you lean against the wall.

Additional periods of zazen

The regular schedule represents the minimum amount of zazen that should be practiced. You may practice additional periods during breaks and after regular evening sessions. For this purpose, there are chairs in the dressing rooms. These serve as "sub-zendos" during retreats, and you should not hang your clothes there. You can also take advantage of night zazen, which is held every evening from 11 p.m. to 12:30 a.m. Be especially alert during the night so as not to disturb others while you are out and about.

Work

The work period is an essential part of the retreat. Participants must report to their workstations as soon as they have finished breakfast and changed their clothes. You are expected to work for the entire duration of the work period. The only exception to this rule is for those assigned to the kitchen, as they work at other times of the day. Most tasks require the entire work period when carefully completed. Notify the work supervisor if you finish early. A bell is rung 5 minutes before the end of the work period. Please use these five minutes to put away any tools or utensils you have used and, if necessary, to clean your workstation. A second ring of the bell indicates the end of the work period.

The End of the Retreat

All participants are invited to attend the final supper. This meal provides a pleasant conclusion to the retreat, and the cooks prepare it with particular care. If you are unable to attend, we still ask that you do not leave before the end of the work period, in order to help clean and tidy the house and zendo. Those staying for the last meal are asked to help clean and tidy the kitchen and dining room before leaving.

Meals

To avoid keeping others waiting, walk briskly on your way to the house for meals. At the table, identify your serving area and serve yourself only there. If there is no food in your serving area, pass your plate further away. When entering the dining room, always head to the end of the table near the window. Take a seat at a place setting, leaving no space between you and the person in front of you. To sit, kneel in the seiza posture, as it requires the least space. If you are seated at a serving bowl, you must serve others first. Bowls are not passed around. Remain seated on your heels while serving. When you feel you have received enough food, indicate by lightly rubbing your palms together. Avoid unnecessary noise while serving and eating. Point to items you want that are out of reach and ensure they are put back in their place. Be attentive to the needs of others. Song sheets are located on the counter and on a chair near the St-Hubert Street entrance. If you do not know the songs by heart, please take a sheet on your way to the table. Place the sheet under the table during service and pass it to the head of the table when the songs are finished. When the clapper signals the second part of the chanting, after the service, you must immediately stop serving yourself or others and raise your bowl to eye level. Then pass around the offering bowls promptly, but without haste. Take as long as you need to eat. You may leave the table as soon as you have finished. All food must be eaten at the table, including the fruit served at lunch. Those who do not wish to eat must remain in the zendo and meditate. Do not go into the bedrooms or use the bathrooms during meals. If you need a glass to drink, ask the head cook for one and remember to return it to the kitchen at the end of the retreat.

Drinking Water in the Zendo

There are water jugs and glasses in the changing rooms. You take the glass whose number corresponds to your place in the Zendo. It is recommended to drink frequently during a retreat to avoid dehydration.

Entrances to the House

Whether for meals, to change, or at the end of the evening session, you must use the kitchen entrance if your room is on the ground floor, and the St-Hubert Street entrance if your room is in the basement or on the third floor. Never enter through the kitchen door after 10:00 p.m., but through the St-Hubert Street entrance, so as not to disturb the person sleeping in Room 5. When moving between the Zendo and the house, keep your eyes lowered, but do not place your hands in the kinhin position.

Bathrooms

Always leave the door open and turn off the light when leaving the bathroom. An open door indicates that the bathroom is free. Hang towels on the towel racks. After showering, please leave the tub clean and the floor dry for the next person. The list of bathrooms and shower times are posted on the board in the lobby. Only use the bathroom assigned to you, except during kinhin, when you may use whichever one suits you. Shower quickly to save water and avoid keeping others waiting. Do not wash your hair or shave during the retreat. To gently and quietly close the zendo bathroom door, you must hold the handle downward. Do not flush the toilet while a zazen session is in progress.

Bedrooms

Remember that you're sharing a common space with other people. Make your bed every time you get up and put your clothes away neatly. As a general rule, only nightlights should be turned on so as not to disturb those who are sleeping or resting. If you need to turn on the lights, remember to turn them off when you no longer need them or when you leave the room.

Exercises

Each participant is required to participate in the daily exercise session.

Smoking

Smoking is strictly prohibited on the Zen Center property. This also applies during a retreat.

Not Leaving the Center

Participants must not leave the Center grounds during a retreat.

Negative Emotions

During a retreat, you will inevitably pass through a whole range of mindstates. From the perspective of Zen practice, all of these are equal. One can practice in times of fatigue, sorrow, or despair, as well as in times of calm, peace, or joy. The key is to maintain one's initial determination and be firmly resolved to penetrate the nature of mind itself. To abandon this determination, under any pretext, is to stray from the path.

Fire Instructions

Please familiarize yourself with the location of all exits and fire extinguishers. If you have any questions regarding what to do in case of fire, please contact your host.

If you detect a fire:

1. Get everyone out.
2. Call the fire department (911)
3. If it's a small fire, try to extinguish it.
4. If in doubt, evacuate the area.

In Case of Fire:

1. Once you have left the building, do not re-enter.
2. Remain calm. All walls of the zendo are covered with drywall. This should delay the fire long enough to allow everyone to exit.
3. Gather in the alleyway facing St-Hubert Street for the call. How to Exit the Zendo
 1. Go down the main stairs and exit through the door on the ground floor.
 2. Exit through the door on the upper floor of the Zendo and take the fire escape.
 3. Exit through the windows of the two changing rooms. These two windows open outward like doors.

How to Exit the House

There are two exits on the 3rd floor:

1. The main staircase
2. The bedroom window opens onto a fire escape. On the roof of the second floor, turn left and enter the stairway door that leads to the ground floor. There are two exits on the second floor:

1. The main staircase
2. The back staircase, through the kitchen door on the second floor

There are three exits on the ground floor:

1. The back door (the kitchen)
2. The side door (St-Hubert Street)

Fire Extinguishers

There are five fire extinguishers:

1. Outside the third-floor entrance
2. Outside the second-floor vestibule
3. In the kitchen entrance on the ground floor
4. In the basement
5. In the zendo entrance

Finishing the retreat

Once you have committed to the retreat, you must persevere until the end, no matter what. It is often wise to schedule a "cooling off" period at the end of a retreat before returning to work.

Retreat Items

You must bring a sheet to cover your mattress, even if you use a sleeping bag. If you need to borrow one of the Center's blankets, bring two sheets. As we have very few, try to bring your own. If you plan to borrow a pillow, please bring a pillowcase. You will need clothes for work and exercise periods. Clothing should be simple and in a subdued color. In summer, if you wish to wear shorts, make sure they are not too short.

Other items you will need:

1. Towel
2. Toothbrush
3. Toothpaste
4. Sanitary napkins