

## Practice Period

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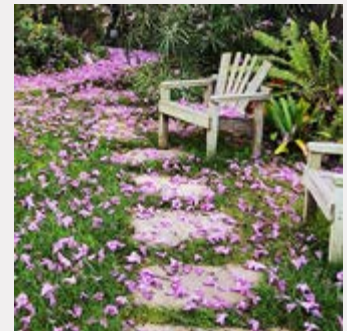
Practice Period is a time to refresh and intensify our aspiration to awaken to the wisdom and compassion that are considered fundamental to Zen. *Wisdom* refers to awakening to life's interconnectedness; and *Compassion* is the capacity to empathize into the suffering that is common to us all, together with the wish to end that suffering.

No matter how long and dedicated our practice has been, sometimes we can realize, with a jolt, that we've lost sight of the broad view and function of practice. We may be just going through the motions, or even forgotten what motivated us to begin Zen training.

This is what makes Practice Period so valuable. It's important to reflect regularly: "Is the point of practice clear? Do I assume I know what practice is, when perhaps a closer look might be useful?"

As we learn to observe ourselves honestly, we may discover that we're sleepwalking through life much of the time, and that we're rarely awake. For instance, we often hold the almost unconscious assumption that we are no more than an individual self, somehow separate from the rest of life, that is defined by our mind and body.

It's understandable that we hold these views, since we've been operating from them for many years—long before we came to Zen practice. Inevitably, our deep conditioning pulls us toward habits like being lost in our activities, or totally believing our opinions as "the truth." We also tend to get caught in the personal storyline and concerns that we call "Me stuff."



### Practice Period

Practice Period will be from September 15 through October 13. Please try to leave the full month free for full participation. Submit your Practice Period Agreement before September 15. The full schedule and an agreement can be found at [here](#).

### October Sesshin

Applications are still being accepted for the October sesshin. Priority will be given to those who are enrolled in Practice Period.

### Announcements

#### Sesshin Application

Click [here](#) to see this newsletter online.

To deepen and clarify our practice, we also need to look at where we may currently be stuck—the places where awareness is lacking or distorted. In both formal sitting and daily life, we may discover patterns that block our ability to stay present or to be genuinely happy. The heightened awareness of Practice Period can help us notice where repetitious emotional reactions and conditioned behaviors lead to disheartenment. The main point is to discover these, and apply awareness practices to address these issues specifically.

As we've probably already learned, good intentions aren't enough. The in-depth experiment of Practice Period gives us an opportunity to go deeper, and to practice the necessary skillful efforts, with a determination and perseverance that stretch us.

So all participants, both local and long-distance, are asked to increase the amount of time that is prioritized for formal practice. The primary commitment is to sit each and every day for the entire month, for at least 30 minutes. Those who already do this can consider sitting twice daily, or lengthening the time.

The materials offered in Practice Period are intended to work together as a practical whole for the month. So those living in San Diego are asked to commit to Saturday mornings, Saturday afternoon workshops, Wednesday evening practice group, and the added Sunday morning sittings.

To live more awake throughout the day, we include practices like those described on the ZCSD website under Practice Period. These include tools like Menu Items, Pauses in Time, Tasks, and our own additions—things like refraining from sweets, TV, coffee, or other strong attachments that can block awareness. All of these can be viewed as *pattern interrupts*, helping us refrain from our habitual preoccupations, and serving as a prelude to returning consciously to the present moment.

We can choose specific practices for each day of the week, alternating between basic areas like "Me stuff," open awareness, and heart-opening practices, to help awaken our inner teacher. Consult with a teacher if you have questions about how to work with menus, or other specific practices that are intended to help make being aware and awake the central theme of our day. Additional guidelines for intensifying practice are listed in the

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## Practice Period Guidelines.

The special conditions of Practice Period make it possible to help us re-prioritize our commitment to waking up. As we revisit our current view of practice, we can explore ways to highlight and refrain from longstanding self-centered patterns that don't serve us. We can renew our aspiration to gradually counteract the apparently relentless force of our habitual patterns and mechanicalness.

Practice Period is a time to prioritize the practice of awareness as the central orientation of our daily lives. We can recommit to wake up from our egocentricity to the greater reality that our deepest aspiration seeks. All of this is intended to help us discover renewed enthusiasm for practice—and thus for life.

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