

Session 1: Orientation

This eight-week course introduces Zen meditation and mindfulness practices aimed at developing insight into reality and who we really are. The ultimate focus is on kensho – literally seeing or experiencing your true nature, not depending on beliefs or notions.

Kensho is “a blissful realisation where a person’s inner nature, the originally pure mind, is directly known as illuminating emptiness, a thusness which is dynamic and immanent in the world” – Peter Harvey.

In this session we have introduced the following concepts:

- 1. Introduced each other** – found out our past experience with mindfulness and meditation, and what we’d like to get out of this course
- 2. Mindfulness** = paying attention, being aware. Can be with an external focus, e.g. on an activity such as flower arrangement or Japanese tea ceremony, or an inward focus e.g. on sensations of the body.
- 3. Meditation** – two broad types: either a narrow focus on concentration (e.g. using a mantra, image), or a broader focus on insight/investigation leading to a clear seeing of how things really are.
- 4. The Zen approach:** meditation is a simple and natural activity/skill, nothing special to believe in. The Rinzai Zen tradition extends back 2500 yrs and has a tradition of teaching meditation for wellbeing and insight both in and outside of the monastic setting.
- 5. The insight our practice will bring is called “kensho”** – seeing our true nature.
- 6. Setting our intention:** Committing to 20-30 mins of practice every day for the duration of this course, including still meditation, writing a meditation diary, movement practices, and daily mindfulness exercises.
- 7. Postures**
- 8. Belly breathing and the Tanden**

Counting the breath meditation reminder: Possibility of practising all meditations on this course lying, sitting, standing or walking. This meditation we will practice sitting.

Sitting either on a chair, kneeling with a cushion or bench (knees apart), or cross legged on a cushion. Establish your triangular foundation between your sitting bones and two knees. Make sure your spine is as upright as you can manage. Hands in your lap, eyes resting down, open or closed, tongue soft and resting on the roof of mouth.

Become aware of your breath as low down as possible, ideally in your belly.

Begin mentally counting your breath: in-breath, one, outbreath, two, in-breath, three, out-breath, four. And so on, up to ten – when you can start again at one.

Allow any thoughts, feelings, memories, or anything at all to arise and pass. Stay with the sensation of the breathing and counting in your belly as best as you can. Anytime you get distracted or lose count, without any judgment, start again back at one. Counting in-breath one, out-breath two... As your mind becomes more settled you can experiment with just counting the out-breaths (again up to 10 then coming back to 1). Or even dropping the counting altogether, just following the sensations of the breath.

Know that at any point, if you feel like you need a stronger anchor, you can re-introduce the counting.

Homework Practice mindfulness of the breath meditation once a day and note down your experiences in your meditation diary.