



Practice Period

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What is Practice Period, and what is its purpose?

Practice Period is a time to refresh our aspiration to awaken to the wisdom and compassion that are the essence of Zen teaching. No matter how dedicated or longstanding our practice, we need to ask ourselves regularly, "Is the point of practice clear? Do I assume I know what practice is, when perhaps a closer look might be useful?"

Over time, it's easy to lose track of the broad view and function of practice. As we learn to observe ourselves honestly, we discover that waking sleep seems to be the basic human default setting. It can be painful to discover that, even after many years of practice, we are rarely awake. For instance, we often hold the almost unconscious belief that we are no more than an individual self, somehow separate from the rest of life, defined by our mind and body. It's understandable that we hold views like these, since we've been operating from them for many years, from long before we started 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 egocentric concerns we call "me stuff."

As awareness increases, we realize that 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 an almost dogged perseverance. 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.

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

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. Either in formal sitting or 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



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Practice Period will be from September 15 through October 14. Please submit your Practice Period Agreement before September 15. The full schedule and an agreement can be found at [here](#).

October Sesshin

The October sesshin is currently full. However, applications are still being accepted for the waiting list. Priority will be given to those who are enrolled in Practice Period.

Announcements

Sesshin Application

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

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conditioned behaviors lead to disheartenment. The main point is to discover these, and apply awareness practices to address these issues specifically.

To live more wakefully throughout the day, we include practices like those described on the ZCSD website under [Practice Period](#). Tools like [Menu Items](#), [Pauses in Time](#), and [Tasks](#), and our own additions, allow us to include pattern interrupts—things like refraining from sweets, TV, coffee, or other strong attachments that can block awareness. This acts 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 [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, and explore ways to highlight and interrupt old patterns that don't serve us, we can renew our aspiration to wake up from our self-centered preoccupations. This is what it takes, 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, and to intensify our commitment to waking up from our self-centered dream, to the reality that our deepest aspiration seeks. All of this helps us discover renewed enthusiasm for practice—and thus for life.

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