

Fundamentals of *Seiza* 静坐, Sitting-in-Stillness

A simple sitting and breathing method established by Okada Torajiro

1. On any level, flat surface, like *tatami*, a flat *zabuton* cushion, or a resilient carpet, kneel on bended knees, with the feet crossed deeply behind the insteps and tucked under the buttocks. Separate the knees by about two fist-widths for men or one for women. Rest the buttocks on the insteps and the ankles on the floor. Thrust the buttocks back.
2. Sit up with good posture, straightening the lower back. Keep the lumbar vertebrae upright and stable whether sitting, standing, or walking. Neither slump nor clench. Keep the lower back erect and buoyant all the time, not allowing it to bend under the weight of the upper body. Maintain this positive carriage consistently, everywhere, all the time, and in any situation.
3. Fold the hands on the lap. Clasp them loosely with one hand holding the thumb of the other, resting them comfortably below the abdomen with the palms turned down. Drop and retract the arms to body. Tuck in the elbows.
4. Lift the head up and imperceptibly forward. Align the earlobes over the shoulders. Touch the back of the collar with the neck. Slight incline the spine forward in a “S” shaped curve, concave at the small of the back, and convex at the shoulders, which are gently loosened and rotated forward. Relax the solar plexus (the pit of the stomach). Gently collapse the xiphoid process at the base of the sternum in and down.
5. Gaze at a spot on the floor about three feet away and then fully close the eyes. Lower and retract the chin slightly. Keep the eyes and mouth gently closed.
6. Breathe. Breathe only through the nose, softly and completely silently. Prolong the exhalation. Release the breath and automatically sufficient air will momentarily flow back up through the nostrils. Breathe out slowly and gently, for as long as possible. Again, effortlessly inhale naturally filling the vacuum. Continue breathing out and in this manner. Breathe from the belly or lower abdomen, not the chest. Never hold the breath.
7. Focus all attention and power into the lower abdomen during exhalation, to a spot behind and about two inches below the navel. This spot, known as the *tanden* or *dantian* (丹田) in Asia or the *hypogastrium* in Western anatomy, is the center of the body. Withdraw all mental energy from the head and channel it into lower abdomen. Concentrate the mind here; breathe from this point.

Sometimes the mind will drift back up to the head. Gently return the mind back to the *tanden*, the lower abdomen. Eventually, it will sit there, the mind and body as one. Sitting happens; effort is not necessary.

Should the feet go numb, lift the buttocks off the ankles and stand on the knees for a few minutes to regain circulation. If one can't comfortably assume a kneeling position, sit on the front third of a chair, maintaining the rest of the posture.

Start practicing this breathing and sitting method for 10 minutes, twice a day. Work up to 30 minutes on arising and 30 minutes before retiring to bed.

Once entering a state of calmness, maintain this state during the daily routine. Live a quiet but active life in this peaceful state to be truly happy. Practice. *Seiza* is the fundamental work of a lifetime.

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