

Basic Instructions for *Seiza*; Quiet Sitting

The correct sitting and breathing method established by Okada Torajiro
(When sitting on a chair)

First, sit on the front third of the chair with your feet slightly apart, then draw your feet in towards you. Men should keep their knees apart by about two clenched fists, women by about one.

Second, straighten your spine, hold your pelvis firmly erect, and sit with good posture. Never let the lower back drop (keep the lower back erect and the pelvis in a natural and balanced position). Shift your centre of gravity forward, creating a posture that aligns with the earth's gravitational pull. The most important point is to keep your lower back straight and stable, whether sitting, standing or walking. Wherever you are, whatever you are doing, always keep a straight lower back. Maintain this correct posture without letting your attention waver. Do not lean back against the chair, nor slouch.

Third, place both hands on your thighs. With one hand, gently grasp the thumb of the other, palms facing down, and rest your hands comfortably just below your abdomen.

Fourth, keep your head straight, aligning your earlobes directly above your shoulders. Drop your solar plexus, completely releasing all tension from your upper body. Pull your chin firmly back, as if you were trying to touch the back of the collar with your neck.

Fifth, close your eyes completely. Keep both eyes and mouth gently closed.

Sixth, breathe out slowly, silently, gently and at length, through the nose alone. Continue breathing out for a long time, feeling the upper abdomen sink inward. The moment you stop breathing out, sufficient air will naturally enter through your nostrils. Then breathe out again as slowly, gently and for as long as possible. Once again, the instant you stop breathing out, air will naturally enter through your nostrils, filling your lungs. You must not consciously breathe in; focus solely on the long out-breath. Breathe with your abdomen, not your chest. Never hold your breath.

Seventh, once you are able to perform the above steps fully, begin to concentrate your strength gradually into your lower abdomen – into a point about two inches (five centimetres) below and behind the navel. In Japan, this point is called the *tanden*, and it is the centre of the body. As you breathe out, focus all your energy into this *tanden*. The energy (or *ki*) in your head will naturally descend into your lower abdomen. During *Seiza*, keep your mind on this strength in the lower abdomen. From time to time, your awareness may drift back to your head; gently bring it back down to the lower abdomen, to the *tanden*. Before long, mind and body will become one and settle there. However, do not rush to put strength into the *tanden*.

It is important to practise *Seiza* every day. Begin by practising this posture and breathing method for ten or twenty minutes a day. Once you are accustomed to it, it is recommended to do thirty minutes immediately after waking and thirty minutes before going to bed. Also, wherever and

whenever you can, practise without wasting a moment.

It is essential to learn the correct method of Seiza directly from an experienced instructor. Seek repeated, specific guidance on correct posture and breathing. If you rely solely on self-study, you are bound to make mistakes.

When the vertical line of the body is established, the vertical line of the mind is also established – and from this arises a serene stillness and a fearless courage. Then, in daily life, joy and inner strength will naturally emerge.

Practise diligently, always with a beginner's mind. Seiza is a fundamentally joyful practice, to be pursued throughout one's entire life.

If you have any questions about Seiza, please feel free to contact me by email. It would be my pleasure to teach Seiza anywhere and share it with all of you.

With gratitude, *gassho*.

Miki Nakura

Buddhist minister and *Seiza* follower

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