

A Guide to Practice Discussion and Dokusan

What is dokusan?

Dokusan is an individual meeting with a person who is fully ordained as a Zen priest and teacher.

Who gives dokusan?

At Red Cedar Zen Community our resident teacher, Tim Burnett offers dokusan. Our guiding teacher, Norman Fischer offers dokusan when he is here leading a retreat. Occasionally we have visiting authorized teachers who offer dokusan.

Who can receive dokusan?

Anyone is welcome to receive dokusan.

What do you talk about?

Dokusan is a practice of authentic meeting. It is an opportunity to discuss your meditation practice and how it applies to your daily life. It is fine to bring up a problem or a question, or you can just describe your practice. You do not have to be profound or “zen.” Just be yourself.

When is dokusan?

Dokusan is offered during the weekly zazen schedule and during retreats, and also outside the regular schedule by request. Phone dokusan is available for those who are out of town or can't come to the zendo.

How often do you have dokusan?

If you are practicing regularly with Red Cedar, it is recommended to have dokusan about once a month. It is helpful to develop a connection with one or more teachers. In our sangha, we do not have a formal process for becoming a student of a particular teacher. This is something that evolves over time through practicing together, but it is good to discuss your commitment to practice with a teacher.

How long is dokusan?

Dokusan usually takes 5-15 minutes, occasionally longer.

How do I sign up?

This varies depending on the setting. Usually the teacher's attendant (jisha) will announce when dokusan will begin and what procedure to follow. During weekly zazen, we have file cards under the sitting mats (zabuton) for you to put on your mat to indicate that you want dokusan. You can arrange for a phone dokusan by contacting the teacher directly.

What is the form for dokusan?

The jisha will explain this if you are new, and feel free to ask if you have forgotten. When you enter the dokusan room you do a full prostration before the alter and a standing bow (gassho) before the teacher, and the reverse when you are finished. This helps to create a container of trust in which both parties can give full attention to meeting each other, supported by the truth of the Buddha Dharma.

Is dokusan confidential?

Dokusan is private and confidential within limits. The limits to confidentiality are: 1) when the individual expresses intention to harm self or other, 2) when a teacher seeks peer consultation from another teacher. Teachers do consult each other from time to time, and may consult their own teacher occasionally, in order to best support sangha members. This is standard practice in major Zen centers. When an individual requests complete confidentiality, that will be respected as long as there is no risk to that person or another.

Teacher contact info (Tim, leaving this for you to fill out)

What is practice discussion?

Practice discussion is an opportunity to discuss your practice with a dharma mentor in a less formal setting than dokusan. As with dokusan, anyone is welcome to have practice discussion.

Who gives practice discussion?

Those who have served as shusho (head monk) for a practice period can offer practice discussion. The shusho can be an ordained priest or a lay practitioner. Currently, Red Cedar has 6 people who offer practice discussion, John Wiley, Bob Penny, Edie Norton, Chris Burkhart, Talus Latona, Nancy Welch.

(insert dharma names before first names, and anyone I left out)

When is practice discussion?

Sometimes practice discussion is incorporated into retreats, and it is usually available during our regular weekly zazen times. It can also be arranged at other times by contacting the person you want to talk to, and can take place in the zendo or at an outside location, or by phone.

How do I sign up?

You can put a colored card on your cushion when practice discussion is available during zazen, or contact any of the practice leaders to arrange for practice discussion.

(we need to decide about how to contact people for this)