

**Kansas Zen Center**  
*Compass of Zen*  
course syllabus

based on a course by Zen Master Hae Kwang (Stan Lombardo)  
adapted by Judy Roitman, JDPSN

This course was first developed for Dharma Teachers in Training, to prepare them to become full Dharma Teachers. It has been adapted to include people who have taken 5 precepts or have had an introductory course in Zen practice. Each lesson consists of assigned readings and focused homework. Class consists of discussions

The readings basically follow the development of *The Compass of Zen*, supplemented by various books. Class sessions will consist of discussions based on the readings.

Except for the first class, every class has essentially two main questions: *what struck you about this material? what questions do you have?* There is also more defined homework to help us focus on specific topics and to help us learn forms, but the main questions are most important. Please do not try to find definitive answers to the questions. They are designed to open our minds, not close them.

**Required texts:**

Zen Master Seung Sahn, *The Compass of Zen* (Shambala)  
Zen Master Seung Sahn, *Dropping Ashes on the Buddha* (Grove)  
Zen Master Seung Sahn, *The Whole World is a Single Flower* (Tuttle)  
Richard Shrobe (Zen Master Wu Kwang), *Don't-Know Mind: the Spirit of Korean Zen*  
Damien Keown, *Dictionary of Buddhism* (Oxford)  
*Chanting book* of the Kwan Um School of Zen  
*The Sutra of Hui Neng*, also known as *The Platform Sutra*. Recommended translations: Cleary or Yampolsky

**Terminology:** We will follow the terminology of *Compass of Zen*, while recognizing its controversial nature (e.g., Hinayana instead of Theravada).

**Without a teacher:** If you're doing this course without teacher, I encourage you to do it with a small group. Whether with a group or on your own, I encourage you to discuss any questions you have with a teacher. If none are available to you, feel free to contact me over e-mail through the Kansas Zen Center address.

*Judy Roitman, JDPSN*

## Lesson 0

In this lesson we get to know each other by talking about our own experience with practice. If you're doing this course on your own, you might want to think about how you came to practice, what your practice has been, and how it's changed over time.

## Lesson 1

Readings:

from *The Compass of Zen*: p. 13 — 84

from *Dictionary of Buddhism*: Siddhartha Gautama, Hinayana, Sravakayana, anatman, triratna, Buddha, dharma, samgha<sup>1</sup>

*what struck you about this material? what questions do you have?*

Focused homework:

How would you tell the story of Gautama Buddha to someone who knows nothing about Buddhism?

Summarize the fundamental insights of Hinayana Buddhism, as outlined in *Compass of Zen*.

## Lesson 2

Readings:

from *The Compass of Zen*: p. 85 — 96

from *The Dictionary of Buddhism*: pratiya-samutpada, karma, Nagarjuna, Mula-madhyamaka-karika

*what struck you about this material? what questions do you have?*

Focused homework:

Describe *mutual causality* to someone who doesn't know what it is.

Rearrange the 12 links in the chain of dependent origination. Compare with the original.

## Lesson 3

Readings:

from *The Compass of Zen*: p. 97 — 111

from *The Dictionary of Buddhism*: four noble truths, dukkha, eightfold path, sila samadhi, prajna<sup>2</sup>

*what struck you about this material? what questions do you have?*

Focused homework:

Find at least four distinct formulations of the four noble truths. (Google is helpful.)

What are the three seals of existence?

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<sup>1</sup> No, this is not a misspelling.

<sup>2</sup> Not the Indian monk

## Lesson 4

### Readings:

from *The Compass of Zen*: p. 113 — 123

from *The Dictionary of Buddhism*: Mahayana, middle way, arhat, bodhisattva, karuna  
*what struck you about this material? what questions do you have?*

### Focused homework:

Memorize the four great vows.

What, in the formulation of *The Compass of Zen*, are the major differences between Hinayana and Mahayana Buddhism?

for 10 precepts people: Memorize the evening bell chant.

## Lesson 5

### Reading:

from *The Compass of Zen*: p. 125 — 139

from *The Dictionary of Buddhism*: Vajracchedika sutra, Heart sutra, sunyata, skandha  
*what struck you about this material? what questions do you have?*

### Focused homework:

What is your understanding about *emptiness? skandha? impermanence? non-self?* and their relationships (or not) with each other.

Memorize the English heart sutra.

(for 10 precepts people): memorize the Korean heart sutra; practice both versions of the heart sutra with a moktak.

## Lesson 6

### Reading:

from *The Compass of Zen*: p. 140 — 149

from *The Dictionary of Buddhism*: Hui-neng, Mahaparinirvana sutra, Lotus sutra, nirvana, One Mind, T'ien-t'ai

from *The Sutra of Hui Neng* (Cleary's translation) p. 5 — 15

*what struck you about this material? what questions do you have?*

### Focused homework:

Why study sutras?

Summarize the chant *Homage to the Buddhas* (see the translation in the chanting book, one sentence or phrase per stanza.

(for 10 precepts people): practice this chant with a moktak.

## Lesson 7

### Reading:

from *The Compass of Zen*: p. 150 — 163

from *The Dictionary of Buddhism*: Avatamsaka Sutra, Hua-yen, Amitabha, Amitabha Sutra, Sukhavati-vyuha Sutra, Vairocana, kalpa

from our chanting book: translation of the morning bell chant (see handout)

*what struck you about this material? what questions do you have?*

### Focused homework:

What is the Hua-Yen school?

Read the translation of the morning bell chant.

The morning bell chant is syncretic, combining elements of the Hua-Yen school, Pure Land Buddhism (Amitabha) and Zen. Identify each within the chant.

(for 10 precepts people) Lead the morning bell chant.

## Lesson 8

### Reading:

from *The Compass of Zen*: p. 164 — 197

from *The Dictionary of Buddhism*: Alaya-vijnaya, yogacara, samsara, dharani

*what struck you about this material? what questions do you have?*

### Focused homework:

How would you explain the following to someone who is unfamiliar with them:  
*karma, storehouse consciousness, dependent origination?*

Chant the great dharani.

(for 10 precepts people) Chant the great dharani with a moktak.

(advanced Focused homework) Memorize the great dharani and use it as a fast mantra during meditation.

## Lesson 9

### Reading:

from *The Compass of Zen*: p. 198 — 204

from *The Dictionary of Buddhism*: paramita, Avalokitesvara

from the *Chanting Book*: translation of the 10,000 eyes and hands sutra

[Note: The beginning of this chant is not translated in the chanting book. It reads: “Today in my unified mind infinite bodies appear; all of them are the great, holy Kwan Um. Each day I bow countless times.”]

*what struck you about this material? what questions do you have?*

### Focused homework:

Memorize the six paramitas and the eightfold path.

Chant the 10,000 eyes and hands sutra.

(for 10 precepts people): Chant this sutra with a moktak.

## Lesson 10

### Reading:

from *The Compass of Zen*: p. 205 — 243

from *The Dictionary of Buddhism*: five degrees of enlightenment, Five Houses, Lin-Chi I-hsuan, Lin-Chi School, Yun-Men Wen-yen, Ch'an, Son, Zen

from *Dropping Ashes on the Buddha*: chapter 32, Five kinds of Zen (handout)

*what struck you about this material? what questions do you have?*

### Focused homework:

What types of Zen are described in the reading? Give examples of each kind from your own life or the lives of people you know.

Have you had any experiences you would call enlightenment? Samadhi? What were they?

Learn the correct forms for mudras, bows, and prostrations

## Lesson 11

### Reading:

from *The Compass of Zen*: p. 244 — 261

from *The Dictionary of Buddhism*: zazen, samadhi, dhyana

*what struck you about this material? what questions do you have?*

### Focused homework:

What would you say to somebody who asks, "What is Zen?"

What would you say to somebody who asks, "What is samadhi?"

Work on your sitting posture so that it feels firm and balanced.

## Lesson 12

### Reading:

from *The Compass of Zen*: p. 268 — 290

from *The Dictionary of Buddhism*: shikan-taza

*what struck you about this material? what questions do you have?*

### Focused homework:

What is your experience of the four basic practice forms: sitting, bowing, chanting, walking meditation?

Try at least two different sitting meditation forms fairly extensively throughout the month.

What is your experience of the various sitting practice that you've tried?

### Lesson 13

#### Reading:

from *The Compass of Zen*: p. 291 — 300

from *The Dictionary of Buddhism*: five degrees of enlightenment

from *Dropping Ashes on the Buddha*: The Zen Circle

*what struck you about this material? what questions do you have?*

#### Focused homework:

Become comfortable eating formal 4-bowl style

What is your experience of 180? 270?

(for 10 precepts people) Learn how to lead 4-bowl style.

### Lesson 14

#### Reading:

from *The Compass of Zen*: p. 262 — 267, p. 301 — 314

from *The Dictionary of Buddhism*: koan

*what struck you about this material? what questions do you have?*

#### Focused homework:

Go to a kong-an interview.

### Lesson 15

#### Reading:

from *The Compass of Zen*: p. 315 — 347, p. 355 — 389

from *The Dictionary of Buddhism*: Gateless Gate, Blue Cliff Record

from *The Whole World is a Single Flower*, p. 233 — 237

*what struck you about this material? what questions do you have?*

#### Focused homework:

How do you experience kong-an practice? [Note: in discussion it will be very important not to give any hints about which kong-ans we've passed or not passed, and not to give any hints about answers.]

Memorize *The Human Route*.

### Lesson 16

#### Reading:

from the *Chanting Book*: Temple rules

from *The Dictionary of Buddhism*: Vinaya Pitaka

The 10 precepts (see next page)

*what struck you about this material? what questions do you have?*

#### Focused homework:

How do you experience the temple rules?

Compare Zen precepts to vinaya.

Observe how you hold precepts and break them.

(for 10 precepts people) Lead as both moktak master and as head dharma teacher.

## Lesson 17

### Reading:

from *The Compass of Zen*: p. 393 — 394

from *The Dictionary of Buddhism*: Mahakasyapa, Bodhidharma, Hui-neng, Ma-tsu Tao-i, Pai-chang Huai-hai, Huang-po His-yun, Lin-chi I-hsuan, Chinul, T'aego Pou, Wonhyo, Korea

from *Dropping Ashes on the Buddha*: chapter 66, chapter 99

from *Don't-Know Mind*: The Modern Period (p. 75 – 141)

pdf article on women ancestors (on the Kansas Zen Center website, under *Resources*)

*what struck you about this material? what questions do you have?*

### Focused homework:

Why lineage?

Read a substantial part of the writings/sayings of one of the following: Hui-neng, Huang-po, Lin-chi (a.k.a. Rinzai).

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## The 10 precepts of the Kwan Um School of Zen

1. I vow to abstain from taking life
2. I vow to abstain from taking things not given.
3. I vow to abstain from conduct done in lust.
4. I vow to abstain from lying.
5. I vow to abstain from intoxicants, taken to induce heedlessness.
6. I vow not to talk about the faults of others.
7. I vow not to praise myself and put down others.
8. I vow not to be covetous and to be generous.
9. I vow not to give way to anger and to be harmonious.
10. I vow not to slander the three jewels (Buddha, dharma, sangha).