

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 for people who have taken either 5 or 10 precepts. Each lesson consists of three parts:

- assigned readings
- questions to think about
- homework

The readings basically follow the development of *The Compass of Zen*, supplemented by various books. The questions are meant to help focus you as you read, but experience shows that even better questions usually arise in class discussion. The homework is mostly about practice forms, often independent of the readings. References to *Dharma Mirror* will be given so those who have taken 10 precepts can find the exact references, but ownership of *Dharma Mirror* isn't essential. Sometimes the homework will have two levels: for those who've taken 10 precepts, and for those who've taken 5. Class sessions will consist of discussions based on the readings and on the homework.

Required texts:

Zen Master Seung Sahn, *The Compass of Zen* (Shambala)
Zen Master Seung Sahn, *Dropping Ashes on the Buddha* (Grove)
Richard Shrobe (Zen Master Wu Kwang), *Don't-Know Mind: the Spirit of Korean Zen*
Damien Keown, *Dictionary of Buddhism* (Oxford)
Dharma Mirror (for those with 10 precepts — it is given during the
precepts ceremony)
Chanting book of the Kwan Um School of Zen

Supplementary texts

Zen Master Seung Sahn, *The Whole World is a Single Flower* (Tuttle)

Material from supplementary texts will be provided in hand-outs, as will other material from time to time.

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

Lesson 0

Questions:

- What brought you to practice?
- How do you practice (e.g., how often at home? at the Zen Center? what meditation practice(s)?)
- What keeps you practicing?

Lesson 1

Readings:

- from *The Compass of Zen*: p. 13 — 84
- from *Dictionary of Buddhism*: Siddhartha Gautama, Hinayana, Sravakayana, anatman, triratna, Buddha, dharma, samgha¹

Study questions:

- What are the purposes of Buddhist practice?
- What are the fundamental insights of Hinayana Buddhism?
- What is the importance of *triratna* (the three precious ones) in the way Buddhist communities and Buddhist practice are organized?

Homework:

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

Lesson 2

Readings:

- from *The Compass of Zen*: p. 85 — 96
- from *The Dictionary of Buddhism*: pratiya-samutpada, karma, Nagarjuna, Mula-madhyamaka-karika

Study questions:

- What is mutual causality?
- Make a case for at least 3 of the 12 links in the chain of dependent origination being the most fundamental link.

Homework:

- What are the elements of a retreat? In your experience, how do these different elements function? (see *Dharma Mirror III*)

¹ No, this is not a misspelling.

Lesson 3

Readings:

from *The Compass of Zen*: p. 97 — 111
from *The Dictionary of Buddhism*: four noble truths, dukkha, eightfold path, sila samadhi, prajna²

Questions:

The formulation of the four noble truths in *The Compass of Zen* differs from its formulation in the *Dictionary of Buddhism*. How?

How do various meanings of *dukkha* illuminate each other?

What are the three seals of existence? (Not just their names — the concepts behind them.)

What are the three kinds of practice? How do they illuminate each other?

Homework:

(for 5 precepts people): If you've been to a Buddhist ceremony, in our school or any other, what struck you about it?

(for 10 precepts people): What elements are common to all or most of our school's ceremonies (see Dharma Mirror IV)

Lesson 4

Readings:

from *The Compass of Zen*: p. 113 — 123
from *The Dictionary of Buddhism*: Mahayana, middle way, arhat, bodhisattva, karuna

Questions:

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

What is the difference between an arhat and a bodhisattva?

Homework:

Learn the four great vows.

How are the four great vows found within the evening bell chant? (see handout)

for 10 precepts people: Learn the evening bell chant (*Dharma Mirror* 5.09).

² Not the Indian monk

Lesson 5

Reading:

from *The Compass of Zen*: p. 125 — 139
from *The Dictionary of Buddhism*: Vajracchedika sutra, Heart sutra, sunyata, skandha

Questions:

What, in your own words, is Zen Master Seung Sahn's core teaching on *The Diamond Sutra*?

What is the concept of emptiness in Mahayana Buddhism?

Contrast and/or relate emptiness to both impermanence and non-self.

What's a skandha? How does this concept relate to emptiness?

Homework:

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
(see handout)

Questions:

What are the common themes of the great Mahayana sutras?

In the old stories, Zen teachers are often contrasted with sutra teachers (who are often made to seem foolish). Why, then, study sutras?

What is the difference between experiential knowledge and academic knowledge?

Homework:

What is the structure of the chant *Homage to the Buddhas* (see the translation in the chanting book or *Dharma Mirror* 5.10).

(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-vyuhā Sutra, Vairocana, kalpa
from our chanting book: translation of the morning bell chant (see handout)

Questions:

Relate the summary of the Hua-yen school with the summaries of the Avatamsaka sutra.

The Avatamsaka sutra can also be summarized as the identification of the Buddha's body with the universe (see handout). What can this possibly mean?

The morning bell chant combines elements of the Avatamsaka sutra with elements of the Amitabha sutra and with ancient Chinese Zen poetry. Identify each component where it arises.

In *The Compass of Zen* Dae Soen Sa Nim seems to find it funny that people think that time and space exist. Why?

Homework:

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

Lesson 8

Reading:

from *The Compass of Zen*: p. 164 — 197
from the magazine *Buddhadharma* (see handout)
from *The Dictionary of Buddhism*: Alaya-vijnaya, yogacara, samsara, dharani

Questions:

How does the notion of karma relate to: (a) the storehouse consciousness; (b) dependent origination?

What is the relation of practice to karma?

How does the story of Mr. Lee illuminate the notion of mind?

In our human lives, how do the six worlds manifest themselves?

Is the notion of karma dependent on the notion of rebirth?

Homework:

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

Questions:

Compare and relate the six paramitas to the eightfold path.

How do the six paramitas manifest themselves in our practice and in the teachings of our school of Zen?

If you’ve practiced in another Buddhist school: how do the six paramitas manifest themselves in the teachings or practice of that school?

Homework:

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)

Questions:

What different types of Zen are described?

How do they manifest in our practice?

Which is the true Zen?

Homework:

Learn the correct forms for mudras, bows, and prostrations

(for 10 precepts people): learn the forms in *Dharma Mirror* 6:01 — 6:14

Lesson 11

Reading:

from *The Compass of Zen*: p. 244 — 261
from *The Dictionary of Buddhism*: zazen, Samadhi, dhyana

Questions:

Originally this lesson was combined with lesson 10. Why?
What does Zen particularly emphasize? I.e., what is Zen?
What is the relationship between sitting Zen and samadhi?

Homework:

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

Questions:

We have four basic practices: sitting, bowing, chanting, walking meditation. How are they alike? How are they different? Where are they pointing? What is your experience of them?

There are many sitting meditation practices, e.g., great question, counting breaths, fast mantra, shikantaza. How are they alike? How are they different? Where are they pointing? What is your experience of them?

Homework:

Carefully observe your sitting practice. Try at least two different forms fairly extensively throughout the month. How do you experience them?

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 (handout)

Questions:

Compare the Zen Circle with Tung-shan's five degrees of enlightenment.
What is your experience of 180? 270?

Homework:

Become comfortable eating formal 4-bowl style
(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

Questions:

The readings for this lesson reach back to the Zen Circle and look forward to the study of kong-ans. Which part of the reading does which?

Homework:

Go to at least one interview this month and carefully observe your experience.

Lesson 15

Reading:

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

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

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

Questions:

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.]

How can you explain/justify/describe kong-ans to people who don't know about them?

Homework:

Memorize *The Human Route*

Lesson 16

Reading:

from the *Chanting Book*: Temple rules

from *The Dictionary of Buddhism*: Vinaya Pitaka

The 10 precepts (handout)

Questions:

How do you experience the temple rules?

Are Zen precepts the same as vinaya?

Homework:

Observe carefully during the course of a day how/whether you hold precepts or break them.

(for 10 precepts people) Lead as both moktak master and as head dharma teacher, paying particular attention to your activities vis-a-vis the altar.

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

Question:

What is lineage about? (Why) is it important?

Homework:

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