

Guidelines for Living at the Rôkoan Hermitage 2025

This hermitage arose to meet the needs of experienced practitioners in Kyoto. Practicing here is a precious chance to devote ourselves wholeheartedly and, whenever others are present, do what we can to support their practice while living together in harmony.

Each moment is precious. Zazen is the natural focus: several hours of concentrated sitting everyday (see sample schedule below). The short breaks in between the 50-minute zazen periods are to use the toilet, quietly stretch in one of the front rooms, or do slow *kinhin*-walking meditation in the front room. Do not make tea, eat, or converse during these short breaks.

Attention and care should be constant – not just during zazen. Noble silence is an integral part of practice; be mindful when talking. Be mindful when eating and do so in moderation. Put sleeping futons away neatly and take out only at night. Clean up promptly and thoroughly after eating or tea breaks, regularly clean the premises, and give a thorough cleaning upon leaving.

Coordinate with others living at the hermitage concerning what they would like to eat. This way, shopping could be done ahead of time and meals could be conducted in silence. Eating at least one meal per day together is a way of supporting each other's practice.

If you have any suggestions or concerns, please let Jeff know right away. Together we are creating this space for sustained practice.

Before making a commitment to come practice here, consider the following:

- Are you living a wholesome life in accord with the practice?
- If you have any mental or physical concerns, inform us first.
- Are you doing zazen regularly? You should be accustomed to

sitting several hour-long periods a day (50 minutes zazen, 10 minute break; 50 minutes zazen, 10 minute break, etc.) See sample schedule below.

- Are you able to financially support yourself during your time here, without being a burden on others? This includes round-trip airfare, health insurance, and daily living expenses. A *Dana*-donation of at least 150 Euros per week (or the equivalent in US dollars or Japanese yen) would be appreciated. Please place it in an envelope and offer it when arriving. Another offering may be made when you depart.
- Are you familiar with Japanese customs and culture? This includes bowing, the importance of silence, listening more than talking, etc.
- Can you speak at least a little Japanese? Learning some key phrases will be helpful.

Please give serious consideration to these questions. Bear in mind that the Hermitage is not a guesthouse; if you want to come to Japan as a tourist, look elsewhere. Nor is it a temple; it is more demanding than a temple, since it requires you to provide much of the discipline yourself. Before coming, you should already have participated in at least one of our retreats and/or lived at a genuine training monastery. Then you will be ready. **Stay and practice full time at the hermitage for at least a week to 10 days to get your toes wet.**

One-On-One

This is to clarify things and resolve doubts. It is not psychological counseling, but a precious opportunity to get to the very bottom of your self with another. Free and open to mutually discover truth, this is the original spirit of Zen Buddhist practice.

Keep your concern or response brief and to the point. No need to "tell your story." One-on-one is not for discussing practice so much as presenting, revealing where you actually are. If

clarification is necessary, questions can be asked. Make best use of this precious opportunity. Jeff is here for you.

During zazen, Jeff will get up from his seat, then go to the one-on-one room (upstairs on the right). After a moment, the first person to his left will rise and go for one-on-one. When that person returns and bows at their seat, the next person will also bow, then go. If you don't feel you are ready, you may just bow and remain sitting, although you are encouraged to go anyway. You will see why.

In the one-on-one room it is only necessary to place hands in *gasshou* when you have taken a seat and are ready to begin, and again at the end of the one-on-one. It is not necessary to bow. If necessary, you may request one-on-one anytime Jeff is present during zazen: quietly rise from your seat, *gasshou* in front of him, he will *gasshou* to you, then follow him. Jeff may initiate one-on-one with you. He will rise from his seat during zazen and *gasshou* in front of you; *gasshou* to him, then follow.

Sample Schedule

5:00 Wake up, wash up, breakfast, prepare for others to sit.

6:00 Fifty-minute zazen.

7:00 Fifty-minute zazen.

8:00 Fifty-minute zazen.

9:00 – 12:00 Exercise, walking, shopping, lunch, etc.

12:00 Fifty-minute zazen.

13:00 Fifty-minute zazen.

14:00 Fifty-minute zazen.

15:00 – 18:00 Exercise, walking, shopping, dinner, etc.

18:00 Fifty-minute zazen.

19:00 Fifty-minute zazen.

20:00 Fifty-minute zazen.

21:00 – Exercise, *yaza* (late-night sitting), etc.

Impressions from Previous Hermits

...The Hermitage is not a place to escape the world. Yes, in many ways it is a sanctuary, but the timetable has been very skillfully crafted. I could neither escape into the hustle and bustle of Kyoto and all its cultural delights, nor hide in the serene quietude of the Hermitage and withdraw from the world.

...During my stay, which was over a month long, I had the opportunity to practice with quite a few zen enthusiasts from Australia, Canada, Germany, Japan, Cuba, Ireland, Mexico, the Netherlands, Serbia, Taiwan, and the United States. Some stayed at the Hermitage, while others stayed at nearby accommodations and came for the sitting periods.

One of the many advantages of staying and sitting together with many people from different backgrounds in a small place is that we have to learn how to put our personal views aside. If our practice does not work in such a situation, something is lacking – probably the reason why we came to practice in the first place. My impression was that everyone who came and stayed there was aware of, willing to accept, and willing to work with this challenge...

Even if one is living in a Buddhist temple in a country with a deep Buddhist tradition, it is a valuable opportunity and a challenge to practice at the Hermitage in Kyoto. Actually, that “even” should be replaced with an “especially”! I say this as a Hungarian who has now lived several years as a Son (Zen) monk in South Korea. This is because staying at the hermitage can be much like a solo retreat – the most advanced and valued way of practice in many meditation traditions. An opportunity to practice at a place like that, for example in a country like South Korea, is not easy at all. Besides, these places may not have experienced teachers available for guidance when needed.

...Following my own rhythm, I meditated for around 13 hours every day, doing long *kinhin* sessions as well as regular zazen, taking short pauses for lunch, and after sitting in the evenings with the monks at Tofukuji monastery, sleeping a good 7 hours at night. Instead of trudging along, fighting against my body, the practice became naturally solid, and I still feel I could have gone on like that for months. No pain, no lack of sleep. Well, there was the cold, but it wasn't that bad...

Over the last 8 years I stayed at the hermitage once every two years, five separate visits, each lasting anywhere from a month to 3 months. The main value the hermitage provides, I thought initially, lies in providing a *sesshin* type of environment combined with daily one-on-one with Jeff. But later I came to appreciate something else, equally valuable: the time spent with Jeff outside of the hermitage, in the city of Kyoto.

My first visit in 2009 revolved completely around sitting with no interest at all in “seeing the sites” (as I thought of it then) with Jeff. So I came for 3 months, sat 12 hours a day, attended 2 *sesshin* at Tofukuji, and did one-on-one with Jeff at least twice daily. The one-on-ones with Jeff were beneficial in ways that seemed miraculous at the time. Even to this day I feel very fortunate that Jeff was there at the beginning, to help provide a living sense of what it means to “completely focus all one's energy” in zazen. I doubt I could have come to that on my own. He also tried to get me out for lunch and for other stuff I did not care about, and out of politeness I would go. We had a great conversation once at a pizza place, but apart from that I found leaving the hermitage annoying and a waste of what I felt was very little precious time.