**Meditation instruction**

Body and mind are one. This means that our bodily posture manifests itself in our mental attitude, and vice versa. The outward calm of sitting (zazen) invites us to follow this example inwardly. As far as possible, we try to become quieter and quieter every time we sit. This is not easy. What matters is that we are aware of our posture, and as far as possible, adopt the optimal mental and physical ‘posture’. This affects our well-being favourably.

The meditation posture:

1. During zazen we let our gaze rest on a spot ca one metre and a half before us on the ground. We keep our eyes half open.
2. The tip of our tongue rests against our palate just behind our front teeth. So in fact we ‘stretch’ our tongue just as we ‘stretch’ our back.
3. We breathe through our nose, noiselessly. Audible breathing is often a manifestation of tension. Silent breathing on the other hand leads to relaxation.
4. Our basic practice is a balanced, natural breathing; therefore, in the beginning, we do not breathe deeper than normal. Gradually, our breathing becomes slower and deeper out of its own accord; you do not have to force this.
5. An important part of the correct posture is the position of our chin. This is slightly drawn in, which is achieved by imagining that we are drawn up by a string running to the ceiling from the top of our head.
6. To obtain a correct meditation posture, a straight back is of the utmost importance. To achieve this, just follow the instruction given for the position of our chin.
7. It’s important that your shoulders are relaxed.
8. Our hands are in the so-called ‘mudra of unity’. We form a nice oval with our thumbs and fingers and place this around our belly button. Thumbs touch eachother just lightly.
9. The position of our legs gives us our stability during zazen. There are different postures to learn to meditate in: seiza – on our knees; birmese lotus – cross-legged with our one leg/foot against our cushion and the other leg/foot in front of it. The posture should be somewhat challenging to get as much out of the practice as possible.
10. We count on our out-going breaths. We count each separate breath, from one to ten, each breath one count. You try to stretch the counting as long as the breath lasts. When you reach 10, you start at 1 again. If you lose count, you also start at 1 again.
11. The basic instruction is: if thoughts come up, just be aware of it and return to the counting, starting at one again. You don’t have to judge yourself for losing count.

Practice at home: 2 x 20 minutes per day zazen, counting your breaths