

Part 1

The books in Part 1 are suggested to be read top down in sequential order. They start at ground level, build on each other, and are intended to establish a wholistic foundation of the Zen Buddhist tradition within the practitioner.

Introduction to Spiritual Practice

Title: *Dokusan With Dogen: Timeless Lessons In Negotiating The Way*

Author: Barbara Verkuilen

Brief Description: The author, Renshin Barbara Verkuilen (passed away in 2024), co-founded, along with her husband Taizen Dale Verkuilen, the Midwest Soto Zen Community in Madison, Wisconsin. They both practiced directly with Dainin Katagiri Roshi.

The Japanese word “dokusan” refers to a one-on-one interview between teacher and student. Eihei Dogen was the great 13th century Japanese Zen master and founder of the Japanese Soto Zen school. So, the title of this book, *Dokusan With Dogen*, suggests a one-on-one interview with this great, ancient master. But don’t let the title intimidate you. This book is a gentle, yet profound teaching on spiritual practice that incorporates foundational Buddhism, teachings of Dogen and Katagiri, as well as Barbara’s own experiences and insights into a book that is understandable to newcomers and continually helpful to long-time practitioners.

The best place to purchase this book is through Firethroat Press, www.firethroatpress.com.

Foundational Buddhism

Title: *What The Buddha Taught*

Author: Walpola Rahula

Brief Description: This book attempts to go all the way back to the Buddha himself and present the original teachings of the Buddha prior to Buddhism’s division into multiple varieties as it spread to other countries and cultures over the subsequent centuries.

Or

Title: *The Heart of the Buddha’s Teaching: Transforming Suffering into Peace, Joy, and Liberation*

Author: Thich Nhat Hanh

Brief Description: Thich Nhat Hanh was a Vietnamese Zen monk and teacher. In Vietnamese, the word “Zen” is “Thien.” This book is a very comprehensive work covering the Buddha’s teachings from Thich Nhat Hanh’s perspective.

Zen Buddhism

Title: *Opening the Hand of Thought: Foundations of Zen Buddhist Practice*

Author: Kosho Uchiyama

Brief Description: Kosho Uchiyama Roshi was a Japanese Zen teacher who also had a background in Western philosophy and religion. He was a student of Kodo Sawaki Roshi (a.k.a. "Homeless Kodo") and the teacher of Shohaku Okumura, a prominent teacher and translator bringing Zen to the West.

This is a great introduction to Zen and its practices. It also mixes in Western philosophy and religion and how this differs from or is the same as Zen. In general, it covers Uchiyama's aspiration for all of us to "*live out our whole self, our true self, the reality of life,*" and the Zen practices to help us with that aspiration.

Or

Title: *What Is Zen?: Plain Talk for a Beginner's Mind*

Authors: Norman Fischer and Susan Moon

Brief Description: This is a book from two Western Zen teachers. Both authors are from the San Francisco Zen Center. The book is in a question and answer format with Susan asking the questions and Norman providing the responses. The book covers a wide range of topics. Some of the chapter titles are, "What's the Point?," "Zazen," "Form and Ritual," "Beliefs and Ethics," and "Everyday Life and Everyday Relationships," just to name a few.

And

Title: *Living By Vow: A Practical Introduction To Eight Essential Zen Chants And Texts*

Author: Shohaku Okumura

Brief Description: For this book, the suggestion is to read it once one has established a practice and has had experience chanting the texts used in Zen liturgical services. Shohaku provides in-depth commentary on texts such as *The Heart Sutra*, *The Bodhisattva Vows*, *The Verse of the Triple Treasures*, just to name a few. The intent of reading this book is to deepen one's understanding of what one is chanting.

Part 2

The books, sutras, and texts in Part 2 contain some of the most well-known literature in Western Zen as well as some of the ancient texts most applicable to the Zen tradition. There is no suggested sequential reading order for the material in Part 2. The practitioner can pick and choose based on their interest. Most of the books in the first two sections below contain talks on various subjects given by the author/teacher which were later transcribed to create the books.

Contemporary Zen Books from the Direct Lineage of the Des Moines Zen Center

Books by Dainin Katagiri Roshi (founder of the DMZC's lineage):

Title: *Returning To Silence: Zen Practice in Daily Life*

Title: *You have to say something: Manifesting Zen Insight*

Title: *Each Moment Is the Universe: Zen And The Way Of Being Time*

Title: *The Light That Shines Through Infinity: Zen and the Energy of Life*

Books by Shoken Winecoff Roshi (teacher and grandfather teacher of the DMZC):

Title: *Zen Seeds for Fallow Ground*

Title: *Passing Through the Dragon Gate*

Other Contemporary Zen Books

Books by Shunryu Suzuki Roshi:

Title: *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind: Informal talks on Zen meditation and practice*

Title: *not always so: Practicing the True Spirit of Zen*

Title: *Everyday Zen*

Author: Charlotte Joko Beck

Ancient, Foundational Sutras and Texts of the Buddhist and Zen Tradition (listed below in a quasi-chronological order)

Title: *Setting in Motion the Wheel of Dhamma (Dhamma Cakka Pavattana Sutta)*

- Brief Description: This is the first teaching of the Buddha after his awakening in which he teaches The Middle Way, The Four Noble Truths, and The Eightfold Path.
- Location:
 - The original location is in the Pali Canon / Samyutta Nikaya, Volume II / Saccasamyutta Sutta / Section 11(1).
 - This sutta is also located in “Part 4 – Discourses” in Thich Nhat Hanh’s book mentioned in Part 1 above, *“The Heart of the Buddha’s Teaching.”*

Title: *The Foundations of Mindfulness (Satipatthana Sutta)*

- Brief Description: This sutta describes in detail the Four Foundations of Mindfulness: 1. Body, 2. Feelings, 3. Mind, 4. Mind-Objects.
- Location:
 - The original location is in the Pali Canon / Majjhima Nikaya / Satipatthana Sutta.
 - There are many books available on this sutta that can be found online.

Title: *Sutra on the Buddha’s Bequeathed Teaching (“Butsu -Yuikyo-gyo” in Japanese)*

- Brief Description: This is a Mahayana sutra considered to be the final teaching of the Buddha just before he passed away. It’s a great summary of his 40 years of teaching. This is traditionally recited in Japanese temples on the occasion of the Buddha’s Parinirvana (February 15). The Des Moines Zen Center follows this practice.
- Location: A copy of this sutra can be found at the following website: [City of 10,000 Buddhas - Sutra on the Buddha's Bequeathed Teaching](#)

Title: *Lankavatara Sutra*

Brief Description: Tradition has it that this was the only sutra the first ancestor of Zen, Bodhidharma, carried with him. He told his disciple, Hui-k’o, that everything he needed to know was in this sutra. Considered the “holy grail” of Zen.

Title: *Diamond Sutra (Vajracchedika Prajnaparamita Sutra)*

Brief Description: Tradition has it that the sixth ancestor of Zen, Hui-neng, realized enlightenment upon hearing a chanting of this sutra. In the sutra, the Buddha teaches his disciple, Subhuti, how to cut through dualistic ways of looking at the world in order to have a deeper contact with the wondrous reality that is inside us and all around us.

Title: *Platform Sutra*

Brief Description: A famous teaching given to an assembly by the sixth ancestor, Hui-neng. The sutra covers a range of topics, one of the most influential being that meditation and wisdom are one, like a lamp and its light, the precursor to Dogen Zenji’s famous teaching that practice and realization are one.

Title: *Heart Sutra (Maha Prajna Paramita Hridaya Sutra)*

Brief Description: This brief sutra expounds the essence of Buddhist wisdom, that being *prajna*, the ultimate emptiness of all phenomena AND the oneness of emptiness and form, the realization of which removes all barriers and eliminates all fears.

The three collections of Zen koans:

- Titles: *The Blue Cliff Record*, *The Gateless Gate*, *The Book of Serenity*
- Brief Description: Teaching stories from ancient China, usually dialogues between practitioners, intended to challenge our limited, conditioned viewpoints and refine our alignment with our deeper nature.

Title: *Shobogenzo (Treasury of the True Dharma Eye)*

Author: Eihei Dogen Zenji

Brief Description: Dogen's large, masterpiece collection of writings on the Dharma covering a multitude of subjects.