

# INTRODUCTION TO ZEN

OLLI, Spring 2021

## Course Description

In this course you will learn about the history, literature, and philosophy of Zen Buddhism, as well as having a direct experience of Zen practices. Zen Buddhism developed in China fifteen hundred years ago. It spread throughout Asia and, since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, throughout the world. Zen is grounded in Buddhist understandings and teachings, but has its own playful, iconoclastic, powerful practices, including *zazen* (seated meditation) and *koans* (stories of awakening). Zen has its own unique teachings and literature, and is the foundation for many Asian arts, including tea ceremony, flower arrangement, martial arts, calligraphy, and brush painting.

Each week will include some history, philosophy, poetry, visual arts, and practical instruction, with plenty of time for questions.

I will be adding resources to the ones listed here, after each class.

## Week 1. January 25: Foundations of Buddhism.

In this class we will briefly touch on the foundational history and teachings of Buddhism, focused on Shakyamuni Buddha (the “Awakened One”) and his followers in the 6<sup>th</sup> c. BCE, as well as the flowering of Mahayana Buddhism about 500 years after the death of the Buddha. This history and foundation are essential to understanding Zen. Practical instruction in mindfulness of breathing.

### Optional online resources for Week 1:

Four Noble Truths: <https://www.upaya.org/2017/05/stephen-batchelor-four-noble-truths-by-john-becvar/>

Four Foundations of Mindfulness: <https://www.lionsroar.com/the-buddhas-four-foundations-of-mindfulness/>

What Is Theravada Buddhism? (great general resource on Buddhism- “Buddhism for Beginners”): <https://tricycle.org/beginners/buddhism/what-is-theravada-buddhism/>

What Is Mahayana Buddhism?: <https://tricycle.org/beginners/buddhism/what-is-mahayana-buddhism/>

### Optional videos for Week 1

Biography of the Buddha (two hour documentary): [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B1Qhja4OhdM&ab\\_channel=LadyHedonist](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B1Qhja4OhdM&ab_channel=LadyHedonist)

Mindfulness of Breath guided meditation: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iR\\_aZOie3Z0&ab\\_channel=MindfulnessHealing](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iR_aZOie3Z0&ab_channel=MindfulnessHealing)

### One book that might be of interest

*Old Path White Clouds: Walking in the Footsteps of the Buddha*, by Thich Nhat Hanh: <https://www.powells.com/book/old-path-white-clouds-9781458768155>

## Week 2. February 1: Bodhidharma Comes to the West

In this class we will explore the meeting of China and India that led to Zen Buddhism. Bodhidharma, an Indian Buddhist teacher, is the semi-mythical founder of Zen (or Chan) in China. However, what is probably closer to the truth is a trickle of Buddhist teachers and written teachings arriving in China over several hundred years and merging with both Daoism and Confucianism, leading to a new way of understanding and practice. Practical instruction in *zazen*.

### Optional online resources for Week 2:

The Silk Road and Buddhism: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Silk\\_Road\\_transmission\\_of\\_Buddhism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Silk_Road_transmission_of_Buddhism)

[Map of Spread of Buddhism](#)

The Three Teachings of China:

[https://scholarship.rice.edu/bitstream/handle/1911/63329/article\\_RIP64SI\\_part3.pdf](https://scholarship.rice.edu/bitstream/handle/1911/63329/article_RIP64SI_part3.pdf)

Who Was Bodhidharma?: <https://www.lionsroar.com/who-was-bodhidharma-2/>

### Optional videos for Week 2:

Living With Great Doubt:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A4PnySfUw9A&ab\\_channel=EmptyGateZenCenter](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A4PnySfUw9A&ab_channel=EmptyGateZenCenter)

### One book that might be of interest

*Daughters of Emptiness: Poems of Chinese Buddhist Nuns* translated by Beata Grant.

<https://www.simonandschuster.com/books/Daughters-of-Emptiness/Beata-Grant/9780861713622>

## Week 3. February 8: Crazy Wisdom, Koans, and Burning the Sutras

In this class we will delve more deeply into the culture and practices of Zen in China, through stories, art, poetry, sutras, and koans. Zen was “counter-cultural” in Imperial China, and yet influenced literati, artists, and even emperors. Zen monasteries in China were famed for their powerful teachers, and Zen pilgrim monks criss-crossed China in search of awakening, while Zen hermits perched in the mountains. *Koans* are short teaching stories, often about the meeting of two Zen practitioners. They are notoriously enigmatic, but there are ways to encounter them, and they also give us glimpses of Zen life and practice in previous times. Practical instruction in the Western practice of *lectio divina* as a way of experiencing *koans*.

### Optional online resources for Week 3:

The Diamond Sutra <https://www.historyofinformation.com/detail.php?id=207>

Koan, “The Old Woman’s Rice Cakes”: <https://www.upaya.org/2018/04/the-old-womans-rice-cakes/>

Chinese hermits: <https://kyotojournal.org/conversations/alone-with-your-self-the-hermit-experience/>

### Optional videos for Week 3

Short video from contemporary Chan temple in China:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ISPTYkvd7mQ&ab\\_channel=CGTN](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ISPTYkvd7mQ&ab_channel=CGTN)

Video on Chan painting: <https://dharma-documentaries.net/james-cahill-on-chan-painting-4-sogenga-and-chan-landscape> or to look at stills from the video:

[https://www.facebook.com/dharmadocusnet/photos/?tab=album&album\\_id=456596857791811](https://www.facebook.com/dharmadocusnet/photos/?tab=album&album_id=456596857791811)

### **Two books that might be of interest**

*Road to Heaven: Encounters with Chinese Hermits*, by Bill Porter.

[https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/313849.Road\\_to\\_Heaven](https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/313849.Road_to_Heaven)

*Bones of the Master* by George Crane: <https://www.powells.com/book/bones-of-the-master-a-journey-to-secret-mongolia-9780553379082>

## **Week 4. February 15: Zen in Japan**

In this class we will explore the rich history of Zen in Japan. Although Buddhism arrived in Japan by way of Korea in the 6<sup>th</sup> century, it took another 600 years for Zen to take root there. We will explore the very different practices of the two main schools of Japanese Zen, Soto and Rinzai, and the myriad ways that Zen Buddhism shaped and changed Japanese history and culture, including the samurai of medieval Japan, the subtle philosophy of Eihei Dogen (the founder of the Soto school), and the Zen poetry of Ikkyu and Ryokan. Practical instruction in Zen practice in daily life.

### **Optional online resources for Week 4:**

Dogen and Zazen: <https://www.buddhisticquiry.org/article/zazen-is-not-the-same-as-meditation/>

Sex, Zen, and Poetry, the life of Ikkyu Sojun: <https://www.scienceandnonduality.com/article/sex-zen-and-poetry-the-life-of-ikkyu-sojun>

Forgetting the Moon: Poetry of Ryokan: <https://sethbalthazar.com/2014/11/14/forgetting-the-moon-the-poetry-of-ryokan/>

### **Optional Videos for Week 4**

Yamada Mumon Roshi : In zazen, I become nothing and everything become nothing:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VYyPDwT1c2c>

Enlightenment Guaranteed (comedic full-length movie by German filmmaker Doris Dorrie, about two bumbling German brothers and their encounter with Japanese Zen monastic life, partially filmed at a Soto Zen monastery): <https://vimeo.com/218703365> (be sure to turn on English subtitles)

### **One book that might be of interest**

*Zen Mind, Beginners Mind*, by Shunryu Suzuki. A classic introduction to Soto Zen teachings in an accessible format. <https://www.powells.com/book/zen-mind-beginners-mind-9781590308493>

## **Week 5. February 22: Women in Zen**

In this class we will bring forward the stories and experiences of women in the history of Zen, much of which has been buried and nearly forgotten, though it is clear that women have been deeply committed and engaged in Zen practice from its beginnings. We will use stories, koans, and poetry to more thoroughly appreciate the role and contribution of women, as well as looking honestly at the ways women were excluded from monastic practice, leadership, and teaching. Practical instruction in Zen cooking.

### **Optional online resources for Week 5**

Chiyono's No Water, No Moon: <https://www.treetopzencenter.org/chiyonos-no-water-no-moon/>

Women Ancestors of Zen: <https://www.learnreligions.com/women-ancestors-of-zen-449935>

The Hidden Lamp: <https://tricycle.org/magazine/hidden-lamp/>

What Is Zen?: <https://www.zencenterofsyracuse.org/content/what-is-zen>

### **Two books that might be of interest**

*Zen Women: Beyond Tea Ladies, Iron Maidens, and Macho Masters* by Grace Shireson

*Finding Yourself in the Kitchen: Kitchen Meditations and Inspired Recipes from a Mindful Cook*, by Dana Velden

## **Week 6. March 1: Zen Arts**

In this class, we will revel in and celebrate the many Zen arts, particularly the arts of Japan, with guest speakers who are practitioners of those arts from our own Japan House. Many of the great art forms of Japan and Korea have their origin in Zen monasteries, and Zen philosophy and practice suffuse those arts to this day. Practical demonstration in Shodo, Zen Calligraphy.

### **Optional online resources for Week 6**

Chado: Zen and the Art of Tea: <https://www.learnreligions.com/chado-zen-and-art-of-tea-449930>

### **Optional Videos for Week 6**

Japan House at the University of Illinois (videos on Japanese arts):

<https://japanhouse.illinois.edu/education/japan-house-shares>

Tea Ceremony in Kyoto:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8fleYpdbFHY&ab\\_channel=KimonoTeaCeremonyKyotoMaikoya-OsakaBranch](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8fleYpdbFHY&ab_channel=KimonoTeaCeremonyKyotoMaikoya-OsakaBranch)

### **One book that might be of interest**

*Shodo: The Quiet Art of Zen Calligraphy* by Shozo Sato

## **Week 7. March 8: Zen in the West: War Zen, Beat Zen, Square Zen**

Although Zen was first introduced to the West at the 1893 Chicago World Parliament of Religions, it wasn't until World War II and the post-war generation that Zen really "arrived", in the form of Americans learning about Zen in Japanese POW camps, and Japanese and Korean Zen masters traveling to the West after the war. The Vietnam War and the great Zen teacher and peace activist Thich Nhat Hanh also has had a significant impact on global understandings of Zen. In this class we will look at some of the ambiguities of Zen during wartime, and the complex ways Zen has entered Western culture. Practical instruction in walking meditation.

### **Optional online resources for Week 7**

Shaku Soyen: the pioneer who first introduced Zen in the west: <https://taru-fukui-album.com/shaku-soyen-the-pioneer-who-first-introduced-zen-to-the-west/>

How Buddhism Survived Japanese Internment: <https://emptysqua.re/blog/how-buddhism-survived-japanese-internment/>

Zen Buddhism and American Poetry: The Case of Gary Snyder: <http://ijern.com/journal/February-2014/15.pdf>

Philip Whalen and the Wild Fox Slobber of Zen: <https://tricycle.org/magazine/philip-whelen-and-the-wild-fox-slobber-of-zen/>

### **Optional videos for Week 7**

Tassajara Zen Monastery, Summer 1968:  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eP4uuZqrxIA&ab\\_channel=cukevideo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eP4uuZqrxIA&ab_channel=cukevideo)

Cooking Your Life Trailer: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SHy-hNklpAk&ab\\_channel=Dogwoof](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SHy-hNklpAk&ab_channel=Dogwoof)

Alan Watts Breaks Down What Is Wrong with the World:  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LXiSPpfM54&ab\\_channel=TheCanuckdian](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LXiSPpfM54&ab_channel=TheCanuckdian)

Thich Nhat Hanh, Mindful Walking:  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YSOKte6TeMI&ab\\_channel=PlumVillageApp](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YSOKte6TeMI&ab_channel=PlumVillageApp)

### **One book that might be of interest**

*Dharma Bums*, by Jack Kerouac

## **Week 8, March 15: How Does Zen Matter Now?**

In 2021, monastic Zen practice in many traditions and lay Zen sanghas can be found across the US and Europe, as well as in China, Korea, Vietnam, Taiwan, and Japan. "Engaged Buddhism" is responding to the myriad problems we are facing. Contemporary Zen teachers will explore this question in the final class of our series.

Videos in last class:

Suzuki Roshi teaching

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1NI-7JOIINGXKkhdIWXNzVGZVlaa0kgC8/view?usp=sharing> 2 min

Suzuki Roshi working:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E2e9zqtVbak&list=PLw3ZzD8g0M\\_MvoNXu3MGizuk954mwG2FX&index=11](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E2e9zqtVbak&list=PLw3ZzD8g0M_MvoNXu3MGizuk954mwG2FX&index=11) 1 min

Ed Brown:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h78Rhwp6r30>

Kaz Tanahashi

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DA1pIYEIWMl> 4 min

Norman

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2wByFc5ZjVs> 2min

Jeff Kitzes

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o94rZUX7FK8> 3.5 min

Joan Halifax

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FHtSQ4WB2hw> 4 min

Bernie Glassman

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A4CKq3ywXL8&list=PLsg7QwKf70f2l-KlurbuvZnfejiM9DCxH&index=30> 3.5 min

David Loy

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gUkt7EBxhKo> – 5 min

Joanna Macy 2.5 min

<https://vimeo.com/12056865>

Zenju 6 min

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0TSSenvjSlw>

Angel kyodo Williams

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sTLDkS3qEHM> 4 min

**Teacher Biography:** Rev. Zenshin Florence Caplow is an ordained Soto Zen priest and teacher, ordained Unitarian Universalist minister, writer and editor. She is the lead minister of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Urbana Champaign. In 2013 her co-edited book, with Sue Moon, was released by Wisdom Publications: *The Hidden Lamp: Stories from Twenty-Five Centuries of Awakened Women*. This collection of 100 koans and stories is accompanied by reflections from 100 contemporary women teachers. Rev. Caplow teaches workshops about these stories and gives talks at Zen centers around the country and internationally. She leads a weekly outdoor sitting in the U of I Arboretum and a monthly online sitting for Japan House.

She can be reached at [fcaplow@uuma.org](mailto:fcaplow@uuma.org)

*Rare Plant Botanist*, 2001-2006. Lead botanist for the State of Washington, Washington Natural Heritage Program, Department of Natural Resources. Responsible for all aspects of plant conservation in the state, including coordinating conservation efforts across agencies, monitoring, research, and writing for federal agencies and national publications. Supervised and worked closely with undergraduate interns.

## EDUCATION

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Iliff School of Theology, Denver, CO. MDiv. June 2016. Previous seminary. **Starr King School for the Ministry**.

**Shogaku Priest Ongoing Training**, North Bend, CA. Certificate. 2009. Successful completion of a three year program in leadership for Zen priests, including speaking, working with students and congregations, and pastoral and counseling skills.

**Wildbranch Writers Workshop**, Sterling, Vermont. 2008. Advanced education in the art of the personal essay and environmental writing

**The Evergreen State College**, Olympia, WA. BS in botany and ecology. June 1987.

## HONORS AND AWARDS

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- Winner of the James Luther Adams Essay Award, James Luther Adams Foundation, 2013
- Winner of the Tsubaki Grand Shrine Scholarship, Unitarian Universalist Association, 2015

## MEMBERSHIP AND LEADERSHIP

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UU Ministers Association  
UU Society for Community Ministers  
Soto Zen Buddhist Association, Associate Member  
UU Buddhist Fellowship, National Board Member  
Planning team for 2015 GA Public Witness

## SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

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Scientific articles published in *Madrono*, *Rhodora*, *Great Basin Naturalist*, and other publications.  
Essays and book reviews in *Tricycle*, *Shambhala Sun*, *The Nature Conservancy News*, *Inquiring Mind*, *Roaring Fork Journal*, *Terrain*, *Sweeping Zen*, and others.  
Editor of *The Hidden Lamp: Stories from Twenty-Five Centuries of Awakened Women* (Wisdom, 2013).  
Editor of *Wildbranch: Nature, Environmental, and Place-Based Writing* (University of Utah Press, 2010).  
Essay blog: *Slipping Glimpser: Zen Wanderings and Wonderings*.

1. The following information:
  1. Full name: Florence Elizabeth Caplow
  2. Home address: 503 W. Vermont Ave., Urbana, IL 61801
  3. Telephone number: 360-480-9636
  4. Email address: fcaplow@uuma.org
  5. UIN (if you have ever had any association with the University of Illinois)
2. Please indicate which of the following applies to the applicant:
  1. I am currently employed at the University of Illinois. List job title and unit.
  2. I retired or resigned from the University of Illinois. List all job titles, units, and dates of employment and separation for all University of Illinois employment, including post-separation employment by the University of Illinois.
  3. I am not now and never have been employed by the University of Illinois.
3. Will this course fulfill a requirement for outreach/broader impacts by your professional position or a grant? If yes, please indicate the position or grant for which this course will serve as an outreach project.

Not directly, though it will count toward continuing education credits through the Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association.

**In addition to all of the materials above, first-time instructors must submit the following:  
Name, title, and contact information for two professional teaching references**

**Taigen Dan Leighton, Guiding Teacher of Ancient Dragon Zen Gate, [taigen108@gmail.com](mailto:taigen108@gmail.com)**

**Umeeta Sadarangani, Professor of English at Parkland College, [usadarangani@parkland.edu](mailto:usadarangani@parkland.edu)**