

Zazen at Gyokushoji Temple

Everyone is welcome to try zazen meditation at the historic Gyokushoji Temple in northern Kikuchi. The hour-long sessions are a shortened version of the practice typically performed by adherents of Soto Zen, the school of Buddhism to which the temple belongs. Before starting out, participants are given a brief lesson in how to breathe and relax both mind and body, as well as how to sit on a *zafu*, the round cushion used in the Soto school's zazen practice. Sessions also include guidance in meditation while walking, or *hokozen*.

Zazen classes at Gyokushoji are non-religious, focusing on self-knowledge as a path to relaxation and peace of mind. Zazen practice is enhanced by the tranquil environment of the temple, founded by Kikuchi Tamekuni (1430–1488), the twentieth head of the Kikuchi clan, which ruled the surrounding area and most of central Kyushu from the eleventh to the sixteenth century. Tamekuni was a reformer who expanded education opportunities for samurai and townspeople and encouraged their intellectual and spiritual pursuits. His tomb is in the Gyokushoji cemetery, located next to the main gate and accessible directly from the temple's parking lot.