

## The nature of Zen

Zen means living in the present and experiencing reality fully, free of the distractions and illusory conflicts of the material world. The whole point of Zen practice is to become fully aware, here and now. To come home to the present moment; this is truly where we live.



[Click here](#) to watch an overview from The Zen Mind documentary, filmed in Japan.

(Video can also be found by following this link:  
[http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player\\_embedded&v=XK\\_4Z5DZcNM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=XK_4Z5DZcNM))

A great Zen master called Tozan once wrote 'The blue mountain is the father of the white cloud. The white cloud is the son of the blue mountain. All day long they depend on each other without being dependent on each other. The white cloud is always the white cloud. The blue mountain is always the blue mountain.' This was Tozan's interpretation of life; that each of us like the white cloud exists dependently, yet independent. When the conditions change the cloud changes and it just keeps going, leaving no trace, no past. This is the Zen way, without effort, without intention. If there is a sound we hear, if our eyes are open we see – there is nothing more than this. When we see ourselves as the white cloud, when we come to this realization of ourselves, it will be enough and there is no confusion. To awaken to this realization is the practice of Zen.

Like a stream flowing down the mountain that finds its own path, living with nature is finding your own way. This is the way of the Dalai and it is found in Zen. If we try to block the stream or resist it, it will simply go around without a pause. It will find its own way. This way is like a falling leaf moving along a stream. If you allow the stream to carry you, its strength becomes yours. You are one with nature – without clinging, without attachment; leaving the past behind, living in this moment. When you look at the forest do not look at the trees as separate or apart but as one; this is the forest. Likewise, do not differentiate yourself as apart from others or from the world outside. The search for self-realization is powered by our anxieties and our fears which feed our ego causing frustration with our daily life – selfishness, jealousy, anger, hate, which unconsciously serve to protect us and in doing so set us in opposition to everyone and everything. To awaken to this realization is the practice of Zen.

## Zen fundamentals

"To be beautiful means to be yourself. You don't need to be accepted by others. You need to accept yourself." ~Thich Nhat Hanh

Here are ten life-changing behaviors that Zen fundamentals can instill in your life.

1. **Identify your values.** As you study your thoughts, you will find patterns in what your mind is drawn to. These are your values, what is most important in your life. This can include your family, your religion, healthy living, kindness to others, or environmental awareness.
2. **Embrace your values.** Once you are aware of your values, it is far easier to live according to them. When faced with a decision, you can compare it to your values and see if it brings you closer to living your values, or draws you away.
3. **Develop inner peace.** Zen mind does not struggle. It accepts life as it truly is. A rock is a rock. It will remain that way no matter how much you worry, wish, or pressure it into changing. The things your mind worries about are the same way. Accept things for how they are, and do not waste time or energy fretting over things you dislike.
4. **Energize for change.** Zen mind can give you extra energy for change. You are not wasting energy fighting against the inevitable. There is a large rock in your way. You have three options: run into the rock repeatedly, agonize about the rock being in the way, or find a way around the rock. Before Zen, most people choose one of the first two options. With Zen mind, you accept the rock for what it is: an obstacle. You accept that you cannot go through it. You do not panic, and waste time and energy worrying about the obstacle. You instead make your own path around the obstacle, either over, around or under the rock.
5. **Enhance knowledge of yourself.** As you practice Zen, you will spend a fair amount of time in meditation, listening to your mind ramble. In time, you learn what quiets your mind, and puts you at peace. Listening to the same fears repeating themselves in your mind will soon inspire you to change what is causing those fears. You realize, for example, that your job is a large source of anxiety, and it is time for a change. Without meditation, we tend to ignore what our mind is telling us, and remain locked into our old patterns of doing things.
6. **Gain confidence.** As you reflect on your inner self, you become conscious of who you really are. You learn what makes you happy, what is beneficial to your life. You bypass the fears and anxieties of your mind, and do what needs to be done. You walk boldly, live passionately. The opinions of others do not matter, because you know you are doing what is right.
7. **Appreciate life.** You accept life as it is. Starry evenings, a stroll by the river, or a night of solitude each have their own unique characteristics to be appreciated. Mundane activities, such as household chores or doctor's appointments, also hold their own charm. Observing the quiet details of life lends value to the less appealing aspects, and brings peace and joy in commonplace tasks.
8. **Increase consideration for others.** Each person on this Earth is interconnected. We are all searching for peace, contentedness, and a meaningful life. It is much harder to be angry at the person who cut you off in traffic when you realize they are on the same path, just at a different point in their journey.

9. **Simplify your life.** Meditation helps you differentiate between needs and wants. Needs are the basics for survival, such as air, food, water, clothing, and shelter. Wants are designer jeans, the latest electronic gadget, or a mansion. You learn that you can live without the latest, greatest thing. You begin to use your stuff as tools on your journey, and not as status symbols or emotional crutches. The same holds true for your commitments. Your to-do list can be culled down to the necessities, such as caring for your family, providing for needs, and fulfilling activities. It is far easier to say no to another commitment, when your plate is full of the things you love and require.
10. **Cultivate a giving spirit.** When you are living the best life you can, your heart fills with joy. You are doing what you were put on this earth to do, and doing it to the best of your ability. Your life is simple, you are living your values, and you have a clear mind. You can then give to others with a loving spirit, to help them along their path.

