



林心寺

Rin Shin-ji
Arcata Zen Group



Arcata, California
November 2004

www.arcatazengroup.org

707/826.1701

Cold and Wary

XXX
by XXX

Meditation Schedules

Weekday Mornings Zazen (Monday to Friday)

5:30 to 6:10 a.m. Zazen
6:10 to 6:20 a.m. Kinhin
6:20 to 7:00 a.m. Zazen
7:00 to 7:10 a.m. Service

Tuesday Evening Zazen (Meditation Instruction) 7:30 to 8:30 p.m.

Orientation to Soto Zen Meditation, instructions, guided meditation, question and answer period, and discussion.

Thursday Evening Zazen

7:30 to 8:00 p.m. Zazen
8:00 to 8:10 p.m. Kinhin
8:10 to 8:40 p.m. Zazen

Sunday Morning Zazen, Service and Dharma Talk

(Held at the Aikido Center, located
off the public parking lot at 8th and F
Streets, behind the fire station,
in Arcata)

8:10 to 8:40 a.m. Zazen
8:40 to 8:50 a.m. Kinhin
8:50 to 9:20 a.m. Zazen
9:20 to 9:30 a.m. Service
9:30 to 10:30 Dharma Talk or Reading



Arcata Zen Group is a nonprofit organization in the Soto Zen lineage. AZG welcomes persons interested in learning about and practicing the teachings of the Buddha. We offer introductory classes in zen meditation and zen philosophy every week at 7:30 PM on Tuesday evenings at 740 Park Avenue in Arcata. Membership is free.

AZG maintains a lending library for all sangha members.

Rin Shin-ji Arcata Zen Group newsletter is published six times a year. To submit articles or announcements to the newsletter, e-mail Mike at:

AZG

Announcements

November Sesshin with Angie Boissevain

Angie Boissevain will lead sesshin, Friday evening, November 5. Sesshin begins at 7:30 p.m., and continues Saturday from 6:30 a.m. to 5:00pm in the Zendo. Rob Roversi is the Sesshin Co-ordinator.

Way Seeking Mind Talks

(all talks given at the Aikido Center)

Mitch Trachtenberg
Sunday, October 24, 9:30 a.m.

Maggie Shaffer

Sunday Dharma Talk

Yoshim Ken Norman will give a Dharma talk at the Aikido Center, Sunday, September 26, 9:30 a.m., following the Sunday service. The talk is open to all AZG members, and non-members who would like to attend.

Sit in Eureka

A Eureka group of the Arcata Zen Group meets Tuesday evenings 6 p.m. to 6:45 p.m., at Consider the Alternatives bookstore, (Second and D streets, Eureka). Contact Gael, 442-4924 or ghodgkins@iopener.net

A Path Not A Position

Catherine Cascade

When the newsletter editor asked me to join the Jukai ordines in submitting some reflections for this issue, I thought certainly something would be on the tip of my tongue in the days following my ordination. But my mind is pretty quiet on the subject. There is a sense in which I am speechless—certainly speechless with gratitude. But for the most part it's not the speechlessness of ineffable enormity but just that there doesn't seem to be much to say.

How can that be?

There has been so much effort; an astonishing amount of grace, generosity and good fortune; my heart's desire unfolding beyond anything I've had the imagination to hope for or the presence of mind to fully comprehend. And a happiness that feels like the cumulative gift of every heartfelt chanting of the Metta Sutta: "May all beings be happy!" Yes, I am!

But overall there is simply a sense of going on. In talking about Jukai, at one point Alan likened it to the situation with many weddings. The ceremony is not so much a beginning as the acknowledgement of something that is already going on, and a commitment to keep going on in the best possible way. Just taking the next step on the path.

At the heart of the ordination ceremony is receiving "the path of the precepts of the Three Treasures." Kobun Chino remarks that, "You don't use the precepts for accomplishing your own personality, or fulfilling your dream of your highest image. You don't use the precepts in that way." And that is true of



the other vows of priest ordination as well. Both Jukai and priest ordination are called tokudo, which means entering or attaining the way—attaining a path, not an identity.

The story goes that when Sojun Rosh asked Suzuki Rosh, "What is a priest?" Suzuki Rosh answered, "I don't know." Sojun Rosh then went to Katagiri

Roshi with the same question and again the answer came, "I don't know." Needless to say, I don't know either. And if they didn't know by that time in their practice, perhaps I never will. Perhaps it doesn't matter.

What does matter is to keep going on; to manifest the vows of tokudo right here, right now, as well as I can; to take the next step on the path, and the next, and the next...which is just what's happening. Every day going on. And there's not really much to say about it.



Thank You

Heartfelt thanks and a deep bow to the Sangha for the gift of a thangka or other framed art work (I get to choose!) on the occasion of my ordination. Looking at pictures is one of the things I enjoy most, so the search itself is a treat!

With love and delight,

**Catherine Cascade's
Ordination**
Lynda McDevitt

Blessings to the priest
cascading into precepts
robes drenched in dharma

Donning the Robe of Buddha

Mike McLaren

Rain fell softly, like a song of quiet joy in my heart. The sky donned the robes of Buddha to keep us comfortable on the day of Jukai. Nothing could have been more fitting than the gentle mist that nourished the magnificent forests surrounding Rin Shin-ji.

Without words, I stood with ten Sangha members, trying not to anticipate too much the ceremony in which we would shortly participate. From a window I watched unseen water gather out of the sky to form a single drop that hung perfectly still from the bottom of an apple on the tree outside. The easy breeze coming off the Pacific Ocean was not enough to stir the drop.

What does it take to cling so steadfastly, I wondered. The single drop of water held to the bottom of the apple with such resolution that for a moment I stood with admiration, until it occurred to me that the drop of water appeared before me only because of the rain, which had come from the ocean, which itself appeared only because of so many drops that fell from the clouds, or from water transported by a river. Eventually the drop would no longer cling to the apple; it would return to the process that had delivered it to my awareness on a particular day. On another day the drop would reappear, different in some ways, yet the same in many others, perhaps upon the bottom of a plum, or at the tip of a leaf, in a glass that I could use to quench my thirst, or it might appear from a hose so that I could shower the peas that grow in my garden to feed me.

It then occurred to me that the water drop was not clinging to the apple at all. It was there simply because weather conditions had placed it at the bottom of an apple on this particular day, at this particular place. Looking more openly, there were more apples and more drops of water. A whole tree grown with fruit touched by the rain.

The Sangha suddenly appeared to me as a drop of water, gathered at that moment at a particular place, because of a certain circumstance, just as other drops of water were gathered all over the Earth -- or even just next door -- for other reasons, or perhaps the same. Single drops that joined as one bigger drop that would eventually dissipate back to smaller, individual drops that would return eventually to the process that created the circumstance for which we had gathered in the first place. I laughed silently, kept the joy in my heart, and realized that I was slightly perplexed by the complexity of the simplicity of life. And just as quickly as the thought had come, it disappeared into everything that I was thinking about Jukai.

What would be the consequence of donning Buddha's robes? Would the path become more clear through the forest of life, or more dark and mysterious? How many lines would I blow when it came time to recite the chants? What if my new name would mean something like "bungling abominable snowman stumbling his way through life"?

Flash -- Walking... "Om Namu Shakamuni Butsu"... "altogether I now fully avow"... "Yes, I will"... Oh, I clung as hard as I could with all of my senses to keep from missing any part of the ceremony, realizing my attachment, and not wanting to let go of the apple.





Jukai from the Inside

What does 'taking the precepts' mean to me?

Bill Devall

I was moved by the jukai ceremony. I confess I was almost in tears when I knelt to receive my rakasu and my new name: Sho Moku Kei Shin, Auspicious Tree, Joyous Forest. I felt the flow of energy through the lineage as our teachers sprinkled wisdom water on my head. Am I transformed into a more noble person after taking the precepts? No. Ancient memories that I thought were long forgotten, ancient twisted karma still flow through my mind as I sit zazen. The same pain in the same place in my back still arises when I sit zazen. Crazy thoughts still float through my mind when I sit zazen. However, at least in these few days since taking the precepts, I feel more calm. When anxiety arises I hear myself saying, "anxiety arising, let it float away." When pain arises I hear my inner voice say "pain arising, let it float away." When I meet a person I dislike I hear my inner voice say "person I dislike is floating through my mind, let it flow away." During our precepts discussion class we discussed many and diverse interpretations of the precepts and taking the precepts. My ideas, my perception of the precepts radically changed during the course of our discussions. I gassho in gratitude to Blanche and Judith for encouraging me, helping me complete my rakasu. I look at my rakasu and see it is not perfect. However, I take one step backwards and follow the way.

Poem by Muso Soseki in Poems and Sermons
14th century

Sun at Midnight

Actions to save the world
 have their ups and downs
 depending on circumstances
You have to be as careful
 As though you were dragging half a ton
 by a hair
Spare no efforts
 To bring the Dharma rain
 to this countryside
The Forest of Wisdom
 will grow dense

I Have My Work Cut Out for Me

Theresa McLaren

twisted thoughts grasping
dissipate for one moment
boddhisattvas rejoice

The Answer

Rob Roversi

Holy water on my head.
What mystery is this?
Will I bumble on not knowing?
I answer, "Yes I will."

Happiness

Maggie Shaffer

By the time August 21 rolled around, the rigors of sewing seemed long in the past. Even the Precepts discussions seemed like last semester's classes. Listening to Alan's and Angie's words, though, I began to feel, first, a renewed seriousness, and then something entirely new: a sense of responsibility. I don't think I will forget this. I was unprepared for the happiness the ceremony brought with it, which I think came partly from the happiness everyone expressed for us. The generosity of the sangha, those people who have already received the Precepts and those who have not but who, I know, hold them in their hearts, has been very moving. The kindness of family and friends who embraced the importance of this day for us filled me with gratitude.

A Metaphor of Marriage

Michael Quam

In her talk the evening before the Jukai ceremony, Angie gave us a lovely metaphor: At a wedding, everyone gets married. The ten days surrounding Jukai and Catherine's ordination felt like that for our sangha. We began with the sewing where so many friends helped one another, then the weeks of precepts study groups when people who were not formally doing Jukai came and talked and listened, and finally, the work that so many friends did to prepare and conduct the ceremonies, prepare and serve the food, and do all the invisible clean-up work. I know that in taking the bohdisattva vows, I am supported by a sangha of bodhisattvas.

Orientation of a Smile

Milli Quam

On Friday and Saturday when people would ask me if I were "ready" for the Jukai ceremony, I immediately became aware of how disoriented I was. I had been away for over a month, my mind filled with car repair, packing, family tensions, illness, brief visits with old friends, everything but Jukai. So, I had no choice but to stay in the present, one step at a time, because I almost didn't know where I was. I went through the ceremony, following directions, catching on as I went, and was amazed to discover that after the ceremony, when we were having our pictures taken, I couldn't stop smiling. I tried to be a little serious for the photo, but really couldn't get the smile off my face. The whole experience, sewing, studying, and ceremony, embodied such a blossoming in our sangha. It just felt joyous, personally and collectively. And it showed in our party at the house afterwards. The energy in the room, the fun we all experienced was testimony that we're chugging along just fine up here on the North Coast. Thank you all for making it happen.



The Mudra of Touching the Ground

By Judith Putnam

The mudra of touching the ground is known as the “earth-witness” mudra or earth-touching mudra (bhumi sparsha mudra in Sanskrit). Literally *Bhumisparsha* translates into “touching the earth.” This mudra, formed with all five fingers of the right hand extended to touch the ground, symbolizes the Buddha’s enlightenment under the bodhi tree. In Japanese it is known as *sokuchi-in*. Statuary exhibiting this mudra, specifically where the right hand touches the ground and the left hand lies open, palm up, in the lap, invariably represents Shakyamuni Buddha. Variants of this mudra, of which there are several, represent deities or other celestial beings.

There are many variations to the story of Gautama’s final struggle to find the answer to his question. He did not seek enlightenment at the time. He sought the answer to his question about why there was suffering in the world. Some say that his enlightenment was accidental to his finding the answer. One version of the story is as follows:

While Gautama was in meditation, Mara, the Evil One, confronted him with temptations much in the same manner in which Satan tested Jesus during his fasting in the wilderness. Mara tempted him with beautiful dancing girls and voluptuous goddesses parading before him, followed by terrible demons assailing him with weapons of flaming rocks, boiling mud and utter darkness, but Gautama remained unmoved.

As a last resort, Mara challenged his right to be doing what he was doing. In response, Gautama used the earth-touching mudra. He touched the earth, and the earth thundered her answer: “I bear you witness!” Mara fled. Gautama spent the rest of the night in deep meditation, in samadhi, and finally reached his enlightenment. This took place on the day of the full moon in the month of May about the year 528 BC, when Gautama was thirty-six.

Since no one was there to bear witness to these events, except the earth, we may assume that the Buddha spoke of them to his disciples at some later time. How else would the story be handed down to us? Why would the Buddha talk about this?

The story hides a deep spiritual truth. Mara is the Lord of this experiential world and of this earth, representing “mortal mind” --the part of us that wants to put ourselves before others. Mara claims that the Bodhisattva, (Gautama), represents that which is beyond the world, that the Bodhisattva has no right even to the piece of ground on which he sits in meditation. This is a very dramatic and important encounter. The response is just as dramatic and important.

The earth-witness mudra has not been discussed in great detail except in the context of Buddha’s enlightenment. This is a shame, since the mudra is useful to any serious meditation practitioner. As one learns to allow the mind to be quiet, the experience of

words or thoughts becomes less as the experience of deep quiet and peace become more. Occasionally, a question will come up in the form of “What am I doing?” or “Why am I doing this?” No answers may come, but rather a fear or sense of inadequacy seems to form. This can often put you right off your meditation and send you to your teacher who suggests, “You are doing it for the sake of doing it.”

If you have been meditating for awhile and seem to be experiencing a strong feeling, try the earth-witness mudra. Since during our actual meditation, the immediacy of the experience is what we seek to work with, this may not seem right for you to do at that time. If not, do it later after your regular meditation or at any time that seems appropriate. Maintain your posture and concentration as you usually do. Do not allow thoughts to enter into this action; do it “automatically” as you might shift your weight to relieve insistent pain. Some people really get into it and place their whole right hand on the floor, palm down. Do what feels right to you. Touch the floor as long as needed to let the energy of the feelings flow out. Be aware of your connection to the earth. The subtle energies of the body will take care of the rest. Just sitting in normal meditation posture usually doesn’t work. This is an aspect of mudra that is most important as the meditation practitioner becomes more seasoned. No thoughts of any kind need arise to quell the thought or feeling that has arisen.

The earth-witness mudra is considered a mudra of safety. It is a symbol of unshakable faith and resolution. By touching the earth the Buddha literally “grounded” himself, and the evil dissipated like static electricity when you touch a doorknob. This gesture is one of making contact with the ground and touching the Earth who witnesses all our deeds, good and bad. One also acknowledges that this single, precious earth is our tilling ground, our sacred ground, and our growing ground. The earth, which is silent, is the only true witness to the enlightenment of an individual. There is no certificate given for arriving at the stage of the arhant or at the stage of the advanced Bodhisattva levels. In fact, these levels only enable you to truly begin the deep work of helping sentient beings.

Another way of using this mudra, is to dissipate the “extra energy” that sometimes seems to accumulate during a particularly profound meditation. These meditations don’t happen often and some meditators don’t experience them at all. But if you find yourself in a state of joy or bliss that seems like you may not be able to handle it all, just touch the floor or ground with your right hand and hold it there until the energy dissipates. Then resume your normal meditation posture until you are finished with that session. It is not peculiar or unusual to experience this, nor is it peculiar not to.

(An illustration of the Earth Witness Mudra appears on the back page)

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The Buddha is sitting in the Earth Touching, Calling the Earth to Witness, or the Victory over (Subduing) Mara position. He sits with folded legs (right on top of the left). The left hand is held in his lap with the palm facing upward. The right hand extends over the right thigh, near the knee, with the fingers pointing towards the ground, palm inward. During meditation, Siddhartha was subjected to many temptations but none as terrible as those posed by the evil Mara, who bombards him with his demon armies, monsters, beasts and violent storms and his three lascivious daughters. The Buddha remains steadfast. Then to testify to Mara of his meritorious past, he points to the earth with his hand and calls forth Thorani, the beautiful earth goddess. She rises from the ground and wrings the water from her long, black hair, which raises a torrential flood that drowns Mara and his army of demons.