

Dharma Rain Zen Center
Portland, Oregon

Our Lineage Tradition and Temple Culture

Prepared by the Elders' Council, 2010,
Revised by the Elders' Council 2018.

I. Introduction

The Elders' Council of Dharma Rain has prepared the following outline of the spiritual traditions and social customs that characterizes and distinguishes the style of practice at this temple. Some of these traditions and customs are rooted in ancient practices, while other are a response to our current time and the culture of our broader world. The Dharma Rain community strives to be a warm and welcoming place, while upholding the forms and expectations necessary for disciplined Zen practice. We honor a variety of practice expressions throughout the life span, including both lay and monastic paths, family practice, and sesshin. This outline assumes a basic understanding of Zen Buddhism and traditional Soto Zen practice.

II. Founding Teachers and Traditions

The roots of the traditional practices of our temple are traced from the teachings of Shakyamuni Buddha; the Mahayana traditions of Madhyamika and Yogacara; the Chinese ancestors of Caodong Chan; and Japanese ancestors and founders of Soto Zen: Dogen Kigen and Keizan Jokin.

A. Dogen Kigen and Keizan Jokin

The teachings and traditions of both Soto Zen ancestors Dogen and Keizan are fundamental to the style of practice embodied in this temple, which exemplifies

1. Dogen's rigorous personal standards and comprehensive teachings,
2. Keizan's intuitive and more devotional approach to practice,
3. An emphasis on enlightened qualities of the celestial Bodhisattvas Kanzeon, Fugen, Monju, plus Fudo,
4. A history of inclusiveness that honors women as well as men.

B. Meiho Sotetsu and Manzan Dohaku

Our style of practice honors the practice style of Meiho Sotetsu and his transmitted descendants through Manzan Dohaku; who emphasized the indispensability of shikantaza, everyday koans, face-to-face student-teacher relationships, and importance of community outreach.

C. Keido Chisan

We honor Keido Chisan Koho Zenji as co-founder of our temple, whose compassionate actions opened the Dharma to us in this country, and who saw beyond the cultural prejudices of his time

D. Jiyu Kennett

We acknowledge our roots from Shasta Abbey through Jiyu Kennett and honor her as our temple's co-founder, an innovator and pioneer for establishing Soto Zen in our country. She continues to influence our temple through her teachings and by her innovations. Specific influences from Jiyu Kennett include:

1. She brought and adapted the formality of the Japanese monastic-style of practice and form to this country.
2. She introduced and adapted the Segaki traditions to our Halloween to remember and address the ghosts of our personal and collective karma.
3. She introduced and adapted the five ceremonies of Jukai with its connection to the Buddhist liturgical cycle and the teachings of Tozan's Five Ranks and the Shushogi.
4. She emphasized the everyday life as a koan (Genjokoan), examining the Bodhisattva precepts as koan study.
5. She developed a liturgical calendar that corresponds with our annual cycles.
6. She designed a rigorous form of postulant training for aspiring monks as a gateway to ordination.

E. Kyogen Carlson

We honor Kyogen Carlson as our founding Abbot. Though we chose to disassociate from Shasta Abbey in 1985, he brought the Abbey's forms to our temple and trained us in them. From the beginning, he guided us towards a primary focus on lay Soto Zen practice. His contributions include:

1. Creating a training path for Lay Disciples.
2. Creating a transmission path for Lay Teachers.
3. Setting a clear example for the teacher-student relationship.
4. Starting a seminary program for in-depth Buddhist study.
5. Championing the creation of the Lay Zen Teachers Association.
6. Initiating and encouraging outreach to prisons, other religious groups, and other Zen Buddhist sanghas.
7. Continuing to emphasize the primacy of retreat and zazen practice.
8. Continuing to support a rigorous form of postulant training as a gateway to ordination.

F. Teachings and traditions within the larger Soto Zen community

1. We honor our lineage and spiritual traditions through contact with teachers and temples both globally and within our lineage tradition in Japan.
2. We honor our lineage and spiritual traditions by deepening our connections to the larger, western Soto Zen community through
 - a. The use of an American Sotoshu standardized translation for liturgical services,
 - b. Active participation in the American Zen Teachers Association (AZTA); Soto Zen Buddhist Association (SZBA); Lay Zen Teachers Association (LZTA); and Gen X Dharma Teachers.
3. A special recognition of Nyogen Senzaki, a pioneer and early teacher of Zen in this country.

III. Core Teachings and Practice

In our practice, we work to save all living beings.

A. Morality (sila), Meditation (dhyana), and Wisdom (prajna)

These three paramitas are particularly emphasized in our teachings and practices as the gateway to enlightened actions, but other paramitas are also cultivated (generosity, patience, effort).

B. Shikantaza or Zazen

We emphasize this form of meditation practice that was described in Dogen's Fukanzazengi

C. The Sixteen Bodhisattva Precepts

We emphasize the study of and conformance to these particular precepts, not as restrictions but as guidelines for the functioning of enlightened beings.

D. Recognition of kensho

We recognize the occurrence of kensho, intuitive experience and the self-realization of our nondual, essential nature. While we recognize and acknowledge the sudden insight type of kensho, we do not present it as a goal of practice. We recognize ongoing insight and transformation through practice as an essential aspect of the Bodhisattva path.

E. Statement of inclusivity

This Sangha acknowledges that suffering is a human condition which can be made worse because of biases or prejudices for or against any race, ethnic origin, sexual orientation, sexual identity, political party, or other belief or position. This Sangha welcomes and affirms all who come here to seek the Way, and who will work toward respectful acceptance of others across our many differences, harmonizing the one and the many.

F. Recognition of Horizontal and Vertical Teaching Function

Within our spiritual community, we emphasize that there are multiple opportunities for teaching and learning.

1. In teaching function, the vertical can appear in the horizontal, and the horizontal in the vertical. In vertical teaching, rank is fluid. We train toward the ability to lead and to follow with equanimity or to move into or out of rank seamlessly. This form of sharing is encouraged as a demonstration of a mature practice of the Middle Way. In horizontal teaching function, we teach by example, side by side.
2. We recognize the formal teaching relationships and paths for both monks and laypersons. Within our community, we acknowledge monks and priests who have completed postulancy, been ordained, follow the schedule and reside at the temple. Within our community, we acknowledge senior lay practitioners who exhibit a high level of integrated practice and who are seen to model that understanding in the complex world of the layperson away from the temple. Members of either group can be transmitted and authorized to give precepts, perform ceremonies, lead retreats, and offer teachings in public or private.

IV. The Tradition of Group Practice

We acknowledge that within the totality of existence the process of enlightenment is a collective, shared experience; therefore, we emphasize group practice opportunities as expressed in the following customs:

A. Cooperation and encouragement

We emphasize cooperation in all spiritual activities and we discourage comparisons, as competition reinforces the illusion of spiritual dualities.

B. Formal practice in community

We encourage formal group practice by frequently participating in regular meditation and sesshin at Dharma Rain.

C. Moving as group

During sesshin, we derive intensity from staying in accord with the group; following the same schedule, doing the same activity at the same time, and placing less emphasis on individual practices like formal koans or yaza.

D. Enlightenment is communal

We recognize that the depth or maturity of one person's practice or experience is a direct reflection of the depth or spiritual maturity of the group.

E. Monastic practice

The training of monks requires complete immersion into community practice, with limited privacy or autonomy.

F. Family Practice

For children enrolled in Dharma Garden, we emphasize that family practice is an integral part of individual practice and understanding.

G. Practice without forms

We recognize the importance of ebb and flow of practice. During temple breaks and free time, we practice without traditional forms and structure, taking these opportunities to internalize our practice.

H. Home practice and vows

As daily life may mean our practice is often physically removed from the temple, we encourage the taking of practice vows for periods of time. While these vows are actualized in the world, they can be formally taken before the sangha, giving an opportunity to acknowledge and practice our individual vows together.

V. Contemporary Temple Culture

The culture that has developed at our temple is a living, changing phenomenon that is held at any moment in unison with all other members of the temple community. Features of our culture are listed below.

A. Inclusivity

1. The opportunity to practice and participate in activities at our temple is available to everyone. There is a place for everyone regardless of background or capacity.
2. We encourage practicing with other traditions, especially for senior members.
3. We acknowledge and encourage the special needs of the various groups within our temple community and create opportunities for practice that meet different needs. We recognize differences non-divisively.
4. We acknowledge and value our connection to the earth and non-human beings.

B. Personal warmth and friendliness

Our group persona is one of friendliness and candidness. We encourage lateral friendships. We attempt to create an inviting and casual atmosphere for social interactions. We encourage self-disclosure in nonjudgmental and protected surroundings. We strive to be welcoming, providing guestmasters, special programs, and practice advisors to assist newcomers to becoming part of the community.

C. Openness and integrity

We encourage and, whenever appropriate, foster open-handed exchanges in relationships and communications. We value directness, frankness, and sincerity in all our interactions. We encourage a friendly, family-like atmosphere for those functioning at the temple through customs such as sharing duties and practicing right speech. We have clear ethics, grievance and reconciliation policies and standards in place. Our customs and activities are grounded in and display openness to the general public without proselytizing.

D. Family customs and activities

We honor and include the family, family relationships, and our children as part of our community, our customs and our social events.

E. Diversity of programing

We encourage our members and non-members to explore the Dharma through our wide variety of programs:

1. We offer five different workshops to the community at large.
2. We provide various discussion groups, classes and seminary classes.
3. We have multiple programs for children and families.
4. We have numerous programs for caring for sangha members with special needs.
5. We have multiple ango periods, sesshin and weekend retreats throughout the calendar year, as well as a daily monastic schedule that the general public is welcome to attend.
6. We assist and offer the Dharma to those in correctional institutions through our prison sangha support groups
7. There are several affiliated and independent satellite groups in distant communities for those unable to journey regularly to Dharma Rain.

F. Local cooperation and involvement

We place a high value on the importance of local cooperation and open communication with other religious lineages and traditions, as well as other mission or value-aligned organizations.