

Guidelines for  
The Formation of Soto Zen Priests in the West

Prepared by  
The Priest Training Committee  
of the  
Soto Zen Buddhist Association (SZBA)

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**ABSTRACT**

The Soto Zen Buddhist Association (SZBA) mission statement reads, in part: the “SZBA exists to preserve and promote the Buddhadharma through the teachings and practice of Soto Zen Buddhism in North America.” To insure that properly trained priests are available to carry forward this effort and to articulate the responsibilities and expectations that a dharma-transmitted priest must be prepared to meet, this report discusses the essential characteristics and skills of a trained priest and presents guidelines for the development of these characteristics and skills.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgments	p. 3
The Three Pillars of Sôtô Zen	4
Not Corrupting the Dharma	5
How to use this document	7
Introduction: What it means to be a Soto Zen priest	7
The Formation of a Priest	8
Centrality of Teacher-Student Relationship	9
Characteristics and Skills of Ideal Soto Zen priest	9
The Importance of Carrying the Tradition	9
Desired Characteristics & Skills in Carrying the Tradition	11
The Importance of Personal Conduct	12
Desired Characteristics & Skills in Personal Conduct	13
The Importance of Self-Understanding	13
Desired Characteristics & Skills in Self-Understanding	14
The Importance of Knowledge of Source Texts	15
Desired Characteristics & Skills in Knowledge of Texts	16
Resources for both Teacher and Novice	16
Appendices:	
A: Resources for Study of the Literature	19
B: Individual responses to what it means to be a Soto Zen priest	22

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This document is based on a draft of Guidelines for Training Soto Zen Priests that was presented to the SZBA membership in early 2006 and discussed by SZBA members attending the Second National SZBA Conference in October, 2006. The revision presented here attempts to reflect the suggestions presented at that Conference. The process of developing training for Soto priests in the U.S. is an ongoing endeavor and this particular document is presented as the result of committee work that may be used and amended by individual Soto teachers as they see fit.

Articulation of the training process for novice priests owes much to the members of the original committee and to the efforts of the current working group:

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## THE THREE PILLARS OF SOTO ZEN (1)

Many students of Zen are familiar with the ground-breaking book by the late Philip Kapleau, entitled *The Three Pillars of Zen*. While nominally Sôtô Zen, Kapleau's lineage introduced a number of Rinzai Zen elements which in the minds of many Westerners became identified with Zen practice. However, there is another version of the "three pillars" which draws more closely upon the teachings of Dôgen-zenji as they have been transmitted to the West by Sôtô Zen teachers such as Suzuki Shunryu-roshi and others. The following comments are designed as a brief introduction to this different perspective.

**Shikan-taza:** This is the heart-practice of the Buddha Way, as Dôgen-zenji understands it. The word *shikan* means "only", or "nothing but"; *ta* means "hit" or "strike against"; and *za* is "sit". Buddha's teaching is that the unity and connectedness of all beings and things is due to the absence of fixed natures. The truth of this teaching is mirrored and celebrated in the practice of sitting upright in stillness, without grasping or rejecting any of the upwelling phenomena of life. Because the ego-centered cramp that masquerades as a "self" is allowed to relax, eventually the nature of things-as-they-are is confirmed and verified in the practitioner's effort. And because this practice is not used as a lever to secure some fantasized state-of-mind, and is not aimed at something beyond itself, it is in complete harmony with the ultimate teachings of emptiness. It is thus immediately the practice of the Buddhas themselves, rather than a stepping-stone to some putatively more advanced "meditation".

**Genjô-kôan:** The Chinese characters in this expression are connotatively dense. *Gen* means "actual, present, current, existing now"; *jô* means "form, make, create, be completed, come into existence". A *kôan*, as many will know, was originally a public document in which a legal precedent or other principle of jurisprudence was announced in ancient China; later, the term came to refer to a literary genre in which tales of the sayings and doings of Zen adepts were ostensibly recorded. As the title of one of Dôgen-zenji's most powerful and haunting essays in the *Shôbôgenzô* collection, however, *Genjô Kôan* is sometimes rendered in English as "The Actualization of the Fundamental Point". Therein, the principles of practice are expressed with complete clarity: When all things are Buddha-Dharma, the world is full of beings, Buddhas, objects, coming-and-going, as the breathtaking panoply of dependently-co-arisen existence. Yet, from the vantage point of vast emptiness, the universe is still, silent, ungraspably alive, with no trace of beings which exist from their own side. However, because the Buddha Way is offered as freedom from encumbering dualities such as exists/does-not exist, suddenly there are practice, birth-and-death, other beings, and so on. At the heart of all of this, the great wheel turns, impelled by the inexorable, though vacant, force of karma. This elegant, boundaryless suchness is abundantly evident in each and every instant of life. In this context, then, *kôan* does not specifically refer to a literary record of Zen antics, but rather to the distilled and concentrated taste of existence, realized and actualized in the here-and-now. This taste is impermanence, unease, and no-abiding-self, and simultaneously it is liberation. Practicing wholeheartedly in this day-to-day no-realm moment after moment is the meaning of *genjô-kôan*.

Memmitsu-no-kafu: In this expression, the character mitsu means "cotton"; men means "close, intimate, dense, secret"; ka is "family"; and fu is "wind" or "manner". Taken as a whole, the expression means a close, intimate family style, as intimate as the threads in finely-woven fabric. A household animated by this principle is characterized by attention unstintingly paid to the connections among people and things, and it is this that largely animates Sôtô Zen training, both inside and outside of the training halls. Carefully dealing with even the most mundane aspects of daily life, such as cups and saucers, rags, clothing, and trash bins, is the arterial connection between shikan-taza as encountered on the sitting cushion, and the workaday world, where the Bodhisattva vow unfolds. This bears on the place of devotion in Sôtô Zen practice, an aspect that Rev. Kyogen Carlson has characterized thus:

Mindful attention to each moment and each thing attended to cultivates a sense of appreciation and gratitude. This develops into an awareness of the sacred within the mundane and a deep reverence for life as dharma, with no particular need for a deity or "other" to whom this reverence is directed. Mindful attention to the forms of practice, ritual, and daily life itself becomes our form of devotional practice. Although this mind of devotion can arise naturally, it is not an end in itself. Ultimately we move past this to see things as neither sacred nor mundane, but just as they are, in a way that is both "nothing special" and truly wonderful.

The "family style" is, therefore, the enactment of genjô-kôan, things-as-they-are not other than the Dharmakaya. Thus, this attentive caretaking can demonstrate that the "three pillars" are actually inseparably one, that is, a single, unified training of the body-mind in accord with Buddha's timeless teachings.

(1) Contributed by Rev. Myo Lahey, Hartford Street Zen Center

## **PREFACE: NOT CORRUPTING THE DHARMA**

This document has its origins in the concerns of SZBA members about the level of experience, discipline, and dedication that will be exhibited by Soto priests in the U.S. In this, we are merely echoing a concern brilliantly voiced by the Buddha himself in The Discourse on Future Dangers (Anagata-bhayani Sutta). It seems fitting to preface our document with the following warning, as translated from the Pali by Thanissaro Bhikkhu:

“Monks, these five future dangers, unarisen at present, will arise in the future. Be alert to them and, being alert, work to get rid of them. Which five?

“There will be, in the course of the future, monks undeveloped in body, undeveloped in virtue, undeveloped in mind, undeveloped in discernment. They – being undeveloped in body, undeveloped in virtue, undeveloped in mind, undeveloped in discernment – will give full ordination to others and will not be able to discipline them in heightened virtue, heightened mind,

heightened discernment. These too will then be undeveloped in body...virtue...mind...discernment. Thus from corrupt Dhamma comes corrupt discipline; from corrupt discipline, corrupt Dhamma.

“This, monks, is the first future danger, unarisen at present, that will arise in the future. Be alert to it and, being alert, work to get rid of it.

“And again, there will be in the course of the future monks undeveloped in body, undeveloped in virtue, undeveloped in mind, undeveloped in discernment. They – being undeveloped in body, undeveloped in virtue, undeveloped in mind, undeveloped in discernment – will take on others as students and will not be able to discipline them in heightened virtue, heightened mind, heightened discernment. These too will then be undeveloped in body...virtue...mind...discernment. Thus from corrupt Dhamma comes corrupt discipline; from corrupt discipline, corrupt Dhamma.

“This, monks, is the second future danger, unarisen at present, that will arise in the future. Be alert to it and, being alert, work to get rid of it.

“And again, there will be in the course of the future monks undeveloped in body... virtue...mind...discernment. They – being undeveloped in body...virtue...discernment – when giving a talk on higher Dhamma or a talk composed of questions and answers, will fall into dark mental states without being aware of it. Thus from corrupt Dhamma comes corrupt discipline; from corrupt discipline, corrupt Dhamma.

“This, monks, is the third future danger, unarisen at present, that will arise in the future. Be alert to it and, being alert, work to get rid of it.

“And again, there will be in the course of the future monks undeveloped in body...virtue...mind...discernment. They – being undeveloped in body...virtue...mind...discernment – will not listen when discourses that are words of the Tathagata – deep, profound, transcendent, connected with the Void – are being recited. They will not lend ear, will not set their hearts on knowing them, will not regard these teachings as worth grasping or mastering. But they will listen when discourses that are literary works – the works of poets, elegant in sound, elegant in rhetoric, the work of outsiders, words of the disciples – are recited. They will lend ear and set their hearts on knowing them. They will regard these teachings as worth grasping and mastering. Thus from corrupt Dhamma comes corrupt discipline; from corrupt discipline, corrupt Dhamma.

“This, monks, is the fourth future danger, unarisen at present, that will arise in the future. Be alert to it and, being alert, work to get rid of it.

“And again, there will be in the course of the future monks undeveloped in body...virtue...mind...discernment. They – being undeveloped in body...virtue...mind...discernment – will become elders living in luxury, lethargic, foremost in falling back, shirking the duties of solitude. They will not make an effort for the attaining of the as-yet-unattained, the reaching of the as-yet-unreached, the realization of the as-yet-unrealized. They will become an example for later generations, who will become luxurious in their living, lethargic, foremost in falling back, shirking the duties of solitude, and who will not make an effort for the attaining of the as-yet-unattained, the reaching of the as-yet-unreached, the realization of

the as-yet-unrealized. Thus from corrupt Dhamma comes corrupt discipline; from corrupt discipline, corrupt Dhamma.

“This, monks, is the fifth future danger, unarisen at present, that will arise in the future. Be alert to it and, being alert, work to get rid of it.

“These, monks, are the five future dangers, unarisen at present, that will arise in the future. Be alert to them, and being alert, work to get rid of them”

## **HOW TO USE THIS DOCUMENT**

This document offers guidelines for the formation of Soto Zen priests and, as such, draws a profile of the characteristics and skills one could hope to find in the ideal fully realized priest. Four areas are covered: Carrying the Tradition, Personal Conduct, Self Understanding and Knowledge of Source Texts. The degree of emphasis to be placed on each area is to be tailored to individual needs.

It is assumed that this document will provide a platform for teachers and students as they continue their examination of the areas of training that it stresses. This might take the form of carefully going through the document together and examining how these elements are reflected in their own practice. Some teachers will undoubtedly develop their own training programs. It also may prove useful in working with individuals contemplating ordination so as to clarify their understanding of what lies ahead.

This document is merely a tool and is not set in stone. It is expected that it will be reviewed and perhaps revised every few years.

The SZBA intends to assist the training process by offering an increasingly comprehensive series of angos and workshops through the activities of the Soto Zen Buddhist Institute.

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **What it Means to be a Soto Zen Priest**

Vocation as a Soto Zen priest embraces three components that are inextricably intertwined and mutually reinforcing. These three are vow, faith and function.

**Vow** represents a deeply rooted, never-ending commitment as expressed in the Four Bodhisattva Vows of our Buddhist tradition: “Beings are numberless, I vow to free them. Delusions are inexhaustible, I vow to end them. Dharma gates are boundless, I vow to enter them. The Buddha Way is unsurpassable, I vow to realize it.” Vow is dedication to service to the sangha and to all beings. It is a determination to live one’s entire life, in all its myriad manifestations, as an expression of this vow.

**Faith** is the essential basis for vow, and is best expressed as trust. We trust in Shakyamuni Buddha's awakening to freedom from *dukkha*, unsatisfactoriness. We trust that his teachings offer a path to this freedom. We trust that the wisdom of the Buddha must be experienced with the entire body and mind. We trust that the truths of the Buddha-dharma are applicable right here and throughout the universe, and that the Buddha-dharma must be experienced in this very moment. We trust that the tradition of Soto Zen as shaped by Dogen Zenji and Keizan Zenji is a container for the enlightened wisdom of the sages, and that if we practice in accordance with the path of Soto Zen we may know directly the truth of the Buddha's teaching. We trust that our very circumstances, just as they are, are the ground of practice and enlightenment and we trust in a boundless heart that vows to free all beings from *dukkha*.

**Function** expresses the activities through which the Soto Zen priest actualizes her/his vow and faith. These activities may include, but are decidedly not limited to: teaching *zazen*, transmitting the teachings of Buddhist literature, officiating at ceremonies such as weddings, funerals, precept and repentance ceremonies, baptisms. Function may take the form of representing the ancient tradition through wearing the garments and expressing the gesture of ritual. It may mean counseling individuals, working in hospitals, hospices, prisons, or struggling to alleviate poverty, environmental degradation or carrying the boundless heart into the conventional workplace. It may mean scholarly research to bring forward the Buddhist canon. It may be the creative voice of the artist. The functions of the Soto Zen priest are as myriad as individual talents and choices, but all exhibit the limitless heart that honors the worth of all interdependent being.

## THE FORMATION OF A PRIEST

In most American Soto Zen lineages, priest training – the development and maturing of skills and attributes over time – begins before Novice Ordination (*shukke tokudo*). This training begins with lay practice and in many lineages, continues through formal pre-ordination programs. After Novice Ordination, the individual becomes a Soto Zen priest, but not a full priest. One is considered a novice who practices and functions under the guidance of his or her teacher until Dharma Transmission (*shiho*), after which the individual becomes a full, or transmitted, priest able to function independently.

The period of formation that follows upon novice ordination (*shukke tokudo*) continues as a life-long endeavor that will sustain individuals dedicated to exemplifying the dharma with integrity. “With integrity” means remaining committed to exemplifying the Bodhisattva ideal despite hardships, disappointments, and unmet expectations. Priest training encourages the continuing unfolding of the Bodhisattva ideal characterized by the Six Paramitas: giving, ethical conduct, patience, energy, meditation, and wisdom.

Novice priest ordination may result in Dharma Transmission, empowering the fully ordained priest to extend Buddhist teachings and Soto Zen practice in the West. However, priest training does not always conclude with dharma transmission. Novices may transition back to lay life. It is usually best to hold appropriate ceremonies to mark either of these transitions and to honor both the training and the service to the community that that the novice has completed.

Formation as a priest rests on the following principles of Zen practice: (1) zazen, (2) mindfulness, (3) deepening understanding through personal effort, (4) self-reflection, (5) working with a teacher, (6) studying Buddhist literature, and (7) sustained effort.

The term “in the West” implies a role and training in some ways different from the current priest role and training in Japan. The term also acknowledges that individuals who become Soto Zen Buddhist priests in America and elsewhere outside of Japan do so through personal choice, usually uninfluenced by family or social tradition, and that a Western Zen priest’s life has been largely lived within a Western economic, artistic, political and academic culture. The use of “in the West” also acknowledges the increasing participation of lay people in zazen and the growing interest in assimilating Zen practice into one’s work and family life.

Completing formal priest training will mean that an individual has internalized the tradition, is capable of transmitting it, and vows to devote her or himself to a life of continuous practice and service.

## **CENTRALITY OF THE TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIP**

If one turns to the section on Resources on page 14, one will find that the greatest resource of all for the novice is her or his own teacher. It is the teacher who models the life of a Soto priest to which the novice aspires and it is the teacher who teaches by example, who chooses the particular path of training for an individual novice and who watches over and guides that training. Our tradition rightly emphasizes mind-to-mind transmission and the bond between teacher and student. It is the teacher, and the teacher alone, who will decide when the novice is ready to assume the responsibilities of dharma transmission. This document hopes to give teachers a template that will assist them in fulfilling their important role in developing the priests of the future, but it is not its intention to suggest that the teacher-student relationship need be an exclusive or possessive relationship between one student and one teacher. It is traditional in Japan, for instance, for a novice to have 3 or 4 teachers – for novice ordination, for study of texts, for the shuso period and dharma transmission. Each of them is vital to the student’s development.

## **CHARACTERISTICS AND SKILLS OF THE IDEAL SOTO ZEN PRIEST**

A fully formed Soto Zen priest will exhibit the characteristics and skills necessary to fulfill the responsibilities of priesthood. These attributes are developed through working over time within four areas:

**(1) Carrying the Tradition. (2) Personal Conduct, (3) Self-Understanding, (4) Knowledge of Source Texts**

## **THE IMPORTANCE OF CARRYING THE TRADITION**

The phrase “carrying the tradition” describes the commitment of a priest to bring into the present the deep tradition of dharma practice that comes to us through the lives of the thousands of Soto priests who have preceded us.

The most important commitment of a Soto Zen priest is to embody the Buddha way as expressed within the tradition of Dôgen’s Zen. In the meditation hall and in all other areas in the practice place, this is done through the body – through zazen, devotional practice, work practice, and all other practice place activity. Ritual and ceremony are the deeply rooted symbolic physical manifestations of the teachings and philosophy of any religion. In Soto Zen Buddhism, they play a vital role in embodying the Way and thereby transmitting the Dharma.

The Soto Zen priest must be firmly grounded in his or her tradition in order to adequately transmit to others the essence of the practice and teaching. To carry the Soto tradition means not mere surface behavior. It requires personal investment in traditional gesture that carries deep meaning because one embodies it thoroughly. It is activity deeply rooted in thousands of years of spiritual practice, study, and understanding. Our tradition has been transmitted through the monastic containers of China and Japan. Therefore it is suggested that during a novice’s training he or she spend adequate time in a monastic setting that employs traditional Soto forms.

## **Components of the Soto Zen Tradition**

### **Zazen**

Shikantaza is to bring wholehearted harmony to the self without attaching to enlightenment or delusion. Thus from the beginning of training to the end, the priest directly faces the self. The mature priest is master of the self in whatever situation he/she may encounter. The authentic form of facing the self is completely wholehearted shikantaza, actualizing spacious awareness in life and death within the space of the entire world, not from the small territory of self clinging. For such a priest, practice and enlightenment are one. The single most important task for a Soto Zen priest is to carry on this shikantaza zazen. Even if there is no one who is interested in such a practice, still the task of a mature priest is to emphasize and teach this.

### **Dharma Understanding**

For the Soto Zen novice, studying the self in zazen is supported and refined through studying with a teacher and studying the words of the ancestors, particularly Dôgen-zenji. In order to carry the tradition, thorough understanding of the source texts of the tradition (i.e., *Shôbôgenzô*, *Eihei shingi* and *Eihei koroku*) is vital. The purpose of such study is not to stuff up the priest’s head with knowledge. Instead, the mature priest employs the study of the Buddhadharma to actualize the following statement of Dogen-zenji from *Bendowa*: “The endeavor to negotiate the Way, as I teach now, consists in discerning all things in view of enlightenment, and putting such a unitive awareness into practice in the midst of the revaluated world.”

### **Ceremony and Ritual**

Carrying the tradition requires mastery of ceremony and ritual. It also includes the Soto Zen liturgy (see *Soto School Scriptures for Daily Services and Practice*). What is often referred to in English as liturgy or devotional practice is expressed in Japanese by *ki-e* or *ki-myo*. “*Ki*” is “to return.” “*e*” means “something you can depend on.” “*Myo*” is “the original ultimate state of life.” It requires loving attention to each moment. Ceremony and ritual as liturgy, then, is to

manifest returning to reality and gratefully sharing the benefits with buddhas, ancestors, and all beings.

### **Service**

The mature priest carries the Soto Zen tradition with the Mahayana spirit manifesting generosity, tolerance, and magnanimity by helping others to live in peace and harmony. Because the suffering of living beings is limitless, the opportunities to serve living beings by giving material things, fearlessness, and dharma are also without limit. In the middle of the confused world, without being crushed by despair, the Soto Zen priest stands upright, thus offering fearlessness and dharma to all living beings. Though opportunities for service are as varied as the needs of humanity, for many the sangha will offer a primary opportunity to serve through even-handedly encouraging the efforts of sangha members in all areas of practice and study. Service also includes care for the practice place and handling financial and other administrative affairs that support the practice.

### **Desired characteristics and skills as outcomes of training in Carrying the Tradition:**

#### **Zazen:**

- has established a steady personal practice
- is able to clearly demonstrate proper procedures
- understands and can articulate the unique nature of shikantaza (wholehearted sitting) as well as various other practices that focus the mind, such as counting the breath, vipassana, gatha or mantra recitation and mindfulness techniques

#### **Dharma understanding:**

- is able to clearly express the Buddhadharma via dharma talks, dokusan, public speaking, and writing
- pays attention to the immediate context of communication and does not give stock answers
- does not pretend to have answers but makes suggestions for exploration

#### **Ceremony and ritual:**

- appreciates the spiritual meaning of ritual and ceremony
- is familiar with the proper use of ritual implements, e.g. mokugyo, kaishaku (clappers), bells, incense, zagu, and kotsu (stick)
- experienced in Soto style of chanting sutras
- is able to perform in ceremony roles: doshi, ino, doan, jikido, jisha, fukudo
- is skilled in proper procedures for cooking, serving, eating, and chanting during oryoki meals
- is able to officiate at not only daily services, but also specialized ceremonies such as weddings, funerals and lay precept ceremonies
- when necessary can construct ceremonies for special occasion
- can give clear instruction to others in ceremonial functions

#### **Service:**

##### **Nurturing sangha:**

- approachable and available to sangha members
- listens well

- participates in the work of maintaining the facility and carrying out sangha activities
- supports sangha members in taking increased responsibility for their own practice
- encourages positive relationships among sangha members
- does not play favorites
- has a sense of humor about one's own limitations
- makes the practice central, not one's own ego needs
- maintains confidentiality
- knows where the boundary exists between practice or dharma questions and personal emotional problems and knows how not to cross it.

Caring for the practice place:

- treats every aspect of the practice place with care and respect, encourages others to do likewise
- is willing to undertake necessary tasks for the financial and physical maintenance of the practice place
- keeps an eye on what may be needed or needs to be replenished'
- knows proper set up for the zendo, e.g.: altar, flowers, cushions

The wider community

- is available on a reasonable basis for public talks, seminars, discussion groups
- may participate in interfaith activities
- is responsive to community's social needs
- is comfortable teaching in non-traditional settings such as prisons, schools, rehab groups etc.

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## **THE IMPORTANCE OF PERSONAL CONDUCT**

A Soto Zen priest aims to manifest the bodhisattva way of life, behaving selflessly not only in personal relationships but also in every aspect of life, moment-to-moment. Personal Conduct is a manifestation of the root of the enlightened mind, empty of personal biases and desires, balanced and ready for whatever comes. The characteristics of Personal Conduct reflect the mind of integrity that creates deep and trusting relationships and puts people at ease. These attributes encourage and inspire others to continue practice and to discover their own wisdom and compassion.

### **Components of Personal Conduct**

**Maturity:** is the ability to respond positively to criticism, practice forgiveness, learn from others and conduct oneself with dignity, courtesy, patience, humility, tolerance, and good humor. These are the attributes of an individual free of a demanding or fearful ego and are manifestations of a generous and giving mind oriented towards others rather than towards oneself. Such attributes enable a priest to avoid taking things personally and acting defensively, attitudes that are corrosive to the Way-seeking mind. A priest who remains caught in the tangle of delusions is thereby hampered from helping others to disentangle from their own, so these attributes are fundamental requirements of a fully matured priest who aspires to lead people in spiritual practice with dignity, humility, and humor.

**Behaving ethically** in accordance with the Sixteen Bodhisattva Precepts is the foundation for honesty in relationships, for reverence for all life, for not harming, and for nurturing and taking care of all beings. Adhering to these ethical guidelines is essential for living in peace and

harmony and acknowledging the interdependent nature of all life. Also, a priest is frequently entrusted with confidential information. A priest must be worthy of that trust.

**Teaching by example** is the most honest and potent way to teach. Because people learn most completely from what they witness and observe, a priest must be able express the precepts visibly in his or her life. \_

**Maintaining constancy** is essential not only in Zen Buddhist practice but also in a priest's life. It means commitments and remaining accountable, not skimming surfaces or professing dedication and then abandoning a project. Maintaining constancy also means to support students through struggles that put a strain on one's relationship with them. It also means not to make promises lightly.

### **Desired characteristics and skills as outcomes of training in Personal Conduct**

#### **Maturity**

- maintains composure, does not react with anger when treated unfairly or confronted by a negative or threatening attitude
- does not react angrily to others' mistakes
- is not callous or dismissive of his or her own mistakes
- encourages feedback
- performs tasks with attention and care
- maintains composure
- shows respect for others in personal relationships
- does not attempt to "win" or be in control
- does not insist on others being perfect
- demonstrates humility rather than pride
- does not display annoyance or defensiveness

#### **Behaving ethically**

- uses 16 Bodhisattva Precepts as standard for behavior
- is honest in relationships, does not mislead
- creates no harm; does not betray or abuse others
- does not take advantage of others for personal benefit
- maintains confidences
- is accountable for commitments and actions

#### **Teaching by example**

- actions are in accordance with words, i.e. "practicing what you preach"
- exhibits care for others, for the practice and for the practice place
- always makes the best effort
- demonstrates leadership, is willing to point the way

#### **Maintaining constancy**

- is willing to make commitments
- sees a task through to the end despite difficulties
- is accountable and fulfills promises
- does not make up excuses

## THE IMPORTANCE OF SELF-UNDERSTANDING

Self-understanding is a necessary pre-requisite for fulfilling the role of a Soto Zen Priest. Selflessness derives from recognizing in what ways one is *not* selfless and then cultivating the willingness to work on letting go of such tendencies. Recognizing, accepting, and refining personal qualities – both those that are admirable and those that require attention – will enable the novice to perceive the needs of others and then to conduct personal interviews, perform pastoral counseling and nurture sangha. In contrast, by failing to develop critical thinking or perceive and accept self-centered needs, well-intentioned and motivated people can become driven by ambition and the pursuit of recognition and approval. The result can be manipulation, betrayal, or abuse of others. Seeing into the problems that arise out of concerns of the personal, small self is the ongoing task of the Zen Buddhist practitioner and the Soto Zen priest in particular.

### Components of Self-Understanding

**Cultivating awareness of habits, tendencies, biases**, as well as self-oriented motives, is the basis for developing critical thinking, overcoming delusions and seeing reality without distortion. This is the foundation of honesty.

**Willingness to show restraint**. Without this, awareness of personal tendencies will be of little value. Over time, the novice priest will develop the ability to let go of the strong pull of desires, for this is the primary work of a realized priest. If this is accomplished, bodhisattva qualities such as the Six Paramitas can emerge without blemish.

**Cognizance of strengths and weaknesses**. Through training, the novice will learn not to allow habits, prejudices, and emotional responses to deflect him or her from the path, particularly when these responses may injure others or may encourage them to misunderstand such actions as valid expressions of practice. The novice will learn to know what personal characteristics and skills can be put to good use and which ones need to be improved to make them more valuable. This process is essential when walking the path of wisdom and compassion. Learning to stress strengths and be mindful of weaknesses, the novice will expand his or her capacity to understand and express the practice.

**Devotion to the continual unfolding of wisdom and compassion** will require ongoing self-examination as the novice endeavors to stay on the bodhisattva path and to manifest Buddhahood. To embrace the ideal of increasing wisdom and compassion leads to a constant awareness of personal characteristics and behavior. Wisdom and compassion are both necessary to express the inherent buddha nature, just as both palms come together to form gassho.

### Desired characteristics and skills as outcomes of training in Self-Understanding

Cultivating awareness of habits, tendencies, biases

- displays a “Letting Go” attitude
- exhibits lack of ambition for personal gain
- has a positive approach to problems that minimizes personal biases
- learns to engage in self-reflection
- learns to feel empathy and patience with the shortcomings of others
- is open to new ideas

- demonstrates humility and asks for patience or aid when working in an area of weakness
- able to lead, demonstrating confidence without pride
- gives clear instructions for performing tasks without being solely wedded to one's approach
- does not mask insecurity by over-reliance on "perfect form"

#### Willingness to show restraint

- exhibits composure and equanimity
- is able to take a wide view, with a sense of connection to the whole
- is reflective, rather than reactive, in words and actions
- accepts direction readily, considers suggestions without resistance
- neither promotes nor deprecates self
- promotes ideas that benefit others, not merely self
- can develop ideas that support long term goals, not just immediate concerns
- lacks stubbornness, does not hold others back

#### Cognizance of strengths and weaknesses

- is able to lead when leadership is called for, follow when following is called for, can both sit down and shut up and stand up and speak out.
- is honest regarding skills and abilities
- has realistic expectations of self, does not jeopardize success of activities by overreaching one's capabilities
- learns from others
- is willing to train and practice in areas needing improvement

#### Devotion to the continual unfolding of wisdom and compassion

- is dedicated to spiritual practice, such as daily *zazen* and *sesshin*
- exhibits selflessness
- is sensitive to the suffering of others
- listens carefully, does not judge
- takes Dōgen's Hachi-dainingaku (Eight Truths of Great Beings) as a model: to have small desire, to know satisfaction, to enjoy tranquility, to practice diligence, to not lose mindfulness, to practice the balanced state of dhyana, to practice wisdom, to not engage in idle discussion.
- is willing to change mind about judgments, opinions or previous responses to others
- shows respect for the Sutras and Zen classics

## **THE IMPORTANCE OF KNOWLEDGE OF SOURCE TEXTS**

The novice needs to become informed enough to reliably express understanding of both general Buddhist and Zen Buddhist literature, history, theory and practice. Just as *zazen* is ongoing life-long practice, just so study of the literature is an ongoing commitment, so that the direct experience of *zazen* both informs, and is informed by, a conceptual understanding drawn from the literature. The novice priest's growing capacity to communicate and explain the principal elements of Buddhism and Zen will expand understanding and encourage study on the part of both committed Zen students and the wider community. Also, a Soto Zen priest must be well grounded in the literature in order to give effective dharma talks and to demonstrate the relevance of practice to everyday life.

## **Components of the study of source texts**

### **An understanding of both basic Buddhist and Zen Buddhist literature**

Study of the actual texts that have come down to us through thousands of years can serve as an antidote to misunderstandings about the practice based upon personal or cultural bias. Study can also be invaluable in creating a commonality of terminology, metaphor and interpretation of personal experience that deepens communication and a sense of community.

**The capacity for communicating well** is of primary importance in effectively passing on the teachings, transmitting one's own understanding and inspiring reflection in others. To have a depth of understanding that will enable one to give dharma talks, make public presentations and communicate effectively within dokusan, one must be well grounded in the necessary history, literature and philosophy.

**The ability to transmit the Soto tradition** requires a solid grounding in Buddhist thought including early Buddhism, Mahayana Buddhism, Chinese Zen and the Soto Zen lineage refined by Dôgen, Keizan and their successors. Out of respect for our own teachers, it is also appropriate that we learn and carry on the practices particular to our Dharma lineages.

## **Desired characteristics and skills as outcomes of training in the study of source texts**

### **Exhibiting understanding of general Buddhist and Zen Buddhist literature**

-is comfortable expressing understanding of the literature through discussions, lectures, writings, and answering questions

-has learned how to relate Buddhist and Zen teachings and principles to those of other religions and belief systems

-is invited as guest speaker by institutions other than own sangha, both Buddhist and non-Buddhist

-written work is published outside of own sangha

-has the respect of Soto Zen teachers

### **The capacity for communicating well**

-is easily understood

-engages the listener and reader in presentation of ideas

-speaks and writes with clarity; is well-organized

-is able to couch ideas in terms that will reach a particular audience, yet without "talking down."

### **The ability to transmit the Soto tradition**

-is well-grounded in the writings of Soto Zen teachers, including Dôgen and Keizan

-is familiar with practices of the Soto school

## **RESOURCES FOR BOTH TEACHER AND NOVICE**

**Listed below are suggested tools for practice and sources of training that may be utilized by teacher and student during the period following Novice Ordination. This is by no means an exhaustive list and will in all likelihood be expanded by individual teachers.**

-  
The resources and their benefits are:

### **ZAZEN**

- understanding of no-self, interdependence and impermanence
- discipline of body and mind
- release of negative (and positive) feelings
- non-thinking, opening the hand of thought
- maintaining the ancient Way
- practice of no-attainment

### **ONE'S OWN TEACHER**

- the nature of commitment
- the practice of zazen
- the ritual style of the teacher's particular tradition within Soto Zen
- care and responsiveness to others
- the role and scope of Dharma Talks
- how to conduct dokusan, the importance of confidentiality
- the importance of being available to others
- care for the practice place
- the ability to respond positively to criticism, practice forgiveness and learn from mistakes
- conducting oneself with dignity, courtesy, patience, humility, tolerance and good humor
- ethical behavior
- learning to display both dedication and equanimity
- awareness of personal habits, tendencies and biases
- ability to show restraint
- to be cognizant of one's weaknesses and strengths
- devotion to the continual unfolding of wisdom and compassion
- importance of knowledge of Buddhist and Zen literature

### **MONASTIC PRACTICE, including sesshin**

- practice of commitment
- letting go of ego-self
- learning to follow a strict schedule and function well in a group
- steady practice of zazen
- ability to perform ceremony and ritual
- reduced reliance on creature comforts
- maturity, responding well to criticism and learning from mistakes
- conducting oneself with dignity, courtesy, patience, humility, tolerance and good humor
- awareness of personal habits, tendencies and biases
- ability to show restraint
- devotion to the continual unfolding of wisdom and compassion
- grounding in the unique approach of Soto Zen

## **THE BODHISATTVA PRECEPTS**

The precepts are a resource for study and reflection. They act as the basis for an ethical life and serve as kôans for our everyday activity.

1. I take refuge in the Buddha
2. I take refuge in the Dharma.
3. I take refuge in the Sangha.
  
4. With purity of heart, I vow to abstain from what is harmful to myself or others
5. With purity of heart, I vow to do what is beneficial to myself or others
6. With purity of heart, I vow to benefit all beings
7. A disciple of the Buddha abstains from the willful taking of life
8. A disciple of the Buddha abstains from taking what is not given
9. A disciple of the Buddha abstains from misusing sexuality
10. A disciple of the Buddha abstains from speaking falsely
11. A disciple of the Buddha abstains from getting intoxicated
12. A disciple of the Buddha abstains from speaking of the faults of others
13. A disciple of the Buddha abstains from praising the self and maligning others
14. A disciple of the Buddha abstains from being possessive of Dharma teachings
15. A disciple of the Buddha abstains from harboring hatred, malice or ill-will
16. A disciple of the Buddha abstains from disparaging the Triple Treasure.

## **SUTRA STUDY**

The major Mahayana sutras, including, but not limited to:

The Lotus Sutra

The Vimalakirti Sutra

The Avatamsaka Sutra

The Prajna Paramita in 8,000 Lines

The Diamond Sutra

The Platform Sutra of Hui-neng

-these sutras provide the philosophical underpinning of Mahayana Buddhism and all had great impact on Zen. Knowledge of them is a basic requirement for solid footing in the teachings.

Dogen's writings, especially Bendôwa , Shôbogenzo, Eihei Koroku

-an understanding of Dôgen's perspective on zazen, Buddha nature, time, being, total engagement, among many other topics. This is essential to an understanding of Soto Zen and the manner in which it may vary from its cousin Zen traditions.

## **SEWING RAKUSU AND OKESA**

The individual hand sewing of these garments is at the experiential heart of our practice, embodying:

-commitment

-patience

-taking great care

-ability to follow guidance of others

-humility in the face of the challenges posed

- willingness to make public witness to one's devotion to the Dharma
- identification with the ancient stream of Soto Zen

Note: Excellent written instructions are available from the following sources:

Minnesota Zen Meditation Center, [info@mzmn.org](mailto:info@mzmn.org). Refer to Tomoe Katagiri's "Study of the Okesa, Nyoho-e Buddha's Robe.

Berkeley Zen Center, [bzc@berkeleyzencenter.org](mailto:bzc@berkeleyzencenter.org). Attention Jean Selkirk

San Francisco Zen Center, [ccoffice@sfcz.org](mailto:ccoffice@sfcz.org) Attention Meiya Wender

### **OUTSIDE RESOURCES**

- visits to a variety of Soto Zen centers and temples to build understanding of the variety of challenges posed to those entering the priesthood
- examination of life roles within the priesthood other than leading a sangha, i.e chaplaincy, prison ministry, social activism
- academic study of Buddhism
- on-line Buddhist courses
- contemporary publications on counseling, interpersonal relations, relation of Buddhism to Western psychology, workshops on ethics, financial accounting, fund-raising and communications, leadership and community building
- personal counseling to build greater self-knowledge
- working with a therapist to remove negative energy and find psychological balance

### **APPENDIX A - Resources for Study**

#### **Background and History:**

*A Concise History of Buddhism*, Andrew Skilton

*Basic Buddhist Concepts*, Kogen Mizuno

*Buddhism, Its Essence and Development*, Edward Conze

*Buddhist Thought in India*, Edward Conze

*Buddha*, Karen Armstrong

*What the Buddha Taught*, Rahula Walpola

*The Beginnings of Buddhism*, Kogen Mizuno

*Mahayana Buddhism, the doctrinal foundation*, Paul Williams

*A History of Indian Buddhism*, Hirakawa Akira, trans. Paul Groner

#### **Philosophical development, Mahayana sutras:**

*The Diamond Sutra*, various translations and commentaries

*The Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines*, trans. Edward Conze

*Heart Sutra*, various translations and commentaries  
*The Lotus Sutra*, various translations  
*Vimalakirti Sutra*, trans. Burton Watson; also Robert Thurman  
*Avatamsaka Sutra* (The Flower Ornament Sutra), trans. Thomas Cleary  
*Gandarvyuha Sutra* (Entry Into the Realm of Reality), trans. Thomas Cleary

### **Philosophical development, systems:**

Madhyamaka:

*The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way*, trans. and commentary, Jay L. Garfield  
*The Foundational Standpoint of Madhyamaka Philosophy*, Gadjin Nagao  
*Heartwood of the Bodhi Tree*, The Buddha's Teachings on Voidness, Buddhadasa Bikkhu

Yogacara:

*The Lankavatara Sutra*, trans. D.T. Suzuki  
*Samdhinirmocana Sutra*, trans. John Powers  
*The Yogacara Idealism*, Ashok Kumar Chatterjee

Tathagatagarbha:

*The Awakening of Faith*, trans. Y. Hakeda  
*Pruning the Bodhi Tree*, Hubbard & Swanson

Hua-Yen:

*The Buddhist Teaching of Totality: the Philosophy of Hua-yen Buddhism*, Garma C. C. Chang  
*Hua-Yen Buddhism*, Francis Cook

### **Early Buddhism:**

*The Dhammapada*, various translations  
*The Sutta Nipata*, trans. H. Saddhatissa  
*The Nikayas*: Anguttara (Short Discourses); Samuyutta Nikaya (Connected Discourses);  
Majjhima (Middle Length Discourses); Digha (Long Discourses)  
*In the Buddha's Words, an Anthology of Discourses from the Pali Canon*, edited by Bhikkhu  
Bodhi

### **Ch'an and Zen:**

*The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch*, trans. P. Yampolsky, also by Thomas Cleary  
*Zen Buddhism, A History*, Two Volumes, Heinrich Dumoulin  
*The Zen Teachings of Bodhidharma*, trans. Red Pine  
*Zen's Chinese Heritage*, Andy Ferguson  
*The Zen Teachings of Huang Po*, trans. John Blofeld  
*Original Teachings of Ch'an Buddhism*, trans. Chang Chung-yuan  
*The Recorded Sayings of Master Joshu*, trans. James Green  
*Cultivating the Empty Field, the silent illumination of Zen Master Hongzhi*, trans. & commentary,  
Taigen Dan Leighton  
*The Roaring Stream*, ed. Nelson Foster & Jack Shoemaker

*Record of Transmitting the Light*, Keizan Jokin (translations by Francis Cook and Thomas Cleary)

### **Koan collections:**

*Book of Serenity* (Shoyoroku), trans. Thomas Cleary  
*The Blue Cliff Record* (Hekiganroku), trans. Thomas and J.C. Cleary  
*The Gateless Gate* (Mumonkan), trans. and commentary, Robert Aitken

### **Dogen, background and history:**

*Dogen's Formative Years in China*, Takashi James Kodera  
*Soto Zen in Medieval Japan*, William M. Bodiford

### **Dogen, Shobogenzo:**

*Moon In a Dewdrop*, selections, trans. Kazuaki Tanahashi & collaborators  
*Enlightenment Unfolds*, selections, trans. Kazuaki Tanahashi & collaborators  
*The Heart of Dogen's Shobogenzo*, selections, trans. Norman Waddell & Masao Abe  
*Sounds of Valley Streams*, selections, trans. Francis Cook  
*Rational Zen, the Mind of Dogen Zenji*, selections, trans. Thomas Cleary  
*Shobogenzo*, Four Volumes, trans. and ed. Nishijima and Cross

### **Dogen, writings and talks:**

*Shobogenzo Zuimonki*, various trans.  
*Dogen's Pure Standards for the Zen Community (Eihei Shingi)*, trans. Taigen Daniel Leighton and Shohaku Okumura  
*The Whole Hearted Way*, trans. Leighton and Okumura, commentary by Kosho Uchiyama  
*Dogen's Extensive Record*, (Eihei Koroku), trans. Taigen Dan Leighton & Shohaku Okumura  
*Master Dogen's Shinji Shobogenzo* (Dogen's 301 Koan Collection), trans. Gudo Nishijima

### **Dogen, shikantaza:**

*The Art of Just Sitting*, ed. John Daido Looi  
*Beyond Thinking*, ed. Kazuaki Tanahashi  
*Opening the Hand of Thought*, Kosho Uchiyama

### **Dogen, commentaries:**

*Dogen Kigen: Mystical Realist*, Hee-jin Kim  
*Dogen on meditation and thinking*, Hee-jin Kim  
*A Study of Dogen*, Masao Abe  
*Buddha Nature is Impermanence*, Joan Stambaugh  
*The Formless Self*, Joan Stambaugh  
*Refining Your Life*, Kosho Uchiyama

## **Other Zen and Japanese Buddhism:**

*The Unborn, The Life and Teachings of Zen Master Bankei*, trans. Norman Waddell  
*The Discourse on the Inexhaustible Lamp of the Zen School*. Zen Master Torei Enji with  
commentary by Master Daibi of Unkan, trans. Yoko Okuda  
*Shapers of Japanese Buddhism*, ed. Yusen Kashiwahara & Koyu Sonoda

## **Founders of Soto Zen in America:**

*Crooked Cucumber*, David Chadwick  
*Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*, Shunryu Suzuki  
*Branching Streams Flow in the Dark*, Shunryu Suzuki  
*Not Always So*, Shunryu Suzuki  
*Appreciate Your Life*, Taizan Maezumi  
*Returning to Silence*, Dainin Katagiri  
*You Have to Say Something*, Dainin Katagiri  
*Each Moment Is the Universe*, Dainin Katagiri  
*Zen is Eternal Life*, Jiyu Kennett

## **Precepts and ethics:**

*The Art of Being*, John Daido Looi  
*The Mind of Clover*, Robert Aitken  
*The Practice of Perfection*, Robert Aitken  
*Being Upright*, Tenshin Reb Anderson  
*Buddhist Ethics*, Hammalawa Saddhatissa  
*Buddhist Ethics, a very short introduction*, Damien Keown

## **Appendix B**

### **Individual SZBA members' responses to what it means to be a Soto Zen priest**

1) I could add other elements, but I would say one critical aspect of "What It Means to Be a Soto Zen Priest," is simply a radical life commitment/priority to maintain the Soto Zen practice and Dharma tradition. This includes making it available to others, and also keeping it alive in the sense of presenting it as meaningful, relevant, and lively for our time and place. There may be as many modes for doing this as there are Soto Zen priests, with each using their own particular abilities, interests, and imaginations to express and enact this.

2) I feel I've profited considerably as a Zen priest and teacher from my preparation for ministry within Western and particularly North American conventions. I suspect possibly the most important thing I've gotten from my seminary education (and of that most importantly from my parish internship and my clinical pastoral education internship) was a clarification for me about the difference between being a Zen priest and a Zen teacher. I do not see them as the same thing, and

my experiences in seminary pointed out pretty clearly how they're different.

I see a Zen teacher, whether a layperson or a priest is primarily concerned with guiding people toward their deepest understanding of who they are. A Zen teacher is concerned exclusively with the project of awakening. And I believe a Zen priest is concerned with ministry, serving the community in all the different ways that might manifest. This includes fostering sangha either by leading a community or directly supporting the leadership of a community. It means taking care of individuals through counseling, visiting, organizing classes and perhaps in giving Dharma talks. It means being concerned with the religious education of children and youth. It means representing the sangha in the larger community. It can easily mean taking on various forms of chaplaincy including but not limited to hospital, prison and military.

And, I believe my ministry has been deeply enriched by my Zen training. The very fact that I have come to see these two separate functions has allowed me to be clearer in that part of my life which is concerned with spiritual direction, to see that ministry and teaching touch, much like teaching and counseling or psychology touch, but are nonetheless ultimately about different areas of focus.

3) I would summarize the essence of being a Soto Zen priest as:  
Take this practice very seriously,  
But don't take yourself too seriously.

4) When I was preparing to ordain the first priests from the Chapel Hill Zen Center sangha, I put together the following piece on *Shukke Tokudo*. I still feel that the fundamental responsibility of a Soto Zen priest is to support practice, particularly zazen practice, by fashioning his/her life around a zazen schedule and by providing zazen instruction. My teacher, Sojun Mel Weitsman, describes a priest as a "servant of the sangha" rather than as someone to be looked up to by the sangha. I find other things such as an upright character, a moral example, etc., more difficult to define in words, but of course, they are of utmost importance for someone being ordained.

#### ***Shukke Tokudo***: Leaving Home and Accomplishing the Way

Over the years, several members of the sangha have expressed an interest in being ordained as a priest. The ceremony of being ordained and receiving the precepts as a priest is *Shukke Tokudo* in Japanese, and it has the meaning of leaving home and accomplishing the way. Although we don't always literally leave home and move to a monastery or practice center, one way to "leave home" is to make supporting formal practice at the zendo one's highest priority. Helping the temple run smoothly and making zazen practice available to others is the way a priest serves the sangha. Obviously this entails reducing the activity and commitments in one's life in order to be available for zendo practice. Someone who is not a priest may have the same intention to practice, but the responsibilities and logistics of one's life may not be such that they allow one the freedom to "be a servant to the sangha."

The ordination ceremony itself marks the beginning of priest training which takes many years. In the beginning the novice priests will be learning how to wear robes and eat with the priest's bowls, they will lead service when I am out of town, and they may give Dharma Talks, but their

responsibilities will not be much different than they are now.

When one "leaves home," one places the needs of the sangha above one's personal preferences, and the sangha supports the priest. This support or encouragement may take different forms. The new priests will continue working at the jobs they had before their ordination. One way our sangha may support someone taking on the practice of being ordained as a priest is for the sangha to provide their robes (the kimono and koromo worn under the *okesa*) and bowls (the traditional set of monastic eating bowls). The robes can be a gift from the sangha to the ordainee, and serving the temple and practice is the priest's gift to the sangha. I think this is a good reflection of our interdependence. Another way to offer your encouragement is to help with sewing the *okesa* or Buddha's robe – the patched cloth worn on top of the under robes. It is sewn by the ordainee in preparation for being ordained, and then it is received during the ordination ceremony and cared for as Buddha's robe. The *rakusu* is a smaller version of the *okesa*. The *rakusu* is sewn and received when receiving the precepts as a lay person in the ceremony called *Zaike Tokudo*, and it is worn by priests for less formal activity.

Being ordained is a big step, not only for the ordainees, it is also a big responsibility for me to learn how to guide this kind of training for others. In this endeavor, we are sharing the training opportunities provided by the San Francisco Zen Center, including Tassajara Zen Mountain Center.

The student and teacher are mutually conditioning. That is, a student needs a teacher in order to be a student, and a teacher needs a student in order to be a teacher. It is my hope that together, as a sangha, we will benefit from the practice and training of priests and find out how it will shape the future growth and maturity of our sangha.

##### 5) Here's what is surely an incomplete set of thoughts on being a Soto Priest.

Including some questions about how we might see the position. Not in order of importance.

- Being a priest means that you are teacher material in the Soto lineage????
- Being a priest means you are someone who can carry the archetype of the religious practitioner.
- Priests perform rituals and carry on the traditions of the school. This means that a priest is thoroughly trained in the forms, rituals, etc of the school.
- Priests maintain the temple schedule.
- Tokudo ordination assumes one is potentially a candidate for dharma transmission???
- Priests sit zazen.
- Soto Zen practice is the primary activity of the person's life. This can take many forms - e.g. chaplain, counselor, teacher, temple priest.
- Vow and renunciation form the basis of the priest's life - this means that all important life decisions are made with reference to ones vows. For example choice of livelihood, amount of material support one needs for one's life, amount of time devoted to dharma activities, personal practice etc.
- A priest is willing and able to reflect on their actions and listen to others non-defensively, to take responsibility for the whole situation and

act for the good of all involved not simply their own self interests. (At the same time a priest should have a good basic awareness of their own needs so that they can be effectively and appropriately met.)

6) Most fundamental is to embody the Buddha-Dharma in our ongoing life practice - realizing/actualizing this in our activities, whatever those be, according to karmic conditions and circumstances. This may mean functioning as an ordained priest/teacher connected to a Zen Center/Temple (and the various functions related to this) or in other forms and life situations. It also includes working with the practices, teachings and texts of our various Buddha ancestors, especially in India, China and Japan, to further clarify and actualize this life we are - to serve all life. Being a Soto lineage means being trained and using the forms of the lineage, and especially the teachings of Dogen Zenji, Keizan Zenji and the various ancestors of our specific lineage which have come down to us - but not to exclude any others; rather it is for us to resonate with the Dharma relations which are most appropriate with our karmic circumstances. To paraphrase Dogen, no ancestors began any school or saw themselves as any sect other than Buddha Dharma.

7) Speaking for myself, I believe the essential quality of being a priest is a dedication to serving others. This is observable in the potential priest's behavior in and out of the sangha and manifests a renunciation of self.

8) Am I allowed to say I don't know? It is a venerable response, right?? Having just returned from Taiwan and from visits to the huge Buddhist institutions there, my own concerns about scale, regimentation, and cultural Buddhism are heightened.

I am a Soto Zen priest because that is the path of my teacher, his teacher, and my dharma sisters and brothers. The forms of Soto Zen are now in my body, like a kind of music. I believe in the transformative practice of our style because I see how it works in myself and in others who apply themselves.

But even our Soto Zen in America has tendrils linking it to Sotoshu in Japan. While I have great appreciation for all the Japanese friends, priests, and teachers sincerely working on our behalf, and while I wish to work with them (having jumped through the appropriate hoops), I have great reservations about Sotoshu as an organization, and, more widely, Japanese Buddhism, which seems mired in bureaucracy and almost a kind of feudalism. We don't need this, and no one in our sanghas seems to have more than a passing interest.

So I am curious what Soto Zen will become here. How will we work with the dynamic tension between tradition and modernity, and shape a practice that benefits all beings.

9) To be a Soto Zen priest means living a deep vow to free all beings from the pains of *dukkha*, our dissatisfaction with things as they are, a vow to be realized in every circumstance and every moment of one's life. This effort to serve others is sustained by the teachings of Shakyamuni Buddha, Dôgen Zenji and the tradition of Soto Zen practices that are the markers of one's commitment.

**10)** I see the role of a Soto priest as to be available to learn and teach and sustain the forms and teachings of any given Soto-associated community. Specifically, since many lay practitioners also take responsibility for such functions, it falls to the priests to establish continuity and the passing on of the heart of the tradition. -