

In a phone call with Angie Boissevain, Jane Macdonald asked her about Practice Period. These are her notes from what she heard Angie say during that conversation in the Autumn of 2006.

JM: How do we do Practice Period?

AB: The Japanese word for Practice Period is Ango, It means “peaceful life” or “tranquil dwelling.” Practice Period is an opportunity to intensify our practice, to challenge ourself to sit more, to study, to make our own schedule, to commit to the sangha in various ways. We might want to give a talk, choose a Precept or sutra to study, work on outreach into the community. It’s a time when we bring our practice into focus and express it more consciously in our life. It’s like tending a garden. There are times when the whole of it benefits from our extra attention and care.

JM: Are there differences in Kobun’s way of doing Practice Period from other lineages?

AB: In the traditional way, the teacher arranges a curriculum and a schedule. The student signs a contract with the teacher. Kobun offered Practice Period as an opportunity to contract with yourself. Of course, it is a self-contract in the traditional way, too, but Kobun tried to free us as much as he could from feeling other-directed. In the same way, he taught us just a few forms so we were free to find our natural form within the form. Practice Period is simply a time to intensify that effort.

JM: Are there Practice Periods in the past that you particularly remember?

AB: Many people were able to sit at Haiku zendo every day during our Angos with Kobun many years ago. With three children, that was hard for me and I felt a bit left out until I realized I could do those sittings at home. I would get up earlier than usual, before the boys woke up, and use that time for “extra” sitting. And Ango is when I first began to really study the Dharma, starting with the Lotus Sutra.

JM: Is there anything we might do that would make our Practice Period easier or harder?

AB: Kobun would say, “It’s all up to you.”