

PRACTICE PERIOD-ANGO: Peaceful life
Angie Boissevain, June 30, 2009

This is a tradition that began in Buddha's time, when the monks retired to practice together in a group during the rainy season. In a monastic setting, monks' practice becomes even more focused on zazen, with much study, and with interaction with the Shuso, the head practitioner.

In our lay life at Floating Zendo, we have taken this tradition into our homes, our meeting place, and sesshin once or twice a year, vowing to deepen our practice in ways that fit into the rhythm of our life. Below are suggestions on how you can participate in this precious deepening of your practice within the shelter and support of your teacher and fellow Sangha members.

Shuso, head practitioner, is a priest-in-training who leads a practice period, manifesting the Bodhisattva teachings for the sake of everyone, from the first evening to the final day of sesshin 6 weeks later, when members of the Sangha can, one by one, question her or him in a public ceremony.

The head practitioner is supported by the Sangha in this further "stepping down" practice, and all are encouraged to participate as much as possible. The head practitioner is expected to: serve any request from the Sangha, ring the wakeup bell at sesshin, clean toilets at sesshin, offer time and space to meet with Sangha members with tea, sympathy and good humor.

The Sangha is expected to keep commitments, and meet with and support Shuso in every way.

For those who live afar, it is suggested that contact with Shuso can be made and kept by email and telephone, and that for the ceremony, questions be sent ahead of time that the Ino can read out for them.

SUGGESTIONS FOR DEEPENING PRACTICE IN ANGO:

- Commit to sitting more than usual at home
- Memorize a chant or a sutra
- Study a sutra or some teachings
- Join every Tues. evening
- Join Shuso's sittings
- Choose a Precept as your special study
- Participate in Sesshin
- Have tea with Shuso
- Have Dokusan at least once with Sensei
- Do an individual retreat of a day or so