

## The Zen Center

Bell ringing at 4 am. You get up immediately.

*Han* (block of hard ash wood struck with wooden mallet) starts at 4:05. 15 minute *han*, 3 rounds. You should be in the *zendo* by end of second round.

*Zazen* (sitting meditation) starts at 4:20. 40 minute period. *Roshi* makes a round of the *zendo* in the beginning. People bowing as he approaches (actually, *gassho*-ing—hands together and bow).

Bell sounds after 40 minutes. *Kinhin* (walking meditation) begins. *Kinhin* for 15 minutes. (Hands on chest, walking very slowly in a line, about a half step with each breath).

Second period of *zazen* (40 minutes).

Service at 5:50. Consists of bowing to the floor 9 times, reciting the *Heart Sutra* 3 times, bowing to floor 3 times; lasts about 20 minutes. With bells and large wooden drum.

Study period. One hour. In large room with fire if it's cold. Kerosene lamps. Tea is served. Warmth often makes you drowsy. You read various texts. Short chant at beginning and end of period.

*Han* for breakfast starts at 7:10.

Breakfast is served in the *zendo*. You sit on cushions in meditation posture. Each student has: an *oryoki* (set of 3 bowls, spoon and chopsticks, a scraper, *setsu* (stick with cloth end), and 3 cloths (for napkin, bowl-wiping, and cloth in which entire *oryoki* is wrapped—folded and tied in prescribed manner). Ritual way for untying and removing bowls. Bowls are placed on an eating board in front of each student. Complicated *oryoki* ritual helps to focus attention. Meals are a sort of meditation, in silence, with as little noise as possible.

Chanting precedes meal (in English at breakfast, Japanese at lunch). After short chant, students set up their *oryokis*. Chanting resumes and servers enter. As server stops before student, they bow to each other, server kneels and dishes food into bowl, they bow again and server goes on to next student. There is chanting while food is served (reciting names of Buddha and Bodhisattvas). When servers leave there is more chanting (we should be mindful of where this food comes from and whether our practice deserved it). Meal is eaten. When meal is finished server enters with hot water and there is a short chant. Hot water is poured in large bowl. Bowl is cleaned and water poured in second bowl, bowl wiped with cloth, and so on until the bowls are cleaned. Water is drunk, with a little bit saved and collected at the end (it's taken out and poured on a plant). *Oryokis* are tied up and put away (placed by the side of each student). Clackers and bow at the end of meal, *roshi* and priests leave, then students leave. As students file out of *zendo* they exchange bows with the cook.

Short period (about 20 minutes) in which you change into work clothes, take care of toilet, etc.

Work drum sounds at 8:40. Students assemble for work meeting. Short informal meeting to make sure each student knows what he's doing, has some task assigned to him, and jobs are co-ordinated.

Work period until *han* 11:10. Gardening, carpentry, masonry, roofing, garbage collecting, cleaning, sewing, etc.

*Han* at 11:10. 20 minutes to clean up, change into robes and get to *zendo*.

(There is a 15 minute *han* for this, so one can gauge his time.)

*Zazen* (40 minutes).

Service (bowing and reciting *Heart Sutra*).

Lunch (same procedure as breakfast). Usually soup, bread, and vegetable.

After lunch there is a rest period, about 30-40 minutes. (This is the chance to get some sun.)

Work drum sounds at 2 (or 2:05). After short work meeting you return to your job.

At 3:30 a bell signals tea. Everyone gathers on steps in front of *zendo* (where there is still some sun), a short chant and tea is served. Sometimes there is a treat (crackers, cookies). A short chant at the end and people return to work. At 5 p.m. drum signals end of work. Clean up, put away tools, tidy work area.

Bath time. Everyone heads for the hot sulphur baths. Before entering bath student bows before altar and recites *gatha* (verse). Silence in bath. (It is already dark in the winter, and quite cold. Kerosene lamp, cement grotto, steam rising from water, shadowy forms. Bath, at about 110° is the one chance for the body—feeling all day like a piece of cold iron—to get really warm. Blood returns to body.) Students bow and recite *gatha* before leaving.

Bell begins at 5:35. 15 minutes to service.

Evening service (as before).

Supper. No chanting, simply clackers before and after meal.

Brown rice, miso soup, and vegetable.

After supper there is free time. You return to your cabin or go to the large room where there is a fire.

*Han* starts at 7:30.

Study period (at 7:45) when there is no lecture.

Lecture—by *roshi*, priest, or student—is in *zendo*, at 8.

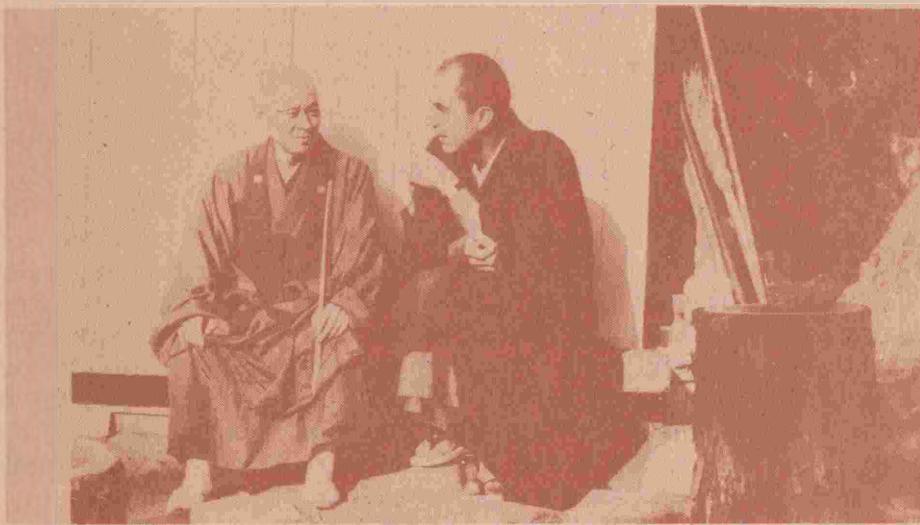
*Zazen* (at 8:35, lecture may extend into this period). Ends with slow deep chanting of *Heart Sutra*.

Students return to cabins.

Lights out at 9:30.

There is a day off on 4 and 9 days (for example, the 4th, 9th, 14th, etc.). This begins after breakfast. On 4 days (officially only 1/2 day off) there is a general discussion in the morning attended by all; completely open—gripes, questions, views, personal problems; feedback for those directing Tassajara; very helpful for students to know where other students are, what sort of problems they're facing. On days off, students are expected to take care of personal needs—laundry, mending, shaving head, and so forth.

The Fall Practice period is 2 months; the Winter (or Spring) Practice period is 3 months. Each period ends with a 7 day *sesshin*—periods of intense meditation—17 hours a day of *zazen* and *kinhin*, including meals, lecture, bath, and short work period.



Besides joining a traditional *ashram* or monastery, you may prefer to participate in a spiritual community in the country or the city. Here are some descriptions and helpful suggestions based on our experiences at the Lama Foundation.