



CEREMONIES

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Ceremonies

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PLEASE REFER TO THE CANTOR'S MANUAL FOR CHANTS MENTIONED HERE BY TITLE
AND FOR THE TEXTS ASSOCIATED WITH CEREMONIES LIKE REFUGE

Origin Stories

Ceremonies unite the lives of individuals with the life of our community, and with our ancestors and the spirit world. They mark thresholds and are occasions of remembering, celebration, and transformation. These particular ceremonies are used at Pacific Zen Institute and within The Open Source, and were given their present forms by myself or in collaboration with John Tarrant. Some are based on very old rituals, and some were created recently. All have evolved to express ancient traditions in a symbolic language that respects and resonates with our time and place. It's customary that the Holder of the Ceremony be a roshi, sensei, or other teacher.

- ◆ Commemorations from deep layers of international buddhist culture : Buddha's Birthday and Ullambana

- ◆ Ceremonies from Zen : New Year's Eve, Refuge, Shoken, and 49-day Ceremony

- ◆ Ceremonies inherited from our lineage : Wedding, Baby Welcoming, and Death and Funeral ceremonies

- ◆ New ceremonies : Beloved Dead, Winter Solstice, and Installing Ancestors

As an example of how a new ceremony appears, I created the Installing Ancestors ceremony based on ancient Chinese rituals, both pre-buddhist and buddhist. I learned of the old rituals from Stephen Karcher and the writings of John Blofeld and other scholars; I folded in my experience in Japan of home ancestor altars — all the while holding in mind what practitioners have shared about their struggles with and appreciations of their own ancestors, so we could perform a ceremony that might be meaningful and helpful.

These ceremonies will probably go on evolving, as they should. I found it useful, when working with an old ceremony, to first ask what it's for, what it's meant to do; it's surprising how easily that can get lost — and how much more obvious the content and shape of a ceremony becomes when we're clear about its purpose. Then, to explore what ritual forms best serve those purposes, which isn't always the same thing as received tradition. Then, what's the most beautiful mix of the old, which carries the power of the ages, and the new, which embraces our peoples and cultures? Some modifications are obvious, like removing gender references from the wedding ceremony, but most are more subtle. Also, our inherited ceremonies can be enriched by bringing in elements from other traditions like the Tibetan body of light visualization for Winter Solstice, or from recently discovered treasures from our own history, like the Tokeiji women's koans for Buddha's Birthday, or the Guanyin oracles.

Blessings on all yr ceremonies, large and small, formal and impromptu. May they be warm fields and lovely gates, and may the beings of many realms be delighted to join you.