

The Wheel of Life

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The Ceremony of Taking Refuge in the Bodhisattva Way

Preparations for taking refuge is a months-long process that includes meetings of participants to discuss the vows, sewing rakus, writing one's own vows, and work in the room. For details, see the booklet "Taking Refuge in the Bodhisattva Way."

THE RAKUSUS

- ◆ Participants will deliver their rakus to the teacher, who writes on the undersides. Each teacher has her own style, but common elements include the name and dharma name of the participant, the home sangha, the date and location of the refuge ceremony, and the teacher's signature.
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- ◆ Supplies : brushes, ink, permanent markers, seals and their ink, alcohol for cleaning them, tissue paper to keep the writing from smearing, and a large cloth in which to wrap the rakus to carry them into the ceremony.
 - ◆ Writing on the rakus is like casting a spell and is best done as a kind of private ceremony deep in retreat, with whatever elements seem right.

PREPARATION FOR THE REFUGE CEREMONY

- ◆ A low table is set up in front of the altar with room for the Teacher(s) to sit between it and the altar, the Head of Practice and Cantor (with instruments) to either side, facing the participants
- ◆ On the table are water glasses for the Teacher(s), any recording device, and a bowl of water that can be held in one hand with a small evergreen branch
- ◆ Put out cushions for the ceremony participants to sit in a line on the other side of the table, facing the altar
- ◆ Cushions and chairs are set up for retreatants and guests. Ceremony programs are handed out or placed on cushions and chairs
- ◆ Leaders greet and seat guests as they arrive

CEREMONY

See the Cantor Manual for details of the ceremony

The Liaison fetches the Teacher(s) and carries in the rakus, which are placed on the table. The Teacher is met by the Head of Practice to offer incense at the altar.



Teacher : Welcome, Invocation, and Water Blessing

Cantor : Conducts ceremony beginning with Purification and continuing through the Four Boundless Vows

All (led by Cantor) : Purification

The Three Refuge Vows

- ◆ *Cantor* announces the Three Refuge Vows
- ◆ *All* read each vow
- ◆ *Participants* read their own words after each vow

All (led by Cantor) : Ti-Sarana

The Three Root Vows

- ◆ *Cantor* announces the Three Root Vows
- ◆ *All* read each vow
- ◆ *Participants* read their own words after each vow

Cantor : The Story of Bird's Nest Roshi

The Ten Bodhisattva Vows

- ◆ *Cantor* announces the Ten Bodhisattva Vows
- ◆ *All* read each vow and Bodhidharma's commentary
- ◆ *Participants* read their own words
- ◆ *All* read Dogen's commentary

Teacher : Presentation of rakusus

- ◆ Explanation of rakusus
- ◆ Explanation of names
- ◆ Verse of the Rakusu

VERSE OF THE RAKUSU

This is the robe of freedom
the bare field, the blessings.
I receive the Tathagata's teaching
which wakes all beings.

A representative of the community pledges support for those taking refuge

All, led by Cantor : Heart Sutra with participants' incense offering

Cantor : Dedication

All (led by Cantor) : The Four Boundless Vows

Close of ceremony and serving of refreshments

Shoken

CEREMONY FORMALIZING THE STUDENT-TEACHER RELATIONSHIP

A request for this ceremony comes from a student and is agreed to, or not, by the teacher. It is done in retreat or during work in the room outside of retreat. It is customary for the student to bring a gift to the ceremony.

Some teachers require a written covenant between teacher and student, describing the relationship, specifying the rights and responsibilities of each person's role, and indicating how to end the relationship if that becomes necessary. The covenant usually involves specific commitments on the student's part regarding practice, study, and dana. This needs to be discussed, and the document prepared, ahead of time.

THE CEREMONY

The teacher liaison explains the ceremony to the student ahead of time and makes arrangements for the student to come into the room at the beginning of a period of Work in the Room

When the teacher rings her opening bell, the liaison doesn't ring the bell in response but instead leads the student to the interview room, taking the student's gift for the teacher (If the student doesn't have a gift, the liaison can supply a bundle of incense)



FULL PROSTRATIONS

- ◆ Stand with hands in gassho
- ◆ Drop to one's knees, then bend forward so the forehead touches the ground
- ◆ Forearms rest on the floor next to the head, palms upward
- ◆ Elbows remaining on the floor, raise the palms straight upward to head level, then drop them back to the floor
- ◆ Straighten the back and stand up, with hands in gassho



- ◆ At the doorway, the student makes 3 full prostrations over the threshold, and the liaison simultaneously prostrates behind the student
- ◆ The student makes 3 prostrations at the mat, with the liaison again prostrating behind the student, and then sits as usual
- ◆ The liaison gives the student's gift to the teacher, saying, "Roshi / Sensei, I'd like to present X, who has requested to be your student." The liaison bows and leaves, closing the door

What happens next is between teacher and student, perhaps a conversation about the student's intentions and aspirations, reviewing the written covenant or discussing what the commitment means to both people, as well as any elements particular to that teacher

The teacher opens the student's gift

Teacher and student offer incense together at the altar; the teacher breaks one stick of incense in half and places the two pieces on either side of the incense bowl, then breaks another stick in half, and each offers one of the halves in the middle of the bowl

Teacher and student return to their cushions; when the ceremony ends, they bow to each other while both are seated, then the student rises and makes 3 prostrations at the cushion, backs up to the door, bows toward the altar, opens the door, and returns to the hall

When the teacher rings the hand bell, the liaison rings the bell in the usual sequence to open Work in the Room

Wedding & Commitment Ceremony

ENTRANCE & MEDITATION

- ◆ A ten-minute bell sequence calls everyone to the ceremony
- ◆ Each Partner stands with their respective 'tribes' while the Holder of the Ceremony offers incense at the altar
- ◆ Partners come together to the altar to offer incense
- ◆ Holder invites all to join in two minutes of silent meditation
- ◆ A bell rings, signaling the end of meditation

INTRODUCTION & WATER BLESSING

- ◆ Introductory remarks from the Holder
- ◆ Holder performs the invocation and water blessing, using a bowl of water and a small leafy branch to sprinkle everyone with water

WELCOME

- ◆ Partners welcome the wedding guests and include those family and friends who are absent or departed; if there are children in the family, they may be acknowledged and welcomed into the ceremony



THE PRECEPTS

- ◆ Explanatory remarks from Holder
 - Holder will say each vow and Partners will repeat it; anyone among the guests may say the vows along with Partners
- ◆ A bell is struck once at the beginning of each vow
- ◆ Partners take the Three Refuge Vows
 - We take refuge in awakening
 - We take refuge in the way
 - We take refuge in our companions

◆ Partners take the Three Root Vows

We vow to do no harm
We vow to do good
We vow to do good for others

◆ Partners take the Five Bodhisattva Vows

Together : We vow not to kill
To each other : I promise to nourish and protect our life together

Together : We vow not to steal
To each other : I promise you a generous and open heart

Together : We vow not to misuse sex
To each other : I promise to respect the power of the bond between us

Together : We vow not to lie
To each other : I promise to trust you

Together : We vow not to misuse drugs
To each other : I promise to keep showing up

◆ Everyone sings the Four Vows

I vow to wake the beings of the world
I vow to set endless heartache to rest
I vow to walk through every wisdom gate
I vow to live the great Buddha way

WORDS TO EACH OTHER

◆ Partners read poems or other words or sing to each other, and / or a Guest reads or sings something they've selected



EXCHANGE OF RINGS & VOWS

- ◆ Holder blesses the rings by passing them through incense smoke, saying :
“These rings represent that which is whole and unbroken : the vastness from which we arise together, and the great wheel of life, which, though it turns and changes through time, continues without end. These rings shine with that light, they are pieces of the light you now entrust to each other for safekeeping.”
- ◆ Holder hands a ring to First Partner, who recites own vow to Second Partner
- ◆ Holder hands a ring to Second Partner, who recites own vow to First Partner
- ◆ Holder : “Do you, _____, take _____ to be your partner / wife / husband, to love her / him wholeheartedly as your companion on the path, the light in her / him illuminating the light in you, to honor and to cherish her / him, in sorrow and in joy, ‘til death do you part?”
Partner : “I do.”
- ◆ Holder : “Do you, _____, take _____ to be your partner / wife / husband, to love her / him wholeheartedly as your companion on the path, the light in her / him illuminating the light in you, to honor and to cherish her / him, in sorrow and in joy, ‘til death do you part?”
Partner : “I do.”

Spouses kiss



BLESSING OF THE NEW SPOUSES

- ◆ A flower girl showers Spouses with rose petals while Holder blesses them, saying :
“May the buddhas and bodhisattvas of the ten directions bless you
May the ancestors bless you
May the spirits of this place bless you
May your family, friends and community bless you

May you be blessed by rock and piñon and the breezes of all the seasons
(can be adapted to different landscapes)
An old buddhist tradition says that if you give each other lovingkindness,
you will ...
Sleep peacefully
Wake peacefully
Dream peaceful dreams
People will love you
Gods will love you
Gods will protect you
Poison and weapons and fire can't harm you
Your faces will become clear
Your minds will become serene
You will die unconfused
And when you die you will be reborn in the heavenly realms.
May all these blessings be yours;
May you extend them to all your relations."



COMMUNITY AFFIRMATION

- ◆ Holder presents Spouses to the community for its blessing and affirmation of support, saying :
“Today _____ and _____ bring us their love, their hopes, and the promise of what will flow from their union, and we as a community are renewed by this. In turn, we can offer them something : our caring and our help to nourish their union. If you wish to do this, please respond “We will!” to my question. Will you, _____ and _____’s family, friends, and community, rejoice with them today and support and sustain them in all the days to come?”
- ◆ All respond : “We will!”
- ◆ A bell tolls, and Spouses are congratulated by their Guests

Baby Welcoming Ceremony

PREPARATION

- ◆ The ceremony is usually held in the family's home but can also be held during a retreat
- ◆ Prepare the altar as for Buddha's Birthday, with lots of flowers ... Statues of the baby buddha, Guanyin or the Virgin Mary with a child, and Jizo (the protector of children) can be placed on the altar
- ◆ People should be able to sit either on cushions or in chairs
- ◆ You can make up cards with the baby's picture, date of birth, etc., and the words of the Guanyin Sutra for the participants

Everyone gathers around the family, who sit in front of the altar with the Holder of the Ceremony. The cantor is nearby, with a bell and mokugyo or drum.

CEREMONY

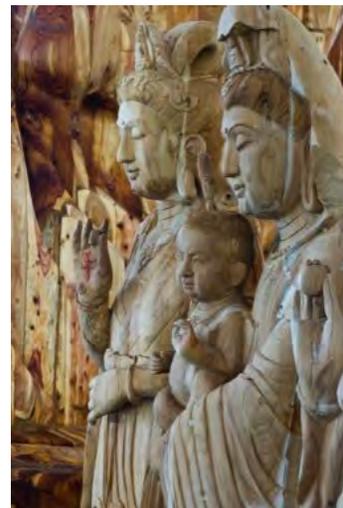
The Holder welcomes everyone. This is one of the ceremonies in which friends and family from beyond the community are likely to be participating, so it's important to make them feel welcome and comfortable.

While everyone chants the Guanyin Sutra of Endless Life, which is chanted at threshold moments like births, the family offers incense or water at the altar.

The Holder speaks to the baby and then to the community, asking them to support the life of this child and this family. Everyone answers, "We will!"

Parents speak to the baby, they invite other family members to do so, and then others come forward to speak to the baby and the family. A basket of flower petals is nearby, and as people offer their blessings, they scoop up some petals and sprinkle them on the family.

At some point while this is going on the Thirteenth Fairy interrupts, offering a blessing against difficulty. This is based on the fairytale tradition of the one who isn't invited to



the party and so curses the child; instead, we include an acknowledgement that life can be difficult, and we turn the curse into a blessing. The person who plays the Thirteenth Fairy should be someone close to the family. She or he can wear a mask or some other indication of her role.

“I am the Thirteenth Fairy, the one it’s important not to turn away. Sometimes life is difficult, sometimes you will know pain, but I give you my blessing now : that when it is hard, people who love you will offer their hands; that you will remember the beauty of the sky and the long grasses, and it will console you; that the pain will pass away, having opened your heart and strengthened your spirit.”



If requested, the Holder gives the baby a dharma name

The Holder performs a dedication with water blessing, using a bowl of water and a small leafy branch to sprinkle everyone with water, while calling on the beings of all the realms to bless the ceremony

Everyone sings “Row, Row, Row Your Boat” as a round

Refreshments are served

When Someone Dies

What happens to bodies after death is determined by state law. In particular, someone who has died in a hospital can sometimes, but not always, be sent home rather than to a mortuary. Check ahead of time, as it might affect where a person chooses to die. In most states, it's legal but not necessarily customary to keep the body of a dead person at home for three days. For everyone's peace of mind, find a funeral director who's willing to accommodate your wishes well ahead of time.

PREPARATIONS RIGHT AFTER DEATH

The person who's died might still feel present for a number of hours after breathing stops. It's possible to communicate with them, and they might be aware of what's going on around their body. Touch the body lovingly, and be aware of what you say.

As soon as appropriate after death occurs, wipe the body with rubbing alcohol to seal the pores, wearing surgical gloves.

To counter the effects of rigor mortis, keep the mouth closed by tying a scarf around the lower jaw and the top of the head, and tie the ankles together. The ties can be removed after a few hours if the jaw stays closed and the feet stay together on their own.

Wearing surgical gloves, wash the body in lukewarm astringent tea (black, green, lavender, or sage).

For a man, put a condom on to catch the last release of urine; for a woman, put on a sanitary pad. These can be removed after they've served their purpose. Pack the rectum with cotton balls.

Change the bedclothes and dress the body in white or light-colored clothing. Put on the person's rakusu, if they have one.

Cover the feet. Place the hands folded together on the abdomen.

Whisper the Heart Sutra into the person's ear.



SITTING WITH THE BODY FOR THREE DAYS

Set up an altar between the body and the people who come to sit with the body : a figure like Jizo, guide through the underworld, or Guanyin; candle, incense, flowers; and a picture of the dead person.

Keep the room where the dead person is lying as cold, well-ventilated, and quiet as possible. If the weather is warm, place the body on a bed of dry ice.

Encourage people to come in and meditate. Try to always have someone with the body.

Chant the Guanyin Sutra of Endless Life as much as possible, to help the person cross into the death bardo. After a time, the person's presence will be less vivid as they enter the death bardo. This is the stage of resting in deepest samadhi, and it can be very peaceful and full of love.

After some more time has passed, the person will cross over into the after-death bardo, where a real sense of journeying begins. Sometimes it's possible to travel for awhile with them, but this should be done carefully, with the awareness that at a certain point it's necessary to turn around and come back to ordinary consciousness.

MOVING THE BODY TO THE MORTUARY

Gather together for a goodbye ceremony, including the Ti Sarana, Heart Sutra, Guanyin Sutra, and Four Vows. Offer incense and place small mounds of salt on either side of the door to the outside.

When the hearse arrives, one person should touch the body continuously from the bed to the van.

Have someone follow the hearse out to the road and remain there until it is no longer visible.

CREMATION

This service is usually performed by a small group of those closest to the dead person; some might prefer not to attend because it can be intense. Some mortuaries will allow you to put things like a rakusu into the coffin.

A formal ceremony includes the Purification Verse, Ti Sarana, Heart Sutra, and Guanyin Sutra. Use bells and mokugyo; set up the altar from the three days' sitting. Offer incense and speak to the dead person. Close with the Four Vows.

After the world-ending kalpa fires
consume all things
Won't the emerald hills still soar
into white clouds?
With these words I commit you to
the flames.

Baisao

Mortuaries have varying policies about people witnessing the actual burning, so check ahead of time. Those who wish can follow the body into the furnace room, everyone chanting the Guanyin Sutra. Ask if you may push the button or pull the lever sending the body into the fire.

Return to the other room, circle, and close with the Four Vows.

BURIAL

A formal graveside service is similar to that for cremation, with the same elements : the Purification Verse, Ti Sarana, and the Heart Sutra. If possible, use bells and mokugyo, and set up the altar from the three days' sitting. Offer incense and speak to the dead person.

“The stone woman calls her back
from her dream of the world.”

Toll the bell 108 times and chant the Guanyin Sutra while the casket is lowered into the earth. Flowers can be placed in the grave.

Close with the Four Vows.

Funeral or Memorial Service

The ceremony can be held at a meditation hall, mortuary, private home, or somewhere else. There's no particular timing once the three-day period of sitting with the body has passed. This is one of the ceremonies in which friends and family from outside the community are likely to be participating, so it's important to make them feel welcome and comfortable, beginning with an introduction and orientation to the ceremony.

First is a **PURIFICATION**. We chant the Purification verse, but even a moment of silence would do. You can add a fire puja or smudging.

Second is a **TESTAMENT OF FAITH**, for which we use the Heart Sutra.

Third is **TESTIMONY**, in which the Holder of the Ceremony speaks directly to the dead person, represented by a photograph on the altar. After that might be one or more eulogies. Decide ahead of time whether you want everyone else who has something to say to come forward, offer incense, and speak. (This can be profoundly moving, exhausting, or occasionally hurtful.)

Here in this village,
there are so many people
coming and going —
but when one of them isn't you
it can be very lonely.

Ryokan
at the early death
of his only pupil

Fourth, it is traditional to recite this **KOAN** :

One day Changsha went wandering in the mountains. When he returned, the head of practice met him at the gate and asked, "Where have you been?"

"Wandering in the mountains."

"Where did you go?"

"I went out following the scented grasses and returned chasing the falling blossoms."

We add this koan :

"What about the ones who neither come nor go?"

"The stone woman calls them back from their dream of the world."

Fifth is a chant to mark the **CROSSING OVER**. We use the Guanyin Sutra of Endless Life and chant it for a good while.

Sixth is the **DEDICATION** of the ceremony to the dead person, which is done by the Holder and may include a Water Blessing.

LONG DEDICATION

Black Tara, mother of the buddhas,
Fire and wind, water and the boundless
earth below,
Guanyin, whose hands and eyes console
the world,
Jizo, companion in the worlds beyond,
All the ancestors, the spirits of this place,
all those seen and unseen who accompany
us,
humans in your many kinds,
cicada, dolphin, frog and deer,
hungry ghosts and gods in the lovely
heavens —
attend us now, bear witness :
a beloved human has died.
Day and night and the moments in
between
the wheel turns,
the waves rise on the sea
the waves fall back into the sea
Each wave, each life full and complete,
Vivid in the light.

Mother and grandmother [or whoever],
bless the generations of this family —
we love the life you gave us
and that in our turn we hand down.
May we flourish underneath the stars.
Now you go beyond the earth
and earthly concerns —
Thank you for your time with us,
travel with our love.

SHORT DEDICATION

Sunlight and moonlight and rainlight,
dawn and noon, dusk and deepest night
reveal the buddha mind at peace,
each creature perfect in its time,
vivid in the light.
We dedicate our service
and our hearts today to you,
Mother and grandmother [or whoever].
Now you go beyond the earth
and earthly concerns —
Thank you for your time with us,
travel with our love.

The dedication can be done as a call and response, the Holder reading a line which is then repeated by the participants. It ends with everyone singing the Prajna Paramita Mantra (“*Gate, gate, paragate ...*”)

Seventh, we close with the Four Bodhisattva Vows (“All beings one body ...”), a **REAFFIRMATION** of our commitment to the ways of compassionate action and spiritual awakening while we still live.

Eighth, we have a feast and a **CELEBRATION** of the person’s life.

Forty-Nine Day Ceremony

In most Mahayana traditions, it's thought that a person who has died is still in some ways attached to this world and the life they just left for forty-nine days, during which time the ties slowly dissolve. The dead person is in an intermediate state when material life is gone but the momentum of karma persists.

Offer incense each day. Pay attention to dreams. Some zen people refrain from eating meat during this period. Make prayers for the dead person's peaceful journey.

At forty-nine days it's believed that the person turns towards the next thing — the afterlife, rebirth, dissolution back into the universe, however you see it. So at that moment it's important for those who are still alive to let the person continue their journey with thanks and blessings, and to send energy to help the person on their way. The dead person turns away from the Earth and towards eternity; the living turn back towards life.

As with all ceremonies, this isn't an arbitrary deadline; for the living, it marks a moment in a process that will go on for however long it takes. It just helps us to remember what the dead person needs, what we need, and how they might be different. Why 49? Seven is a sacred number in the Mahayana, and 7 x 7 is a week of weeks, the completion of a cycle.

CEREMONY

Gather to meditate, perhaps before dawn to sit the sun up

Chant the Guanyin Sutra and offer incense at an altar with the person's picture on it

People can speak about their willingness to let go now and encourage the on their journey

Do something that reminds everyone of the person, which can be serious or light

Participants thank each other for their companionship during this passage

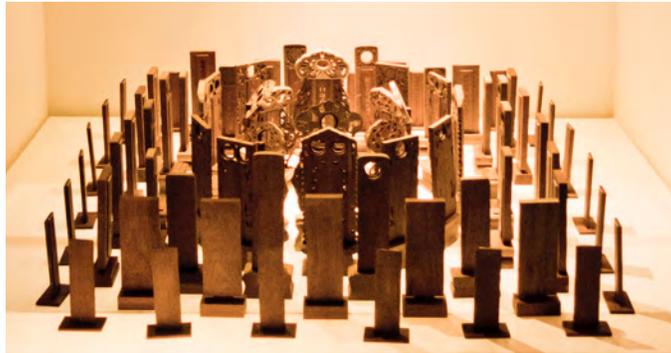
Sing the Celtic Blessing ("Deep Peace ...") to close

Perhaps each person takes away something to remind them of the dead person

People should leave with a sense of something completed, of a new time beginning

Ceremony for Installing Ancestors

AT THE CONCLUSION OF A GHOSTS INTO ANCESTORS RETREAT



PREPARATION

- ❖ This ceremony is done at the conclusion of a Ghosts into Ancestors Retreat, which can last a single day or long weekend, or can be woven throughout a longer meditation retreat.
- ❖ The participants' preparatory work involves choosing (or being chosen by) a ghost you wish to turn into an ancestor, doing the work of releasing the ghost (who is made up of the dead person *and* yourself) and liberating the ancestor to become a figure who brings blessings. Since this takes some time, participants should be given instructions well ahead of a day or weekend retreat, or at the beginning of a longer residential retreat. The teacher can work with this in talks, in work in the room, during dream circles, etc.
- ❖ The ancestor installation happens in two steps, the first at the retreat and the second at home, for which instructions are included in the ceremony.
- ❖ This ceremony requires special supplies and setup : wooden ancestor tablets, Sharpie pens, a way of installing the tablets upright above the altar (like a large bowl of sand on a hanging shelf to stand them in), Samantabhadra paper (blank cards with an image of Samantabhadra on the outside, like the one on page 37), and food for an offering and feast.



CEREMONY

Introduction

Guanyin Visualization

- ◆ Everyone begins the Guanyin Sutra of Endless Life chant, slow and soft, which each person continues aloud or to themselves all the way through the visualization
- ◆ Visualize a calm ocean spreading to the horizon in all directions; you're sitting in the middle as though floating weightless on the water
- ◆ A recently risen full moon softly illuminates the scene; Guanyin appears within it and the moon disc is a nimbus of white light around her; she stands on a white lotus; her body emits light
- ◆ Guanyin skims across the water until she's standing only a few feet in front of you, smiling; a stream of light issues from her heart and enters through the crown of your head
- ◆ This light flows slowly downwards, driving before it all pains, sorrows, anxieties, addictions, stupidities, and illnesses, which take the form of a stream of heavy, thick liquid goo flowing down and out the lower part of your body, sinking into the ocean and feeding sea monsters who've rushed in to partake of the feast
- ◆ Now you're full of light; sit quietly and continue the invocation. Eventually Guanyin's body begins to grow fainter, until it disappears into a moonlike nimbus, which contracts to a pinhead and then vanishes.
- ◆ Wind down the chanting and ask people to return to their meditation, still aware of the light

Ancient Chinese Meditation

- ◆ Let the radiance flow out from you to everyone else in the hall, so that everything disharmonious among us dissolves
- ◆ Call in the ancestors and invite them to sit with us
- ◆ The radiance circulates through the group, living and ancestors, and eventually flows out into the rest of world
- ◆ Let the light soften and mellow; imagine yourself as a mountain and everyone else, too; the light begins to flow back into the mountains, settling at everyone's hara
- ◆ When you're ready, return to your meditation and breathe normally

Pass out ancestor tablets and black Sharpie pens



Everyone meditates on their tablet in preparation for writing on it

Everyone writes an ancestor's name on the tablet in black ink

Everyone chants Sho Sai Myo Kichijo Dharani while one person at a time installs her tablet on a shelf above the altar

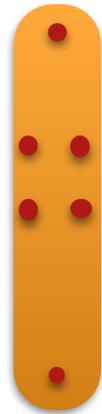
The Cantor leads the Remembrance Dedication

Food is offered at the altar

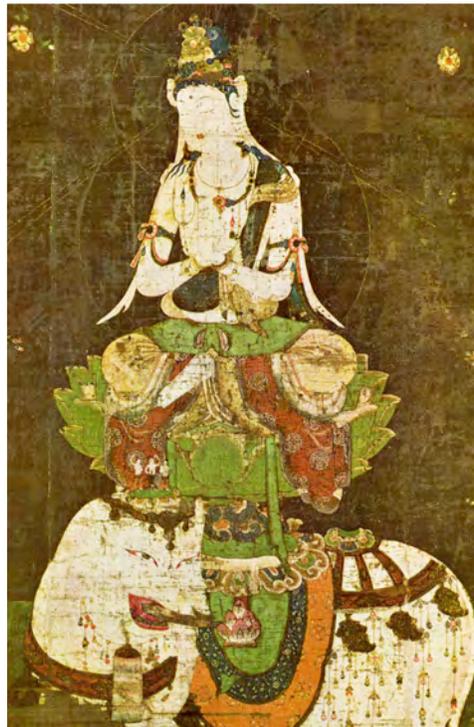
Instructions are given for installing the tablets at home, where they should first be enlivened with 6 red dots : 2 pairs in the middle, representing eyes and ears, 1 on the top for heaven, and 1 on the bottom for earth

Each person gives dana as a living memorial for her ancestor, writing the gift on a Samantabhadra card

The offered food is taken from the altar and passed out to everyone for feasting



Discussion



**SAMANTABHADRA,
BODHISATTVA OF
SKILLFUL ACTION**

