

Stockholm Zen Center

INTERNATIONAL NEWSLETTER

Summer 2000



New Ordinations

On the first day of the new millenium, Maria Kristensson became the first lay member of the *Three Jewels Order*. Eija Ernsten received the same kind of ordination in a ceremony following the April 7-day sesshin, as did Per Drougge during the Vesak celebrations in May. All three ordinations were performed by Sante Poromaa Sensei at Zengården. There has been a great interest in the Three Jewels Order here in Sweden and several members of the Stockholm Zen Center are currently preparing for ordinations as priests or lay members of the order.

As most readers of this newsetter probably know, Rochester Zen Center and its affiliates underwent some major administrative changes a couple of years ago. With the sanctioning of Sante Poromaa and Sevan Ross as full teacher, their respective centers became independent entities, with

no formal ties, administrative or spiritual, to Rochester Zen Center and its abbot, Bodhin Kjolhede Sensei.

The three teachers did however decide to form a kind of network: *Cloud-Water Sangha*, consisting of the Zen Centers in Rochester, Stockholm and Chicago, and their affiliates.

This is a quite informal institutuin, with a minimal organizational apparatus. The idea is that it will help preserve the sense of closeness and affinity that has developed over the years. Members of the different Sanghas are for example welcome to all Cloud-Water centers.

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The ordained members of Cloud-Water Sangha were simultaneously organized in what is called *The Three Jewels Order*. This, too, is a very "slim" organization with a minimum of bureaucratic structure.

Compared with many other Western Zen Centers the number of ordained people has always been relatively modest at Rochester Zen Center and its affiliates. There are several reasons for this, one being that priests in our tradition always have been required to make a life-long, full-time commitment to the Sangha. We use the word *priest* – rather than monk or nun – as ordained people in our tradition don't make any vow our celibacy; several priests have in fact been married. The expected level of commitment, however, has made it practically impossible for people with family responsibilities or professional careers to become ordained.

When the Three Jewels Order was still in its planning stages it was decided that it would consist of two wings: the "old" kind of priests, and also householders, senior Sangha members willing to take on the commitment of ordination in addition to their work and/or family responsibilities. The same kind of life-long commitment is expected from both kind of order members.

Another novelty is a somewhat formalized training program, or novitiate, lasting from between one and three years. During this time the prospective members

of the order work their way through a curriculum of Buddhist sutras and other texts and receive training as necessary in the various Zen center functions.

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What, then, is the function of the lay members of the order? What will they *do*? It's not easy to respond to that question, at least not yet. as the program is still in its infancy. The formal outline states that lay members of Three Jewels Order will "serve the Sangha and provide a model for householder practitioners. Also, to be a vessel of the Zen tradition as practiced by the Cloud-Water Sangha, and to manifest this in service to the Three Jewels Order." *How* such a commitment will manifest is of course dependent on the individual members' particular life circumstances and is therefore likely to differ considerably.



Maria Kristensson



Eija Ernsten



Per Drougge

We can see this with the first three lay members: Maria Kristensson works as social worker in Stockholm; Eija Ernsten has been living and training at Zengården for the past five years, and Per Drougge is a full-time student with two small children. Hopefully this kind of variety will show to be a real strength, pointing to the possibility of engaging in authentic Zen training under very different conditions.

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