

An Introduction to the SFZC Chantbook

This is an outline of the SFZC Chantbook, offering some very brief descriptions of our central chants.

For deeper commentary on many of these, see Shohaku Okumura's excellent book, *Living By Vow*.

Note that all of the non-English chants (except the Three Refuges in Pali) are in Sino-Japanese, which is to say they are the romanized expression of the Japanese pronunciation of the Chinese characters of the text (Chinese characters which are themselves generally translations from the Sanskrit).

ROBE VERSE *Dai sai ge da pu ku musō fuku den e hi bu nyo rai kyo kō do shoshu jo*

This is chanted in homage to the rakusu or okesa, before it is put on. The English translation is: "Great robe of liberation / Field far beyond form and emptiness / Wearing the Tathagata's teaching / Saving all beings."

THE REFUGES IN PALI

*Buddham saranam gacchami Dhammam saranam gacchami Sangham saranam gacchami
Dutiyampi buddham saranam gacchami Dutiyampi dhammam saranam gacchami Dutiyampi
sangham saranam gacchami Tatiyampi buddham saranam gacchami Tatiyampi dhammam
saranam gacchami Tatiyampi sangham saranam gacchami*

This is the Pali for "I take refuge in Buddha" "I take refuge in Dharma" and "I take refuge in Sangha." *Dutiyampi* just means "for a second time" and *tatiyampi* means "for a third time."

AFTER THE DEDICATION *Ji ho san shi i shi fu shi son bu sa mo ko sa mo ko ho ja ho ro mi*

This verse is part of the dedication of merit of a ceremony. The English translation is: "All buddhas, ten directions, three times. All honored ones, bodhisattva-mahasattvas, Wisdom beyond wisdom, Maha Prajna Paramita"

HEART OF GREAT PERFECT WISDOM SUTRA

This is a core text for all Zen schools. “Prajna Paramita” is the “Perfection of Wisdom”, or “Wisdom that goes beyond wisdom.” There are many accessible commentaries on this Sutra, including in *Living By Vow* and Thich Nhat Hanh’s *The Heart of Understanding*.

MAKA HANNYA HARAMITA SHIN GYŌ

This is the Sino-Japanese version of the Heart of Great Perfect Wisdom Sutra. It is chanted daily in Zen temples.

HYMN TO THE PERFECTION OF WISDOM

This chant is an SFZC addition to the Soto Zen liturgy. It appears as an introductory verse in some sutras. It offers yet more praise to Prajna Paramita, perfected wisdom.

SHŌSAIMYŌ KICHIJŌ DARANI

This dharani is chanted “for removing hindrance” or to ward off misfortune.

“Dharani” (j. *darani*) is a type of incantation, mantra or spell that is based on the cosmic resonance of the sounds of the original Sanskrit (or related early Buddhist languages). As their meaning and power is in their sound themselves, they are not translatable. The version we chant is the Japanese pronunciation of the Chinese transliteration of the sound as expressed in Sanskrit. Some attempts have been made to reconstruct these sounds into meaning, but such reconstructions are not accepted by scholars because there are too many uncertainties about the source languages. The Soto Zen Text Translation project does not include dharani translations for this reason.

ENMEI JUKKU KANNON GYŌ

This is the “Ten Line Sutra of Kannon for Protecting Life”

Kannon, also Kanzeon, is Avalokiteshvara, the Bodhisattva of Compassion.

There are many translations of this text. A common translation is:

Kanzeon!

I venerate the Buddha

Buddha is my source

Buddha is my affinity

Affinity with Buddha, Dharma, Sangha

Constancy, ease, assurance, purity

Morning my thought is Kanzeon

Evening my thought is Kanzeon

Thought after thought arises in the mind

Thought after thought is not separate from mind

LOVING KINDNESS MEDITATION

This chant is an SFZC addition to the Soto Zen liturgy, a modified translation of the Metta Sutta, a teaching from early Buddhism.

HARMONY OF DIFFERENCE AND EQUALITY

This is the English translation of the Sandokai, a core text of Soto Zen, by ancestor Sekito Kisen (Shitou Xiqian, 700-790).

SANDŌKAI

This is the “Harmony of Difference and Equality” by Sekito Kisen.

SONG OF THE JEWEL MIRROR SAMADHI

This is the English translation of the Hokyo Zammai, a core text of Soto Zen, by one of the Soto Zen founders in China, Tozan Ryokai (Dongshan Liangjie, 807–869).

HŌKYŌ ZAMMAI

This is the “Song of the Jewel Mirror Samadhi” by Tozan Ryokai.

FUKANZAZENGI / GENJO KOAN / SELF-RECEIVING AND EMPLOYING SAMADHI / EIHEI KOSO HOTSUGANMON

These are among the most important writings of the Soto Zen founder in Japan, Eihei Dogen (1200-1253).

NAMES OF THE BUDDHAS AND ANCESTORS

Daiosho means “great teacher”.

This is chanted daily in Soto Zen temples. This chant is a recitation of the name of each ancestor in the (mytho-historical) lineage of direct face-to-face transmission of the essence of the teaching from Shakyamuni Buddha through Suzuki Roshi.

NAMES OF WOMEN ANCESTORS

This chant is an SFZC addition to the Soto Zen liturgy, a recitation of select names of eminent women Buddhist teachers, who under patriarchy were generally excluded from the official lineage but without whose teaching and practice the Dharma could never have flourished. The names include great teachers from India, China, and Japan, and in reciting them we acknowledge the many great women teachers forgotten by history.

DAIHI SHIN DARANI

This is the “Dharani of Great Compassion,” chanted traditionally in Zen for the deceased.

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