

Your Hia-Ching and Rakusu

The Rakusu is a garment, worn around the neck by Zen Buddhists, who have received the Precepts from their teacher. In our tradition here at Lotus Zen Temple, the Rakusu is given at Lay Ordination (Jukai), i.e. past the level of the Precepts. The Rakusu represents the usually longer garments that Gautama Buddha put together to wear after he left his palace on his journey towards enlightenment. According to legend, his followers were instructed to collect rags from trashes, funeral pyres, and other places. They then cleaned the rags, sewed them together and dyed them in saffron, which gave them an orange-golden appearance.

Even within Zen tradition, there are differing practices when it comes to obtaining the Rakusu. In many places, the master will require from his or her students to make their own Rakusu whether or not they ever had ever a sewing needle in their hand. Others will allow exceptions. I encourage you to make your own Rakusu, but if it becomes a hindrance, you may purchase yours anywhere you like or have one made by someone according to the specifications given.

After Jukai, you may wear your Rakusu at any time and place where appropriate, foremost and naturally during meditation times, temple events and during zazen at home. However there is no “requirement” to wear it. It has become customary, mostly here in the West, to wear the Rakusu directly over street clothes, whereas traditionally it is only worn over the Hia-Ching or Koromo (a black komono-style robe), which was originally reserved for monks and priests. You are encouraged to obtain your own Hia-Ching or Koromo and wear it accordingly.

Treat your Rakusu (and Hia-Ching) with utmost care and mindfulness. Always put it on with great respect by briefly placing it on your head in folded form while quietly saying the Gatha:

*I wear the robe of liberation,
the formless field of benefaction,
the teachings of the Tathagata,
saving all the many beings.*

When taking it off, fold it properly and put it into a pouch (usually provided). The same applies for the Hia-Ching. The best place to store both items is on or near your home shrine. When you go somewhere, simply carry it in the pouch; or put it on at home and

wear it either on top of your clothes or under your coat, depending on the weather and other conditions.

If you order your Rakusu, LZT recommends our Chinese supplier in Fujian, China. Their Rakusu selection is around \$100, some of them with free shipping. That is a bargain as compared to other places. Go to this page: <http://stores.ebay.com/fukudenkai>

When ordering your Rakusu, be sure to look for and/or mention to the supplier:

(1) It should be a Rakusu in the Soto style

This is because we practice predominantly in the Soto tradition.

(2) It should be dark green in color

This is because it is the color of the Zen Buddhist Order of Hsu Yun, of which I am part of and in which lineage I stand as your master. (Traditionally a black Rakusu is only used by a fully ordained master.)

(3) It should have a white panel on the back side, i.e. a blank white panel for authentication calligraphy by your master

As soon as you have received your Rakusu in the mail, be sure to bring it to me right away, so I have enough time to work on the back panel before the Jukai ceremony.

Fajian