



International Zen Association

I am a Soto zen nun within the IZA which is the lineage of Masters Kodo Sawaki and Taisen Deshimaru.

In Japan a nun or a monk is called unsui which means clouds and water. Our sangha is not monastic (a few people live in the temples to run and maintain them but generally they only stay for a few years at a time) and I understand that in Japan they would therefore consider those who have taken nun or monk ordination to be priests. Being ordained as a nun or monk means putting the practice and the sangha at the centre of your life, and making a connection with a master (who may be either female or male).

We wear our robes – white kimono and black kolomo – for practice, in sesshin (retreat) and in the temple. At ordination we receive a kesa (pieces of cloth sewn together by hand with a very small stitch). It is worn over the left shoulder and around the body and on top of the robes for zazen (meditation), ceremony and sometimes eating. A rakusu is also received at ordination. It's a small kesa worn around the neck for practice and it is more practical for daily activity. It can be worn without the robes and in pretty much any situation – but only if you want to. It shouldn't be worn to impress of course. Shaving the head is also optional. Consequently we aren't necessarily easily identifiable in daily life.

There are really no special ways to treat an IZA nun or monk. There is no official differentiation between women and men. We show special respect to anyone who has had a longer practice than our self. We also respect beginners of course. The importance is placed on attention in each moment so right behaviour automatically follows.

One gesture we use a lot is gassho. The bringing together of the right and left palm with fingers pointing upwards, tips of fingers at the level of the nose and held away from the face by a few inches. There will be some degree of bowing at this point. It can range from a bow of the head to a bow from the waist, taking the head to waist height. When we gassho to a person we make eye contact before and after the bow. It is a gesture with many nuances. It is a marking of respect, an expression of our humility and a moment to remember to be attentive. When the gassho is to another person they gassho at the same

time. Usually the end of the gassho happens quite naturally. In Japan the elder in the practice would determine when it stops, or the older person if they are both lay people.

There are no rules stopping anyone touching, kissing or hugging a person in our sangha, man or woman, in or out of robes. Simply follow the usual daily life considerations of appropriateness, paying attention to the moment.

We pay special attention when touching the kesa but there are only rules for putting it on or taking it off. When the rakusu or kesa is not being worn we don't put them on the floor or underneath anything so please try to be aware of this if you need to move a kesa or rakusu when it's not being worn.

Some people are sensitive to having their head touched when it is shaved so ask first if you want to touch!

There are two formal commitments to the practice and sangha. One is Bodhisattva ordination which includes taking refuge and receiving the precepts. The other is the nun or monk ordination. Bodhisattvas and those who haven't received ordination can wear a black kimono and bodhisattvas receive a rakusu at ordination, they don't have a large kesa.

At bodhisattva and at nun or monk ordination we are given a name. In the west the bodhisattva name is used on our ketsumyaku (ordination document), written documents, advertising of meetings etc. It would be in the form of Jan Hei Ki Pearse or Hei Ki Jan Pearse. The nun or monk name is on the ketsumyaku and it is only used after death. The name we are given at either ordination is a teaching which grows with our practice and by keeping the nun/monk name private we aren't influenced by the opinions of others. It is also okay to tell someone your nun/monk name!

Nothing is sacred,
Everything is sacred.

Gassho

Hei Ki Jan Pearse