



BECOMING A FORMAL STUDENT OF ROSHI AMALA WRIGHTSON

From time to time people ask about what it means to become Roshi's formal student. Below is some information about the prerequisites, the ceremony, and what is expected of you once you are a student.

PREREQUISITES

Before she accepts a student, Roshi generally likes that person to have worked with her for a while either in a sesshin, or for a period of fairly regular dokusans outside sesshin. You also need to have been a Supporting Member of the Centre for a year or more, be participating regularly in Centre activities, and to have participated in, or be about to participate in, at least one Jukai ceremony (see the website for [podcasts](#) on the precepts).

REQUESTING TO BECOME A STUDENT

If you want to become a student, the first step is to ask Roshi in dokusan.

THE CEREMONY

A New Student Ceremony is arranged once there are two or three people waiting for it. The ceremony is sometimes held on the first night of a sesshin, or if all local people are involved, before or during the evening sitting on a Thursday. It takes about ½ an hour, and the ceremony assistant goes through the details right before it happens. Most of the ceremony involves Roshi talking about the meaning of being a student. Following Japanese custom, the ceremony also includes a token anonymous monetary offering to Roshi from each new student. This is to her personally, and is symbolic of the student's willingness to support the teacher and an expression of commitment, respect and gratitude. The ceremony assistant presents the offerings on behalf of the new students.

REQUIREMENTS

1. **Working with other teachers.** Like Roshi Kapleau, his teachers in Japan, and her teacher Roshi Kjolhede, Roshi prefers that those who have formally become her students consult with her *before* taking one-to-one or intensive instruction (such as attending a retreat) with other teachers. The main reason for this is to prevent possible confusion in the student. Different teachers have different styles, and committing to one teacher and tradition will foster the teacher-student intimacy that will make that relationship more effective, as well as being helpful in going beyond the “comparing mind” that can be such a hindrance in spiritual work. A commitment to one tradition and one method aids the student in going deeply into him- or herself, rather than seeking salvation “outside.”
2. **Addressing the teacher.** Roshi asks that you use the name “Roshi” when addressing her once you are a student. Use of this form of address underlines the special nature of the

student-teacher relationship, which transcends individual personalities. In essence it is a relationship to the Dharma (for both parties).

3. **Sustaining the Centre.** Being a Supporting Member of the Centre is the main way to sustain the Centre. This involves making a regular financial contribution if you can, maintaining regular involvement in Sangha activities through attendance at sittings and other community activities, and being willing to volunteer to help out where needed. Roshi now requires formal students to attend at least one sesshin a year unless there are compelling reasons (such as physical limitations) why they can't, and to talk to her about alternatives if that is not possible. Maintaining regular contact with Roshi by phone, email or remote dokusan is important for students living out of Auckland, and is up to the student to initiate. Locals are expected to come to face-to-face dokusan when they can.
4. **Wearing a robe.** Roshi requires everyone to wear a robe for dokusan and sesshin. You may get a robe made, sew it yourself, or use the loaner robes.
5. **Ending the relationship.** If at any time you no longer wish to be a student, please talk to Roshi about it, so there can be a clear parting of the ways, just as there was a ceremony to begin the relationship. This is both a way of acknowledging the gravity of the student-teacher bond and ensuring that there is an opportunity for a degree of closure. Just drifting away can be unhelpful.

Once you have read these notes, please take up any questions you have about them with Roshi.

FURTHER STEPS

Once you are a student, you may request to receive a rakusu (which you sew yourself) and Dharma name. This happens in conjunction with a Jukai, the receiving-the-precepts ceremony. Jukai is offered a couple of times a year at the Centre, and there are teishos available from the library which talk about the precepts and their meaning. Anyone may take Jukai any number of times, but those doing so in conjunction with receiving a rakusu play a special part in the ceremony. The rakusu is the abbreviated Buddha robe that is worn by priests and lay students as a reminder of their commitment to the Three Treasures (Buddha, Dharma and Sangha). In a sense, the sewing and wearing of the rakusu is "going public" with one's commitment, and the receiving of a Dharma name marks that change as well, though the name has mostly a private significance (some students will use it in correspondence to Roshi).