

Centro Budista Zen Soto.PR

Presenter: Sai Ho Sandra Laureano

The information about the setup and the technical description have to do with the Jukai ceremony that we had in October 2020.

Photos of the setup

What does it look like behind the scenes? How did you handle running cables, plugging into the wall, wifi, etc?

We had the production table in another room and ran the cables on the floor covered with tape. We used a multiplug where everything was connected. The space was laid out two days in advance because it took a lot of time and effort to make sure we had the necessary distancing as well as the audio and visual resources covering the correct space. The second day was used to make sure the sound was transmitted adequately.

Technical description of the setup

What kind of equipment are you using, as specifically as possible?

In Puerto Rico we had an apple computer, a screen and professional equipment lent to us. The room where the Jukai took place had two microphones, a larger one close to the initiates, with a cover and a smaller one close to the preceptor. The image was projected with an iPad and a phone, one captured the initiates and the altar and the other the bowing area and the preceptor. In LA we had Jon Voss directing the process. Overall, mistakes aside, we were satisfied with the final results, both audio and video seemed to be very good.

Do you have links to recordings of any ceremonies, etc?

Only if available, it'd be great to see what this looks like "in front of the camera," and you can also demo this on the call if you're able to join from your zendo.

Because it was a Jukai ceremony it was not recorded. We thought it would flow more freely without initiates and preceptor concerned about it being recorded.

What is working/what challenges are you facing so far?

In as much detail as you are willing to share, let us know about what is working for you and where you are running into challenges and what you're coming up with to face these challenges.

We began meeting on a daily basis in March 2020 through phone calls, our practices combine sutra chanting, zazen, dedication of merit, and discussion on particular topics. The on-line chanting was a challenge immediately because of the time lapse. After a few months we started

to use on-line recording of the sutras. When we had our first zazenkai at the Center we recorded ourselves with a phone and use that.

In June we started experimenting with different platforms and in July 2020 we decided to acquire Zoom Pro. It gave us the time and flexibility we needed. It also implied that students had to learn how to use the platform and deal with the challenges that arose. One of the students took two courses on Zoom platforms and we started attending the weekly workshops coordinated by Branching Streams. The student became the technical resource for the rest of the community, offered workshops to the sangha and slowly accompanied those that needed more support.

At the beginning of November 2020 we reduced practices to three times a week, and that is still our present schedule. Tuesdays are always virtual Metta Service and zazen night. It has been a challenge to accommodate the screens so that bells can be rung with the postrations and everyone can participate. Many students are using chairs instead of their cushions because it's easier to accommodate the screens. We think this is a limitation.

During all of 2020 we practiced only virtually, with the exception of our Jukai ceremony in October which combined the presence of initiates, preceptor and technical support with the virtual ceremony to which approximately 35 people connected. The challenges were addressed by technical support sangha members.

In January 2021 we began our monthly zazenkai in a combined format at the Center. We accommodate a maximum of 8 people at the Center and as many as want to participate virtually. In April 2021 we started zazen at the Center, two Sundays a month from 10am-12pm. We accommodate a maximum of 6 persons and do not offer virtual connection.

During this time the increase or decrease of COVID victims has determined the continuance of our practices. We cancelled practices at the Center during the month of May but have resumed them since June. Technical difficulties are continuous because of deficient internet access with practices being shut down frequently. We are now always selecting a co-host so that if the host loses connection, it doesn't shut down everyone. Some of our students are now connecting with Zoom using their phone number with no video because of connectivity issues.

I think a major challenge is how we move forward. Do we continue with the combined format? What does that mean for the teachings? How do we provide the effect of physical presence, the support and the particular effect of practicing together? How do we guide students who we perceive are not totally present during virtual practices? Will students be willing to give up the commodity of at-home practice?

An important gain during this time is that we have been able to record teachings, transcribe and translate them, allowing students to have them permanently. We would also like to be able to upload them into our web page when we have one.



