

About Hosshinji

Hosshinji was built in 1522 by Motomitsu Takeda, the feudal lord who ruled this area. The Takeda clan was one of oldest samurai families, descended from a Japanese emperor. You can see the emblem on your cookies in many other places in this temple. This is the Takeda family crest. Motomitsu Takeda had his castle on the mountain behind this temple. The temple is located in Northwest of the castle. According to geomancy the Northwest is considered an unlucky direction and called demons' gate (Kimon). The temple was built here to ward off evil and practically served as a fort.

Hosshinji has about a 500 years history. But the history of Hosshinji as a modern Zen monastery began with the 27th head priest, Sogaku Harada roshi.

Sogaku roshi was born in Obama 1871 and become a monk in a Soto temple when he was seven years old. He practiced not only in a Soto temple but also in a Rinzai monastery. He visited famous Masters in both Soto and Rinzai school at that time and learned from them. After he worked as a professor at Komazawa Buddhist College of the Soto school, he was invited to Hosshinji as head priest in 1922.

Before Sogaku roshi came, Hosshinji was already a monastery, but a small one with 4 or 5 monks and didn't have an excellent Master. There were only the main hall and a small zazen hall. Sogaku Roshi raised the money and had the new zazen hall, monkshall, ihaido, kaisando and koushishitsu built.

The new phase of the monastery started with about 20 monks. Many of them were former students of Sogaku Roshi at Komazawa Buddhist College. Since he practiced also at Rinzai-temples, he introduced some Rinzai methods to Hosshinji, for example, koan practice. Although Hosshinji got famous as a very rigorous monastery, it got more and more monks and in the 1930's there were always 60 to 70 monks. There were one-week-sesshins six times a year that lay people also participated in. More than 100 people, including laypeople, practiced zazen at rohatsu sesshins in December.

After World War II, foreign Zen practitioners started to come to Hosshinji. In 1953 Philip Kapleau joined the rohatsu sesshin and in the next year he came again and stayed at Hosshinji for three years. He later published *The Three Pillars of Zen*. After him some foreigners practiced under the guidance of Sogaku roshi. Among them Father Hugo Makibi Enomiya Lassalle was very impressive to Sogaku roshi. He says in his autobiography, "He is a really nice person. He maintains the celibacy and seems to lead a life according to strict precepts. He has a lot in common with Zen monks. He is a likable person". Father Hugo Lassalle visited many times Hosshinji Sesshin, sometimes with his friends. Later he reported about the practice at Hosshinji in a book and sent the

book to Sogaku roshi. Sogaku roshi was very happy about that, although he didn't understand any words, only pictures, because he didn't know German.

After Sogaku roshi retired, his disciple Sessui Harada took over as the head priest and the abbot of Hosshinji monastery. After Sessui Harada roshi, Ungan Kakudo roshi became the 29th head priest of Hosshinji. After the short period of the 29th head priest, in 1974 Sekkei Harada roshi took over as the head priest and abbot. He is the incumbent head priest.

He was ordained by Sessui Harada roshi, but he didn't become his dharma heir. He left Hosshinji for a while and practiced under the guidance of Gien Inoue roshi, who is considered one of greatest Soto Zen Master in the Showa era. Gien Inoue roshi gave Sekkei Harada roshi his Inka, that means, he officially recognized the enlightenment of Sekkei roshi. Sekkei roshi is one of a few people that received Inka from Gien Inoue roshi. Sekkei roshi started to teach Zen in sesshins in Europe and USA 1982. From 2002 to 2004 Sekkei roshi stayed in Milan, Italy as director of Soto Zen Buddhism Europe Office.

Daily practice at Hosshinji

There are 14 Monks including the head priest and vice head priest and two lay residents now. Among them there are practitioners from abroad too, one monk from Colombia and layman from America and one from Greece.

The typical schedule of our daily activity is as follows:

4:00 wake up, zazen, sutra-chanting, and cleaning

7:00 breakfast

8:30 to 11:00 work-practice which we call samu

11:30 lunch

13:30 to 15:30 samu

16:20 sutra chanting

17:00 supper

19:20 zazen

21: 00 lights out

For samu we do maintenance and cleaning of the temple and the grave yard, gardening, making of firewood and so on. The samu is as important as zazen. It is said that the samu is Zen in motion. We go on takuhatsu, begging, every now and then. Especially in winter, January the fifth to February the third, we go on takuhatsu every day. This takuhatsu is also important Zen practice. Just like in Sogaku roshi's time we have sesshins six times a year.

Explanation to Halls

Hatto (Dharma hall)

Sutra chanting in mornings and evenings and various ceremonies take place in the hatto. Main stature on the alter is Kanzeon bosatsu. Behind the alter we have a sculpture of Bodhi dharma, the founder of Zen Buddhism in China) and Daigenshuri bosatsu (guardian God of temples). This disposition of statues is quite common in Soto temples.

Ihaido (memorial tablets hall)

This room is called the Ihaido, because Ihais, memorial tablets for the deceased, are placed by danka members. On the memorial tablet the posthumous names of danka members' family are inscribed. I have to explain now what danka is. Danka originally means a patron of a temple. Practically speaking dankas mean people who have a family grave in the graveyard of the temples. Monks of the temples take care of the graveyard and conduct funeral and memorial services of the deceased. Dankas pay an annual membership fee and when monks conduct funeral and memorial services, they pay for that too. This is usually the main revenue of a temple. Dankas don't have the habit of going to temple on Sunday like church, but they quite often visit the grave of their family, because in Japan ancestor veneration is strong. When they pay a visit to the grave, they come to this room and offer the incense at the memorial tablet of their family. On a tablet often many names are inscribed. They are not memorial tablets for a single parson, but for a whole family. The same thing goes for graves.

Kaisando (Founders Hall)

Statues

-Cyugansoujo: the first head priest

-Tenganzensaku: the one who revived the temple

After the Takeda clan was overthrown, the temple was rundown. Tenganzensaku had the temple rebuild in 1616.

-Dogen Zenji: He is said to be the Founder of the Japanese Soto school, He transmitted Tendo Nyojo's dharma, who belong to Chinese Soto school. But Dogen Zenji never used the word Soto school.

-Keizan Zenji: The master four generations after Dogen Zenji

He is the one who spread the teaching of Dogen Zenji all over Japan.

Dogen Zenji and Keizan Zenji are said to be two great patriarchs in the Soto school

-Motomitsu Takeda

The sculpture is designated as a culture property of Fukui prefecture

The memorial tablets of head priests

Picture of Sogaku Harada roshi and Sessui Harada roshi

The memorial tablets of war dead

Syuryou (Monkshall)

The Monkshall built in Sogaku roshi's time was decrepit, we had it rebuild.

It opened just three days ago.

Sodo or zazendo (zazen hall)

The calligraphy on the board was drawn by Sogaku roshi.

It says undo literally "cloud hall". It is another name of zazendo

We, monks, practice zazen here, mornings and evenings and in free time.

The platform where we practice zazen is called tan. A space of one tatami is given to each monk. We sleep here too. In the closet above the tan, futons, blankets and pillows are stored.

Monjyusyuri bosatsu: Representation of enlightenment or wisdom of Buddha

A tip for zazen

The motto of the Soto school is Shikantaza, 'just sitting' as you might know.

But this just is the most difficult. You do usually too much. You do unnecessary things.

Or you can say that you yourself are too much. During zazen you don't need yourself.

If You do zazen, that is not yet zazen, Real zazen means zazen does zazen.

When you find it difficult, you can focus on your breathing. But that doesn't mean that you observe your breath, but you become your breath. You should become one with your breathing. So long as you observe your breath, you are not one with you.

When you become one with breath, the breath breathes.

Let's try it!

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Joe Itaka

Hosshin-ji 発心寺

Fushiwara 45-3

Obama-shi 小浜市

Fukui-ken 福井県

917-0054 Japan 日本