

Sewing Buddha's Robe

The introductory class

Sewing Buddha's Robe is an offering at Appamada for those who have taken the Precepts Program or who are currently in the Precepts Program and consider Appamada their practice home. It is entirely voluntary, for those who would like to explore this traditional practice. It begins with a series of four classes to prepare you for sewing a rakusu, or small, five-panel version of Buddha's robe. Following the class, you may join the regular Sunday afternoon sewing group at any time.

No previous sewing experience is necessary.

Structure of the class series:

Class 1. Introduction and overview of sewing Buddha's Robe as mindful practice; the relationship of this practice to taking the precepts. Information about the rakusu ceremony and the way rakusos will be worn and circulated in the sangha.

Class 2. Readings from Dogen, Shohaku Okumura, and Diane Riggs on the significance and meaning of sewing Buddha's Robe.

Class 3. Planning for sewing: Architecture of a rakusu, diagrams, process, how to measure and mark the pattern, how to properly cut the fabric.

Class 4. Learning the stitches, pinning and practice sewing, and finally cutting pieces and preparing for sewing a rakusu.

At the end of the class you will have the instructions and the materials prepared for sewing a rakusu (a rakusu "kit"), and you may join the sewing group as your schedule permits. If you are not able to join the sewing group on Sundays, we will work out alternative ways for you to meet with others for sewing.

Sewing practice group:

The sewing practice group participants will be at different stages of sewing Buddha's robe. The space and time for sewing will be ongoing, Sunday afternoons from 4:00-5:30. The format for the sewing group: we will begin with an incense offering and chanting the verse of the robe. We will sew together in silence (except for questions and instructions about the work) for the first hour. Sewing practice is essentially zazen with sewing (and in comfortable chairs!) Then we will have a chance to discuss the work, ask questions, and share a bit about our experience.

Once a set of rakusos and their envelopes has been completed, there will be a ceremony of blessing, receiving and offering the rakusos. In keeping with our relational practice and the heart of our sangha practice, we will have a slightly different process for this, which we will discuss in the introductory class series.

Supplies needed

What you will need (some supplies can be found at local shops; others need to be ordered; many of these items can be shared):

1. A set of pins with colored round heads. Most hobby shops and fabric stores stock these.
2. A packet of needles. Sharps are preferred. Again, hobby shops and fabric stores.
3. A wristband pincushion. You can find different varieties of these. Don't get the ones that snap onto your wrist with a plastic bracelet: they scratch and become uncomfortable. The ones with a fabric strap and velcro fastener seem most comfortable and adjustable.
4. A storage box for your project: a good size is approximately 12" X 17". The Bigso Stockholm document boxes from the Container Store work well, for example, but you may use any container you wish.
5. A pair of sewing scissors. The best scissors can be quite costly (I have a pair of Shozaburo scissors from Japan that run about \$70, and that is the low end of this brand), but you do not need fancy scissors. Your scissors do need to be sharp, and sewing scissors are preferred. (You can find perfectly useful sewing scissors at most craft, hobby, or fabric stores, as well as at the usual outlets such as Target, Bed Bath and Beyond, etc.) It's good to purchase them where you can try them out to be sure they fit your hands. Do not let children play with your sewing scissors, and do not use scissors that have been in household use.
6. A chalk marking pen. These come from France via Amazon and are perfect for making an even white line without sharpening.
7. A centimeter ruler at least 12" long

Useful, but not required:

- "Third hand" sewing clamp. It fastens to a table or chair and holds the fabric firmly as you sew.
- Magnifying glasses for close work, if you need them.