

Zen Practice at Eiheiiji Temple

Eiheiiji Temple is an active religious center where monk trainees (*unsui*) engage in daily training from dawn to dusk. Life for the *unsui* is structured according to the principles described by Zen Master Dōgen (1200–1253), the founder of the Sōtō school of Zen Buddhism in Japan. Accordingly, the monk trainees follow a demanding day-to-day routine and live an austere monastic lifestyle.

For the *unsui* at Eiheiiji Temple, an average day begins at 3:30 a.m. (4:30 a.m. during the winter), when they wake up for the early-morning zazen session. This is followed by the daily morning service held in the Hattō (Dharma Hall), where the monks chant sutras and make offerings. After breakfast, which consists of a simple vegetarian meal, the *unsui* clean the entire temple's corridors by hand, a process called *zōkin-gake*. When the cleaning is finished, they split into groups to work on individual tasks, such as maintaining the temple grounds, preparing meals, or receiving visitors at the temple's reception desk. The *unsui* also spend time practicing important ceremonies and attending lectures on Buddhist teachings. After a brief break for the midday service and meal, the *unsui* continue their tasks in the afternoon. At the end of the day, there is an evening service, meal, and zazen session lasting until 9:00 p.m., after which the monks and trainees go to bed. From dawn to dusk, working or eating, the *unsui* treat each moment as an opportunity for the wholehearted practice of Zen.