

Some Impressions of Walking the Alms Round in Portland

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On a rainy Friday in mid-April, I had the privilege of taking part in the first Alms Round done in Portland by Reverend Master Meiko and the other monks of the Portland Buddhist Priory together with Reverend Master Meido of Lostine, Reverend Master Oswin of Eugene and other lay trainees from Portland and Eugene. About 10:00 a.m. the five monks and seven lay people gathered at the corner where Rev. Master Meiko had planned to begin the Alms Round. Then we formed our line, Rev. Master Meiko leading with traveling staff and bell, then the other monks, and then the lay people, all walking at a dignified, mindful pace, the only sound being that of the bell announcing our going. As we went on, letting the activity unfold, I had many impressions. Here are a few of them: Walking behind the monks, seeing and feeling their dignity and humbleness, the fruits of renunciation. Not seeing Rev. Master Meiko, but hearing the bell ringing steadily, without insistence, just, we are here, walking past, giving anyone the opportunity to practice generosity, to demonstrate the ever-present connection between self and other.

The great respect shown to the monks by the donors and everyone. The gratitude of the donors for the chance to make an offering, thanking the monks as the monks thanked them. The donors concerned to catch up to the monks in order to make their offerings. The ordinary, average people, some working at restaurants, a medical clinic, a hardware store, even a bridal boutique, also a young man on a bicycle and some people shopping at a grocery store, all coming with awe and respect with their offerings. The homeless man smiling and bowing in gassho as we bowed to him: "Buddha bows to Buddha and Buddha recognizes Buddha." Seeing how even the one person that perhaps responded inappropriately to our going, was still treated with respect by the monks and lay trainees, turning the encounter into a positive one.

Finally: my fellow lay trainees meditatively and gracefully doing what needed to be done to keep the Alms Round moving on smoothly-- taking food from the monks' alms bowls and transferring it to the car. Moving the car to keep up with the monks. Walking Bodhi, the dog, at the end of the procession in such a way that he too seemed to be going meditatively. Taking the names of those whom the donors wished merit offered to. Quietly recording the alms round with photos. Everyone, monks and lay people, uniting to make our activity a ceremonial offering.

These were a few of my impressions of the Alms Round. I'm grateful to Rev. Master Meiko and to Rev. Master Oswin for the chance to take part, and to all the monks and other lay people who helped to make it a success.