



SOJI ZEN CENTER NEWSLETTER

2014 Spring Ango at Soji Zen Center

At Soji Zen Center we are in the midst of our annual Spring Ango, a three-month period of intensive practice, which began March 9th. During this time, our teacher Shuzen Sensei challenges us to sit more, study more and give more of ourselves in all aspects of life.

Lisa Onshin Powley, a Zen priest and long-time Soji student, is leading the practice period as Shuso. In her Letter to the Sangha, Shuso Onshin asks us to reflect on

the theme of the Ango period of "Letting Go." With this in mind, she provided guidance on ways to intensify our practice including: increasing sitting time each day; studying the six par-amitas, the four noble truths, and the precepts; practicing oryoki (just enough) at mealtimes; volunteering at Soji or in other settings; setting an intention for the practice period; and asking "What do I need to work at let-

ting go of to truly integrate all areas of my life into my practice?"

As part of the practice period, Shuso Onshin also urged us to "dive into the wisdom of our female ancestors" and contemporary women teachers by reading the recently published book *The Hidden Lamp: Stories from Twenty-five Centuries of Awakened Women* edited by Zenshin Florence Caplow and Reigetsu Susan Moon.

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Roadside Assistance, The Soji Way By Ed S., Soji Student

It seems that life has a way of making me move forward no matter how hard I try to cling to possessions, jobs, parents, lovers, the past, children and my most cherished beliefs. A house can burn down, get covered in mud, water. Parents suffer old age and death. Spouses can be taken at any time. Chil-

dren inevitably leave and grow older.

Past history is just that, passing. No matter how hard I try, my arms are not long enough to hold on to it. Not only that, but those long passed pleasures and traumas get embellished and imbued with power they never had originally.

Whether from anger, fear, lust, shame on the dark side or desire for a return to the good old days, it seems like what the future brings will never be the same. Deeply held beliefs that I am what has passed is an impediment to living now.

So what to do, go into denial, run away, join a monastery?

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A Note from Shuzen Sensei

"Ultimately, we must let go of letting go. . . that's it!"

Losing a Tooth, Practicing Letting Go

By: Abby Jingo Lang, Soji Student

Growing older offers abundant opportunities to practice letting go. Going on 60, I've lost most of my original hair color, my ability to read without glasses and, most recently, a tooth. You don't hear much about the spiritual gifts occasioned by losing a tooth but here you go...

About nine months ago, I noticed an intermittent, dull pain in a tooth but decided to just keep an eye on it. After months of no improvement, I went to an endodontist who detected a small crack in tooth #13, a second premolar. I opted for root canal and all went well. Just two weeks later, however, and prior to getting it capped, I broke the weakened tooth eating a cracker.

Temporarily held together by dental "spackle," I had to weigh my options. This is when my emotions started to get the better of me. I was confused about

my choices despite having them laid out clearly by my dentist. I vacillated between the known (a crown over the damaged tooth) and the unknown (extraction followed by an implant). I did research on the Internet and talked to friends. But all this fact-finding led to neither clarity nor acceptance. Instead I conjured up the specter of losing one tooth after another. Slowly I came to understand I wasn't wrestling with a dental procedure; I was resisting my own decay.

After that stark realization, I accepted that a decision had to be made. I opted to have the tooth pulled and replaced with an implant. Thanks to the wonder of local anesthetics, the extraction itself was not physically painful. But the sensation of someone applying subtle force inside my head was unsettling. Drawing on my

meditation and yoga practices, I concentrated on my breathing and repeatedly relaxed my grip on the dental chair. During a momentary break in the action, I joked with the dentist and his assistant, "I'm telling the tooth to let go, let go." We all laughed but, really, I wasn't kidding. And with the next round of gentle pressure, the tooth and I both let go and a gentle calm flooded in.

In the scheme of things, the removal of one cracked, dead tooth is not a major life event. Furthermore, I appreciate how fortunate I am to have good dental insurance and excellent dentists. But most of all, I am grateful for a practice that sheds light on my many attachments and then teaches me how to let go.



instructor called it investing in loss. When you become proficient at letting go on the physical level it also affects you on the mental and spiritual levels. Anything that affects one part of the Mind Body and Spiritual System affects it all. When I learned the Push Hands technique, I didn't know that one day it would support my Zen practice. But now I know.

Push Hands Practice - Learning to Let Go

By: Craig Shodo Bundick, Jikido and Soji Student

Tai Chi Chuan is a martial art first and a health exercise second. One of the training methods used in Tai Chi is Push Hands practice. Push Hands helps the fighter develop sensitivity to the opponent's incoming energy and learn how to yield, neutralize and bend the opponent's energy back to them. The technique is letting go...

letting go of the resistance to being pushed and allowing oneself to be pushed over and over again. My Tai Chi instructor would say to me, the more you allow your training partner to push you, the better you get at letting go. You sense the opponent's incoming energy and redirect it in whatever manner is necessary. My

South African Zen Teachers Visit Soji Zen Center

Five years ago, Soji's resident teacher and vice abbot Sensei Jules Shuzen Harris was invited to give a public talk and five-day retreat at the Robertson Retreat Center in Cape Town, South Africa. Heila and Rodney Downey are the founders and teachers at the Dharma Centre, an independent, contemporary Zen center in Cape Town.

Recently while travelling in the States, Rodney and Heila came to Soji one Sunday morning and joined the sangha in sitting. Shuzen Sensei welcomed the couple warmly and invited them to give a dharma talk. Rodney offered his understanding of the Buddhist concept of interdepend-

ent origination while Heila shared how a tragedy in her life led to some of the work they now do. The couple described their evolving approach to teaching mindfulness practices to individuals in prison. Responding to a question from a Soji member, Rodney and Heila observed that sanghas around the world encounter many common challenges, including the in- and out-flow of participants as well as financial difficulties. Sustaining practice is difficult but small groups of practitioners help keep the dharma alive and vibrant. Soji Zen Center members were delighted to have the chance to hear Heila and Rodney speak and to talk with them during an informal reception at the end of the morning.

Although not a focus during the visit to Soji, it is noteworthy that Heila Downey is one of the 100 contemporary female Zen teachers whose reflections are included in the book, *The Hidden Lamp*. As stated earlier, this book is serving as the study text for Soji's Spring 2014 Ango period of intensive practice. Heila's reflection came in response to the koan "Jiju-Kennett's Not Bigger, Not Smaller." In just one observation, she wrote: "Now I would say kensho, satori and enlightenment are a doing, a way of life, not things or states, and can be likened to looking through a pinprick hole in a rice paper screen, when all at once we see that which was previously hidden." (*The Hidden Lamp*, page 87).

Roadside Assistance: The Soji Way

(continued from Page1)

There really is no place to run, no matter where you go, there you are. So, I found myself at Soji and what did I find? That I am whole, perfect and complete. The challenge is to realize this and let go of thoughts of who I think I am. Those ideas and opinions are not who I am. As long as I am living and breathing there is the potential to help myself and everyone around me.

Did I mention letting go? That's where faith comes in. If I have the

courage to do it, then my true nature will manifest. I am fortunate to have a teacher here at Soji, so when I have a blowout due to potholes on the path, I can call for roadside assistance!

Spring's Streams By: Bill Mason Soji Member

Walk in Spring's
streams of colors
and let them smooth
the rough spots
in your heart.



June Retreat at St. Raphaela

Soji Zen Center and three other sanghas – the Clare Sangha, Flowing River Sangha and Red Rose Sangha – will join together in a Summer Solstice Sesshin from June 18-22 at St. Raphaela's Retreat Center in Haverford, PA. Sensei Jules Shuzen Harris, Sensei Bruce Seiryu Blackman and Sensei Barbara Shoshin Craig will lead the residential Zen retreat, which includes 7 to 10 hours of zazen each day along with chanting, private interviews and dharma talks. St. Raphaela Center has been the site of numerous Soji retreats and is conducive to intensive practice in a supportive environment.



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COMMIT TO PARTICIPATE!!!

- ◆ ANGO-March 9, 2014—June 8, 2014
- ◆ Shuso Hosen Ceremony—June 8, 2014
- ◆ Summer Solstice Sesshin—St. Raphaela Center—June 18-22, 2014
- ◆ Soji's One-Day Retreat (June 21, 2014) will be cancelled due to Retreat at St. Raphaela

Soji Zen Center is a contemporary Buddhist center providing instruction in Zen meditation, philosophy and contemplation techniques for training the mind. We are guided by our founding teacher, Sensei Jules Shuzen Harris.

Soji Zen Center is part of the White Plum lineage which brings together elements of Japanese Soto and Rinzai traditions of Zen Buddhism to teach intensive awareness sitting practice (Zazen) and koan study to beginners who want to learn about meditation, as well as to experienced practitioners of Zen Buddhism to strengthen their technique.

Weekly Schedule

Sunday	Meditation & Dharma Talk	9:30 AM
Monday	Meditation	7:30 PM
Tuesday	Yoga	7:00 PM
Wednesday	Meditation	6:30 AM
Wednesday	Study Group	7:00 PM
Thursday	Meditation & Dokusan	7:00 PM
Saturday	laido	8:30 AM