



# SOJI ZEN CENTER NEWSLETTER

## Meditation On and Off the Cushion

By Brenda Jinshin Waters, [info@sojizencenter.com](mailto:info@sojizencenter.com)

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**A Note from Shuzen Sensei**

*"...Cultivate the mind of no activity in activity...."*

**Reminder**

Registrations and full payment for the Year-End Meditation Retreat at Malvern Retreat House are due by November 30th to receive discounted rate.

Meditation comes in many shapes and forms and is generally thought of as sitting cross-legged on a cushion. Western society is getting attracted to just one of the three treasures, and it doesn't even know it's missing the other two. It wants to acquire Buddha (awakening) without Dharma (teachings) or Sangha (community). It is worth remembering that working with a skillful teacher and being part of a community of practice is very different from hearing a description of meditation as if it is a singular activity, rather than an expression of many different forms of practice. While meditating and reaching a calm state of mind on the cushion are a central part of Zen practice, it is of equal importance to keep a harmonious state of mind in our everyday life.

Can there be harmful forms of what is called spiritual practice? Without care and attention, our desire to cultivate a deeper awareness can lead us down paths where we avoid aspects of our life of connectedness. Some practices might even fuel our ego's need for self reinforcement. That is why different traditions employ 'skillful means' in the

ways we work with our attention while engaging in ordinary activity. In our Zen tradition we have the practice of samu (work), eating together (oryoki), chanting together, even simply walking mindfully in a prescribed pattern (kinhin) - in all of these practices we work to bring our meditative state of samadhi to our actions as well as our work in the wider world.

As evidenced by the "Outreach" tab on the Soji Zen Center's website (<http://sojizencenter.com/outreach/>), Zen practice also takes us off the cushion and into the world. While meditation is the core of our practice, Soji students reach out to people who are facing major life challenges such as incarceration, drug and alcohol addiction, mental illness, homelessness, hunger, and discrimination as well as care for people who are dying. We engage with veterans, the LGBT community and individuals in prison as well as people at key developmental stages - most often youth and seniors.

Recently mindfulness has become a much used word that many are equating with meditation. The core teachings of Buddhism—liberation from suffering, for example—have been thoroughly transformed by the contemporary secular mindfulness movement, which is largely about stress reduction. There are also legions of young researchers investigating meditation's neuroscientific, behavioral, and philosophical effects.

Soji Zen Center was founded on the principle of wanting to help people regardless of religion, race or socio-economic status. In addition to meditation in the zendo, Soji Zen Center offers yoga classes, laido and various workshops that include QiGong, art, writing and poetry that reflect an expression of "Meditation in Motion." The articles in this issue of the newsletter give a taste of some of these practices and we invite you to join us in person.

## Yoga at Soji

By Tim Wade, Soji Yoga Student

When Soji first started offering yoga on Tuesday nights over six years ago, I enthusiastically jumped at the opportunity for reasons that seem naïve and uninformed today. A few years earlier, I had attended a couple of yoga sessions with my sister and her husband while visiting in Boulder, Colorado and enjoyed them immensely. Years of distance running had left me with a body that was as strong as piano wire and just as taut. I had rarely stretched before or after a run. At those first yoga classes, the young athletic teacher had come around to individual participants and pushed or leaned on them to get them into the different yoga positions. This is what I thought yoga would offer: a way to return limberness to my aged body.

The yoga sessions at Soji that Tina Pritchard teaches start gently, not with a heart-racing warm-up. We often begin with a poem to focus our racing minds away from the day's concerns. Then we begin with a series of gentle stretches

and movements. Each of the positions, the asanas, are announced with their Sanskrit and English common names. Detailed instructions are given as Tina demonstrates. We are encouraged to take the position only as far as we are able. There is no talk of pushing yourself or the "no pain, no gain" nonsense. Some are limber, most of us are not.

These days there are many types of yoga advertised, from Ashtanga to Yin Yoga. Some are rigorous repetitions of the same series of asanas. Some leave you tired and sweaty at the end of the session. Tina's yoga at Soji would fall under the name Hatha yoga. The focus is traditional, on the positions themselves. The practice is centered on trying to attain the best you can on this day, at this time. The asanas were created to help the body be able to confront the physical challenges of long periods of meditation. They are not an ancient form of Pilates or aerobics. Although you move between the asanas, over a session you can

achieve a mental stillness that is complementary to a meditation practice. A few years back I once complained to Sensei that I wasn't getting any better at meditation. He commiserated "I've been meditating for 45 years and I've never gotten any better either." Yoga isn't about getting better. It isn't a sports skill. Practice isn't about attaining the flexibility of a circus acrobat. Yoga is just the practice of the asanas. By leaning or lifting or twisting your body into positions we don't ordinarily, you can gain insight simply from doing.

After more than six years I still can't bend at the waist like I did as a young man. I can't even touch my toes without bending my aching knees. But if I get up early and practice a few asanas, I start my day with a sense of stillness.

Soji's yoga classes take place on Tuesday evenings at 7pm. The first class is free so give it a try!

## Kinhin: A Reflection

By Michael Daitoku Palumbo, Zen Priest and Soji Student

Kinhin is walking meditation. It is "just walking." It is not, as I once thought, a break from practice or a rest period. Shuzen Sensei has frequently told us that our practice must inform our daily lives. We need to take the peace, calm, serenity, centeredness and in-

sight from the cushion out into our daily lives. Kinhin or walking meditation is a bridge to help us do just that.

The Kanji for "kin" means to go through (like the thread in a loom), with "sutra" as a secondary meaning,

and "hin" meaning walk. If taken literally they mean "to walk straight back and forth." Another translation means "meditative walking or walking meditation." Its meaning is similar to the idiom "walk-the-talk" as its literal meaning includes "sutra walking." (continued on Page 4)

## laido (居合道)

By Mark Gavin, Soji laido Student

laido 居合道 (pronounced "ee-eye-doe") is the Japanese martial art of drawing and cutting with the Japanese sword. laido was founded some 450 years ago in the mid-1500's. When someone asks "What is laido,?" I normally start by saying that laido is something like Tai Chi with a sword. Unfortunately, this is really not a very good analogy; but it is a place to start the explanation. laido is a prescribed, deliberate series of solo movements, or Kata, where the practitioner defends against a series of perceived attacks. laido does not include directly fighting against a person or sparring like many other martial arts. Because of this non-competitive aspect, and laido's emphasis on precise, controlled, fluid motion, it is sometimes referred to as "moving Zen." Today laido is considered one of the Zen arts of Japan; very much like the arts of flower ar-

ranging, archery, and the tea ceremony: Ikebana, 生け花, Kyudo, 弓道 and Chanoyu, 茶の湯.

Roughly translated, the word laido means the "Way of Harmony." A more literal translation is as follows:

"I" 居 the existence of body and spirit.

"Ai" 合 the adaptability to changing situations.

"Do" 道 the art being a way of life.

laido may then be translated as "the way of meeting life." Other translations include: "The way of mental presence and immediate reaction" and "The way of harmonizing oneself in action."

Through the practice of laido, the practitioner learns the proper techniques for handling a sword. These include drawing and sheathing the sword, cutting, balance, posture, movement and breathing. Through practice, laido fo-

cuses the mind of the laido practitioner into a moving meditation.

The late Yamaguchi Katsuo - Meijin, 10th Dan Muso Jikiden Eishin Ryu laido, says this about laido: "The practice of this martial art requires a solemn spirit, extreme concentration, and skill." He observes, "The secret to laido is a calm spirit... A serene spirit must be cultivated at all times. It is said that the sword is like the mind, and if the sword is upright, the mind is upright. But if the mind is not upright, the sword can never be wielded properly." "Even though you may devote yourself to it with all your heart and soul, it is very difficult to master laido completely. It is possible, though, to move one step at a time toward the ultimate goal through practice."

Shuzen Sensei offers laido classes Saturday mornings at 8:30 am.



## QiGong: Movement and Meditation

By Craig Shodo Bundick, Zen Priest and Soji Student

(as shared with Abby Jingo Lang, Soji Student)

In the United States, many people equate QiGong ("chee-gong") with Tai Chi or other marital arts but QiGong, itself, is not a martial art. Rather QiGong is designed to open up energy channels in preparation for an array of physical, mental and spiritual pursuits, much like yoga originally prepared people for meditation.

Tradition has it that Bodhidharma, who brought Chan or Zen Buddhism to China, also taught QiGong exercises to monks at the Shaolin Temple in China in the 6th Century A.D. QiGong is commonly viewed as a practice to cultivate and balance 'qi' (chi) or what has been translated as "life energy." QiGong practice typical-

ly involves coordinating slow flowing movement, deep rhythmic breathing, and meditative states of mind.

In instructing others, Shodo focuses on QiGong Sets which encompass energy work. Exercises with exotic  
(Continued on Page 4)

## Words, Etc.

### Bill Mason, Soji Member

Words are empty

Forms are full.

Either way

we get hooked

If we allow.

Instead learn

To pause,

To reflect,

To choose wisely.

Only Practice makes

Perfection possible.

Just learn to play your own piano.

## Kinhin

(continued from Page 2)

Zen Master Anzan Hoshin says, "...kinhin means to feel a step when taking a step, in other words, to take a complete step." He also says "It is not mindfulness of walking, stepping, or even of a step. It is mindfulness of this step, and this step, and this step."

###

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.

## QiGong (continued from Page 3)

names, such as Bone Marrow Washing, combine meditation with motion and lead to enhanced flexibility, relaxation, vitality and inner strength. Shodo takes this practice very seriously. And yet, at the same time, when students inquire about a particular aspect of QiGong "Is this very important?" he responds: "yes and no," embodying the essence of balance. Being mindful of the people around you, he says, is as important as remembering and executing the exercises precisely.

Finally, Shodo supports the view that the important thing isn't so much that QiGong is done mindfully, as that mindfulness is cultivated and brought to the practice of QiGong. By fully sinking into the specific sensations of each posture, practitioners create the possibility of letting go of the usual busyness of mind and expand beyond the usual constrictions of the body, beyond the boundary of the false self. In this way, QiGong and Zen practice complement one another.

Craig Shodo Bundick began studying Judo in 1962 while serving in the U.S. Air Force. He has also studied American and Korean forms of Karate, Tai Chi, Kung Fu and Healing QiGong. Shodo currently offers instruction in the Philadelphia area and periodic workshops at Soji Zen Center.

### Weekly Schedule

Sunday	Meditation & Dharma Talk	9:30 am
Monday	Meditation	7:00 pm
Tuesday	Yoga	7:00 pm
Wednesday	Study Group	7:00 pm
Thursday	Meditation & Dokusan	7:00 pm
Friday	Mindfulness & 12-Step Recovery	7:00 pm
Saturday	Iaido	8:30 am

## Contact Information

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### COMMIT TO PARTICIPATE!!!

Fusatsu	January 12	
One-Day Retreat	November 15	January 17
Rohatsu Sit	December 7	
Year-End Retreat	December 26- December 31	
Shikianshiki (Abbot Ceremony)	January 24	