



SOJI ZEN CENTER NEWSLETTER

Jukai at Soji's Winter Sesshin

Soji's 2014 Winter Sesshin took place from December 26 to 31 at the Malvern Retreat House. Twenty-nine participants joined in part or all of the six-day retreat led by Soji founder and now Abbot, Shuzen Sensei. On Sunday afternoon of the ses-

shin, three Sangha members took the Buddhist precepts in a moving Jukai ceremony. Their new dharma names and meanings are listed below:
Valda Woodson: **Jakudo**, 寂度 (Serenity Awakened)

Ed Schieferstein: **Daikanchi**, 大鑑知 (Great Mirror Wisdom)
David Dahl: **Ryumon**, 竜門 (Dragon Gate)
In the following article, Jakudo shares her experiences before, during and after the ceremony.

Inside This Issue	
Jukai at Soji's Winter Sesshin	1
The Precepts and Practice are One	1
Zen Teachers on the Precepts	1
The Precepts Enter and Re-enter Our Lives	2
Not Being Stingy: Action on the Eighth Precept	2
Fusatsu: Renewing Our Commitment to the Precepts	3
The Precepts and Our Wedding Vows	3
The Sixteen Bodhi-sattva Precepts	4
Overview and Upcoming Schedule	4

The Precepts and Practice are One

By Valda Jakudo Woodson, Soji Student

Upon reading the precepts, my thoughts were - "not so hard." As I read them over and over again and considered how they function in our daily lives, I realized that committing to living by the precepts required a shift in my thinking and my behavior. As I worked on my rakusu, I would review the precepts, still reading them and seeing them as something separate from

myself. But soon I came to understand that I needed to see myself as the precepts. Excitement began to really build as the Jukai ceremony approached in late December. Finally the day arrived and I stood before, and with, the Sangha making the promise to live by the precepts. Great!! It was an emotional high. BUT!! It

doesn't stop once the words have been said. The commitment goes on. Living the life, keeping the promises, takes over. The transformation that began with the first reading of the precepts continues to unfold. The precepts are becoming internalized and not something to live by, but a way to live. The precepts and the practice become one.

Zen Teachers on the Precepts

In *On Zen Practice: Body Breath and Mind* (2002, p 71), Taizen Maezumi Roshi writes "receiving the precepts and maintaining them is not easy...we may see that in the very living itself we are almost constantly violating the precepts. That means constant atonement is necessary."

Robert Aitken Roshi's book, *The Mind of Clover: Essays in Zen Buddhist Ethics* (2000, p, 3) is devoted to a deep understanding of the Zen Buddhist precepts. Aitken Roshi comments: "Without the precepts as guidelines, Zen

Buddhism tends to become a hobby, made to fit the needs of the ego...the true Zen Buddhist center is not a mere sanctuary, but a source from which ethically motivated people move outward to engage in the larger community." (continued on Page 3)

A Note from Shuzen Sensei

"...To study the precepts is to cultivate compassion -- the activity of fundamental wisdom."

The Precepts Enter and Re-Enter Our Lives

By Michael Daitoku Palumbo, Zen Priest and Soji Student

The Sixteen Bodhisattva Precepts are woven throughout everyday practice at Soji Zen Center and are the centerpiece of ceremonies that mark our lives as Zen practitioners.

The first time we “take the precepts” occurs at the Jukai ceremony or Zaikei Tokudo, the time when we formally commit to Buddhism. In this ceremony we promise to live by the precepts and are given a dharma name. At Soji Jukai ceremonies, Shuzen Sensei reads each precept aloud and asks the candidate if she or he will fulfill it, a process accompanied by repeated bowing and often deep emotion.

Becoming a novice Zen priest, I participated in the Shukke Tokudo ordination ceremony. In front of the Sangha, again I was asked to vow to live by the pre-

cepts and to deepen my understanding of what that means. At Soji, we also have a beautiful opportunity to renew our commitment to the precepts at a Fusatsu ceremony held every other month. Led by one of the Center’s priests, Fusatsu includes chanting the names of Buddha and Bodhisattvas while bowing and remembering our vows to save all sentient beings.

The Sixteen Bodhisattva Precepts also are at the core of the American Zen wedding ceremony. The wedding partners vow to take each precept and additionally vow to help one another to fulfill them. For me this is deeply moving. The idea of someone I love vowing to help me fulfill the precepts always brings me to tears. We have had several wedding ceremonies at Soji, the most recent one being

one of our very own Sangha members who writes about it in this issue.

Finally, during a Zen Buddhist funeral service the precepts once again hold a central position. If the deceased had not taken the precepts during his or her lifetime, then the precepts are given during the funeral service along with a dharma name. If the deceased had already participated in Jukai during their lifetime, the precepts are given again but the same dharma name remains the same.

Thus, throughout our lives, we return to the Sixteen Bodhisattva Precepts and they, in turn, help us to find the way to end our suffering.

Not Being Stingy: Positive Action on the Eighth Grave Precept

By Craig Shodo Bundick, Zen Priest and Soji Student

“I vow not to be stingy.” This precept does not necessarily mean monetarily holding back. As a priest, I am responsible for giving and sharing all that I possess, including time, experience, love, and compassion. One of the things I share with others is my time and experience as a Tai Chi teacher.

The exercises of Tai Chi strengthen the immune system and send synovial fluid to all the joints in the body to help

relieve arthritis pain and inflammation. I volunteer to teach these exercises to seniors in a nursing home in my community. Some of the seniors walk in to the class on their own power, some come into the room using walkers and canes, and others come into the class being pushed in a wheelchair by an assistant.

I don’t have to say a word about how important these exercises are to these



seniors. These seniors, who range in age from 60 to 100, know very well what these exercises mean to their bodies and their wellbeing. I don’t do this teaching for a reward but I am rewarded by the smiles on my students’ faces and the number who attend every class each week.

Fusatsu: Renewing Our Commitment to the Precepts

By Annalisa Rakugo Castaldo, Zen Priest and Soji Student

Fusatsu is an ancient ritual, going back to the earliest days of Buddhism. It is the ritual of atonement and renewal of vows, traditionally done on the night of the full moon. Fusatsu is Japanese for uposatha, the Pali word for observance (in Sanskrit: upavasatha). One source I found suggested that Fusatsu actually began as a Vedic lunar sacrifice and became an important day of fasting and purification for Hindus, and was seen as a time when gods entered human dwellings. The first Buddhist monks didn't want to give up an observance that connected them to their communities, so they began to gather for meditation. Lay practitioners asked for teaching and the monks began by reciting the 227 rules of the order. This gradually evolved into a recommitment to the rules and the practice overall. In Zen the focus is

on a renewed commitment to the precepts.

This renewed commitment comes in several forms. The first is simply setting aside the time to come to the ceremony on a Monday night! Since the ceremony happens only every other month, it is easy to see it as an "extra" or an imposition on the schedule. "I was just at Soji for three hours Sunday. That's plenty!" It's also difficult for me to think of going out on a Monday night, with almost the entire work week looming.

Then there's the sense some people have that ceremonies are only for priests, that the meat of the practice is in sitting. Those who have not taken the precepts may even feel they are not supposed to attend—after all, how can one renew commitment to the precepts if one hasn't formally taken them yet? But sewing a rakusu and doing a cere-

mony with lots of bows is not when practicing the precepts begins. Everyone who comes to Soji regularly is practicing the precepts, and all can benefit from renewing a commitment, whatever the level. And while sitting is vital to our practice, Shuzen Sensei is always pointing out that people who separate their sitting from the rest of their lives are practicing "spiritual bypassing" and nothing in their lives will change. The public, explicit declaration to practice the precepts is one concrete step we can all take. Thus I hope that everyone, whether you have formally taken the precepts or not, will come to the next Fusatsu and experience the rich satisfaction the ceremony offers.



The Precepts and Our Marriage Vows

By Jill Kyokugo Ripkin, Soji Student

Taking our marriage vows with Shuzen Sensei as our officiant was a cherished milestone in my life. Standing at "my Soji Center" with our families and Sangha to bear witness, we voiced our promise to uphold the precepts as a couple. Two separate people being joined as a united force committing to upholding these sacred principles for living. We symbolized one of the main foundations of Zen - no separation.

Both Joseph and I came to stand together at the altar after many years and many life challenges. We have learned on our journey that we are much stronger together and this principle is also true for the practice of Zen. We are better able to be focused, committed and realize our vows through the practice of sitting when we are accompanied by fellow travelers on the path.

Zen Teachers

*(continued from Page 1)

In her book, *Most Intimate: A Zen Approach to Life's Challenges* (2014), Roshi Pat Enkyo O'Hara shares (p 131): the "precepts are not commandments; rather, they are principles for living a life of freedom and services... Make them your own. Be intimate with them. Rather than simply trying to follow them, embody them, in much the same way you 'become' your zazen."

The Sixteen Bodhisattva Precepts

The Three Treasures

- I vow to take refuge in the Buddha.
- I vow to take refuge in the Dharma.
- I vow to take refuge in the Sangha.

The Three Pure Precepts

- I vow to cease from evil.
- I vow to do good.
- I vow to liberate all sentient beings.

The Ten Grave Precepts

- I vow to refrain from killing.
- I vow to refrain from stealing.
- I vow to refrain from improper sexual conduct.
- I vow to refrain from telling lies.
- I vow to refrain from being intoxicated and ignorant.
- I vow to refrain from talking about others' errors and faults.
- I vow to refrain from elevating myself and blaming others.
- I vow to refrain from being stingy and selfish.
- I vow to refrain from indulging in anger and hatred.
- I vow to refrain from speaking ill of the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha Treasures

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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	7:00 pm
Tuesday	Yoga	7:00 pm
Wednesday	Meditation Study Group	6:30 am 7:00 pm
Thursday	Meditation & Dokusan	7:00 pm
Friday	Mindfulness & 12-Step Recovery	7:00 pm
Saturday	laido	9:00 am

COMMIT TO PARTICIPATE!!!		
Breaking Through The Art of Transmutation	March 28	10:00 am
One-Day Retreat	April 18	10:00 am
Bringing Zen Home	April 25 May 2	10:00 am 10:00 am
Summer Sesshin	June 26— 30	4:00 pm 1:00 pm

