



February 10, 2019

Dear Sangha,

I am humbled and grateful to be asked to serve as Shuso. I promise to dedicate myself to serving Soji as deeply as I am able during the Ango period, which runs from March 10th to June 9th, 2019. The theme for this Ango will be “Sangha.” Sangha is one of the Three Treasures, recognized by the Buddha as a vital part of practice. During this intensive practice period I hope we can all consider the many ways sangha supports and enriches our practice.

Sangha is complex and multifaceted; we will be exploring two key dimensions—ritual and harmony. Part of what makes us a sangha is our commitment to ritual. We set aside specific times to practice, pay attention to how we dress, and bring awareness to how we move, sit and speak. One of the reasons for this is to foster unity and harmony, to create the sangha through our actions. For that reason, the study text for this Ango period is the chapter “Final Shelter: The Verse of the Three Refuges” from *Living By Vow: A Practical Introduction to Eight Essential Zen Chants and Texts* by Shohaku Okumura.

One translation of sangha is “harmony.” Our sangha is a truly harmonious and we are fortunate to be a part of the community at Soji Zen Center. This Ango period can be a time to think about how to deepen our connection to Soji and consider how to manifest this level of harmony in the rest of our lives. I also hope it will be a celebration of our particular sangha, because Soji is truly a treasure, a wonderfully supportive and close-knit group of people who care for each other.

As long as the practitioners hold regular and frequent assemblies, as long as they meet in harmony, depart in harmony and carry on their affairs in harmony, as long as they honor and respect the elders within the sangha, as long as they preserve their personal mindfulness, they may be expected to prosper and not decline. Parinibbana Sutta

With deepest gratitude,

Annalisa Rakugo Castaldo

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