

Southwind Sangha Soto Zen Association

About Us

www.southwindsangha.org

We are a community who follow the path of the Buddha. We began as a meditation group in the early 1990s and later became a Zen Buddhist sitting group. In 1997, the group affiliated with the Atlanta Soto Zen Center (www.aszc.org).

As a meditation group, we follow the instructions for *zazen* (sitting meditation) as given by Zen Master Eihei Dogen-Zenji (1200-1253). The Soto Zen tradition emphasizes the practice of *zazen* and individual effort. By learning to put our entire being into our practice, we practice to realize our original nature and to carry that experience into daily life.

The Soto Zen School (Japanese: Sotoshu) has transmitted the Buddha Dharma from Shakyamuni Buddha and the Ancestors to the present day. The essence of the School began some eight-hundred years ago with the work of Dogen-Zenji, founder of the School. The fourth Japanese ancestor, Keizan Jokin-Zenji (1268-1325), further enhanced the School, making it more accessible to the laity.

The doctrine of the Soto Zen School states that we are all children of the Buddha and come into this world endowed with the Buddha-Mind. However, failing to realize this, we live selfish, willful lives, causing ourselves much suffering. For that reason, we take refuge in the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, and commit ourselves to lives guided by the Buddhist precepts. We aspire to follow the Bodhisattva ideal of Mahayana Buddhism, in which we rejoice in being of service to others.

In the early 1970s, the Atlanta Soto Zen Center was founded with the leadership of Zenkai Taiun Michael

Elliston-Roshi, who was a disciple of Rev. Dr. Soyu Matsuoka-Roshi in Chicago during the 1960s. Elliston-Roshi remains the Zen Center's abbot and spiritual leader.

Dharma Master Rev. Dr. Soyu Matsuoka-Roshi, a Gondaikyoshi (Bishop) of the Soto Zen School, served as superintendent and abbot of the Long Beach Zen Buddhist Temple and Zen Center. The Temple was headquarters to Zen Centers in Atlanta, Chicago, Los Angeles, Seattle, and Everett, Washington.

Matsuoka-Roshi was born in Japan into a family that has a history of Zen priests dating back six hundred years. Matsuoka attended Komazawa University in Tokyo, where he graduated with a bachelor's degree. He was sent to America to serve as a founder of temples both in Los Angeles and San Francisco. He furthered his extensive graduate work at Columbia University with Dr. D.T. Suzuki. He finally established the Temple at Long Beach in 1971 where he resided until his passing in 1998. Matsuoka-Roshi was a great dynamic influence in both America and Japan, lecturing and providing true Zen training to all people. He is registered in the book of national treasures of Japan.

No matter how long we have been sitting, we aim for "beginner's mind" and treat each period of meditation as if it were our first time. We focus on the mechanics of sitting, including the posture, the breath, and disposition of the mind during meditation. Our practice is rounded out with Dharma readings and teachings given by teachers and disciples of the Southwind Sangha and Atlanta Soto Zen Center.

Taking Refuge

You may formalize and celebrate your Zen practice by requesting an Initiation Ceremony (Japanese: Tokudo). This ceremony marks your desire to take refuge in the

Three Jewels and be involved as a lay practitioner of Soto Zen Buddhism. Additional information about Tokudo is available from the Southwind Sangha.

Suggested Reading

Soto Zen: an Introduction to Zazen, Sotoshu Shumuchō, 2002.
What the Buddha Taught, by Walpola Ruhula, Grove Press, 1974.
Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind, by Shunryu Suzuki, Weatherhill Inc., 1972.