

# Southwind Sangha Sōtō 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 Sōtō Zen Center ([www.aszc.org](http://www.aszc.org)).

As a meditation group, we follow the instructions for *zazen* (sitting meditation) as given by Zen Master Eihei Dōgen Zenji (1200-1253). The Sōtō 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 Sōtō Zen School (Japanese: Sōtōshū) 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 Dōgen 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 Sōtō 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 Mahāyāna Buddhism, in which we rejoice in being of service to others.

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

Michael Elliston Rōshi, who was a disciple of Rev Dr Sōyū Matsuoka Rōshi in Chicago during the 1960s. Elliston Rōshi remains the ASZC's abbot and spiritual leader.

Dharma Master Rev Dr Sōyū Matsuoka Rōshi, a Gondai-kyoshi (Bishop) of the Sōtō 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 Rōshi 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 Rōshi 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 Sōtō Zen Center.

## *Taking Refuge*

You may formalize and celebrate your Zen practice by requesting an Initiation Ceremony (Japanese: *Zaike Tokudo* or *Jukai*). This ceremony marks your desire to take refuge in the Three Jewels and be involved as a lay

practitioner of Sōtō Zen Buddhism. Additional information about taking refuge is available from the Southwind Sangha.

## *Suggested Readings for Newcomers*

*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