

Seven Practice Modalities

by Genjo Marinello

Our Great Vow is to care for all beings great and small, animate and inanimate. We support this vow through our various modes of practice at Chobo-Ji. Our zendo is a laboratory to investigate, manifest and actualize our deep nature that is naturally loving and compassionate. Our seven traditional modes of practice stimulate our capacity to be mindful and harmonious with our environment and to dissolve the artificial, egocentric barriers between so-called self and other. Traditional practice modalities make heavy use of what we call “noble silence”; in other words, we work hard to practice together beyond dependence on words or concepts and directly share our heart-mind activity through developing buji, (action that is no action), where our ordinary daily activities naturally manifest as enlightened activity. Our seven traditional practice modalities are as follows:

- 1) *Samadhi Chanting (sutras, commentaries, dharani and mantras).*
- 2) *Samadhi Seated Meditation (zazen).*
- 3) *Samadhi Harmonious Motion (bowing, walking meditation, opening and re-nesting bowls, tea ceremony).*
- 4) *Samadhi Work Meditation (sweeping, chopping vegetables, gardening, cleaning dishes, etc.).*
- 5) *Samadhi Heart-mind Exchange (one on one Dokusan, Councils, Dharma Dialogues and NVC as Spiritual Practice).*
- 6) *Samadhi Study (commandments, precepts, vows, sutras, koans, teishos, dharma talks, and book groups).*
- 7) *Samadhi Service (Beacon Emergency Action Network, 100 Meals Program, prison work and our associations with [Patacara Community Services](#) and the [Faith Action Network](#)).*

Beyond these modalities we also offer a limited residential practice for a few students, and have several committees associated with our Board of Directors where we must learn to communicate and work together for the common good and support of the sangha and the local neighborhood.

Note that our practice modalities all begin with the word “samadhi.” This is key! Samadhi is a state of being totally aware of the present moment; a one-pointedness of mind. I think of it this way: a deep harmonious awareness of whatever action we are engaged in. When we are fully present, the the artificial barriers between self and other fall away and we realize that our personal mind and sense of a separated self are an illusion. Zen practice is the practice of honing skillful means for samadhi. In samadhi bike riding, there is no bike, no rider, no time, and no destination. In samadhi playing of music, there is no instrument, no score, no composer, no musician, no audience, just harmonious music that transcends self and other. I think it is fair to say that up to now Chobo-Ji practice has been stronger in the first four modalities and perhaps weakest in samadhi heart-mind exchange because of our necessary and exemplary emphasis on the use of noble silence.

We have discovered as a community that we need to be more skillful at heart-mind exchange beyond the venue of the dokusan room. This is why I’m very pleased that collectively we are making a concerted effort to move beyond the exclusive emphasis on noble silence to develop skillful means for verbal samadhi heart-mind exchange. No matter what policies we develop to handle difficult situations that arise from time to time, we will find ourselves unprepared to effectively and efficiently sort through them without this effort.

This is not to say that we are abandoning the practice of noble silence where it best serves our foundational practice modalities (1-4), but we must continue to learn from our past and improve and expand the latter practice modalities (5-7) in order for Zen practice to be effective and relevant to this century. Please join me in this concerted effort to balance and expand our practice appropriately for the benefit of all beings.