

Sun Do News

INTERNATIONAL SUN DO ASSOCIATION - NON PROFIT ORGANIZATION
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Dear Members,

We aren't connected to Nature --

We Are Nature.

—BOUP SA BO WENDY LARMAN

Reflections on the Korea Trip

by Kim Hedegaard

Ever since I have been back from Korea, I keep daydreaming of ways that I could move my family there, so that they could experience the joy of living in an outstanding culture. I love my town, Duluth, MN, and I am very grateful for living here. However, in Duluth, all kinds of crime, including violent crime, has increased significantly in a short time. I feel somewhat unsafe often in my own neighborhood, and unsafe downtown. This is not so in Korea. There is a shockingly small amount of crime, and people are generally healthy and kind. I don't want to make this Sun Do Korea tour write-up

about the woes of our culture. I did come back with a newfound appreciation of America, as well. But this aspect of my trip, experiencing the culture, is definitely a lingering highlight of the trip for me. It makes me feel good to think about this thriving country across the world.

I suppose that meeting and having tea regularly with great Sun Do instructors and monks, including our very own favorite, was one of the outstanding qualities of the trip, as well, to put it very mildly. Attending the elaborate promotion ceremony

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Nora Downey, Master Kim, Christine Ucich, Steven Holmes and Kim Hedegaard under the cherry blossom trees in Korea.

Photo by Kim Hedegaard

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in Seoul was a great highlight, as well. The ceremony day was especially wonderful. We woke up and were taken to a hot springs. What an amazing way to start the day! After the ceremony, we walked a bit among the cherry blossoms, which lined the street as far as the eye could see. It had just rained and was very beautiful and fragrant.

The incredible food, without exception, the gorgeous land, the cherry blossoms, the friendly and warm people--all of this--and regular Sun Do practice, often at Master Kim's beautiful retreat center, helped to make this trip one that I hold very dear in my heart

Kim Hedegaard practices in Duluth, MN.

A Sun Do Journey (Excerpts from Steve's Black Belt Paper)

by Stephen Holmes

Sun Do was first introduced to me twenty-two years ago. I could not do many of the exercises. I labored heavily in my breathing. My body ached. I do remember the good feeling that the breathing gave me as I lay in near silent darkness. But I was not ready. I walked out of the center that day and forgot about Sun Do for several years --- almost.

In late 1995, I heard there was a practice at 7:30 pm Monday that fit our family's schedule. Once again, the stretching and warm-

should I say restart, I felt better after practice than before. This is a constant in my life now. I cannot remember coming out of a practice worse off than when I went in.

I discovered that my thirst for pure plain water picked up, and I actually enjoyed the act of drinking slowly and the taste of the water. My appetite also improved; food tasted better, and my body seemed to be telling me to eat good food, as I began to crave foods like soup, rice, and vegetables after practice. I still love fried

minutes in the morning. My daily grounding. A little bit of Sun Do is better than no Sun Do at all.

Yellow belt held the wildest surprises. But the changes had been happening for several years as the desire to be clear headed gradually took hold. But guess what? Have you ever felt as if you were being pulled off the ground while you were standing on your head? Pure weightlessness.

I began to feel that for me Sun Do was a lifetime journey, and I felt like a child who had taken his first small steps. I wandered (and wondered) with each new step. As spring turned to summer and then fall I found that I was beginning to accept the advancing darkness and the slowing down that would come with winter. Maybe Sun Do helped prepare me for this.



Steve Holmes romps in a field of flowers during the Korea trip

Photo courtesy of Christine Ucich

up proved to be too much for this fifty-year-old body. But the breathing was a quiet respite from a long day often filled with stress, much of it self-inflicted.

White Belt & Yellow Belt

I continued with one practice a week for several months, but slowly things started to happen. Actually, almost from the start, or

oysters though, and I'm not sure Sun Do will cure me of that.

The other important thing that happened was that I actually wanted to come to practice more. So during the first year I worked up from one to two and then three practices a week. I practiced with the group three times a week - four if I could - but I did a little bit every day even if only for five

Red Belt & Blue Belt

*Nothing in the world
is as soft and yielding as water.
Yet for dissolving the hard and inflexible,
Nothing can surpass it.*

*The soft overcomes the hard,
The gentle overcomes the rigid.
Everyone knows this is true,
But few can put it into practice.*

*Therefore the Master remains serene
in the midst of sorrow.*

*Evil cannot enter his heart.
Because he has given up helping,
He is people's greatest help.*

True words seem paradoxical.

Tao Te Ching #78

These were the words spoken at the end of Sun Do morning practice soon after the unforgettable events of 9-11-01 began unfolding.

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The Montpelier Sun Do Center that morning was a peaceful sanctuary with two doves named Heidemarie and Betsy breathing ever so silently nearby inside as the sounds of the outside world carried on--"serene in the midst of sorrow"-- the words from Heidemarie penetrating deep inside my belly that morning.

As I began the eighth set in the fall of 2001, one day after class I told Martin that for several moments during practice I had lost track of time and place. I did not know for how long. The people in the room seemed new to me as well. I told Martin I felt "out of my mind." Martin smiled and said: "Out of mind – this is good." It did feel good, this "out of mind." The feeling I suppose of the baby who wakes up each day to a new world, new faces, new places--no names. Judgment falls away; there is no place for it to grow.

The physical changes were only one dimension of this practice. My heart and spirit were lifted immeasurably through the experience of Sun Do. I experienced a range of feelings from fear of the unknown, to vulnerability, to wonder, to joy. I became aware of higher confidence in myself and trust in others.

I began to feel my heart opening in new ways. Physically I began to experience my heart pounding more than I had noticed in the past. I actually went to our family doctor for a physical and talked about this sensation. She could not find anything wrong with me.

I often felt tears welling up in my eyes, the feelings bubbling at or near the surface. Sometimes feelings of joy sometimes sadness. Sometimes a thrill of exhilarating excitement. Sometimes a deep



Steve receives his promotion certificate.

photo courtesy of Christine Ucich

sense of loss. Could a particular posture, like placing both hands on the chest, have come in the right place at the right time? I don't know, but I am eternally grateful for the experience. It remains one of the most memorable postures of my Sun Do journey.

At times both during and after practice I felt a playfulness come up within me: not the mischievous boy who had been angry at the world. This was more like a long-lost child who is full of wonder at the mysteries of the universe.

Blue belt was to be a serious challenge, as Master Kim had indicated to me at the close of the 2003 promotion. I began to experience the delicate balance between the breathing and the posture. I felt compelled to try to hold the posture longer, through the pain, to "push the envelope," but I could always hear the voice inside from earlier years of practice, "the breathing is most important." So I usually heard that voice and followed it.

Gray Belt

We begin practice in darkness from late October to March in Vermont. Sometimes the full moon greets us. Other mornings--23 degrees below zero. It is dark outside--and inside--for most of the practice in December and January. The dark and light interplay in the belly and in the third eye. Sometimes the eye is

black and sometimes white. It is deep in the black. It is deep in the white. Sometimes one is deeper than the other.

We recently released a flaming lantern to the night sky. Several of us had written on it things we were letting go of. I wrote the words judgment and self-denial. These have been with me for as long as I can remember, and are two of the hardest things to lose.

I continue to experience the joy of drinking water and the delight of Maria's unique cooking--nectar and ambrosia--which was the best I have ever experienced at the January 2013 retreat. These simple acts of drinking and eating have been, and continue to be, special. These are gifts to me from Sun Do practice, which has truly become my fourth meal.

I find myself listening more, in quiet acceptance of the way things are. Sun Do can surprise at any moment. My heart is open. My eyes awake. Hold on to center and breathe.

These days there is more of taking each moment as it comes. Simplicity--patience--compassion. I often simply ask myself: "Now, what is wrong with this moment?" The answer is nothing.

Steve Holmes practices in Montpelier.

Looking for the Connections

(Excerpts from Christine's Black Belt Paper)

by Christine Ucich

My first Sun Do class was typical enough. I stretched and breathed along with other students, thinking this was a great way to improve my flexibility for the martial arts classes I was taking. There was one very memorable moment that came at the end of the chant before the cool-down stretches. The room was completely quiet. I was sitting silently in half-lotus when the feeling came over me that I had come home. It was like a memory of something long ago that was sweet, yet very distant. From that day on, I continued to practice, sporadically at first, then with increasing vigor. I had no idea, at this early stage, of all the changes I would experience as a result of Sun Do's breath work and postures.

In the following months, I again experienced some pain during practice, but the pain slowly

became less and less annoying. Time after time, I made the conscious decision to sit and be present with the pain instead of avoiding it. I guess I decided to make friends with this pain, which was a part of me, and not to see it as an enemy at which to be afraid or angry. By the end of my first year of practice, I noticed the pain, especially in my lower-back, had lessened considerably!

Transitioning from White-Yellow to Level 3 Yellow Belt was not easy. I found the breathing difficult because of the longer holding time. During the holding period of the breath, it felt like the blood inside my arteries was pounding. It was very uncomfortable. At the same time, the postures were much more challenging for me. There were about four postures that I could only hold for a few seconds at a time, and afterward, I felt exhausted. I think there were

factors in my personal life adding stress to my practice as well. Emotionally, I felt like I was on a roller coaster ride. Sometimes I felt so awful, it was impossible for me to finish a practice. Sometimes I felt completely exhausted.

I was living in an apartment a couple blocks away from a public park when I started Red Belt. If the temperature was above 60 degrees, I enjoyed going to the park around 6:00 am to do my Sun Do practice in a spot below a crabapple tree where I could see the sun rising. Having a nice location in which to practice made me want to practice more often! So I started to practice three to four times a week, including a few double practices once in a while.

At about posture set 9 or 10, I started to feel very good and

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Christine Ucich, Kim Hedegaard and Nora Rose Downey at the promotion ceremony in Korea.

Photo courtesy of Christine Ucich

Promotions

Jin Ki Dan Boup
(Black Belt)

Stephen Holmes, Montpelier
Kim Hedegaard, Duluth
Christine Ucich, New Haven

Chook Ki Dan Boup
(Gray Belt)

Barbara McCandless, Lillooet

Won Ki Dan Boup
(Blue Belt)

Sheila Simpson, Lillooet

Instructor Trainee

Sharon Kamenka, Lillooet



Clay pots once used to ferment foods—such as kim chee—in Korea

photo courtesy of Christine Ucich

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had a definite sense of energy in my lower abdomen. It was such a great feeling! My energy level started going up, up, up!

Another interesting phenomenon I have noticed with more challenging postures is that I look forward to doing these types of postures more and more. It is like exploring your body and its energy at a deeper level. I remember when I first started to practice, I wasn't even connected to my body. Consequently, I definitely wasn't interested in exploring the parts that were stiff or painful. But over the years, I have slowly been establishing a mind-body connection so that now, it seems like areas that have pain are just parts of my being that haven't been explored yet.

At this point in my practice at Grey Belt, I am finishing the postures and entering into a state where I can be more meditative. I have been sitting with the Shambhala Buddhist group here in my city. They sit for about 25 minutes, then do 10 minutes of walking meditation, then sitting again. I have found then after I have been sitting for more than an hour, I experience deep vastness within my being. There is a feeling of expansion and lightness in my body, while at the

same time, I feel rooted through my lower tancheon. The energy orbits seem much easier to do in this state and sometimes I believe I see more light within my third-eye. I really like sitting, and I am eager to find out what type of practice I will do at the Black Belt level.

From the past 16 years, I have realized that unifying mind and body was necessary to get to this stage of the practice. Working with the body to clear physical and emotional blocks had not been easy for me at times, but now, I'm really glad I did it. In a meditative state, in which I work with only Qi and breath, I can see why postures might interfere with this type of work. To truly unite the energy of the three centers, there needs to be stillness within the body and mind so that the more powerful energy work can take place.

Christine Ucich practices in New Haven, CT.



Virginia Platt, Winter Retreat 2013.

Photo by Heidi Meyer-Bothling



Forest therapy trail at healing center and arboretum in Jagulsan, Korea.

photo courtesy of Christine Ucich



The Sun Do News welcomes stories, articles poems, photos and announcements. Please send your contribution to Betsy Forrest as an email attachment, if possible, at bforrest777@gmail.com.

Website

www.sundo.org

Visit the Sun Do website for information on Sun Do history, retreat dates and registration, and much more.

Sign up to receive Sun Do News via email at www.sundo.org/sundo-e-news/

You may also e-mail questions to us through the website.



Editor

Betsy Forrest

Newsletter Production

Heidi Meyer-Bothling

Retreat Schedule

Summer Retreat

July 26 - August 4 (9-day retreat)
July 30 - August 4 (5-day retreat)
August 1 - 4 (3-day retreat)
Sun Do Meditation Center
Barnet, VT

Registration:

Regular Retreats: \$95/day
\$80/day for 3- or 5-day packages
paid 2 weeks in advance.

For more information see <http://www.Sundo.org/retreats>.

Fall Retreat

Columbus Day Weekend
October 11 - 14 (Friday-Monday)
Sun Do Meditation Center
Barnet, VT

All retreats begin at 4:00 PM on the first day and end at noon on the last day.



Sun Do Centers

Main Center		West Hartford, CT...45 South Main Street, Suite 90, West Hartford, CT 06107-2402 (860) 523-5260 Coordinator: Anne Lee	
Meditation Center		Located in the town of Barnet, VT...Mailing Address: 1347 Kitchel Hill Road, St. Johnsbury, VT 05819 Phone: (802) 748-3667 (during summer) (802) 748-3371 (during winter) Coordinator: Virginia Platt	
USA	California	Greater LA, CA...(310) 586-1594, Hank Babcock San Francisco, CA...(510) 530-6938, Tae Won Kim	
	Florida	Tampa / St. Petersburg, FL...(727) 478-4211, Associate Master Tora Strawderman	
	Massachusetts	Northampton, MA...(860) 745-4154, Lucy Young Swansea, MA...(508) 674-1789, Associate Master Ron Catabia Worcester, MA...(978) 838-2439, Rich Kramer	
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	Nebraska	Omaha, NE...(402) 650-7715, Joel Dunning	
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