

ARCATA ZEN CENTER NEWSLETTER
February, 2001

WEEKLY SITTING

Sundays the AZC meets at 8:10 AM at the Northcoast Aikido Center, located off the public parking lot at 8th & F Streets, Arcata. Two half-hour periods (second sit at 8:50), with kinhin in-between, are followed by reading and discussion. Maylie Scott, Soto Zen teacher, generally gives dharma talks on the first and third Sundays of the month. On the second Sunday, the sangha shares poetry and other readings brought in by individuals. Weekday Sittings are held at Rin Shin-ji Temple (740 Park, Arcata). Monday through Friday mornings two 40-minute periods, with kinhin, begin at 5:30 AM (second sit at 6:20), followed by a short service. Thursday evenings two half-hour periods, with kinhin, begin at 7:30 PM (second sit at 8:10). Meditation Orientation, on Tuesday evenings from 7:30 to 8:30 PM, offers orientation to Zen meditation through instruction, guided meditation, and a question-and-answer period. This is open to both experienced students and beginners.

UPCOMING EVENTS
SESSHIN

There will be a retreat from February 21 through 24 at Rin Shin-ji Temple. Sesshin will begin at 7 PM Wednesday; daily sitting will be from 6:30 AM to 9 PM. Please consider sitting for the whole day; otherwise, come for a block of time. It is also possible to spend the night(s) at the Temple. Maylie will give a talk each day at approximately 10:50 AM. The retreat and meals will be in silence. Meals will be oryoki style; bring three nesting bowls, chopsticks, spoon, towel, and napkin. Both oryoki and sitting instruction will be available. There will be sign-up sheets for dokusan. The retreat will end 5 PM Saturday, followed by clean-up. On Sunday, the group will meet as usual at the Aikido Center at 8:10 AM; Maylie will give a talk at approximately 9 AM. The cost is \$20 per day; scholarships are available. Mail checks to: AZC, 740 Park Ave., Arcata 95521. For more info, and to help us estimate the quantity of food needed, please call Maylie. The next sesshin is April 18 through 21.

VIMALAKIRTI SUTRA CLASS

Steve Jenkins will offer a three-series class on the Vimalakirti Sutra, on February 28, March 7, and March 14. The classes will be at 740 Park Ave. at 7:30 PM. Fee is \$15.00 for the series. Steve is a professor in the HSU Department of Religion and also a member of the AZC. Call Maylie for questions.

ONE DAY RETREATS

On Saturday, March 10, a daylong retreat for newer as well as older sitters will be held at Rin Shin-ji from 9 AM to 5 PM. There will be two zazen periods in the morning, dharma talk, and discussion. The afternoon will include break, work period, and two or three sittings. There will be time for teacher interviews. Bring an oryoki set (three nesting bowls, chopsticks, spoon, towel, and napkin) for meals. Please call Maylie for information and if you plan to attend lunch to facilitate meal planning. The next one-day retreat will be May 12.

BUDDHA'S BIRTHDAY

There will be a ceremony at 11 AM on April 8 at Rin Shin-ji Temple followed by a potluck to celebrate the anniversary of our new zendo as well as Buddha's birthday. All are invited.

BIG FLAT RETREAT

Make your reservation now for the annual Big Flat retreat, June 7 through 11. We will meet at Rin Shin-ji on June 7 to carpool for the two hour drive. We will hike in silence 8.5 miles along the beach in the King Range Wilderness to the homestead at Big Flat, returning by the same route June 11. Hiking time averages 5-6 hours. We will observe silence during sesshin. Terrain varies from rock rubble to packed and loose sand, with stream crossings and large rocks to negotiate. The weather in early June is variable - headwinds and rain are possible and days can be foggy, damp, and cool. As with any wilderness hike, it is important that participants be confident in their ability and be prepared for the terrain and distances involved.

Our gear will be brought in by plane, so daypacks need carry only sack lunch, drinking water, jacket/rain gear, and personal items. Pack for this trip as you would for a backpacking trip; transport space is limited so consolidate your gear. If you need an equipment list, call Suzanne. We won't be bringing zafus or zabutons on the plane; if you want to use a zafu during sesshin, carry one in in your daypack. Sleeping bags and pillows are available at Big Flat to serve as supports and pads. There are also some tents on-site; those tents we do bring must be small/backpack tents. Details will be worked out with those who sign up.

During our stay at Big Flat a regular sesshin schedule will be followed. We will have use of the kitchen, zendo, sauna, and hot tub. We will be sleeping in tents near the house. All jobs will be shared. Fees reflect the cost of food and

transportation plus a per person charge for the use of the facilities at Big Flat. We estimate a total cost of approximately \$150 per person. Partial scholarships may be arranged. Call Maylie with your reservation as soon as possible as space is limited. Please also send a \$60 deposit to the AZC, 740 Park Ave., Arcata CA 95521. Bring checkbooks or cash on June 7 so we can settle the balance. Call Maylie with questions.

MAYLIE'S TALK

Empty of Self

An ancient Buddhist simile suggests that we can think of ourselves as a handful of beads persistently imagining ourselves into necklaces. This is the "self habit." Sometimes the necklace is lovely - "Somebody said something nice about me and yes..." - but other times the necklace is heavy and hot and burns the skin with its self judgment or anger or obsession. We usually don't notice the fact that we are the makers of the necklaces until we begin to sit zazen.

Recently a group of thirteen HSU students participated in a "Zen Workshop" which actually was a mild day and a half sesshin. Only one of them had ever meditated before. It was a significant adventure of stepping out into the unknown and also a significant challenge. After the dharma talk, we went around the room and each person spoke. The necklaces were very heavy. Resistance was forceful; the repeated sittings and the attention to details of form seemed controlling and unreasonable. Why sit through such physical suffering? Although many thought about leaving, none did. By the end of the day there was much more awareness of the transitory nature of experience; that what was nearly unbearable was abruptly forgotten or subsumed by another mind state. An agonizing thirty minutes might, for no reason, be followed by one with considerable ease.

We chanted the Heart Sutra. "Form is emptiness, emptiness form." The solidity of experience was challenged and what began to come up were more perceptions of necklaces of stubbornness, anger and desire for control and anxiety. One person said he looked out the window and saw a tree, but caught some inner distance between his eye and the tree, as if he were making the tree up. "All dharmas are marked by emptiness."

Sitting zazen offers us the opportunity of watching the activity of presenting a "self" to ourselves. One bead thought arises and within the very breath there is a necklace, with its own history and mood and desires. A Zen saying says, "Pick up the corner and the whole piece is there." We may get lost for a while, but sooner or later (thanks to impermanence) the mind construction wears out and we recall our intention of returning to the present moment. "Oh yes. I am not a necklace, I'm just a handful of beads" and we wait for the next one. If we are suffering we begin to find that this return is where comfort, even a subtle sort of pleasure lies.

Sitting zazen this way is actually very interesting; watching the play of mind and, at the same time, appreciating the space out of which the beads come. The interest in, the curiosity about the process, brings us into greater intimacy with our breath by breath experience. Samadhi, the experience of wholeness, begins to arise. Deeper than understanding, we begin to Real-ize "All dharmas are marked with emptiness." What is the emptiness out of which everything arises?

The deep experience of anatta, of "no self," is NOT nothing. It is a fluid activity that does not exclude nor get stuck in preferences or aversions. An element of pleasure - subtle or strong - begins to arise as we find freedom in the discipline of allowing ourselves to just be beads - to just be who we are, complete, moment by moment. When we are not working on necklaces, we can just appreciate the beads - each one a fresh teaching to respond, but not react to. Even if the situation is difficult, there is openness and a bedrock kindness. The heart is not obstructed.

ACTIVITIES

PRACTICE COMMITTEE

Items discussed at the February 4 meeting included, the Rin Shin-ji Temple sign, the use of the talking stick, acquiring cooking utensils, and various practice issues such as timing and a new clock for the porch of the Temple. Further interest was expressed in the Social Action Committee. A Temple archivist is still needed, and a picture-taker (complete with camera) for those big events.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

At the February 7 meeting, the financial report for 2000 was presented and ways of improving financial informational flow were discussed. The Board positions were divvied up: Lynda McDevitt, President; Denis Shayne, Vice President; Geoffrey Smith, Secretary; and Gordy Anderson, Treasurer. Gordy will present a draft budget for 2001 at the next meeting and Dennis will take care of changing the name of the group from AZG to AZC with the State. The next meeting will be at 10:30 AM on Sunday, March 18.

ed's note: complete minutes for these meetings are available Sundays at the Aikido Center; practice committee meetings are held at 11 AM the first Sunday of the month at Maylie's, board meetings the fourth Wednesday at 7:30 PM - all are welcome to attend.

SOCIAL ACTION COMMITTEE

Members of the social action committee attended a meeting at the N.E.C. on January 9 to discuss strategies of support for the California Wild Heritage Campaign. The next wilderness planning meeting is at Sacred Grounds on Tuesday, February 20, at 2 PM. We will be taking stock of the letter writing campaign and start to plan spring and summer hikes into some of our local proposed wilderness areas.

GARDEN NEWS

Our gardener, Dennis Tuite, has drawn up a beautiful plan for landscaping around the zendo. We'll need to schedule a work day with five able bodies to put in a small retaining wall, sculpt a dry stream bed, and lay a path. This day could be a Friday or a Monday, or (after March 16) a Saturday from 9-5. Lunch included. Let Maylie know if you are interested and she will schedule it.

LIBRARY NEWS

A number of tapes of Maylie's talks are now available to be signed out of the AZC library. Please be sure to bring materials back in a timely manner for others to share.

WEBSITE

The AZC website is now up - check us out. Our address is arcatazencenter.org/home/

SANGHA FRIENDS

Sangha member Marilyn Sterling is looking for someone to share her home.

NEXT NEWSLETTER

The next newsletter deadline is May 7. Mail your practice announcements, articles, reflections &/or poetry to Suzanne

DATES TO REMEMBER

FEBRUARY:	20	Wilderness Planning Meeting (see Social Action Committee news)
	28	Vimalakirti Sutra Class Begins
MARCH:	10	One-day Retreat
APRIL:	8	Buddha's Birthday & Zendo Anniversary Potluck
	18-21	Three-day sesshin
MAY:	12	One-day Retreat
	7	Next Newsletter Deadline
JUNE:	7-11	Big Flat retreat - Get your reservation in ASAP

Volunteer Opportunities:

Photographer
Temple Archivist
Garden workers
(build a path, a wall, a dry stream bed)