

ARCATA ZEN GROUP NEWSLETTER  
February, 1998

UPCOMING EVENTS

WEEKLY SITTING

The AZG meets at 8:10 AM Sundays at the Northcoast Aikido Center, located in the alley between F & G, 8th & 9th streets off the Arcata Plaza. Everyone is welcome.

MARCH SESSHIN

There will be a retreat with Maylie Scott from 7 PM March 11 through Saturday March 14 at Lloyd Fulton's home on West End road. (Maps are available on the book table at Sunday sittings, or call Monique.) Daily sitting will be from 6:30 AM to 9 PM.; Maylie will give a talk each day at approximately 10:50 AM. On Saturday, the retreat will end at 5 PM, followed by clean-up and a pot-luck at 6 PM. The main course for the pot-luck will be prepared by retreatants. Those who have been unable to participate in the sesshin are welcome to the potluck - please bring a side dish or something to drink. Sesshin meals will be orioki style; bring three nesting bowls, chopsticks, spoon, towel, and napkin. Also bring bedding and toiletries if you plan to stay overnight. 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.

Please fill out and return the reservation form by March 8 to help us estimate the quantity of food needed for each meal. The retreat and meals will be in silence. Both orioki and sitting instruction will be available. The cost of the sesshin is \$10 a day and, as always, scholarships are available. For more information call Lynda or Quynh.

EXTENDED PRACTICE PERIOD

NOTE FROM MAYLIE

In Buddha's time when the monsoon rains began, Buddha's wandering disciples gathered together for intensified Sangha practice. The AZG continues this custom today amid California rains with other sanghas all over the world. Practice period is an opportunity to intensify our effort for a limited period of time and to offer this effort to the sangha. In monasteries, the hours of zazen are extended and there are more sesshins.

In lay practice, we commit to a sitting practice schedule that stretches us and is also do-able. In this way we can renew intention and avoid ruts. We also strengthen our intention to practice throughout the day - eating, walking, driving, working, speaking, etc. - so that we can have some experience of the world as monastery. Sharing these different practices is a way of encouraging ourselves and others. Each person makes a commitment. Nobody else monitors that commitment, but its energy is felt. A smallish group signed up for the AZG's first practice period, and then quite a few more joined in as the positive energy became apparent.

"I am coming to feel that Buddha Sangha, and by that I mean zendo membership, is a cadre of change. It is a community of people secure in their vision of universal Sangha, grounded in their personal sanctuary, who seek to transmute the poisons of the world in organized and coherent ways." (Encouraging Words by Robert Aitken)

-- Maylie

Our extended practice period is in the planning stage. There will be a meeting at Lloyd's at 7:30 PM March 11 to discuss the form for this practice. In the past, participants agreed to sit together once a week in addition to Sundays, to come in early (6:00 AM) once a month prior to the regular Sunday sit, and to share their wayseeking-mind experiences. There was also a general commitment to focus more on individual practice.

SATURDAY SESSHIN

On the second Saturday of every other month (alternating with Maylie's visits and sesshin), a daylong sit is held at Gael's house from 9 AM to 5 PM. The next Saturday sesshin is scheduled for April 11. Please bring a bag lunch and sitting equipment. For more information, call Gael.

JUNE MEDITATION with ZEN MASTER DON GILBERT

Paula Yoon is organizing a morning of meditation, focusing on Compassion, with Reverend Don Gilbert for June 21. A potluck lunch will follow. More information will be available in April as plans develop. Please call Paula if you are interested.

LETTERS ETC.

PAIN CITY

Gael Hodgkins

“How strange are the back streets of Pain City.” - Rainer Maria Rilke

When I was in graduate school I learned two methods of doing textual analysis, qualitative and quantitative. Pain in the body, pain in the feelings, in the mind, or in consciousness is hard to either qualify or quantify, but Mark P. in his “Notes on the September Sesshin” (Newsletter of October 1997) gave both types of analysis a try. To convey the quality of pain, he used the words paroxysms, intense, excruciating, screaming, and finally passing out. The quantity of pain was communicated by the number of times the word was used--seven times in seven paragraphs!

When I first read Mark’s analysis of his experiences, I quite naturally asked myself, “Gee, how will I be able to sit with Mark knowing he is in so much pain?” Another way of pondering this question is what is right view and right intention toward Mark as we sit together in the same room, sometimes zabuton to zabuton or at meals zafu or zafu or in kinhin bonnet to tail (bumper to bumper in Americanese). The next thought that naturally arose in my mind was, “What about all those I’m sitting with whose pain I know little about?” How am I to sit with them?

It was after Mark’s excruciating pain sesshin that I experienced the pneumonia sesshin; the question now was how I was to live with my own pain. Actually I experienced that sesshin at home on my couch in front of a woodstove fire so qualitatively the pain was more comfortable than Mark’s. But my old and faithful friend, Depression, had hopped on the back of the pneumonia bug, and so I lay on my couch wondering again about the relationship between depression and right view and right intention and right effort. Meditation--right or wrong--seemed meaningless.

Two questions were being put to my body-feelings-mind-consciousness: how to accept my own pain and how to be with others in theirs. Even in a hundred thousand million kalpas, these questions are unanswerable, but the Chinese expression “pu erh” or sometimes “wu erh”--not two--became a way of working with them. Shunryu Suzuki used the term in Zen Mind Beginner’s Mind. Referring to the relationship between body and mind, he said, “This is the most important teaching: not two and not one.” Seng-ts’an (d. 606 c.e.) used it in “On Trust in the Mind/Heart”:

The Dharma-realm of true actuality  
harbors neither self nor other.  
To reach accord with it at once,  
just say, “Not two!”

Rainer Maria Rilke expressed familiarity with the concept in his Tenth Elegy of Duino Elegies. Moving from a time to a space metaphor, he suggested that we are always trying to wriggle out of our pain, searching for a time when it will end. Might it be wiser to consider our pain a resting place, a hearth, a refuge into which we can settle. He wrote:

How we squander our sorrows  
gazing beyond them  
into the sad  
wastes of duration  
to see if maybe  
they have a limit.  
But they are  
our winter foliage  
our dark evergreens  
one of the seasons  
of our secret year  
--and not only a season  
they are situation,  
settlement, lair,  
soil, home.

Self and pain, self and depression, self and pneumonia--pu erh, not two.

When I read Dogen’s “Instruction for the Tenzo” with the question of others’ pain in mind, the whole essay became a reflection on the subject; it became “Instruction for Doing Zazen with Those in Pain.” That instruction would include the following: Shut your eyes and count the number who are present [count in the sense of include]. Also count those in their own quarters, in the infirmary, in the entry hall, or out for the day, and then everyone else. You must count them carefully. Practice in such a way that others come and abide in your mind, and your mind returns and abides in others, all through the day and night. Take care of others as if they were your own eyes. Take the same care for all, raw or cooked. “Great mind” is a mind like a great mountain or a great ocean. It does not have any partiality or exclusivity.

Pu erh--not two: my mind and “Great mind,” self and paroxysms of intense radiating pain,” self and depression, self and anger, self and Maylie, self and Mark, self and sangha. The next time you find yourself in Pain City or in the

“fields of sadness in bloom” with “tall tear trees” and “herds of grief,” read Rilke’s Tenth Elegy or maybe just the following will do:

Oh you nights  
that I grieved through  
    how much you will  
        mean to me then.  
Disconsolate sisters  
    why didn’t I kneel  
        more fully  
to accept you  
    and lose myself more  
        in your loosened hair?

End of the Long Cycle

- the taste of Lychee fruit

Mark P.

A bird stirs  
in the forest  
in the tomb  
it is quiet  
the whisper of the ground  
and the leaves  
in slow respiration  
blend into  
no sound

When  
the wind picks up  
from nowhere  
it blows  
a wild rushing  
stream of impulses  
through the feet, legs, torso  
nose, tongue  
body mind

Uprooting  
the earliest trace  
of memory  
from the round world  
and blowing it  
through the rusty gate

- for Gael

Buddhism in the News:

As an example of engaged Buddhism, Gael sent along an article from the January 1, 1998 New York Times, concerning the 1.3 million chickens killed in Hong Kong, which noted that 80 Buddhist monks and nuns prayed and meditated for 7 days “to speed the birds souls toward reincarnation.” She included this quote from Rilke:

It’s time, though:  
how strange are the back streets  
of Pain City.

...

Alone, he goes off climbing  
into the mountains  
of primal Pain.

And not even  
his footstep  
rings from this soundless fate.

From the Jan. 16 SF Chronicle:

Former Bangkok governor Chamlong Srimnuang, a strict Buddhist, believes more people could weather the [economic] crisis if they followed his austere example: By buying rice in bulk, growing vegetables on a small plot and doing without consumer goods, he keeps monthly expenses to about \$15.

## CURRENT AZG DISCUSSIONS

### FOLLOW-UP ON MEMBERSHIP/NEWSLETTER

In the last newsletter, we sent out cards asking if you want to become a member of the AZG or simply receive the newsletter. Approximately 30 people have responded; 20 want to be members and 10 just want to get the newsletter. This reduces our mailing list by 2/3. If you did not reply and want to, please do so as soon as possible; people who do not reply by April 5 will be removed from the mailing list. If you need a card, they are available on the book table on Sundays or by calling Monique. Sitings and other AZG events remain open to anyone who wishes to participate.

### INVESTORS' GROUP UPDATE

Bill, Gael, Mark, and Pete met with Realtor Betty Dobkin to familiarize her with the needs and unique requirements of the AZG. Issues raised included financial, AZG use, parking, permitting and zoning, legal status, need for rental space, location, and future needs. For her, the most difficult issue was that groups of people stay over several nights regularly throughout the year. She felt this presented zoning problems; she will research zoning specifics unique to AZG use. Other problems associated with this use were congestion (traffic/parking) and public response.

The investors' group has looked at several properties, most recently a place on 10th at O in Arcata. They will be scheduling a meeting with Betty and the planning department to discuss various issues.

### PRACTICE COMMITTEE

There is a practice committee meeting March 1 to discuss the organizational structure of the AZG, specifically the relationship between and the parameters of the Board of Directors and the Practice committee. Everyone is welcome; if you can't come and want to be sure the group has your input, please send a letter or e-mail to be shared at the meeting.

A major issue discussed in the last three meetings was the revision of the Bylaws, specifically the functioning of the Board of Directors and the relationship between the Board and the Practice committee. An underlying group polarity was given voice: one position wanting to move directly on to meet our new legal incorporation requirements (an immediate board election, adoption of current bylaws, etc.), while the other position favored a slower process which would research and design organizational forms specific to the needs and desires of the AZG. It was decided to do the homework necessary to highlight and describe issues requiring resolution, i.e., the future board's structure and size, its decision making process, the development of working guidelines to augment the bylaws, the question of board liability, etc. It was proposed that the Practice committee have an advisory capacity to the board and continue to oversee practice issues. These proposals were made: a) the Board, which has final power by law, will create the Practice Committee through inclusion in the bylaws and will give them full authority around issues of practice; and b) a member of Practice committee would have a permanent position on the Board.

Other issues discussed included bowing in sync, the Mountains and Rivers sesshin, the role of shikas in welcoming new people, banking procedures, renting the space at NCC, and the beginner's handbook.

Thank you:

Although we are still waiting for federal approval of our non-profit incorporation, the state has approved our Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws. We would like to thank Richard Platz for all the work he put into drafting these documents for us. Thanks, Richard, for all your help.

### NEXT NEWSLETTER

The next newsletter deadline is APRIL 5. Mail your comments, letters, articles, announcements, &/or zen poetry and reflections to Suzanne Please note on your enclosure that it is for inclusion in the newsletter.

### EDITOR'S NOTES

Today's Favorite Zen Quote: I yam what I yam. -- Popeye  
That's all, Folks!