

ARCATA ZEN GROUP NEWSLETTER
February, 1999

SITTING & SESSHIN SCHEDULES

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. There are two half-hour sittings with a kinhin in between; reading and discussion follow. On the first Sunday of the month, the sangha shares poetry and other readings brought in by individuals. Weekday sittings are held at Gael Hodgkins' house on Tuesday mornings at 9:15 AM and Wednesday evenings at 7:15 PM, through June. There are two half-hour sittings with kinhin. Please note there will be sitting during the week of March 21. If you have any questions, call Gael. Everyone is welcome.

MARCH SESSHIN

There will be a retreat with Maylie Scott from the 10th through the 13th in Maylie's new home at 740 Park Avenue, off Fickle Hill Road in Arcata, beginning at 7 PM Wednesday; daily sitting will be from 6:30 AM to 9 PM. [Maps are available on the book table at Sunday sittings, or call Suzanne.] Maylie will give a talk each day at 10:50 AM. The retreat and meals will be in silence. Sesshin meals will be oryoki style; please bring your own oryoki set (three nesting bowls, chopsticks, spoon, towel, and napkin). Thanks to Diana Lynn, we have three oryoki sets for guests. Both oryoki and sitting instruction will be available. There will be sign-up sheets for the jobs at sesshin as well as for dokusan. On Saturday, the retreat will end at 5 PM. (There will not be a potluck dinner after sesshin, although people may gather to go out for dinner after 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 8:50 AM.

Please fill out and return the reservation form by March 5 to help us estimate the quantity of food needed for each meal. The cost of the sesshin is \$10 a day; as always, scholarships are available. Please note that parking near the house is limited (see - and save - enclosed map); additional parking is available on Fickle Hill Road. For more information call Ken or Pete.

SATURDAY SIT

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 sit is scheduled for April 10. Bring a bag lunch and sitting equipment. Please call Gael if you are planning to attend and/or for more information.

JULY SESSHIN has been moved to the 28th through the 31st.

LETTERS

NOTE FROM MAYLIE

Dear Friends,

The January retreat was an unforgettable beginning. Sitting, eating, working, meeting together in the new Park Ave. property, taking in all the new energy, had for me the quality of a dream. Can it be true? It seems to be. So how do we protect this beginning, nourish it and to allow the space for the group to come into its most fully articulated body. The excitement, the sweetness is a little like holding my six week old granddaughter, the small, entirely open face that changes week by week.

How to just be with beginning. To appreciate this new, constellation of group effort. Not to load it too quickly with plans, nor to slump back into mere repetition. How to keep balance in the midst of excitements, anxieties, and diversity of views.

I'm really grateful for all of our history together, hours of zazen, the many sesshin and committee and group meetings and trips and, in the past couple of years, the property-seeking excursions. We have earned the base of trust and know-how that made the process of selection and purchase of the property flow easily.

I deeply appreciate the group energy and commitment to this new project. Having a common practice and work focus will strengthen our purpose and make us more available to the wider community. I think we all felt this at the retreat. As I sat in what will be the Community Room, my heart warmed with the question, is it mine? is it ours? As the days went by and we settled in, working in and outside even in the rain, the question settled itself.

This is who we are, our different hands and minds and hearts, clarifying our intention to awaken together amongst ourselves and with all beings. Bodhi Svaha. May it be so.

After a Visit with the Primates at the San Francisco Zoological Gardens
on August 27, 1998
Gael Hodgkins

“The path of Zen Guitar is like scaling a wall with no visible top.”

not

The path is like a climb down
Climb down from your high horse
Get down on the cushion
Descend from the tree top into the roots and rhizome of your life
Ground yourself.

Get out of your head
Even beneath your heart.

Descend like the Orang utan (person of the forest) from its seat
in the sky

Swing low
Descend the ladder
Descend rung by rung
Descend branch by branch
Come home to the earth, the ground
Swing down the wire cage
Lope, loop down the inner way

Mix with the lowlands
Lower yourself
Be of this earth.

Dogen says:

Earth-ground
Mind-ground
Treasure-ground.

An Impression: The January 1999 Sesshin
Dennis Shayne

A milestone quietly passed in January. Marked by the chime of a solitary bell and the patter of raindrops on the pavement outside, it marked the first retreat of the Arcata Zen Group in what promises to be a site for a permanent zendo. Up to 30 people squeezed into a room that could comfortably accommodate 10 to 12 people to sit, to eat, and to work together.

In some ways it was all new - a new sitting environment, new meal arrangements, new working situations, and, even in the midst of it all, new relationships with our neighbors. Still, everything was far from new - the sangha gathering together to solve the problems of our collective life and each one of us doing what we could to address the problems of our individual lives in the context of all this. The enthusiasm and hope that accompanied it all was palpable. Together, the sangha grew. Together, we turned problems into opportunities.

From my own perspective, it was a moment-by-moment experience of anxiety that began many days earlier. As sesshin organizer, I fretted over the upcoming 3 days - would there be enough room for sitting, how would we address the eating accommodations, and, over and over again, were my calculations as to quantities of food for meal preparations adequate? Would the whole thing collapse because of my fantasy that I could handle the overwhelming requirements of the job for which I had volunteered? Only last night, long after the retreat was concluded, did I discover the answer. In “Zen Mind, Beginner’s Mind,” Suzuki Roshi says, “To live in the realm of Buddha nature means to die as a small being, moment by moment. When we lose our balance we die, but at the same time we also develop ourselves, we grow.” I now realize that I was losing my balance and dying, moment by moment, but I was also growing. Each one of us who was there, I’m sure, lost his balance and died a little and we all grew. I discovered that every time I was set to fall down, someone was there to pick me up, dust me off and point me in the appropriate direction. From trucking zafus and zabutons in, to gathering all the cooking implements together, to taking on cooking and other work duties, to arranging flowers at the last moment, the sangha did it all. All I had to do was sit. And I did.

I am reminded of something Pete said at the conclusion of our retreat; that in following his breath, he had finally reached "10." In some ways, the sangha also seemed to make it to "10." And when we did, we exhaled and started again at One.

Gassho!

I spent the day with Death . . .
Suzanne M.

I spent the day with Death
snuggled warm inside my lungs,
leaving no room for Breath,
no place where I belonged;

only Death and Breath to focus on,
only this moment and the next,
just the rise and fall of my chest
and wondering what went wrong.

I've claimed I'd settled up with Death,
no issues left there for me.
Then why this nervous queasiness,
this panicky need to be?

Shaking, I clutch my warm teacup
as horrifying thoughts flood in:
My children need me - I need them -
I want to see them grow up.
I sound the uselessness of need,
of grasping after want;
plump as I am, my face is gaunt.
Thirty years of sitting, indeed!

Mature reflection can't begin
to show us true nature;
one day like this and I am sure
Death and Breath are kin.

SANGHA FRIENDS

Erin Anderson will be moving to Port Townsend, Washington and is having a Bon Voyage celebration Sunday, February 28 from 4 - 7 PM at the Unitarian Fellowship in Bayside. The Arcata Interfaith Gospel Choir and Good Company will be entertaining. Please bring a potluck item and a picture of yourself for Erin's album.

CURRENT AZG DISCUSSIONS

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

January 19: The Board met with Maylie; most of the meeting was dedicated to the garage remodel. Mark put forth some proposals based on different alternatives. Rob offered to head up the project using volunteers where possible and paid help where necessary. Maylie asked that a feng shui practitioner look at the garage and surroundings to guide us to the best possible features of the building and property. She also wants to honor Bill's request to use environmentally friendly materials.

February 6: The Board established the fourth Wednesday of each month at 7:30PM as our official meeting time. Our next two meetings will be February 24 and March 24. Board meetings will be held at Arcata Health Alliance, 739 Tenth St., Arcata; everyone is welcome to attend.

Lynda and Monique are working on a letter to sangha members about ways people can support the garage remodel project. It was agreed to pay Rob \$15/hour for his time on the garage project. Gordy offered to design the storage building. ed's note: complete minutes are available on the library table Sunday morning or from Pete.

PRACTICE COMMITTEE

The Practice Committee is reorganizing and looking for new (and old) members. At the January meeting, guidelines for membership were established and the PC job description was expanded and clarified. Here's an idea of what the PC is all about:

Guidelines: The Practice Committee is comprised of an unspecified number of voting members who are willing to commit to a term of one year. If a member cannot attend a meeting, he/she will notify someone on the committee. If there are unexplained absences at two or more meetings, that person ceases to be a member. Anyone is welcome to participate in PC meetings but only members will vote. New members may join the PC at any time.

Job Description: The Practice Committee coordinates all functions of the AZG except financial affairs and teaching responsibilities. These functions include:

Maintain regular dialog with the teacher and with members who provide resources and information concerning the AZG (newsletter, inquiries to the POBox, phone contacts, etc.), including the Board of Directors

Coordinate set-up and leadership of Sunday morning zazen; coordinate additional sitting times

Coordinate bi-monthly sesshin and other sangha events

Meet at least once a month to review current needs and business of the sangha

Explore AZG groundwork issues such as: incorporation, by-laws, membership definition, etc.

Work with the teacher to identify and set up opportunities for extending and deepening practice. Examples: extended practice period, Dharma study group, Base group.

Work with the teacher and the sangha to develop introductory instruction and information. The PC will provide information to newcomers about opportunities for involvement, including making minutes of meetings available and encouraging participation in the various sangha groups.

PC members should be willing to take on specific job assignments such as organizing library materials, facilitating meetings, welcoming newcomers after reading/discussion, etc.

Some duties of the PC are not easily categorized but may range from choosing a gift for the teacher to supporting a sangha member in need.

A form is included in this issue of the newsletter to be filled out by those who wish to join the PC. Please fill out the form and bring it with you to the next PC meeting, 11AM March 14 at Northcountry Clinic, or mail it if you cannot attend the meeting. Since new members can sign up at any time, forms will be available throughout the year either on the library table at Sunday zazen or by calling Suzanne. PC meetings are held either on the first Sunday of the month or, when Maylie is in town, after her talk on Sunday. All meetings are at Northcountry Clinic and begin at 11 AM. Please consider becoming a member.

Other issues recently discussed by the PC included: Revising the parking map to reflect changes; Gael volunteered a Buddha for Maylie's; continued rental of the Northcountry Clinic room for another year; beginning and ending each meeting with meditation; the quality of after-zazen discussion; the sangha's relationship to photographers and observers; and late comers at Sunday zazen, which is to be the topic for the next meeting.
ed's note: complete minutes are available from Pete.

GARAGE COMMITTEE

The Mother of All Meetings . . .
Mark P.

A group of volunteers has been meeting to plan and begin work on the remodeling of Maylie's garage. Our goal is to create a space where we can all sit together for sesshin and for weekday zazen. If things move along with the building permit process and with selection of building materials, we hope to complete the project by August 1 of this year. So far, we have gathered input from the sangha on design and taken our initial plans to the Board of Directors for feedback and approval. Rob Roversi has been hired by the board as our work leader and he has submitted plans to the building department. I will continue to coordinate volunteer involvement.

One of the issues that has come up in our discussions is how to select building materials that sustain the environment. Bill Devall has suggested the use of Certified Sustainable lumber (lumber that is cut according to the most ecologically-sensitive timber harvest practices). Other approaches have been suggested, such as using recycled lumber and alternatives to wood products. We will meet at 11 AM Sunday February 28 at Northcountry Clinic to discuss our ethical goals and to consider alternatives, tradeoffs, costs, and availability of materials.

I want to thank the people who have been coming to the meetings and work days for the last couple of months: Gordy, Jane, Pete, Diana, Rob, John, Dennis, Bill, Maylie, Suzanne, and the BoD. Some of you have put in many hours and all of you have given generously - gassho.

If anyone is interested in joining us on a workday, please call me.

. . . And the Mother of Further Complications:
upon discussing my chemical sensitivities with the Garage Committee

Suzanne M.

Okay. So I come from Brooklyn where guilt trips are among the ultimate forms of relating - and I really didn't mean to lay one on the Garage Committee (yeah, well, I did mention the First Grave Precept, and I did start gasping for breath when the aftershaves, deodorants, carpets, and whoall knows what else started permeating my inner airspace) but anyway I asked everybody if, in creating this cool new place to sit, they could keep in mind using low- or non-toxic materials in the remodel and to provide a sort of ventilation bubble for me - and it quickly became apparent (after we moved outside and I started breathing again) that we had entered an area of major non-familiarity for all concerned so Rob, bless his heart, asked me to look into what's available, especially insulation and stuff, and that's what I've been doing, with a healthy chunk of support from both Mark and Rob who's designed a window corner just for me and who's been patiently explaining all manner of construction info (hey, I'm gettin' an education here!) as I do my research and sniff toxic substances at the local lumber yards and I just wanted to say thanks to everyone for making this one of the priorities as we march along the Way together, Dharma tools slung over our shoulders, whistling as we work . . .

Fundraising Teaser!

Coming soon to your mail box . . . an important request for your time and/or money donations for the garage renovation. Please give it your full consideration.

NEXT NEWSLETTER

The next newsletter deadline is April 5. Mail your comments, letters, articles, announcements, reflections &/or zen poetry to Suzanne at the above address or e-mail her. Please note on your enclosure that it is for inclusion in the newsletter. Unless you indicate otherwise, some submissions may be edited.

EDITOR'S NOTES

A monk asked, "What is the treasure in the bag?"
The master replied, "Keep your mouth closed."

Chao-chou, from
The Roaring Stream

RESERVATION FORM FOR MARCH SESSHIN

Return by March 5

NAME

PHONE

ADDRESS

What meals do you plan to attend? (Please circle)

Thursday: Breakfast Lunch Dinner

Friday: Breakfast Lunch Dinner

Saturday: Breakfast Lunch

Do you need a ride? yes no Can you provide a ride? yes no

Do you need a scholarship? yes no If yes, partial \$ full

Make checks payable to: Arcata Zen Group

- - - - - CUT HERE - - - - -

PRACTICE COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP SIGN-UP FORM

Bring with you to the next PC meeting

DATE

NAME

PHONE

ADDRESS

DATES TO REMEMBER

- | | | |
|-----------|-------|---|
| FEBRUARY: | 24 | - Board of Directors Meeting |
| | 28 | - Garage Committee Meeting (see enclosed article) |
| MARCH: | 5 | - Return Sesshin Reservation Form |
| | 10-13 | - Sesshin |
| | 14 | - Practice Committee Meeting/Membership Forms Due |
| | 24 | - Board of Directors Meeting |
| APRIL: | 5 | - Next Newsletter Deadline |
| | 10 | - Saturday Sit (call before attending) |

CHECK INSIDE FOR THE REAL SKINNY ON MEETINGS, ISSUES, AND OTHER EXCITING AZG NEWS!