

ARCATA ZEN GROUP NEWSLETTER
July 1997

SANGHA FAMILY PICNIC

The First Annual AZG Sangha Family Picnic will be held Sunday, August 24, 11:am promptly in Arcata).

VERY LOW RESPONSE RATE TO PLEDGE SURVEY

Paul Dillon

Less than 25% of the individuals on the AZG mailing list responded to the pledge survey sent out with the last newsletter. Only 15 persons responded to the query that was intended to gauge AZG's financial capability to establish a permanent home for regular sitting, sesshin, and other activities. As shown in the table, the number of respondents and the monthly amount they would pledge differed for each of the three alternatives.

If one can read anything into such a small number of responses, a few trends can be detected. The majority favor either renting or buying a property as opposed to sticking with the status quo. Unfortunately, the maximum amount pledged would probably not rent anything that would be useful to the group. The continuity of pledges over time is also problematic. Only six respondents, all of whom favored buying, saw themselves still contributing throughout a period of five years. It might be that the majority of AZG members, at least of those who responded to the survey, see themselves as transitory in the area and feel unsure of their future several years from now. Beyond any interpretations, however, the table tells the woeful tale that AZG membership is not yet at the point of supporting a center on the basis of its own contributions.

PRACTICE COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

7/13/97 10:30 AM NorthCountry Clinic
Michael Dow

Present: Gordy Anderson, Rose Brewster, Michael Dow, Maylie Scott, Linda McDevitt, Pete Kayes (facilitator), Paul Dillon, Mark P., Gael Hodgkins, and Monique Belanger.

Pete opened the meeting by suggesting we follow Mark's recommendation of taking minutes and forming an agenda. An agenda was quickly solicited:

1. Responses to Survey
2. The I Street House
3. A Review of the Practice Committee Format
4. General Announcements

Linda suggested that at some point, though not necessarily today, we needed to talk about our decision-making procedures and review our membership criteria--that this was the underlying, unresolved issue that was making movement difficult. This was agreed on by all. Maylie asked whether we had developed any process rules on how we run our meetings. The group had not and Maylie said she would send up some rules the Berkeley group.

LOCAL RETREAT

There will be a short retreat in September before the Mountains and Rivers retreat. It will be held at Gael's house, 2638 Pigeon Point Rd., Tuesday Sept. 9, 9 am to 5 pm. Please bring a sack lunch; donations are requested. If you have questions or need directions, call Monique or Suzanne.

MOUNTAINS AND RIVERS SESSHIN

The Mountains and Rivers Sesshin will be held from Wednesday, Sept. 10 through Sunday, Sept. 14. Please mark your calendars. This is a sesshin held in the wilderness (location to be determined) and as such follows all the usual sesshin guidelines--no talking or reading--most of you know the shtick. The hiking will be of moderate difficulty; we're looking at probably a hike of a few hours (with pack) on either end and then otherwise taking afternoon "kinhin hikes" from our base camp. We'll be requesting confirmations and deposits at the time of the next newsletter when we'll also give you more details as to the how and where of it all. If you have any questions or suggestions, please feel free to call either Gordy (or Michael).

LETTERS

On Mountains, Rivers, DSM IV Labels & Sangha Dialogue --
Sherry Zenhead

Is Mountain “paranoid” in defining its fixed solidity
as an object separate from the atmospheric field?
“grandiose” in the thrust of its heights over the valley floor?

Is River “delusional” in its insistence upon seeking a common level?
“inappropriate” in its intimate embrace of that
which was previously Other?

Is Zen, with its history of honoring both
the “psychotic” wildness of crazy-zen &
the “obsessive-compulsive” rigidity of perfectionistic-zen,
a system of “schizophrenic” or “magical thinking”?

Is the perception of Duality necessary
to move us individually or socially into Unity?
coexisting dynamically in the same zendo,
is diagnostic of sangha health & vitality.

CURRENT AZG DISCUSSIONS

SUMMARY OF PLEDGE SURVEY RESULTS

n= number of people indicating this choice
\$/mo = total amount pledged by these people
total number of respondents = 15

In addition to the pledge information, respondents added the following comments in the space provided:

- (1) “I now contribute this amount and whatever we do I will contribute this amount for the next 12 months.”
- (2) “I don’t feel it’s as economically efficient to rent as to buy. By pledging \$20 under that line, I’m not voting to rent in place of buying. I’m pledging to support the group.”
- (3) “[I will] help with down payment as a loan.”
- (4) “I don’t object to the status quo--however use the increased pledge money to rent an appropriate place (i.e., vacation rent had come up with. Monique also offered to see what the Humboldt Area Foundation for Non-Profits had to offer in this regard and all present agreed to do some thinking on this for the next meeting. We then prioritized the agenda and gave tentative time allotments to each topic. We began with announcements.

1. Announcements:

Gordy announced that the newsletter would be coming out July 20 and the deadline for submissions is this week. Gordy and I are tentatively planning to extend the Mountains and Rivers sesshin an additional two days so that it would begin on Wednesday, Sept. 10 rather than Friday, Sept. 12. This would allow us to have a solid three days to settle in to one place with a day in and out on either end. The one day sitting would in this case be on Tuesday, Sept. 9. Comments on this scenario as well as potential locales for the sesshin are welcomed.

In light of the fact that the Sunday following sesshin is the scheduled date for a large protest at the Headwaters Forest, Gordy and I raised the issue of whether to link the sesshin at all with any sort of protest action. Pretty quickly our “announcement” degenerated into an indirect request to be relieved of the responsibility entrusted to us by the group to make a decision. (Note: There’s a theme here.) Paul, however, quickly put us back on track, declaring, “This is not an announcement, but an example of poor decision making.” We went on to the next topic.

2. Response to Survey:

At the start of the meeting, Monique handed out the survey results which tallied up the amounts members had pledged to support alternatives 1, 2, and 3 (the status quo, renting a house, and buying one). Fifteen respondents out of some 60 solicited “members” replied, giving us monthly pledge totals for the first year of \$100, \$350, and \$385 respectively. Mark began the discussion by pointing out that the possible conclusions are various. Bill, on the one hand, has said that we need at least \$2000 a month with 30 core people to do anything other than what we are already doing. The pledge results fall far short of this. Maylie, however, sees the results as an affirmation, or certainly as no hindrance. With a

few investors to put up the money for a down payment, a few renters, and the pledge money, the purchase of a house seems almost possible.

Linda brought up the possibility of renting a place just for sesshin and otherwise continuing to sit Sundays at the Aikido Center. Paul suggested finding a large industrial-type space that would be inexpensive to buy and could be rehabilitated to suit our needs. Gordy pointed out here that the difference between these two suggestions is whether a daily group sitting practice is desired. This was not discussed.

There then ensued some general discussion of the survey: whether the paucity of response was due to lack of commitment or unclearly presented proposals, or even just poor information gathering techniques. Gordy suggested again that we just request pledges without any specific plan attached to them, while Monique countered that she's found fundraising to be effective only if a specific plan is involved. I agreed, predicting that if we did put out a definite plan that we as a group (the practice committee) felt strongly about, our response would be that much stronger as well. Maylie reiterated this, calling for a timeline and a "vision." Mark added that, considering our group dynamics, it was remarkable that the group agreed on the form of the survey.

The discussion then drifted into what to do next. Pete and Rose exchanged a little heat around whether the practice committee should "give people time to digest" the results or take definite action now. Monique suggested that it might be simplest to just encourage the four or five prospective investors to purchase the property on their own and then have them rent the space to the AZG, thus incurring no risk upon themselves. People seemed to like this idea, and Maylie strongly suggested to pursue the I Street house as "a possibility." Gael, who is entering a period of silence this month, then spoke for the first time, saying quite passionately that she doesn't object to the vision of the group, but that she sees our structure as more of a circle than a pyramid, and has the question, "Who elected a membership group?"

At this point I pointed out that we were no longer talking about the survey results, that it was in fact entirely unclear what we were talking about. I also noted that obviously a deeply-felt question had been posed by Gael that we at some point should return to. (Unfortunately we did not, and I confess that I am still unclear as to what was meant.) We agreed that I would summarize our responses to the survey in the minutes and that Paul would do a chart. (Please see Summary of Pledge Survey Results above - ed.)

3. The I Street House

Pete began by suggesting that people who had seen the house offer their general impressions. (For those who have not, the house has 3 small bedrooms with a large living room space and rents for \$1100 a month. The owner is trying to sell it for \$140,000.)

Mark's comment was that "people like it." He sensed a general consensus, although mentioning that Suzanne thought the sitting space was too small. Maylie said it "looked pretty good," too small perhaps but could be added onto. "Renters would have to practice," she emphasized. Gael liked it. Her main concern was about noise. Gordy mentioned that the bodyshop was the main contributor of noise.

Maylie proposed that we inform our membership that we are very interested in this house and suggest donations. Monique thought it would be good for the investors to meet at some point on their own. Mark mentioned that guidelines for renters would need to be formulated. Linda figured that realistically we would need a \$60,000 down payment and Paul passed along Bill's appraisal of the asking price as too high.

Pete agreed to be the contact person for the investor group. Paul wondered if it would be possible to form a Foundation to deal with AZG's finances, but the idea was not pursued.

A discussion followed in which it became clear that some sort of sub-committee was in order to be empowered to make a decision. It was decided that a) the investors needed to meet on their own and that b) a Housing Committee be formed consisting of Pete, Gordy, Mark, Paul, and Michael. Maylie nominated Gael in an attempt to address the masculine imbalance of this group, and Gael bowed, gratefully accepting, although with the proviso that she remain absent during her one month of silence.

4. Practice Committee Format

Monique wanted to read the document that formed (?) the Practice Committee a year ago. It stipulated that the nine-member core group named therein had committed to meet monthly for a year ending this August. (Many of the members were not present.) It was noted that we need to nominate members for another year at the next meeting. (Please see the General section for more on this - ed.)

(An important aside here: according to the form agreed upon a year ago, others were welcome to attend and give input, but the decision making power resided in the committee. This makes sense to me, but was quite different from the reports I heard from others regarding the functioning of this committee. These largely said anyone was free to come and take part in decisions. I would propose that the already agreed-upon format is actually just a sane establishing of boundaries, that is not rigid, but respectful to all parties concerned. Would you let anyone into your marriage and have

equal decision-making power regarding your children?)

5. Decision-making/Membership:

Time was running out at this point and a short discussion ensued about the final topic looming over us (or was it seething below?): decision-making/membership criteria. Paul said quite forcefully that we should devote the entire next meeting to a careful analysis of this topic, to meet it head on until either ourselves or the topic is exhausted. All agreed that the issue be discussed at a later date, but most seemed to feel less urgent. Maylie suggested that "it will resolve itself" if we just keep at it. Mark said he doesn't mind taking it head on as long as we don't approach it with the attitude that we can "get it done." It was agreed to put it on the agenda for the August meeting. Gordy said he would like to see us make a presentation to ourselves of a format on how the board could be structured. The issue was left hanging in a bit of a rush to end the meeting.

The meeting was adjourned and the Housing Committee stayed afterwards to meet further.

GENERAL

AUGUST PRACTICE COMMITTEE MEETING

The meeting will take place on August 3 at NorthCountry Clinic after Sunday zazen. The committee has been meeting for a year now and is in the process of determining membership for the next year. The committee meets on the first Sunday of every month to discuss and determine a variety of issues (see sec. 4 of the minutes above). If you would like to volunteer to be on the committee, please attend the August meeting. All sangha members are welcome to attend and to take part in the discussions.

NOTES FROM SUZANNE

previously referred to herein as - ed

Volunteers needed for the Farmer's Market AIDS Food Project, a group which meets at the muffler shop on the corner of the Plaza every Saturday from 12:30 pm to about 2:30 pm to collect and distribute produce and flowers to families living with AIDS. If you are interested, have questions, and/or would like to volunteer, please contact me (677-0429) or John Hudson (822-9043). It's a great group to work with and lots of fun - not to mention the occasional zuke or cuke you get to relish.

Couch Potato Time: I noticed Video Experience, the video rental store on the corner of Samoa and G, has the Dalai Lama's 4-video series : The Four Noble Truths. They also have a Korean film I much enjoyed called, if memory serves, Why Has Bodhidharma Left for the East. When all else fails, there's the drive-in movie section.

NEXT NEWSLETTER

We will be sending out another newsletter next month on/about August 27. Submissions are needed by August 17. Please send these to me (Suzanne) at the Trinidad address. It's 4am - do you know where your zafu is?