

ARCATA ZEN GROUP NEWSLETTER

June, 1999

SESSHIN COORDINATORS NEEDED FOR AUGUST

For Information on How to Volunteer, Please See Below

SITTING & SESSHIN SCHEDULES

SCHEDULING CHANGES

Maylie's move to Arcata in July has engendered some scheduling changes. Those so far decided are: The July and September sesshin have been combined into an August sesshin (see below); there will be a work practice day July 17 (see below); the August sangha picnic is canceled; and there will be a Saturday sit at Maylie's home (740 Park Ave., Arcata) September 11 (see below). Also, Bill Devall will be leading a visit to Headwaters Forest September 4 (see below).

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 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 at Gael's house, Tuesday mornings at 9:15 AM and Wednesday evenings at 7:15 PM, will be held through the rest of June. There are two half-hour sittings with a kinhin in between. If there are any questions, please call Gael. Everyone is welcome.

JULY WORK PRACTICE

Maylie moves into her new home Saturday, July 24. Gael and Suzanne are coordinating the effort to prepare the house and grounds starting July 1. This will culminate in a work practice day Saturday, July 17, starting at 11 AM. Those who'd like to help out with weeding, washing, 'n' sprucing up - and helping unload the U-Haul July 24th - please give us a call.

COORDINATORS NEEDED

The August sesshin is currently without coordinators. If you would like to coordinate this sesshin, please call Suzanne.

AUGUST SESSHIN

There will be a retreat with Maylie from August 25 through 28 at Jane Meyer's home. The sesshin will be held outdoors, but the kitchen will be available for meal preparation. The retreat will begin at 7 PM Wednesday; plan to arrive early if you need time to set up your tent. Daily sitting will be from 6:30 AM to 9 PM. Maylie will give a talk each day at approximately 10:50 AM. The retreat and meals will be in silence. Sesshin meals will be oryoki style; bring three nesting fowls, chopsticks, spoon, towel, and napkin. 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. 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.

Parking is somewhat limited so carpooling would be helpful. Please fill out and return the reservation form with a \$30 deposit by August 4 to allow the sesshin coordinators time to plan carpooling and meals. Those who sign up will receive a map and other sesshin instructions. The cost of the sesshin is \$20 a day; as always, scholarships are available. To volunteer as a coordinator and/or for more information, call Suzanne.

HEADWATERS VISIT

On Saturday, September 4, Bill Devall will lead a visit to Headwaters Forest, witnessing for the forest through silence, kinhin, and discussion. Those who wish to go will meet in the Coop parking lot at noon and return to Arcata around 5 PM. If you have questions, please call Bill.

SATURDAY SIT

On the second Saturday of every other month, alternating with the longer sesshin, a daylong sit will be held at Maylie's house from 9 AM to 5 PM. The next Saturday sit is scheduled for September 11. Please bring a bag lunch and sitting equipment (a few zafus are available for those who do not have their own). For more information, call Suzanne.

LETTERS

NOTE FROM MAYLIE

Each year Big Flat receives us and works as a powerful focus for us. We used this retreat to study Dogen's fascicle on Miracles. "The miracles I am speaking of are the daily activities of buddhas, which they do not neglect to practice." We began the walk in with the question, "What is 'undivided mind'?" Ocean, shore, and wind and steady pace supported our study. As restless minds gradually settled, we began to experience the miracles of the freed senses; eyes just seeing, skin feeling the continuous changes of breeze, ears widening to include all the sounds.

In the next three days, we learned something of the miracle of 15 independent people living as one body. This was evidenced in the concerted chanting, in the tendency for people to be in their zendo seats before the period began, and in the hard work we did together, chopping and collecting wood, mowing, cooking, weeding, and digging a new privy hole. All this ordinary activity was "no small matter." It is important for us to have sesshin experience with no coming and going; to enjoy intimate group mind and remarkable energy that arises from common ritual.

"Not to be hindered by either form or formlessness and not to depend on intellectual understanding are miracles." We sat zazen in the upstairs room with bay windows looking out on the ocean. We were continuously helped by the changing light, the swallows' chatter, our breaths, the distant surf. Inside or outside? Afternoons, we walked to the beach in kinhin and chanted Kanzeon and sat a period facing the ocean. Nothing excluded.

The last night, we sat in a campfire circle, exchanging places as the breeze brought the smoke around. We expressed appreciation for one another and excitement about the opportunities the new practice place presents. We hope soon to begin the garage remodel, to continue the miracle of devoted work together even in the midst of differences and difficulties. We hope to find ways as a sangha of addressing the suffering in our community and bioregion and world. Each voice in our circle was unique and spoke to the whole intention. A new crescent moon rose in the low western sky.

from the Dogen fascicle, Miracles ("Jinzu"), studied at Big Flat
translated by Katherine Thanas & Kazuaki Tanahashi

The miracles I am speaking of are the daily activities of buddhas which they do not neglect to practice. There are six miracles [freedom from the six sense desires], one miracle, going beyond miracles, and unsurpassable miracles. Miracles are practiced three thousand times in the morning and eight hundred times in the evening. Miracles arise simultaneously with buddhas, but are not known by buddhas. Miracles disappear with buddhas, but do not overwhelm buddhas. Miracles occur throughout practice and enlightenment, whenever buddhas seek and teach, and whenever they search in the Himalayas or become a tree or a rock. When the buddhas before Shakyamuni Buddha appeared as his disciples, bringing a robe and a stupa to him, he said, "This is a miracle caused by the inconceivable power of all buddhas." Thus we know that this miracle can also happen to buddhas now and buddhas in the future.

Guishan is the thirty-seventh ancestor, a direct descendant of Shakyamuni Buddha. He was a dharma heir of Baizhang. Today, buddha ancestors in the ten directions, even those who do not call themselves descendants of Guishan, are all in fact his remote descendants. One day while Guishan was lying down, Yangshan Huiji came to see him. Guishan turned around to face the wall. Yangshan said, "I am your student. Please don't be formal." Guishan started to get up. Yangshan rose to leave. Guishan said, "Huiji." Yangshan returned. Guishan said, "Let me tell you about my dream." Yangshan leaned forward to listen. Guishan said simply, "Would you interpret my dream for me? I want to see how you do it." In response Yangshan brought a basin of water and a towel. Guishan washed his face and sat up. Then Xiangyan came in. Guishan said, "Huiji and I have been communicating intimately. This is no small matter." Xiangyan said, "I was next door and heard you." Guishan said to him, "Why don't you try now?" Xiangyan made a bowl of tea and brought it to him. Guishan praised them saying, "You two students surpass even Shariputra and Maudgalyayana with your miraculous activity!"

If you want to understand buddhas' miracles, you should study Guishan's words. As 'this is no small matter,' to practice miracles is to study the buddha way.

from Lynda McDevitt

Afternoon stillness
Sunlight slides across the sill
Not a small matter

Big Flat Saturday Morning
Pete Kayes

Through the pad and sleeping bag, I felt a soft tapping on my butt, like when you have a tic and your skin moves. So I put my hand between the sleeping bag and my body. It came again, the soft tapping, like a dog's tail. And it came again with a kind of insistence and once again.

The interaction was so gentle there was little fear, although when this first started, my mind needed to eliminate the possibility of something in my sleeping bag.

Without actually seeing the animal, it seemed a gopher was trying to surface under my tent. She probably had a sense of how much soil was above her and was surprised she couldn't surface. In any case, she woke me in time to begin wake-up call.

Inspired by Public Reading of Suzuki Roshi's Story of Frog* at Sangha Meeting

April 25, 1999

Bill Devall

Pitbull bitch sits in living room. Child enters room. Bitch leaps at throat of child, crushing her spine. Big lunch. Continue sitting. Like pitbull bitch we do not sit for enlightenment. We sit as expression of our buddha nature. We just sit. When lunch arrives, we eat. Belching during next zazen.

*from the chapter entitled, "To Polish a Tile"

If we are like a frog, we are always ourselves. . . . if something comes along, he will snap at it and eat it. So I think a frog is always addressing himself. I think you should do that also. . . . When you are you, you see things as they are, and you become one with your surroundings. There is your true self. There you have true practice; you have the practice of a frog.

Two Poems by Philip Whalen
submitted by Paul Dillon

Heigh-Ho, Nobody's at Home

Certain teachings are whispered into the right ear,
others are murmured into the left; but the
most sacred and arcane of all must be blown into
the crown of the head, down through the sutures
of the skull bone. When the recipient of this

wisdom is able to convey it to another human being,
to a horse, to an ant, a spider, an owl, a goldfish
And a high cliff by words, gestures, actions
which probably affect the lives of any
such beings I'll be happy to call him a
wise man, saint, successful poet, living man, etc.

Why not now?

What's the reason I'm not reaching you? (Since I think of you,
your presence - your existence - is unquestionable)

but reasons and ontologies are generally uninteresting

I've chosen the wrong way to amuse or instruct. This is
a subject, a topic, a locus, and you have been trained to
interpret such items of discourse as implying certain con-
ventional stances.

How many times have I told you, Millicent, that "blow" is only
a figure of speech?

Gull flies ahead of his
reflection in the wave.

Plaza Sits: Silent Witness for Non-Violence
Suzanne M.

(Each Wednesday for over a month, Gael co-developed and -lead interfaith evening sits on the Arcata Plaza, attended by Buddhists, Christians, peace workers, passers-by, and others who wished to witness for non-violence.)

My belly warmed by a bowl of chili colorado, I sit bundled up in my heavy jacket and Mark's too. This first night there's a dozen of us sitting around Gael's blanket, on a chair, on the bench. The sun's going down, casting shadows in front of me on the sidewalk where my gaze naturally rests. Two shadows of people walking by behind me pass before me and I experience a shiver of panic, realizing how vulnerable we are; I'm grateful we, unlike so many others, can sit here without worrying about being shot from behind or whether our families will be alive when we get home, without having to watch our backs, with warm food in our bellies and warm clothing against the cold April wind.

CURRENT AZG DISCUSSIONS

PRACTICE COMMITTEE

Topics covered:

Late Comers: a sign will be created that spells out times for sitting and walking meditation that will be posted in the stairs of the aikido center.

Maylie's Schedule Proposal:

Daily zazen schedule - two half hour sits with a ten minute walking break, followed by nine bows and chant. It could begin between 6 & 7 AM. It could be Monday through Friday. We could have a late evening sit once or twice per week.

Sundays - dharma talks once possibly twice per month.

Sesshins - continue with current schedule of one-day retreat one month followed by a three-day the next month.

Practice Discussion - available times could be posted so members can sign up for half hour slots.

Classes - a series of four-week talks, beginning with the Heart Sutra.

Jukai - any one who has sat with the group for a couple of years or more could prepare for lay ordination.

Out-reach - finding steady ways of making our presence known in the wider community.

Next meeting - July 11. Practice committee meetings are held the first Sunday of each month.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Fee schedule - after much discussion, the Board raised the cost of local retreats to \$20/ day donation; scholarships will be available. For Big Flat the cost will be \$10/ day plus expenses, with two scholarships available .

The Board is still waiting for the shed and garage budget to be completed.

The Board will, over the next several months, be reviewing the by-laws.

The next two meetings will be June 23 and July 28. Board meetings are held the fourth Wednesday of each month. Come join the fun.

NEXT NEWSLETTER

The next newsletter deadline is September 1. Mail your comments, letters, articles, announcements, reflections &/ or zen poetry to Suzanne M. Please note on your enclosure that it is for inclusion in the newsletter; also include your phone or e-mail in case I have any questions. Unless you indicate otherwise, some submissions may be edited.

EDITOR'S NOTES

upon discussing the review of the movie, Matrix, in the Summer 1999 Tricycle:

. . . people let other people define their reality for them a lot. It's important to think about, 'cause, when you think about it, the basis of the word 'reality' is 'to realize.'

Hank Gardner

