

ARCATA ZEN GROUP NEWSLETTER

November, 1999

WEEKLY SITTING

Sundays the AZG 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, 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 Maylie's house (740 Park, Arcata) Monday through Friday at 5:30 AM (second sit at 6:20). Two 40-minute periods, with kinhin, are 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, at Maylie's 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.

The above events are all free; sangha and friends are welcome. If there are any questions, please call Maylie or Suzanne.

Parking is limited at Maylie's; carpooling is helpful. Please remember to use the driveway, the areas in front of the house, or Fickle Hill Road; do not park across the street. Also please do not use anything scented (perfumes, deodorants, soaps, hair and shaving products, moisturizers, etc.) before AZG events.

UPCOMING EVENTS

NOVEMBER SATURDAY SIT

On the second Saturday of every other month (alternating with longer sesshin), a daylong sit is held at Maylie's home from 6:30 AM to 5 PM. The next Saturday sesshin is scheduled for November 20. Please 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 breakfast and/or lunch to facilitate meal planning.

DECEMBER SESSHIN

There will be a retreat with Maylie Scott from December 29 through January 1, 2000 at her home. The retreat will begin at 7 PM Wednesday; 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 bowls, 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 Friday, New Year's Eve observation - including the traditional 108 strikes of the bell - will begin at 8:30 PM after an informal dinner and rest. Please feel welcome to attend New Year's Eve even if you haven't been able to come to the rest of sesshin. The Saturday schedule will be announced; suggestions have included an interfaith peace activity. 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 December 15 to help us estimate the quantity of food needed for each meal. The cost of the sesshin is \$20 a day; as always, scholarships are available. For more information call Mark or Gordy.

PRECEPT CLASS & JUKAI

Maylie will be offering jukai (lay ordination) to people in the new year. Jukai means "receiving the precepts." It is a ceremony of commitment to practice and sangha. Each person is given a lineage paper, a "blood line" that goes from Shakyamuni Buddha through the Soto Zen ancestors to Suzuki Roshi, Mel Weitsman Roshi, to Maylie, and finally to the new recipient. Each new "child of Buddha" receives a new dharma name; an expression, carefully considered by the teacher, of the student's spiritual identity.

A precept class will begin meeting in January in preparation; it will take about six months and includes precept study and the sewing of a rakusu. This class is open to anyone who has practiced three years or more, whether or not they want to take jukai. The class will not be open to drop-in's; everyone signing up should be generally committed to regular every-other-week meetings for six months. Sewing will take additional time; teachers from the Bay Area will make occasional weekend visits to instruct. If you are interested in either the class and/or jukai, please call Maylie.

LETTERS

DHARMA TALK

October 30, 1999 - Maylie Scott

Sojun Mel Weitsman is my root teacher. Maureen Stuart was my first woman ancestor-teacher. I met Maureen in 1981, nine years before she died in 1990, the same year I first came to the AZG. I have been thinking about her a lot as I settle into Arcata; she is always in my background, but in this transition, her presence is particularly strong. When people die, there is great loss and there can also be a releasing of positive energy; the hindrances in the relationship are gone. The energetic connection with Maureen endures and the nine years since her death make little difference. One of her repeated phrases that instantly brings her into focus is, "There is nothing that is not sacred, nothing that is not spiritual practice." I think this was the base of Maureen's sustaining, continuous practice.

In 1981, as Lenore Friedman was writing her book, *Meetings with Remarkable Women*, a group of Bay Area women invited Maureen to come out and lead an all-women sesshin. It was a life changing experience for a number of us. The forms were traditional, but freshly constellated. We improvised a zendo at the Vedanta Society retreat center, sitting half-hour periods, following one another's step in kinhin, eating in a formal but simplified style, listening to Maureen's deep-voiced teiso's, engaging in brief and pungent dokusans. Our confident, new arrangement was the basis of much of what we are doing here in Arcata. Then it seemed an exciting, even daring variation of the harder-edged forms of our more traditional, male taught practice centers. We were thirsty for this opening in practice and Maureen's sesshins continued twice a year until she died.

Maureen had been a concert pianist before she became a Zen teacher, so it was natural for music to become her teaching; both what she taught and the way she taught it. Talking about her music she said, "But I don't play. Something plays me. The more we come to the condition of emptied out, cleared up, warmed up mind, the more we can let go of the self-consciousness that makes us denigrate ourselves or worry about being conceited. We can be glad we can make something beautiful or play beautifully. We can be glad to share it with others and glad they like it. It is not conceited to say, 'Yes, I play the piano beautifully.' If I did not after all the training, all the work, all the effort, it would be sad. And so it is with you. Each of you is the artist of your own life. Play your life beautifully. Hold your head up and be glad you can offer whatever it is you have to offer freely. The little bell hanging in emptiness sings. Each one of us is hanging in the emptiness singing. Sometimes lover, sometimes wife, sometimes husband, sometimes artist, sometimes friend, always with open, compassionate, wisdom mind."

Like all good teachers, she had as many teaching methods as she did students. She could be sharp and severe with indulgence or self pity, sensitive and supportive with developing intuition. Several times, I begged her for teaching; "You must see things about me that need correction. Please say." She would smile and say nothing and I kept watching her and learning. I was often cook for our retreats and I had a kind of pressured style. I thought it was better for people to be in the zendo than to be in the kitchen, so I tried not to use helpers and to be quick and efficient. This involved increasing speed as meal time arrived and a good amount of last-minute tension. Maureen began to come into the kitchen a little before meal time. "Can I help?" she would ask. I would thank her (I certainly didn't need the Roshi, excellent cook as she was, to help me!) and say I was just fine. She would sit down and calmly watch me chasing around. Actually it was pretty annoying. "Why does she have to do that?" This rapacious independence was such an engrained part of my character, it took several kitchen visits and a long time to catch on.

Maureen offered me the very special gift of her friendship. As I had an extra bedroom, she began to stay at my house during her trips west. I would visit her in Cambridge summers when I went east to see my mother. "You are my friend," she said. "It doesn't mean that the teaching stops, but you are my friend." Understanding my reticence, she taught me about friendship - the confidences, the ways of appreciation, the heart-engaging trust. She opened her life to me, giving me a chance to see how a teacher lives, the stresses, the challenges, and the steadfast, generous balance.

Her liver cancer was diagnosed in the course of an annual check-up in late 1987. The last years were powerful as she rose fully to what she didn't like. "Whatever happens, don't make a move to avoid it." She had one operation, during which it was determined that the cancer had metastasized, and then refused further treatment, preferring to have quality of life in the time she had.

"Thanks to this practice, I feel I do have some true peace of mind. After all, life and death, health and illness are one. The true face of this universe includes all things in it - good, bad, life, death, health, illness - all of it. There are many so-called healers in the world, but healers cannot bring us wholeness. Healers do not heal us. The healing is already there in the wholeness. And the real goal of healing is to help the person in need of healing to be aware of this. At the deepest level, the so-called sick person has no sickness. At this level, I am not sick. With deep gratitude to this practice - because of Buddha, Dharma, Sangha, because of all of you; because of all of this that we are engaged in together; because of this indefinable, mysterious, unspeakable, marvelous whatever-it-is - I really do feel this no-sickness."

So I want to express my great love for this wonderful teacher. Her mantra, which she received from Soen Nakagawa Roshi, was "Namu Dai Bosa" (in the name of the Great Bodhisattva); leaping into the Great Bodhisattva, the Great Bodhisattva leaps into me.

(Quotes from *Subtle Sounds: The Zen Teachings of Maurine Stuart*, ed. Roko Sherry Chayat. Full transcript of Maylie's talk available on the library table.)

by Lynda McDevitt

Sitting facing in
Now sunlight joins the sangha
No shadow of doubt

The God Question
Gael Hodgkins

I thought I had settled the God question once and for all. Then Maylie came along during October sesshin with a koan which will probably last me the rest of my life. The koan, known as "Postlude," appeared in the October 11, 1999 issue of The New Yorker and is attributed to Robert Mazzocco.

How can you go to the cemetery
Sunday after Sunday, and not believe in God.

How can you bring flowers, Sunday after Sunday,
to the grave of your mother, the grave of your father,

Sunday after Sunday, and not believe in God.
And clear away a stray leaf, or water the harsh earth,

or freshen the burnt grass, or shovel up
the raw snow, or make the sign of the cross

and beg forgiveness of the past, the shadow of tomorrow.
How can you do it, do all of that, Sunday after Sunday,

in the name of love and the hereafter,
though still, deep in your heart, still not believe in God.

Morning Zazen: haiku
Suzanne M.

Driving in dark and
fog focuses the mind: Where
are other beings?

During kinhin our
three shadows merge in candle
light: Who is walking?

Sit straight; breathe; keep track;
listen. Fog dripping from the
thousand leaves. Now. Breathe.

For just a minute,
fog swirls away. How funny!
Stars in the morning!

CURRENT AZG DISCUSSIONS

"The time has come," the Walrus said,
"To talk of many things:
Of shoes - and ships - and sealing-wax -
Of cabbages - and kings -
And why we need more zafus
For every Sunday sitting."

You may have noticed that on Sundays, when attendance is high, there is a shortage of zafus. We would like to purchase five or six zafus, at \$30 each. As the AZG is trying to save for the garage project, it would be beneficial if we could raise money for the purchase of zafus separately. Just an extra \$3 to \$5 in the Sunday donation basket will help have the AZG sitting pretty. And, now that the garage project has started, please remember to send in your monthly pledges. Thank you for your continuing generosity.

ed's note: Checks can be sent to AZG; please indicate which fund on the check.

And, Speaking of More Money . . .

Due to a number of factors, the cost of the newsletter has risen. After discussion, the Board decided to raise the price of a subscription to the newsletter. People who are not making regular monthly contributions to the AZG can get one issue free. If they wish to continue receiving it, the cost will be \$10 a year. People who contribute regularly and/or generous donors will receive the newsletter for free.

Time to Stuff the Ballot Box

The ballots for the board nominations went out November 5 to all AZG members. If you do not receive yours, please give Monique a call. Be sure to return them before December 5, or take them to the annual board meeting on that date.

Garage Remodel Update

Rob Roversi

The garage / zendo remodel is finally underway after many months of dealing with county and city bureaucracies. My carpentry partner Dan Oram and I are now working full time on the project Monday through Friday 8:00 to 4:30. At the time of this writing, we are only three days into it and we've already had a lot of participation from volunteers and many inquires.

Anyone interested in helping can contact Mark P. or myself or just show up. There are all kinds of ways that you can help, so don't be shy if you lack carpentry experience. I will try to get the word out when we particularly need a lot of help. Hope to see you there!

Religions Day at HSU

On Saturday, December 4, the AZG will once again participate in Religions Day in Goodwin Forum from 12-5 PM. Maylie will be giving zazen instruction as a workshop participant. We will need other volunteers to help out at the AZG table. For more info or to offer yourself up, contact Maylie.

OCTOBER PRACTICE COMMITTEE MEETING

Many members attended this meeting, during which the United Religions Initiative, October's Celebrate Peace Day, a phone tree, and the zendo construction were discussed. Rob and Dan volunteered to work for \$12/hour each instead of \$15 as their contribution. The library also came under discussion. People who have borrowed books and not returned them need to be called. Maylie suggested that the library should be available to members only. It was requested that an announcement be made once a month to remind people to return overdue books.

OCTOBER BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING

Several financial matters were discussed. Monique presented promissory note loan documents to the board, which are available on request to the secretary. Reminder letters will be sent to members who agreed to make monthly contributions to pay off the loans for building the zendo. These will go out in the middle of the month. In December the board will set up a budget for the year 2000. Monique will be contacting lenders as needed to keep up with spending on the Zendo project. Copies of financials are available to AZG members from the treasurer. Maylie and Lynda collaborated on a letter to the larger Buddhist community to ask for support of our Zendo project. The election of the new Board was also discussed. Final voting will be at the December 5 annual meeting, to be held at 11 AM at NorthCountry clinic. The next meeting will be November 17 instead of the fourth Wednesday (the day before Thanksgiving) at Maylie's house at 7:30 PM as usual. The articles of incorporation are on the agenda.

NOVEMBER PRACTICE COMMITTEE MEETING

This busy meeting saw the distribution of a phone tree for efficiently contacting members regarding schedule changes etc. The United Religions 72-hour millennium peace vigil was discussed again, but other groups have not been found to participate. An article made up of letters of thanks and appreciation for Maylie's leadership in BASE groups from the "Touching BASE" newsletter was read after sitting on Sunday, stimulating people's interest in exploring local activism. Shunryu Suzuki's new book, a commentary on the San do kai, will be used for Sunday morning readings. There was some concern that we were adopting a new book while still having A Path with Heart as our Practice Committee recommendation. The issue of unofficial channels will be put on the next practice committee agenda. 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.

NEXT NEWSLETTER

The next newsletter deadline is December 15. Mail your zen comments, letters, articles, announcements, reflections &/or poetry to Suzanne M. at the above address Please note on your enclosure that it is for inclusion in the newsletter. If you e-mail submissions, please left justify and put two spaces after periods.

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RESERVATION FORM FOR DECEMBER SESSHIN

Return by December 15

NAME PHONE

ADDRESS

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

Thursday: Breakfast Lunch Dinner

Friday: Breakfast Lunch Dinner

Saturday: Breakfast Lunch

Will you be attending the New Year's Eve observation? yes no

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 & return to: Arcata Zen Group

DATES TO REMEMBER

NOVEMBER: 17 - Board of Directors Meeting
20 - Saturday Sit

DECEMBER: 4 - Religions Day at HSU
5 - Counting of the Votes / Annual Board Meeting
- Practice Committee Meeting (follows)
15 - Sesshin Reservation Form and Deposit Due
- Newsletter Deadline
29 - December Sesshin begins
31 - New Year's Eve Observation begins

MEMBERS: PLEASE REMEMBER TO RETURN BOARD BALLOTS