

ARCATA ZEN GROUP NEWSLETTER
August, 1998

UPCOMING SESSHIN

SESSHIN COORDINATORS NEEDED FOR NOVEMBER

As of this writing, volunteers are still needed for the November sesshin, currently scheduled for the 16th through the 21st. Call Monique or Suzanne if you can help. Please consider volunteering for at least a portion of the work involved - preliminary organization, coordinating other volunteers, meal planning, food purchasing, zendo set-up . . . Hey, come back here!

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.

WEEKDAY SITTING UPDATE

The extra weekly sittings held at Gael's house will resume on Tuesday morning, September 29. To accommodate as many sangha members as possible, the sittings will alternate between Tuesday mornings at 9:15 and Wednesday evenings at 7:15. We will attempt to implement a schedule whereby the Wednesday evenings will be on the first and third weeks of the month, and the Tuesday mornings will be on the second and fourth weeks of the month. There will be two half-hour sittings with a kinhin in between. If there are any questions about the new schedule, please call Lynda or Gael.

SECOND ANNUAL SANGHA POTLUCK PICNIC

This year the Sangha picnic will again be held at Redwood Park. It will be on Sunday, August 23, starting at noon. After the group has assembled, we will hold a short service in the nearby forest; afterward there will be a potluck picnic.

Last year the picnic included a sunny day, great food, good conversation, Frisbee games, playground activity, and music. This is a great opportunity for the sangha circle to expand to extended family and friends. Maybe we'll even get another sunny day.

SEPTEMBER RETREAT

The Mountains and Rivers retreat with Maylie Scott (September 23 to 26) will be held locally at Jane Meyer's property on Ole Hanson Road. Jane's home is situated on 19 acres of redwoods; the setting includes a pond, beautiful gardens, and ample room for camping. 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 want 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 orioki style; bring three nesting bowls, chopsticks, spoon, towel, and napkin. Both orioki and sitting instruction will be available. 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 will be necessary. Please fill out and return the reservation form (see last page) along with your deposit of \$25 to P. O. Box 730 Arcata 95518 by September 10 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 full sesshin is approximately \$50; as always, scholarships are available. For more information call Gordy or Suzanne.

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 October 10. Please bring a bag lunch and sitting equipment. For more information, call Gael.

LETTERS

Note on the August One-Day Sit

The August 8 sit was held on the Arcata Plaza from 9 AM to 4 PM to offer a silent expression of peace and compassion in conjunction with Hiroshima Day, a day of international reflection on the causes of war and their resolution. Gael and Gordy formed the core group, and were joined throughout the day by Bill, Mark, Patricia, Patty, Paul, Pete, Sherry, and Suzanne. Handouts included information on the BPF and the AZG and quotes from Maylie Scott and Robert Aitken.

August 8, 1998
Bill Devall

On August 6, 1945, the U. S. military dropped an atomic bomb on the Japanese city of Hiroshima. Three days later, on August 9, 1945, a second atomic bomb was dropped on the Japanese city of Nagasaki.

The Atomic Age had begun.

The ability of the human species to wreck havoc on fellow human beings and on the myriad of other beings who co-inhabit this planet with us had taken a quantum leap.

Does the human mind have the ability to control the destructive capabilities of atomic weapons? That is the question that J. Robert Oppenheimer asked when he set off the first nuclear weapon in a test at Alamogordo, New Mexico in 1944, and it is the question that continues to perplex us. Oppenheimer is quoted as saying that he and his fellow scientists did not know what to expect at Alamogordo. They feared that they might blow up the whole state of New Mexico. Still they persisted with the Manhattan Project mission - developing an atomic weapon that could be delivered by plane or missile to a designated target.

Weapons designers, scientists, and politicians have persisted since 1945 in developing and testing more and more sophisticated nuclear weapons systems. During the Spring, 1998, both India and Pakistan engaged in testing nuclear weapons.

Although no nuclear weapon has been used during warfare since August 1945, the potential for use has increased dramatically. For example, it is estimated by some authorities that there are over 30,000 nuclear weapons stored in Russia and nations in the former Soviet Union. It is widely accepted that Israel, South Africa, and perhaps North Korea have joined India, Pakistan, the U. S. A., Russia, France, Britain, and China in stockpiling nuclear weapons.

When I joined the Arcata Zen Group in a collective sit-in commemorating Hiroshima Day on Saturday, August 8, I did so because I am a citizen of the U. S. A. who shares collective responsibility for the tragedy of the Atomic Age. I sit with all other citizens who witness for peace during the Atomic Age.

Although demonstrating great knowledge in splitting the atom and developing atomic weapons, my species remains in ignorance about the great truths illuminated by the Buddha. As Robert Aitken Roshi said, “. . . the spiritual equivalent of the process of releasing the bonds of the atom is releasing the bonds of ignorance--release of the bonds of self-centeredness. True release of the bonds is the experience of love.”

I don't know if I experienced love while sitting zazen on the Plaza, but at least momentarily I experienced the ghosts of peace in a world of fact.

We sat facing outward in the midst of the usual bustle of Saturday market on the Plaza. We sat with the awareness of the recent bombing of U. S. embassy buildings in Africa with great loss of life. The flags were flying at half-mast in memory of the victims of this latest act of human destructiveness.

Sirens of ambulances rushing to aid casualties of vehicle collisions cut through our minds - sounds of normal suffering in a world of anguish.

I have participated in many demonstrations on the Arcata Plaza, but this was my first silent sit-in. It is very important to engage in such sit-ins with fellow practitioners. A single person, sitting for peace on a busy street, is seen as a freak, eccentric, easily dismissed. A small group of people, even a very small group of people, makes a collective statement and manifests synergy - collective energy.

Did our very small group from the AZG make a difference? Of course. Indeed the AZG was accorded the highest honor that can be accorded protesters on the Arcata Plaza. We were granted the privilege of using the restroom at the Arcata Hotel in honor of our noble efforts for peace. Fearful that I might accumulate too much merit in my actions for peace, I saved my pee until I could pee behind a bush in the Arcata Marsh Sanctuary later in the afternoon.

The sit-in began under deep fog at 9 AM but the last period of zazen ended under brilliant summer sun at 4 PM. After the last period of zazen, we moved from the cushions to the grass. Sitting under the shade of the palm trees, munching on ripe peaches from the bounty of our bioregion, we asked ourselves what we experienced during our sit-in on the Plaza and whether we would do it again. For myself, I experienced tears, and yes, I definitely would sit again on the Plaza on Hiroshima Day.

I was not sitting to argue the past - whether dropping the bomb averted an even greater disaster that could have occurred if the U. S. had invaded the Japanese mainland - nor was I sitting to look to the future - whether generations of humans many generations in the future will have the will and capacity to sit with the decaying piles of nuclear waste that have been generated in just over fifty years of the Atomic Age. I was sitting because it was the appropriate, engaged action to take now, August 8, 1998.

I sincerely thank and bow to the members of the AZG who organized this collective witness for peace.

Thoughts on Sitting August 8th
Suzanne M.

When I joined Bill, Gael, Gordy, and Mark during the last period of sitting, pulling up a chair near the circle of

cushions, I immediately felt the strength of this sit - very settled, totally in place - on the Plaza, in the world. Definitely right effort.

Yet my eye was caught by a sign that said, "Hiroshima Day." During discussions before and after the sit, I brought up my concern about linking the general intent of our sit (or "Peace Yes, Nukes No" as I dualistically approached it) to a day named for specific wartime actions. I felt this might limit some people's perceptions about what we were doing there - presenting compassion as still points in the swirl of the Plaza, not just condemning the use of nuclear weapons in Japan. It was explained to me that people do know "Hiroshima Day" is a day to recognize the suffering arising from all wars.

I've been thinking about this, and feel it is true for those actively involved in peace-work as well as for most of the community around here. But I can't get two things out of my head. One is my perception that many people would not make the leap to the general intent of the day - that the political realities of the war are still too close to the bone for many people. The other is the memory of seeing an elderly Chinese woman in San Francisco, encountering one of the first Hiroshima Day observances, who asked her American-born granddaughter to explain what was happening. As she listened, she drew back away from the window where she had been watching, clutched her granddaughter's arm, and began crying.

I've also been thinking about why I can't get these things out of my head - what they link into for me. But I do know that these are questions I'll be sitting with, and that I would join the AZG again next year in sitting on the Plaza .

SANGHA FRIENDS

from Gaia Pine:

Dear Sangha members,

As I write you all this letter, I am filled with great gratitude for the years of growth, support, laughter, and intimacy I've shared with my dharma family here in Arcata. Big Flat, Big Trees, Big Hearts, Big Livingrooms, Big Meetings, Big Practice, Big Mind . . . I bow to you all Thank you.

Sincerely with smiles and lotus flowers, Gaia

(P. S. You haven't seen the end of me . . . nope, not that easy)

from Lynda McDevitt:

Dogen Zenji says, "Yes."

NEXT NEWSLETTER

The next newsletter deadline is October 12. Mail your comments, letters, articles, announcements, &/or zen poetry and reflections to Suzanne at the above address or e-mail her. Please note on your enclosure that it is for inclusion in the newsletter.

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RESERVATION FORM FOR SEPTEMBER SESSHIN

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

Make checks payable to: Arcata Zen Group