

ARCATA ZEN GROUP NEWSLETTER
December, 1997

UPCOMING SESSHIN

ONE DAY SIT

Maylie will lead a one-day sit at Gael Hodgkins' house on Wednesday, January 7, from 9:00 AM to 5 PM. Please bring your own bag lunch. If you need more information please call Monique or Gael.

SANDY BAR RANCH

On Thursday, January 8 at 9:00 AM, we will meet at the Aikido Center to carpool to Sandy Bar Ranch. We will return Saturday, January 10.

Those interested in attending this retreat should bring bedding, toiletries, towels and other personal items. We will have two cabins for the group. One of the cabins will be set up as a Zendo. We will have our meals in the other cabin. Both cabins can also be used to sleep. If you wish to rent your own cabin, you may do so by calling Sandy Bar Ranch at (916)627-3379. The rates for individual cabins are \$35.00 for one person and \$50.00 for two. Meals will be orioki style; bring three nesting bowls, chopsticks, spoon, towel, and napkin. The retreat and meals will be in silence.

Please fill out the reservation form and mail by January 5, to help us estimate the quantity of food needed for each meal. The cost of the sesshin is \$45 for the weekend; as always, scholarships are available. For more information call Monique or Gordy.

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.

LETTERS

NOTE FROM MAYLIE

Dear AZG Dharma Friends,

Thank you for the generous gift certificate to Shambala books. What a pleasure to go and browse with that permission in my pocket. Thank you also for your continuing support of me as teacher, allowing me to explore my voice and place in that role.

As I write, the winter solstice is close, the darkest time of the year, reminding us of our own cycles of life and growth and death and retraction. Buddha's Enlightenment was on December 8th. His birthday will be in the spring, near Easter. We are invited to let the short days slow us down so we can sense the cold ground beneath the business of our lives and listen quietly and attentively.

I walked past a spread of dried leaves in the corner of an empty lot and, hearing a particular rustle, noticed a sparrow, the same dusty color as the leaves, shaking itself out. The sparrow takes care of its life form and we take care of ours for the short spans that are given. This narrowing time reminds of our origins, the dynamic matrix we arise from and return to. When we can abide, stripped down in this un-knowing, that includes our own doubts and insecurities, and chronic limitations, we can realize that the seeds of wisdom and compassion are actually planted right here. And then we can light candles and look into our neighbor's eyes and see the light generated in our own eyes reflected in theirs and meet one another as Dharma friends.

Best wishes for the holidays,

Maylie

CURRENT AZG DISCUSSIONS

**** Clarify Your Intention: Establish Membership In The AZG! ****

The following represents the culmination of the work of the practice committee over the last several months on the issue of membership. Now it is your turn, Reader, to continue the process of working cooperatively to find long-term solutions to the needs of our Sangha.

Establishing a membership list will allow us to proceed with the formation of a board of directors and the further implementation and refinement of our articles of incorporation. This will be a measure of our process, our intra-Sangha

communications, and the willingness of the newsletter subscribers to read and respond.

Please consider becoming a member of the AZG and return the enclosed card by the end of January to enable us to proceed. If you don't wish to make a decision at this time, cards will be available at the regular Sunday meetings on the library table. This is not a test.

Statement of Purpose:

The purpose of the Arcata Zen Group is to provide opportunities for the study and practice of Zen Buddhism. Meditation (zazen), services, group readings and discussion, and teacher-led retreats (sesshin) form the core of the practice. Our emphasis and wider purpose is to encourage people to integrate spiritual practice with their own lives.

Responsibilities of Membership:

The responsibility of active members is to contribute to the ongoing functioning of the group (e.g., sesshin preparation, zazen participation, serving on the board or committees, financial support, newsletter, etc.). The particular way of expressing how one will contribute to the life of the AZG will depend upon one's situation.

Rights of Membership:

AZG members elect the board of directors and vote on major Sangha issues such as choosing a teacher or amending the by-laws.

Membership will be renewable by mail on a yearly basis.

Membership is not required to participate in Sangha activities.

PRACTICE COMMITTEE

November Meeting

Diana Lynn

Nov. 23, 1997. Attended by Bill, Diana, Gordy, KayDee, Linda, Mark, Maylie, Monique, Pete, Quynh, and Rose. The meeting opened with a reading of group process suggestions offered by Maylie.

Linda reported that she and Paul were continuing to prepare practice guidelines/handbook for beginning students and sangha visitors. She suggested two possibilities: the first a low-budget version for our sangha only, and second, a higher cost guide that could be published more broadly. Maylie favored the low-end approach, advising that these practices are never written in stone, but rather change over time. Diana agreed, pointing out that sanghas' practices vary and require their own guidelines.

Monique posted the 1998 calendar and the group spent the remainder of the meeting setting dates and discussing locations and various perspectives on the coming year's sesshins.

It was decided to ask Gael if a one day meditation may always be held at her home on the day preceding the longer bi-monthly sesshins with Maylie. This would insure interviews with Maylie for members who cannot attend the full sesshins.

Practice committee meetings will be held the day following each sesshin.

Pete and Monique explained the duties of sesshin coordinators: the gathering and returning of materials, making phone calls, and using existing food shopping lists and menu plans for meal preparation.

Maylie will speak with Gael about the possibility of incorporating Rohatsu into the existing December calendar, and suggested the possibility of celebrating Buddha's Birthday in April with other ethnic Buddhist groups.

Mark said the BPF requested that he pass onto them any news of local Buddhist social action, so please appraise him of any such actions members may hear about or participate in.

Pete was given permission to buy and make up a half dozen extra orioki sets for visitors and drop-ins at sesshins.

Diana will sew the napkins.

1998 Sesshins

January See above.

March Starting the night of the 11th and ending the 14th. Linda and Quynh will coordinate this sesshin at Lloyd's.

May Mark will book the 14th through the 18th at Big Flat. He, Gordy, and KayDee will coordinate. (ed's note: Mark has booked these dates.)

July Monique will ask Lloyd if we may sit at his home from Wednesday night the 15th through the 18th.

August Pete suggested another potluck Family Day at Redwood Park on the 23rd. The group agreed.

September From the night of the 9th through the 12th, this will be a hiking/floating/car camping/??? outdoor sesshin. Gordy will talk to the owners of "Five Waters," Diana will talk to two land owners in Denny and to river raft operators. The group considered various approaches to Mountains and Rivers sesshins, from awesome wilderness earned by physical strength and endurance, to car camping in less remote areas for members unable to backpack.

November From the evening of the 16th throughout the 22nd, this longest sesshin will be held again at Lloyd's. The meeting closed with five minutes of meditation.

NOTE: The practice committee will meet January 11, 1998. The next meeting will be February 1. Everyone is welcome to attend.

NEXT NEWSLETTER

The next newsletter deadline is February 15, 1998. 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. I look forward to hearing group members' voices more often in the newsletter next year.

EDITOR'S NOTES

Year's End

Today the wind picks up masses of cloud left over from the storms. I feel cheerful, looking forward to whatever the day holds - for the first time after months of illness. I also feel unsettled - the housework, phone calls, and paperwork await, but this is the first day, the first free breath. I put on my boots, get in the car, and drive to Stone Lagoon. On the way, I bop to the radio - hey, I get to have some free mental time - some fantasy time - I don't have to think about all those needs, responsibilities. Driving along the curves in third, I daydream - I could be Sigourney Weaver - I could go out into the world, be reborn stronger with every breath. I can battle the world's foes, save the Earth, do great deeds of physical, moral, and intellectual strength.

But I can't. I can only, I find, walk a few hundred feet along the beach. So hard to walk through the sand. I wanted to skip, to frolic, hike anywhere, be anyone; I got exhausted just past the first outcropping north of the parking lot. I saw a place to step up to a small stone hollow on the rock. Just four feet off the sand, it took me several minutes and great effort to move and ask for strength from limbs unused for months. A perfect seat, a perfect back rest. I faced northwest and became still. I didn't think about it. The habit of long years of sitting in nature just became what I was doing then. I sat. There, on the edge of the world, sitting so still with the rock, the wind, the ocean, and the sand. If one sits still enough, long enough, there is only being. The forests taught me that as a child.

And it all became clear again here. The ocean ever-coming, waves, translucent in the partial sun, small but crackling. The foam, thick and white, rushing over the rounded stones and pebbles of the beach, making a sound soft and rich and deep; satisfying. The sky, here on the edge of things, every shade of blue from royal to almost white; the clouds the same. Thick, still clouds mirroring the foam, the sea, the sky.

The ocean, the earth, this very place is the mother of all that is change, the father of all that is constant. Over the sand, the wind blows bits of dried seaweed and small chips of wood along the beach. Redding Rock, four miles out, stands as a remnant of an earlier coast; the pebbles on the beach match the rock which cradles me. Further up the beach, the hillside has slid and still bleeds orange into the sea. A hawk glides like foam over the wind-stunted brush, alighting on the topmost bare branch of an alder, and folds its wings to stare ocean-ward. Two crows pass overhead, cawing as they fly.

Everything is just what it is in this very moment. There is a great joy and peace in that. The dried seaweed, the bleeding hill, the concert of foam and pebbles, the rock waiting, holding the roots of ocean-wrenched plants and bits of stubborn earth and me. No complaints from the seaweed for being dead. No mutterings from the tree for being uprooted, from the rock anticipating the ocean.

Yes, the tide has definitely risen. I sit up straight and, maneuvering on my bottom, using arms and legs and relying on the thick tread of my boots to catch the irregularities of the rock's surface, I climb down to the sand and walk back up the beach. I walk up the beach, Suzanne who has been ill and will be again, who is well just now and glad to be here on the edge.

Happy New Year!