

ARCATA ZEN GROUP NEWSLETTER
December 1998

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; reading and discussion follow. On the first Sunday of the month, the sangha shares readings brought in by individuals. Weekday sittings are held at Gael Hodgkins' house on Tuesday mornings at 9:15 AM and Wednesday evenings at 7:15 PM, through June. There are two half-hour sittings with kinhin. If you have any questions, call Gael. Everyone is welcome.

UPCOMING SESSHIN

DECEMBER 31 - JANUARY 1: New Year's Eve Sit

We will gather at Gael's house at 8:15 PM; sitting starts at 8:30. Sitting, kinhin, sending off the old/welcoming the new, and ringing the bell will be followed by sangha circle, champagne, and potluck snacks. For more information, call Suzanne.

JANUARY SESSHIN

There will be a retreat with Maylie Scott from the 20th through the 23rd in Maylie's new home at 740 Park Avenue, off Fickle Hill Road in Arcata, beginning at 7 PM Wednesday; daily sitting will be from 6:30 AM to 9 PM. [Maps are available on the book table at Sunday sittings, or call Suzanne.] Maylie will give a talk each day at 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. Three oryoki sets are available for guests. Both oryoki and sitting instruction will be available. On Saturday, the retreat will end at 5 PM, followed by clean-up and a pot-luck at 6 PM. The main course for the pot-luck will be prepared by retreatants. Sangha members who weren't able to participate in the sesshin are welcome to the potluck; please bring a side dish or something to drink. 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 January 13 to help us estimate the quantity of food needed for each meal. The cost is \$10 a day; as always, scholarships are available. Parking is restricted to not more than two or three spaces in front of the house. Please park on Fickle Hill Road if these spaces are taken. For more information call Dennis Shayne or Pete Kayes.

FEBRUARY SATURDAY SIT

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 February 13. Please bring a bag lunch and sitting equipment. For more information, call Gael).

LETTERS

from Sherry Skillwoman

To the Incoming BOD members - welcome to the smaller circle, if not the lesser vehicle. It's been fun keeping the zafu warm for you. One resource which might be helpful is Humboldt Area Foundation's "Orientation to BOD" workshop. It's a three hour orientation to the dharma & karma of being on a BOD, which provides lots of koan material & some common vocabulary. The co-facilitator tag team was also a great "process-art" performance. There were three of us zenners from AZG at the last one, but none of us were Incoming. Upcoming BOD workshops are scheduled February 23 & May 5 from 5:30 to 8:30 & cost \$20, including abundant snacks (sorry Gordy - I misremembered that they were free, but I had actually prepaid awhile back). HAF's phone is 442-2993. Enjoy the journey & remember, if you don't like the news, go out & make some of your own!

HALLOWE'EN & THE DHARMA DOZENS: Erin & Sherry showed up at early sit wearing dharma instruction devices that strangely resembled clown noses (remember those cues from Maylie to focus on your nose?). These devices seem to work through the mechanism of making it more challenging to breathe, forcing the wearer to deepen their meditation into the anaerobic zone. In the external realm, the clown noses also present other sitters with the opportunity to work with whatever emotion (such as annoyance or hilarity) arises. Later, in the parking lot after "dressing down," a little dharma banter arose spontaneously amongst the zenners:

"WHERE'S your nose?"

"That IS the great question, isn't it?"

"WHOSE nose is it, anyway?"

"WHO knows?"

Yours for bozo zen as part of the continuing dharma drama - sherry zenhead

from Mark P.

Something was quietly offered at our reading discussion a few Sundays ago. This was an account by our dharma friend, Bill Devall. Bill told us how he had come to find himself at St. Joseph's Hospital just one week earlier. On Rose's advice Bill checked himself into the hospital emergency room and was diagnosed with congestive heart failure. In a few timeless moments he found himself tied to life support systems while an array of doctors and nurses monitored his condition. During this time Bill's awareness settled into a state of unexpected ease. His focus sharpened and he experienced the activity around him with a broad, natural calm. At the edge of life and death he discovered an inherent freedom. Bill commented to the group that this experience verified for him that the Buddhist term "emptiness" is not just a concept.

So thankfully Bill is still with us and is doing well. He spoke on November 15 at an interfaith prayer vigil for the healing of the planet. His comments were derived from the heart ground of mountains walking - alive at this moment and active since before the Empty Eon. (See Dogen: Mountains and Waters Sutra.)

Daishu-in West Rinzaï Zen Temple: A Mountain Song

Michaela Vargas

It is difficult to find the words to describe my experience of the Zen Temple in the mountains above Benbow, for it was a deeply felt experience coming from a space inside of me that manifests in physical sensations rather than mental formations. But, let me try to give you some sense of my impression of what it was like to come upon this exquisite setting.

The road up the mountain is our usual part-paved and part-dirt road that we have in Humboldt County and it winds up about four miles from the freeway. (I was glad I was not driving. I have a bit of a phobia of heights so I was completely absorbed in the road and holding on as we went around the curves.) (Good practice in mindfulness.) Ursula (one of the Zen Priests) was leading us up the road, or we may never have found the place. Later coming back we looked for landmarks so that we could find our way up again. (A good idea if you plan to go there yourself.) Suddenly, from a rough wild Humboldt terrain, we turned down a road and found ourselves in a landscape that seemed to have dropped out of another time and place. A Japanese Zen garden lay before us and I could feel already a sense of peace and timelessness enveloping me.

The first thing that I noticed and felt was a profound sense of Order, a sense that everything in this place was in harmony and had a specific reason for being the way it was. (Even the tools used by the Zen priest were laid out after use in a set pattern on the ground.) My feeling was that every detail had been arranged here to give one the experience that you could be completely here and in the now in this perfectly aesthetic environment and not have to do a thing but just be here! The paths around the grounds are meticulously raked every day and I felt I should not even be walking on them. The whole ambiance blends in with the surrounding hills and trees, and even each rock on and along the sides of the paths seemed to be set in place with an artistic touch to add to the beauty of every other rock around it.

The Temple itself is smaller than I had expected, almost like a symmetrically designed dollhouse that is really to be looked at rather than gone into. But, meditating in the temple facing the door that looks out toward the hills above the Eel River was an experience I shall never forget, pure bliss to me! One that is etched in my memory for all time, and that I can still bring into my consciousness when I choose to do so. The other buildings on the land besides the Temple are the kitchen, another building for guests and where the priests live, the hot tub, and of course the Japanese toilets. There is also a very lovely pond that one can sit by and listen to the fish plop and at night the frogs singing their melodies.

The whole compound is not very large. I could only envision from six to ten people being accommodated there at one time max. However, I got the impression from the two Zen priests that they would like more visitors and people who would like to come there to practice. They were very kind and hospitable to us, but said that if we came to practice they would be more strict. Also there is no charge to go there or to stay, they do not even ask for a donation; just a call to let them know you are coming is all that is required. I took lots of pictures that anyone is welcome to view, and Mark has a set of the same pictures. (ed's note: Daishu-in West's number is 923-9529; call at 7AM, noon, or 4PM only. The Temple is featured in the October 29 Northcoast Journal.)

from Suzanne M.

the breath of pines in winter;
water over stones:
ah, here you are.
Incense burns to ash and smoke.

SANGHA FRIENDS

What a busy time for Maylie - the home on Park Ave should be going into escrow any day now and she has a new granddaughter. Mariana made a dramatic entrance at 1AM on the 13th: she paused after popping just her head out, opened

her eyes, and looked left, then right before all seven pounds of her greeted the early morning and her family. She and her parents, John and Patricia Scott, are doing well.

In another dramatic entrance, John Hudson appeared this month in his first acting engagement at HSU, Angels in America, a seven-and-a-half hour play exploring various aspects of American culture and AIDS in the mid-80's. Huzzah! He acquitted himself so well he was offered another role next year, which he is considering.

CURRENT AZG DISCUSSIONS

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Pete Kayes

The annual meeting of the Board of Directors was held at Northcountry Clinic December 6. The election of the board took place at this meeting. The ballots were counted by Bill Devall and Mark P. Bill announced the results; Gordy Anderson, Lynda McDevitt, Maylie Scott, Monique Belanger, and Pete Kayes were elected. The board then elected their officers: Gordy was elected president; Lynda, vice president; Monique, treasurer; and Pete, secretary. A number of items were discussed:

1. It was proposed that the board meet when Maylie is here for the January retreat.
2. It was proposed that board members participate in a workshop in boardmanship sponsored by the Humboldt Area Foundation.
3. Teacher support was also brought up as a topic for the Board to discuss.

A date for the next Board meeting is tentatively set for January 19, 1999.

GARAGE COMMITTEE

As the process of Maylie's buying the home on Park Ave continues, a new committee has formed to look into remodeling the garage for use as a zendo. This group will be meeting, planning, consulting, kvetching, designing, pricing, purchasing, digging, building . . . If you have experience in these areas, are a contractor, know a contractor who might offer low-cost or free consultation and/or design services, or are just plain interested, please call Mark P. The next meeting, after zazen January 10 at Northcountry Clinic, to formulate a basic remodeling plan from which we can generate a cost estimate.

PRACTICE COMMITTEE to meet Jan. 3 & Feb. 7, after zazen, at Northcountry Clinic.

1999 CALENDAR

Weekly Sunday meetings which follow local sesshin will be held at the Aikido Center at the regular time unless otherwise noted.

Practice committee meetings are open to all. They are held on Sundays at Northcountry Clinic at 11:00 AM following regular zazen practice.

Weekday sits have increased to both Tuesday at 9:15 AM and Wednesday at 7:15 PM every week through June. Weekday sits will not be held at Gael's when they coincide with sesshin or during the week of March 21.

Non-sesshin sitting dates, times, and place may change when Maylie moves to Arcata. When changes occur, a new schedule will be generated and mailed.

The Newsletter will carry information regarding other changes in the calendar when possible.

JANUARY

- 03 Practice Committee Meeting
- 10 Garage Committee
- 19 Board Meeting (tentative)
- 20-23 Sesshin at Maylie's
- 24 Practice Committee Meeting

FEBRUARY

- 07 Practice Committee Meeting
- 13 Sit at Gael's 9:00 AM - 4:00 PM

MARCH

- 10-13 Sesshin at Maylie's

14 Practice Committee Meeting
21 Weekday sits will not be held this week

APRIL

04 Practice Committee Meeting
10 Sit at Gael's 9:00 AM - 4:00 PM

MAY

02 Practice Committee Meeting
13-17 Big Flat Sesshin (Coordinators: Mark & Gordy)

JUNE

06 Practice Committee Meeting
12 Sit at Gael's 9:00 AM - 4:00 PM

JULY

15 Maylie moves (tentative) (Note: non-sesshin sitting dates and times may change)
21-24 Sesshin at Jane's
25 Practice Committee Meeting

AUGUST

08 Practice Committee Meeting
14 Saturday Sit 9:00 AM - 4:00 PM
22 Family Picnic - at Jane's

SEPTEMBER

05 Practice Committee Meeting
9-14 MOUNTAINS & RIVER SESSHIN Coordinator: Paul

OCTOBER

03 Practice Committee Meeting
09 Saturday Sit 9:00 AM - 4:00 PM

NOVEMBER

07 Practice Committee Meeting
10-13 Local Sesshin Coordinators: Lloyd & Lynda

DECEMBER

05 Practice Committee Meeting
7-11 Possible Sesshin

EDITOR'S NOTES

The next newsletter deadline is February 18. Mail your comments, letters, articles, announcements, reflections &/or zen poetry to Suzanne at the above address or e-mail her. Please note on your enclosure that it is for inclusion in the newsletter.

From Ancestors, Tricycle, Winter 1996, on Dharma Master Ta Tsung:

One day in early May, I was driving down the street in Monteagle when I spied Ta Tsung sitting on the stone wall under a big oak tree in front of the Methodist Church. He had a small easel and his ink brushes and other paraphernalia, and I guessed that he was painting from life.

It turned out that it was only another one of his Chinese landscapes, with great mountains, cataracts, and flowing streams. About two-thirds of the way down from the top was a small clearing in a pine forest where a hermit, diminutive in the grandeur of the landscape, was sweeping his hut. He had a smile on his face and a glow about his head.

“What’s that about?” I asked Ta Tsung.

“This person just have enlightenment sweeping hut.”

“What happens next?”

“Keep sweeping.”

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RESERVATION FORM FOR JANUARY SESSHIN

Return by January 13

NAME PHONE

ADDRESS

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

Thursday: Breakfast Lunch Dinner

Friday: Breakfast Lunch Dinner

Saturday: Breakfast Lunch Potluck

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 to: Arcata Zen Group