

ARCATA ZEN GROUP NEWSLETTER
February, 2000

SESSHIN COORDINATOR NEEDED FOR APRIL
To Volunteer, Please See Below

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

ZENDO APPRECIATION POTLUCK

On Saturday, March 4 at 6 PM, there will be a potluck dinner at the zendo to show our appreciation to Rob, Dan, and Mark (as volunteer coordinator) for the effort they have put into the garage-to-zendo remodel. Come to Ooh! and Ahh! over the guys (and the remodel); stay to eat.

ONE DAY RETREAT

On Saturday, March 11, a daylong retreat will be held at Maylie's home from 6:30 AM to 5 PM. 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.

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

Tom Lewis is doing an internship at Humboldt County Correctional Facility (jail). He is teaching yoga, meditation, and leading spiritual support groups as a Unitarian Universalist Ministerial Student. This spring he will be training community volunteers from different religious faiths to teach a 20 hour curriculum called Framework for Recovery to inmates at the Humboldt County jail. The training will take place during the first two weeks of May at the Humboldt County Jail, times and days to be announced later. Facilitators will work together in pairs and be required to facilitate the 20 hour program at least twice during a calendar year. If this interests you, please come to one of two informational meetings (at St. Mary's Catholic Church, Janes Road, Arcata, Wednesday March 22, 7:00 PM or at Humboldt Unitarian Universalist Fellowship, Jacoby Creek Road, Bayside, Monday April 17, 7:30 PM) or call Tom for more information.

In addition, Tom will be showing three videos at the Fellowship Building on March 11 at 7:30 PM and leading a following discussion. The videos: Doing Time, Doing Vipassna: a violent large prison in India is transformed by an ancient meditation technique. Reaching Behind Bars: trained volunteers visit inmates to provide non-judgmental companionship. Framework for Recovery: introductory tape about learning new life skills and changing negative, addictive patterns of behavior.

FORMAL OPENING OF THE ZENDO

On April 2 at 11:30 AM, Maylie's teacher, Mel Weitsman Roshi of Berkeley Zen Center, will join us for the formal opening of our new Zendo. The ceremonies will be followed by a potluck. Carpooling is requested; please contact Maylie for ride-sharing information.

APRIL SESSHIN

There will be a retreat with Maylie from April 5 through 8 at her home. (There is some discussion of an alternative site for the sesshin; call Maylie for an update after the March 5 PC meeting.) 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 Saturday, the retreat will end at 5 PM, followed by clean-up. On Sunday, the group will meet as usual at the Aikido Center at 8:10 AM; Maylie will give a talk at approximately 9 reat will be held outdoors during the day, followed by evening discussions at a public hall. Camping will be at Bandelier National Monument. At this time, Robert Aitken is scheduled to lead the retreat; Maylie Scott is planning to attend. For more information, contact Greg Mello with the Los Alamos Study Group (phone: 505-982-7747 or email: gmello@lasg.org). Maylie and Mark also have some info.

LETTERS

DHARMA TALK: Pilgrimage

Maylie Scott

(excerpted from a talk given at the Aikido Center, November 21, 1999)

I want to talk about finding our way; how we engage with our path. There is a discussion about this in a collection of koans in the Book of Serenity, case number 20, "Dizang's Nearness."

Dizang asked Fayan, "Where are you going?"

Fayan said, "Around on pilgrimage."

Dizang said, "What is the purpose of pilgrimage?"

Fayan said, "I don't know."

Dizang said, "Not knowing is nearest."

When we are practicing, that is, when we are living by vow or intention rather than by what we want or don't want, we are on pilgrimage. If we understand our life as pilgrimage, we naturally take the cultivation of the precepts as the work that turns us towards our Buddha nature. Our suffering takes on meaning; as we recognize and honor it, we learn to work through our resistances and to go deeper in our way.

The teacher asks the student what he's doing and the student says he's going around on pilgrimage. In those early days in China, monks traditionally went around from one practice place to another. We too move around - we have an extraordinary number of teachers and traditions to choose from, but this is not the point. The teacher wanted to take care of the student, to go deeper. "What's the purpose of pilgrimage?"

This is the teacher's job; to re-frame the life situation in practice. Somebody asked me if I felt bored when she came and "dumped her moods" on me. I said no, because moods are what we live with most intimately, so how we use them - compelling, demanding, confusing as they are - how we practice in the midst of them is very important. Pilgrimage is an every day matter.

What's the purpose? Every other month we have a three day sesshin. After a few periods as body begins to complain and mind is less than accommodating, the question "What am I doing here?" naturally arises. We very often talk about it; no one of us can give a definitive answer, but we continue to come and it is even possible to look forward to sesshins. The student says he "doesn't know" (he is probably a sincere student, known to the teacher, who is not using "don't know" in a superficial way), and the teacher accepts and refines the answer, "Not knowing is the nearest," thus helping all of us on our way.

Zazen keeps us "near" to our experience. Even if we are obsessing and daydreaming, we are not doing anything else - not running around - and our breath and body are strong reminders of the bare presence of our root. Sesshin sustains this experience of "nearness" for a longer time and so we have more time to digest it. When our experience is one of separateness, we are the victims of our situation. "I am bored, hurting, impatient, angry," etc. When we bring our attention in closer, what was a problem becomes just the experience of pain, mood, fatigue, etc. and we can find a place of rest in the midst of it. We are then in recovery from thinking we have to dislike or like what is happening.

"Not knowing is nearest." Not an easy practice. There is often an element of holding one's feet to the fire. But as one stays with it, one's life begins to change; there is a freedom from burdens of attachment and a warming up of compassion. Large decisions about life changes can be made with more stability because one is grounded, in the transition - taking one step at a time and watching the effects, then taking another. One is involved with the many aspects of the situation, rather than engaged by attachment to our idea of the outcome.

While each of us has a unique path, we are also deeply affected by one another. Our different intentions are mirrors for one another and we find energy and inspiration in the common effort. Nine people are involved in the process of receiving Jukai, the Bodhisattva lay precepts. This involves sewing rakus, studying the precepts together, and participating in a ceremony that will occur in late spring in the new zendo. What will happen next? We don't know, but our purpose is strengthened.

ONCE MORE, DEAR FRIENDS . . .

The PC is reorganizing and looking for new (and old) members. Here's an idea of what it's all about:

Guidelines: The Practice Committee is comprised of an unspecified number of voting members who are willing to commit to a term of one year (to begin in January of each year). If a member cannot attend a meeting, he/she will notify someone on the committee. If there are unexplained absences at two or more meetings, that person ceases to be a member. Anyone is welcome to participate in PC meetings but only members will vote. Job Description: The Practice Committee coordinates all functions of the AZG except financial affairs and teaching responsibilities. These functions include:

Maintain regular dialog with the teacher and with members who provide resources and information concerning the AZG (newsletter, inquiries, phone contacts, etc.), including the Board of Directors

Coordinate set-up and leadership of Sunday morning zazen; coordinate additional sitting times

Coordinate bi-monthly sesshin and other sangha events

Meet at least once a month to review current needs and business of the sangha

Explore AZG groundwork issues such as: incorporation, by-laws, membership definition, etc.

Work with the teacher to identify and set up opportunities for extending and deepening practice. Examples: extended practice period, Dharma study group, Base group.

Work with the teacher and the sangha to develop introductory instruction and information. The PC will provide information to newcomers about opportunities for involvement, including making minutes of meetings available and encouraging participation in the various sangha groups.

PC members should be willing to take on specific job assignments such as organizing library materials, facilitating meetings, welcoming newcomers after reading/discussion, etc.

Some duties of the PC are not easily categorized but may range from choosing a gift for the teacher to supporting a sangha member in need.

The PC meets on the first Sunday of every month at 11 AM at Maylie's. If you wish to join or get further information, please come to the next meeting on March 5.

Old Cats Dream of Buddha

Suzanne M.

We let our lives live through us,
cushioned in fluid reality,
by amniotic memory
of what has and will come to be,
like old cats sleeping soundly,
moving only to keep in the sun.

We hold ourselves, suspended,
listening hard for the moment of birth,
for delineation between the days,
when the future is thought to reveal
the rock outcropping of hardcore truth
plowed up in a fertile field.

The cat was never a kitten,
the plow only breaks on the rock;
all of our days urge us gently to wake,
while our lives haven't even begun,
begun
and our lives haven't even begun.

CURRENT AZG DISCUSSIONS

PRACTICE COMMITTEE

During the January meeting, the PC looked at the intermeshing of the practice period (to begin with the February sesshin) and jukai by discussing memories and impressions of last year's practice period. They also discussed PC membership, the forms used within AZG practice, the tools used during work periods, the remodel, and simplifying sesshin cooking.

At February's meeting, Mark offered to submit an article to the newsletter to explain membership

in the practice committee. The issue of multiple chemical sensitivity (MCS) was raised, with Carol providing a handout to the committee which generated much discussion. The PC agreed: 1) to address the personal issues raised by Carol and Suzanne (both disabled by MCS), and to consider these issues in the context of larger environmental concerns; 2) to support the AZG as a comfortable place for those with MCS through the development of education and guidelines for the sangha (see below); and 3) to begin implementing these decisions by creating a larger, more forceful sign for zendo entry doors regarding the use of chemicals in the zendo, and also by having someone from the sangha speak personally to anyone who may come to an AZG event inadvertently or unknowingly wearing an obvious fragrance. Also discussed at the meeting were the Appreciation Potluck and the current state of both the zendo remodel, including a decision to paint when the weather is better, and the AZG Web page being created by Monique. Next month's agenda will include the possibility of holding the April sesshin at Rose Madrone's property in Southern Humboldt and the book selection process.

MULTIPLE CHEMICAL SENSITIVITY (MCS) AND THE SANGHA: What You Can Do to Help Carol Boyd

The word "fragrance" on a product label refers to any combination of 4,000 chemicals, nearly all of them synthetic derivatives of crude oil. Commonly, "fragrance" equals formaldehyde, phenol, and/or ethanol. People with MCS get sick from these toxic chemicals, not from real peaches or real roses. The single most effective action those who attend AZG events can take for the safety and comfort of people with MCS is to begin eliminating fragrance from their clothing and bodies. Fragrance appears in laundry products (detergents, soaps, softeners, etc.) and in personal care products (shampoo and conditioner, lotions and moisturizers, shaving products, soaps, deodorants, etc.). Laundry products are not required to disclose ingredients, but nearly all mainstream products contain fragrance. If it says something like "spring-time fresh," has an obvious scent, or just lists patent numbers, chances are high it contains fragrance. Several alternative products disclose ingredients, so just look to see if "fragrance" is listed. (Lifeline and Planet are fragrance-free.) Personal care products are required to label ingredients. "Fragrance-free" products typically say so on the front, or you can read the "Ingredients" list on the container. If the word "fragrance" appears by itself or in combination with other words (natural fragrance, peach fragrance, fragrance oil, etc.), it means the product contains fragrance. If you have any questions regarding MCS and/or safer products to use while attending AZG events, please call Carol.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

At the January meeting, the board was elected: Lynda McDevitt (president), Dennis Shayne (vice president), Pete Kayes (secretary), Gordy Anderson, and Maylie Scott, who, in her absence, was assigned treasurer. Maylie deferred and at the February meeting, Gordy was elected unanimously to the treasurer post. The BOD also discussed the gifts to be presented to Rob, Dan, and Mark (as volunteer coordinator) at the Appreciation potluck. The next meeting will be March 29; items for the agenda: teacher compensation and letter to those who haven't committed to pledges.

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 April 10. Send your practice-related announcements, articles, reflections, &/or poetry to Suzanne.

DATES TO REMEMBER

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| MARCH: | 4 | - Zendo Appreciation Potluck |
| | 5 | - Practice Committee Meeting |
| | 11 | - One Day Retreat |
| | | - Prison Programs Videos |
| | 22 | - Framework for Recovery Jail Program Meeting |
| | 29 | - Board of Directors Meeting |
| APRIL: | 2 | - Formal Opening of the Zendo |
| | 5-8 | - Sesshin |
| | 10 | - Next Newsletter Deadline |
| | 17 | - Alternate Framework for Recovery Jail Program Meeting |
| MAY: | 22-26 | - Interfaith Retreat at Los Alamos with Robert Aitken |