

February 2002 AZC Newsletter

Thoughts on the future of Rin Shin-ji

As many of you know, The Board of Directors and the Practice Committee have been busy developing strategies for a response to a complaint issued by The Humboldt County Planning Department concerning zoning regulations and our use of the zendo on Park Ave. The weeks of sangha discussion make a long, multi-layered story with an extensive list of alternatives, contingencies, and questions. So, to be brief, let's say, the Board is making headway towards a resolution. To those who have helped, visible and invisible, near and far - thank you.

I wanted to put the details of these concerns aside for a minute and say something about the long term future of Rin Shin-ji. When Maylie moved into the house on Park Avenue, it was with a sense that this would be a wonderful place for her to live and teach during the time that we continued to be a small group. She guessed that we could get along with limited parking and a relatively small space for several years. But Maylie also foresaw a time when we might need to find a space where we could accommodate more people, and become a more inclusive center. In this imagined future we could advertise our retreats, invite other groups to use the center, and not be constrained by parking or septic. As for the immediate future, there is a good chance we will resolve our differences with the Planning Department and continue to sit in peace and harmony at 740 Park. This will take a bit of luck and a willingness on our part to be a minimalist temple. A larger and more inclusive center, if it is to come into being, is still somewhere down the road. But at this edge of practice and group transition we can ask: What are our long term goals and how do we nurture Maylie's vision in its most intimate expression?

In a Dharma talk that Maylie gave in March of 2001 she refers to Bodhidharma's words on the how and where of authentic practice. - Bodhidharma said: "By pointing directly to your own heart, find Buddha." Rin Shin-ji or Forest Heart Temple is the name Maylie (with some help from Kaz Tanahashi) gave to the zendo at 740 Park Ave. In doing this she was designating more than a place. She identified a spirit of place and practice, the refuge of Buddha, that we have inherited and continue to nurture. It is not subject to life and death or zoning regulations but is not separate from them either. Maylie had great faith in a future that would fall into place naturally. By pointing directly to her own heart she showed us what we need to know.

Mark P.

NEWS AND EVENTS

Movie Night at Rin Shin-ji

AZG Sangha members have been treated to a series of great Buddhist cinema over the last several months at Rin Shin-ji. Hosted by Erika Makino and Gael Hodgkins, dharma-related movies (and free popcorn!) are offered one Wednesday night a month. The next series includes:

- "Enlightenment Guaranteed"

German comedy about two brothers in mid-life crisis trying to get their lives back together in a Japanese Zen monastery. If you think we struggle with oryoki, wait till you see these guys!

7 PM Wednesday February 20th

•“King of Masks”

Brilliantly filmed drama about an old Chinese artist and his wish to have a son and an heir to his magical craft. 7 PM Wednesday March 20th

Kahaeng Chongjin Eight-hour Zen Retreat

Sitting meditation and other elements of Korean Buddhist practice, led by students Yosim Ken Norman and Ken Berman. We usually meet once per month on a Saturday, from 9 AM to 5 PM. Mark your calendars now for Saturday, March 23 and Saturday, April 13. Location to be announced. This is not an AZG-sponsored event, but all are welcome to attend!

This is an excellent opportunity to grow in our Dharma practice, putting peace and serenity together with great energy and fearless effort. It's an uncomplicated day off, full of pure pleasure and deep, luminous quiet. Please bring a sack lunch and a small donation (suggest \$5 - \$20). Please come for the entire eight hours, and respect silence.

“May the divine power of the inexhaustible Three Jewels help us fulfill our wish that all beings in the Dharma realm attain their Buddhahood together at one and the same time.”

Prison Sangha News

The Buddhist-Taoist sangha at Pelican Bay State Prison has invited the Aracta Zen Group to join them in a celebration of Buddha's Birthday on Saturday, February 23rd. AZG members will travel to Crescent City in time for morning zazen and a festive luncheon. For those who wish to accept this invitation, prior gate clearance and security forms are now available for approval. Call Michael.

At the Humboldt County Correctional Facility in Eureka, several sangha members continue to lead weekly meditation classes each Thursday evening. We are also involved in the Framework for Recovery curriculum, offered once a month by certified trainers at the jail. Aftercare support groups are now being planned for Framework graduates.

Sangha Week at Tassajara

The SF Zen Center extends an invitation to members of small sanghas and sitting groups to practice together at Tassajara April 28th-May 3rd in honor of Zenkei Blanche Hartman's last year as Abbess. The rate is \$50/day/person. Pre-registration is required. Contact Hannah Meara at (415) 865-3789 or presassist@hotmail.com

Bulletin Board

•Teacher Committee Survey

The results of the Teacher Committee survey on visiting teachers prompted a recommendation to invite back Angie Boissevain and/or Daniel Terragno to lead a second sesshin in 2002.

There is an opportunity to help form a residential practice community near Rin Shin-ji for members of the Arcata Zen Group. A three bedroom home in Bayside, 7 minutes from the zendo,

will be available in February. For information and applications call Michael.

The AZG is requesting donations or information concerning reasonably priced bedroom furniture (ie., full-size futon and frame, nightstand) and any appropriate decorations for the visiting teacher's bedroom. Many thanks to Quynh Shafer and Erika Makino for creating the beautiful curtain for the closet.

- Zen Master Jeff Kitzes of the Kwan Um School of Zen will lead a retreat on Saturday Feb. 16, from 9 to 5 at the Samoa Women's Club. Private dharma interviews available. Bring sack lunch. For more information, contact Ken. On Sunday, February 17th, Jeff will give a dharma talk at the Aikido Center at 9:20 AM.

- The AZG Morning Sitting Group extends an invitation to all Sangha members to share breakfast and informal discussion on the 3rd Tuesday of each month at 7:15 AM after morning zazen.

- Tuesday, February 19th

- Tuesday, March 19th

- Tuesday, April 16th

- New AZG Board Elected: Geoffrey Smith and Gordon Anderson were re-elected to two-year terms on the AZG Board and Michael Twombly was elected to his first two year term. Rose Brewster and President Lynda McDevitt continue serving as Board members for one more year.

The following is a letter from Margaret Howe, a sangha member living in Booneville, California.

February 4, 2002

Dear Friends at AZC,

I think of you often and send you much love. I am so impressed with how much you are doing and continuing on with, all the while carrying the weight of the sadness and loss of our beloved Maylie. Thank you for your great dedication to the practice and the AZC in this rocky time. I send this poem to share with you. It is so zen and seems so much like Maylie. When my father died 22 years ago, my sister found it in a magazine and gave it to all eight of her siblings. After Maylie died, I resurrected it.

Many blessings to you.

Love,

Margaret Howe

Form

We were wrong to think
form a frame, a still shot of the late
beloved, or the pot thrown
around water. We wanted
to hold what we had.
But the clay contains
the breaking, and the man
is dead--the scrapbook
has him--and the form of life

is a motion. So from all this
sadness, the bed being touched,
the mirror being filled,
we learn what carrying on
is for. We move, we are moved.
it runs in the family.
For the life of us
we cannot stand to stay

Heather McHugh

The Four Foundations of Mindfulness

Dharma talk by Maylie Scott, Roshi

April 18, 1996 Arcata, CA

I want to talk today about a very old tradition in Buddhism, The Four Foundations of Mindfulness.

I begin with a story about a man who was walking down the road and saw the Buddha. The Buddha was radiant; he had a wonderful, open, peaceful and radiant look. The man went up and asked him, tried to figure out who he was. "Are you a god?" and the Buddha said "No." "Are you a king?" and the Buddha said, "No." "Are you a man?" and the Buddha said, "No."

"Who are you?" the man asked.

"I am awake."

So this is our endeavor: to be awake. Buddhism is not a theistic religion so it doesn't ask that you bring any belief to it at all. In fact, it asks the opposite: that you simply make the effort to be awake and, in the light of that awakening effort, you examine all the beliefs that you have, and you see what holds and what doesn't hold.

So what does this business of being awake mean? It means that we make an effort to see things as they really are...to be with what is, to be in the present, whatever the depths and the boundaries of that present are. This is a pretty radical effort because we are all bound up in our self-habit. We all have particular points of view and particular feelings and habits and histories, causes and conditions that brought us into the world. We look different, and our attention patterns are different, and our abilities are different, and so on.

We have a tendency to get enclosed in those differences, to be enclosed in our self-habit and therefore to see the world from that point of view. We all have the different spectacles of our self-habit that we see through. The spectacles are so close and familiar that much of the time we don't even notice we're looking through them. Buddhism asks us if we are awake. Can we suspend that self-habit? To what degree can we suspend that self-habit? Can we take that self-habit lightly enough so that we can be in the present, so that we can see things more as they really are?

That's what the exercise of this day is: to notice the self-habit and suspend it. We have had

several hours now of sitting in one place and watching our body-mind habits. This effort is an unusual effort because it's just for the sake of itself. If we put some kind of expectation or some kind of goal on this effort, we are still bound to self-habit. For example, we think, "I should be able to keep my mind clear of thoughts; probably everyone else is already doing it." Or "I should be a better person after this day." "Maybe I'll sleep better." All this kind of expectation. It's impossible to be without expectation but still, we should take that lightly because the point of what we are doing is just to be, to suspend the doing and just to be and see what happens.

Our effort is to be mindful. Mindfulness, awakeness, is a quality we cannot have too much of. Mindfulness means to just be aware of what is coming and of what is here and of what is gone. And mindfulness has several aspects. There's a very sharp, clear aspect of mindfulness. One teacher says it's like throwing a rock against the wall and when you hear the rock hit, that moment, that's mindfulness. The complete moment of contact is mindfulness.

Another aspect of mindfulness is awareness, a broader aspect, just being aware of your toes and your scalp and your waist, a kind of inclusive awareness. And another aspect of mindfulness is called bare attention, just shining a light on, just bare attention. So the right effort in this day of sitting is simply to be mindful, to be present, and that involves, as you are finding out, balancing, a continual kind of balancing of all the aspects of your situation. It's like being in a sailboat: when there's a strong wind, you take in the sail; when there's a big wind, you let it out, and you're steering and constantly making adjustments to what the changes in the weather are. So in this day your mindful effort is, from moment to moment, to know what's going on in this system and to balance it in the most awake way possible.

I'm going to talk about a very old teaching called "The Four Foundations of Mindfulness," using Thich Nhat Hanh's book *Transformation and Healing: Sutra on the Four Foundations of Mindfulness*. I'll read part of the Sutra translation.

The Buddha said: "Bhikkus, there is a most wonderful way to help living beings realize purification, overcome directly grief and sorrow, end pain and anxiety, travel the right path and realize nirvana. This way is the Four Establishments of Mindfulness. "What are the Four Establishments?"

1. "Bhikkus, a practitioner remains established in the observation of the body in the body, diligent, with clear understanding, mindful, having abandoned every craving and every distaste for this life.
2. "He remains established in the observation of the feelings in the feelings, diligent, with clear understanding, mindful, having abandoned every craving for this life.
3. "He remains established in the observation of the mind in the mind, diligent, with clear understanding, mindful, having abandoned every craving and every distaste for this life.
4. "He remains established in the observation of the objects of mind in the mind, diligent, with clear understanding, mindful, having abandoned every craving and every distaste for this life."

These are the four foundations. You notice that there's a little tag with each one of them, "with clear understanding." That is, one sets one's intention, one sets one's purpose very strongly. You say to yourself, "I'm going to stay here, no matter what. I am going to sit on this cushion. I am

going to be here awake for this day,” and that’s just a strong intention. Mindful. Making that effort.

“Having abandoned every craving and every distaste for this life.” We’re just continually buffeted between our wanting and our not wanting, between our craving and our aversion, so this is a request to give that up for this time, to suspend wanting and not wanting and just apply attention.

The first foundation of “observing the body in the body” is what zazen instruction persistently emphasizes. It means to put your attention just on the body sensation and to be aware of all that kind of body music, sensation, energy that is always going on underneath the skin, that we’re often only slightly aware of. Just be there, be in the breath, be in the body, to be in the presence of the body, putting effort into keeping the body open.

The second foundation of mindfulness is “observing the feelings in the feelings.” Now, what are feelings? We have emotional feelings: we’re happy, we’re sad, we’re tired, we’re excited, depressed. We have physical feelings, physical feelings of anger, desire and so on, and so there is a whole continuum of feeling.

We can use these foundations of mindfulness by first just putting the attention on the body, just the body sensation, and then in the body base, you can move to the feeling foundation. What are the feelings? What are the feeling sensations? What are the feeling energies? What are the emotional feelings? Are they positive? Are they negative? Are they neutral? There’s always something going on. If it’s a neutral feeling, it’s kind of transparent, but it’s there. Observing neutral feelings is a very subtle practice.

The third is the state of mind, examining the state of mind, the feeling states-of-mind such as excitement or torpor or anxiety, faith, hope, irritation anger, contentment, restlessness, etc. One way to be mindful of states of mind is to name them. If I’m irritated, I just notice that and perhaps say “irritation” or if I’m sleepy, I notice that and say “sleepy.” So you always know the state of mind you’re in; very often we don’t know the state of mind we’re in; so we carry it around, and it is actually what we’re acting out of, but we don’t know it. Can you notice what the state of mind is? And you may even be able to notice how it changes; you may notice that your state of mind at the beginning of the first period of zazen is quite different from what it is now, and so on.

And then the final foundation is the contents of the mind, what it is we are actually thinking about, the stream of contents. It may be that it’s a very extended daydream or plan, or it may be it’s a thought that has a lot of juice in it. For instance, you may be thinking about a close relationship, feeling very loving about that person and missing that person. How does the body respond to that thought? If the thought is about some unresolved situation that you’re trying to work out, and carries some anxiety and maybe irritation about it, what’s the feeling in the body which is associated with that?

If you find yourself becoming preoccupied and carried away by the thought you are thinking—that it persists and dominates—you can try cutting the thought off, just not thinking and just feeling the feelings underneath, breathing with the feelings underneath. That can be very

releasing.

So those are the four traditional foundations of the mindful effort: the body, the feelings, the state of mind and the contents of mind. That's the kind of sieve you can use to let the day go through. Sometimes your experience will be that malleable; other times the experience just takes over. Sometimes all you can do is take one breath at a time, and that's valuable too.

The important thing is to be awake and aware of your own state of body-mind, moment by moment.

Morning Sitting

My alarm clock is permanently set and ready to go off at 5 A.M. I just have to remember to turn it off when the weekend comes. Getting up early is not so much a problem as going to bed early, but, even after a good night's sleep, some mornings I face my inventive excuses not to go or my sense of entitlement to be lazy today.

I don't know why I go. Maybe it's my curiosity about the mysterious process of learning and refinement of simple acts and a glimpse into a world beyond logic. For example, we are learning to sound the bells and the mokugyo. The process is an exquisite lesson in Practice. Maylie told us that one needs to "sound the bell with one's ears," and Thich Nhat Hanh says one does not strike a bell but one "invites the bell to sound." Many of us in the morning Zazen group took all that to heart, and we paid attention.

At a Sesshin with Sojun Roshi, he gently pulled Rose and me aside to say that he wanted to speak to us about the bell ringing. I was puzzled because, after all, we have been practicing to produce a beautiful sound. He gently lifted the mallet and brought it close to the bell. I watched his technique like a hawk, but in a fleeting micro second of inattention, the bell sounded in such a way that I could not identify from where it came. The sound filled the Zendo and remained there for eternity. The sound was like a first bite into a flaky, buttery French croissant or the stunning melt in your mouth morsel of a perfectly ripened pear. One cannot describe it, but only experience it.

So our motley crew of morning Zazen practitioners continues to Practice. The French have a wonderful word for "practice:" répétition.

June Davis

February 2, 2002

Spring Poem

Spring is here again
with her mantle of
hope and healing—
green everywhere,

flowers, sunshine
soft blanket of fog.
Our teacher dying,
net of birds lifting and
settling over the
bay,
newborn donkey with
big ears, tiny legs already
standing.
Death, birth, all
are contained within this
vessel, the lengthening
days of Spring.

Judith Louise

And from Suzanne M.:

Thank you everyone for the wonderful gift certificate to All Under Heaven - what fun it is to browse around my favorite store, knowing i can get anything i like! I'm enjoying that so much, that i have gotten only one thing so far - a book called "Yoga for Wimps"!! Oy!

Some Thoughts on "When to Listen"

Several Sundays ago I said it's important to tolerate differences of opinion, to understand where even bigots or corrupt politicians are coming from. I sincerely believed in this. Then I went home, got angry at my neighbors and found myself mentally calling them all sorts of names. I live in a studio apartment behind a house inhabited by students whose lifestyle is rather different from mine. They drink a lot. They party a lot. They play loud music. Intellectual snob that I am, this bewilders me.

Yet they seem like nice people, when I remember to see them as people and not as The Noisy Neighbors.

I want my heart to be open even to people who irritate me. I don't like thinking in terms of "us" and "them." But how do we stay open to large differences of culture and opinion? For me, one of the hardest challenges right now is knowing when to listen and when to speak.

I love how the sangha values silence. I've always been quiet, and I feel comfortable with this. It's taken me longer to learn to value speech. Now I feel that if I can offer information or clarity or comfort with my words, I should use them. Yet it's hard to know when and how to offer my opinions on something controversial. I worry that I speak up simply to prove that I'm right. I like seeing how others respond, though. When I hear why they disagree, I realize maybe I'm not quite as right as I thought I was. That is, it's precisely when I talk about my prejudices that I'm most likely to be able to begin to let go of them.

I think I perceive the sangha as more utopian than the rest of the world, and so I get even more frustrated with differences here. I feel the sangha should be a place where wealthy corporate executives and my noisy neighbors are equally welcome to sit. I'm not sure we have that. We're human and each full of our own deeply-held beliefs. Sometimes we have trouble communicating. Sometimes there are conflicts.

I've always been inclined to flee when things get difficult. But this group encourages me, because I see here a willingness to at least keep talking about the difficult issues, to wade into the swamp of conflict.

So I try to peer into the swamp and not be afraid. I try to take a deep breath as I listen, rather than reacting immediately with anger. Often I fail. Most important, and hardest of all, is acknowledging that the challenge and the opportunity are the same: part of why my neighbors' noise bothers me is that the walls between us — the barriers between all of us — are more thin than I usually realize.

Sara Authur

From One Who Came After

I hang up my jacket
place boots on floor,
keys in the snug cave of my shoe
and open the door
No matter how many times
I open that door
the beauty still shocks
Silent figures on black cushions
familiar faces, soft in the buttery light
they do not see me
but I see them
My socked feet pad across the wideboard oak flooring
I am walking on a tree from a forest
I want to roll around this floor like a cat,
press my cheeks against its honeyed finish,
curl up in the rectangles of lamplight
I spot the last free cushion
arrange myself like a teacup in its saucer
and stare at the scrubbed wall,
my eyes tracing the stencilled forms on white,
so different from the picket-fence I face on Sundays
what stories hide behind these alabaster walls?
Innumerable labors created this building
I see people standing under the studs,

discussing, deciding, arguing
all the worries, the late-night phone calls
So that someone like me,
someone no one even knew
could come after,
stay dry and sheltered
and face a textured wall
softness washes over me like warm water
thank you

Louisa Rogers