

ARCATA ZEN GROUP NEWSLETTER

June, 2000

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. 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

ONE DAY RETREAT

On July 8, a daylong retreat will be held at Maylie's home from 6:30 AM to 5 PM (see note below in Jukai Ceremony section). 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. The next one day sit is September 16.

JUKAI CEREMONY

Sunday, July 9 will be the AZG's first Lay Ordination Ceremony - Jukai, "receiving the precepts." The event will take place at 11:30, at our new Rin Shin-Ji (Forest Heart) temple, at 740 Park Ave., after the regular Sunday morning program at the Aikido Room. Eight members have sewn rakus and studied the precepts. The ceremony will acknowledge and honor their commitment. It will be a significant event for the whole sangha. Everyone is invited. Please be ready to pack in, as each of the ordines will invite guests. The ceremony will take about an hour. A potluck will follow.

Saturday, July 8 is a one day sitting. It will be a good time for the ordines to get centered before the ceremony. Everyone is invited. Longer sittings are an important way to explore and deepen practice. Please consider coming for the whole day. If this is not possible, try to come for a block of time. It is also possible to just come for the talk.

"The main subject of Jukai is how to become a transmitter of light, life light. Practice takes place to shape your whole ability to reflect the light coming through you, and to generate, to re-generate your system so the light increases its power. Each precept is a remark about hard climbing, maybe climbing down. You don't use the precepts for accomplishing your won personality, or fulfilling your dream of your highest image. The precepts are the reflected light-world of one precept, which is Buddha's mind itself, which is the presence of Buddha."

Kobun Chino Sensei

UNITED RELIGIONS INITIATIVE

In celebration of the United Religions Initiative, a 90-minute universal worship service, honoring all world religions, lead by Mike & Christiane Furniss of the local Sufi committee, will be held at 4 PM July 9 at Ananda Hazard's home. A vegetarian potluck will follow. Please RSVP to Ross Connors-Keith. On July 16, Rev. Canon Charles P. Gibbs, executive director of the United Religions Initiative, will speak at 10 AM at the Humboldt Unitarian Universalist Fellowship in Bayside about the purpose and vision of the initiative. Everyone is invited to attend these events, especially those interested in the newly-forming Humboldt Interfaith Circle.

PAINTING PARTY

Painting the outside of the zendo will be done with brushes by group members. Everyone is invited to come on July 28, 29, and/or 30 from 9 AM to late afternoon. Lunch will be provided. We are hoping for a minimum of four people painting at all times. Please RSVP your working schedule to Maylie. Bring painting clothes, good brushes if you have 'em, and ladders. Mark will buy materials and oversee the cleaning of the zendo exterior the day before. This work-weekend is an opportunity for us all to put in good energy together.

AUGUST SESSHIN

There will be a retreat with Maylie Scott from August 16 through 19 at her home. 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 AM. The cost is \$20 per day; scholarships are available. Mail checks to: AZG, 740 Park Ave., Arcata 95521. For more info, to volunteer for jobs before sesshin, and to help us estimate the quantity of food needed for each meal, please call Maylie.

LETTERS

DHARMA TALK: Second Part of the talk given April 2, 2000 (first part in last newsletter)
Sojun Mel Weitsman

So our practice is not just to get something. If you practice in a manner just to get something, that is materialistic practice, what Trungpa used to call spiritual materialism - practicing in order to get some experience. So supposing you have some big enlightened experience. Then what? Then life just becomes ordinary so you might just as well appreciate the ordinariness of life to begin with.

Enlightenment brings us to practice, and then a lifetime of practice matures our enlightenment. That is why it is so important to continuously practice. Not trying to get something. But just appreciating each moment, truly appreciating each moment's activity with gratitude and without wanting too much. It is very easy for us to want too much, and there is so much that is offered to want. So if we can just be careful not wanting too much and practicing in a very steady way, we can have some really deep experience of our enlightened mind.

Enlightenment is not something to get but something to reveal. We say it's like walking in the fog. Walking in the fog, your clothes get wet unawares. It's not like walking in the rain where you know that you're getting wet. You reach down and feel your clothes and say, "Oh, my clothes are wet." So practice over a long period of time means that at some point your maturity reveals itself, and you realize that has been happening for awhile but you weren't aware of when it happened.

People ask, "Well, how should I practice, what should I do?" I say that if you really want to practice, you should harmonize your sitting practice with your life. But you should decide when you are going to sit zazen and put that on your calendar. You may say, "Well, I'll sit zazen Tuesdays and Thursdays." Then you put Tuesday and Thursday on your calendar and when that time comes, you say, "Oh, time for zazen." You don't do something else. Otherwise, our lives are so busy that if we just arbitrarily sit, other things will sweep away our intention or take over our intention.

So in order to really have a practice, practice has to be intentional, intentional in the sense we have to put it on our calendar, and then it becomes a part of our life. When zazen is integral with your life, with all of your other commitments and responsibilities, then you have a practice, and you can sustain that over a long period of time. When that month is over, you ask, "Well, did that work?" Okay, so you continue or you add something or if it didn't work, you change it. So you are always monitoring what your practice is. That way you have an intentional practice.

There are different styles of practice, but for lay people who lead busy lives, you need some structure to make it work. Without the structure, practice doesn't work for very long; it's just another thing that you do and then pretty soon something else comes along and washes it away. I really advise you to structure your practice. Practice is not dependent on your moods; it's not dependent on whether you like it or don't like it; it's not dependent on feeling good or not feeling good - "I feel good today so I'll sit zazen" or "I feel terrible today so I better go sit zazen." It shouldn't depend on your feelings; it has to be beyond your feelings. Practice has to be driven by your intentions because feelings come and go and are not stable and are untrustworthy. Intention is what is trustworthy. I don't want to say vow, which is a little strong, but if you want to think of it that way, that's good. But intention, a strong intention, is necessary because otherwise you can't sustain a practice.

When the time comes to sit zazen, you may feel, "I don't want to sit zazen today," but your intention was to do it so you follow your intention rather than your momentary feeling. In that way, you build a strong practice, and then you feel better. When you follow your intentions, you really feel good. That is enlightened practice. So we don't have to wait for an enlightenment experience to have enlightened practice. Practice itself when done with an attitude of intention is enlightened practice. It's good to study the old masters, but I think it is also important to set them aside as well, because if you only compare yourself to the old masters, you'll think, "Oh, this is impossible for me," and then you get very discouraged. We should study the old masters' words and be inspired by them and at the same time we should set them aside and realize that our life is right here - the year 2000. This is our circumstance, and we have to act within our own social norms given all the problems that we have. There's much to say, but that's as much as I can say at the moment. Do you have any questions? Please feel free to ask questions.

Q. Do you feel it is important to practice every day? A. Yes, if you can. If you can't then do the next best thing.

A Two Bear Sesshin

Bill Devall

On June 1, 2000, Maylie Scott led a band of hardy zen students across the Black Sands beach from Shelter Cove to Big Flat in the King Range National Conservation Area to begin our annual AZG sesshin in wild silence. Pete, Gordy, Bill, Lynda, Rose M., Paula, Carole, Emelia, Quynh, and Sherry joined the mountains and waters to form one body, one mind in silence.

At Big Flat we were joined by Marilyn Bruder, the guardian of the Big Flat estate.

The first day of our sesshin we were also joined by two bears, one on our left, and one on our right. They sat with us throughout the sesshin, sitting in the garden, sitting in the compost, sitting almost in some of our tents. We were blessed that the two bears joined our sesshin but we had to adjust our activities to accommodate their needs and their sometimes adventurous behavior.

Maylie taught us that we always follow our noses for reasons we frequently do not understand. In the case of our bear dharma teachers, they follow their substantial noses, thus the need to bury our compost and put all our food in a semi-bear proof location.

Each year during our AZG retreat at Big Flat we have been joined by some creatures of the wildness. One year a rattlesnake sat on a rock by the front door of our zendo and we all passed the rattlesnake several times a day as we moved to kinhin and back to the zendo. One year two wild turkeys joined us and laughed loudly each morning at our struggles with Beginner's Mind.

This year the two bears helped us focus on mindfulness. Some fears arose in the minds of some zen students about the possibility of sleeping with bears in their tents and encountering the bears deep in the night. Facing those fears helped us to appreciate how much we have to learn from our bearish sangha members.

For practicing during the sesshin, Maylie asked us to consider Dogen's "Bendowa: Talk on Whole Hearted Practice of the Way." We were encouraged by Dogen's statement, "...even if only one person sits for a short time, because this zazen is one with all existence and completely permeates all time, it performs everlasting buddha guidance with the inexhaustible dharma world in the past, present, and future. (Zazen) is equally the same practice and same enlightenment for both the person sitting and all dharmas."

At Big Flat we express mindfulness with other creatures for as Dogen states "The grass, trees, and earth affected by this functioning together radiate great brilliance and expound the deep, wondrous dharma endlessly. Grasses and trees, fences and walls demonstrate and exalt it for the sake of living beings, both ordinary and sage; and in turn, living beings, both ordinary and sage, express and unfold it for the sake of grasses and trees, fences and walls."

Each afternoon we sat zazen on the beach with our backs against ancient driftwood breathing in and breathing out with the rhythm of the breaking waves.

Fire was our constant ally at Big Flat and on the final evening of the sesshin we formed our annual Sangha circle around the campfire. Reviewing the process of Sangha over the past year we realized how far we have come and how far we have to go. Maylie has been a resident in Arcata for less than a year, yet with her presence we have built a new zendo, encouraged more people to sit with us, held several study classes, and strengthened our practice in many ways. We bowed to all those sentient beings who have encouraged the Sangha during the past year.

We strengthen our faith and welcome the two bears to continue practicing with us as we practice with them.

The Yellow Spider

Erika B. Makino

Near the stairway a spider thread was hanging down from the ceiling. A yellowish creature with thick legs like a miniature scorpion was holding on to its end.

"It's all dried up and dead," my daughter commented. I was not in the mood to go and get a broom. The next day the spider was a few inches lower to the floor.

"It's dead, Mom."

Later that day, when I passed by absentmindedly, I got tangled up in the thread. It stuck to my cheek, my shoulder, my arm. I wiped it off. I was annoyed. The spider was nowhere to be seen. I got busy in the kitchen when I felt something crawling on my neck. For a second my rational mind was wiped out and with atavistic terror I brushed away whatever it was. A yellow spider hurried across the cooking stove and disappeared. I felt a trace of anger. How could that tiny animal have the power to reduce me to a bundle of reflexes?

The next morning, the spider was sitting on the rim of the sink. I rinsed a few dishes when suddenly I noticed that the creature had fallen and was now hovering precariously at the edge of the drain. A little more water and it would get flushed down.

"Okay," I said, "I won't kill you, but I won't rescue you either." I could see he was in bad shape; his legs were

