

ARCATA ZEN GROUP NEWSLETTER

RETREAT--JULY 9-12

Maylie Scott will be conducting sesshin at Lloyd Fulton's house from July 9 through July 12, starting at 7:00 p.m. on Wednesday and finishing on Saturday at 6:00 p.m. with a potluck supper at Lloyd's. Coordinators for the sesshin are Gael Hodgkins and John Coonen.

Maylie's dharma talks at Lloyd's will be given each day at 11:00 a.m. Maylie's dharma talk on Sunday July 13 will be at the Aikido Center at 8:50 a.m. Maylie will be available for practice instruction interviews. For scheduling, sign up at the sesshin or speak with Maylie directly.

A reservation form is enclosed and should be received no later than July 1 so the coordinators can plan for food. Lloyd will accommodate overnights. Please come for all or part of the retreat.

Meals will be simple and served oryoki style. Please bring three nesting bowls, wrapped in a cloth, a napkin, a favorite spoon, chopsticks and a spatula/scrapper.

A \$10/day donation is suggested to cover expenses. Scholarships are available. Donations will be collected at the sesshin. Maps to Lloyd's are available at the regular Sunday sitting or call Monique to have one mailed to you.

On Saturday July 12 we will end formal sesshin about 5:00 p.m. to give time for cleanup before the potluck at 6:00 p.m. Please feel free to come to the potluck even if you have been unable to participate in the sesshin.

FUTURE AZG EVENTS

1. SANGHA CIRCLE--Aug. 24

Linda McDevitt has volunteered to coordinate this event. It will be a potluck/picnic for members and their families. Linda would like someone to help with planning. If you want to help please call her.

2. SEPTEMBER & NOVEMBER RETREATS

We need volunteers to coordinate these two retreats. The September retreat is scheduled as a one-day retreat at Lloyd's. The November retreat is our longest retreat, currently scheduled for November 10-15. If you want to volunteer, please call Monique.

3. MOUNTAINS & RIVERS SESSHIN

This sesshin is scheduled for September 12 through 14. We need to start looking for a place now. We also need a coordinator. If you think that you might want to coordinate this retreat, but would like to talk to someone about what is involved, please call Mark, Gabe, or John Muir (555-1234), as they have done it before.

SANGHA FRIENDS

We would like to welcome Paul Dillon, Michael Dow, and Samten Smith, who have recently joined our group. If anyone has been omitted, please let Monique know.

Sherry Skillwoman sent us the following note:

The Sangha lost a good friend recently. Michael Batchelor "bowed out" to the Big Sensei for the last time this Feb. He was driving his log truck on Hwy 299, when he lost control on a turn & crashed into the Trinity River.

Michael trained with Sensei Tom Moreland in the 70's & was involved with Internal School, where he taught Aikido. He trained with Rev. Don Gilbert, whose Blue Dragon Zen Academy was also located at Internal School. Later, he sat with Darryl Gardner at the Falling-Down-Garage Zendo. He visited AZG at its current NCAD location, where he was appreciative of the new (Aikido) mat.

Michael loved to dance & could frequently be seen providing "a good lead" on the dance floor. At the time of his death, he was studying to be a Practitioner with Eureka Church of Religious Science.

Goodbye, Michael. You are missed.

LETTERS

Maylie Scott

We do not have to practice intensively in a monastery. If we allow ourselves to be a good Sangha, transformation will come naturally. Just being in a Sangha where people are happy, living deeply the moments of their days, is enough. Transformation will happen without effort. The most important thing a Dharma teacher can offer his or her students is the art of Sangha-building. Knowing the sutras is not enough. The main concern is building a happy Sangha--taking care of each person, looking into his pain, her difficulties, his aspirations, her fear, his hopes in order to make everyone comfortable

and happy. This takes time and energy.

---Thich Nhat Hanh

The jewel of the AZG practice is its sangha reliance. Reliance on the sangha was born of necessity in the group's early years; a small, persistent number of practitioners was all there was. In the six years I've come, I've watched the development from a kind and tolerant and diffident group to a kind and tolerant and committed group.

Discovering harmonious and functional sangha structure takes years and is the hall-mark of mature practice. The AZG has already done considerable work:

-The BASE group helped a core group get to know one another much better.

-A practice period including members' "way-seeking mind" talks made the richness and diversity of members' practice more visible.

-Regular newsletters have grown from simple announcements to engaging commentary.

-The practice committee, begun a year ago, has made the Group's shape much clearer, spelling out procedures and providing a container for group discussions and vision.

-Innumerable coffee hours, Sunday mornings, well-planned retreats, extra meetings, and phone calls fill in gaps.

Now we are on the verge of the major next step of finding our own home. The group is taking on responsibilities of incorporation, by-laws, and board of directors. While we are very grateful to Lloyd Fulton for sharing his home with us for so long, it is time for the group to find its own quarters and to discover its own daily, Sunday, and retreat shapes.

We are beating our way through thickets of decisions and patience is tested and practice challenged. Our most important ally is good process; agreeing to guidelines that manifest the Dharma and sticking by them. This is the solid base of harmonious sangha; we continue to work at it "stitch by stitch."

The sangha has been called "the matrix of enlightenment." It is the joint expression of personal and social transformation. Each one of us plays a unique part in its support. May all beings be well, happy, and peaceful.

Sesshin on the Lost Coast--May 1997

Bill Devall

(contemplating scripture HOTSU MUJO SHIN

"Arousing the Supreme Thought"

"However, Bodhidharma, the first Chinese patriarch, said, 'The One Mind and all minds are wood and stone.' What he calls 'mind' is the absolute mind, the mind of the whole world, and so the One Mind is the mind of oneself and others. The minds of all the beings in the world, the minds of Buddhas and patriarchs everywhere, and the minds of devas and magas are wood and stone. There is no mind apart from these. These stones and wood, or things in general, are not themselves bound by the realms of being and nonbeing, emptiness and form, and so on. One arouses the thought of enlightenment, practices, and attains with the mind which is wood and stone, because mind is wood and mind is stone. With the power of this mind which is wood and stone, the mind which is liberated now is manifested. Hearing and seeing the sounds and sights of the mind which is wood and stone, for the first time one transcends the views of those fellows outside the Dharma. There is no Buddha Dharma apart from this.")

Fire on the ocean, fire on the mountain, fire circle of Sangha

"And a stone woman gave birth to a child in the night"

Swallows returning to the barn

deer on the flat

douglas iris, California poppies, fremontia blooming in the garden

("Softly now, let all men turn to the earth"-Nancy Newhall This is the American Earth)

kinhin in the meadow, crushing chamomile with our bare feet

the upwelling flowing through our bones and joints

upwelling of being and nothingness.

upwelling of rich nutrients as continental plates collide

Physical suffering manifest in our practice

Mental suffering manifest in our practice

Radical suffering in the depth of desire.

work practice

Annual Flatheads burning rituals

collecting clippings from the garden
collecting driftwood
collecting branches from trees blown down in winter storms
collecting corpses
collecting desires
collecting ignorance
collecting illusions

Burning in the meadow
Burning to heat the hot tub
Burning for the Sangha campfire

circle around, circle around
brothers and sisters
circle around
owl and whale, feather and fin
circle around
circle around

Attention!
Flatheads are calling us to Attention!
attend to our breathing
attend to our despair
attend to mindfulness
attend to the Metta Sutra

Bowing to the tathagatha buddha
Bowing to the mountains
(volcano quiet awaiting his next eruption)
Bowing to rivers
(don't fall off the log
crossing Big Flat creek)
Bowing to ocean
("We build our little boat, sail
out into the middle of the ocean,
and drown.")

Attention!
Lost Coast welcomes us
we are lost, perhaps to be found
lost on our way?
Searching for a way?
The Lost Coast welcomes us

Attention
consequences follow causes
rattlesnakes co-inhabit this place
poison oak co-habits this place
spiders dwell in this place

"Are we returning Home?
Yes, child, we are home.
Home in the boneyard
select a bone
whale bone
bird bone
dolphin bone
human bone?"

bones of our ancestors
Gray whales salute us as they cruise northward
salute the bones of their dead comrades lying on the beach

the great swells rolling onto the point salute us
surfers--ghosts of surfers long since drowned
surfers of earthly delight finding the ripcurl
all surfers salute us

("What are you people doing up there at the big house?
Having a party? It must be nice in the big house.
But it's nice here, on the beach. I come up here anytime
I have a few days off work. Great waves. But mostly I
like to sit on the beach. You know, just watch the waves.
There's something here. I don't know. I'm just a surfer.
I strap my surfboard on my backpack and just walk.
You know, just go for it, walking from Black Sands beach
to the point. You know, you just have to walk.
What are you people doing, up there at the big house?"
-a surfer, barefoot and salty, eating
out of a tin pot on the beach)

bones of our ancestors
select a bone
bones bleached from wing and salt and sun

In the long Spring evening
the last bell sounds.
Beginners minds stumble out from zazen
into the flash of green light at sunset
into the boneyard
coming home, always coming home.

(Photos of the Flatheads are available for inscription by the Flatheads. Last year after the Lost Coast sesshin I wrote "Dogen, John Muir and Beginner's Mind: Dialogues on Entering the Mountains." Copies are available to Sangha members who agree to write a response.)

Big Insights at Big Flat
Sherry Zen Head
What difference between Big Surf Mind & Big Sit Mind?
What difference between Big Mind & Big Head?
What difference between Big Breakthrough & Big Breakdown?
What difference between an inflatable zafu & a whoopee cushion?

Big Flat: Big Sit -- Big Time
No Big Deal -- Just Do It

CURRENT AZG DISCUSSIONS

Many issues have arisen in the AZG since we looked at the Foster Ave. house. Members, both individually and within the practice committee, have been discussing, among other issues, our decision-making process, the definition of membership, and finances. The following detail and reflect the current work.

Recap of meetings--by Paul Dillon

During May a group of AZG members met to discuss membership and the organization of decision making in AZG. Bill Devall's presentation on the "decision tree" at the Big Flat sesshin campfire and Maylie's comments on the need

for organizational development led to placing these items on the agenda of the May 11 practice committee meeting. The complexity of these issues became apparent at that meeting. Lacking the time for further discussion, the participants agreed that a subcommittee should meet to further explore the membership question and to make a presentation on their work. Gordy Anderson, Ken Berman, Pete Kayes, and Paul Dillon volunteered to prepare “issue papers” containing proposals for defining membership and to meet the following Sunday to discuss them and prepare recommendations for the practice committee’s consideration.

The “membership committee” volunteers met the following Sunday morning at a pair of shaded picnic tables in Redwood Park. Other AZG members and friends, including Bill Devall, Daniel Flannagan, Rose Brewster, John Coonen, Michael Dow, Gael Hodgkins, and Mark P., also attended. Everyone at the meeting seemed to be in agreement that the AZG is at a point in its existence where it needs to find its own home and that this requires a regular and reliable flow of income as well as a more clearly defined decision-making process. Major disagreements emerged around the issue of how that income should relate to membership in AZG, how such membership would be defined, and what relationship paying dues should have to the process of decision making. Before long a heated discussion was underway.

Gael Hodgkins headed up those who strongly opposed tying the payment of dues to any definition of membership or any rights to participate in the decision-making process. Paul Dillon presented a position paper that advocated an organizational structure in which participation in decision-making related to resource allocation and other “civil and legal” matters should be tied to members who contribute either monetary dues or some form of work service. Questions of practice or vinaya, such as those related to kinhin, how often chants are made, etc., would not be so restricted. Everyone seemed to oppose restricting participation in group activities to dues-paying members but the relation between financial participation and rights in the decision-making process remained a major point of contention.

Ken Berman, who acted as facilitator, struggled to find a track and keep the discussion on it but the complexity of the issues and the tenacity of individually-held positions prevailed against simple resolutions. Several people, including Gael and Bill, had to leave the meeting early. Before adjournment however, the group decided to meet again the following week and also to suggest that people who regularly participate in the AZG activities should contribute either \$50, \$30, \$10, or whatever they could afford each month. Ken commented that the decision to request a monthly contribution represented a significant organizational step.

On May 25, the “membership committee” reconvened at the NorthCountry Clinic. Many of the additional members who had attended the previous week and some new faces were also present. Pete, who acted as facilitator, requested that each person express what they believed to be the important topic of the meeting. As each participant spoke, a number of tangents were entered upon, and some major questions came to the fore. Monique stated that the existing by-laws already specify how participation, voting, and membership should be determined. Gael and others also stressed the need to take a look at the by-laws to see how to proceed and avoid reinventing the wheel. Pete stated very strongly that the existing by-laws do not address these issues. They were simply boiler-plate adopted for reasons of expediency when applying for the 501.3 non-profit status. Beyond that, he emphasized that the primordial necessity was raising funds, foreshadowing the meeting outcome. Monique returned to the definition of membership, expressing the position that it is “inhumane to tie voting membership to money or service.” Gael and Kay Dee seconded this point of view. Paul emphasized his concern that the problem is lack of clarity about how decision making actually happens and that before anything else there is a need to clarify how decisions are made. Once the current patterns are clarified, he believes that it will be necessary to see if they are appropriate for the new and different legal and organizational commitments an AZG home would entail. It later became clear that some members who had left the previous meeting early were unaware that a tentative dues structure had been decided upon.

The issue of examining the bylaws arose repeatedly and the group agreed that at the next meeting of the practice committee (June 1) copies of these bylaws should be made available to all. Monique said she would take care of this. Discussion continued concerning the imperative to raise funds to either rent or buy a place to practice, an AZG home, and a quick straw poll drew unanimous support for the need to focus on this now without waiting to resolve the thornier issues of membership categories, responsibilities, and rights. Thus the group decided to prepare a request for financial contributions to be mailed to all AZG members (tentatively defined by the mailing list in the absence of a formal definition). Sylvianne pointed out that pledges for extraordinary expenses, such as the start-up costs of getting a house, should be distinguished from the normal payment of dues. Pete agreed to prepare the request form and the meeting was adjourned.

Clearly these issues are going to take time and thoughtful cooperation to resolve. The outcome of the May meetings are perhaps less significant than the willingness of AZG members to work together to develop a solution.

Decisions, Decisions-- by Bill Devall

Sangha included the Buddha and the Dharma. Sangha includes all those who practice among the mountains and rivers until they become the mountains and the rivers becoming themselves.

The Arcata Zen Group is also a 501.3c California incorporated corporation. It is a legal entity, a house for manifestation of our practice, a corporation having fiscal responsibility.(ed. note--incorporation application in progress).

Seeking to develop the Arcata Zen Group in order to provide more space and structure for practice, the group has undertaken a process of decision-making that can be characterized by a “decision tree.” During the past several years those who wish to participate in decisions have addressed the following questions.

Are we a zen group or an eclectic spiritual seeking new age group?

DECISION: We are a zen buddhist group.

Do we want to continue to practice together as the Arcata Zen Group or disband into spontaneously forming practice?

DECISION: We will continue as the Arcata Zen Group.

Do we want to have a regular teacher affiliated with the Arcata Zen Group, rely on visits from different teachers, have no teachers?

DECISION: We want to have a regular teacher.

After this decision recruitment occurred, and Maylie Scott was asked to be the teacher for the Arcata Zen Group. She has remained our teacher. Her contract is renewed on a year by year basis.

Shall we formalize ourselves under the laws of the USA and state of California or be an informal, underground group?

DECISION: We shall formalize ourselves as a 501.3c corporation.

Should we have a practice committee to develop procedures for practice that will assist newcomers to the group or decision on the form of practice at the beginning of each Sunday zazen?

DECISION: We will have a practice committee that is open to all members who want to help develop guidelines for opening the zendo, conducting zazen, and leading ceremonies, as well as other duties that might be delegated to the practice committee by the corporation.

Shall we have formal membership in the Arcata Zen Group or open membership that is inclusive of anyone who has ever been on the mailing list of the Arcata Zen Group?

DECISION: We will have membership in the Arcata Zen Group.

What shall be the criteria of membership?

This is the current discussion.

Who shall make decisions for the group?

Some practitioners are suspect of any delegation of authority or any hint that the Arcata Zen Group is exclusive rather than inclusive. There is a continuing undercurrent of fear (perhaps bordering on paranoia in some people) or at least ideological commitment to the position that all opinions are equal, all voices are equal, all concerns raised in any meeting are of equal importance.

Membership includes certain rights. What are these rights?

Membership includes certain responsibilities. What are these responsibilities? One responsibility is that of raising sufficient money to maintain the operations of the Arcata Zen Group.

What should be the process for making decisions within the Arcata Zen Group?

By consensus

By democratic vote of the majority of members voting

By informal consensus among interested participants

By the authority of the teacher

By the Board of Directors of the corporation called Arcata Zen Group

Should the Arcata Zen Group seek a home of its' own?

For the past several years the Arcata Zen Group has subrented for two hours each Sunday at the Aikido center.

For the past several years the Arcata Zen Group has relied on the generous gift of Lloyd Fulton of use of his home for sesshins in Arcata.

For the past several years the Arcata Zen Group has rented timesharing space at retreat centers for its mountain and rivers sesshins.

DECISION: The Arcata Zen Group should seek a home of its own.

What type of home should the Arcata Zen Group seek for itself?

Buy land and build a house for zazen in or near Arcata

Buy a building near or in Arcata
Lease a building in or near Arcata

In order to pay rent, or make a payment on a building, pay any necessary insurance, utilities, maintain the property, and build a reserve for periods of cash shortfall, the Arcata Zen Group needs a steady income of approximately \$2000. per month.

Should those members who have a greater net income pay more for membership in the group than those who have less net income?

Should those members with greater net income subsidize those members who have less net income?

How Much Will You Pledge for an AZG Home?
Mark P., Paul Dillon, and Sherry Skillwoman

In the process of looking at the old farmhouse on Foster Avenue for possible purchase as a Zen center and in the discussions that have followed, some points have come to light.

One is that the level of financial commitment needed to buy this property appears to be beyond the group at this time. Another is that we have more work to do in terms of determining our space needs and our approach to ownership and management.

Renting has been proposed as an interim step while we continue to look for a more permanent place. Renting would allow us to demonstrate (or not) our ability to raise funds, to experiment with a more extended sitting schedule, and to move gradually into greater responsibility in managing a center.

At the same time, the logistics of our current situation continue to have obvious drawbacks--mainly in terms of having to move from place to place whenever we want to hold meetings, drink tea, have sesshin, etc. Maylie feels, in fact, that we have "outgrown" our current arrangement.

Lloyd continues to extend his generosity to the group in providing us with sesshin space. But scheduling conflicts at the last two sesshin and the sense that we may be pushing the limits of right meditation in moving in on Lloyd's family life convince us that renting our own building is probably the best idea for now.

At the last meeting of the practice committee, at which all of the proposed members of the board of directors were present, a full consensus was achieved to implement a system of voluntary pledges in which members evaluate their own ability to contribute on a regular basis and commit themselves to a pledge for a specified period of time. It was also determined that pledges should be requested only if enough money can be generated to rent a suitable site.

In the Arcata rental market, we would need at least \$1200 a month to cover rent and utilities on a site large enough to accommodate our needs. The current mailing list contains approximately 70 names. If 40 people pledge, it would be in the neighborhood of \$30 per month per person. Some AZG members cannot realistically contribute this much while others can contribute much more. We need to have an accurate estimate of how much can be counted on each month over an extended period of time.

There is an additional consideration. Some members of the June 1 practice committee meeting felt that a financial evaluation should list all possible alternatives. The idea here being that some people might contribute more (or less) if a property were being purchased instead of rented or leased.

Alternative 1: Continue to rent a hall for weekly group sitting on the basis of member pledges. Expenses for rental of sesshin facilities to be financed on the basis of sesshin participants' fees.

Alternative 2: Rent a house or suitable building in the Arcata area for existing and expanded sitting schedules, sesshin, and other AZG activities such as meetings.

Alternative 3: Purchase a house or suitable building in the Arcata area for existing and expanded sitting schedules, sesshin, and other AZG activities such as meetings.

The postcard that is attached to the newsletter will help us know how much the AZG board will be able to commit for a

home. The three alternatives are numbered in the first column. The second column contains the amount you would be able to contribute regularly for that alternative. The third column allows you to specify the frequency with which you would like to make the pledge; e. g., weekly, monthly, annually. In the fourth column, you should indicate the duration for which you feel you can commit yourself to continuing to pay the regularly scheduled pledge.

For example, if you are willing to pledge \$20.00 per month for the next five years for a rental or a purchase, you would put 20 in column 2, month in column 3, and 5 in column 4 on both the Alternatives 2 and Alternative 3 row. You would leave all of the spaces on the Alternative 1 row blank. If you were willing to contribute \$10. per month more over the same period for the purchase of a house you would put 20, month and 5 in the cells on the Alternative 2 row, and 30, month, and 5 in the cells on the Alternative 3 row. Hope this isn't too confusing.

It is very important at the current time that you think seriously about how much you can and are willing to pledge for an AZG home. No serious planning can take place without an accurate idea of what our resource base is. Your estimate should be treated as though it really were a pledge although at the present time it is only a survey to determine what our next step will be. Cards must be received by July 12.

GENERAL

Sleeping Bag Alert!!!

A blue sleeping bag in a black stuff sack (says Caribou on label) was not picked up from the group gear flown in from Big Flat. If this is your sleeping bag, please tell Mark so he can get it back to you.

Where We Live, Understanding Place
KayDee Simmon

Would members of the AZG like to participate in a celebration of the wonders of the Northcoast this September 4-7, 1997 at Patrick's Point State Park? Keeping with past customs of Shasta Bioregional Gatherings (SBGs), everyone is invited to explore their sense of place at this year's SBG5.

Several local bioregionalists will be joining the gathering. Bill Devall reflects on bioregionalism as a mindfulness of local environment, history, and community aspirations that can lead to a future of safe and sustainable life. Another participant at SBG5, Jim Dodge, brings to light that, "To understand natural systems is to begin an understanding of the self, its common and particular essences--literal self-interest in its barest terms." And Jerry Martien adds that it "is about care-taking in all its forms."

Come join in all proceedings and help to develop presentations of life-places. This year's theme is: Restoring Watersheds, Communities, and Ourselves. The gathering is participant-driven; you are encouraged to share information and hands-on experiences. Some have asked about or suggested having zazen &/or a dharma talk. Rondall Snodgrass of Sanctuary Forest will be discussing the Cultivation of the Self and sharing some of his experiences from a workshop he attended with Thich Nhat Hanh.

In addition to the traditional watershed reports, planning for festive experiences and a variety of presentations and panels aimed towards exploring different ways to enrich the landscape and the numerous plant, animal, and social communities in our watersheds will be developing up until the gathering. There will be activities for all ages, stories of place, the story of KR' R NIT's Place at Patrick's Point, a Council of All Beings, poetry, music, dance, theater, and entertainment by Human Nature.

Early registration before July 1 is \$86 per person; registration during July 1-Sept. 1 is \$96. On-site registration is \$101. These fees include eight meals, three nights camping, and insurance. One night camping and three meals is \$32. If you wish to attend only during the day, registration is \$10 daily; meals are \$5 each. If I can answer any questions please call me. Hope you can join in the celebration.

NEXT NEWSLETTER

Our next newsletter will go out on July 20. If you have any articles, comments, poems, or replies you wish to share, please mail them to Gil Friedman