

ARCATA ZEN GROUP NEWSLETTER

October, 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 a kinhin in between; reading and discussion follow. On the first Sunday of the month, the sangha shares poetry and other readings brought in by individuals.

Weekday sittings are held at Gael's house. To accommodate as many of the sangha as possible, the sittings alternate between the second and fourth Tuesday mornings of the month at 9:15 AM and the first and third Wednesday evenings of the month at 7:15 PM. There are two half-hour sittings with a kinhin in between. If there are any questions about the schedule, please call Lynda or Gael.

Everyone is welcome.

UPCOMING SESSHIN

NOVEMBER SESSHIN

There will be a retreat with Maylie Scott November 18 through 21 at Lloyd Fulton's home on West End road. (Maps are available on the book table at Sunday sittings, or call Monique.) Sesshin 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. Thanks to Diana Lynn's sewing ability, we have three oryoki sets for guests. 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, sesshin will end at 5 PM, followed by clean-up and a potluck at 6 PM. The main course for the potluck will be prepared by the retreatants. Sangha members who have been unable 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 November 15 to help us estimate the quantity of food needed for each meal. The cost of the sesshin is \$10 a day; as always, scholarships are available. For more information call Pete Kayes or Dennis Shayne.

DECEMBER SATURDAY SESSHIN

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 December 12. Please bring a bag lunch and sitting equipment. For more information, call Gael.

NEW YEAR'S EVE GATHERING

The event of the season. We will gather at Gael's house at 8:15 PM Thursday, December 31, with sitting to start by 8:30. During a full schedule of sitting, kinhin, and sending off the old/welcoming the new, the bell will be rung 108 times. The ringing will be shared by those present and will end at midnight, followed by sangha circle, champagne, and potluck snacks. For more information, please call Gael or Suzanne.

LETTERS

NOTE FROM MAYLIE

Dharma transmission or entrustment is a joyful occasion for sangha and recipient alike. The week of intimate ceremonies at Tassajara was like a stone dropping to deep bottom, waves moving out and out. I felt close to all of you and supported by you. Thank you, dear friends, for the "Gassho" calligraphy and the two hats, one for cold, the other for sun. A very complete gift! Your generous reception continues to resonate in my heart.

Our eight year connection is fruitful. Nothing is lost in the good effort of a sangha; some members have come and gone, and their energetic contributions survive their absence. The Group that persists year after year is finding a balance of stability and diversity. A core of people have worked hard on making the Practice Committee into a body that includes some openness and some efficiency (and, sometimes, some laughs). Gradually, through business meetings and many different practice occasions, an AZG style is being forged. The Newsletter publishes it. The new Articles of Incorporation will hopefully contain it in a Group structure that will engage and nourish sangha energy through various circumstances in years to come.

On a more personal level, my teacher, Sojun Mel Weitsman, said that the biggest reward for him as a teacher is to see students' lives change. While AZG members' practice has a strong, independent quality and varies widely, members can look at themselves and at others and see significant changes. As long as we ripen together in the Dharma our lives will

be continuously renewed.

As I think about moving to Arcata I am encouraged by the possibility of enlarging and deepening sangha focus; setting up a daily practice center and making connections with HSU are obvious beginnings. Many of us share a dream of finding a local form that brings practice and social change work into clear and workable focus, combining zazen and activism.

The ceremonial week at Tassajara is a powerful, ancestral dream in the background. A new community dreams ahead. Meanwhile our many lives weave the Group's Dharma intention into a shape we cannot foresee, yet still, each day, carefully nurture. Wonderful adventure.

On Sesshin

Gordy Anderson

Beginning with Jane's gracious offering of the exquisite beauty and sounds at Thimbleberry Pond, our September sesshin was quite blessed with good weather, few insects, strong sits, and compelling dharma talks.

Much appreciation for everyone's cooperative efforts in the kitchen and with work periods, everyone sharing in the experience which makes it all work. Some specific thanks: to Ken for bringing his clock, Pete for bringing the picnic table, Maureen for doing wake-up and heating water and coffee, Rose for leading stretching and breathing, and special acknowledgment of Suzanne's help with menus, shopping and sign-up lists, and doing the shopping with Mark and myself. And her gomasio was just right.

It's always good sharing responsibilities with Mark, who puts himself fully into the task and willingly delegates to himself exactly what's needed. And deep appreciation to Maylie for her dharma talks and interviews. And to all who took part including Margaret, Lynda, Dennis, Quynh, Gael, Erin, Paul, and Monique, and any others I'm not remembering.

Gordy

Letter from Margaret Howe

Coming from my third sesshin with you this year, I feel a mountain of gratitude. You have been an anchor for my spiritual life this year and even though our personal knowledge of each other is scant, I feel a coming home and warmth when I arrive.

I love your anarchistic formality perhaps well described at the last retreat when we were asked to do a purification ceremony on the land upon which we were sitting. Jane, who was going to lead the walk around her land, mentioned hesitatingly that we would have to walk our kinhin a little faster than normal. Maylie immediately responded with an emphatic, "Oh, we don't mind that!"

Of course not, and that energy is the same one that welcomed my two year old daughter to the winter retreat and accommodated our family there.

Thank you for all this, for all your work creating these sesshin sanctuaries so often, and for creating such a unique Humboldt County Zen.

Much Love, Margaret

Buddhism in the News

Suzanne M.

Maylie and the AZG have been getting quite a bit of media attention. Just a few months ago, Mark Sommer interviewed Maylie on two of his weekly radio programs; this month the Lumberjack ran an article on Maylie, transmission, and the AZG. An article for the Northcoast Journal by Patty Harvey, who has been doing extensive research, is due out soon. This outreach not only provides a broader community awareness of Maylie, the AZG, and Zen Buddhism in general, but also helps us reflect on and define ourselves in terms of and in relationship to that community. We are gaining such name-brand recognition that General Mills is quietly doing market surveys to determine the impact of a first-ever Group-Photo-of-a-Spiritual-Community for a future Wheaties box.

Beginner's Handbook

Gael Hodgkins, as relayed to Suzanne M. and Mark P.

Mind is beyond measure. Things given are beyond measure. Moreover, in giving, mind transforms the gift and the gift transforms the mind.

Dogen

Thank you to Paul, Lynda, Gordy, Mark, Suzanne and the many others who gave their time and effort to the creation and completion of the Beginner's Handbook.

Gordy Anderson

I am thrilled with Maylie's choosing to become a full time resident here. Her increased availability as member and teacher will greatly be of benefit. We have been wanting strong growth with our group, thinking that one need was our own place. Yet it seems that strong foundation of deep relationship is much more worthy than of simply having place. Maylie's one pointed focus will influence us toward our correct place naturally, individually and as a group.

So how will we show support for a teacher? Toward a person whose path is completely availing herself to our and everyone's true healing and well being. Surely to deepen our own commitment to our own individual awakening is strong. Yet we also need to assess what we as individuals are willing to give toward supporting our teacher, and more importantly what we as a sangha come to on this.

In the world today so much is misdirected. So easily we are misled, within and without. Maylie's consistently gentle nudging to return to our true nature we instinctively know is beyond measure. Yet it's often difficult to give directly for such help. We don't question the cost of a doctor or counselor when crisis and help is needed. In comparison what value do we put on true guidance toward awareness and liberation? May we as a group come from our wholeness and acknowledge the wealth we have and share it. Meet such generosity with generosity. We can join together and take responsibility to support what we want.

Address this subject for it is an imminent issue for us as a group. The new Board will need to set policy as to what represents the sangha.

SANGHA FRIENDS

Our thoughts and concern go out to Bill, Michaela, and KayDee, who all have been having difficult times lately. (Hugs for Burt, too . . .)

Congratulations to Heidi, who has just finished her Master's thesis.

As of this writing, Maylie has a verbal agreement to purchase a home, with a large garage which we can remodel into a zendo, on Park at the bottom of Fickle Hill.

Bodhisattva-of-the-Month Award: Was that our Gordy mentioned in the letter to the editor, Times-Standard of October 15? The writer, upon the return of a lost wallet insert, appreciated Gordy's "encourage[ment] . . . to be more thoughtful and helpful to others." A balance for most of the other letters . . .

CURRENT AZG DISCUSSIONS

PRACTICE COMMITTEE

Election of Board Members

Pete Kayes

In order to fulfill our obligation to our by-laws by electing a Board of Directors to transact our business, we will have an election during November, 1998, culminating at our annual meeting December 6, 1998.

Members* of the Arcata Zen Group will receive a list of all the members of the group during October 1998. Those members who would be willing and able to serve on the board if nominated and elected will be indicated on the list. Each member will have the opportunity to nominate up to five AZG members to the voting pool for the Board of Directors. These nominations must be received by October 31, 1998. They may be mailed or dropped into the donation basket at the Aikido Center on Sunday morning. On Monday, November 9, 1998, ballots with the names of nominees will be mailed to members. Each member may vote for as many as five board members. The ballots may be mailed to our PO Box, dropped in the donation basket, or brought to the December 6th board meeting.

During the meeting on December 6, the votes will be counted and the names of the new board members will be announced. After the names are announced, the new board members will meet and elect the officers.

*Members are individuals who have filled out a membership card. For those who have not yet become members and would like to, a card is enclosed with this newsletter.

Practice Committee Highlights

Pete Kayes

During our last two practice committee meetings, we planned and held a workshop with the help of Leon Lowrey. This workshop concerned our process in the practice committee with an eye to improve it.

Also, we looked at the need to hold elections for our board of directors and we have set up a process to elect officers at our annual meeting Dec. 6, 1998.

Gael Hodgkins took on the responsibility for advertisement and outreach for AZG. Mark offered to help.

Monique and Suzanne are working on a web page for AZG.

Dennis Shayne and Pete Kayes will co-ordinate the November retreat, which will be three days: Nov. 18-Nov. 21. The by-laws are an ongoing topic of practice committee meetings.

ed's note: There will be Practice Committee meetings on November 1 and on November 22 with Maylie after sesshin. Topics likely to come up are: by-laws, setting the calendar for next year, teacher support, the Board of Directors, and on-going process discussions.

DHARMA STUDY GROUP

Several AZG members have expressed an interest in forming a second Dharma Study Group. The initial meeting will be November 15 at Northcountry Clinic after zazen. First meeting discussion will include what each person's goals for the group are, what makes a person feel safe or not in a group, and a review and agreement upon group guidelines. Below is a general guidesheet Maylie sent for dharma groups' process and structure which was used as a basis for structuring our first study group.

Dharma Groups

Purpose: To promote spiritual friendship - kalyana mitta - among members. To share, each from his/her own perspective, the understanding of the Dharma.

Process: The basis of the group is good process and it is the responsibility of each member to care for it.

Guidelines

Confidentiality

Equality of participation: Some people talk easily and lengthily, while others are reticent and find talking in a group hard. Nevertheless, the group must strive toward balanced participation. Towards the end, people who have not spoken should be asked for comments; those who have already spoken hold back.

Personal experience-based comments: We learn from one another's experience. "Teaching" should be avoided.

Personal responsibility for group process: If anyone feels persistently irritated, bored, hurt, etc., they should examine the feeling and make a "process comment," using "I" statements ("When such and such happens, I feel . . .").

Attendance commitment: If a member cannot make a meeting, they should call an assigned person. If they decide to leave the group, they should give group feedback about why.

Appointing a Facilitator: This job can be rotated or not. However, there should be time to discuss the role and to give feedback to the person in it. The job involves keeping track of time, keeping the talk close to the agreed-upon topic, and generally watching process (encouraging those who haven't spoken, etc.).

Regular process evaluations: every 5 or 6 meetings and/or briefly at the end of each.

Responses to the raising of personal situations/problems: Care should be taken lest this unduly dominate a group. Life difficulties should be presented in some kind of practice frame. Advice should be very sparsely given. Dharma groups are not therapy groups.

Group Structure

Approximately ten members: If 2 or 3 don't come, there is still a viable group. More makes it difficult to get around to everyone.

(Renewable) Commitment of six months: If a person doesn't feel an affinity for the group after 2 or 3 sessions, they can leave (hopefully giving some feedback).

Initial structure: Some initial structure is advisable, otherwise too much time is spent wondering what to talk about. After the group has coalesced (3 or 4 months), its own structure "happens." An excellent beginning is to spend initial meetings on "Beginner Mind" talks (a couple per meeting). These can be brief with time for questions and discussions of dharma issues raised. Other forms are reading together, talking about a particular topic, etc.

NEXT NEWSLETTER

The next newsletter deadline is December 15. 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.

EDITOR'S NOTES

Final Curve

When you turn the corner
And you run into yourself
Then you know that you have turned
All the corners that are left.

Langston Hughes

RESERVATION FORM FOR NOVEMBER SESSHIN

Return by November 15

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, PO Box 730, Arcata CA 95518

DATES TO REMEMBER

- NOVEMBER: 1 - Practice Committee Meeting
- 15 - Return November Sesshin Reservation Form
- First Meeting of Second Dharma Study Group
- 18-21 - Sesshin
- 22 - Practice Committee Meeting with Maylie

- DECEMBER: 6 - Board of Directors Elections/Meeting
- 8 - Rohatsu
- 12 - Saturday Sesshin
- 15 - Newsletter Submissions Deadline
- 31 - New Year's Eve Gathering

For Members who are voting, return nominations by October 31. Ballots will be mailed November 9 and must be returned in time for vote-counting at the annual meeting December 6.