

Anchorage Zen Community

Buddham saranam gacchami

February, 1996

Schedule

Sunday Morning Zazen

Every Sunday, 8:25 - 10:15 a.m.
4141 B Street, Suite 208

Day of Mindfulness

Second Saturday of the Month
10:00 a.m. - approx. 2:00 p.m.
at the home of Mira & Rashad
in Wasilla. Pot-Luck contributions
welcomed. For more info: call 373-6031

Monthly Sangha Potluck

Third Saturday of the month
6:00 p.m. - approx. 9:30 p.m.
at the home of Terry & Olcay
Bozkaya
For more info contact them
at 345-3755.

Inter-Sangha Pot-luck

Open to all people in the area
interested in promoting mindful
living -- Come and meet new
friends!

Elizabeth McNeill's house
3852 Caravell Drive
ph: 248-235

Spring Sesshin

To be held at Meier Lake
March 14 - 17th
Teaching shared by community
members. If you are interested, contact
Karen at 344-9840 ASAP.

Free-form, Low-Impact Zen Practice

Elizabeth McNeill

On the last day of 1995, Karen Laing, John Daley and I continued sitting after the regular Sunday service in the Yoga Studio. We ended at 5 p.m.

In the past, the Sangha scheduled a 7-day New Year's Sesshin at Meier Lake Retreat Center as a way to begin the new year. However, we have not held this retreat for the past two years. Karen suggested having a "teeny" sesshin at the juncture of the old and the new years, and it was wonderful.

After the regular service, some met at Kaladi Brothers at New Sagaya for the regular Sunday coffee and tea gathering. Then, those of us who wanted to continue meditating returned to the yoga studio and meditated from 11:30 to 2:30.

For our break, we walked back over to Kaladi Brothers in the sunshine to buy cookies for our afternoon tea. We talked about dreams and plans for the sangha's own zendo at some point in the future. Plans were a bit large given the budget, but shared dreams serve as inspiration for our future plans. After our outdoor walk, tea and conversation, we sat zazen again.

Sitting and walking meditation were free-form. Each person could alternate sitting and walking

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for as long as they liked. This form was the one introduced to us by Nonin at a previous sesshin. The times designated for zazen and kinhin were silent; the outdoor walk and tea were not. In all, we meditated about six hours. At the end of the that time, I felt refreshed, and my knees could still say thank you. Hopefully, others will join us next time, as we plan to do it again.



Meeting Up-dates

Linda Pavitt

There have been two Board & Sangha Meetings since the last newsletter. For the benefit of those unable to attend, I will summarize here.

The Oct. 1, 1995 meeting was attended by 12 people. There was a financial report, a report on the continuing process of attaining non-profit tax status, an update on Jan Bay's visit which took place in Anchorage last November, and an agreement to have staggered terms for Board members.

The Sangha also discussed issues raised in correspondence received from the Minnesota Zen Meditation Center (MZMC). This was in regard to boundaries and ethics within sanghas, and the relationship of students/practitioners to teachers/priests in general. All those attending were asked to preview the material prior to the meeting.

Points covered included: the effects of a power differential between priest & students, how the very act of seeking instruction/advice places the student on an unequal footing with the one being asked, the need to clarify roles and establish policies guiding behavior, as well as the need for individual responsibility.

Since these issues have arisen in MZMC as well as many other Sanghas, Churches and Spiritual communities, AZC wants to remain aware of boundary & ethics concerns, and open to further discussion on the subject. This is particularly relevant as AZC continues its on-going search for a teacher.

Eleven people attended the Jan. 14, 1996 Annual Board & Sangha Meeting. Keith Wiger was re-elected for a full 3-year term as a member of the AZC, Inc. Board of Directors. There was a discussion of AZC's current phone book listing (just the white pages with voice mail for now, with the possibility of the more expensive yellow pages listing in the future if so desired). Karen gave a detailed financial report and explained the policies & procedures of the Treasurer.

AZC, Inc. now has a federal tax ID# but is still not considered non-profit. A few more hoops remain to be jumped.

The by-laws were amended to that, in the future, this annual meeting will take place on the third -- rather than the second -- Sunday in January so as not to conflict with the Rev. Martin L. King holiday (as so that yours truly will not have to miss the NFL Conference Games next time!)

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The group discussed making two additions to AZC's Library:

- (1) Gretchen Ganz will contact Jan Bays to get copies of her talks based on Sharon Salzberg's "Loving Kindness;"
- (2) It was agreed AZC will buy two video tapes per year for use in future Precepts groups and as an addition to the Library.

The meeting concluded with discussion on the continuing process of finding a teacher, and the formation of a new committee to look into the possibility forming ties with other Buddhist groups in Anchorage and -- perhaps -- collectively obtaining a new meeting space. These topics are discussed elsewhere this issue.

Teacher Up-date

Linda Pavitt

AZC continues to search for a teacher with whom to form a continuing relationship. It is a question that has been discussed at Sangha meetings and when planning for sesshins.

To provide some background, since many current members of AZC (including myself) are new to this process:

A few years back, after having many teachers come up, AZC decided to enter into a "Three Year Trial Period" with a priest from the Minnesota Zen Meditation Center, Dokai Georgeson. This "Trial Period" was interrupted, however, by events at MZMC and Dokai's decision not to teach for a period. During this time, AZC continued to have other teachers up, Nonin Chowaney from Nebraska and Jan Bays from Oregon.

Now Dokai will be returning to AZC for a 2 to 3 week period in May to teach, conduct the Spring sesshin, and answer any questions people might have. Exact dates and a place are still being worked out.

At the Annual Meeting in January, the Sangha

agreed that this could be viewed as a continuation of the "Trial Period" -- where both teacher and practitioners continue to evaluate the relationship. This will be the first opportunity to do so for many people.

The over-all feeling I have observed expressed at Sangha meetings has always been love and respect for Dokai and an eagerness to have him return. But considering the changing make-up of the Sangha, with so many new members, the process remains one of evaluation and, in Elizabeth's words, "continuing to look for a teacher."



Daitokuji

In the Mailbox . . .

Linda Pavitt

I haven't included the Mailbox segment in the Newsletter for a few issues now. For one thing, there is always a lot to wade through! There is another aspect to opening the mailbox, however, that would cause me to want to "put it off," which I didn't originally expect. Like opening the morning paper, looking at what comes in the mailbox can bring in news of the suffering in the world.

Many groups share the dharma with AZC, which is so wonderful I'm always eager to get in touch with that. But, albeit indirectly, I have also been put in touch with people suffering from AIDS, torture victims in Guatemala, and a mother soothing her dying son with chants.

In a newsletter from the Clouds in Water Zen Center in Minneapolis, Mike Port writes, "Practicing the dharma means staying in touch with impermanence, and noticing any tendency to ignore our own or others' suffering -- and instead opening up to it." The mailbox has had this effect for me.

Along with same lines, Thich Nhat Hanh writes in his most recent book, "If while we practice we are not aware that the world is suffering . . . we are not practicing mindfulness. We are just trying to escape."

So, here's a summary of the correspondence AZC has been receiving. Perhaps I have devoted too much time to this section this issue. I'd appreciate your comments on this. I've divided it into three sections:

Outside Newsletters

Since I cannot bear to toss away any dharma teachings, I have decided to keep the newsletters we receive on file and available to anyone interested.

AZC received the Winter issue of The Nebraska Monkey from the Nebraska Zen Center where Nonin Chowaney teaches. As many people will remember, Nonin lead AZC's Spring Sesshin last March. It includes an article by Nonin called "Titles" and he writes, "Since we inherited Soto Zen Practice from the Japanese, we inherited the titles that go along with it . . . I'd like to clarify what these titles mean to me in light of my practice in Japan and why I no longer use them . . ." There is also material on the Loving Kindness Sutra, and other things.

The Winter-Spring issue of Ordinary Mind from Ordinary Dharma & Manzanita Village in Southern California arrived. This Sangha follows in the tradition of Thich Nhat Hanh and the Order of Interbeing. It includes a talk by Joanna Macy called "Are you willing to be surprised?" She says, "The dangers that confront us in this time are not visited upon us by some extraterrestrial force, or some satanic deity, or even by a preordained fate. They arise out of our own choices, our relationships, our lives styles. Made by the human mind, they can be unmade by the human mind. . . ." Other articles are on Deepening Practice, Conservatism, Family Values & Materialism, and Gardening.

Two issues of the newsletter Streams came from the Clouds in Water Zen Center in Minneapolis. They include an article about becoming a priest, establishing a relationship with a teacher, the lack of racial diversity in American Sanghas, poetry, practice and other things.

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The Ch'an Meditation Center in Elmhurst, NY, has sent 4 issues of their newsletter and one magazine. Each of these contains reprints of dharma talks given by the teacher/advisor there, (Shih-fu) Venerable Master Sheng-yen. Topics include commentaries on the Surangama Sutra (Generating Bodhi Mind, How to Untie the 6 knots, and enlightenment through eye-conscienceness), a commentary on the Heart Sutra, a biography of a Chinese Monk, and other in-depth material. The Ch'an group is especially prolific and generous. AZC thanks you.

Please feel free to make use of all these gracious offerings of the dharma.

Catalogues

Numerous catalogues come in the mail, but there was one I wanted to describe. The catalogue is produced by the Institute for Economic Justice & Indigenous Technology in Eugene, OR. They market extraordinary back-strap weaving -- including meditation shawls -- made by Mayan Indian women in Guatemala. Most of these women are widows, the result of many years of political violence against the Mayan people. With assistance from people in the Canadian Embassy there, they have formed a non-profit cooperative to sell their works in order to meet their basic needs and keep their ancient culture alive. Men also work in the co-op, for one young man the work is a way of rehabilitating his hands after being disabled as a result of torture.

I was very moved by all this, and their weavings are truly works of art. I'd like to place a **bulk order** -- so if anyone else thinks they might be interested, contact me and I'll get a copy of the catalogue to you.

Other Correspondence

There was an article from The Arizona Republic on the Tibetan practice of "cross breathing" or "co-meditating" which can relieve the suffering of the terminally ill. Contact me if you'd like to know more.

The White Plum Sangha in NYC (in the lineage of Soto Zen Master Maezumi Roshi) is starting an AIDS ministry. Their goal is to help the AIDS National Interfaith Network (ANIN) expand its Judeo-Christian base to include the Buddha-dharma. For more info, contact me.

Last Dec., the Community for Mindful Living sent AZC a proposal for raising money to complete a professional-quality film project of retreats held around the world by Thich Nhat Hanh, including beautiful interviews of Thay and Sister Chan Khong. I am aware that some members of AZC have sent contributions to this project.



Stalking the Moment

John Daley

Belly first I face the wall.
Knees aching, feet asleep.
Shhh, be quiet. . . .
I'm stalking something through all this noise.

My mind's in a trough of my own design.
My horizon confined. Meanwhile, just outside. . . .
Alpenglow slips over the mountains.

Sheepish unease creeps in.
Embarrassment? How important -- these selfish facades?
Put them down.

Sangha member represented at Second Annual Exhibition of Contemporary Buddhist Art -- Congratulations Buz!

Linda Pavitt

Last Fall, Buz Blum, a member of AZC living in Palmer, had all three of the pieces he submitted accepted to The American School of Japanese Arts Exhibition in Santa Rosa, California.

Buz submitted "turned and altered bowl," "turned birch bowl," and "turned and carved (fluted) bowl" to the exhibition entitled "Liberation by Seeing," which was sponsored by the Gold Ridge Sangha.

I am completely at a loss to describe Buz's art, but he was kind enough to send me a poem written about him and his work by M. E. Williams:

Woodsong

Birch turnings, like concave fluted mushrooms,
long-stemmed, delicate, translucent as parchment,
form fairy rings on the dusty windowsill.

In the dark cavern of your workroom,
you choose and lift another slab, listen for its voice,
caress its knots and ridges, envision its possibilities.

A bowl for Buddha? The living element yields its heart
to your fingertips, to your eye and ear. Satisfied, you
secure the iron bolt into its rough-hewn end.

Ivory-colored tendrils spiral to the floor forming fragrant heaps,
soft curling drifts to join and mingle with those of
apple, birch, maple, camphor, and oak.

And on the lathe, seduced and shaped by the sure
touch of your lean hands, the cherry wood sings.

What words can I use to teach
others the way? Gold must be
beaten hundreds of times before its
brightness can appear.

January is cold.

I wish you every happiness.

Dogen Zenji



The end of all our exploring will
be to arrive where we started, and
to know the place for the first time.

T. S. Elliot



Inter-Sangha Committee Formed -- Pot Luck Scheduled for March 24th

Linda Pavitt

The idea of acquiring a new meeting place AZC came up at the January meeting. While everyone is still very happy with the existing arrangement with the Yoga Studio, there continues to be difficulty (and expense) involved in finding places to have retreats, and there is a growing desire to be able to have "a place."

Discussion came up about renting a store front, finding an old house, even -- and I'm not clear on this -- building huts out of hay.

This led to the idea of inviting other Buddhist groups to think about getting a place together. Thus, the Inter-Sangha Connection Committee was formed to begin making contacts. John Daily will

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head the committee and talk to Kurt Wong (with the Alaska Buddhist Society), Cathy Collins would talk with a Taoist group she knows, and Elizabeth McNeill will talk with a realtor.

From what I have heard, progress has been quite remarkable. An Inter-Sangha Pot Luck has been scheduled for March 24 at 11:00 a.m. at Elizabeth's house. What a wonderful opportunity for all of us.

Who knows what will come of the idea of a new meeting place. But the idea of reaching out to other groups seems like a very positive step to me. To some extent this is already starting to happen (with AZC's collaboration with Stillpoint on the Buddhist--Christian Discussion group). I hope more people will contribute their thoughts on this subject.

Many, many thanks to the Committee for their efforts so far. I hope everyone interested will be able to attend the Pot-Luck on March 24th.



Sit very still, breathe very deeply, and practice the way of Avaloketaswara.

Avaloketaswara means listening to the suffering of the world. At least you can listen to the people who are close to you, your children, your father, your husband . . .

We invoke your name, Avaloketaswara. We aspire to learn your way of listening in order to help relieve the suffering of the world. You know how to listen in order to understand.

We invoke your name in order to practice listening with all our attention and open-heartedness.

We will sit and listen without any prejudice. We shall sit and listen without judging and reacting. We will sit and listen in order to understand.

We will sit and listen so attentively that we will be able to hear what the other person is saying, and also what has been left unsaid.

We know that just by listening deeply, we already alleviate a great deal of pain and suffering in the other person. . .

Thich Nhat Hanh



From where I sit . . .

Linda Pavitt

This newsletter is a couple of months overdue, but I feel I've made something more comprehensive than before. There is SO much going on!

I've had the privilege (thanks to the Sangha) of participating in Stillpoint's discussion group "Living Buddha, Living Christ" based upon Thich Nhat Hanh's recent book. Through this, I've seen whole new possibilities of inter-faith dialogue. Possibilities I didn't realize existed. The sangha generally is at a stage of reaching out to the wider community through the formation of the new Inter-Sangha committee, and even more possibilities exist here.

I am finding that dialogue with others is one of the best ways to know myself. As this continues, It is my hope the newsletter can help define what's going on. I welcome your comments.

Anchorage Zen Community borrows a quotation from Kosho Uchiyama to describe its "Statement of Purpose" -- "(to) cooperate with one another and aim to create a place where sincere practitioners can practice without trouble."

To add your name to (or delete it from) the mailing list:

contact Linda at 345-8515

To submit material:

contact Linda at 345-8515

I can take material at any time, in almost any format. It is my hope the newsletter will serve as a place for meaningful dialogue, art, opinions, stories and so forth.

Anchorage Zen Community

Board of Directors:

President -- Judith Haggar

Secretary -- Elizabeth McNeill

Treasurer -- Karen Laing

Additional Directors: Keith Wiger

Stefan Otterson

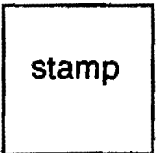
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Newsletter Editor: Linda Pavitt

Mailing List Coordinator: Ronn

Rasmussen

Library Coordinator: David Berkshire

**Anchorage Zen Community**  
2401 Susitna  
Anchorage, Alaska 99517



Mailing Label