

Anchorage Zen Community

October 1996

**For Sesshin Information
Please See Page 10**

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## Fall Schedule

### Zazen

**Sunday Mornings, 8:25 - 10:15 a.m.**

Sitting & Walking (Kinhin) Meditation  
followed by a short Buddhist Service;  
at 4141 B Street, Suite 208  
(note: location change during  
Dokai's visit, see p. 10)

For more information, phone 566-0143

**Wednesday Mornings, 7:05 - 7:35 a.m.**

Sitting Meditation, followed by  
tea for those who have the time  
at 2600 Denali Street, Suite 701  
for information, phone: 278-6732

### Sangha Pot-Luck

**Third Saturday** of each month

Informal dinner, followed by sharing a poem  
or short story if you like, at the home of Terry & Olcay  
for more information phone: 345-3755

### Day of Mindfulness

**Second Saturday** of the Month, in **Wasilla**, 10:00 am - approx. 2:00 pm

Several sittings followed by kinhin, then lunch while listening to a dharma audio  
or video tape (Pot Luck contributions welcomed), followed by discussion.

For more info phone Mira or Rashad: 373-6031

### Precepts Group

**Every other Sunday** following Zazen at 4141 B Street, Suite 208

Precepts recitation followed by informal discussion on the precepts or  
any questions related to our practice.



drawing by Liz Byrne

## Generosity

by Elizabeth McNeill

Over the years many people contributed, and continue to contribute, to the Anchorage Zen Community to truly make us a growing and ever changing community. For years, as practitioners, our generosity has taken many forms.

We brought up and housed a variety of teachers so that our sangha could be exposed to Buddhist teachings. We always found a location where we could meditate regularly on Sundays. We have been "doans" for one another. We held precepts discussion groups in our offices and homes. We hosted monthly mindfulness days for several years. We had a Buddhist group for the children. We meditated together during mid-week. We gave talks in the schools and to interested groups. We organized a mega-potluck for many groups and individuals who engage in some type of meditative practice to promote greater connectedness among us. We donated legal work and cleaned up a creek. We have our own home page on the Internet.

We invited ourselves to tea and coffee after zazen each Sunday so we get to know each other in informal ways. We hosted monthly potlucks with delicious food donated by all. We backpacked together in scenery that has the capacity to awaken us to the precious moment.

We donated poetry, articles, and artwork to the newsletter, which comes out regularly and helps us all stay more connected with one another. We keep a current mailing list to facilitate the mailing of our newsletter.

We have a library in a member's home. We donated video and audio tapes for all members to borrow. For sesshins we cooked, sewed zafus, and made oriyoki sets for the benefit of the sangha. We have beautiful birch bowls for oriyoki.

We have been very generous.



## The Space Between Thoughts

by John Daley

Meditating has shown me that I think a lot. Actually I think/feel a lot. This goes on and on, often with out me even being aware of it. There are several basic themes to these "thoughts". Among the most popular themes are: work, sex, my father, a lady I once knew, and a boss I once hated. It's amazing to realize that I spend a good part of each day going over and over the same stuff, often without even realizing it. And it's not just simple "thoughts". There is significant emotional content in some of this stuff. These "thoughts" are my life. They are my reality.

Meditation has helped me to step back from these thought/feelings and see them from a distance. This of course, is easier said than done. Never the less, it has been very, very, interesting to notice what my mind is really doing. It's only in this distance that I can see thought/feelings somewhat objectively. For a few moments, I am not immersed in them. For a few moments, I am in the space between thoughts.

This space between thoughts interests me greatly. It seems to be a very difficult place to get to. To see it, I have to put down my agenda. I have to put down my mission. I have to put down my goals and positions. It seems that I really am quite attached to these things. These things that I spend so much time and effort at. It's almost beyond my ordinary comprehension. My mind demands: "What will I do if I'm not immersed in thinking about this that or the other thing? You want me to stop?.....Now?". These things seem to important to just put down.

So what does it look like, this gap in my thinking? Well the glimpses I've seen, though brief and not completely clear, are nothing special. Just emptiness. A blank slate. But the longer I experience this simple emptiness, the more profound it seems. You see, for a moment, I'm free. I am outside of it. I can see my career, social life, family life, etc. as nothing more than a stream or path of thought/feelings. These are things that I am constantly creating. I am constantly writing these things on the blank slate of my life. Interesting indeed!

With this awareness, I can stop going down the same old paths. I can write something new. I am not fixed or stuck. "I" am not any "thing" in the sense of something unchanging or rigidly defined. "I" am nothing more than a stream of "thoughts". Of course, there is a sort of momentum or habit to these "thoughts". They don't seem to turn on a dime. And this space, or slate, or big mind if you will, is something that we share with others. What I do affects them also. So it's not easy.

I wonder if this is the "Great Robe of Liberation" we hear about in the Verse of the Kesa? Is it the "Virtuous Field far beyond form and emptiness"? Is it as simple as the space between thoughts? I don't claim to know. What is amazing is that we all have access to it. We are all tied to this space and are constantly writing on it with our lives.

Bowls courtesy of Buz Blum ("treen ware")

## A Little Perspective . . .

At a Board Meeting earlier this year, Judith shared a letter she'd found from over nine and a half years ago. All those at the meeting agreed it would make interesting reading for the Newsletter. Interesting for those who were there -- to look back and recognize how much has been accomplished -- and for those who have joined the Sangha more recently, to see how things have developed, and give a sense of history to the group's current plans & dreams.

The full text of the letter appears on the following page.



"River, sky, moon and stars, mountains, forest, every blade of grass, and every mote of dust were transformed for the Buddha. He knew that the long years he wandered in search of the Way had not been wasted. Indeed, thanks to his trials and hardships, he had finally discovered the way in his own heart. Every living being possessed the heart of enlightenment. The seeds of enlightenment existed in everyone. Living beings did not need to seek enlightenment outside of themselves because all the wisdom and strength of the universe was already present in them. This was the Buddha's great discovery and was cause for all to rejoice."

From p. 132, Old Path White Clouds  
by Thich Nhat Hanh



## From Where I Sit . . .

As I began the process of assembling this Newsletter, I realized almost half a year has gone by since the last one! Of course, during this time the Sangha has been corresponding in other ways -- there have been 3 Sangha/Board Meetings, Colleen has sent out a letter to all on the mailing list, there have been backpacking trips, twice-weekly sittings, a resumption of Precepts Discussions, and other occasions for people to come together, share and grow in their practice.

What can this Newsletter do to reflect all that? I don't think it's necessary -- or even possible -- for me to try to chronicle or summarize all of these activities.

In the past I have included detailed summaries of Board Meetings for the benefit of those unable to attend. I've listed and described all catalogues, announcements, clippings and the like which arrived in the mailbox. To continue to do these things, however, would make the Newsletter so lengthy (and time-consuming for me) that it's just impractical.

But, I do want to continue to provide information on these things! That's the way I see my role as "Newsletter Editor." At the June 19th Sangha meeting, in particular, there was an important discussion on the subject of Teachers and the future direction of the Sangha. How could I not include this? So -- a middle way -- I'll provide excerpts, and serve as a source to contact for further information.

Beyond that, the Newsletter is whatever participants make of it! I think we've got an outstanding group of contributions this issue. What else would you like to see? Any sections I should leave out? Should we have more debate? Questionnaires? Should we charge for the cost of mailing? Use Membership/Donation forms? To what extent should our Web-site replace the Newsletter? Anybody got any ARTWORK!

Zen practice is limitless. The ways it impacts our lives, diverse. And so, the possibilities for the Newsletter must be, well, pretty wide open!

Linda Pavitt

April 3, 1987

Anchorage Zen Center  
Anchorage, Alaska

Dear Zen Student,

Excuse the impersonal nature of the greeting; in the name of expediency, we opted to mass produce this invitation to make sure we got this to you in sufficient time for scheduling.

A small group of us met last Tuesday evening for a brief "planning" meeting. Our planning was more of a session of dreaming; a fantasy sketch of how our current sangha practice might develop. This letter is to invite you to join us in our next meeting, April 14.

Some seven years ago, a few people came together and formed the Khawachen Center. Our principle activity was a once-weekly sitting. We were an eclectic group of "meditators" from various traditions. Some four years ago, we invited Dainen Katagiri Roshi of the Minnesota Zen Center to be with us. Subsequently, he and one of his students have honored us with short visits on four occasions. Through his teaching and encouragement, our group, The Anchorage Zen Center, was formulated to create and sustain a center devoted to the study of Zen.

In our brief meeting last Tuesday, those of us present projected five years into the future. Some of the ideas that were generated are:

Practice: regularly scheduled practice sessions throughout the year  
sesshins of varying lengths  
daily meditation  
wilderness retreats

Teacher: invite "interim" teachers to be with us for periods of time  
eventually, establish a "teacher-in-residence"

Sangha: establish various rituals that embrace individual, relational, and  
community activity  
conduct ongoing education in aspects of Zen Buddhist ritual,  
history, psychology, and philosophy  
guest lecturers, student lectures, Dharma talks

Resources: a building in which to practice and focus the activities  
finances to support the building and activities  
a governing board and a non-profit status for the Zen Center

Certainly some of these visions are ambitious; others are more immediately attainable. Our agenda at Tuesday evening's meeting is to incorporate your ideas into our plan, and then establish some immediate direction for our efforts. We would invite your ideas and energy.

We are meeting at Judith Haggan's house at 2401 Sustina (in the Turnagain part of town). Call Judith at 248-1049 if you need directions. We begin at 7 p.m. and intend to end by 9.

Hope you can join us.

In gassho,

*Keith Wiger*  
*Glen Ray*  
For the rest of the planners,  
Keith Wiger and Glen Ray

## Board Meeting Highlights

As mentioned elsewhere in this issue, there has just been too much going on since the last Newsletter to try to cover all the Board Meeting material here. Elizabeth McNeill, Sangha Secretary, does a marvelous job of providing complete minutes, and anyone can feel free to contact Elizabeth or me for copies.

For the benefit of those unable to attend, I want to provide excerpts from the minutes on the two most talked about issues at recent meetings: Teacher and Place.

From the June 19 meeting, under the heading: "Future Directions for the Sangha and Discussion to Select a Teacher" –

The principle objective of the meeting was to discuss the Zen Community's need and desire for a teacher. The sangha spent some two hours discussing our collective and individual need for a teacher, the form(s) by which this need might be met, and the decision as to our next step in this process. Among the central issues that the members raised were:

1. The power and importance of a "direct transmission" from a living teacher to the student is central to Zen. The nature of that personal relationship with a teacher is difficult to assess or predict. Without such contact, a student must rely on other students, readings, and/or occasional meetings with transient teachers here in Anchorage or in journeys Outside. This has sustained and provided much to our community over the years.

2. Having an itinerant teacher, or a teacher-in-residence, would likely bring new members into the sangha, and significantly change the forms and processes by which the Anchorage Zen Community has operated. This change, both in scope and depth, cannot be anticipated. The character and style of the teacher will be a significant factor in these changes. It was acknowledged that when we choose a teacher, some members will stay and others will leave - a common development in centers.

3. How much time, energy, & money will be necessary to support a teacher is a somewhat nebulous question. Several in the group were supportive of the notion that once the "desire/wish" for a teacher is clear and specific, the other stuff (money, effort) will follow. Certainly an assessment of our resources and the means by which these might be amplified/sustained for such a commitment is necessary. It seems quite apparent that a larger sangha is necessary to support and sustain a teacher-in-residence. Whether we proceed on faith that such a community will evolve once a teacher is here, or be patient for the development of a larger community is a question we must answer collectively.

This section of the minutes was followed by three options (1) re-engaging with Dokai as teacher, (2) inviting Jan Bays to conduct sesshins on a 3 times per year basis, and (3) Exploring the possibility of sharing a priest with the Japanese, Thai, or Korean communities.

Each option was followed by related concerns and discussion, pro & con. If you desire more information, contact Elizabeth, secretary, for complete copies of these minutes.

(Cont. next page)



From the September 3rd Meeting, on the discussion of Place:

**PLACE: Financing a place:**

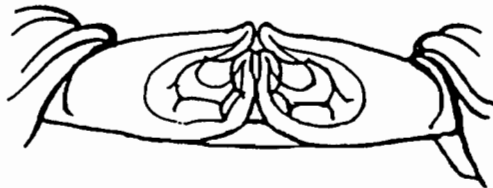
Colleen handed out a financial sheet showing how much money could be saved if 1, 20, or 27 members contributed 25 cents, 50 cents, or \$1.00 per day over 1 to 5 years. The amounts were substantial.

**MOTION:** Open a savings account specifically for a building fund. A vote of 2/3rds of the members could transfer the money into the general fund if AZC never funds a building. Approved.

**MOTION:** When \$5000 accrues in the building fund account, the topic of "place" will be placed on the agenda for the next Board and Sangha meeting. Approved.

**MOTION:** Open an account for the Anchorage Zen Community at the Anchorage Recycling Center, so money generated from items we take in for recycling will be credited to AZC. Olcay volunteered to open the account.

Although the discussion of a "place" focused on buying, John D. suggested we stay open to other options - such as sharing a place with other groups, looking for donated space, etc.



**Thank you, Mark "Webmaster"**

AZC member Mark Standley has graciously donated his services to put AZC "on line." Through a unanimous decision at the Sept. 3 Board Meeting, it was agreed that AZC will have a home page on the World Wide Web. It's still in the initial stages, and Mark could not be reached for comment at the time of this writing, but I'm told: Use your WWW Browser to search for key words Zen@Alaska.net or Anchorage Zen Community. Once it's functioning, AZC can be connected electronically to other Sanghas and other Buddhist resources on the vast WWW.

Mark is providing this service free of charge to the Sangha. Thank you again, Mark, for your generous contribution. (And thank you, John Cunningham, for your assistance with this article).

Linda Pavitt

## Backpacking (Zen Style) Over the Fourth of July

By Terri Bozkaya

When I was first asked to write an article about our Fourth of July backpacking trip, I decided to sit on it for a few days until I could decide from which "angle" to approach the subject. Should I write about the beauty of waking up across from Mt. McKinley with its majestic snow-covered peaks, surrounded by smaller (yet equally beautiful) mountains and the jagged edges of "Moose's Tooth, or the incredible soft-spoken grandeur of the tundra with its cushioned carpet of miniature flowers? The wonder of observing the beginnings of life in previously barren places as lichen and moss attach to ancient rocks and earth? Should I talk about the difficulty and challenge of the climb, the pure concentration that hundreds of feet of rock-hopping demanded of all of us and, particularly of Judy Saha, who crossed without the help of a walking stick to balance her as she carefully stepped from large stone to small stone to wobbly stone with a 35 lb. pack on her back?

Should I write about the harmony (aka "good vibes") that existed between us as a group (Judy Saha, Elizabeth McNeil, John Daly, Olcay Bozkaya, Terri Bozkaya) throughout the four days? Or maybe the near-gourmet breakfasts and suppers that we all prepared for each other in the shelter of Elizabeth's kitchen tent?

Maybe I should write about the meditations? (There were actually "scheduled" times for sitting but, in reality, I'm not sure when the meditations began or ended, or if they did. It's hard *not* to be in a meditation when walking on a path, bear bells ringing, one person behind the other, moving the feet in a steady rhythm and keeping the breath flowing in and out of the body. Nature has a way of "connecting" us to itself when we're subjected to it.)

So, what can I say about the time in Denali State Park or the Coal Creek Trail?

Each of us have our own rendition of the experience and I hesitate to speak for the group at large. Personally, I eagerly await other trips with interested members of the Zen Community and would encourage others to explore the idea of a trek up the mountain.

Sequel: The Weekend of July 27 & 28, Olcay and I went backpacking with John Daly at Crow Pass in Girdwood. After making the three mile hike to Crystal Lake (the last portion is a "kicker"), we discovered that our new tent poles were still in our garage. Olcay's face had a momentary blank/shocked look on it and I was ready to "flow" with the situation and head back to civilization and a restaurant. John Daly said he thought it would be fun to hike back down the hill, drive our jeep to our house and get our tent poles, drive back to Crow Pass Trailhead, and hike the three miles back to Crystal Lake. What could we say? He did, we didn't and, five hours later, John appeared again with poles in hand. Again, we all had *individual* experiences regarding the trip; I believe I can say with confidence, though, that we all enjoyed the hike, walking on Raven Glacier (our Sunday morning day trip), and stopping at Double Muskee Restaurant for a reprieve after our adventure.

## In The Mailbox . . .

AZC receives far more literature, catalogues and announcements than I can possibly report here. The latest material to come in includes: Snow Lion, Peace Action, The Zen Studies Society (New York), Two Anchorage publications, IASC (International Assoc. for Spiritual Consciousness, Inc.) and The Eternalist, Sangha Jewel (Portland), and numerous others. Anyone interested can contact me and dig deeper into what's "in the mailbox." I'd just like to highlight the items I found most noteworthy:

AZC member Buz Blum sent in a clipping from the July 7, '96 New York Times about work being done in London on what is believed to be the oldest Buddhist manuscripts ever discovered. Thirteen scrolls of birch bark were found rolled up inside clay pots. The Deputy Director of Oriental and India Office Collections at the British Library is quoted as saying, "It was like putting together a jigsaw puzzle when the edges of the pieces have been gnawed away by mice." The fragments contain perhaps 20 different texts dating from the end of the first century A.D. or the beginning of the second century. The Deputy Director goes on to say, "As we get closer to Buddha's own time, we are closer to the transition (of the teachings into written form) and closer to the oral tradition." Contact Linda to receive a copy of the entire article. Thanks, Buz, for sending this along!

The Ch'an Meditation Center (Elmhurst, New York) continues to be most generous to AZC. Their newsletter and the lovely "Ch'an Magazine" have arrived. But in addition, they have donated a second book to the AZC library, Dharma Drum (The life and heart of Ch'an practice). Their first donation, Zen Wisdom, Knowing and Doing (Conversations with Ch'an Master Sheng-yen), was mentioned in a previous Newsletter. This literature is really beautiful. Everyone is encouraged to read these gracious offerings of the dharma.

Finally, although the registration deadline has passed, an announcement arrived regarding an event taking place over Thanksgiving that I wanted to mention. Bearing Witness: A Retreat At Auschwitz-Birkenau will be bringing together an interfaith, international assembly of people to practice sitting and walking meditation at this site of Holocaust atrocities 51 years ago (over one and one-half million people died at this camp). Morning walks will follow the same path as Auschwitz slave laborers did years ago. Between periods of sitting meditation there will also be walking meditation around the extermination sites. According to the material, as well as providing a chance for people to talk about the losses in their lives and families, the retreat's intention is "to create a space where those of us who wish to work for peace can meditate and think, mourn and grieve, and do that work to which we would be drawn . . ." I just thought this was something really powerful to know about. For the announcement in its entirety, contact me.

Linda Pavitt

## Odds & Ends . . .

Judith was in an exhibit in Washington D.C. over the Summer entitled "Puja -- The Hindu Way of Devotion," and saw a statue of Nandi, the sacred Bull upon which Shiva rides. When I asked her if she had any inspirational quotes for the Newsletter, she told me she was inspired by what Nandi stands for: Single-minded devotion and peaceful strength of faith.



Addition to Video Library: "Man on Cloud Mountain," a video of Dharma talks by Harada Roshi, donated by Gretchen Ganz (Thanks, Gretchen!). The video, approx. 55 min. in length, was filmed at a sesshin outside Seattle. This is an awesome video. Harada Roshi, from the Rinzai lineage, provides profound teachings and any student of Zen Buddhism will learn much by viewing this. Contact David Berkshire, Librarian.



Gentle reminders: Dues \$100 annually, installments and/or reduction available upon request (Contact Karen, Treasurer)

Recycling Account beginning to form . . . Next time you're ready to bring those cans into the recycling center, remember to check if AZC's account has been established. Also, Building Account beginning to form . . . If having our own place is a priority for you, this is a direct way you can contribute. These two accounts are new ways AZC is branching out in an effort to develop a broader financial base from which to grow . . .



Karen Laing has been practicing in Plum Village recently (the community established by Thich Nhat Hanh in France). She has written saying that he is continuing to re-work the phrasing of the 5 Wonderful Precepts. The following page shows his translation of the Precepts as recited at AZC's bimonthly discussion group.



### Fall Sesshin Information

**Sesshin** will take place at Meier Lake Nov. 7 - 10, 1996

**Dokai Georgesen**, Teacher

Those interested in car pooling, or just needing more information, call: 566-0143

### Other activities scheduled for Dokai's Visit (Oct. 31 - Nov. 19, 1996) :

Details were still being worked out at the time of this printing. There will be morning & evening meditations, and classes conducted by Dokai twice a week.

**During Dokai's visit, all activities (except Sesshin) will be held at St. Mary's Rectory (the smaller building located next to the Church at Lake Otis and Tutor Rd.) This includes Sunday Morning Zazen.**

Please confirm exact dates & times by contacting AZC's voice mail (566-0143) Information will also be available by contacting the Anchorage Daily News's listings by calling 277-1500 and entering AZC's code: 5408. Check also the Religion Section of the paper.

### Spring Sesshin Information

**Meeting to decide selection of Teacher -- Dec. 1**

Following Sunday morning Zazen, at Elizabeth's house

Pot Luck contributions welcomed, for more info phone: 278-6732

**Sesshin** is scheduled for April 2 - 6, 1997 at Meier Lake

## The Five Wonderful Precepts

*Following the Spring Retreats, Thich Nhat Hanh re-translated the Five Precepts to express their implications more thoroughly and to rephrase the "Do not's" in a way that articulates these positive practices:*

1. Aware of the suffering caused by the destruction of life, I vow to cultivate compassion and learn ways to protect the lives of people, animals, and plants. I am determined not to kill, not to let others kill, and not to condone any act of killing in the world, in my thinking and in my way of life.

2. Aware of the suffering caused by exploitation, social injustice, stealing, and oppression, I vow to cultivate loving kindness and learn ways to work for the well-being of people, animals, and plants. I vow to practice generosity by sharing my time, energy, and material resources with those who are in real need. I am determined not to steal and not to possess anything that should belong to others. I will respect the property of others, but I will prevent others from profiting from human suffering or the suffering of other species on Earth.

3. Aware of the suffering caused by sexual misconduct, I vow to cultivate responsibility and learn ways to protect the safety and integrity of individuals, couples, families, and society. I am determined not to engage in sexual relations without love and a long-term commitment. To preserve the happiness of myself and others, I am determined to respect my commitments and the commitments of others. I will do everything in my power to protect children from sexual abuse and to prevent couples and families from being broken by sexual misconduct.

4. Aware of the suffering caused by unmindful speech and the inability to listen to others, I vow to cultivate loving speech and deep listening in order to bring joy and happiness to others and relieve others of their suffering. Knowing that words can create happiness or suffering, I vow to learn to speak truthfully, with words that inspire self-confidence, joy, and hope. I am determined not to spread news that I do not know to be certain and not to criticize or condemn things of which I am not sure. I will refrain from uttering words that can cause division or discord, or that can cause the family or the community to break. I will make all efforts to reconcile and resolve all conflicts, however small.

5. Aware of the suffering caused by unmindful consumption, I vow to cultivate good health, both physical and mental, for myself, my family, and my society by practicing mindful eating, drinking, and consuming. I vow to ingest only items that preserve peace, well-being, and joy in my body, in my consciousness, and in the collective body and consciousness of my family and society. I am determined not to use alcohol or any other intoxicant or to ingest foods or other items that contain toxins, such as certain TV programs, magazines, books, films, and conversations. I am aware that to damage my body or my consciousness with these poisons is to betray my ancestors, my parents, my society, and future generations. I will work to transform violence, fear, anger, and confusion in myself and in society by practicing a diet for myself and for society. I understand that a proper diet is crucial for self-transformation and for the transformation of society.

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."

**Anchorage Zen Community  
Board of Directors**

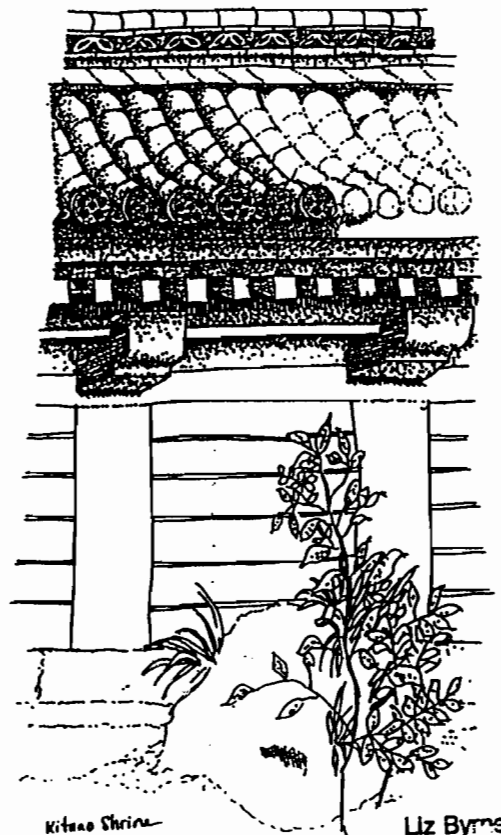
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**To submit material, or  
add/delete your name from  
the mailing list:**  
contact Linda at sittings or  
through the AZC voice mail at:  
566-0143



I am indebted to Dora Archer, my mother,  
for her assistance in producing this issue.



Kitano Shrine

Liz Byrne

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