

Anchorage Zen Community

Blue Mountains, Constantly Walking (Dogen)

September 1995

Schedule of Events

Sunday Morning Zazen

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

Zazen, Precepts Recitation, Discussion

Beginning September
Every Thursday Evening
6:55 p.m. - approx. 9:00 p.m.
Judith's house, 2401 Susitna
for information call: 248-1049

Day of Mindfulness resumes Oct. 14th

10:00 a.m. - 2:00p.m. in Wasilla
Tea & Hot Soup provided, Pot-Luck
contributions welcomed
For info contact Mira or Rashad: 373-6031

Board Meeting & General Membership Pot-Luck Lunch

October 1st Following Zazen
At Elizabeth's house:
3852 Caravelle Drive, Anchorage
phone: 248-2350 for directions

Jan Bays in town for Sittings and Talks

November 10 - 12
Arrangements on location still in
progress



Board Meeting October 1st

Everyone is encouraged to attend a Pot-Luck Board Meeting Sunday, October 1st, at Elizabeth's house following Zazen.

The purpose of the meeting is to discuss group dynamics, trust, and boundary issues raised in a report received from the Minnesota Zen Meditation Center. Copies of the report are available at Sunday morning Zazen or through contacting Judith. All participants are asked to please read the material prior to the meeting.

Look for a summary of these discussions in the next newsletter.



It's That Time Again

Fall is traditionally the time AZC asks its members to renew annual dues. Dues are used to pay for expenses such as donation toward the Yoga Studio for Sunday Morning Zazen, the Newsletter, and for bringing teachers up for Sesshins and other teaching.

Just as a reminder: Dues are \$100 annually, and can be broken down into monthly installments. If this is too high for any individual member, however, a smaller amount or a service may be substituted. Please contact Karen (after Zazen or by phone at 344-9840) to make dues payments or any necessary arrangements.

AZC's Library in Progress

by David Berkshire -- Library Coordinator

The A.Z.C. recently received over 100 books to begin a library. It is our hope to bring together a list of all the selections in the library and all the selections that individual members would be willing to lend out. The 100 books that were donated are on varying Buddhist topics ranging from Tibetan Buddhism to Zen. It is my hope, as the newly appointed librarian, to distribute a list of these books. I hope to include individual member's books on this list. The list will be handed out at the Sangha meeting Oct. 1. If you have some books that you would be willing to put on loan please send me the list via regular mail, E-mail, or over the phone. I will need your phone number also, so other members can reach you to borrow your book(s). If you have any questions feel free to contact me also. Gasho,
David Berkshire (907)276-4658
1700 Stanford Dr. email: berk@aonline.com
Anchorage, AK 99508

Teacher Update: Jan Bays coming to Anchorage

AZC is honored to be able to bring to Anchorage Jan Chozen Bays, from the Zen Community of Oregon. Jan Bays is one of the twelve original dharma heirs ordained into the White Plum Lineage by the Venerable Hakuyu Taizan Maezumi Roshi, a seminal influence in the growth of Zen Buddhism in the West, who died suddenly last May 15th. (For more information on Maezumi Roshi, refer to the Fall 1995 issue of Tricycle.)

In addition to teaching in the Zen Community of Oregon, Jan Bays is a pediatrician who specializes in helping abused children.

She will be here November 10 - 12th and possibly again later this Winter. AZC hopes everyone will be able to meet her.



What is Mindfulness Day?

From October through April, on the second Saturday of each month, everyone is welcome to deepen their practice with a "Day of Mindfulness" at the home of Sangha members Mira and Rashad. They live in a quiet, wooded area of Wasilla. Contact them at 1-907-373-6031 for directions. (Note -- people sometimes car-pool from Anchorage. Check with interested people after Sunday Morning Zazen.) The day begins at 10:00 and usually lasts until approx. 2:30 p.m.

The day is made up of 3 sittings with walking meditation in between, followed by a simple vegetarian meal (contributions welcomed) and a video or audio tape of a dharma talk. Thich Nhat Hanh's tapes have been used in the past. Tapes of other Buddhist teachers, such as the Dalai Lama, would be welcomed.

The atmosphere is neither formal nor completely casual, but somewhere "in the middle." For example, food is not done in the Oryoki style, but silence is observed during the meal and dharma tape. "This is our way of contributing," Mira said.

Excerpt from Three Pillars of Zen (on Sesshins & Practice)

Elizabeth Mc Neill contributed the following excerpt from the classic 1966 book Three Pillars of Zen by Philip Kapleau:

Sesshin in one form or another goes back to the time of the Buddha, when monks would train themselves in seclusion during the several months of the rainy season. The purpose of sesshin, as the word implies, is to enable one to collect and unify his normally scattered mind so that he can focus it like a powerful telescope inward in order to discover his true Self-nature. During sesshin the basic teaching devices and methods of Zen—i.e., zazen, teisho (the formal lecture), and dokusan (private instruction)—are coordinated into a meaningful whole during seven days of seclusion. Satori is not of course confined to sesshin, but since sesshin is unquestionably its most potent incubator, the progressive steps involved in this unique form of mind-honing are worth describing at some length if the reader is to have a clear insight into this incubation process.

In a monastery, sesshin actually commences with certain ceremonies the evening before formal zazen begins. In the dimly-lit *zendo*, which is to be the hub of all activities for one week, grave head monks assemble the participants for the purpose of assigning places, instructing newcomers how to enter and leave the *zendo* unobtrusively, how to manipulate their chopsticks and food bowls silently during meals, how to walk in *kinhin*, and how to move quietly on and off their sitting pillows.

With the conclusion of these formalities everyone is summoned to the main hall, ablaze with lights, by the ponderous beats of the giant monastery drum. Dressed in formal sitting attire, the participants line up in two rows facing each other across the hall, kneel in the traditional Japanese posture, then bow to each other as a sign of mutual respect and identification with one another's aspiration. There is an air of suppressed excitement and hushed expectancy when, a few minutes later, the roshi and his principal aides in full ceremonial dress enter. As they pass between the two ranks to take their seats at the head of the hall, all bow again, this time with heads touching the *tatami* mats, out of deep respect for their teachers.

After welcoming everyone the roshi speaks in effect as follows:

During sesshin you are not to talk with one another, as speaking disrupts the concentrated mind and thus hinders your own practice and that of others.

Each of you must devote himself single-mindedly to his own zazen to the exclusion of everything else, including a concern with his neighbor's problems. If you have pressing questions, speak to the head monks out of earshot of the others.

(cont.)



Your eyes should always rest unfocused in front of you while sitting, standing, walking, or working, at a distance of about one yard when sitting and about two yards in the other positions. When your eyes dart about and fix themselves on something or other, this contact creates an impression, which in turn gives rise to a thought. Thoughts multiply and then like flies buzz about in the mind, making concentration difficult if not impossible. Do not therefore divert your eyes for any reason whatever.

During sesshin dispense with social amenities of every sort. Don't greet one another with "Good morning" or bid one another "Good night," and don't compliment or criticize each other. Further, you mustn't make a point of stepping aside to allow others to go ahead, nor should you push ahead of them. In all your activities you should move neither hastily nor sluggishly but naturally, like flowing water.

It is advisable in sesshin to eat no more than half of what you normally eat, and if you follow this caution your zazen will be more effective. However, zazen is not asceticism and it is unwise to abstain altogether from food, as your mind might become disturbed by pangs of hunger or you might find yourself becoming too weak to do zazen. If you have no desire to eat during certain meals because you are striving particularly hard, you may of course refuse food.

Do not eat too rapidly or so slowly that everybody has to wait for you. Ideally all should finish at approximately the same time so as not to upset the established rhythm of the sesshin. Be careful not to rattle your bowls when you uncover them and when you put them away, and munch the pickled radishes as quietly as possible; such sounds often prove intrusive to beginners.

Following the morning meal, most monasteries and temples schedule *samu* (physical work) which, during sesshin, takes the form of sweeping, dusting, scrubbing the floors and toilets, plus sweeping the walks, raking leaves, and weeding the gardens. Since the time when Hyakujo first instituted it, more than a thousand years ago, manual labor has been an essential ingredient of Zen discipline. It is recorded of Hyakujo that one day his monks, feeling he had grown too feeble to work, hid his gardening tools. When they refused to heed his entreaties to return them, he stopped eating, saying: "No work, no eating." The same spirit was expressed in modern times by Gempo Yamamoto-roshi, former abbot of Ryutaku-ji, who died in June of 1961 at the age of ninety-six. Almost blind and no longer able to teach or work about the monastery, he decided it was time to die, so he stopped eating. When asked by his monks why he refused his food, he replied that he had outlived his usefulness and was only a bother to everybody. They told him: "If you die now [January] when it is so cold, everybody will be uncomfortable at your funeral and you will be an even greater nuisance, so please eat!" He thereupon resumed eating, but when it became warm he again stopped, and not long after quietly toppled over and died.

(cont.)



What is the significance of such work in terms of Zen training? First, it points up that zazen is not merely a matter of acquiring the ability to concentrate and focus the mind during sitting, but that in the widest sense zazen involves the mobilization and dynamic utilization of joriki (the power generated by zazen) in our every act. Samu, as a mobile type of zazen, also provides the opportunity to quieten, deepen, and bring the mind to one-pointedness through activity, as well as to invigorate the body and thereby energize the mind.

The object here, as in every other type of zazen, is the cultivation first of mindfulness and eventually mindlessness. These are simply two different degrees of absorption. Mindfulness is a state wherein one is totally aware in any situation and so always able to respond appropriately. Yet one is aware that he is aware. Mindlessness, on the other hand, or "no-mindness" as it has been called, is a condition of such complete absorption that there is no vestige of self-awareness.

Any action arising from these states of mind can be neither rushed nor desultory, neither strained nor lax, can have no false movements nor waste any energy. All labor entered into with such a mind is valued for itself apart from what it may lead to. This is the "meritless" or "purposeless" work of Zen. By undertaking each task in this spirit, eventually we are enabled to grasp the truth that every act is an expression of the Buddha-mind. Once this is directly and unmistakably experienced, no labor can be beneath one's dignity. On the contrary, all work, no matter how menial, is ennobling because it is seen as the expression of the immaculate Buddha-nature. This is true enlightenment, and enlightenment in Zen is never for oneself alone but for the sake of all.

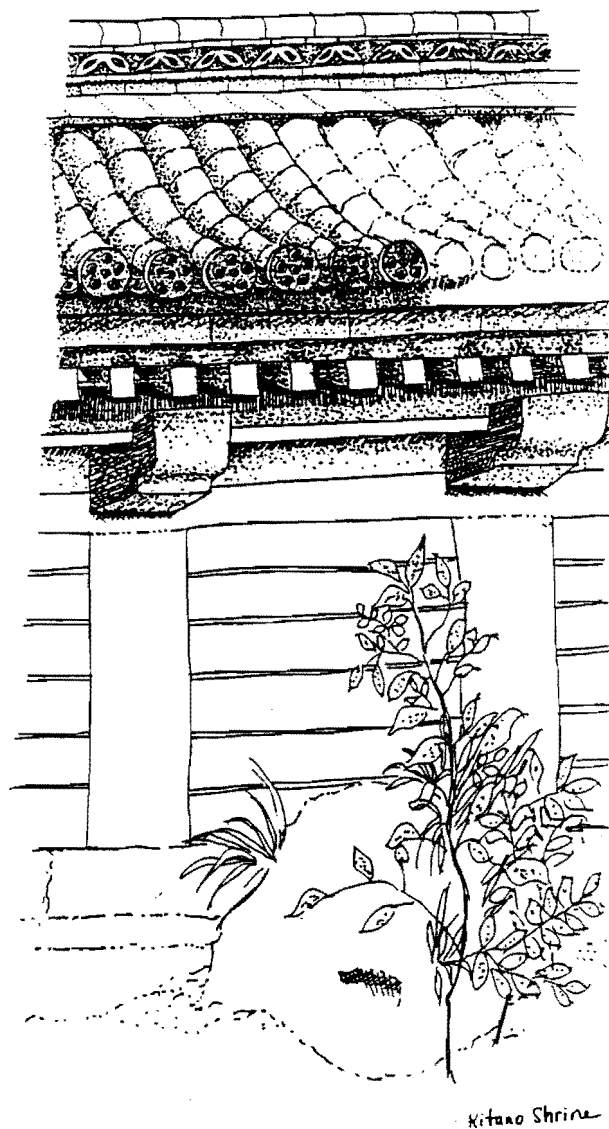
This ideal is stressed throughout sesshin. Four times a day in fact—at the close of the teisho-lecture, at the end of sutra-chanting in the morning and in the afternoon, and the last thing in the evening—the Four Vows are recited three times in unison:

Sentient beings are countless—I vow to save them all.

Tormenting passions are innumerable—I vow to uproot them all.

The gates of the Dharma are manifold—I vow to pass through them all.

The Buddha's Way is peerless—I vow to realize it.



Finding the Right Moment

By Katy Steger

This past March Lama Tsering Everest spoke from her Tara Buddhist perspective on death and dying. One of her early meditation assignments from her teacher was to imagine herself dying a new death every night. *Acquaintance with death is the liberating reality of impermanence, and there is nothing more important than that realization*, she said. In fact, *life is training for death*.

About two weeks before her lecture I was driving the Chickaloon Pass during a blizzard when I flipped my car off the road. As the car lost control and began to roll, I watched in disbelief. A slew of thoughts washed through my head: *I'm dying like this? I can't believe it! No time to explain to my family? This is crazy!* I imagined metal pushing into me, being stranded on a remote highway, pinned in my car. There were a variety of ways to die there. It was not yet a fear of any of these means of dying but disbelief that my time had come without even an inkling of warning.

I had an expectation that I would build up to death: aging, terminal illness, severe turbulence in a plane, stalling with a psychotic killer. All of these scenes have some prelude time, from two minutes to 20 years. This is, however, *dying*. I distinguish death from dying, because dying is a gerund: the process of death. *We are dying--we are in the process of death*. Death is the moment. For an instant, as the trees came towards the windshield, and the roof of the car crushed, I saw the edge of that exact moment: an opportunity for my existence to go either way--into life or into death. Disbelief.

Last winter a friend began teaching me how to ski. He's like a flame wavering down the mountain, a flicker bent at the knees--a very good skier. He casts off hills into the air...SHOUSH! he's back on



the slope again after a 30 foot jump. He does it all the time. It's no big deal for him. He doesn't ask for viewers or talk big about "conquering the mountain". To myself, I call him "My Naive Buddhist Friend" because he's so good at just doing things without ego or fear.

Skiing with him I found myself doing tremendous forward rolls--catapults almost, stomach and butt slides with 20 foot skids, amazing entanglements. *My God*, I thought, *I had no idea I wasn't going to break my legs on that last collision!* It was wonderful to have such a teacher show me how to let go into the action at hand.

Between living and dying it is rare for me to live in the moment that is neither process. To be suddenly in life or suddenly in death generates a sense of great disbelief.

Recently I've kept two phrases in my head to keep mindfulness awake in me (i.e. being mindful of mindfulness): "Let the beauty we love be what we do" from the poet Rumi and "Well, my body winds up dancing anyway [despite all the unexpected life changes]" from a song by a band whose name I forget. The first phrase tells me to envision those things I find beautiful and then respond to experiences with that beauty in mind. The other phrase is similar in its artistic guidance and says to let all action be dance.

Death is just as much training for life as life is training for death. Moments are practice for moments. Encounters with or meditations on death bring out mindfulness for each action. As each action may be our last, each action is its own last.



sumi painting from "Zen Art for Meditation"

A Note From Your Editor

It's been wonderful for me to see how this Newsletter idea has evolved. What began originally as simply an effort on my part to make AZC news bulletins look a little prettier has become a real outlet for contributions from the community, as well as a format to clarify and announce what's happening in the Sangha.

I've found by putting something in writing, and publishing it, so to speak, I'm forced to understand it. In this way I hope I've been able to clarify for others as well as myself some of the activities of the Sangha. My hope is that the Newsletter can continue to do this -- in the spirit of "Beginners Mind" -- defining what's going on for those new to the practice, providing encouragement to all, and inviting questions, comments, original contributions, and the opportunity to share the dharma generally. It can be a common thread among many far-flung members.

For this reason, I hesitate to make any sort of "Editorial Policy." Let contributions take any form members want them to take -- any length, any dharma/Sangha - related subject, submit them at any time. If practicalities get in the way, I'll let you know.

This month, my time simply ran out before I could finish the "In the Mailbox" section, but I would like to keep it as a regular feature. I expect the Newsletter to come out quarterly, with occasional bulletins as necessary.

Big Thanks to everyone who sent in articles this time! Thanks also for all the supportive comments. It is truly my pleasure. Now if only I could understand how this computer works!

How to submit material for the Newsletter: call me at 345-8515 or see me after Zazen.

Simple Truth

by John Daley

"Smile and the world smiles with you."
So simple and sweet. Not serious at all.
You try it. A light hearted grin brings a similar
reply.
Is there truth here? Follow the thread.

The world is reflected in your heart.
Hesitation. Doubt.
Dark pain hiding in the pit of your stomach.
Is this reflected also? Strangers keep their
distance.

Cause and effect roll off of you like notes from a
tuning fork.
You think back; All the Karma ever created by
me..."
You're living in the midst of a tune you've been
humming since before you were born?
Do you know your own song?

A sour note. An unmet need, an unrighted
wrong.
It clouds your vision. It marks your heart.
Look at it. Face it. What is it really?
Pierce it firmly but gently. It is you.

Find a quiet spot and sit down.
Struggle to keep your back straight.
Struggle to open your eyes to the world. Step
back and look past yourself at the unbelievable
depth of it all.

Anchorage Zen Community
2401 Susitna
Anchorage, Alaska 99517

Mailing Label

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All Illustrations this issue:
Liz Byrne



Thank you, Ronn!

Thanks are long overdue to Ronn Rasmussen, who has been keeping AZC's mailing list together for many years. (Ed. note: Thanks also for all the support and encouragement you've provided me over this last year -- including the much cherished copy of The Dhamapada.)

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