

PRIMARY POINT

PUBLISHED BY THE KWAN UM ZEN SCHOOL

528 POUND ROAD, CUMBERLAND, RI 02864

VOLUME I, NUMBER 2

SPRING 1984

WORLD PEACE IS POSSIBLE

[The following talk was given by Zen Master Seung Sahn at Tahl Mah Sah Zen Center on January 19, 1983.]

Recently one of my students died. I went to his funeral at a church. The minister talked about God. He said that anytime you have a problem, if you just depend on God, the problem disappears. But sometimes this doesn't seem to be enough. Our life is impermanent, like smoke or water, like grass or flowers. Our life appears, then disappears. We worry about many things: money, family, our job, and also about the next life. Human life means worry. But human life also means, don't worry. If you understand impermanence, everything is okay. Problems appear because human beings always want more.

How do we control our desire for more, and our anger and ignorance? This is a very important point. In elementary school the students learn to study and play. They learn about their country and its boundaries. They learn, "This is my country and it starts here, ends here." After school when the students go home to their mothers, the idea of "my country" disappears. You are born into this world. When you are about to leave it, you think "This is my house, my family, my country." Your "I-my-me" appears. But when you die, this I-my-me disappears.

In childhood, you are your mother's child. When you grow up, you are the student of the universe. So this is your home. When you are born, where do you come from? When you die, where do you go? Everyone has a true home. Buddhism means becoming completely independent: not dependent on God or Buddha or your understanding. If you completely become your true self, there is no life or death, no coming or going.

A long time ago a Zen Master said:

Coming empty-handed, going empty-handed—that is human.

When you are born, where do you come from?

When you die, where do you go?

Life is like a floating cloud which appears.

Death is like a floating cloud which disappears.

The floating cloud itself originally does not exist.

Life and death, coming and going, are also like that.

But there is one thing which always remains clear.

It is pure and clear, no depending on life and death.

Then what is the one pure and clear thing?

If you find it, you are free from life and death. Why then would you need Buddha or Christ? You are already Buddha, you are the same as Christ. So put down all your opinions and understand your true self. If you understand what is the one pure and clear thing, there will be no problems, no life or death. It won't matter whether the sun rises or sets.

Our eyes see blue sky in the daytime, dark sky at night. High up in the sky it never changes. Only our eyes perceive a change. Where do your eyes come from? Now you have eyes, but before you were born you had no eyes. When you die, your eyes will disappear. Eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, mind: these are like the floating cloud which appears and disappears. Don't be attached to them. Put down all of your opinions and thinking.

When you are thinking, you perceive other people's minds as different from yours. If you cut off all thinking, your mind and my mind are the same, the same as Christ and Buddha. Then there are no opposites, no coming or going, no good and bad, no high and low, no you and me.

The sun never says, "I am the sun." The

Continued on Page 2



William K. Dalby, Providence Journal—Bulletin

CAMBRIDGE ZEN CENTER: A TEN YEAR PORTRAIT

by Ellen Sidor

Cambridge Zen Center has come a long way in just ten years: from three students in a small, rented apartment to becoming one of the largest residential Buddhist centers in metropolitan Boston. How could a handful of students, professors and ex-hippies blossom in such a short time into a well-respected spiritual group that is fully authorized as the first Buddhist monastery in the city of Cambridge? In making the massive financial and physical commitment of renovating an aging 40-room townhouse and adjacent building, Zen Center members have undergone many changes, and their perspectives on the function of the Center have become much wider. This review of the Zen Center's remarkable ten-year growth and maturing will look at the history of the Center, why it undertook a project of such magnitude, and what are the possible ramifications of their new location in a high energy urban setting.

ing anything, we see that everything has as its basis Zero. What is Zero? It is before thought, unfathomable, vast and inconceivable. Zero is the point we return to when we have run out of logical explanations. Far from being void and empty, it is rich and deep and all pervasive. It holds everything.

Jan. 19. Who is it that is facing all this stuff? Only reflective awareness. We set up a fake discipline and then congratulate ourselves for enduring it. Where there is discipline, there is fear—yet you have to start somewhere.

Continued on Page 7

Cambridge Zen Center began in June, 1974 when two students, Stephen Mitchell and Lynn Woodcock, decided to move with another student, Kevin Bell, to a house on 31 Fayerweather Street, Cambridge. A few weeks later Soen Sa Nim, who was still learning English and formulating the teaching language we use today, moved in and stayed the rest of the summer. "There wasn't much structure," said Cambridge Zen Center Vice-Abbot Dyan Houghton. "Lots of people would come just for an interview, and not even bow or sit. One day Becky (Rebecca Bernen) came in and told us that Soen Sa Nim wanted us to bow to him when he came. We didn't like that. One day we had a meeting with Soen Sa Nim. We told him we wanted Sunday off from practicing. Soen Sa Nim made it clear he wouldn't come anymore if people didn't bow and eat formally every day. It was always tightening and loosening, and gradually it got more structured."

From the beginning Cambridge Zen Center has been a center that attracted a lot of visitors. Even back in 1974 it was not uncommon for 50 people to appear for retreats, although few of them observed the forms that Soen Sa Nim was beginning to introduce. Today, ten years and three residences later, the Cambridge Zen Center has returned to Cambridge 3 blocks from busy Central Square, and it established on an entire block on Auburn Street, centrally located for public transportation to all parts of Boston and Cambridge. The new quarters, a 100-year old townhouse with 40 rooms and an adjacent building with 4 apartments, accommodates all 22 current Zen Center residents and still has room for 10-12 more. Today the visitors still come, some

Continued on Page 8

Journal of A Winter Solo

[Master Dharma Teacher George Bowman has returned to formal teaching following a year of silence, during which he worked on the construction of the new Diamond Hill Zen Monastery in Cumberland, RI. Between January and March of this year he did a two-month solo retreat in a cabin in Maine. The following excerpts are from a journal he kept on the retreat.]



Ruth Klein

Jan. 11. Everyone is headed home, like it or not. That is the one great longing in the human heart: to become one, to dissolve into all that is. It is disguised in so many ways, misinterpreted and sought after. Sexual release, that forgetting of self, is confused with the object of experience and so there is pain and sorrow and all the misery of human desire and sense of inadequacy.

If there is any great lesson, it is that from waking to sleep we are looking at our own face. Moment to moment it is none other than us. That which we like, that which brings satisfaction we are naturally drawn to—that which we don't like, we shrink away from.

Look at your everyday life—why is it that you return again and again to the same problems? Why not a new problem every day? What we fear most, what we hope is not our piece to unravel, is exactly what our job is, and if that is done with courage and straightforwardness, it is our unique and tremendously important offering to the universe.

Returning home is returning to balance to zero mind. Everything, mosquito or moose, has as its content Zero. A mosquito is a mosquito worth of zero. A moose is a moose worth of Zero. When we look at the world from the perspective of not hold-

Cambridge Zen Center



Ellen Sidor

dismayed by the apparent chaos and confusion of the renovations underway, others willing to plunge in and join the work. Two local teenagers are regular weekend helpers, as is a local artist. The fourth huge dumpster squats on the pavement outside, to receive the piles of debris from the fourth townhouse unit which is still under construction. Since last October the Zen Center residents, outside members, friends and members of other Zen Centers have been working diligently to make the old townhouse suitable for use.

Why did the Zen Center make such an ambitious move at this time? Abbot Mark Houghton explained that it had been suffering growing pains for several years in the cramped quarters in Allston across the river from Cambridge. Even with the purchase in recent years of a small apartment building near the 150 year old white farmhouse on North Harvard Street, Cambridge Zen Center had begun to turn people away from retreats because there wasn't enough space to accommodate them. Zen Center residents, few of whom own cars, also felt that living in Allston was isolating, and too far from the main flow of public transportation and urban energy. Mark said the search for new quarters that would bring Cambridge Zen Center members together in one building had been going on for three and a half years.

During this time several tantalizing prospects appeared, including, in 1981, a 30-room Victorian mansion in Cambridge that would have required a new roof and extensive interior work. Negotiations began and dragged on for months. The owner seemed serious enough, but kept raising the price every time the Zen Center offered a bid. Frustrated Zen Center residents turned for advice to Soen Sa Nim, who told them to chant Kwan Se Um Bosal every night for a new building. "It seemed like we had tried everything else," said Sonia Alexander, the Zen Center's Head Dharma Teacher, "so the chanting went on through the whole summer of 1982."

"The first morning after we moved in, it was like going into London after the Blitz."

In February of 1983 another possibility appeared in Newton, a wealthy suburb 6 miles from Boston and Cambridge. A beautiful stone mansion owned by the Carroll School for the Blind was for sale, and Cambridge Zen Center residents were struck by the elegant landscaping, spacious lawns, and livable condition of the interior. The Carroll School continued to utilize the buildings around the mansion. There were many possibilities for mutual support, but the location was too inaccessible by public transportation. Later that same month Cambridge Zen Center discovered the Auburn Street properties in Cambridge, and after lengthy negotiations, a purchase and sale agreement was finally signed in May.

The new Cambridge Zen Center is located in an area between Central Square and the Charles River locally known as Cambridgeport. It is a high energy urban setting in transition, with a dynamic mixture of the poor, students, middle and working class people and young professionals. Old buildings are coming down and new ones are going up. "There's a crazy kind of energy in Central Square, like Times Square," said Beth Ottenstein, a Zen Center resident for the past six years. De-

caying Cambridgeport has again become a desirable place to live, and many of the older buildings are being renovated. The poor, the ethnic minorities and the elderly are again being jostled and squeezed in the process of "gentrification"—when people with capital, mostly young professionals and real estate speculators, move into a decayed area and start pouring in money. Some residents already in such areas feel resentment over the process, since it involves demolition of familiar landmarks and the relocation of people, particularly the disadvantaged. Others are glad of the changes.

Official Recognition

The move into the Cambridgeport area was a lengthy and complex legal process, which required a lot of effort by the Zen Center members. In order to be able to live and practice as a spiritual group in a residential area, the Zen Center had to become officially recognized by the city as a religious institution. There were a great number of city requirements that had to be satisfied, including the health and fire department codes, parking regulations, and numerous legal requirements including those of the Zoning Board, the Board of Zoning Appeals and the Rent Control Commission, among others. In addition, what did the neighbors think of a spiritual group moving into the area? Mark Houghton noted that unexpected opposition appeared from people who "a few years ago would have supported what the Zen Center wanted to do, but were opposed simply because rent control housing in Cambridge is sacred, even if the building is derelict and empty. When we first saw the Auburn Street building, only a few tenants were there."

Initially the Zen Center was perceived by some people as being just another institution coming in and taking over a piece of the dwindling supply of low-income housing which the Auburn Street property repre-

sented. Mark Houghton explained, "In Cambridge there's tremendous distaste for Harvard [University] and MIT [Massachusetts Institute of Technology] because it is felt they don't contribute enough to the community. Now Cambridge is broken up into areas where institutions simply cannot buy property. Auburn Street is a residential area, so there was some of negative opinion about another institution coming in, even though we agreed to pay taxes." "Also," Mark said, "People are not enthusiastic about something that's different, like a Zen Buddhist center."

In order to function as a residential practice center, Housemaster Nancy Brown, a resident for over four years, explained that Cambridge Zen Center needed a zoning variance, because the Auburn Street building was a rooming house and already an exception to residential zoning of single and multi-family residences. In addition Cambridge Zen Center needed to have the main building removed from Rent Control. "Being under Rent Control would have put us into an unclear situation," said Nancy. "If people moved in to practice and paid rent, then stopped practicing, we might have difficulty asking them to leave—whether they

were still paying rent or refused to. For the zoning variance, the Zen Center had to request a definition of itself as a religious institution from the Board of Zoning Appeals." To show the seriousness of the group, the Zen Center presented its schedule of meditation practice, the **Dharma Mirror** explaining the rules of practice and living together in one of Soen Sa Nim's Zen Centers, **Compass of Zen** which is a compilation of basic Buddhist teaching, the monthly Newsletter, the Residential Rules and Procedures, and other relevant written material.

A neighborhood open house was held in the summer, after Cambridge Zen Center residents had leafleted the neighborhood to explain the Zen Center and its purpose. It was a tense time. Without neighborhood support, approval from the Zoning Board and the Rent Control Commission was very unlikely. Finally the meeting was held, and to everyone's relief, only mild opposition was voiced. Cambridge Zen Center was granted a zoning variance "for religious use" and in April the Zoning Board of Appeals ruled that Cambridge Zen Center was a monastery. The main building (but not the adjacent apartments) was removed from Rent Control with the stipulation that if the building was sold within five years, it would return to Rent Control. Nancy Brown said this was to prevent the property from being sold as condominiums. In addition, Cambridge Zen Center is paying taxes to the City of Cambridge.

Massive Renovations

Did Zen Center members know what they were getting into when they undertook the



Mark Houghton

massive renovations of the building they affectionately called "the Pit" on Auburn Street? Why was it necessary to do such extensive renovation? Mark Houghton explained that the vast majority of the 40 units were empty and in such considerable disrepair that a great deal of work had to be done before even parts of the townhouse were livable. Demolition and construction began even before the legal papers were passed in mid-October. Part of the pressure came from good luck: the Zen Center's two Allston buildings sold very quickly and were slated for occupancy in November.

The work was organized and supervised by Mark Houghton, Eileen Repucci, coordinator of the Extended Community group, and master Dharma Teacher Mu Deung Sunim. The original Auburn Street building consisted of four attached townhouses, side by side with separate entrances and with four floors each. The renovation plan called for making interior connections between all four units, and using the ground floor of the second and third units as a dining room and Dharma room, respectively. To create these large rooms meant tearing down all the interior walls, removing stairways, chimney, and center support pillars, and adding new supports. The resulting floor in the Dharma room was so uneven that a new one had to be poured in cement and then covered with plywood. In each townhouse, walls had to be removed to make larger rooms for common usage, doors relocated, bathrooms renovated and ceilings replaced.

The initial idea was to make the first two units livable, and to renovate the second two over a period of several years. "I thought we'd fix it up little by little," said Mark Houghton, "and do it slowly over several years, financing it a little at a time." Although this plan would have accommodated all of the Allston center residents, it left no immediate room for new residents. "Things catapulted very quickly," said Eileen Repucci, who is the owner of a house-painting business, and in charge of day-to-day work. Massive renovations in the first

two units began immediately. "As soon as Mu Deung Sunim moved in," recalled Mark, "the walls started coming down." A skilled carpenter and veteran of many Zen Center building projects, Mu Deung Sunim had moved to Cambridge in mid-October to supervise the construction.

The pace was telling. People were working 10 and 12 hours a day, coming home from outside jobs and school, eating supper, and working until late. The move to Cambridge was accomplished in mid-November. Five truckloads of furniture, bedding, office records and equipment, the entire inventory of Dharmacrafts (Dyan Houghton's meditation supply business), kitchen supplies and assorted personal gear were packed and moved from the two Allston houses to Auburn Street. Living conditions became chaotic. There was a constant parade of carpenters, plumbers, plasterers, electricians and painters, some of them Zen students being trained on the job, and some outside contractors. Plaster, sawdust, and construction debris were everywhere.

Beverly Feldt, a resident for the past one and a half years, said, "The first morning after we moved in, it was like going into London after the Blitz. Everything was strewn everywhere, only the bedrooms were livable and painted, and dust was everywhere. Everyone suffered lung problems off and on for months, because demolition was going on even after we moved in." For weeks the floors were too dusty to sit on, so people ate standing up at makeshift counters. No rugs were down. Everyone was packed into the rooms that were livable. What sitting meditation was being done, was being held in the tiny third floor office.

Sometimes there was not enough heat, sometimes there was too much. Formal Zen practice was virtually suspended.

Several weeks after moving into the new quarters, Mu Deung Sunim, who had been working long hours every day, had a serious heart attack. He was rushed to Cambridge hospital, where he was treated in the intensive care unit and cardiac care unit for two days. For weeks Cambridge Zen Center and other centers did special Kwan Seum Bosal chanting for him. He recovered well enough to go on to lead the 90 day winter Kyol Chê intensive retreat at Providence Zen Center, but on a much modified schedule. His sudden absence was a blow to harried CZC, and they sent out a call for help to Providence Zen Center and the Extended Community. It was a difficult time. The PZC construction crew was heavily involved trying to close in part of the new monastery building in Cumberland before the winter snows, and was able to come to Cambridge only rarely. Somehow the renovation work proceeded. The dusty, tiring, frustrating work continued for months. A series of high trash dumpsters, big enough to drive a small car into, were installed on the pavement outside and filled with construction debris, and hauled away. The dust permeated everything, defying repeated moppings of the floors. Gradually the house took shape. Residents fixed up their rooms, put down rugs and hung curtains.



Mark Houghton

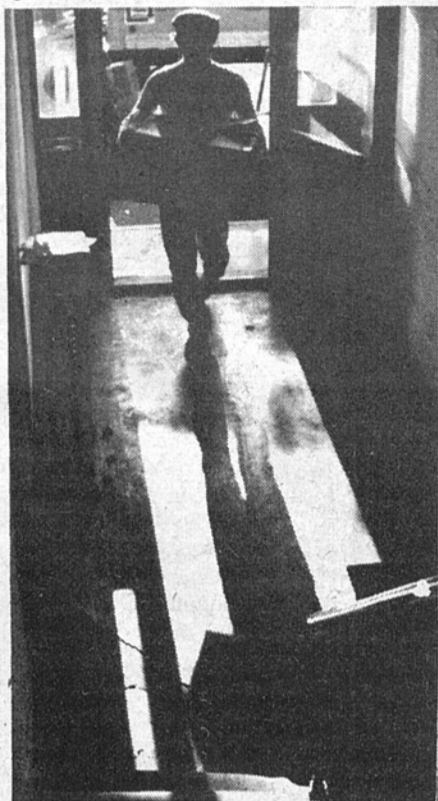
Formal evening practice was gradually resumed.

Looking Back

Now that some of the dust has settled, members are beginning to see where they have come from over the long grueling winter. The new Dharma room is spacious and well-lighted, large enough to accommodate the growing number of people who come to the Center for talks and retreats. In March Soen Sa Nim delivered a new, larger, gold-leafed Buddha from Korea for the altar,

commemorating the Zen Center's move and expansion.

As of mid-April, the third unit was almost finished, with some sanding and painting still to be done. Renovation of the fourth unit was well underway. The new dining room includes a wood stove which sits on tiles made and donated by local artist Joan Wye, who is also producing some decorative tiles based on traditional Korean temple painting. The kitchen has a huge 10-burner stove, a commercial-size



Mark Houghton

double refrigerator, a triple-basin sink, new grain racks and butcher block counters. The work still proceeds, but at a more reasonable tempo, with outside carpenters, plasterers, plumbers, electricians and Zen Center members hired to do painting and finishing work.

Six months after the move, Mark admitted he still feels nervous about the amount of money CZC owes, but sees the work going much faster. "I feel a lot more in touch. With 8 or 9 people working, I know what everyone's doing, and supervising them is no problem." He added, "Now we have a bigger center, a bigger Dharma room, and we'll be able to help a lot more people. Here, we meet all the codes and are authorized by the city. At North Harvard Street, we never felt really authorized." Eileen Repucci felt that the construction work had drawn people a lot closer. When members go out for a break, they often discuss where the Zen Center is going. "It's really phenomenal what's been accomplished in just a few months."

What is it like living at the Zen Center now? "It still seems chaotic," said Nancy Brown, "to some people who come for the first time and are turned off. Others pitch right in and join the flow. The work retreats have been fantastic—so full of energy and goodwill."

Jon Yanow, CZC bookkeeper and Zen student for 6 years said, "It's been good teaching all around. I was very wary of moving here because I doubted the energy would be found to make a go of it, but I have been surprised and pleased to find the energy did appear. It's definitely a worthwhile move. I'm very grateful to Mark for all his energy."

Part of the "new look" at the Zen Center includes the reintroduction of evening

practice. Working out the schedule in recent months has been a fascinating and sometimes frustrating process. Since the moving and construction blitz started in October, the Zen Center has had little formal evening practice. Only in February were retreats started again. Morning chanting was not resumed until the Dharma room was finished enough to be sound-proofed, in March. As Eileen Repucci said, "At one point in the construction this winter, people really wanted to practice. We were experiencing all the old vibes of the people who had lived here, and there was a need to change the atmosphere in the house, toward practice. Our outside members were delighted when we started evening practice again."

The modified practice schedule for students that began in the Allston house now needs to be reviewed. "We need to find a balance between too loose and too tight," says Nancy Brown. "With a lot of students [she is one of them] that changes the schedule." With over half of the house members involved in careers and schooling, she said, "It's not possible to do hard formal training. We're all at different places in our commitment to practicing, too, and we all have lazy minds. So we work with these different desires: to practice formally and not to practice, to have relationships, to be on committees, to have fun, and so on."

Family Issues

What about the need for integrating family life with Zen practice? This is another large area of concern in future planning at the Zen Center. Until recently there hasn't been much interest from families wanting to move in, or much of a commitment from the Zen Center as a group to resolve family situations, according to Andrea Feit, a student of Soen Sa Nim's for 8 years and previous resident

"America is a society of laypeople. How can we practice and still have families and jobs?"

of New Haven and Cambridge Zen Center. She and her husband, Rick, and their baby moved out of the Zen Center several years ago when she was expecting her second child, and when it became apparent that there wasn't adequate family space at the Allston house. It also became apparent that it wasn't really acceptable with the other Zen Center members to do a modified practice schedule. As Dyan Houghton said, "We all did very hard training [in the early days of the Center] but we were also very intolerant of people who didn't dedicate their lives to Zen practice. Once the children and students started arriving, there were lots of tensions, but it showed us how closed the Zen Center was."

Andrea currently sits several mornings a week at another Zen community in Cambridge whose hours are more convenient for her family life. "Out of all this struggle," she said, "I take a more critical view of things, but it's not a negative view. I got a lot of independence. It showed me I don't need anyone else around in order to get up and practice every day, so my direction has become very strong. When the children get older, I'll have to see what appears possible for formal practice. Perhaps I'll do more retreats and come over to CZC in the evenings."

The Houghtons and their daughter Mandy are the only continuous family residents of CZC. As their daughter has gotten older, Dyan says she is becoming more aware of the struggles families face in



Mark Houghton

trying to balance family life with formal practice, and the needs of a busy and ever-changing Zen Center.

"America is a society of laypeople," Dyan said. "How can we practice and still have families and jobs? Buddhism always adapts itself. It's one thing if you vow to give up your family and become a monk, but what if you want to keep your family and your job? What can you do?" She would like to work on ways for more families to live in or near the Zen Center. One idea is buying houses nearby, so that members of the Extended Community could move in closer. Of the four apartments in the house adjacent, one is currently occupied by the Houghtons, who will be soon moving into a family apartment in the main building. Another is occupied by members, and two others have

speaking for the Extended Community, it has to be OK not to live in the Zen Center too. "You can give service living outside." Eileen feels the ZC needs to look at how it takes in new people. "How do you get them to a point where they feel responsible for the community?" she asked. "How do you instill the idea (in outside members) that the Zen Center is more than just a place to practice?"

Recently Mandy Houghton's family daycare center closed on 24 hours notice, and suddenly the Zen Center found itself with a makeshift family daycare center in the Houghton's tiny apartment. On one Saturday in April, a group of the daycare parents and their children had arrived and were busily cleaning up the Zen Center's backyard, raking leaves, planting shrubs, and removing trash and construction debris. "Forming a daycare center would be a way for laypeople to connect with us," said Dyan.

In The Future?

As Soen Sa Nim has said, "Everything happens by natural process." A few families raking leaves in the Zen Center's backyard could easily turn into a permanent daycare center. The struggles of several families and students with Zen Center living will lead to a more flexible and convenient practice schedule, that will ultimately benefit many other people. In ten years, the Cambridge Zen Center has gone through many variations of size and outlook. The sheer magnitude of the Auburn Street project forced people to mature. Going from a rag-tag student group to becoming a well-respected spiritual center, fully authorized by a city noted for its tough requirements, is a remarkable accomplishment. As Mark Houghton noted, Zen is widely known and well-respected. From this strong base of respect, official recognition, and new quarters that at last seem large enough and are located in a dynamic urban center, the Cambridge Zen Center will be reaching out with a wider vision and new enthusiasm. □

tenants. Eventually all of the adjacent apartments will be for members who wish to live near but not in the Center.

Reaching Out

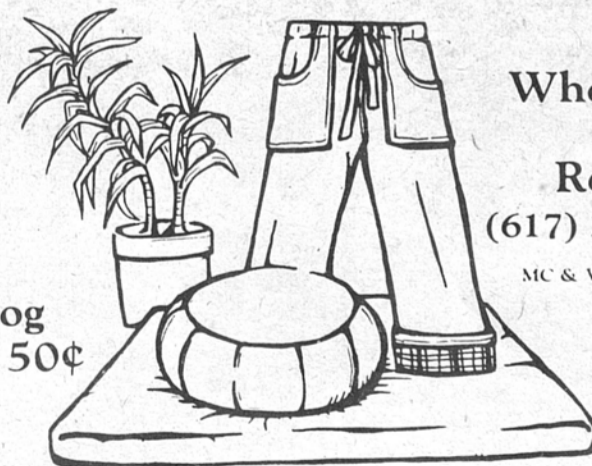
In addition to serving families, the Zen Center members are discussing ways of serving the wider community, for example, by adding more flexibility in sitting time. Sittings in the later morning, at noon, and afternoon would serve the needs of people with children, as well as students with irregular schedules. Workshops, introductory classes, and more one-day sittings, which the Zen Center used to offer before the renovations began, could be offered. "We will advertise more," added Mark. "Within the next year," said Dyan, "we hope to have a full-time staff person here and get a real urban-style practice center going. Our modified schedule still needs a lot of work," she added. "We need people, for instance, who are students but are committed to making it work with practice. It really helps people to live in the Zen Center."

But as Eileen Reppucci pointed out,



DHARMACRAFTS
MEDITATION SUPPLIES

Pants • Zafus • Mats • Incense • Buddhas
Malas • Benches • Books • Etc.



Wholesale
&
Retail
(617) 254-0363

MC & Visa Accepted

For
Catalog
Send 50¢

c/o Cambridge Zen Center, Dept. P
199 Auburn St., Cambridge, MA 02139

