

# Walking Mountains

“The green mountains are always walking” – *Daokai*



*Dear Sangha and Friends,*

I don't know about you, but this time of year I want homemade bread fresh out of my own oven, so I usually make my own starter, which takes about a week. But this year, I have come upon a recipe for starter that takes three weeks before the baking even begins – good old-fashioned delayed gratification.

One is required to weigh everything, even the water, and to add fresh flour to the mixture every day at the same time of day. At the end of three weeks, the last step is to make the leavening, which sits for 10-16 hours and to test its readiness I'm suppose to drop a spoonful into a bowl of room-temperature water. If it sinks, it is not ready and needs more to time to ferment and ripen. Attention! Attention! Attention!

Luck has nothing to do with it. If all goes well, I'll bring a loaf to the potluck on Entertainment Day in March

— *Joan White*

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## Clarity by Emily Cross



**R**ecently, I saw a performance of the *Nutcracker* by the National Ballet of Canada. It was absolutely spectacular. It was perfect. Sensei

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### MISSION

*The Vermont Zen Center's mission is to create a peaceful and inviting environment to support those who seek wisdom, compassion, joy, and equanimity within a Buddhist context. The two-fold practice of the Center is to overcome the causes of suffering through spiritual development and to alleviate the world's suffering through outreach activities and the cultivation of a caring attitude to the earth.*



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once quoted someone as saying that mastery is when you practice so much that not only can you do it right, but you can't do it wrong. This describes the performance. The control and grace of the dancers was absolute.

Once during an Aikido class long ago, the teacher mentioned that the Japanese expression for beauty is a combination of the words for power, grace, and simplicity. I clearly recall when she said this, exactly where I was on the mat, and the practice we were working on at the time (including my non-beautiful rendition of the technique!). Power, grace, and simplicity describe the dancers' performance that day—beautiful.

What does beauty have to do with Zen practice? Well, Zen practice is simple: as Sensei says,

straightforward, if not easy. And there is grace, the natural grace of the human form in zazen, and the grace of our True Nature shining through. Also, it is profoundly powerful. How do we know it is? Sometimes it doesn't feel that way, still, there are clues. First, it has lasted 2500 years, spreading across many countries. And closer to home, witness the growth and development of our Triple Sangha. Furthermore, not even a hair's breadth away, it changes how we live our lives—no small feat. So, Zen practice is, by definition, beautiful.

There is another aspect to the dance performance that stood out—clarity, a near relative of simplicity. When I think back on the performance now, clarity is another word for love. When I was around 8 years old, I gave my first solo violin recital. The piece was *Perpetual Motion*, with

variations, by Shinichi Suzuki. By my mother's recollection, everyone was blown away by my performance. Now of course, mothers can tend to be biased. However, my mom has always called it like she sees it, and is definitely not always on my side, which I see as a good thing.

But the reason I believe her is that, to this day, I remember playing that piece perfectly. I remember watching my fingers move, and hearing the sound of the bow, in perfect tempo, and timbre on the strings. Except, I can't say it was me playing. All that mattered was that piece, expressing that piece, exactly as written. I disappeared, and was an onlooker. So, I think it can be said that if the self is let go, then clarity is beautiful, a by-product of selflessness. Clarity expressing clarity—the beauty of zazen! ———

# The Religious Life Council Visits the Vermont Zen Center

by Josh Kelman



The Religious Life Council, a fellowship of Princeton University students committed to fostering interfaith communication and individual spiritual growth, visited the Zen Center for five days in mid-January. It was a retreat for the RLC and an opportunity for us to host this group of 29 open, energetic students and provide a space for their activities. It was truly a Triple Sangha effort because members came from Costa Rica and Toronto to help.

Hosting this retreat was more than providing meals and clean rooms. The Zen Center itself with the daily schedule of sitting and chanting, the power of the figures and the spaces for small and large group activities set a tone of intentionality. As the week went on we each had

our individual interactions with students but were mostly busy with scheduling, meal preparation and housekeeping. It was only at the closing ceremony and in conversations that evening that we saw how much we all had gained from the experience.

These students from Muslim, Sikh, Christian, Hindu and Jewish backgrounds find understanding each other's faith a part of their individual spiritual path. Activities and discussions, large and small, planned and spontaneous, occurred all week, creating genuine bonding. We could see smiles and eager

conversation replacing much of the initial nervousness and reticence. Credit goes to the dedication and intelligence of these students who opened themselves up to each other and threw themselves into the process. The students gave great credit to us for nurturing them with food



and caring. One student told us that in her native Mexico, love can be felt in the food and she really felt love in the food this week. Another said that the energy kept flowing and so did the desserts.



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The program included leading classes at the Renaissance and Rockpoint Schools. The RLC split up to lead six of the Renaissance School classes for their weekly Peace meeting. One of the RLC students experienced a paradigm shift away from viewing peace strictly as a means for addressing disputes because the



Renaissance School views peace as simply a way to be. At both schools, the RLC students fashioned stories from their own spiritual traditions that could be understood by children. The younger students found out about the fears and responsibilities of college life and heard stirring stories from faiths new to them. Sleigh riding followed. The deep snow of Vermont was another new experience for many.

Impressions we had of this remarkable group of students

include an admiration for their thirst for personal growth. There was genuine interest and serious questions asked during the orientation we gave on zazen. The mutual respect and caring the students had for each other was mirrored in the gratitude expressed to us for our hospitality. A student told how his initial skepticism of the value of sending Metta to a neutral person was dissolved through

the warm embrace he received from someone at the Zen Center. Another student felt that her life was transformed during group activities in the Common Room and that the Tibetan prayer rug in the room so symbolized that transformation she wanted to take it home. And we can all be proud of the appreciation expressed of the cleanliness of the Zen Center (even closets!) and how it aids awareness. As we sang songs together during the closing ceremony, all distinction between host and guest fell away. —



# FEBRUARY 2011

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
		1	2	3 Chanting	4	5
6 Teisho	7	8 FAMINE RELIEF CEREMONY	9	10	11	12
13 Sitting & Set Up	14	15	16	17 Chanting	18	19 PARINIRVANA CEREMONY Sesshin...
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
Vermont 7-Day Sesshin 2/19-26						
27 ZC Closed	28					

# MARCH 2011

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
		1 Chanting	2 Metta 1	3	4	5
Sensei Away						
6 Sangha Entertainment	7	8	9 Metta 2	10 Chanting	11	12 Indian Cooking Course
Sensei Away						
13 All-day Sitting	14	15 Chanting	16 Metta 3	17 Sitting & Setup	18	19 Workshop
Sensei Away						
20 Teisho	21	22	23 Metta 4	24 Chanting	25	26 Workday Sesshin Deadline
27 Ceremony Workday	28	29 TEMPLE NIGHT	30 Metta 5	31 TEMPLE NIGHT		

## NEW COURSE OFFERINGS AT THE ZEN CENTER

Four new courses will be offered in 2011: Indian Vegetarian Cooking (March 12), Flower Arranging (June 18), Introduction to Sumi-e (August 15-19), and A Taste of T'ang Poetry (August 20).

For more information and registration, please visit [www.vermontzen.org](http://www.vermontzen.org).

# The Buddha's Parinirvana

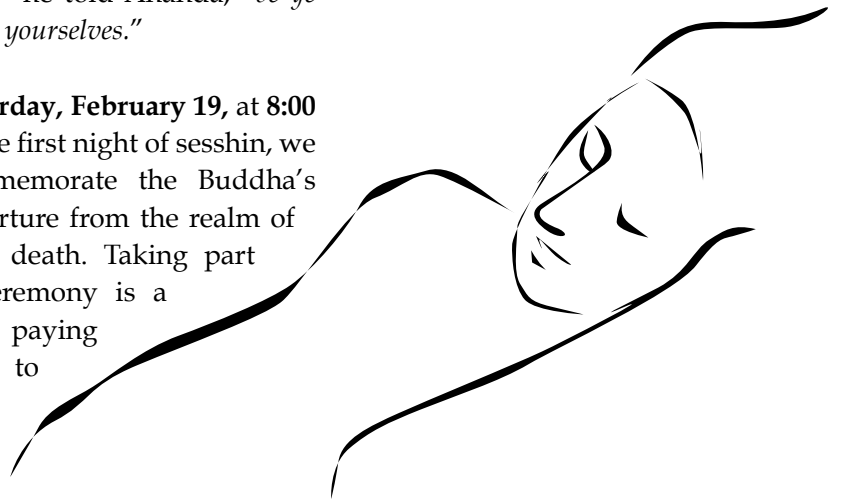
For 45 years the Buddha, after attaining Perfect Enlightenment, preached the Dharma to all who would listen, devoting himself to the welfare of all living beings. But in his eightieth year, during the seclusion of the rainy season, he suddenly fell ill. Feeling that his time, though near, had not yet arrived, he entered a deep samadhi to free himself of the disease. Emerging from his meditation he said:

*This body has become worn-out and is like an old cart which can only be kept rolling along with great difficulty. My time to be set free from the bonds of becoming, as a chick which on hatching finally breaks free of its shell, will be in three months.*

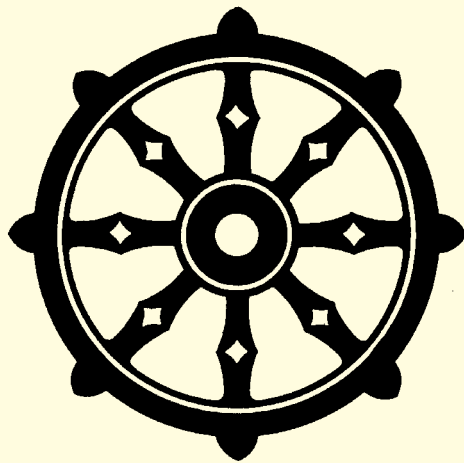
He reminded Ananda that although his bodily journey was nearing fulfillment, each person was to continue to work at his own Enlightenment. He said that since he only taught the Dharma out of his own Realization, the Sangha was not dependent on him for leadership. "Therefore," he told Ananda, "be ye lamps unto yourselves."

On **Saturday, February 19, at 8:00 p.m.** on the first night of sesshin, we will commemorate the Buddha's final departure from the realm of birth and death. Taking part in this ceremony is a way of paying homage to

Shakyamuni Buddha, the founder of our faith. Members not attending sesshin may participate in this ceremony. Because it takes place during sesshin, please do not bring children who are too young to remain silent during the ceremony. —



## Entering the Buddha's Family: Spring Jukai Ceremony



On **Sunday, April 3,** we commemorate the Buddha's "real" birthday with a Jukai Ceremony at **10 a.m.** Prior to the ceremony, there is a one hour sitting. Dokusan will not be offered that day.

Our Center has two Jukai Ceremonies each year, one in April and one in November. It is customary to take Jukai as often as possible. Each time you participate, your resolve to practice and realize the Buddhadharma grows stronger.

During the ceremony, participants take part in a repentance ceremony,

then take the Three Refuges, the Three General Resolutions, and the Ten Cardinal Precepts.

Jukai also entails making a monetary donation to the teacher, called an incense offering. This traditional gift represents the practitioner's desire to support the teacher's work in propagating Buddhism.

Jukai is one of the most solemn rituals we observe at the Center, so please be sure to wear a clean and pressed robe if you have one. If not, wear dark, solid-colored clothing or borrow a robe from the Center. Children of all ages are welcome to come to this spring Jukai, which honors the birth of Shakyamuni Buddha. —

# Temple Night

**Tuesday, March 29** and **Thursday, March 31** from **6:30 to 9 p.m.** are Temple Nights at the Center. This takes the place of regular sittings. There is no dokusan on those evenings.

At Temple Night people of all ages come to sit informally, offer incense, chant, and do prostrations before Buddha and Bodhisattva figures set up on special altars.

Participants often walk around the zendo looking at the many different figures. The sitting, though informal, is focused and deep. Anyone who has been to a Temple Night can attest to the strength of concentration that builds up through the night. The sari-covered altars are beautifully decorated. Seated upon them, the figures not only remind us who we really are, they also help us express gratitude to and reverence for those who have transmitted the Dharma.

This year, as in the past, we will have a table for "home figures." If you wish, you can bring the figure



on your home altar to share with the Sangha. Children may also place their special figures on this "Home Altar."

You will find Temple Night inspiring and invigorating. It is surely one of the most beautiful stops on the journey to our True Home. Please join us. Everyone is invited whether or not they are a member of the Sangha.

## Workdays for Temple Night and Jukai

**Saturday, March 26** and **Sunday, March 27** are workdays to set up for Temple nights and **Saturday, April 2** a workday for Jukai. The sitting on **Sunday, March 27** will be followed by a work period to complete the temple night setup. Saturday workdays begin at **10 a.m.** Please lend a hand if you can.



# Dharma Kids Days in February and March

**P**arents mark your calendars! On Sunday, February 6 and Sunday, March 6 we will be having "Dharma Kids" events at the Zen Center—mornings of fun and educational Dharma-related activities for children of all ages. These events are part of an ongoing series of Dharma Kids days that will be offered regularly, usually once each month. Each morning's program will include Dharma-based songs, stories, crafts, and

other activities, as well as a snack, and an opportunity to participate in the ceremony and/or sitting that is taking place that day. All of the activities will be organized around some theme: for instance, the life of the Buddha or one of the six paramitas (generosity, morality, patience, energy, concentration, and wisdom).

The programs in February and March will begin at 8:45 a.m., before

the morning sitting; on March 6 our activities will be coordinated with the Sangha's Entertainment Day. We encourage at least one parent to stay with their child or children in order to help them get settled and to help with our activities. If you are interested in attending, or would like any further information about the events, please contact John Spackman at [jspackma@middlebury.edu](mailto:jspackma@middlebury.edu).



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*A bright winter morning;  
The charcoal is in good spirits,  
It goes crackle! crack!*

*—Issa*

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## Sangha Entertainment

Time to dust off your instruments, just like to sit in the audience, bring out the games, loosen the that's fine too! Informal sitting vocal chords, brush up on your beforehand (no dokusan that Tango—it's Sangha Entertainment day). The entertainment begins at 10 a.m.

are welcome. Bring your family and friends for a morning of music, fun, games, and vegetarian pot luck fare. Kelly Story is the coordinator for this event, please give her a call if you want to perform. If you'd

