

Walking Mountains

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

Dear Sangha and Friends,

I cannot remember a wetter spring, and certainly not a greener one. Each morning when I look out my kitchen window, maple boughs dripping with rain appear to have encroached even closer during the night, and the idea of “inside” and “outside” is nearly erased. I find myself wondering if tomorrow morning I will find the windows and walls gone—my kitchen sink sitting under a maple tree.

The whole scene brings to mind our new Buddha building and zendo—its completion getting closer every day. Soon we will be sitting there—through days and nights filled with blazing sunshine, or dripping rain, buffeting winds, falling snow. A place of Zen practice—where the mind of “inside” and “outside” can fall away and we can see who we truly are.

— *Joan White*

Reflections From a Sesshin “Outsider” **by Kelly Story**

For the first fifteen years of my practice, I attended as many sesshins as possible. With no children, a flexible job, and support from both my husband and boss, this was not difficult. As a result, I was very lucky to attend every Vermont sesshin for many years.

Then Ian and Jonan came (still young now at 6 and 4), along with

an in-home child care business and new financial demands. With those responsibilities, it has been much more difficult for me to attend sesshin in recent years. However, one of the wonderful revelations in my new role as a sesshin “outsider” has been the experience of being there while a sesshin is taking place at the Zen

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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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Center. With this revelation came a real gratitude for those of you who are able and willing to make the effort to attend sesshin, and an appreciation for the work that goes into it. The work that sesshin participants do doesn't just affect those attending sesshin, it affects folks "outside" as well.

In the last six years, I have often experienced this power from the "outside" as an increased sense of well-being and a desire to sit more. Just this past December during the Rohatsu sesshin I woke early to find my six-year-old son doing zazen in his bedroom – no kidding! When, with a little surprise and disbelief, I asked what he was doing, he responded: "Mom, I just woke up and decided to meditate." No big deal. I had to laugh, and I reflected that I also find myself wanting to do

extra zazen and be especially careful with the precepts during sesshin.

It is not uncommon for me to have trouble sleeping during an especially powerful sesshin. Many folks report trouble sleeping when the moon is full, and during sesshin the energy one feels is not that different from the energy felt on the eve of a full moon – clear and powerful. So instead of sleeping, I join in and sit with the Sangha from home. I have found these late night "sesshin outsider" sittings to be especially deep and quiet.

This topic has come up with other Sangha members – in particular ones who live near the Zen Center – and it isn't surprising to discover that other people are having these experiences as well. It is a welcome reminder that we are deeply connected to one another,

“ ... it is with deep gratitude and joy that I accept the healing power of the work of those in sesshin which extends outside the walls of the Zen Center. ”

and the quiet work we do on the mat – the clear, joyful energy of our true mind – is something we share with others. It is not unlike lighting a candle. Though you yourself are the one that lights the candle, others share in this light as well.

So, though it is my intention to return to regular sesshin participation as soon as it is possible, it is with deep gratitude and joy that I accept the healing power of the work of those in sesshin which extends outside the walls of the Zen Center. And it seems to me that when I finally do get back to regular attendance, the joy of doing the work will be much deeper now that it is more clear to me that the work we do in sesshin has an immediate impact on those inside and outside the zendo. With heartfelt gratitude: Thank you sesshin participants! —

The Blue Lady

by John Spackman

Last Christmas I gave my wife, Marion, a Kannon figure for our home altar that we call “the Blue Lady.” Since Marion started coming to the Zen Center a couple of years ago, she’s had a special affinity for Kannon, and I loved the figure when I saw it—in fact it reminded me a bit of Marion. Kannon is seated on a lotus throne, her left hand holding a vase containing her tears of compassion, her right hand raised in the gesture of conferring blessings. Her garments are colored with a blue-green patina, and drape down gracefully over her shoulders and around her arms. Her whole form bespeaks a gentle and calm—but determined—compassion.

Sitting in front of the blue lady with Marion has been a huge gift. There is something so wonderful about going upstairs to sit in the evening and finding Marion already sitting there—it gives me a feeling of coming home. I’ve always felt that Marion and I were ultimately on the same path, but finding a way of expressing our common endeavor together in a shared practice and a shared way of life has meant a great deal to me.

Before she started sitting

regularly, Marion was incredibly supportive of my practice, valiantly and graciously taking care of our two young kids on her own while I was away at sesshin. I simply wouldn’t have been able to participate in sesshins without that support, and I’m deeply grateful for that. But doing her own first retreat last year has, I think, given her a deeper appreciation, from her own perspective, of how valuable this practice is, and it has taken our sense of being on a common path to a new and deeper level. It has also changed our whole family dynamic in some ways. Going to the Zen Center is no longer just something that I do, it’s something we all do as a family, the foundation of a common way of life.

Marion’s increased participation at the Center has, of course, brought with it some logistical challenges, and some sacrifices. There’s the weekly discussion of who is going to go to the Center when, and who is going to take care of the kids. There’s the challenge of fitting our family days at the Center into our busy schedules. And there’s the sharing out of sesshins. Given our family and work commitments, the number of sesshins and retreats



that it’s possible for either of us to attend each year is quite limited, and so we simply have to divide them up equitably. But these are small things. I’m so grateful to be able to practice together with Marion, and for the enrichment this has brought our life as a family. Having “the Blue Lady” presiding over us makes any challenges just seem insignificant. —

Is There Time (for me to go to the Zen Center)?

by Marion A. Wells

The last time I attended an evening sitting at the Zen Center I went to say goodnight to my children before leaving, as I always do, because they are in bed and (we hope) asleep by the time I get home. My eldest, Theo, looked me in the eye and said: "But I haven't seen you all day. And now I won't see you all evening." And his head slumped down onto his homework. I tried to apply my maternal Geiger counter to this remark (1 is basically OK but disgruntled; 9 is severe emotional upset), and came away with about a 2. I decided to go to the Center, but maintained a low-level unease for most of the drive. I shouldn't have been going anyway that evening, because it was Thursday, and Thursday is the day John (my husband) goes to the evening sitting. Tallying up the results of my decision I came up with the following:

Things I am not doing by driving up to the Zen Center:

- Spending time with my children, who haven't seen me all day
- Spending time with my husband, who hasn't seen me all day
- Allowing John to go to the Zen Center
- Doing any of my own

accumulating work

- Many other things that don't rise to the level of this list
- Things I am doing by driving up to the Zen Center:
- Meditating

I am always trying to take the measure of things, because my time is so multiply over-subscribed. I seem not to have any of the kind of time that is sometimes called "free." How much will it harm Theo not to spend the few hours of the day left to us together? If I spend the evening away today, where can I find the extra time somewhere else? If I don't get those two enormous student theses read tonight, when will I get to them?

We can measure some things, but we cannot measure everything. We cannot measure, for instance, my sitting against my reading/working/being with my children and husband. We cannot measure what it will bring to our children that John and I both practice meditation. Theo's interest in and engagement with Buddhism as both practice and doctrine is already intense. Who can say how my decision to go to the Center on that particular evening or others will affect his or Toby's lives in the future? Rather than thinking of my own attendance on these evenings

“ Rather than thinking of my own attendance on these evenings as somehow stealing time ... perhaps I can begin to see my own practice as a gift to them that is inextricable from its benefits to me? ”

as somehow stealing time from my children or my husband, perhaps I can begin to see my own practice as a gift to them that is inextricable from its benefits to me?

There are some wonderful lines in the Metta Sutta that use maternal love as a model for true compassion: "Even as a mother protects with her life/Her child, her only child,/So with boundless heart/Should one cherish all living beings." As a mother one effortlessly knows the boundless heart. It takes more work to feel one's way to the truth of the simile: one's compassion for all beings should likewise know no bounds. But the simile, nonetheless, does make it clear that the work one does at home is not fundamentally separate from the effort of sitting, and the terrible sense of loss involved in taking the measure of things (especially of time) begins, mercifully, to fade in the light of that recognition. —

JULY—AUGUST 2011

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
					1 Zen Center Closed	2 Zen Center Closed
. . . VT 5-Day Retreat: June 25-30						
3 Zen Center Closed	4 Zen Center Closed	5 Chanting No Dokusan	6	7 No Dokusan	8	9
10 Taped Teisho	11 metta sitting	12	13 Costa Rica	14 Chanting	15	16 August Deadline
17 VT ALL-DAY SITTING CR Sesshin	18	19 Chanting	20	21 Sitting & Set-up	22	23 WORKSHOP
24 Sangha Picnic	25	26	27	28 Chanting	29	30 Garage Sale
31 Teisho	1	2	3	4	5	6 Sesshin
Training Program at VZC (evening sittings Mon–Thurs)						
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
VERMONT 7-Day Sesshin: August 6-13						
14 Zen Center Closed	15	16 Chanting	17	18	19	20 T'ang Poetry Course
Sumi-e Course						
21 Teisho	22	23	24	25 FAMINE RELIEF CEREMONY	26	27 September Deadline
28 WATER BABY CEREMONY	29	30	31 Metta Course 1			



Sangha Day: Picnic, Garage Sale

Come one, Come all. **Sangha Day Picnic** will be on **Sunday, July 24** at the Zen Center, starting at **10 a.m.** Please bring family and friends, musical instruments, and a vegetarian dish to share. We hope to see you there!

Our **Annual Garage Sale** will be **Saturday, July 30**. Donations for the garage sale may be left in the basement common room anytime during July.

YARD SALE 

Upcoming Events/Reminders

August Sesshin: The application deadline for the August sesshin is now one week later: **July 16**. Please be sure to apply by the deadline, as planning for this sesshin will be more complicated than usual due to the new facilities. People are encouraged to apply for any portion of the sesshin they can attend, with the hope that most participants will be attending full time. As with all sesshins, full-time applicants have preference over part time.

All Day Sitting: There will be an all-day sitting on **Sunday, July 17**, which falls on the last day of the Costa Rica 3-day sesshin.

Art Course: Katia Rodriguez will be conducting an **Introduction to Sumi-e Course** Monday, August 15–Friday, August 19. This course is

an introduction to the basic elements of Sumi-e (Japanese ink painting) suitable for ages 12 and up, as well as for adult beginners. It provides general studio instruction and involves basic studio work in the expressive and illustrative Japanese ink painting techniques. Students do not need to have previous experience in drawing but this is a plus. The course is designed for the beginning student in painting or drawing; however, since it will primarily concentrate on practice, and given that student attention will be mainly individualized, it is suitable for intermediate levels as well.

Poetry Course: Joan White will be conducting a **Tip of the Tongue Taste of T'ang Workshop** on **Saturday, August 20**. It will

begin with a short introduction to meditation and a 10-minute silent meditation. There will be a discussion of background reading before moving on to a small taste of poems from *Poems of the Late T'ang*, by A.C. Graham, with discussion of the poetry. Participants will be invited to silently stroll through the Zen Center grounds and trails, or sit in the Zen Center gardens. Following that there will be a break for lunch provided by the Zen Center. After lunch poems from W.S. Merwin, Billy Collins, and Jane Hirshfield, will be read. This will be followed by a writing period of half to three-quarters of an hour. The day will conclude with a sharing of poems.

For further information about both courses, and to register, please visit the Zen Center's website: www.vermontzen.org —

Sort-of Training Program: July 31 through August 5

For five days in the beginning of August the Zen Center will offer a residential training program. Sort of. Regular training programs are a way to experience the discipline of Zen training through total immersion similar to living in a monastery. During training programs, trainees live at the Center and participate in all aspects of traditional Zen training, learning how to bring Zen practice into everyday life is. Each day there is:

- Zazen
- Chanting
- Work practice

- Dokusan
- Teisho (Zen talk by the teacher) or talks by senior students

For this training program, however, the atmosphere will be less structured and a bit more free form. Because of the delay in beginning construction (due to many other delays, in particular the closing on the sale of development rights), the training program and August sesshin were pushed back a week. This will enable us to move into the new Buddha Building

during the training program week and prepare for our dedication sesshin in the new zendo.

We hope to have as many people as possible participate in these events. For that reason, the training period is open to all members for free — though donations are gratefully received and always welcome — and the sesshin is open to people whether they can attend full time or part time, with fewer restrictions on part-time attendance than usual.

If you are planning to attend the training period, please let us know, especially if you will be staying at the Center and/or eating

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Water Baby Ceremony: Remembering Lost Children



On Sunday, August 28, the Zen Center will hold a Water Baby Ceremony, the remembrance ceremony for lost children. The ceremony takes place after a one hour sitting with a short talk and will therefore begin around 10 a.m.

The Water Baby Ceremony is a Buddhist service for adults who have lost an infant or young child through still birth or early death, have lost a fetus through miscarriage or abortion, or have lost a child of any age, in any way. It is also appropriate for people who wish to remember a child who has passed, even if it is not their own child, to attend this ceremony.

Jizo Bodhisattva presides over the Water Baby Ceremony. He is considered to be the protector of women, children, travelers, the

helpless, and the needy. In Japan, there are thousands of Water Baby shrines. Often many figures are placed together in a garden or on a mountainside.

For this ceremony we will gather in the dining room after the sitting. The ceremony itself takes place in the Jizo garden, weather permitting. Everyone is asked to bring some scraps of fabric (red, with or without pattern, is the traditional color, but you may bring other bright colors) as well as scissors, needle, and thread. The Center will provide these items for those who don't have them. In silence, working together, each of us will sew a small, simple garment such as an apron, cape, bib, or hat which will be placed on one of the many Jizo figures at the Center. The garment represents the being we are remembering, and thus commemorates a death and rebirth, a passing from one form of life to another. Those who wish may also write the name of the child or a verse on a piece of paper which will be placed between the rocks in the Jizo garden.

While we work in silence, anyone may speak about his or her experience of loss. When we have finished sewing, we will carry the figures to the Jizo garden where we will chant the Prajna Paramita, the Kannon Sutra, and the Sutra of Jizo Bodhisattva, followed by a special Eko to return the merit of the ceremony to the children. Each person or couple will then offer incense and put their garments on a figure.

Participants are welcome to stay after the ceremony to talk or just sit quietly. This ceremony is not limited to members of our Center. However, everyone who comes should participate. While many people who attend do so to mourn for a personal loss, it is also appropriate to come if you wish to mourn for children not individually known to you—for example, children who have died from starvation or through violence. Such disasters touch us all, even if we have never met those who died. This is the only ceremony at the Center where we ask that you not bring young children. —

Om Ka Ka Kabi Sam Ma E Sowa Ka

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meals at the Center. (Meals will be provided.) We will need a lot of help to make this transition, so if you can spare a day, an hour, five days, whatever, please do come during this five-day period.

As for the schedule: There will be sitting in the mornings and evenings with dokusan once or twice a day (depending on how many people are at the sittings). Breakfast, lunch, and a light supper will be served. And there will be lots of work! The

day will end with a short chanting service. Beyond that, we'll see what happens. After breakfast each day we will discuss the day's proposed schedule and work assignments. Morning sitting will begin at **6:00**. Breakfast will be at **8:00**. —



Vermont Zen Center

Post Office Box 880
Shelburne, VT 05482

802-985-9746
www.vermontzen.org

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*In the summer rains,
The frogs are swimming
At the very door.
—Sampu*



CONTRIBUTORS:

Ti'an Callery
Emily Cross
Sensei Sunyana Graef
John Spackman
Kelly Story, *production*
Marion A. Wells
Joan White, *editor*
Delia Zamora-Crosby, *layout*

It's Mowing Season...

and the Zen Center needs volunteers for mowing and weed whacking. If you are willing and able, please check the bulletin board at the Center for the sign up sheet. There is room for two people to sign up each week for mowing and for week whacking (about 30-40 minutes per week).

. . . And It's Weeding Season

The Jizo garden, the fence plantings, the entryway sign, and front and rear beds all need regular attention. If you can spare a few minutes, or a few hours, the grounds will thank you.