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Walking Mountains

"The green mountains are always walking"–*Daokai*

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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 twofold 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.

Dear Sangha and Friends,

Last November, Sangha members traveled to Costa Rica for the Shinsanshiki Ceremony, or the Mountain Seat Ceremony, at the Casa Zen. This ceremony is comprised of three elements in which the current teacher, Roshi Graef, preparing to transmit the Dharma, descends the mountain; the transmission ceremony, which takes place that evening in private; and a public ceremony, the next day, in which the new teacher, Sensei Bodhi Murillo, ascends the mountain.

Our days leading up to the two events were filled with work alongside our Costa Rican Dharma brothers and sisters—preparing meals, cleaning the temple, dressing altars, arranging flowers, many rehearsals, and zazen—but also lots of laughter and tears as they anticipated that most challenging stretch of the human journey: change. That is, saying good-bye and expressing gratitude to their Roshi of almost 40 years and welcoming the new teacher, Sensei Murillo. In doing so, we all climbed a mountain together.

Witnessing such an extraordinary event—the transmission of the Dharma—is no small privilege as the accounts in this issue of *Walking Mountains* attest. It is our Sangha's sincere wish that sharing these photos and words provides a testament of this moment and the significance of the expansion of the Dharma at such a critical time.

–Joan White

Shinsanshiki Reflections

Descending, Ascending,
passing along the Way,
exchanging a smile, a flower,
encouraging continuous practice.

—Jhana Piché

It was a privilege to be present for two very moving ceremonies with our Tico Dharma brothers and sisters with whom we saw the Dharma manifest in multiple dimensions. Change is inevitable, and this profound event was a passing of the torch to better enable all beings to grasp the unchangeable.

—Josh Kelman

Stepping down,
Time waits for no one.
Stepping up-
~Udumbara flower!

—Roshi Taigen Henderson

A new generation of young Casa Zen practitioners express heartfelt gratitude to their newly recognized teacher. Like the young seekers of the past, now mature practitioners, they will receive careful cultivation. Someday, at least one of them will ascend the mountain.

—Lynne Davis

What a privilege to be part of the ceremonies. The Costa Ricans are so joyous and kind. Their practice inspires mine.

—Mitra Coulter

It was such a moving experience. It felt like being present when the wheel of the Dharma is in the process of turning. Gracias!"

—Ramiro Barrantes

Generosity. Roshi's generosity of time, care, and effort to bring to life the Shinsanshiki ceremonies, and Sensei Bodhi's deep generosity in ascending the mountain and becoming the new teacher at the Casa Zen. The dedication, love, and commitment of the Sangha came shining through in every moment. My deepest gratitude to you all.

—Metta Goodman

The ceremonies were so incredibly moving and touched the heart of practice itself. They bore witness to the beautiful energy of the growing tico Sangha with all their happiness and tears. And as Sensei Murillo acknowledged the lineage with bows and bells, we felt the ancient vow renewed.

—Heather Kelman

Transformational—seeing the hard work of so many people for so many years manifesting at this one moment was moving, humbling, and precious. The Ancestral line clearly present in front of us, showing the unobstructed Path, and adorned with the Dana of our Triple Sangha members, working together, is something I will never forget. Thank you Bodhi Sensei for taking this pivotal step for all of us!

—Marcela Pino

The Shinsanshiki Ceremony was so moving. To witness our Dharma brother, then Carlos, now Sensei Bodhi, deepen his practice over so many years, and now pass the teachings on to others, is nothing short of inspiring. So much gratitude for his commitment and the commitment of our dear teacher, Roshi Sunyana Graef.

—Kelly Story

Sensei Bodhi—
incredible joy and love.
So glad to be there.

—-Anna King

The Mountain Seat Ceremonies were beautifully rich in symbolism, penetrated wisdom, and heart-felt statements of gratitude all held in homage to the Dharma and our ancestors. One profound moment for me was when the newer members of Casa Zen came forward to make their invitational bows to their new teacher, Sensei Bodhi. In this moving gesture, the promise of a secure, generative future for Casa Zen was made visible.

—Meredith Markow

Descending the mountain ceremony—
ringing the bell,
just sitting, shoulder to shoulder.
Ascending the mountain ceremony—
a sesshin of bell ringing,
folding kesas, unfolding kesas,
ringing bells, striking the drum,
inviting bells, then…
quiet.

—Nowa Crosby

Shinsanshiki ceremonies. Descending and ascending the mountain. A metaphor for something so deep it defies comparison. We were present as witnesses to honor a teacher and a disciple and a Sangha at this moment. In one sense they were just doing what they naturally do. Yet in another, how rare, how poignant, how fertile this moment.

—Greg Heath

Gathering with the Casa Zen, Vermont, Toronto, Endless Path, and Mountain Gate extended Sangha provided a new perspective on how broad, intertwined, and deep our spiritual connections truly are. It was a privilege to share in this time at Casa Zen, meeting new friends and deepening bonds. Thank you to Sensei Bodhi and the Casa Zen for your example and warm hospitality in sharing this moment.

—Laurence Doody

The Shinsanshiki was one of the most powerful ceremonies I've ever witnessed. Strong manifestations of love and devotion were on display from the participants. The Shinsanshiki was all about transition. The exertions and efforts from the past brought us to this present moment, and past and present propel the Casa Zen into a bright and beautiful future. I am so grateful that I was able to attend.

—Jim Kahle

With over a half century of practice, and many decades of Roshi Graef's guidance, the Dharma firmly rooted in Costa Rican soil deepened, as it was transmitted to Sensei Bodhi, a teacher of their own. It was also a tribute to Roshi Kapleau, their first teacher, and to his strong lineage. So much gratitude, warmth, and love, although bittersweet in the knowledge of Roshi's departure perhaps expressed in the seemingly unrelenting cloudy skies. As the Dharma roots deepened, the bonds between us strengthened.

—Alison Gardner

At a time when there is so much division and separation in the Americas, to hear Sensei Bodhi speak about world peace to a room full of North, Central and South Americans was incredibly hopeful. Throughout the ceremonies I was struck by how the Dharma really is all-embracing—is there anything or anytime it cannot hold? Such immense gratitude for our incredible teacher, for Sensei Bodhi, the ancestors, our Triple Sangha, the newest members who are just arriving and will carry this way forward.

—Aylie Baker

Annual Meeting–Sunday, January 25

The Sangha is invited to participate in our Annual Meeting to help plan for the year ahead. We will discuss the Center's finances, the year's schedule, courses, special events, and more. Your input is essential and valued. Please come and help with the decisions and direction of the Center. A link to the meeting will be on the member page. A pot luck lunch follows the meeting. Please bring some vegetarian food to share.

2026 Annual Meeting Agenda

- 2026 Projects
- 2025 Financial Report
- 2026 Preliminary Budget
- Committee Review and more

January 2026

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25 Annual Sangha Meeting	26	27	28	29	30	31

Upcoming Courses at the Vermont Zen Center

www.vermontzen.org/courses.html

Introduction to Zen

January 24

Lead by Roshi Sunyana Graef, during the half-day schedule of talks, question periods, demonstrations, and guided meditation, participants are introduced to the body-mind disciplines of Zen Buddhism. More information and registration on the Zen Center's website.

Haiku Poetry

January 31

Through close readings of Japanese poets, participants learn the essential elements of traditional haiku and gain an understanding of the interaction between spiritual practice and poetry, as well as an appreciation of the deeper meaning of haiku. More information and registration on the Zen Center's website.

Flower Arranging

February 28

Learn basic Ikebana and flower arranging elements used at the Vermont Zen Center. Gain an appreciation of the deeper meaning of flowers as a way to bring a sense of tranquility to one's environment. More information and registration on the Zen Center's website.

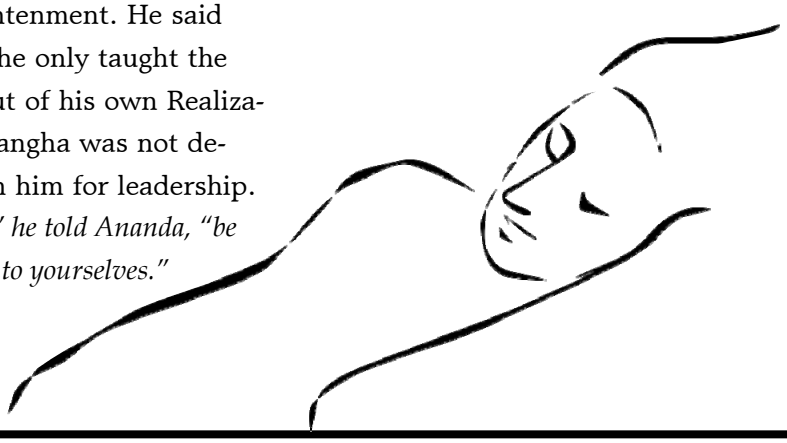
The Buddha's Parinirvana

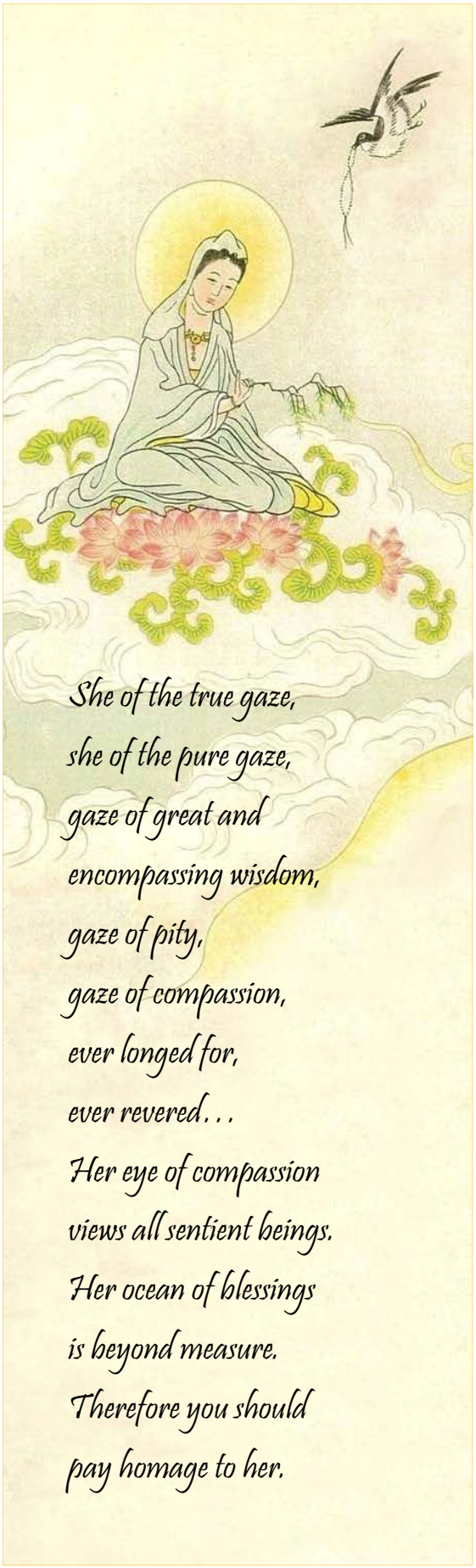
For 45 years the Buddha, after attaining Perfect Enlightenment, preached the Dharma to all who would listen, devoting himself to the welfare of all living beings. But in his 80th year, during the seclusion of the rainy season, he suddenly fell ill. Feeling that his time, though near, had not yet arrived, 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 **Sunday, February 15,** during the morning sitting, 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. All are invited.





Special Ceremony Honoring the Bodhisattva Kannon

On **Sunday, January 18 from 9:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.** we will pay homage to Kannon, the Bodhisattva of Compassion. This bodhisattva, so beloved in Mahayana countries, is the embodiment of tender compassion. Through this ceremony, we thank Kannon for her unceasing help.

After a half hour of zazen, we begin a series of rounds of sitting, bowing, chanting, and circumambulating. We chant the *Kannon Sutra* in English and Japanese a total of 108 times, recite the *Mantra of Kanzeon* ("Praise to Kannon Bodhisattva") 108 times, and chant the *Lotus Sutra Scripture of Kanzeon Bodhisattva,* and the *Dharani of Avalokitesvara* three times each.

By the end of the ceremony, we will have made 108 prostrations. Even if you are unable to do prostrations, you can still participate by making standing or partial bows. Members and their families, as well as friends of the Center and non-members are all invited. Anyone who wishes to pay homage to Kannon Bodhisattva is most welcome to attend.

In addition to the bowing, there will be circumambulations, incense offerings, special readings, and a vigorous Rinzai-style chanting of the Kanzeon in Japanese. A few notes about the ceremony:

Dedication—You are welcome to dedicate the merit of this ceremony to whomever you wish. There will be a table for the names of those to whom you are dedicating the ceremony.

Donation—As a concrete expression of compassion, please submit ***a monetary donation*** which will be given to COTS (Committee on Temporary Shelter). **Please note that checks should be made out to the Zen Center so that we can send COTS one check**

The celebration of Kannon Day affords us a way to express our boundless gratitude to the Bodhisattva of Compassion for her ceaseless, wondrous help. We hope you will join us on this special day.

More information: *www.vermontzen.org/ceremony_kannonday.html*

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The voice of the bell
Eddies through the mist,
In the morning twilight.
–Basho

Wishing you a Happy, Healthy, and Peaceful New Year!

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