

Walking Mountains

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

Dear Sangha and Friends,

As we launch the spring season with Sangha Entertainment Day, I find myself deeply grateful for technology, and those who make it possible, to continue with this deeply enriching tradition. Music, poetry, storytelling, and irreverent skits bring us together in ways that words do not suffice. “Sangha celebrating Sangha,” as our dearly departed Ti’an would often express.

Shortly after, Roshi will be taking a well-deserved break, reminding us of the Buddha’s words, “Let ye be lamps to yourselves, be a refuge to yourselves. Hold fast to Truth as a lamp; hold fast to the Truth as a refuge.” And we do so with taped teishos, memorial services, ongoing daily sittings via Zoom, and an all-day sitting.

April brings Temple Nights and spring Jukai—an opportunity to renew our vows as Buddhists. We don’t know now what, or where, we will be with this pandemic, but we can seek refuge in our practice and one another. Please join us.

—Joan White



Rohatsu in the Retreat Cabin

by Kelly Story

One of the aspects of the Zen stories of the ancients that has always fascinated me is the practice of solo retreat. There are many stories in Zen lit-

erature about eager students with a burning desire to find truth, sitting for hours and hours in solitary medi-

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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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tation in huts or in fields, getting bitten by mosquitoes, who, with the guidance of their teachers, made an exerted solitary effort to break through. It has always seemed so admirable to me that a person would put aside all of their worldly needs and desires to seek the truth. It seems clear that this searching and finding has a deeply positive effect on the world around us.

Fast forward to our time when participating in sesshins at home has been necessary during the pandemic. However, with two active teenage boys, doing a sesshin at home isn't exactly distraction free. Although they are very supportive of my practice, it is a bit harder for them to have me so close during sesshin, knowing they cannot interrupt and needing them to be somewhat quiet. When I go to sesshin at the Zen Center, for them, it is easier as I am truly out of sight and a lot more out of mind.

In thinking about Rohatsu sesshin and how I could make it a bit easier for my family, it suddenly occurred to me, what about using the retreat cabin? A quick email to Jed and Roshi brought the great news that yes, it was available, but I better act quickly before someone else snags it. Glenn and the boys were incredibly supportive (maybe a bit too much!) of me doing the Rohatsu in the retreat cabin.

From the beginning of signing up for the cabin to the end, the

cabin support team made up of Ramiro, Eric, Jhana, and Gerry ensured that every detail necessary in having a positive solo retreat was met. Ramiro, Nowa, and Jed helped me with all of the technical aspects having to do with the internet connection. Eric and Jhana gave very helpful informational tours before starting. Gerry let me know she would be there to help with any housekeeping needs before or after. While you are alone during the solo retreat, you are very aware that there is an enthusiastic, competent team there to support you.

The retreat cabin itself has a quality of supporting one in a friendly, quiet simplicity. Everything you need to function day to day is there. It is simple and beautiful without extravagance. The small altar area creates a feeling of quiet intimacy. One feels held by these elements and protected in a way that allows one to relax, let

go, and deepen one's practice. Sitting in this small space was at times a feeling of sitting in the palms of the Buddha. What created that feeling? Was it the simplicity of the cabin? The support of the cabin team? The energy of those that have been on retreat before me? The cabin itself?

I don't know the answer to these questions, but what is clear is that spending four days in the solo retreat cabin during Rohatsu rejuvenated my spirits and energies in a profound way. It made me feel both healed from the pandemic stress and ready to get back out there to bring my best attitude and energies to family, work, the Zen Center, and our community. For that, I am eternally grateful. I am hopeful that the Sangha and those in our community who need this experience will have an opportunity to use the retreat cabin as well. It is truly a blessing. —



Practice in the Midst of Covid

by Josh Kelman

In mid-June 2020, Roshi Graef began what would become a multi-year teisho series of reading and commenting on the *Vimalakirti Sutra*. The premise of the sutra is that Vimalakirti, a deeply awakened disciple of the Buddha, is sick and bedridden because all the beings of the world are sick. Which is to say, everybody's sickness is his sickness.

We recite the Bodhisattva Vows after every formal sitting. Therefore, we too, at least aspirationally, seek to embody Vimalakirti's understanding. So, here we are amidst a worldwide pandemic with sickness and death across the globe. We, like everybody else, must orient our lives to the pandemic.

There is quite a bit of resistance around the world to the personal restrictions used to combat the pandemic. Complex problems do not generally yield to simple pain-free solutions. But what the Bodhisattva Vows ask of us, and what our practice reveals to us, is seeing that the sickness and pain of others are not at all separate from ourselves. Furthermore, our actions must be aligned toward ending the suffering across the globe. We are scrupulous around mask wearing in public; we avoid unnecessary travel and gatherings; we provide whatever aid we can to the sick and needy. And we continue our formal Zen practice.

“Complex problems do not generally yield to simple pain-free solutions. But what the Bodhisattva Vows ask of us, and what our practice reveals to us, is seeing that the sickness and pain of others are not at all separate from ourselves.”

We take inspiration and bow to the bodhisattvas among us laboring long hours in hospitals and care facilities, to teachers working under duress, and the untold millions who go to work every day, taking what precautions they can while keeping goods and services flowing. Donations to organizations providing services to the needy are said to have soared.

Horrible as it is, the pandemic is a teaching moment. Amidst the restrictions, we found a way to raise a beautiful Sangha vegetable garden this summer and maintained the magnificent Zen Center grounds. Our Sangha tech geeks enabled Zoom virtual sittings, all-days, ceremonies, a term student program, and even sesshins. The virtual zazen stretching across thousands of miles generated real *jo-riki*. As a Sangha we found a way to maintain genuine practice. We cared for Covid-stricken Sangha members as we could and held ceremonies of aid for the world at

large. This was our pandemic bow to Hakuin's "practice in the midst of activity."

I recall that when Heather went through a life-threatening illness, she would thank me (her spouse) for being at her side and caring for her. But the thanks were superfluous as anybody who has been in that situation knows. Life and death is a profound if unwelcome teacher for taking care of each other. We find that leaving the cap off the toothpaste tube has lost its power to create victims and culprits.

The Bodhisattva Vows are our vows and they stretch across lifetimes. There is no higher aim, yet no aim closer to our genuine aspirations. Of course, the audacity of vowing to save all beings is daunting to say the least. But we commit to these vows together as one Sangha. And that immeasurably lightens and brightens the effort. Svaha! —



Temple Nights

Temple Nights, on **Tuesday, April 6** and **Thursday, April 8**, are two special evenings set aside for people of all ages to sit informally before beautiful altars honoring Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. They take the place of regular sittings and **begin at 6:30 p.m. and end at 8:30 p.m.** with a special chanting service and circumambulation.

There will be three altars set up for this year's virtual Temple Night, in addition to the main altar. Anyone who has been to a Temple Night can attest to the strength of concentration that builds up throughout the evening. 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.

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. All are invited. —

Entering the Buddha's Family Spring Jukai Ceremony

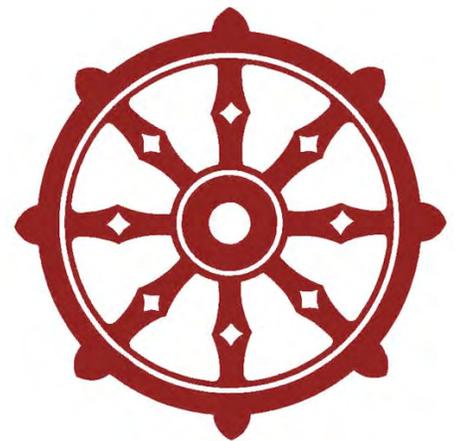
On **Sunday, April 11**, we commemorate the Buddha's "real" birthday with a Jukai Ceremony which starts at **9:00 a.m.** with a half hour informal sitting. The ceremony will be conducted via Zoom. Register online at www.vermontzen.org/ceremony_jukai-zoom.html

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 an anonymous 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,



please wear dark, solid-colored clothing.

Children of all ages are especially welcome to come to spring Jukai, which honors the birth of Shakyamuni Buddha. —

MARCH 2021

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
2/28 Teisho	1 FINDING YOUR SEAT Tai Chi 2	2 Chanting	3 Metta 5	4	5	6
Roshi on Break						
7 Sangha Entertainment	8 Tai Chi 3	9	10 Metta 6	11 Chanting	12	13
Roshi on Break						
14 Taped Teisho	15 Tai Chi 4	16 Chanting	17	18	19	20
Roshi on Break						
21 Taped Teisho	22 Tai Chi 5	23	24	25 Chanting SESSHIN DEADLINE	26	27
Roshi on Break						
28 All-Day Sitting	29 Tai Chi 6 ZC Closed	30 Chanting	31			

APRIL 2021

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
				1	2	3
4 Teisho	5 FINDING YOUR SEAT Tai Chi 1	6 Temple Night	7	8 Temple Night	9	10
11 JUKAI	12 ZC Closed Tai Chi 2	13 Chanting	14	15	16	17
18	19 ZC Closed Tai Chi 3	20	21	22 Chanting	23	24
26 Teisho	26 Tai Chi 4	27 Chanting	28	29	30	

SITTINGS: Monday through Friday 6–7 am; Tuesday & Thursday 7:00–8:00 pm; Sunday 9–10:15 am

The Living Room by Meredith Markow

In a teisho that Roshi once gave about the value of Sangha, I recall her saying how essential it was to her that there be a living room that stands between the Buddha Building and the link in the floor plan of the Center. She mentioned the importance of our coming into a common social gathering space before we leave the building.

It is in the Buddha Building spaces that we hold ceremonies, listen to teishos, go to dokusan, chant together, and sit to deepen, refine, and grapple with our practice on our individual mats. We are unquestionably strengthened by one another in the formal aspects of our practice in the Buddha Building, sitting next to a Sangha member scaffolded by their stalwart stillness in times when the mind is wandering, joining together as one voice in a chant, bowing to each other, and prostrating toward the altar. We set an example of fortitude and commitment to our practice and to one another in the Buddha Building, and it fuels us to keep going.

Yet there is an "alone togetherness" in those aspects of our practice, and without the living room we could easily exit the building in solitude, without the awareness that we are also people being people, living common and extraordinary lives and who have stories to share. We join in the living room to greet one another to exchange a warm smile. We ask how our children are doing, how work is going, and how we are managing our health issues. It is not the place where we cast our eyes down, but rather it is the place where we

look into them.

Given the necessity to be socially distant in the current times, where is our living room right now, and how do we gather in it?

We gather in the living room when we see each other in tiny Zoom boxes after our sittings. There we wave to each other and offer a genuine hello or good morning. We welcome visitors, make mention of someone's birthday, or even talk about the glorious rain that came after a long period of drought. We also gather in the living room when we receive a card or an email from a Sangha member.

With all of the dangers and distractions of Facebook, I need to be on it occasionally for my work. When I am there, I feel as if I'm in the living room when I see a post from a fellow Sangha member that reflects their integrity, their mission in their work, their political convictions, and even their goofy sense of humor. I sit in the living room when I am talking with my precept buddies about how I fell short in managing judgmental mind and how they listen with compassion, and objectivity.

I sit in the living room with all of you when I submit to our website an anonymous post (rather than writing on a piece of paper on the living



room coffee table) my resolution for the new year, or the ghosts I wish to burn, or the many things for which I am grateful in preparation for one of our ceremonies. We are together in the living room when we gather during a virtual social hour. And I am in the living room with you right now as I write these words, imagining you all with me.

We are kept apart for now because of this pandemic, but we can still gather in the living room. We can vacuum and dust it in our minds as we are cleaning our own homes, straighten the books in the library as we tidy our own shelves, and we can make sure that the couches and chairs welcome conversation when we puff the pillows on our own couches. We can still keep it clean and welcoming, so that in that moment, just before we click the button to leave a Zoom sitting, teisho, or ceremony and exit into the daily affairs of our own lives, we can remember to pass through the living room until we find each other again in the one on Thomas Road.



This beautiful antique Chinese Kuan Yin was an anonymous gift to the Zen Center.

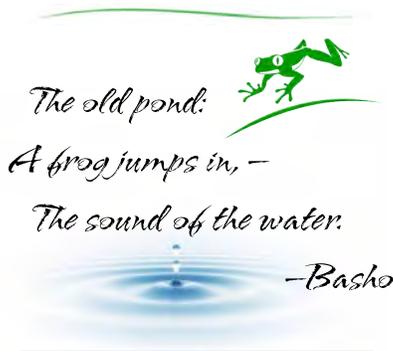




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Sangha Entertainment

Time to dust off your instruments, bring out the games, loosen the vocal chords, brush up on your Tango – it’s Sangha Entertainment day on **SUNDAY, MARCH 7**, and all acts are welcome. Your family and friends are invited to a virtual morning event of music, fun, and games. Kelly Story is the coordinator for this event; please give her a call

if you want to perform. If you’d just like to sit in the audience, that’s fine too. The entertainment begins at **10 a.m.** Hope to (virtually) see you there! Sign up online: www.vermontzen.org/events_entertainment--zoom.html

