

Walking Mountains

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

Dear Sangha and Friends,

It's April and who doesn't have buds on their mind? Everywhere you look, there they are. And when I stop and reflect on them, now beginning to burst in their magnificent sequence we call spring, I realize they have been sneaking into my subconscious mind since last fall (at least). There I can visualize the plump buds of rhododendron and mountain laurel, fuzzy star magnolia, and the redbud's tiny dark jewels. Throughout the winter, the white landscape is adorned with the willow's yellow and the maple's red gems.

They remind us of the Dharma seed planted within us, no matter how many lifetimes ago, that has brought us to practice. How fitting that they begin to come to fruition as we approach the Jukai Ceremony, when we renew our Buddhist vows – when our hearts burst open with gratitude for this practice.

— *Joan White*



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The Ox in New Hampshire

by **Greg Heath**



Sensei's words were at once cautionary and encouraging. Last October we met to discuss my belief that Sangha was awaiting its expression in central New Hampshire. She foresaw challenges and potential pitfalls. The very question of starting an affiliate group begs a multitude of additional questions. And for me...what would this mean? As it turns out, for one thing, it most certainly means I know where I will be every Monday evening – on a cushion sitting with the Oxbow Zen Sangha, a new affiliate of the Vermont Zen Center.

A stalwart, dedicated band of six began sitting in January at a newly constructed

(Continued on page 2)

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.



(Continued from page 1)

Quaker meetinghouse in Canterbury, New Hampshire. It happens to be located on Oxbow Pond Rd, hence the name. What a fortunate, serendipitous association with our old friend the ox! Four of us are friends from the '90s when we sat with another local group that no longer meets. Two are a young couple who were members of the Diamond Sangha in their home state. And now we are eight since welcoming others who attended the Vermont Center's January workshop.

Our intention is to keep it simple. We sit for three periods, recite the four vows, make prostrations, bow to one another and go home. Sometimes we'll have tea. We have a very nice, but simple altar. For those who want to participate in all day sittings, chanting, or individual instruction, the path is very clear. It even has a name: Route I-89.

One of the benefits for me is more contact with the Vermont Center as I make it a point to accompany to Shelburne anyone who would like to join us in Canterbury.

So what makes a group an affiliate of the Vermont Zen Center? There's nothing on paper. There is no legal or banking relationship, but we do choose to associate. That choice comes from a deep place. It's the same place we go when we recite the verse of the kesa and place our rakus over our heads. It's that direct connection from teacher to student and from student to teacher. The Oxbow Zen Sangha is led, but not by Greg Heath. I do my best to hold to the forms and courtesies of the zendo as I have learned them and to hold the compass showing the way to Shelburne.

I would be less than honest

and forthcoming to not admit the existence of ego involvement at some level. I am overflowing with enthusiasm for this opportunity to help spread the Dharma. I am deeply grateful for the support of Sensei and my Dharma brothers and sisters at the Center. This is a very exciting development, and it is pushing my own practice forward. Perhaps "joyful" is the best word to describe my feelings about what is under way. As for ego, that creative and devious so-and-so: ego is why we have a teacher, now isn't it?

Please know you are all invited to visit and sit with us on a Monday evening. Everything will feel most familiar. To sweeten the invitation, we can offer a very nice guest apartment. With the Canterbury Shaker Village a mere mile and half down the road, a warm summer get-away may be in your future. —

The Power of Humility

by Jim Kahle

I have been thinking a lot about humility lately. Humility seems to start with some clearheaded assessments. When the Sixth Patriarch was asked why he was selected to succeed the Fifth Patriarch he was said to have responded, "Because I don't understand Buddhism." If Hui-neng didn't understand Buddhism, what does that say about me? I am human. I am not perfect. I don't have all the answers (or any of them). What is really interesting is the tremendously liberating emotions that start to emerge after these admissions are made. When I first heard Hui-neng's statement, I had the palpable feeling of many self-inflicted shackles falling away. I felt liberated, energized, alive. I felt like I had nothing to hide. I could take a chance. I could do my best. I felt free.

When you think about it, humility is one of the qualities that are strengthened by Zen practice. Whether it's going to dokusan, lead chanting, monitoring a sitting, or (gulp) writing an article for the newsletter, we are afforded abundant and regular opportunities to look foolish in front of our teacher and the Sangha. So what can we do when that happens – quit? Mostly we sigh, and hope we'll do better the next time. The characteristic of humility is fostered by this.

I remember some words from Barack Obama on his inauguration

day. He said that our country has many problems, but he hoped that we could work on them out of a sense of humility. What might that look like? It's knowing that you don't have all the answers, that you might even be wrong about some things. It means there could be listening, learning, trying to understand those who feel differently. A sense of humility elicits the feeling that we all share in our imperfections, that we are all in this together. There are feelings of respect and compassion that follow. So many doors are opened, so much fog is lifted when the challenges of life are viewed through the lens of humility.

It's probably important to say what this feeling of humility is not. It is not the voice of, "I'm no good. I can't do it. I'm afraid." That is actually one of the many voices of ego. Nor is it being satisfied with our imperfections. Humility is a freeing up that allows us to strive

“ It's knowing that you don't have all the answers, that you might even be wrong about some things. It means there could be listening, learning, trying to understand those who feel differently. ”

for perfection even when we know, because we are human, that it really isn't possible – at least not in the relative sense. After all, in the words of Stephen Stills, "What have we got to lose?" —



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Book Review—Josh Kelman

In the Shadow of the Buddha:

Secret Journeys, Sacred Histories and Spiritual Discovery in Tibet

by Matteo Pistono

Matteo Pistono is an American who was drawn to Tibetan Buddhism in the mid '90's and began working with a lama outside Kathmandu where he attended retreats and developed a daily practice. He became particularly drawn to a well-known late 19th century teacher, Tertön Sogyal. Matteo planned "... to see where Tertön Sogyal's saintly life had played out — and deepen my own meditation practice — in hallowed caves and hermitages high on the roof of the world." However, this pilgrimage did not take the form that Matteo had planned. Many of us can also attest to spiritual journeys not going according to plan.

But Matteo did travel to Tibet and met accomplished Buddhist teachers. He also encountered heartrending stories of torture and persecution at the hands of the Chinese authorities. He was pressed to deliver messages to and from Tibet to help publicize these human rights crimes. This he did with mixed feelings. He was fearful of putting those he met in jeopardy (as a Westerner, expulsion would likely be his only penalty if caught). And he fought within himself a belief that this work delayed his own spiritual development which could only come from long retreats. Breaking through this knot became his practice. Again and again his teachers stressed working for the

benefit of others: "Who will be the object of your compassion if you are alone in a cave?" one teacher asked. Matteo also developed tremendous anger at the Chinese authorities and describes how he was taught how to see through this anger and transmute its energy in a positive direction.

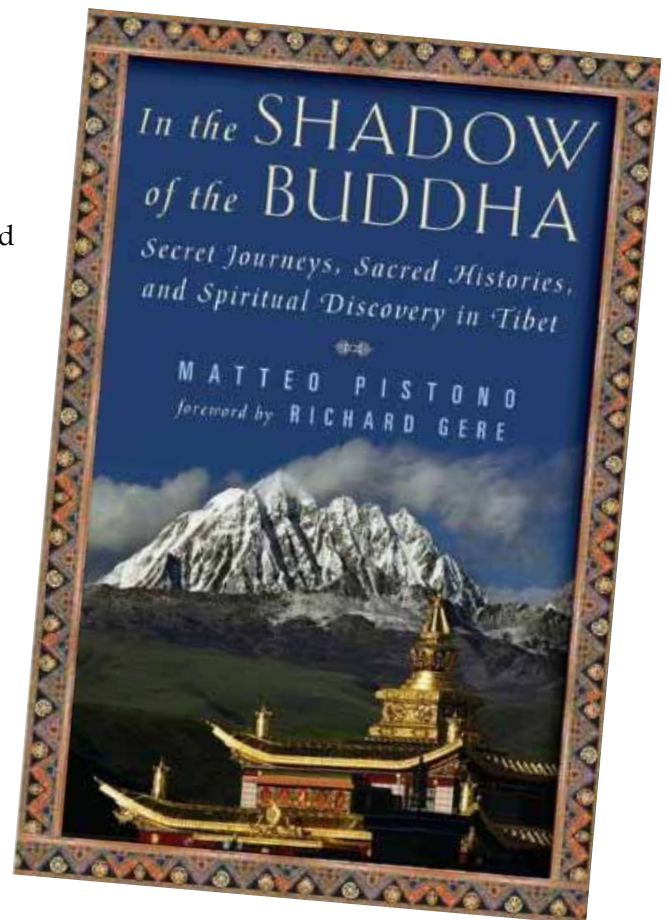
The book intersperses Matteo's travels with the life and travels of Tertön Sogyal. This was a true Master who lived out his compassion and wisdom in interactions with everyday people as well as teacher to the thirteenth Dalai Lama in other dangerous times (I had not realized that Chinese troops occupied Lhasa in 1910 and were only withdrawn due to the 1911 revolution in China). His life story is quite stirring.

The sufferings in Tibet are profoundly tragic and, as we all know, the Dalai Lama teaches that Buddhist practice is to generate compassion even for the Chinese authorities in Tibet. A conversation the author had with Lodi Gyari, an envoy of the Dalai Lama to the



Chinese, takes this further. Gyari tells the traditional Tibetan story of how an ogre named Rudra,

... the embodiment of the negative self-cherishing ego, after carrying out many atrocious crimes, was subjugated by a powerful Buddhist deity. The Buddhist deity entered Rudra's body, and through powerful and skillful compassionate means, destroyed Rudra's anger and aggression from within.

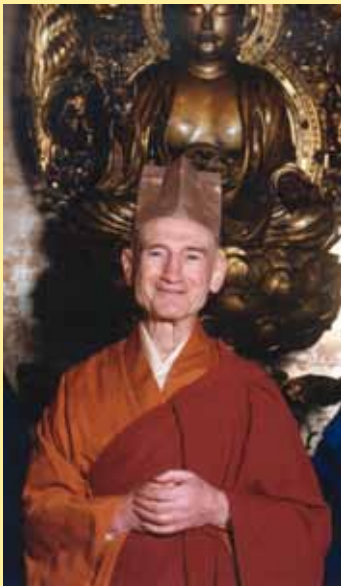
Lodi Gyari maintains that this is slowly happening within China, "... with the teachings of nonviolence and compassion emerging as the victor." This is subversive activity we can all believe in. Matteo Pistono's work plays a role in this and so does our own.



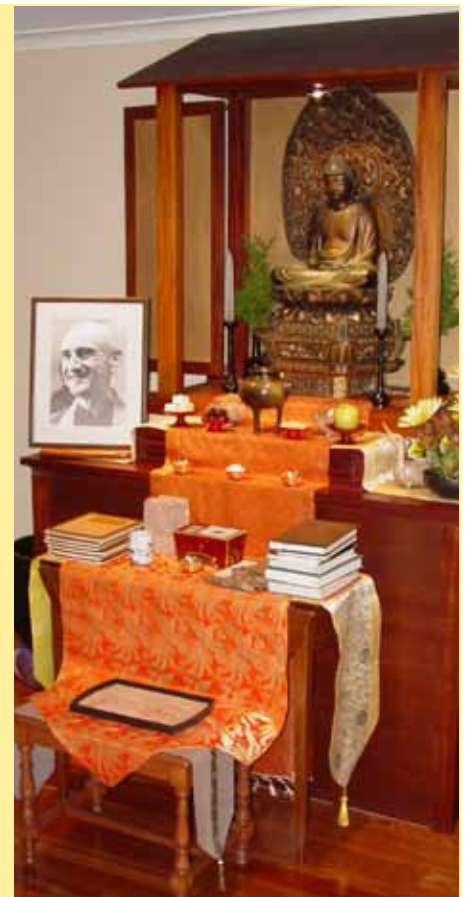
APRIL 2011

| SUNDAY | MONDAY | TUESDAY | WEDNESDAY | THURSDAY | FRIDAY | SATURDAY |
|--|--------------|-----------------------------------|------------|----------|--------|---|
| | | | | | 1 | 2 Jukai Workday Sesshin Deadline |
| 3 JUKAI  | 4 Costa Rica | CR Sesshin 5-Day Training Program | | | | |
| 10 Sitting/Set up  | 11 | 12 Chanting | 13 Metta 6 | 14 | 15 | 16  |
| 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 | 22 | 23 |
| VT 7-Day Work Sesshin | | | | | | |
| 24 ZC Closed | 25 | 26 Chanting | 27 | 28 | 29 | 30 |

Events in Honor of Roshi Kapleau



Roshi Philip Kapleau passed away on May 6, 2004 at the age of 91. A day of remembrance honoring Roshi Kapleau will be held at the Center on **Sunday, May 8**. On this day we will have an extended sitting, beginning at **8 a.m.** and ending around **1 p.m.** with a pot luck lunch. (Roshi loved pot lucks.) During the day there will be a special chanting service, dokusan, and one of Roshi Kapleau's taped teishos will be played. The memorial service for Roshi will be on **Thursday evening, May 5**.



Dean Zimmerman's Tool Box

by Kanho Doug Dittman

Nebraska Zen Center's friend and neighbor, Dean Zimmerman, has been gone for some time now. The big white house across the street sold soon after he died, and a young couple moved in. Shortly after that, a baby was born, and now, as I look out the window, I see that she is already a toddler, zipping across the green law just out of her mother's reach. However, I catch myself looking for Dean smoking out on the front porch or puttering out in the yard, a tan bucket-hat pulled low across his eyes. Even though he was 70, Dean's hair still hinted at the red it had once been. Fifty years as a union bricklayer had worn him

“The sides of the box undulated in and out, mortar and paint had been splashed here and there ... I was struck, however, by the care with which the tools were placed.”



thin, and it's a safe bet that the scotch and cigarettes didn't help much.

The day his tools sold, I got too busy and ended up getting there the day after the sale was over. His widow, Mary, showed me down the stairs to the basement, and literally, all that was left was Dean's beat-up old tool box and a three foot level out of plumb. I didn't need either, but the way they looked sitting there in the empty room tugged at my heart, so I bought them and took them home. I stuck them out in the garage, got busy and forgot about them.

In a few months, it was time to start bricking the new dairy parlor on our farm, so I dug out Dean's tools. I set up the scaffold, plunked down the toolbox next to the mortar board and finally took the time to look inside it. The sides of the box undulated in and out, mortar and paint had been splashed here and there, and rust red had replaced most of the original grey color. I was struck, however, by the care with which the tools were placed,

and although worn, how sharp, clean, and ready they are.

The blade of the trowel was worn thin and sharp from use, but it was free of any mortar whatsoever. The heel of its handle was wedge-shaped from the old practice of tapping down bricks. The broken-handled brick hammer was neatly mended with cotton tape, and the head was spray-painted burnt orange to distinguish it from the hammers of the men he worked with.

In the box, there were also odd striking tools, bent at all angles and obviously home-made, wood blocks and steel jigs for pulling line-up string tight, steel "twigs" to hold it up over long spans, bits of wedges to hold the piece up and in place, lead and wax pencils, chalk to lay out the work, and a worn brick-rule with brass joints worn smooth and loose, the markings now illegible.

My first impulse was to get rid of all this extraneous stuff. Who needs it? I wanted to throw it all out and get on with my job! However, the mortar was already mixed, so I

reluctantly ignored this impulse and set to work. When I picked up the trowel it nestled in my hand—a good fit. When I came to a tight corner, I found that an old bent striker was perfect for the spot.

The bricks had to go up before winter, so after I started, I stayed with it until the job was done.

By the time I laid the last brick, I had used every single tool in the box! Looking back, I laugh at how arrogant I was to think that I knew better than Dean what tools are of use and what are not.

This whole process is very much like Zen practice. My Sangha friend George says that the first time

anybody shows up at a Zen Center or temple, they probably think that the teacher and everyone else is nuts. Meditation might make a little sense, but chanting and bowing? — No way! What good are these strange and anachronistic practices?

Luckily for us, our teacher, Nonin, is no push-over, and the practice is clear and fully in motion, no hesitation. Newcomers and long-time practitioners alike join in and practice in the same way. Immediately, we step onto this well-worn path and begin, just as so many have done before. We pick up the same worn tools and use them, whether we recognize their

value or not. Setting aside our likes and dislikes, we allow experience and time itself to determine their intrinsic value. But mostly we temporarily quiet this clamoring “I” that insists on being heard, and instead experience a much broader, ancestral way, old and worn yet fresh and new. —

Kanho Doug Dittman is a long-time practitioner at Nebraska Zen Center / Heartland Temple. His teacher is Rev. Nonin Chowaney. This article originally appeared in “Prairie Wind,” the newsletter of the Nebraska Zen Center: www.prairiewindzen.org. It is reprinted by permission.

It's Official

After a four-year-long process, the sale of our development rights to the Lake Champlain Land Trust took place on the afternoon of Friday, February 25.

This means we now have funds to complete the Buddha Building. It also means that our land will be preserved and remain undeveloped for generations to come. Four years is a long gestation period, and there were times—many times when it seemed this would never occur. Now that it has, there are not words enough to express sufficient gratitude to all those who helped make this final phase of the Zen Center's expansion possible. Sangha and friends contributed time and resources and much good will. Thank you for your generosity and support!



Chris Boget handing Jed a check for the sale of development rights

The immediate impact of the sale is that work has resumed on the Buddha Building and is also going on the Center (Dharma) building. A sprinkler system is being installed and foam insulation will be blown into the attic of the Center building.

After that, the work will all be in the Buddha Building.

Sittings will continue as usual throughout the work. Check the Center's website for regular updates of this exciting phase in our growth. —



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*From what tree's
blossoming, I do not know,
but oh, its sweet scent!*
— Basho

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The Buddha Building