

Walking Mountains

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

Dear Sangha and Friends,

November mornings belong to the cacophony of crows. And yet they're invisible—calling somewhere from within daybreak's dense fog. They remind me of my father calling to us from the bottom of the stairs on a Saturday morning when my siblings and I were deep in our teenage sleep: “Wake up!” You're sleeping your lives away!” Who could ignore those words?

And rising today I think, thank goodness there is always more work to do—the work of practice, following the precepts, doing good in the world we live in. Work calls to us this month as we step up our pace in preparation for the Great Jukai Ceremony, followed quickly by the Oxfam Ceremony for World Hunger and our Thanksgiving Ceremony. So off to work we go, and along the way, the landscape slips out of its gray coat of fog and the world presents itself.

— *Joan White*

ON THE WAY by Jim Kahle



There have been occasions during the course of a sesshin when I would awaken in the middle of the night. From time to time I would stumble up the stairs and into the kitchen. There were times when I would find Bonnie there, sitting on a stool by one of the islands, head in her hand, cup of hot tea nearby. She was usually poring over some recipe in anticipation of the next day's meals. I would

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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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actually stop myself when I tried to contemplate the massive amounts of time and effort she would be putting into the sesshin as the head cook. I really didn't even want to think about it.

Bonnie has been the head cook at the Center for many years. She is responsible for virtually all facets of food preparation and presentation at sesshin, ceremonies, workshops, and the like. This involves planning the meals, buying the food, preparing the food, presenting the meals, and cleanup. During a sesshin, not only do the meals need to be prepared, but they need to be ready *on time*. Bonnie is responsible for the training and performance of all kitchen workers whether or not they have any training or natural inclination. She has performed her duties with great skill, determination, patience, and good humor. She has repeatedly been willing to reveal to me the workings of the Cuisinart, and how all those mysterious pieces actually fit together.

It was inevitable that someday Bonnie would be ordained as a priest at the Center. The ordination was scheduled for early September. An ordination is a significant undertaking for the Center, and there had been plenty of work that had already been done before the day of the event arrived. There had been many willing workers. A large contingent of the Canadian members of the Sangha had made the long trek not only to take part in the celebration, but to help make it happen. I ran into Lynne Davis

drying dishes in the kitchen, and remarked in a somewhat off hand way that it was great that she had been able to make it. "Make it to Bonnie's ordination?" she replied in a puzzled tone of voice. I should have known better.

Kelly Story and I were assigned the job of greeters on the day of the ordination. It was actually an interesting position. The kitchen was nearby, and there was a veritable buzz of activity as the workers feverishly prepared for the day's festivities. There were a couple of occasions when I needed to go over by the Buddha Hall where the ordination ceremony was to take place. The atmosphere was very different there. It was taut, somber, focused. Sensei was nowhere to be seen, and neither was Bonnie. I had been reminded the day before that the priest to be is not to be seen on the day of the ordination until the ceremony itself. This was a serious and solemn occasion to be sure.

The ceremony itself was very moving. There were times when I was bursting with pride, then awed

and humbled. Then there were the moments that often seem to occur at these events when powerful emotions arise that have no name. Sensei mentioned the hope that Bonnie live a long life in the Dharma. She mentioned gratitude to Bonnie's parents, and to the Buddha/Dharma. She said that Bonnie's role as a Zen priest is primarily that of an exemplar, showing the way by how she leads her life. Sensei quoted the words of Zen Master Dogen when he said that the merit of becoming a priest leads many beings to the Buddha Way, and is a practice of self-benefit and benefit to others. One of the highlights is when the novice is given their new name as a priest. Bonnie's new name is Mitra, meaning spiritual friend. At one point during the ceremony, Bonnie left the Buddha Hall to put on her new blue robe. There was a pause. There were at least 50 people in the room, but it was very quiet, very still. I thought I could hear the sound of the morning dew falling from the roof outside and splattering on the rocks below.

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Ordination

by Kathy Clarke

The bell rings and the novice enters the Buddha hall, head shaved, dressed in a white under robe and white socks. A memory arose of digging up a large white larva in the dark soil beneath the maple tree stump one autumn, a pale, vulnerable creature. As the ceremony proceeds, the lion's roar of conviction and commitment to the Dharma reveals the enormous strength within this

thin, white-clothed person. Sangha, family and friends witness as the new blue robe swirls three times over incense and unfolds like the wings of a monarch. Bonnie becomes Mitra, "spiritual friend."

I remember the day twenty-six years ago you were "Mrs. Coulter," my son Thatcher's kindergarten teacher. You sparkled and laughed your particular laugh and I knew he was in good hands. Now, as Mitra, you sparkle and laugh and we have long experience of being in your good hands.

We watched you walk the Buddha Way all these years with a cheerful, steady step. We've eaten plates full of tofu casserole and received the fruits of your consistent work at the Center. This ordination is a generous gift to teacher, Sangha and beyond, beyond, beyond. It is the gift that keeps on giving. Thank you, friend.

The Dharma winds blew the hair right off her head.

She laughed. How delightful!

Dear Sangha and Friends,

The happiness and love I felt from you throughout the preparation and ordination ceremony was truly amazing. So many hands were involved to make it possible and to enable it to unfold so beautifully. Hands that extend back to my mom and dad.

While greeting people after the ordination I was overwhelmed with gratitude and joy. In expressing my thanks to people for coming, many responded, "No, thank you." There it is! One Mind – one feeling of gratitude for love, for joy, for practice, for Sangha. Always present! One commitment extends to all.

My family and friends all expressed their delight in the place, in the people and in the food.

The gifts to me from the Triple Sangha were most generous. Jizo has already established a place among our plants in our south facing windows. The *tangkha* of Bhaisajyaguru is so moving in a world that longs for healing. The money will help fulfill my wish to do a pilgrimage to India some day.

With deep gratitude and joy and love,

Mitra

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The celebration afterwards was anything but subdued. There was a lot of great food and bonhomie. Mitra was presented with some gifts from the Triple Sangha. She received a Medicine Buddha Thangka, a Jizo figure, and some money to allow her to take a pilgrimage. It seemed fitting that

Mitra should be presented with these devotional figures. Mitra has lived, and continues to live, a life of devotion to the Dharma and the Center, but also to her family, to her mother, father, and husband.

Circumstances allowed me to be a small part of the ceremonial rehearsal. There is a point when

the inkhin bell is rung, and that was Bonnie's signal to enter the Buddha Hall. Nowa rang the bell, and there was a pause. Sensei called out, "Bonnie, that was your cue." Bonnie answered back from the adjoining room, "I'm on my way." Yes Mitra, yes you are.

Great Jukai—The Ceremony of Entering the Buddha’s Way

On SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 13, AT 4:00 P.M., the Center will hold a ceremony of Great Jukai. There is no morning sitting that day. While Jukai has been held many times over the past 23 years, Great Jukai has been held only a few times. What is different about this ceremony?

In the usual Jukai, there is chanting, incense offering, repentance, and taking of the Sixteen Precepts – the Three Treasures, Three General Resolutions, and Ten Cardinal Precepts. In Great Jukai, we do all this, but first participants pass through the Wheel of Samsara: different areas in the Center portraying the six unenlightened realms of existence. The ceremony itself is longer and more elaborate with a dramatic burning of klesa papers, representing our ego defilements, taking place after the repentance ceremony.

Six Realms of Existence

The six unenlightened realms that everyone passes through on their way to the zendo are those of hell, hungry ghosts, animals, human beings, titans, and heavenly beings (devas). Each of these realms forms a segment on the Wheel of Life. Beings in these realms are conditioned by ego-based notions

of a separate self, which desires everything that satisfies it and rejects everything that opposes it. At the hub of the Wheel is ego, embodied by the defilements of greed, anger, and ignorance, and represented by a cock, pig and snake.

The Wheel of Life is set in motion by actions stemming from our basic ignorance of the nature of existence and by karmic propensities from incalculable past lifetimes. Our craving for the pleasures of the senses and our clinging to them keep this Wheel revolving and so lead to an unending cycle of births, deaths, and rebirths to which we remain bound until full awakening.

Kannon Bodhisattva

In each of the six realms, the Bodhisattva Kannon appears, representing the omnipresence of Absolute Compassion, or the enlightened Mind common to all beings. The Bodhisattva is in differently colored form in each realm, bearing gifts appropriate to the needs of the inhabitants. In hell, she carries the flame of purification; in the realm of hungry ghosts, she offers spiritual food and drink to liberate the tortured spirits from their unquenchable greed; in the animal realm she holds a book,



since animals are driven by blind instinct; in the realm of titans – who understand only the language of force and violence – she brandishes the flaming sword of wisdom; to the devas, she plays the melody of impermanence on a lute; and among the humans, she carries a staff and begging bowl, pointing out the way of ultimate liberation which humans alone are capable of following.

Yamaraja and the Klesa

In traversing the six realms, one comes first before Yamaraja, the “Lord of Death,” who holds up his mirror of karma. Yamaraja does not condemn, but rather, through this mirror, allows each person to pronounce his or her own judgment as to their former and future life. Yamaraja himself may also be seen as an aspect of Kannon, who, out of compassion, stirs an individual’s innate need for liberation. Thus, what might otherwise be suffering is transformed into that which has

the power to cleanse and purify. From Yamaraja each member will receive the klesa paper, symbolic of one's greed, anger, and ignorance, which will be offered up at the altar and then burned prior to taking the Precepts. The klesa is represented by a cock, signifying desires, passions and greedy attachment; a pig, symbolizing ignorance and delusion; and a snake, representing anger and hatred. In the traditional depiction the animals are shown biting one another's tails.

Significance of Jukai

Of the Jukai ceremony itself, Zen Master Dogen said, "The Buddhas and Patriarchs have all stated that receiving the precepts is the first step to entering the Way." Zen Master Bassui said, "The precepts are a shortcut for entering the Buddha gate." Taking Jukai is essential for those who wish to

practice Zen as a Buddhist. In fact, it is not until participating in this ceremony that you can truly be said to be a member of the Buddha's family. This is because the Precepts

lay the foundation for practice in the Buddhadharma, setting forth the ethical and spiritual mores for following the Way of the Buddha. It is customary to take Jukai as often as possible. Each time you participate in this ceremony, your resolve to practice and realize the Buddha's Dharma grows stronger.

Important Details – Please Read Carefully

At Great Jukai, after passing through the Six Realms, participants will enter the Buddha Hall to make repentance and 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" which is presented at the altar. This traditional gift represents the practitioner's desire to support the teacher's work in propagating Buddhism.

Because this is one of the most solemn rituals we

observe at the Center, please be sure to wear a clean and pressed robe if you have one. If not, wear dark, solid-colored clothing or, better yet, borrow a robe from the Center. It is also customary to bathe before receiving Jukai and, if possible, to clean one's living quarters as well. Children old enough to participate in the ceremony are welcome to attend. Please be aware, though, that some of the realms, in particular the realm of Hell, may be frightening to younger children. (You may wish to skip that realm if you are with a young child.) Only practicing members of the Sangha and their families may attend. Please do not invite friends who are not practicing Buddhists.

Those receiving rakusus and Buddhist names will have their ceremony in the reception room of the Buddha Building prior to Great Jukai.

Please note that for this ceremony, people will enter and leave the Center via the rear entrance of the Buddha Building. Shoes should be placed on the shoe racks and coats may be hung on hooks in the bedrooms. Robes will be moved from their usual places to the basement of the Buddha Building. No one should enter the Center through the front door.

We sincerely hope you will join us for this special ceremony of Entering the Buddha's Way. —




November 2011 Ceremony Schedule



- Thurs, Fri, Sat , 11/10-12 CEREMONY WORKDAYS FOR GREAT JUKAI
To set up for the ceremony on Sunday. Help Needed!
- Sunday, November 13 GREAT JUKAI — TAKING THE PRECEPTS
9–11 a.m. Expanded Ceremony of Entering the Way of the Buddha passing through the six realm of existence. This ceremony takes place once every four years.
- Thursday, November 17 OXFAM FAST FOR A WORLD HARVEST
6:45–8:30 p.m. Zazen and dokusan, followed by a ceremony for the alleviation of world hunger. Please bring a monetary donation (for Oxfam) and a packaged VEGETARIAN food offering (for the food shelf). The Center matches donations for this famine relief ceremony.
- Saturday, November 19 WORKDAY FOR THANKSGIVING CEREMONY
10 a.m.–noon Please lend a hand if you can.
- Sunday, November 20 THANKSGIVING CEREMONY
9–11 a.m. Zazen followed by ceremony of gratitude. Please bring a packaged VEGETARIAN food offering for the food shelf. Refreshments afterwards. Families and guests welcome!
- Thursday, November 24 THANKSGIVING DAY—CENTER CLOSED
- November 22–28 ZEN CENTER CLOSED

NOVEMBER 2011

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
		1 Term Student Meeting	2	3 Sitting & Set-up	4	5 Workshop
6 Teisho	7	8 Term Student Meeting	9	10 Ceremony Workday	11 Ceremony Workday	12 Dec. Sesshin Deadline Ceremony Workday
13 GREAT JUKAI 	14 metta sitting	15 Term Student Closing Ceremony	16	17 OXFAM CEREMONY	18	19 Ceremony Workday
20 THANKSGIVING CEREMONY	21	22	23	24 THANKSGIVING	25	26
Zen Center Closed for Thanksgiving						
27 Zen Center Closed	28	29 Sitting & Sesshin Set up	30			

Ceremony Workdays

To prepare for the upcoming ceremonies of Great Jukai and Thanksgiving there will be several workdays at the Center. The workdays for Great Jukai are on **THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 10** (during the usual sitting time); all day **FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 11**; AND **SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 12**

(starting as early as people wish and continuing as long as needed). Meals will be provided. There will also be a rehearsal for those involved in the ceremony on **SUNDAY MORNING, NOVEMBER 13 at 10 A.M.**

The workday for the Thanks-giving Ceremony is on **SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 19, 10 A.M. until noon.**

Oxfam Fast for a World Harvest

In this month of abundance, it is sobering to remember that millions of people are hungry all the time. Taking our vows seriously means opening our eyes and hearts to this suffering and resolving to offer help where it is needed.

On **THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 17** we will commemorate the Oxfam Fast for a World Harvest. For this ceremony, the Center will match all donations received, which will be sent to Oxfam America.

Members are encouraged to fast in whatever way they are able and contribute the money

they would have spent on food to Oxfam. Of course, you are free to give as much money as you wish and fasting is not mandatory. In addition to the monetary donation, please bring a vegetarian packaged food offering, which will be sent to the local emergency food shelf.

If you know anyone who would like to participate, please feel free to invite them to the ceremony. (Remind them about the offerings.) The ceremony will take place at **7:50 p.m.**, after the Thursday evening zazen and dokusan. —





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Thanksgiving Ceremony—Expressing Our Gratitude

*My hut at night;
The cricket
Is rummaging about
— Issa*



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A Ceremony of Thanksgiving will be held on **SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 20 at 10:00 A.M.**, after an hour-long informal sitting. Family members of all ages are welcome to attend this special ceremony; everyone is invited to attend the sitting, too, if they wish. Non-sitters could also wait in the living room or come at **10 a.m.** The sitting begins at the usual time of **9:00 a.m.** There will be no dokusan.

During our annual Thanksgiving ceremony, we make food offerings, read words of gratitude, chant, offer incense, circumambulate, and end with a special gatha of gratitude. Afterwards, join us for pie, cider, and bagels.

Please remember to bring a packaged vegetarian food offering for the emergency food shelf. This will be presented at the altar as part of the ceremony. —