

Walking Mountains

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

Dear Sangha and Friends,

It's October and the beginning of what you have so often heard me call Ceremony Season at the Zen Center. And, we get to set up and participate in these activities in our “new” Buddha Hall (given our new zendo). With Term Student Program underway, there are lots of opportunities to fulfill our commitments and more than enough energy to do so. So whether you are washing floors or cleaning altars or arranging flowers, this is an opportunity for practice—nothing more, nothing less.

We begin by honoring our ancestor Bodhidharma at the beginning of the month and ending October with the Hungry Ghost Ceremony. How fitting, too, that we have the Working Persons' Sesshin this month with participants working on the Jataka Tales with Rafe Martin for five days. These stories inspire the commitments we made for the Term Student Program and fill our hearts with gratitude for this practice.

— *Joan White*

Summer Pilgrimage **by Lynne Davis**

For the last number of summers, I have attended the summer training program, followed by the August sesshin. When Sensei announced the opportunity to train at the Center at the very time of the year when college faculty members are able to slip away from campus unnoticed, I couldn't believe my good fortune!

The five day training program is a very intense space. We sit and work. Typically, we rotate through the various areas of keeping the Center operating smoothly: cooking, cleaning,



gardening, and special projects. Under Bonnie Coulter's watchful eye, I have not only learned to make numerous recipes but have been taught effective cooking techniques, such as breaking

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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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an egg into a small glass bowl to check for eggshell before adding it to the larger baking bowl. Ti'an has introduced me to various gardening tools and Joan has coached me to pull out weeds which I thought were pretty plants. Dharman has guided me through the intricacies of cleaning supply inventories, sesshin set-up checklists, and special cleaning projects. And while our responsibilities require great attention, what makes the training program most intense is that all of these activities unfold under Sensei's very diligent eye for detail. Each morning, we have breakfast with Sensei, after which she assigns work responsibilities for the day. There is no question that all of our efforts will be carefully scrutinized.

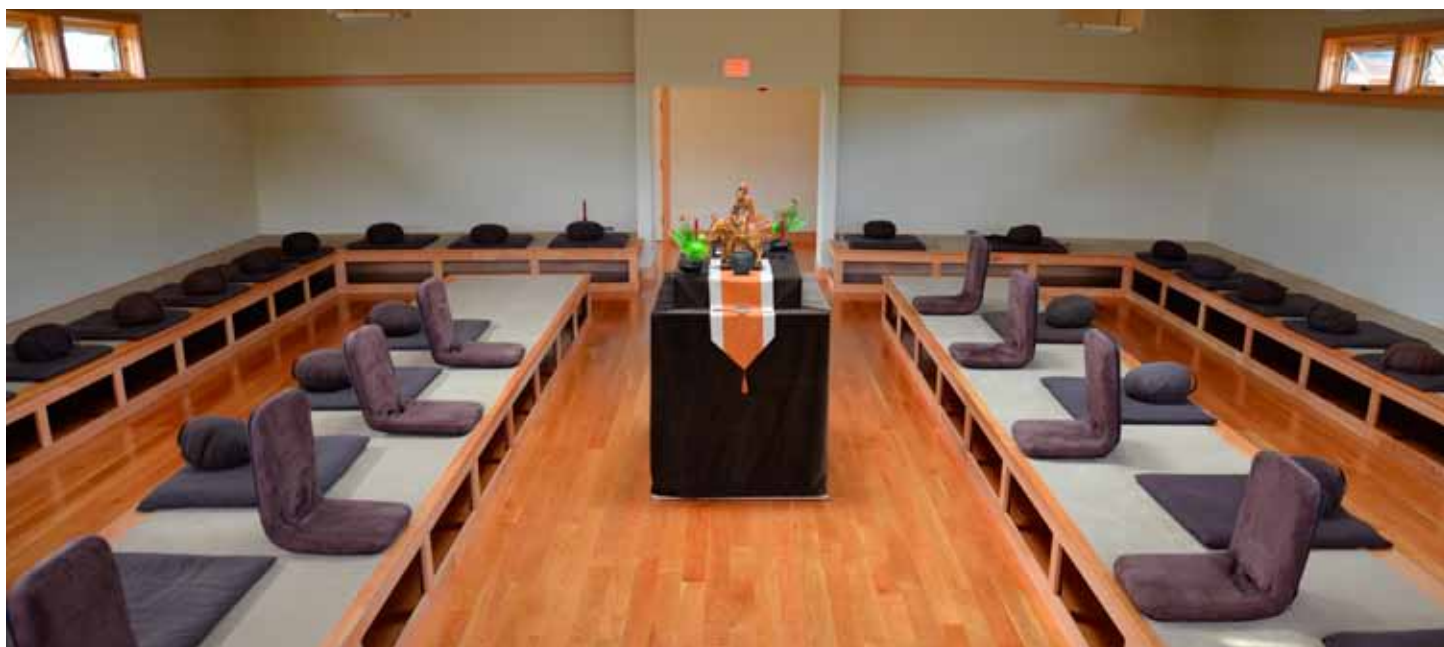
The training program is not always easy. It is an extraordinary opportunity to learn and also to tame ego. When the blueberry

pudding cake sticks to the pan, when one misses dusting in a particular area of the Center, when there are wrinkles in something that is supposed to be ironed perfectly, these are all gifts to learn to do better, and to learn to let go. I remember a teisho that Sensei gave when she talked about how Roshi often criticized staff members but expressed gratitude to outside volunteers for their efforts. She commented that she herself offered criticism because she cares so deeply about our development as bodhisattvas. I was utterly moved by the spirit behind her words. They have helped me to greet criticism with a different heart and mind. Well, at least, it's something to work on.

As the training program unfolds, my mind and body begin to collapse with exhaustion. Thoughts of marking student papers, designing new courses, administrative tasks and research projects all begin

to slip away. The mind becomes increasingly clear. It is as if sesshin has already begun. By the time the training program comes to an end, the slide into sesshin is both welcome and easy.

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For me, a defining moment of the 2011 training program was captured in the kitchen on the last night. Bonnie had mentioned to some people that help was needed in preparing the next morning's breakfast. When I arrived at the kitchen, it was already filled with helpers. Not only had an enthusiastic team assembled, but they were all engaged in learning: two people were tackling the making of muesli for the first time and another person was getting tips on how to cut the bananas just so before putting them into the wooden bowl. Several trainees were trying to figure out how to put together the grating blade of the Cuisinart while I took delight in squeezing

lemons using a new-found amazing device, an electric juicer. As Bonnie poured over the complex task of assembling a shopping list for a 58 person sesshin, she smiled with each interruption, calmly offered advice to the neophyte on how she would tend to approach the daunting task at hand, and spoke words of encouragement. Right down to the very last breath of the training program, Bonnie was presiding with equanimity over a space filled with respect, happy learning and joy. I looked around the room and my heart swelled with gratitude.

Much could be written about the 2011 training program, announced as a "kind of" training program. It took place during the last days

of building the new zendo which was still a construction site as the training program was ending. There were moments during these transitional days that were both historic and profound. I will remember always the tea-and-cake party we held for the construction workers to applaud their extraordinary efforts to complete their work with excellence and at the same time, to meet the impossibly tight deadline. I will remember always our last sitting in the old zendo and the opportunity Sensei gave each of us to share a remembrance in gratitude to the sacred space that had nurtured our practice for so many years. I will remember always the procession

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of senior students carrying the Kannons to inaugurate our brilliantly beautiful new Kannon room, and Sensei's heartfelt words expressing how this new space was the embodiment of a dream-come-true. I will remember always the awe of entering the new building for the first time, skating on rags to help shine the zendo floors, and watching the aspiring zendo transform into a real zendo as each mat and cushion took its place. How deeply planted are these seeds of remembrance in our unfolding practice.

The summer pilgrimage to Vermont always stays with me long after the summer is gone. I bake refrigerator bran muffins for my students, and prepare squash-miso soup for participants in writing retreats at our home. Our garden

tools keep expanding, and a new Jizo garden has sprung up under a tree. A cleaning product is changed to match a new product that has been introduced at the Vermont Zen Center. The continuity between the summer pilgrimage and everyday life grows ever more seamless year-by-year, as do the deep friendships with dharma sisters and brothers. This is our continuous practice together. —



Recollections from Jataka Tales Sesshin

by Josh Kelman

With our third Jataka Tales Sesshin approaching, I'm recalling how rewarding it was to participate in the first two. This sesshin takes place during the term student program and features readings from the Jatakas; stories of the lives of the Buddha. Rafe Martin reads from his renderings of the Jatakas and gives commentaries. Rafe's translations provide the practice context for these stories using language from our own culture. The Buddha's lives range from animal to royalty to poverty. But they all paint a picture of the Bodhisattva Path. During this sesshin we spend our normal work days at our workplace as we strive to integrate our practice into our daily lives. In effect, we get to apply each day in our own lives what was presented the previous evening from the Buddha's lives.

These tales offer a perspective of long term practice we can easily lose sight of (although if we are listening closely to our teacher it has always been there). We can unconsciously slip into viewing the bodhisattva path as the exclusive domain of Kannon and the great masters down through the ages. But these stories of beings with family, careers and character struggles seem a closer fit to our lives. My personal struggles can be seen within the context of my own bodhisattva path. Granted,

a practice light years less mature than that of the Jatakas, but nonetheless it is the path. Career choices, humbling attachments and interpersonal issues are now more often seen in the big picture as only stumbling steps along the way.

How often we hear at various times in various contexts that we should be grateful for our pain, our difficulties, our struggles. This is what propels growth. Usually I swallow this with bitter resignation. But these stories bring to life the never-say-die energy of Prince Five Weapons, the beyond-pain selflessness of the Monkey King and the Sage Little Bowman's rising beyond his deformities. These stories have power and they burrow deep into us uncovering our own determination. Similarly, reflecting on the vast scope of these stories, I find that patience takes on new perspective. On the one hand, when there are kalpas upon kalpas of self-work on the horizon, impatience loses some of its power to magnify today's shortcoming. On the other hand, some of these habits grip so deeply it seems that it will take forever to exhaust them. Well, we will be working on them, essentially, forever.

Our vow to dedicate our practice for the sake of all beings is given animated life in these stories. Our vow, our purpose for practice is for the sake of all beings.

“... our story teller brings to life these ageless existential tales as if they just happened in our backyards.”

The Jatakas put flesh on these bones and demonstrate concrete application over and over again in fresh circumstances. Circumstances we all, in our own way, come up against. I say to myself, “Yes, this is what the vow is. This is why I practice. This is purpose.”

I cannot overstate how fortunate we are for what Rafe has done with these stories. The scholarly direct translations available are quite terse and dry. Coming from an oral tradition, perhaps they were meant to be outlines for the story teller to flesh out. Well, our story teller brings to life these ageless existential tales as if they just happened in our backyards. Come to think of it, they did! —

"Once you stop clinging and let things be, you'll be free, even of birth and death. You'll transform everything. You'll possess spiritual powers that can't be obstructed. And you'll be at peace wherever you are."

— Zen Master Bodhidharma

On **Thursday, October 13** we honor our great ancestor, Bodhidharma, the founder of Zen. Following two periods of sitting, we will have a chanting service with circumambulation and incense offerings. Children and family members are cordially invited. The ceremony will be during the evening sitting and will begin around **7:50 p.m**



beings, it is also a time to remember all beings who have died in the preceding year. After the ceremony proper, a fire is lit at which time people offer the names of deceased loved ones.

The ceremony is also an opportunity to appease our personal ghosts—the voracious demons who fill us with passions for food, drink, recognition, possessions, money, and all manner of unhappiness. As such, the ceremony is one of personal, as well as other-worldly, cleansing, appeasement, and renewal. It is an expression of our compassionate concern for beings in all realms.

At our Center, we combine the Hungry Ghost Ceremony with a Halloween celebration. Children are especially welcome, so please extend a cordial invitation to all your family members. Friends and relatives who are not Sangha members are also invited. Come in street clothes or wear a costume if you wish.

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Ceremony for the Liberation of Hungry Ghosts

A Ceremony for the Liberation of Hungry Ghosts will be held on **Sunday, October 30 at 10:30 a.m.** During this observance, we offer food and drink to the hungry, thirsty inhabitants of the preta realm.

Hungry ghosts, or pretas, are beings in a sub-human state of development. Due to their extreme greed in prior lifetimes, they have been reborn into a state where they constantly suffer from hunger and thirst. Their stomachs are grossly distended, their limbs are emaciated, and their mouths are as small as the eye of a needle. Whatever they eat turns to poison; whatever they drink turns to fire.

According to legend, Moggallana, a disciple of the Buddha, was plagued by nightmares

of his mother being tormented in a realm in which she could neither eat nor drink. The Buddha told Moggallana that his mother was in the realm of pretas, and he should try to help her overcome her bad karma through a special ceremony.

During the Hungry Ghost Ceremony, we chant sutras and make offerings of food and water to the beings of the preta realm. In making this gift we must overcome our own greed, thereby setting an example for the hungry ghosts. This freely-offered food and drink does not turn into poison or fire, which is why at many Buddhist homes and temples small bowls are passed at the beginning of each meal to make offerings to the hungry ghosts.

Although the ceremony is directed particularly to these



OCTOBER

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
					Oct. Sesshin Deadline	1
2 Taped Teisho	3	4 Term Student	5 Metta Course	6	7	8
Costa Rica 7-Day Sesshin (10/1-8)						
9 Taped Teisho	10 metta sitting	11 Term Student Meeting	12	13 BODHIDHARMA DAY CEREMONY	14	15
16 Sesshin Set up	17	18 Term Student Meeting	19	20	21	22 VT Jataka Sesshin
23	24	25	26	27	28	29 Ceremony Workday
VT Jataka Working Persons' Sesshin with Rafe Martin (10/21-28)						
30 HUNGRY GHOST CEREMONY	31					

Please bring a canned or dry vegetarian food offering for each member of your party. Everyone will give this gift to the hungry ghosts during the ceremony. Afterwards it is taken to a food shelf.

We hope you will join us in this ceremony of aid for the beings in the realm of the Hungry Ghosts.

Hungry Ghost Ceremony Workday

Saturday, October 29 from 10 to 12 is a workday to set up for the Hungry Ghost Ceremony. Come help turn the Center into a spooky, haunted house, replete with ghosts and goblins, carved pumpkins, and lots of goodies for the Hungry Ghosts. Read more about the ceremony on page 6. *Please bring a canned or dry vegetarian food offering.*





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*An autumn evening;
It is no light thing,
To be born a man.
— Issa*

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2012 SESSHINS/RETREATS/TRAINING PROGRAMS			
	COSTA RICA	VERMONT	Vermont Sesshin Application Deadlines
JANUARY	7-12 (5 days) ³		
FEBRUARY		18-25 (7 days)	January 28
APRIL	10-15 (5 days) ⁴	21-28 (7 days) ¹	March 31
JUNE		23-28 (5 days) ²	June 2
JULY	12-15 (3 days)	7/29-8/3 (5 days) ⁴	
AUGUST		4-11 (7 days)	July 14
SEPTEMBER		27-30 (3 days) ⁵	
OCTOBER	6-13 (7 days)	19-26 (7 days) ³	September 29
DECEMBER		8-15 (7 days)	November 17
¹ Work Sesshin ² Open Schedule Retreat ³ Jataka Tale Sesshin ⁴ Training Program ⁵ Gardening Weekend			