

Walking Mountains

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

Dear Sangha and Friends,

Emerging from the winter solstice, January’s light grows and blossoms into February. And the light reflecting off the willows’ yellow and the maples’ red buds awakens our world again. What a great opportunity to bring forth our “beginner’s mind” – new and old practitioners alike – a resurgence of energy corresponding to that of nature’s all around us.

The New Year ceremony calls us into renewed action; the Kannon Ceremony beckons us to compassionate living; preparation for and participation in workshops reminds us to share and manifest the Dharma; the Buddha’s Parinirvana Ceremony tells us that life passes quickly; the annual meeting brings us together as one. Don’t miss a moment. Please join us.

– *Joan White*



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Finding My Way by Jason Miller



I suspect that my journey to Zen practice is a familiar one in the sense that few American Buddhists are born into the religion. However, unlike many of the first wave of American converts, students of Suzuki Roshi, Kapleau Roshi, and others, I had no religious tradition to turn away from. My parents were children of the sixties who rejected the Christianity of their parents and raised me without religion. Aside from very occasional trips to church with my grandmothers or a midnight Mass with my mother (for old time’s sake), I never set foot inside a church.

(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.

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I was steeped instead in the materialism, consumerism, and individualism that are the hallmarks of secular American life. This is not to say that my parents were proponents of these values. Indeed, they often cast a critical eye at the vapidness of what passed for culture. I had no spiritual foundation to undergird my perception of the world. The vacuum was filled with a utilitarian conception of the relationships between people, other creatures and the natural world. I had a nihilistic view of why we are here.

But in my heart, I've always known that the world is much richer and more textured than any philosophy could describe or explain. Sensing this, I've been pulled toward religion and, in particular, toward communities that live their values. In this country, those communities are primarily Christian. I have had spiritual experiences while spending time with believers who are truly committed to their way and bring it alive through their deeds. But because I have never been able to believe the Judeo-Christian theology, it was never anything I could join and still remain true to myself. I found myself stymied and falling forever back toward the position that life itself was without meaning and that the worth of everything could be quantified.

Throughout my life, even as I struggled to reconcile my heart and my mind, I read Zen and other Buddhist books. I understood

it intellectually and resolved to meditate. That's the way to make it a part of my life, right? For a few days I would do it, but nothing would happen, so I'd stop. Sure, I'd heard the adage that Zen books are dead Zen, but I didn't know how to take my interest further.

My wife Rachael's chance meeting with Sangha member Nina Thompson changed that. Together we signed up for a workshop last May and became members in June. Since then, I've been sitting

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most mornings at the Center and attending as many of the other events as possible. I feel such joy to be a part of the Sangha and to be with people who are working to understand the Way.

I enjoy being a beginner—the freshness of starting each day in the zendo and going to evening sittings; attending teishos, ceremonies, and celebrations. Learning the cycle of the Buddhist year, from Vesak to Term Student to Rohatsu is an opportunity to gain knowledge of the traditions. Learning the names of fellow Sangha members, the different

parts of the Center; this newness is invigorating, yet I know it is transient.

So, I focus on the timelessness of this practice, working to live in alignment with the commitments I make. Each time that I chant the Four Vows it reminds me of why we are here and how we should live. As a term student, I pledge to deepen my practice. At Jukai, I repent my past misdeeds and take the precepts.

Unlike the man who has lost his

keys in the dark and is looking for them under the streetlight, I am finally feeling for the truth where I have a chance to find it. Knowing that a person like me, over 2,500 years ago, discovered the way to end suffering and shared the teaching, strengthens my resolve. That the teaching has been transmitted from teacher to student all the way to the present day awes me. That I have access to it and need only become present to it gives me courage to face life as it is. I am grateful for this practice, this Sangha, and this Center. —



The Lovingkindness of Snowplowing

by Dharman Rice

Although I've lived in Vermont since 1970, I'm still not considered a native. Yet, in the morning darkness after the passing of a big snowstorm, while taking our dog Sophie out for her early *toilette*, I hear the state and town plows; and I feel completely at home—here in Vermont and in the world at large.

The plow blades make the most reassuring sounds, scraping the pavement on the state highways down in the valley and the gravel of the town roads up in the hills. If it's clear, and the stars are hanging over the hills, I can hear plows miles away faithfully doing their work.

Some would say that we humans are essentially, or even exclusively, preoccupied with our own private appetites and interests and that the common good will only emerge from our

continuous struggles with similarly struggling neighbors.

The symphony of those snowplows, however, tells a different story. It is the parade of human life. The snowplow operators are agents of our everyday care and concern for one another and the common welfare.

One of the simplest and loveliest stories about the Buddha involves his overhearing his cousin and longtime attendant Ananda explaining to a novice monk that friendship is half of Buddhist practice. "Don't say that, Ananda," the Buddha said. "Friendship is the whole of Buddhist practice."

Friendship, the unselfconscious concern for the welfare of others (and of ourselves), is the whole of genuine human practice. No fancy posturing is necessary or helpful.

The crystalline, star-filled sky

with the crescent moon in the southwest, the deer tracks in the fresh snow behind the barn, one of the town plows making its welcome noises as it pushes snow to the side on its way down our town road: what a wonderful world Sophie and I look at and listen to on such mornings.

Whenever there is a huge snowstorm, I cannot help but think of the operators of the big state and town plows. I've met several of them over the years, and I know how rightly proud they are of the work they do. It is socially useful work, and all of us who use the roads in winter are beholden to them.

May those operators—and we too, in large part because of their efforts—be happy and safe driving during the winter months. And all the rest of our lives. —



*She of the true gaze,
she of the pure gaze,
gaze of great
and encompassing
wisdom,
gaze of pity,
gaze of compassion,
ever longed for,
ever revered...*

*Her eye of compassion
views all
sentient beings.*

*Her ocean of blessings
is beyond measure.*

*Therefore you should
pay homage to her.*

Special Ceremony Honoring Kannon

**On Sunday, January 20
from 9:00 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 photos and names of those to whom the ceremony is being dedicated.

HOME ALTAR FIGURES— There is a special altar for Kannon figures from your home altars. Important: Please bring them to the Center on the workday prior to the ceremony.

WORKDAY— On **Saturday, January 19 at 10 a.m.** there will be a work period to prepare for the ceremony. Please join us if you can, and don't forget to bring your Kannon figures.

DONATION— As a concrete expression of compassion, please bring a monetary donation which will be given to Harbor Place, a homeless shelter in Shelburne. **Please note that checks should be made out to the Zen Center so that we can send Harbor Place one check from the Sangha as a whole.**

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. —

January 2019

| Sunday | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | Saturday |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|--------------------------------------------------|--------|------------------------------------------|
| | | 1 Zen Center Closed | 2 | 3 PM ZAZEN | 4 | 5 |
| 6 Teisho | 7 AM ZAZEN MON-FRI Tai Chi 1 Finding Your Seat Meeting | 8 PM ZAZEN Zoom Dokusan | 9 | 10 PM ZAZEN Sitting & Workshop Prep | 11 | 12 Workshop |
| 13 Teisho | 14 AM ZAZEN MON-FRI Tai Chi 2 | 15 PM ZAZEN Zoom Dokusan Chanting | 16 | 17 PM ZAZEN | 18 | 19 Ceremony Workday |
| 20 Kannon Ceremony | 21 Zen Center Closed Tai Chi 3 | 22 PM ZAZEN Zoom Dokusan AM ZAZEN TUE-FRI | 23 | 24 PM ZAZEN | 25 | 26 Indian Cooking Course Chaat |
| 27 Annual Sangha Meeting | 28 AM ZAZEN MON-FRI Tai Chi 4 | 29 PM ZAZEN Zoom Dokusan | 30 | 31 PM ZAZEN Famine Relief Ceremony | | |

February 2019

| Sunday | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | Saturday |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|------------------------------------|---------------------------------|----------|
| | | | | | 1 Retreat Deadline | 2 |
| 3 ROSHI IN CR Sitting followed by Advance Care presentation & discussion | 4 AM ZAZEN MON-FRI Finding Your Seat Meeting Tai Chi Course 5 | 5 PM ZAZEN Chanting | 6 | 7 PM ZAZEN | 8 | 9 |
| | | Costa Rica 5-Day Jataka Sesshin | | | | |
| 10 Sitting & Retreat Prep | 11 AM ZAZEN MON-FRI | 12 PM ZAZEN Zoom Dokusan The Buddha's Parinirvana Ceremony | 13 | 14 PM ZAZEN Retreat Prep | 15 Vermont 2-Day Retreat | 16 |
| 17 Retreat | 18 Zen Center Closed | 19 PM ZAZEN Zoom Dokusan AM ZAZEN TUE-FRI | 20 | 21 PM ZAZEN Chanting | 22 Roshi on Break | 23 |
| 24 Taped Teisho | 25 AM ZAZEN MON-FRI | 26 PM ZAZEN Chanting | 27 | 28 PM ZAZEN | | |
| | | Roshi on Break through March 22 | | | | |
| | Tai Chi Course 6 | | | | | |

Upcoming Courses

Indian Cooking—Chaat

Chaat are the savory-spicy-tangy snack foods enjoyed in India. They are utterly delicious and addictive! Chaat originated in instructor Manju Selinger's home state of Uttar Pradesh, and she is an expert in their preparation. Manju will guide you through the process of preparing the chaat, which all will enjoy for lunch at 1 p.m. With a cookbook of the recipes in hand and practical experience from the Zen Center's cooks, you will be ready to prepare delicious Indian snacks for your family and friends. No cooking experience is necessary.

Date: Saturday, January 26

Time: 9 a.m.-2 p.m.

Fee: \$85 non member, \$75 member discount



For more information and to register, please go to www.vermontzen.org/indian_cooking_chaat.

Tai Chi

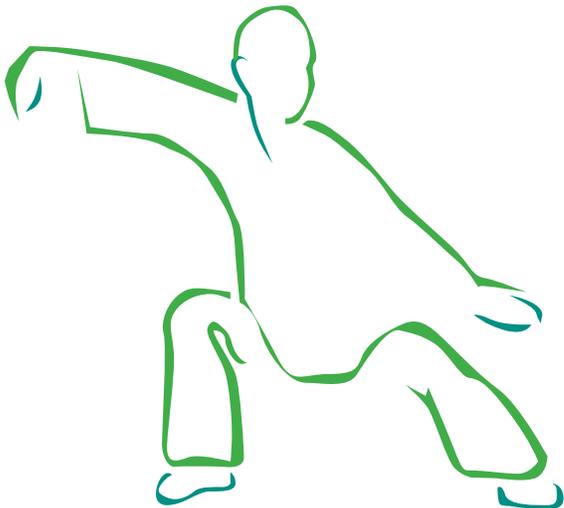
Tai Chi offers many benefits for health, relaxation, and concentration. A Tai Chi practitioner is mindful during each posture and movement, allowing the chi energy to flow throughout the body. There are numerous medical studies demonstrating the physical and mental benefits of Tai Chi, including for many people with arthritic and neurological conditions.

Dr. Eric Berger offers several six-week courses in Tai Chi at the Vermont Zen Center. The next one begins on January 7. Each hour-long Monday evening session includes instruction, practice periods, and Q&A. These courses fill almost immediately, so sign up soon to reserve your space.

Time: Mondays 7:30-8:30 p.m. and 6:30-7:30 p.m. (for those who have taken at least five prior courses)

Dates: January 7, 15, 21, 28, February 4 and 25

Fee: \$100 for the six classes



More information and registration is available on the Zen Center's website at www.vermontzen.org/taichi.html

Annual Meeting Sunday, January 27, 9:30-11:30 a.m.

The Sangha is invited to participate in our Annual Meeting to help plan for the year ahead. We will discuss the Center's finances, next 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.

The meeting will be followed by a pot-luck lunch. Your family is cordially invited to join us at 11:30. Out-of-towners can Zoom-in to the meeting. If you'd like to do so, please get in touch with Ramiro.



Annual Meeting Agenda

- 2018 Financial Report
- 2019 Preliminary Budget
- Committee Review – reports from the following committees: *Ceremony, Kitchen, Housekeeping, Library, Outdoor, Courses, Newsletter, Finding Your Seat, Prison, Kannon*
- Casa Zen Report
- Miscellaneous

The Buddha's Parinirvana

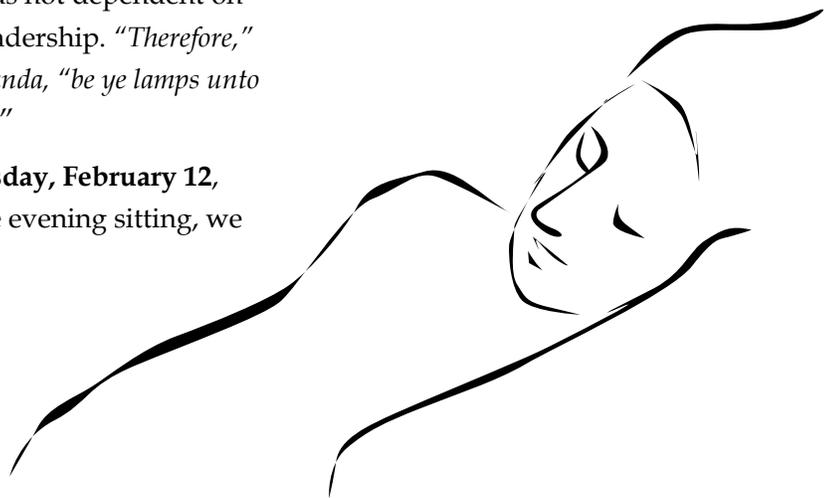
For 45 years the Buddha, after attaining Perfect Enlightenment, preached the Dharma to all who would listen, devoting himself to the welfare of all living beings. But in his eightieth year, during the seclusion of the rainy season, he suddenly fell ill. Feeling that his time, though near, had not yet 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 Tuesday, February 12, during the evening 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.





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*In the icy moonlight,
Small stones
Crunch underfoot.
-Buson*

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Our deepest gratitude to all of you who so generously contributed to the 2018 Annual Appeal and to all of you who plan to do so.

In running our temple, we turn to our members and friends to ask for support.

Your willingness to offer your time and energy, as well as your generosity with financial contributions, enables us to maintain this place of practice which is truly a treasure. Your contribution helps ensure that the Wheel of the Dharma keeps turning and the doors of our temple are kept wide open.

Thank you for your dedication, support, and generosity!

*Thank
You*