

# Walking Mountains

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

*Dear Sangha and Friends,*

This month we celebrate the Buddha’s birth and we honor Roshi Phillip Kapleau – two ceremonies connecting the events and lives of those more than 2,500 years apart – and in so doing, all that lies between them. Continuous practice.

How fitting we honor them in the spring when our world is abundant with the rebirth of nature. The frogs down at the frog pond tuning up and a chorus of tree toads throwing their trilling voices from tree to tree as we come and go at the Zen Center. How fitting that we finish the month with the Garden Intensive, working together in the gardens. It brings to mind this jewel from W. S. Merwin:

By The Front Door

*Rain through the morning  
and in the long pool a toad singing  
happiness old as water*

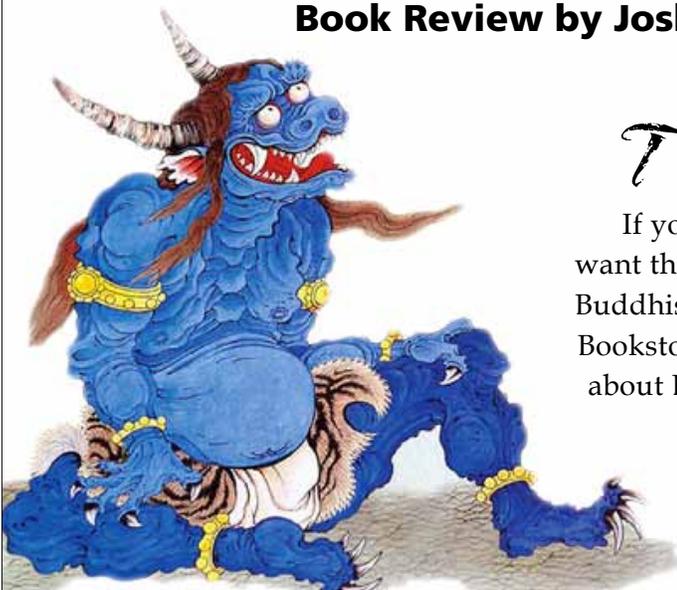
We sit. We chant. We practice Metta. We walk the same path. Please join us.

— *Joan White*

## Before Buddha Was Buddha

by Rafe Martin

**Book Review by Josh Kelman**



**T**his ought to be a three word review: *Read this book!*

If you are a practitioner, or want the inside story of what Buddhist practice is, read this book. Bookstore shelves groan with books about Buddhism. But Buddhism is a practice and not about acquiring knowledge. Sensei Martin’s book

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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.*

(Continued from page 1)

concerns itself squarely with practice. In *Before Buddha Was Buddha*, we have 18 jataka tales, stories the Buddha told of his past lives, presented simply. Each is followed by Sensei Martin's commentary in which he mines practice gold from them.

Sensei Martin continually takes us from the lofty to the ordinary. Do the Buddha's exertions seem superhuman? Well, he was also a musician who lost confidence, a quail who could not convince his flock to avoid danger, a robber who had compassion for his victims, a clinging gardener who just could not let go, a poor man desiring a life of ease, and a tiny parrot seemingly helpless in a world ablaze. Tough choices. Not unlike our own choices.

The stories are poignant because they are inevitably personal. The Buddha's quest for enlightenment and compassion for all beings is ever-present, but often overwhelmed by sticky everyday habits. Sound familiar? The same excuses we use, the same fears we have, the same self-doubt we experience, the Buddha had too. These aeons old storylines look remarkably like our own in so many ways. As indeed they are. And the Buddha did not let these deluded habit patterns stop him; he always pressed on. And so do we. Sensei Martin's commentary always

returns the tales to our life, our practice, our choices, our difficulties.

A common theme in these stories is a core koan for us. Why is the world filled with suffering? Why do innocents suffer? How can we end our own suffering? The jataka tales face this head on and pull no punches. We see the Buddha at various times in desperate poverty, enslaved, slain and expelled from a sangha for being born into the untouchable caste. And for each of these painful life situations there was cause.

Sensei Martin says,

*Given our complex mix of karma, which classical Buddhism says extends through an endless past, painful things not easy to swallow or digest are going to happen.*

And so,

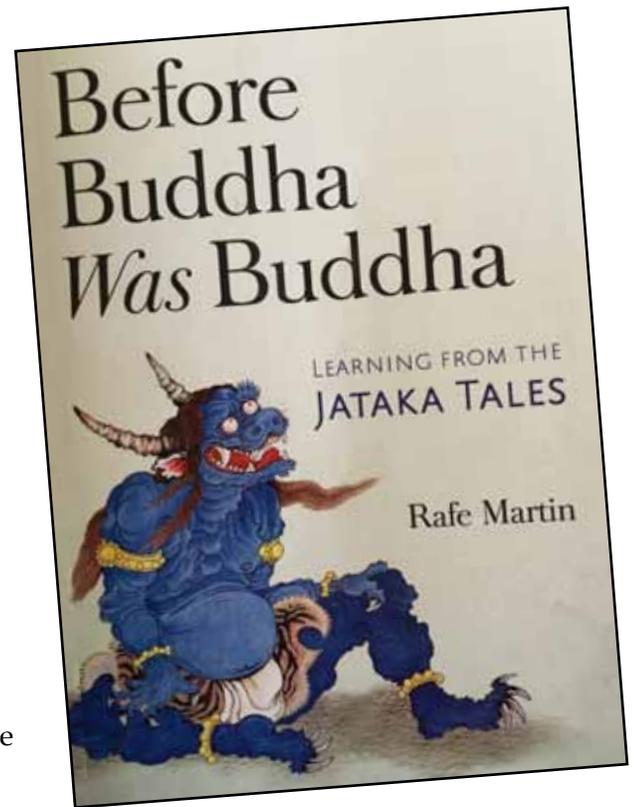
*Freedom from difficulties is not the freedom we are going to find. Freedom to accept our karma fully is.*

What to do?

*It is the effort to be fully present that turns the tide.*

Always back to practice.

These are not stories designed to make us feel better or to promise



miracles. They are a light that shines on the Path making it easier for us to see, and to return to it when we have strayed off.

These jataka stories and commentaries portray karma and rebirth like nothing else I'm aware of. Explanations abound but inevitably fall short. Therefore, our debt to Sensei Martin is immense. This book, his previous books, and the jataka tale teisho many of us have been privileged to hear, are unique and precious. The Buddha told these stories as a vehicle to present these teachings. Sensei Martin has taken them and, as Zen Master Mumon might say, peeled them like a lychee nut and placed them in our mouths. —

# A Bow to People Following the Way in Prison

by Eric Berger

Over the past several years, I've had the opportunity and privilege to correspond with people from all over the country who are incarcerated in prisons and who practice the Dharma. Much of what I've read has been inspiring.

While we reside at home, coming and going in generally safe conditions, free to practice the Dharma in a stable and supportive Sangha, our Dharma brothers and sisters in prison often practice in conditions literally the opposite of ours. They have written about being mocked while they sit in meditation. Worse, they are sometimes threatened. At other times, some inmates will deliberately shout and create distractions to interfere with a meditator. One person wrote about being physically attacked in his cell, the very place where he sits zazen. Imagine sitting on your mat while enduring shrieks, threats, and insults, or walking in kinhin and suddenly being attacked. And to endure this daily.

Often, they are not allowed mats or zafus and have to roll up their blankets to sit on the floor. A number of prisons also have restrictions on certain books and some will not allow used books to be sent to people who are hungry for spiritual growth.

Inmates are separated from their friends and families. They endure confinement, threats, and insults where they practice, the very opposite of our circumstances. Yet many of our Dharma brothers and sisters still meditate, do prostrations, practice the precepts, and continue on.

These are only some of the examples that have been shared. Other challenges and ways of coping and practicing the Dharma in prison can be read in Calvin Malone's book, *Razor Wire Dharma*, (which was returned by one particular institution on the grounds it had scenes of potential violence and was not suitable for reading). If any of us wishes to read and be inspired by this book no one will stop us. It's a click away at an online bookstore.

To paraphrase Issa, "And yet, and yet..." what comes through in the letters from many of these people is a strong determination to persist in their Dharma practice. They keep going. I can't recall the number of times I've written how I can only imagine the challenges they face, the obstacles they must practice through, and how inspiring it is to my practice that they do so.

It's important to state that many of the people who correspond have openly shared

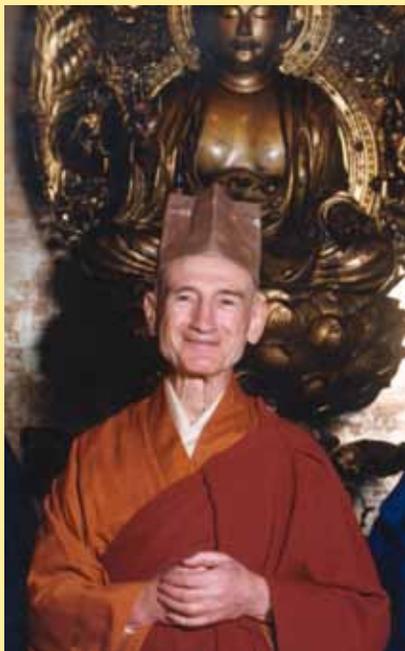
and acknowledged the reasons for their imprisonment. They've written how they recognize how their prior decisions and actions lead to their current circumstances. Whether they state it explicitly or not, they recognize the workings of causation.

At the same time, many have also written about the beneficial effects of causation through their Dharma practice. Over the years, I've happily read many statements such as, "I'm more calm and peaceful than I used to be," "I'm not as angry as before," "I've learned to go with the flow more easily." What comes through from many is sincerity and ongoing effort. This has inspired my own practice and I've written of this in many letters.

As Roshi mentioned at the annual meeting, over the years, a number of prisoners have written to thank her and the Sangha for our newsletter. I've heard this as well. People have written how the articles help them to feel in touch with other Dharma practitioners and help them in their own practice.

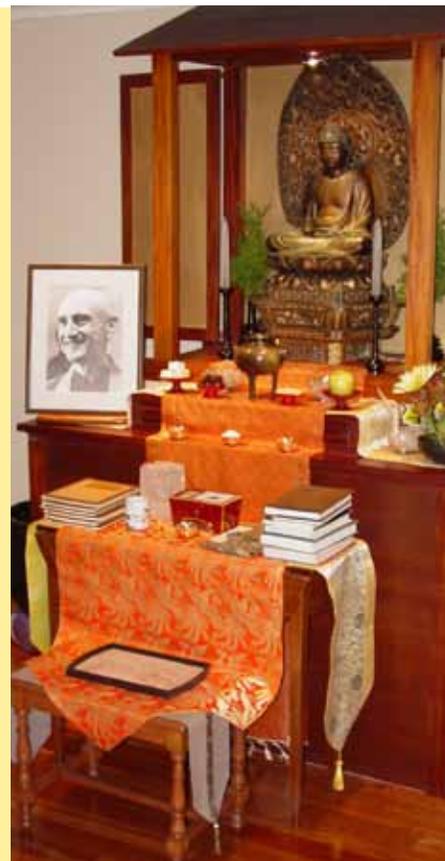
Their gratitude, by extension, encompasses all those who work on the newsletter: Joan, Roshi, Kelly, Greg, Maria, newsletter contributors, Sangha members who help prepare the newsletter for mailing, and ultimately to all the Sangha. —

# Events in Honor of Roshi Kapleau



**R**oshi Philip Kapleau passed away on May 6, 2004 at the age of 91. As is our tradition, a special **Day of Remembrance** honoring Roshi will be held at the Center on Sunday, May 6.

On this day we will have an extended sitting **beginning at 8 a.m. and ending around 2 p.m.** with a pot luck lunch. During the day there will be a special chanting service including the memorial prayer. There will also be dokusan, and one of Roshi Kapleau's taped teishos will be played. Don't forget to bring some vegetarian food to share.



## Indian Cooking Course: Weekend Lunch



Learn how to prepare a delicious and authentic weekend vegetarian Indian meal in the Vermont Zen Center's spacious kitchen under the careful guidance of Manju Selinger. Manju's courses are very popular and fill up quickly as they are limited to eight people. So, if you're interested, sign up soon!

**Date:** Saturday, May 26

**Time:** 9:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.

**Fee:** \$85 (\$75 member discount)

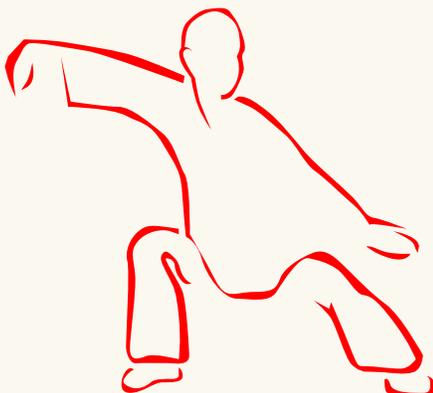
More information and registration is available on the Zen Center's website at

[www.vermontzen.org/indian\\_cooking\\_lunch.html](http://www.vermontzen.org/indian_cooking_lunch.html)

# May 2018

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
		1 PM ZAZEN	2	3 PM ZAZEN <b>Famine Relief Ceremony</b>	4	5 Ceremony Workday
6 <b>Roshi Kapleau Memorial Extended Sitting</b>	7 AM ZAZEN MON-FRI <i>Finding Your Seat Meeting</i> Tai Chi Course 1	8 PM ZAZEN	9	10 PM ZAZEN Sitting & Workshop Prep	11	12 Workshop
13 Teisho	14 AM ZAZEN MON-FRI Tai Chi Course 2	15 PM ZAZEN Chanting	16 Garden Intensive Deadline	17 PM ZAZEN	18 Vesak Workday	19 Vesak Workday
20 <b>VESAK</b> 	21 ZC CLOSED Tai Chi Course 3	22 AM ZAZEN TUE-FRI PM ZAZEN	23	24 Set up for Garden Intensive	25	26 Indian Cooking Course: Weekend Lunch
27 ZC CLOSED FOR MEMORIAL DAY	28 Tai Chi Course 4	29 PM ZAZEN Chanting or Work Period	30 VT Garden Work Intensive . . .	31		

## Tai Chi Course



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.

Eric Berger offers two Tai Chi classes on Monday evenings in six-week courses offered four times a year. An additional four-week course is offered in November. For all courses, the first hour is for those who have taken a minimum of five prior courses with Eric. The second hour is for those who are new to the practice of Tai Chi or for those who have not completed five courses.

The next set of courses begins on **May 7**. Each hour-long Monday evening session includes instruction, practice periods, and Q&A.

**Time:** Mondays 6:30-7:30 p.m. and 7:30-8:30 p.m.

**Dates:** May 7, 14, 21, 28, June 4, 11

**Fee:** \$100 for the six classes

More information and registration is available on the Zen Center's website at [www.vermontzen.org/taichi.html](http://www.vermontzen.org/taichi.html)

# Vesak 2018



## The Buddha's Birthday Celebration

**V**esak, the celebration honoring the birth of Shakyamuni Buddha, will be on Sunday, May 20, beginning at 10 a.m. According to tradition, the Buddha was born on April 8. However, for purely practical reasons we celebrate this event in May when the weather is warmer and we can be outdoors.

Of all the Buddhist holidays, this one is the most fun. After all, it's a birthday party! People of all ages are most welcome.

Following the ceremony is a potluck picnic. Please bring a vegetarian dish to share. The Center will provide plates, cups and utensils as well as drinks and birthday cake.

Part of the ceremony is to present a small, wrapped baby gift for the Buddha which is later donated to the Lund Home. Presents need not be expensive—diapers, pacifiers, bottles, bibs, booties, rattles—anything is appreciated. Please also bring a flower offering for the baby Buddha.

We hope to see you there!

### Workdays **Friday, May 18 and Saturday, May 19**



Please lend a hand whenever you can. Help is greatly needed and truly appreciated with setting up for the Buddha's Birthday Celebration on Sunday.

*Workdays start at 10 a.m.*

### Vesak: The Buddha's Birthday Celebration Sunday, May 20—10:00 a.m.

- Story of the Buddha's Birth
- Songs, Elephant Parade, Sleeping Sage
- Potluck Picnic & Buddha's Birthday Cake
- Gift for Children

### Remember to bring

- a flower offering
- a baby gift
- a vegetarian dish to share

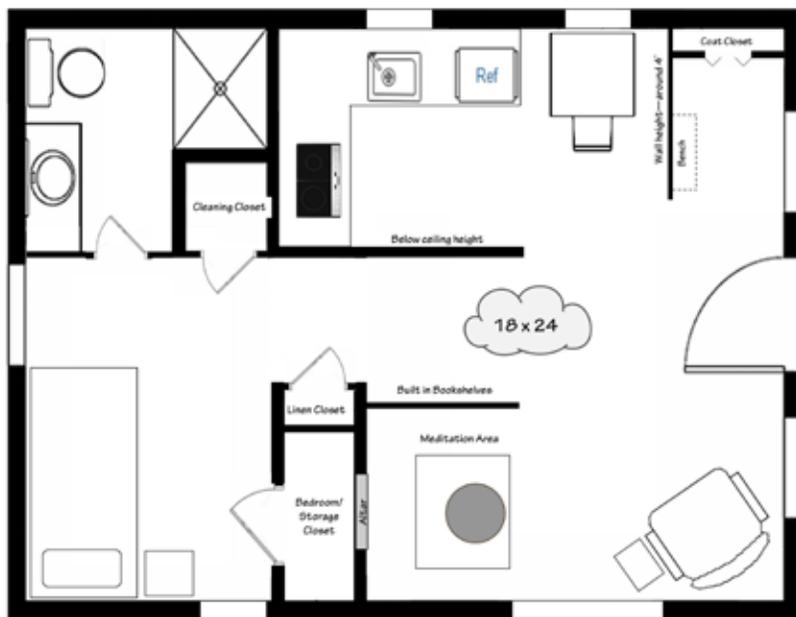


# Save the Date!

We hope you will join us on Sunday, July 15, for our  
*30th Anniversary Celebration.*

More details coming.

## Retreat Cabin



As part of our 30th anniversary year, we are hoping to complete the final phase of our temple complex with the construction of a small cabin for private solo retreats for members and the general public.

The proposed retreat cabin will be situated near the Zen Center, but by itself. Unlike many retreat cabins, our space will have a kitchen and a bathroom, as well as electricity, and be usable year-round. Although modest in size—18 x 24—it will be large enough for walking meditation and exercise so that the retreatant will have the option to remain indoors for total seclusion.

More information coming soon. —



## Vermont Zen Center

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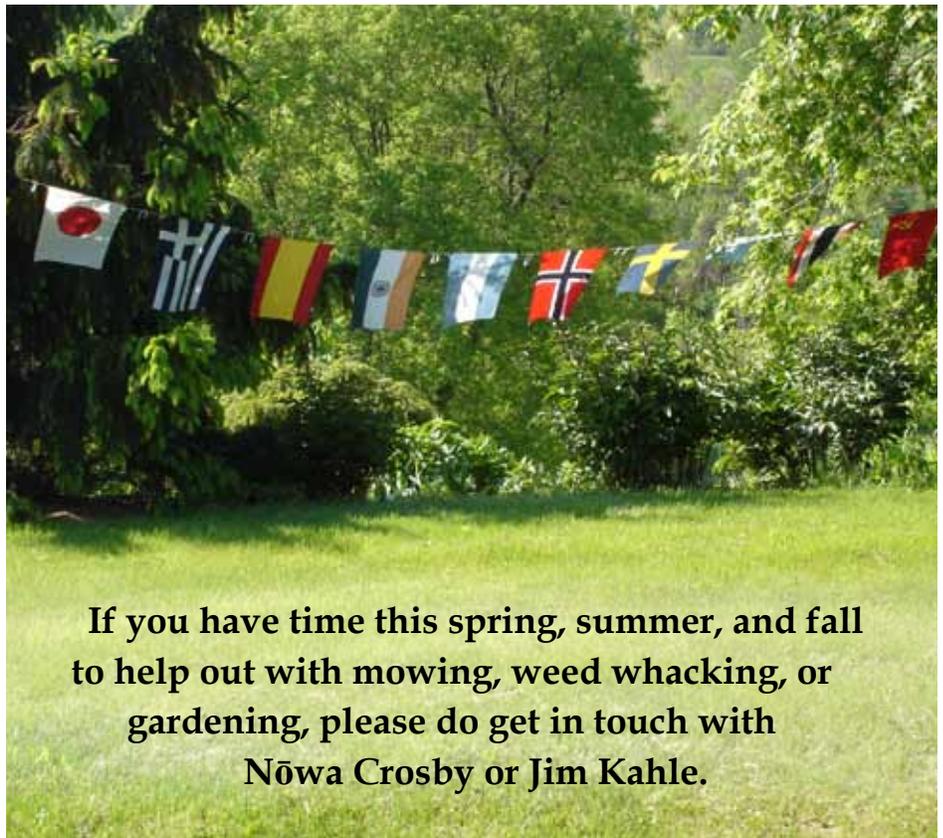
*The soft breeze,  
And in the green of a thousand hills,  
A single temple.*

*-Shiki*

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### CONTRIBUTORS:

- Eric Berger
- Josh Kelman
- Greg Sheldon, *proofreading*
- Kelly Story, *production*
- Joan White, *editor*
- Maria Delia Crosby, *layout*



**If you have time this spring, summer, and fall  
to help out with mowing, weed whacking, or  
gardening, please do get in touch with  
Nōwa Crosby or Jim Kahle.**