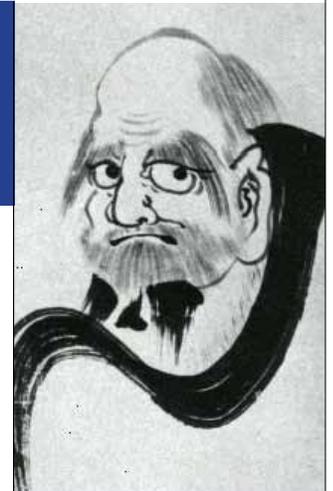


# Walking Mountains

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



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*Dear Sangha and Friends,*

The Term Student Program begins this month and Dharma sisters and brothers come together to support one another to ensure each other’s success in attaining whatever goal has been set. But this program also calls for the support of family members, friends, and even neighbors, as they make sacrifices and provide support to Term Students as well. It’s a time when we’re reminded that because of our increased effort on the mat, the fruit of that effort spills out the front door into the world in which we live.

And there are lots of other activities over the next couple of months when opportunities to support one another abound. Sangha Garden Weekend is filled with camaraderie, fun, and work as we enjoy each other’s company while getting the gardens ready for the winter. The World Peace Ceremony in September and the Oxfam Ceremony in October are opportunities to bring our practice into the world at a time when it is so needed. Bodhidharma Day fills us with gratitude for the founder of our sect and practice. Then we move into the Jataka sesshin with stories of the Buddha and his care for all sentient beings. And lastly the Hungry Ghost Ceremony, again filled with fun, but also remembering those who have passed from this life to the next. All of this we do together, and it reminds us that Sangha, too, is perfect, whole, and complete. Please join us.

— *Jean White*

## Decisions, Decisions, Decisions

by **Josh Kelman**



I’m not aware of Abraham Lincoln sitting cross legged on a mat, burning incense and chanting sutras. But try to find an example of somebody better able to maintain equanimity while under the crushing weight of terrible choices, all of which led to immense suffering. Under constant personal attack, Lincoln

(continued on page 2)

*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)

consciously put his reputation aside, focusing only on the consequences of the decisions at hand. War, staggering death tolls, slavery and the fate of democratic institutions were all at stake in his decisions every day. No wonder volumes have been written on him, and he is justly regarded as heroic.

Our own lives do not have the earth-shaking melodrama of Lincoln's but karma being what it is, our decisions all have consequences. And like Lincoln, there is often no option that avoids suffering. Worse, when we see ego-based habits informing the decisions, we may not heed the insight. What, oh what, is the poor Zen student to do?

Often the quandary is whether to do anything at all. Years ago, I worked for a large industrial firm and our agreement with a customer on a project mandated my company to share labor costs. I came to find out that some of the costs that were shared were not true. This occurred within a climate of threats and intimidation regularly delivered by this customer. It is for good reason that automobile industry relationships are called a contact sport.

Nevertheless, there was some level of dishonesty from my company. What should I have done? Quit? Inform the customer? I did neither. Looking at it twenty year

later, I'm just glad to be out of there.

We are told that the Buddha walked away from his entire Sangha of squabbling monks for some time simply to get them to stop. Was he risking the Dharma Wheel coming to an end? It's easy to believe that the Buddha was incapable of a bad decision. Less clear is his decision not to allow women to enter the order until finally Ananda and others convinced him to do so. Certainly, a tough decision for him given Indian culture at the time. Perhaps we can take heart that, apparently, even the Buddha struggled with choices.

As Buddhists, we have the precepts as guidelines for behavior. But what exactly do the precepts tell us about how to deal with our own squabbling teenagers? How do we respond to a co-worker undermining our efforts? The answers are there, but may not be easy to pry out. And, as householders we must act. Just sitting there because a decision might cause pain is not acceptable.

Once again, we must be ever grateful for practice. Nothing will make us infallible. Nothing will perfectly clarify tough choices. But we can, like Lincoln, at least seek to eliminate our own agendas from the decision. We can "sit on it," letting it sink into a level of consciousness less susceptible to ego-based habits. We can certainly

“  
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poor Zen student  
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call on the precepts to help scour away the reactivity of these habits. We can sit before Kannon. And through zazen we can develop the ability to decide from the hara and not always from the head.

The Buddha's very first teisho was on suffering and the ending of suffering. Ending suffering seems like a pretty wise goal for us to use in decision making, whether or not we can guarantee that outcome. —

# Nurturing a Tender Heart

by Dharman Rice

Almost from the outset of my Zen practice, I was drawn to the life and teachings of Eihei Dogen.

To say that all things change, that nothing lasts forever, is commonplace. To say that impermanence is being — is time itself — is not commonplace. Zen Master Dogen seems to suggest in the “Uji” (Being-Time) section of his *Shobogenzo* (*The True Dharma Eye*) that when we understand this uncommon truth with our whole being, not just with our heads, we can begin to live fully and freely.

In her recent book *Being-Time: A Practitioner’s Guide to Dogen’s Shobogenzo Uji*, Reverend Shinshu Roberts spells out what she takes to have been Master Dogen’s reasons for writing “Uji.” She suggests that Dogen meant to offer a clear approach to understanding and actualizing reality, resulting in awakening. He poses and answers questions that he would like us to ask. These questions help us clarify our muddled thoughts, encouraging us to leap beyond the intellect to enact the Buddha Way in our daily life.

At the beginning of “Uji,” Dogen says “the ‘time being’ means time, just as it is, is being, and being is all time.” And, a bit further on, he says, “we must see all the various things of the whole world as so many times.” This means that things, occurrences, and beings do not occur *in* time, they *are* time. We are not “carried along in” time, we *are* time.

Dogen doesn’t deny our ordinary sense of time as proceeding, on a horizontal line from the past into the

present and the future. Rather he is “concerned with the nondual nature of time and beings as expressed in the presencing moment.” Dogen wants us to get beyond merely reflecting on reality to *enacting* it in enlightened response.

Roberts emphasizes in her discussion of enlightened response that “our practice is not in order to attain realization. Practice itself is the actualization of realization.” Our spiritual practice “in and of itself” is realization. Practice and realization are always “like wave and ocean,” occurring together and “dependent upon each other for their actualization.”

Roberts continually emphasizes and clarifies these points, both because they go in and out of focus for us and because they are so vitally important. She says that when we see practice as merely a *means* to attain realization, we tend to regard our previous stages as “behind us” and our realization as not yet here. She insists that this “desire to define realization as something outside of ourselves, only attainable at some future date and better than our current ordinary life” will only lead us further away from “our true experience.”

Roberts concludes this discussion of practice by insisting that ... To live fully in this moment is to experience the profound impermanence and changing nature of our life.... It is only when we address our current situation without trying to cut off or repress our difficulties that we will be able to fully address and transform our practice. This can only happen where we are, not where we wish we were.

“Presencing ourselves” means being fully present with whatever we are doing at all times. Not just some of the time or whenever it suits us, but all the time. This is what Dogen also refers to as “continuous practice.” This is not easy practice; but the more we do it, the easier it gets, the more natural it gets. And, perhaps strangely at first, the freer and happier we feel.

Even if we are being selfish [Roberts writes], it does not change the truth of our interbeing. As soon as we enact intimacy with all of reality, then both buddha-nature and buddha-actualization or enlightened action arise simultaneously and reveal themselves.

And, Roberts insists, “buddha-nature is not potential; it is always presencing right now. *This fully present buddha-nature is being-time.*”

This continuously presencing buddha-nature is who we really are, right here, right now. All we need to do, according to our teachers and ancestors, is to wake up to our “fully present buddha-nature.” When we do, they assure us, we can begin, in thought and deed, to manifest it more fully.

Dogen points to the fact that we are profoundly happy when we are in step with the Great Way. We can then — we simply do then — help others toward profound happiness as well.

It is worth reminding ourselves that, though Dogen was a profound thinker and a great Zen Buddhist master, he was above all a thoroughly admirable human being. It is telling that when asked, upon his arrival in Japan, what he had brought back from his training under the Chinese master T’ien-t’ung Ju-ching, Dogen replied simply, “a tender heart.” What mattered most, for him, was to be aware of and to cherish all life. —

# Sangha Garden Work & Social Weekend

**A** Sangha Garden Work & Social Weekend will be held from **Thursday evening, September 6 through Sunday afternoon, September 9**. The objective is to work together on buildings and especially grounds, enjoying the beauty of our land and the company of Dharma brothers and sisters. Sangha members and their families, including children of all ages, are invited. You are welcome to stay at the Center. There is no fee for this event, but you must be a member of the Sangha. Roshi will offer morning dokusan on Thursday evening as well as Friday and Saturday mornings. She will be away on Saturday afternoon through Sunday.

We will schedule the bulk of the work for the morning in order to leave most of the afternoon free for unstructured activity as well as mini

workshops offered by Sangha members. It would be a big help to know who is coming for planning purposes, so please send a reservation to the Center by **September 10**, if at all possible.

The registration form is online at [www.vermontzen.org/events\\_gardenweekend.html](http://www.vermontzen.org/events_gardenweekend.html)

Everyone can participate. No special skills are needed. We will sit a bit more than the regular schedule, and dokusan will be offered each day, but this is most definitely not a sesshin.

**WHAT TO BRING:** Sitting robe, work clothes, boots or other sturdy footwear, a hat, water bottle, bedding and towel if staying overnight. If you are allergic to wasps or bees, remember to bring your medication.

**WHEN TO ARRIVE:** The retreat starts Thursday evening, September 6. It's fine to come for all or part of the weekend.

**CHILDCARE:** As there will be formal sittings each day, childcare will be needed to be arranged by parents for those times. Also, children should not enter the fenced area around the fire pond. The sides are steep, slippery, and dangerous, which is why it's fenced.

**MEALS:** Meals will be provided, so there's no need to bring food unless you have special food requirements. In that case, you'll be responsible for your own meal preparation. Breakfast and lunch will be eaten together, and in the evening soup and leftovers will be available. If you must bring food, remember that no alcohol, meat, fish, or poultry are allowed on Center grounds.

**REGISTRATION:** Please visit the web page on the Center's site for more information and for the registration form [www.vermontzen.org/events\\_gardenweekend.html](http://www.vermontzen.org/events_gardenweekend.html)



## Bodhidharma Day

*"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 **Sunday, September 30** we honor our great ancestor, Bodhidharma, the founder of Zen. Following an hour 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 morning sitting and will begin around **10:00 a.m.**

# September 2018

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	※ Throughout the Term Student Program, on Tuesday evenings there will be a very short sitting followed by a meeting in the Buddha Hall for Term Students only. Non-participants are welcome to continue sitting informally in the zendo.					1 <b>ZC CLOSED</b>
2	3 <b>ZEN CENTER CLOSED</b>	4 <div style="border: 1px solid black; border-radius: 50%; padding: 2px; display: inline-block;">AM ZAZEN TUE-SAT</div> Set up for Garden Weekend	5 <div style="border: 1px dashed black; border-radius: 10px; padding: 2px; display: inline-block;">Metta Course 2</div>	6 PM ZAZEN	7	8 <b>Sangha Garden Work Weekend</b>
9 <b>Garden</b>	10 <b>ZC CLOSED</b> <div style="border: 1px solid black; border-radius: 5px; padding: 2px; display: inline-block;">Finding Your Seat Meeting</div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; border-radius: 5px; padding: 2px; display: inline-block;">Tai Chi Course 1</div>	11 <div style="border: 1px solid black; border-radius: 50%; padding: 2px; display: inline-block;">AM ZAZEN TUE-FRI</div> PM ZAZEN Term Student Program 3 Begins	12 <div style="border: 1px dashed black; border-radius: 10px; padding: 2px; display: inline-block;">Metta Course 3</div>	13 PM ZAZEN	14	15 <b>Workshop</b>
16 <b>World Peace Ceremony</b>	17 <div style="border: 1px solid black; border-radius: 50%; padding: 2px; display: inline-block;">AM ZAZEN MON-FRI</div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; border-radius: 5px; padding: 2px; display: inline-block;">Tai Chi Course 2</div>	18 PM ZAZEN * Term Student Meeting	19 <div style="border: 1px dashed black; border-radius: 10px; padding: 2px; display: inline-block;">Metta Course 4</div>	20 PM ZAZEN	21 <b>Sesshin Deadline</b>	22 <div style="border: 1px solid black; border-radius: 5px; padding: 2px; display: inline-block;">Flower Arranging Course</div>
23 Teisho 30 <b>Bodhidharma Ceremony</b>	24 <div style="border: 1px solid black; border-radius: 50%; padding: 2px; display: inline-block;">AM ZAZEN MON-FRI</div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; border-radius: 5px; padding: 2px; display: inline-block;">Tai Chi Course 3</div>	25 PM ZAZEN * Term Student Meeting	26 <div style="border: 1px dashed black; border-radius: 10px; padding: 2px; display: inline-block;">Metta Course 5</div>	27 PM ZAZEN	28	29 <div style="border: 1px solid black; border-radius: 5px; padding: 2px; display: inline-block;">Indian Cooking Class: Festive</div>

# October 2018

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	1 <div style="border: 1px solid black; border-radius: 50%; padding: 2px; display: inline-block;">AM ZAZEN MON-FRI</div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; border-radius: 5px; padding: 2px; display: inline-block;">Finding Your Seat Meeting</div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; border-radius: 5px; padding: 2px; display: inline-block;">Tai Chi Course 4</div>	2 PM ZAZEN * Term Student Program 2 Begins	3 <div style="border: 1px dashed black; border-radius: 10px; padding: 2px; display: inline-block;">ROSHI IN CR</div> <div style="border: 1px dashed black; border-radius: 10px; padding: 2px; display: inline-block;">Metta Course 6</div>	4 PM ZAZEN	5	6 <b>Costa Rica 3-Day Sesshin (10/5-8)</b>
7 Sitting and Sesshin Prep <b>CR Sesshin</b>	8 <div style="border: 1px solid black; border-radius: 50%; padding: 2px; display: inline-block;">AM ZAZEN MON-FRI</div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; border-radius: 5px; padding: 2px; display: inline-block;">Tai Chi Course 5</div>	9 PM ZAZEN * Term Student Meeting	10	11 Sitting and Sesshin Prep	12	13 <b>VT Jataka Sesshin</b>
14	15	16	17	18	19	20 <b>Workshop</b>
<b>Vermont 7-Day Jataka Sesshin with Rafe Martin 10/12-19 VZC CLOSED DURING SESSHIN</b>						
21 <b>ZC CLOSED</b>	22 <div style="border: 1px solid black; border-radius: 50%; padding: 2px; display: inline-block;">AM ZAZEN MON-FRI</div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; border-radius: 5px; padding: 2px; display: inline-block;">Tai Chi Course 6</div>	23 PM ZAZEN * Term Student Program 1 Begins	24	25 PM ZAZEN <b>Oxfam Ceremony</b>	26	27 Ceremony Workday
28 <b>Hungry Ghost Ceremony</b>	29 <b>ZC CLOSED</b>	30 <div style="border: 1px solid black; border-radius: 50%; padding: 2px; display: inline-block;">AM ZAZEN TUE-FRI</div> PM ZAZEN * Term Student Meeting	31	Throughout the Term Student Program, on Tuesday evenings there will be a very short sitting followed by a meeting in the Buddha Hall for Term Students only. Non-participants are welcome to continue sitting informally in the zendo.		

# Ceremony for the Liberation of Hungry Ghosts

**A Ceremony for the Liberation of Hungry Ghosts will be held on Sunday, October 28 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 emaciated, and their mouths 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.

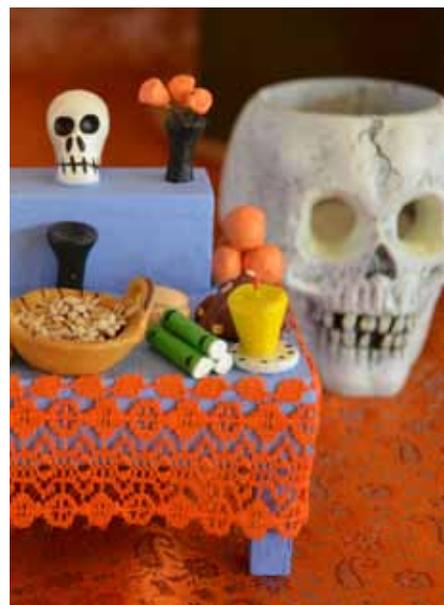
During the Hungry Ghost Ceremony, we chant sutras and make offerings of food and water to the

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 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.

**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 27 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.

## World Peace Ceremony **Sunday, September 16, 9:00-11:00 a.m.**

An **International Day of Peace** was established by the United Nations in 1981. In 2002 the General Assembly officially declared September 21 as the permanent date for the International Day of Peace. At the Center, we conduct this ceremony on a Sunday close to that date.

The World Peace Ceremony begins with a chanting service, which is followed by a group recitation of the names of all the world's countries along with the Peace Prayer – "May Peace Prevail in [name of country]."

Please join us on this special day. All are welcome.

## Oxfam Fast for a World Harvest **Thursday, October 25, 6:45 - 8:30 p.m.**

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, October 25** 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. 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.

## Upcoming Courses



### Flower Arranging

Learn basic Ikebana and flower arranging elements used at the Vermont Zen Center: triangulation, depth, placement, color, container size and materials. Through understanding the interaction between spiritual practice and flower arranging, participants will gain an appreciation of the deeper meaning of flowers as offerings and as a way to bring a sense of tranquility to one's environment.

**Date: Saturday, September 22.**

See website for more information and registration: [www.vermontzen.org/flower\\_arranging.html](http://www.vermontzen.org/flower_arranging.html)

### Indian Cooking Course — Festive Meal

Learn how to prepare a delicious and authentic vegetarian Indian meal in the Vermont Zen Center's spacious kitchen. Manju Selinger will guide you through the process of preparing the meal, 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 a delicious Indian meal for your family and friends. No cooking experience is necessary.

**Date: Saturday, September 29.**

See website for more information and registration: [www.vermontzen.org/indian\\_cooking1.html](http://www.vermontzen.org/indian_cooking1.html)



### Tai Chi

Tai Chi offers many benefits for health, relaxation, and concentration. 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. 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 6:30-7:30** for those who have taken at least 5 prior courses. **7:30-8:30 p.m.** for everyone else.

**Dates: 9/10, 9/17, 9/24, 10/1, 10/8, 10/22**

**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)



**Vermont Zen Center**

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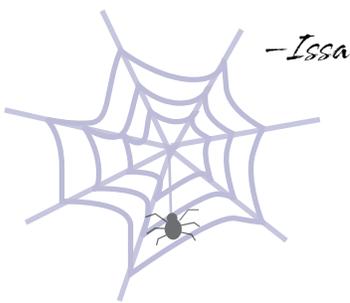
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*The spider's offspring,  
All scatter,  
And make their livelihood.*



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## October 12 - 19, 2018 Jataka Sesshin

**Deadline September 21**

**W**e are extremely fortunate to be able to offer once again a Jataka Tale/working person sesshin with Sensei Rafe Martin as the guest teacher. The sesshin begins on **Friday evening, October 12**, rather than the usual Saturday start of a 7-day sesshin. The first two days (Saturday and Sunday) will be full-time. The last five days sittings will be in the early morning and the evening, with nothing scheduled during the day so that people can go to work. Roshi will be giving dokusan three times a day during the first two days, and twice a day during the last five days.

The full seven days of sesshin will be devoted to working with Jataka tales. Sensei Rafe Martin will be conducting discussions of the Jatakas during the first two days, and giving teishos using the Jatakas throughout the seven days. The emphasis will be on how these ancient stories of the Buddha's previous lifetimes relate to our own lives here and now.

A reminder that there is a flat rate \$70 surcharge for all those who attend this sesshin either part time or full time. This is the honorarium for our guest teacher. This year, for the first time, there will be the option of Zooming in for the Jataka talk portion of the sesshin. Please go to [www.vermontzen.org/jataka-zoom.html](http://www.vermontzen.org/jataka-zoom.html) for more information. —