VOLUME 38, ISSUE 5
SEPT/OCT 2026

Walking Mountains

"The green mountains are always walking"–*Daokai*

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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.

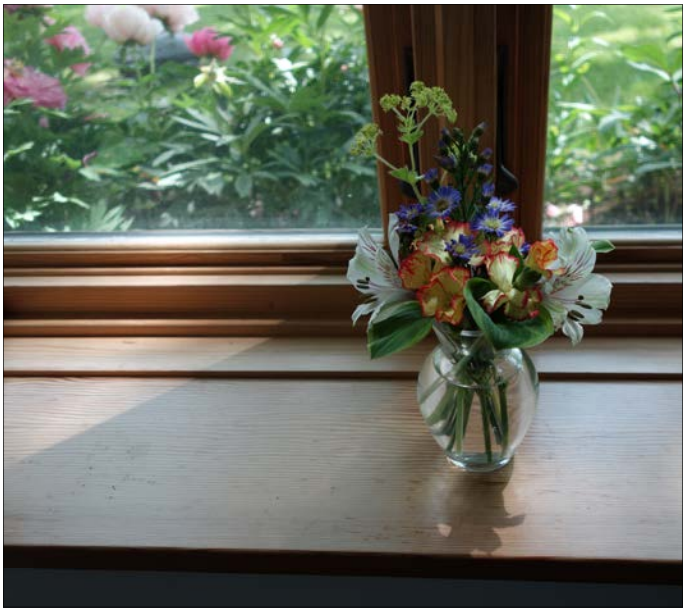
Dear Sangha and Friends,

In June, the Zen Center hosted the American Zen Teacher Association (AZTA) conference, which meant that 23 teachers from across the country attended and were guests at the Center for four days. The Sangha was extremely busy readying bedrooms, making shopping lists, grooming gardens, and the like in preparation for this event. Once the conference was in motion, there were meals to prepare, cleaning, gardening, and even an entertainment evening.

This newsletter is filled with member reflections in the form of vignettes and poetry about their experience. No doubt the focus and commitment before, during, and after the AZTA conference was rocket fuel in preparation for the Term Student Program that begins this month. Ceremonies abound as well, including World Peace, Bodhidharma Day, and Hungry Ghost. Please join us.

–Joan White

American Zen Teachers Association Conference: Sangha Reflections



The Masters arrive.
Lifetimes of preparation.
We meet again,
embracing Dharma.
—Jhana Piché

Many helping hands
sunrise to sunset—Sangha.
Flowers all smiled!
—Susan Grimes

A summertime visit from
extended family generates
beehive activity in the
kitchen.
—Cheryl Betz

The real highlight was sharing this experience with Sangha. Doing the work together so harmoniously made it such a joyful way of being with one another. Sure, waking up some mornings with a sore and tired body was real, but that just made the laughter and connection feel even sweeter. The conference reminded us how much more we are capable of when we come together like this. It was also heartwarming that the AZTA participants could see how active, committed, and warm our Sangha is. And having Mauricio and Nelly stay with Josh and me was especially dear. We got to know them better, and they truly feel like family. But let's be honest—Tim, our barista, had the key role. Without his coffee, we probably would have folded by day two!

—Heather Kelman

It never ceases to amaze me how wonderful it is to work with Sangha members even when it's non-stop, and that so many Costa Ricans joined was the icing on the cake. Everyone brings such dedication and strength to their work; it's uplifting and inspiring. To have the opportunity to serve a group of teachers from all over the Americas, knowing that their efforts at AZTA will aid them in spreading the Dharma, and helping people just like us, feels like the most important work we can do. Grateful!

—Kelly Story

Talent Show

When I think back on the AZTA Conference what stands out most for me is sitting and chanting with everyone in the mornings. It was so powerful. I noticed how some of the teachers would touch the chant book to their forehead before placing it on the mat. I was moved by this reverence.

—Nina Thompson

Participating in hosting the AZTA Conference was beneficial in many ways. Every time I arrived at the Zen Center I could feel the abundance of energy. Cooking, cleaning, dishwashing, walking with purpose to the next task. One could just dive in and enter this great effort of turning the Dharma wheel. In addition, we hosted Nelly and Mauricio from Costa Rica at our house for the week. Getting to know these wonderful Dharma siblings, drinking coffee, stretching after a long day, and just being together as if we had known each other for ages.

—Josh Kelman

The AZTA Conference offered an opportunity to practice together in a context distinct from the formal intensity of sesshin. From logistics to lattes, linens to luscious deserts, the Sangha revealed its deeply rooted cohesion, adaptability, discipline, and generosity. Our bonds with one another and with the wider Zen community felt strengthened by the undertaking. What a gem.

—Laurence Doody

The look of wonder on the faces of the guest teachers as they walked through our Zen Center made me feel so proud and filled with admiration for our own teacher who has skillfully built this beautiful place and Sangha.

—Marcela Pino

Buried beneath low-hanging pine branches and wet leaves a Buddha figure sits patiently. I pass quickly by on a path to nowhere in particular. I remember my task, circle round to begin my work — clearing, weeding, lifting the low branches. Buddha keeps a watchful eye. I create a space to breathe and take instruction from the trees and birds. Excited, I uncover a garden stone, long hidden under a tangle of growth and decay. Light now sifts through the pines. Long shadows crawl up the fence as the sun sets. I gaze over at Buddha and for a moment we smile. Guests will arrive soon.

—Beth Rizzon

Dinner at Shelburne Farms

The energy from the anticipation of the AZTA Conference was infectious. As one of many at work in the gardens I experienced the quick work that comes from having a deadline: searching for trouble areas in the garden; pulling stubborn weeds; and adding new plants in bare spots washed out by the spring rains. Through the work of many hands seemingly daunting tasks were taken on and completed together, sprucing up our already beautiful gardens.

—Bill Petrow

Walking into the dining room filled with Zen teachers, I realized the answer to a question I didn't know I had: *"Where the heck are the adults in the room these days?"* They are here! I was moved to tears. A deep bow to all who took time out of their busy schedules to attend for your devotion to teaching the Dharma. I feel privileged to have had the chance to support the AZTA conference. *Thank you.*

—Emily Cross

The opportunity to support the AZTA Conference felt like participating in the full expression of Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. To experience the way we threw ourselves into working together in a tremendous effort to prepare the Center, cook meals, prepare flowers, wash dishes, make beds, run the laundry—all in service of those teachers who are upholding the way of our ancestors in such a joyous and selfless manner—this week will always stand out for me as a true marvel of practice in action.

—Aylie Baker

From the first to the last—kindness, care, and teamwork permeated the Center and grounds. Our zendo blessed by teachers' decades of practice. An altar and Memorial Service commemorating the Zen teachers who passed still teaching us through lovely memories openly shared. And a last evening of entertainment—such deep joy, laughter and fun!

—Alison Gardner

Cleaning bathrooms and floors. Offering a small helping hand. Very grateful to contribute to the much larger effort in preparation for the AZTA Conference.

—Josh Berger

Memorial Altar for AZTA Zen Teachers

I found myself quietly moved. Our practice was present in the gardens we tended, the spaces we cared for, the meals we prepared, and the joyful exhaustion of the Sangha.

—Tim Cusick

True dedication to the Dharma was made manifest prior to and during the AZTA Conference. Our Sangha held to its word in preparing and beautifying the Center for the teachers and in caring for their needs. The teachers in turn gathered together to strengthen Zen Buddhism not only in America, but also so that its much needed teachings can reverberate throughout the world. The event in its entirety was a sincere and moving act of commitment and of love.

—Meredith Markow

Sangha Garden Work and Social Weekend

A **Sangha Garden Work & Social Weekend** will be held from **Thursday evening, September 24 through Sunday afternoon, September 27**. The purpose is to work together on buildings and especially grounds, enjoying the beauty of our land and the company of our Dharma family. 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 dokusan on Thursday evening (as usual) and possibly on Friday morning.

We will schedule the bulk of the work for the morning in order to leave most of the afternoon free for unstructured activity. It is important to know who is coming for planning purposes, so **please send a reservation to the Center by September 17**.

What to bring: Work clothes, boots or other sturdy footwear, a hat, water bottle, sitting robe, (bedding and a towel if staying overnight). If you are allergic to wasps or bees, remember to bring your medication.

When to arrive: The weekend schedule starts on Friday, September 25, although you are welcome to arrive earlier.

Childcare: If you are bringing young children, childcare will need to be arranged by parents for formal sitting times. Children need to be watched at all times and 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 are provided. Breakfast and lunch will be eaten together, and in the evening soup and leftovers will be available.

Registration: More information is on the VZC website:

vermontzen.org/events_gardenweekend.html

Hosting the AZTA Conference was like turning on the Vermont Zen Center purring machine to see what it could really do! From the many hours Dave spent patching up the paint of every nook and cranny weeks before the arrival of any teacher from far and away, to how the kitchen team piped out delicious food while Tim piped out hot espressos and cappuccinos each morning made to order for the teachers. For the time being, the Sangha moved like the staff of a Michelin-starred restaurant with the same focus and fervor of a sesshin. The teachers arriving and leaving from all their respective far and away places with different colored suitcases and robes or garb lent the gathering a type of excitement akin to watching travelers arrive at a welcoming hotel. The whole thing moved like bees making honey and buzzed with the happy tasks of Sangha volunteers. What could be next? Perhaps a Sangha football or softball team? Everyone came together in such good heartedness it is cause to wonder what shape could a team not take if working from that kind of practice place?

—Jacob Cribbs

Sitting and chanting with 23 Zen teachers—Wow!
Intense activity in the kitchen—Whew!

—Polly Whitcomb

Roxana Brizuela created whimsical signs for all the delicious food.

May Peace Prevail on Earth!

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.

World Peace Ceremony

At the Zen Center, we have a **World Peace Ceremony** on a Sunday as close as possible to the United Nations' International Day of Peace. This year it is on **September 20 from 9:00 to 11:00 a.m.**

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 members and trial members are welcome to attend in person. Non-members are welcome to attend via Zoom.

More information and registration at *www.vermontzen.org/ceremony_worldpeace.html*

Term Student Program: 9/15–11/10

If you want to strengthen your Zen training, invigorate your sitting, and learn how to incorporate practice into your daily life, consider joining the Term Student Program beginning on **Tuesday, September 15** and ending on **Tuesday, November 10.** The registration form is due by **Tuesday, September 8.** This year, there are two levels of the program rather than the three of recent years.

You will find that Term Student is a shortcut to deeper concentration and greater understanding of Zen. As well, you will discover that you are capable of working far more intensely than you had ever imagined. Whether you are a new student or a long-time practitioner, you will derive benefit from participating in the program. It is an unsurpassed way to strengthen your commitment to the Dharma and deepen your practice.

For detailed information about the program as well as Term Student Form, please go to *www.vermontzen.org/termstudent.html*

Ceremony for the Liberation of Hungry Ghosts

A Ceremony for the Liberation of Hungry Ghosts will be held on Sunday, October 25 at 10:00 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.

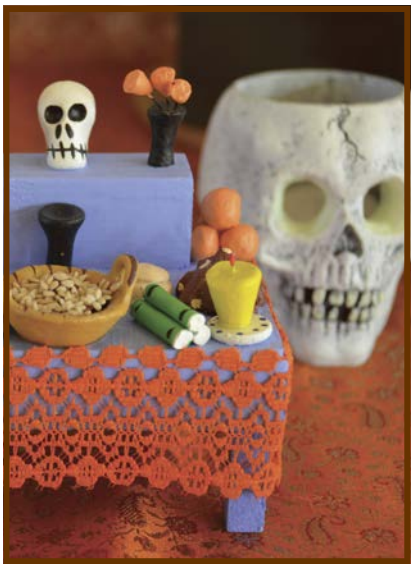
According to legend, Moggallana, a disciple of the Buddha, was plagued by nightmares of his mother being tormented in a realm in which she could neither eat nor drink. The Buddha told Moggallana that his mother was in the realm of pretas, and he should try to help her overcome her bad karma through a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

Members are invited to attend in person. You may also attend via Zoom. For full information visit: *www.vermontzen.org/ceremony_hungryghost.html*



Upcoming Courses at the Vermont Zen Center

www.vermontzen.org/courses.html

Festive Indian Cooking

September 12

In this course you will learn how to prepare a festive meal for a special occasion. Manju Selinger and the experienced cooks in the Zen Center's spacious kitchen will guide you though the process, and you'll enjoy the results for lunch. More information and registration on the Zen Center's website.

Flower Arranging

September 19

Learn basic Ikebana and flower arranging elements used at the Vermont Zen Center. Through understanding the interaction between spiritual practice and flower arranging, participants will gain an appreciation of the deeper meaning of flowers as as a way to bring a sense of tranquility to one's environment. More information and registration on the Zen Center's website.

Haiku

October 31

Through close readings of Japanese poets, participants learn the essential elements of traditional haiku and gain an understanding of the interaction between spiritual practice and poetry, as well as an appreciation of the deeper meaning of haiku. More information and registration on the Zen Center's website.

October Jataka Sesshin–Deadline September 18

We are extremely fortunate to be able to offer once again a Jataka Tale sesshin with Roshi Rafe Martin as the guest teacher. The sesshin begins on **Friday evening, October 9,** rather than the usual Saturday start of a sesshin. The first two days (Saturday and Sunday) will be full-time, the last four days there will be sittings in the early morning and the evening, with nothing scheduled during the day so that people can go to work. Roshi (Graef) will be giving dokusan three times a day during the first two days, and twice a day during the last three days.

The sesshin will be devoted to working with Jataka tales. Roshi Martin will be conducting discussions of the Jatakas during the weekend, and giving teishos using the Jatakas throughout the rest of the sesshin. The emphasis will be on how these ancient stories of the Buddha's previous lifetimes relate to our own lives and practice.

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 once again, there will be the option of Zooming in for the Jataka talk portion of the sesshin.

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Nonprofit Organization
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
Shelburne, VT
Permit No. 60

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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, October 4, we honor our great ancestor, Bodhidharma, the founder of Zen. Following a short 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 9:40 a.m.