

Walking Mountains

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

Dear Sangha and Friends,

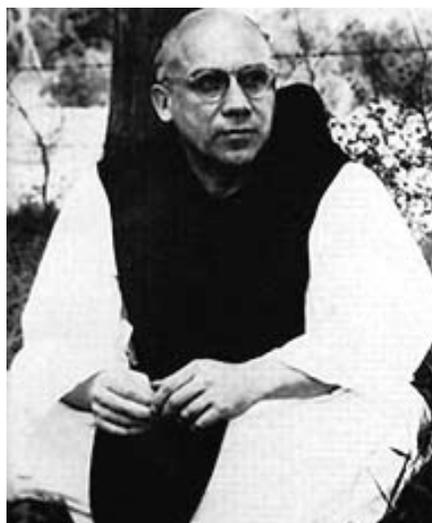
In this world of impermanence one of the greatest teachers of change is the garden. Come spring and summer, her lessons manifest: as plants lost to the winter's cold; those that need dividing; erosion; suckers erupting every which way; weeds rapidly gaining ground. The list goes on. And so does the work of digging, pruning, moving, dividing. It's a tremendous opportunity to practice not falling into impatience, frustration, a myriad of negative thoughts and habit patterns. It's a great reminder that a garden, or the practice of gardening, is never finished—a great metaphor for our practice on the mat.

How timely is the Garden Intensive Weekend that takes place this month. Four days of work focused on what's right in front of us: the weed, the branch, the shovel, the trowel. Sangha brothers and sisters, volunteers, and our teacher all dedicated to the sole purpose of gardening practice.

But we're not done yet! The summer months bring more weeds, dead-heading, watering, lawn mowing. Let's recall Zen Master Hyakujo's words: "A day of no work is a day of no eating." It makes our practice and our Sangha and the world we live in strong. If you have ten minutes, an hour, don't hesitate to check in with Louise, grab a hoe, a trowel, and dig in. Please join us.

— *Joan White*

Paying Attention Is an Act of Love



by **Dharman Rice**

Teaching the *Mettabhavana* class at the Center twice a year is so much fun because taking it twice a year is so rewarding. There is no end to Metta. We can always go deeper into the practice and further afield in sending or radiating Metta to all beings.

At no time in the recent history of our

(continued on page 2)



INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Paying Attention Is an Act of Love	1
A Few Timeless Jatakas for Today	3
Calendar	5
Training Program	6
Sangha Picnic	6
Summer Courses	7
Annual Yard Sale	7
Garden Mowing	8

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)

troubled world have we needed regular Metta practice more, both for our own sake and for the sake of countless beings in all directions. The wonderful thing about Metta practice is that it goes hand in glove with our zazen, our mindfulness or concentration meditation. These two practices facilitate and mutually reinforce one another.

Thomas Merton, the renowned Roman Catholic (Trappist) monk, once compared the actions and teachings of Zen masters to the ringing of an alarm clock. Merton suggested that Zen students often react as sleepers do to alarm clocks: sometimes they turn off the alarm or press the snooze button and go back to sleep, sometimes they jump “out of bed with a shout of astonishment that it is so late,” and sometimes they just continue to sleep without hearing the alarm.

The more we learn how to concentrate or pay attention from our zazen, the easier it is to rouse lovingkindness in and for ourselves and to radiate it toward others—benefactors, friends, people about whom we have no particular feelings one way or the other, people we find to be difficult, and ultimately to all beings in the ten directions.

Paying attention is an act of love. All parents know this; all caregivers know this; all teachers



know this; we all know this at some level or another. Looking at our watch or out the window as we’re talking to someone is usually not a loving or friendly thing to do. Those habits are too often markers of a certain self-preoccupation, which helps neither ourselves nor others.

Our zazen helps us become aware of these unskillful habits and to overcome them. So does our Metta practice. In fact, the more we practice Metta, the happier and more friendly we tend to become. And, somewhat surprisingly perhaps, the easier it is to pay attention, to be mindful of how we open and close doors, how we eat our meals, how we wash and put away the dishes, how we drive our cars. That zazen goes hand in glove with Metta practice is, for me, somehow captured by the three famous and astonishing Buddha figures carved into a rock cliff at Gal Vihara, Polonnaruwa in north central Sri Lanka—the seated figure, the standing

figure, and the parinirvana figure. My laptop boots up to a picture of the standing Buddha figure by the head of the huge reclining figure. This picture is a continual reminder for me of our responsibility to pay attention and to care for all beings.

In *The Asian Journal of Thomas Merton*, he wrote of this scene at Polonnaruwa just days before his accidental death in 1968:

The thing about all this is that there is no puzzle, no problem, and really no ‘mystery.’ All problems are resolved and everything is clear, simply because what matters is clear. The rock, all matter, all life...everything is emptiness and everything is compassion.

Paying attention is paying attention to others and to ourselves. The more we truly understand ourselves, the more we truly care for others. This ceases to be paradoxical to the extent that we truly care for others and, consequently, see into ourselves. —

A Few Timeless Jatakas for Today

by Eric Berger

 The Jataka Tales are stories about the many lives of the Buddha-to-be as he cultivated and perfected the wisdom, lovingkindness, and the virtues naturally manifested by an enlightened mind. The tales tell of a long journey, highlighting the Bodhisattva's enduring commitment to awaken for the sake of all beings and to end all suffering.

Many readers know this and a number of Sangha members have had the opportunity and great fortune to hear and learn about these remarkable tales from Sensei Rafe Martin during the annual Jataka sesshin. These tales, especially heard through Sensei Martin's telling and with his commentaries, are truly inspiring and open our hearts and minds to new aspects of this precious Dharma.

The Jatakas are ancient, with the earliest verses dated to the 5th century BCE. Yet, they're as relevant, inspiring, and as fresh as ever. We need them in these times; in all times, actually. Fortunately, we have them, and not just the important ones told in books but those taking place right now. The Jatakas

are timeless not just in their ever-relevant teachings, but because they're always being told.

Several years ago, a 12-year old child in Africa was kidnapped by several men. Three lions chased off the abductors and then sheltered and protected the child for hours. When the police and family members arrived, as the newspaper account says, the lions "just left her, like a gift."

One wildlife expert offered that the child's whimpering could have sounded like a cub's mewling, causing the lions to instinctually offer protection. Maybe. I'm no expert and I don't "speak lion," but one might doubt that's the whole story or even a real part of it. It seems hard to believe that the lions could have been duped for hours by the sounds of a young human. They have excellent vision and an acute sense of smell, neither of which would have triggered a, "This is my cub!" response. And if they took the child for their cub, why would they walk away?

There's mystery here, but one certainty is that the fundamental heart of goodness and kindness is never shut off in any realm. The Bodhisattva Kannon manifests in

all realms, showing the way to liberation as the fundamental heart of kindness of us all, sometimes displayed as a deer king, sometimes as a monkey king, sometimes as wild lions protecting a child, manifesting as endless new Jatakas.

In the Taipei zoo a tortoise somehow became flipped on its back, unable to right itself. This tale is on a YouTube video. Along comes another tortoise... Before continuing this Jataka of perseverance and kindness, a small digression: many humans tend to accord reptiles very little in the way of intellectual and emotional development. Dogs and cats, sure. Savvy birds like crows and jays, certainly. Dolphins and whales, of course. Turtles and tortoises, generally not so much. Yet it takes something to recognize that another being is distressed and then to be moved enough to do something about it, as the heart of kindness essentially shines boundlessly, including in the reptile sections of zoos.

The video shows a helping bodhisattva-on-the-way tortoise deliberately walking towards a struggling, upside down

(continued on page 4)

(continued from page 3)

companion, the formless heart of kindness on display. Using its head and weight, with deliberate action, the companion is nudged back onto its feet and off they go. The crowd cheers. The helping actions of a tortoise gladden us in the human realm, with the kindness that's not limited to species, time, or place.

There are, of course, human Jatakas. Richard Moore was running home from school during the Troubles in Ireland when he was shot in the face with a rubber bullet, rendering him permanently blind. And now? He and the soldier who shot him are dear friends and they traveled together to Dharamsala to visit the Dalia Lama, who was himself inspired by their forgiveness and reconciliation.

Born a slave, Emma Ray was "the saint of Seattle's slums" and a leader in the battle against poverty. There's a beautiful essay about her life at crosscut.com by Lorraine McConaghy.

The heart of kindness, the developments and realizations expressed in the Jatakas can manifest where the ego-mind least expects them. Even in Auschwitz. A father in a crowd on the way to the gas chambers turned and saw his young son for the last time and implored, "Don't hate." The son survived and never forgot the teaching.

The Sufi mystic Rumi wrote, "Love is from the infinite and will remain until eternity," and, "They say there is a window from one heart to another. How can there be a window where no wall remains?"

“The Jatakas are timeless not just in their ever-relevant teachings, but because they're always being told.”

Every time we're completely in our practice we're living a jataka tale. Saying "Hi" on the street, spreading soil on the seedlings. There are no small or meaningless things, just fundamentally an endless jataka tale of the ever-opening heart, now. —

*The night sky floods
with each star perfectly
aligned*

*Daybreak's blue sky
renders them invisible*

*The house is clean
save for the dust motes
clinging to a sunbeam*

—Joan White



June 2017

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
				1 PM ZAZEN Chanting	2	3
4 Sitting and Retreat Setup	5 AM ZAZEN MON-FRI Finding Your Seat Meeting Tai Chi Course 5	6 Set up for Retreat	7	8	9	10
VT Garden Work Intensive						
11	12 ZC CLOSED Tai Chi Course 6	13 AM ZAZEN TUE-FRI PM ZAZEN	14	15 PM ZAZEN Chanting ROSHI IN CR	16	17 Tai Chi Intensive CR
18 Taped Teisho	19 AM ZAZEN MON-FRI	20 PM ZAZEN Chanting	21	22 PM ZAZEN	23	24 Flower Arranging Course
Costa Rica 7-Day Sesshin 6/17-24						
25 Taped Teisho	26 AM ZAZEN MON-FRI	27 PM ZAZEN	28	29 PM ZAZEN Chanting	30	

July 2017

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
						1 ZC CLOSED
2	3	4	5 AM ZAZEN WED-FRI	6 PM ZAZEN Workshop Prep	7	8 Workshop Sesshin Deadline
ZEN CENTER CLOSED						
9 Teisho	10 AM ZAZEN MON-FRI Finding Your Seat Meeting	11 PM ZAZEN Famine Relief Ceremony	12	13 PM ZAZEN	14	15
16 Sangha Picnic	17 AM ZAZEN MON-FRI	18 PM ZAZEN	19	20 PM ZAZEN Chanting	21	22
23 Teisho	24 AM & PM ZAZEN	25 AM & PM ZAZEN	26 AM & PM ZAZEN	27 AM & PM ZAZEN	28 AM ZAZEN	29 Sesshin
Vermont Training Program (Sunday morning – Friday afternoon)						
30	31	AUGUST 1	AUGUST 2	AUGUST 3	AUGUST 4	AUGUST 5
Vermont 7-Day Sesshin 7/29-8/5 ZEN CENTER CLOSED DURING SESSHIN						

Training Program

Sunday, July 23 through Friday, July 28, 2017

For five days this summer, the Zen Center will offer a residential Training Program. Training Programs are a way to experience the discipline of Zen training through total immersion similar to living in a monastery. During Training Programs, trainees live at the Center and participate in all aspects of traditional Zen training. A core element of the Training Program is learning how to bring Zen practice into everyday life. Each day there is:

- Zazen
- Chanting
- Work practice
- Dokusan
- Teisho (Zen talk by the teacher) or talks by senior students

Participating in a Training Program can help anyone, regardless of age, occupation, or previous exposure to spiritual disciplines, learn more about Zen practice, strengthen their spiritual training, and learn to practice meditation in the midst of everyday life.

The cost is \$175 for members (non-members \$275). Applications are available on line. **Please read "Information for Trainees,"** on the Zen Center's website before applying.

The Training Program begins on **Sunday, July 23 at 9:00 a.m.** and ends on **Friday, July 28** after lunch. **Please note that the Training Program begins Sunday morning.**

Local trainees can arrive at the Center in time for the morning sitting. Out-of-town trainees should arrive at the Center by Saturday evening.

Applications for the Training Program are on-line at: www.vermontzen.org/training_programs.html

Daily Schedule

5:30 am	Wake up
6:00	Zazen
7:00	Chanting
8:00	Breakfast
8:30	Work
10:30	Tea break
10:45	Work
12:15	Lunch & break
2:15	Work
3:45	Chanting
4:45	Supper
6:30-8:30	Zazen



Sangha Picnic at Shelburne Beach

Come one, Come all! Our annual Sangha Picnic will be on **Sunday, July 16** at Shelburne Beach on Beach Road in Shelburne, starting at **10:30 a.m.** There will be swimming, volleyball, bocce, basketball, kayaking, good food and lots of fun.

Bring family and friends, musical instruments, sun block and bathing suits. And be sure to remember to bring a vegetarian dish to share. We hope to see you there – at **Shelburne Beach Park!**

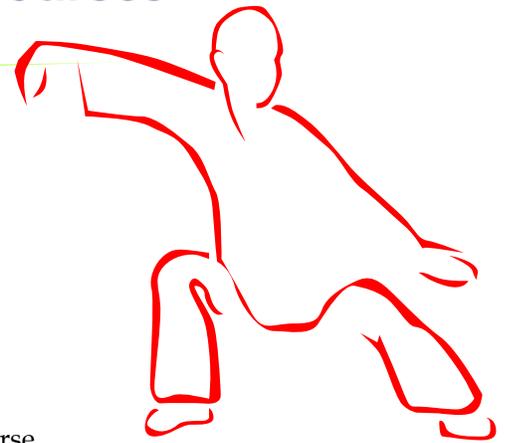
Upcoming Summer Courses



Tai Chi Intensive

The Zen Center is offering a half-day Tai Chi intensive to help participants expand their knowledge and practice of this gentle martial arts form. The course is open to those who have completed a six-week Tai Chi course at the Center or are enrolled in the course at the time of the intensive. Dr. Peter DeBlasio, Dr. Eric Berger's teacher, will be the guest teacher leading this class.

Activities will include warm up exercises, review of previously learned Chi Kung postures as well as instruction in new postures,



practices for learning to contact and develop chi, prolonged push hands instruction/practice, question and answer periods, and further instruction in the Long Form.

Date: **Saturday, June 17**. See website for more information and registration: www.vermontzen.org/taichi_intensive.html

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, June 24**. See website for more information and registration: www.vermontzen.org/flower_arranging.html



Donations for the sale may be left in the basement common room anytime after the August sesshin. This is a wonderful fund-raiser for the Center, as well as a great way to clean out your unwanted, unused, and unneeded stuff. The yard sale will be on **Saturday, August 19**.



Vermont Zen Center

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*With the evening breeze,
The water laps against
The heron's legs.
—Buson*

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**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.**