

Walking Mountains

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

Dear Sangha and Friends,

We begin this month with a seven-day work sesshin, which focuses on the Zen Center grounds and gardens. We rake and prune and plant and weed and water, and mostly we pay attention. Ask anyone who has ever participated and they will tell you that it’s a lot of work, and extremely gratifying. In the end, the Zen Center gardens look, well, deeply loved. And the rewards are reaped throughout the summer and fall seasons and beyond. It may be that one of the best parts is that if you can’t attend, you can come during any work period and help. So don’t hesitate to let Louise know when you plan to do so and your help will be greatly appreciated.

Then we close the month with a celebration of the Buddha’s birth, during which there is a fabulous parade with a great white elephant through our newly groomed grounds. So, yes, these bookends for the month of May are calling to you. Please join us.

— *Joan White*



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Gratitude for Continuous Reminders of Practice

by **David Sweet**



When we first learned of the pilgrimage and started considering whether or not I would go, my wife stated, “You have to go—it’s a trip of a lifetime.” Her selfless willingness to manage things at home while I was away provided the opportunity for an experience beyond anything I could have imagined. Each moment was vivid, vibrant and full of life. As I now reflect on it, I struggle with the futility of trying

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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.

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to capture countless moments, two and a half weeks, fifty-plus journal pages, and more than 600 pictures in words, or to frame them with a photo.

Every moment was mindfully planned by Roshi whose attention to detail never ceases to amaze and inspire. Throughout the trip, her continuous example of living the Dharma whether talking with the head monk at Entsu-ji or pointing out how we might improve our practice was motivating. Sudarshana's ability to translate not just the words being spoken but their essence, gave new insights into our practice. Ryutarō's endless planning and organizing allowed us to seamlessly fill each day with ever-more wonderful experiences. The opportunity to spend so much concentrated practice time with 49 dedicated pilgrims (including those from other "pods") was something that I will always cherish.

There are so many remarkable memories from the trip that it is difficult to single out one. Some of the standouts for me included the breathtaking, unfathomable peace and Metta of the 1001 life-sized Kannon figures in Sanjusangendo, giving hope for the world; seeing Hakuin's practice-inspiring scrolls up close at Shoin-ji; the anchoring serenity and natural beauty of the gardens at Ryoan-ji, Nanzen-ji and Tenryuji reflecting our interconnectedness

“Early in the tour we were all rushing up the stairs with slippers falling off of our feet. It was pointed out that we shouldn't worry if someone in front of us slows down. Our practice at that point is waiting.”

and impermanence. Perhaps the most moving experience was being in the presence of the Miroku-Bosatsu and chanting with everyone at Koryu-ji.

Sitting zazen with the group was especially powerful whether in the mornings on the third floor at the Kyoto Traveler's Inn; at Shoin-ji in the zendo with Hakuin's chair under the constant stare of his statue; or at Entsu-ji in front of the magnificent tapestry of the Buddha's Parinirvana. At Eihei-ji we mindfully tried to follow the monk's example of the proper way to get on and off of the tans and then sat under the watchful gaze of the monitor, listening to the water running through the mountainous gardens outside as everything dropped away...

At the gardens at Ryoan-ji I was struck by the bamboo supports lashed into a "T" shape used to prop up branches or

whole trees. They were simple, gentle, unobtrusive, strong, effective supports, reminding me of the importance of practice in life as well as my parenting goals. One very old gnarled, hollowed out trunk that was supported from falling over, surprisingly had blossoms blooming on the ends of its extended branches appearing as a metaphor for the rewards of supporting our elderly.

I am grateful for the lessons from the monks at various temples including at Eihei-ji where we were reminded that the most important practice is living daily life. Early in the tour we were all rushing up the stairs with slippers falling off of our feet. It was pointed out that we shouldn't worry if someone in front of us slows down. Our practice at that point is waiting. Learning about how each morning the monks deliver green tea and a meal to the remains of Dogen in the *Joyoden Hall*, asking, "How are you?" and in the evening commenting, "How wonderful you are!" gave a new perspective about the vitality of our practice, our offerings, the Buddha and Dharma.

I'm grateful for the opportunity to sit and chant before the Kannon figure in the Peace Memorial Park in Hiroshima with Greg Heath during one of our free days. The recognition of the tragedy of the bombing, affirmation of life and dedication to ensuring future peace without recrimination was inspirational.

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Connecting to Home by Heather Sowell

When I think about my experiences on the pilgrimage to Japan I think of the many layers of connection. Connection to my dear roommate, to my Sangha brothers and sisters, to the Dharma, and to all beings past and present.

This deep sense of connection is something I have previously felt most strongly during sesshin, when I am one cell in the living organism that sesshin becomes. There was a bit of that sesshin feeling in Japan as well, as our group did zazen together, ate together, traveled together, and chanted together. But for me there was also a deeper layer of connection: to the temples, to the previous masters, and to the history of Buddhism and practice.

Of the many places we went and the experiences we had, there were three for me that were paramount – Ryoanji, Shoinji, and Eiheiji.

The rock garden at Ryoanji is probably the most recognizable rock garden in the world. Fifteen large stones in a rectangle of white, raked gravel, arranged such that one can never view all fifteen at the same time. It is said to denote our human imperfection and that upon attaining enlightenment one would be able to see all fifteen at once. But pictures cannot come close to capturing its essence and deep beauty. Sitting on the



veranda overlooking the garden, I was enveloped in such a sense of stillness and timelessness. Even though there were tourists snapping pictures and people coming and going, it all drifted away to just rocks, just breeze, just breath. For me there was such a strong pull to Ryoanji that I felt as if I could have stayed on and on.

Shoinji is Zen Master Hakuin's temple and we were honored to be able to sit zazen briefly in its zendo. In sitting there I was struck by a powerful sense of energy and strength rising from the cushions up my spine, filling me with determination and connecting me with the countless others who also sat on those cushions. How many students and masters came before us? How many practiced amid the same doubts, fears, and fatigue we feel, and kept going anyway?

Eiheiji, Zen Master Dogen's temple, was also a living

demonstration of practice. Black-robed monks completely present in their work moved from one task to the next with effortless ease. Like a leaf carried on the wind seems to glide at exactly the right speed without agitation or hurrying, the monks performed each action – waiting, listening, walking, or running – with a focus and grace that seemed perfectly suited to the action and the moment.

Our guide at Eiheiji asked to hear the members from Casa Zen chant the *Prajna Paramita* in Spanish, something he had not heard before. While listening to my Dharma brothers and sisters beautiful chanting I realized that the *Prajna Paramita* is the same in each of the many languages of our world, yet is transformed in each language to touch the heart and mind of the person speaking that language. I had not previously considered that our chants

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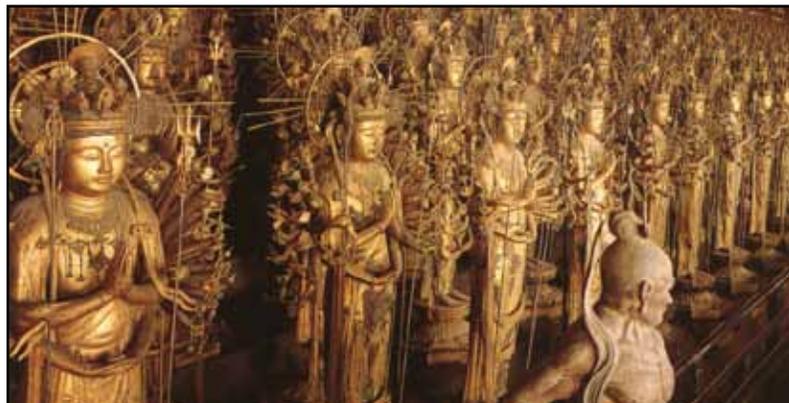
JAPAN PILGRIMAGE 2016

ALTAR OFFERINGS—EIHEIJI, Greg Heath

Our day at Zen Master Dogen's monastery, Eihei-ji, was special in so many ways. Dogen's ashes are interred there. His figure is also installed on an altar in a hall called the Joyoden. Our guide, the Rev. Kuroyanagi (such an endearing man) stopped there and spoke with us, soft spoken, but so clear and direct. He spoke of the offerings brought to that altar each morning: fruit, water, and other food. As I write now I can't recall his exact words, but the impression I took away was vivid. The offerings acknowledge that Dogen's teaching is alive. He lived in the experience of True Self, experiencing no distance between past and present, teaching that he is not separate from right now, alive. And so, each morning he is greeted with the offering and the words, "How are you?" and each night with, "How wonderful you are!"



At once I saw our own altar offerings in Vermont in this new, very alive way. This priest's breath was visible in the fresh morning air rising between us and Dogen's figure. We chanted here the *Prajana Parimita*, the Heart of Perfect Wisdom, and *En Mei Jikku Kannon Gyo* praising the Bodhisattva of Compassion. It all came in an instant that I now have in my heart. The fruit and water, "How wonderful you are," the crisp air, the transporting chants. For me, with thanks for this day, our altars are transformed forever. —



THIRD PILGRIMAGE, Nōwa Crosby

This was my third pilgrimage to Japan, but the first as fully ordained. Two things struck home with me this trip. First being in robes much of the time, including some of the free time, was actually very comfortable. I rode on the bus to several temples on my free days, in robes because ordained people enter for free, and I was just another person on the bus. Some people, especially older people, might give a little bow and smile. There was a time I was

waiting for Saman in a department store in robes, and it didn't seem odd at all.

Secondly was returning to Sanjusangendo, the hall of one thousand Kannon. It really struck home this time how much time was spent in creating and then rebuilding and repairing after a fire, less than 100 years after it was finished. A total of 150 years of work, and hundreds of sculptors. This is continuous practice. —

BUDDHIST OUTPOST, Josh Kelman

It's easy to forget, practicing in our North American Zen centers, but we are still an outpost in Buddhist history. The words and stories of the masters help with this, but there is still something we miss. That something resides in the temples, figures, gardens and culture of traditional Asia. We did not visit them, we experienced them. Standing before an imposing, larger than life size, bronze Kannon, we breathed in Kannon. We were awe struck among one thousand, thousand armed Kannon in Sanjusangendo. The unadorned Maitreya, whose picture hangs outside our Buddha Hall in Vermont spoke to us. And we took into our haras eight original Hakuin ink drawings, shown especially for us, at his temple, Shoin-ji. Gardens had Jizos growing out of the soil. And every plant and tree was individual in character even as it fit perfectly into the garden. Our practice suddenly became more well-rounded. —

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May 2016

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1 Roshi Kapleau Memorial Extended Sitting	2 AM ZAZEN MON-FRI Tai Chi Course 4	3 Sitting & Sesshin Prep	4 Metta Course 6	5 Sitting & Sesshin Prep	6	7 Work Sesshin
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
VT 7-Day Work Sesshin 5/7-14 VZC CLOSED DURING SESSHIN						
15 Zen Center Closed	16 AM ZAZEN MON-FRI Tai Chi Course 5	17 PM ZAZEN	18	19 Sitting & Workshop Prep	20	21 Workshop
22 Teisho	23 AM ZAZEN MON-FRI Tai Chi Course 6	24 PM ZAZEN Chanting	25	26 PM ZAZEN	27 Vesak Workday	28 Vesak Workday
29 VESAK 	30 Zen Center Closed	31 AM ZAZEN TUE-FRI PM ZAZEN				

*The crows in the trees
Green moss crawls up the steep hill
Silent friends by my side
—Gerry Farrington*



PILGRIMAGE IMPRESSIONS, Eric Berger

Zen Master Hakuin's paintings, energy stern yet loving figure – Shoin-ji.
Geyser of blessedness – Ryoanji.
A monk tells Roshi he is moved by the Sangha's devotion and chanting.
Delicious meals lovingly offered by chefs mindful of every detail every meal.
Conductor bows when entering the train to collect tickets. Bows again before walking out.
Walking where Ryokan walked, sharing the Path, sitting in the same zendo.
Sudarshana and Ryutaro, loving gracious translator guide friends. Thank you so much.
Loving teacher Roshi. Many many bows respect love gratitude beyond words.
Fun joy respect love thanks every day – Sangha.
Loving compassion caring 1001 Bodhisattvas – Sanjusangendo. Wondrous!
Sitting zazen Dogen's temple. Zen Master Dogen's temple.

Flower Arranging Course

Saturday, June 11

Learn basic Ikebana and flower arranging elements: 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 a way to bring a sense of tranquility to one's environment. More information and registration can be found at www.vermontzen.org/flower_arranging.html



7-Day Garden-Work Sesshin

May 7-14

This year the work sesshin will be in early May, rather than June. The focus of this sesshin is working in the garden. However, there is also daily zazen and two dokusan periods. This is an especially good sesshin for people to get a taste of sesshin training as well as how to work on one's practice in the midst of activity.

(Gratitude... Continued from page 2)

Each meal was a delight for all of the senses and a lesson in mindfulness with so many different tastes. The people of Japan were universally welcoming, friendly and helpful. I was fortunate to meet a Buddhist wood carver and his wife in his shop along the Philosopher's Path. Between their broken English and my broken

Japanese, we forged a warm friendship. He had been given a scroll of the Heart Sutra earlier in the day by a visiting monk and together we chanted the *Maka Hannya Haramita Shingyo*. The inscribed Enso drawing and carved Jizo figure he created are cherished treasures I brought home from my trip.

At the end of the pilgrimage I was profoundly grateful for everyone and everything involved in this wonderful experience and, with an enhanced sense of awareness and appreciation, for the opportunity to continue my practice at home with my loving family. —

(Connecting... Continued from page 3)

are, or could be, done in Polish, French, Farsi, Swahili, or any other language. Imagine hearing the *Prajna Paramita* chanted together in every known language in unison!

Because my life in Colorado prevents me from having the day-to-day relationships and

interactions many of you enjoy, one of the gifts of this pilgrimage was the deepening and strengthening of connections to many fellow Sangha members. I treasure this, and the memories warm my heart. But the souvenir I am most grateful for is the connection I felt with an endless stream of practice by so many others through the centuries.

In walking through those ancient temple halls, and hearing the crunch of my footsteps on gravel paths walked by generations over hundreds of years, I truly felt I was walking with all those who have come before and those yet to come — all of us walking together. —

Vesak 2016



The Buddha's Birthday Celebration

Vesak, the celebration honoring the birth of Shakyamuni Buddha, will be on **Sunday, May 29, 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 27 and Saturday, May 28



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 29—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





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I fell in love 
With the wings of the birds,-
The light of spring on them!
- Chora

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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.**