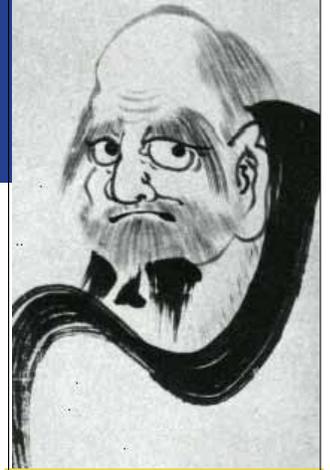


Walking Mountains

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



Dear Sangha and Friends,

Bird song is quiet this morning as most of our feathered friends have departed on their long journey to warmer parts. I always marvel at their courage and determination as they line up on the wires between telephone poles chatting away. We will never know for sure what the discussion is about, but we certainly can liken it to Sangha brothers and sisters supporting one another and the world we live in.

There's ample opportunity to do just that this month and next. Garden weekend is filled with camaraderie, fun, and work as we enjoy each other's company while getting the gardens ready for the winter. 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. 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. 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.

— *Joan White*

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Term Student Program Commitments

by **Josh Kelman**



At the heart of the term student program are our commitments. We fulfill these commitments to benefit ourselves, our Sangha sisters and brothers, and all beings. They are at once tools to strengthen our practice and an

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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)

actualization of our practice. By publicly announcing and reporting on the progress of holding to our commitments, we link arms as Sangha and work as one.

At the same time, working to meet our commitments brings us face to face with our individual demons and self-centered habits that seek to knock us off course. We get to see these “endless blind passions we vow to uproot” for what they are rather than just sleepwalking through them.

One of the simplifying aspects of practice is that there is no need to analyze the whys and wherefores of these pesky habits. We just need the courage to let them go. And we discover that they have no essential hold on us. They are ephemeral and we choose to give them life or take it away. Doing so may be painful, but we can and do overcome them over and over again. Really, we should call them our friends, because this effort strengthens our practice.

A Tree Treeing

by Joan White

It takes great determination to become a pine tree. Mature trees bear male cones at the bottom and females at the top. The spring winds lift the pollen skyward into the open air, where by chance, or more likely karma, some land on the female cones. There the pollen grains begin their long journey to the ovule, taking up to two years for

From the very beginning of our tradition commitments have been central to practice. When the Buddha left home he committed to abandon a life of self-gratification and devote all his efforts to liberation. And then again under the Bodhi tree he committed not to leave his seat until he achieved full enlightenment. These are the footsteps we are walking in. These are our own footsteps.

Closer to our own time, anyone who has read about Ernest Shackleton’s commitment to his stranded sailors’ rescue from desolate Antarctica knows of the great strength and endurance he summoned, seemingly way beyond what we might think possible. Our teachers tell us that each one of us has this same ability. Our term student commitments enable us to bring out our inner Shackleton (or fill in your favorite athlete, artist, or adventurer).

I know that even as I first select commitments for each year’s program, the internal whining

fertilization and seed formation. Cones and seeds fall to the ground, or are picked off by squirrels, porcupines, and other animals, and seed dispersal begins. Then we can only hope that the seed encounters the goodness of fertile ground, moisture, and sunlight to sprout.

And then there is the “wolf.” About 150 years ago when farmers cleared the forests of Vermont for pasture, they would often spare one

“ We get to see these ‘endless blind passions we vow to uproot’ for what they are rather than just sleepwalking through them. ”

begins. A chorus of fearful visions of discomfort and longings for the easy way out bubble up. By holding to the teachings and the flesh and blood examples of our lineage, those visions are held at bay. Our term student program commitments are the tools we use to show up these pretenders. This is the work we have chosen. Together, in gratitude, we simply do this work. The work of the Buddha, of Shackleton, and of countless others down through the ages. —

or two trees to keep as shade for their cows. With no competition for sunlight, these trees branched out again and again and again, like a mind unfettered by nagging thoughts. Some limbs grew horizontally, others criss-crossed, three erupted from the same place on the trunk—maximum photosynthesis. Cows resting beneath mimicked its girth. It seems these pines realized their true

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nature, which is not what we have come to think of as the natural form for pine trees – forced to grow with a singular trunk, and branch out high as they compete for sunlight and food.

But as pastures were abandoned, other trees moved in, and the old pasture trees became relics not looked upon kindly by 20th century timber barrens. It was they who named the old trees wolves for preying on the young, hogging the light and food, and as they saw it, undercutting the economics of forestry. Chain saws ripped and roared, and bark chips flew as thousands were felled. Fortunately, forestry became more holistic and the way in which these old trees were viewed changed. Today best forest management practices hold that we should keep a certain number of these trees as they are beneficial to wildlife.

In fact, I recently read a study by a conservation biologist who set out to see if this claim were true. It's remarkable what he found, which included his observation that foraging birds visited these trees 20 times more often than typical trees. Overall he witnessed 22 different species of birds feeding from wolf trees as opposed to seven on the typical ones. He also found that birds preferred to sing in them, recording a total of 60 minutes of bird song in old pasture trees, while singing in typical trees totaled less than two minutes. In addition to the expected host of squirrels and

chipmunks, he found mammals of all sizes used the old trees. They provide a convenient place for animals to mark their scent, dead limbs for hiding, horizontal branches for scouting and naps, rugose and sloughing bark to scratch one's back, and cavities and hollows in which to birth their young – all gestures of lovingkindness.

He observed a porcupine and its young porcupette lounging on a horizontal branch and then crawling into the hollow of the tree. After he saw a coyote bolt from one, he stuck his head inside to find six newborn pups wobbling around. In total he documented 106 incidents from eleven mammal species at wolf trees compared to 77 incidents from five species at typical trees.

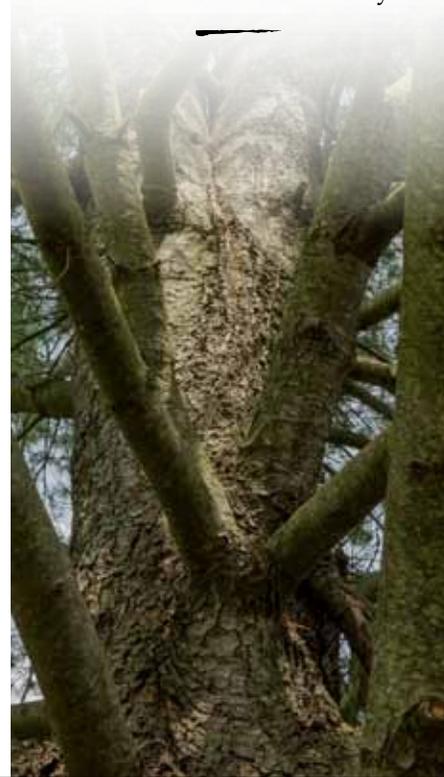
Today, we are losing wolf trees to succession. There is a great irony here: the original justification for culling – the shading of surrounding trees – now threatens the old trees' survival. With the onset of shade, their photosynthetic activity has been substantially reduced and their great mass can no longer be supported – lower branches die and surviving branches reach, not horizontally, but straight up. But despite this, wolf trees in the Northeast are still relatively common.

You can see one (rather famous in these parts) in Red Rocks Park in Burlington and a number of others there as well. I'm fortunate to have one in my own backyard. But one doesn't really have to go any further than the front yard of the

Zen Center. There stands a wolf pine. It was the only tree standing on the property when the original building was purchased. Perhaps it was a pasture tree on the old Thomas farm?

We can look to this tree as a metaphor for our practice. The Dharma seed planted in each and every one of us, cultivated by practice. And as we become better people, practicing the precepts and living skillfully, we find that others are at ease with us, seeking comfort and friendship. But also, it's a great reminder to us when we're struggling. It is a living, breathing example of Zen Master Mumon's verse:

Hundreds of flowers in spring,
the moon in autumn,
A cool breeze in summer
and snow in winter.
If your mind is not clouded
with unnecessary things,
No season is too much for you.



Sangha Garden Work & Social Weekend

A Sangha Garden Work & Social Weekend will be held from **Thursday evening, September 22 through Sunday afternoon, September 25**. 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.

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

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 24**. It's fine to come for all or part of the weekend.

CHILDCARE:

As there will be formal sittings each day, childcare will need 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



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."

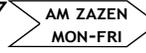
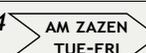
— Zen Master Bodhidharma

On **Sunday, October 2**, 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 2016

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
				1	2	3
	* 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.			ZEN CENTER CLOSED 9/1-5		
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
ZEN CENTER CLOSED		 PM ZAZEN	Metta Course 2	PM ZAZEN		
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
Teisho	 Tai Chi Course 1	PM ZAZEN * Term Student Program 3 Begins	Metta Course 3	PM ZAZEN Sitting and Workshop Prep	Sesshin Deadline	WORKSHOP
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
WORLD PEACE CEREMONY	 Tai Chi Course 2	PM ZAZEN * Term Student Meeting	Metta Course 4	Sangha Garden Work Weekend		
25	26	27	28	29	30	
Garden	 Tai Chi Course 3	PM ZAZEN * Term Student Program 2 Begins	Metta Course 5			

October 2016

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
						 Indian Cooking: Chaat
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
BODHIDHARMA DAY CEREMONY	 Tai Chi Course 4	PM ZAZEN * Term Student Meeting	Metta Course 6	PM ZAZEN Sitting and Sesshin Prep	VT Jataka Sesshin	
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
Vermont 7-Day Jataka Sesshin with Rafe Martin 10/7-14 VZC CLOSED DURING SESSHIN						
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
ZEN CENTER CLOSED	 Tai Chi Course 5	PM ZAZEN * Term Student Program 1 Begins		PM ZAZEN	Costa Rica 3-Day Sesshin (10/20-23)	
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
Taped Teisho CR Sesshin	 Tai Chi Course 6	PM ZAZEN * Term Student Meeting		PM ZAZEN OXFAM CEREMONY		Ceremony Workday
30	31					
HUNGRY GHOST CEREMONY	ZEN CENTER CLOSED					

Ceremony for the Liberation of Hungry Ghosts

A Ceremony for the Liberation of Hungry Ghosts will be held on **Sunday, October 30 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.

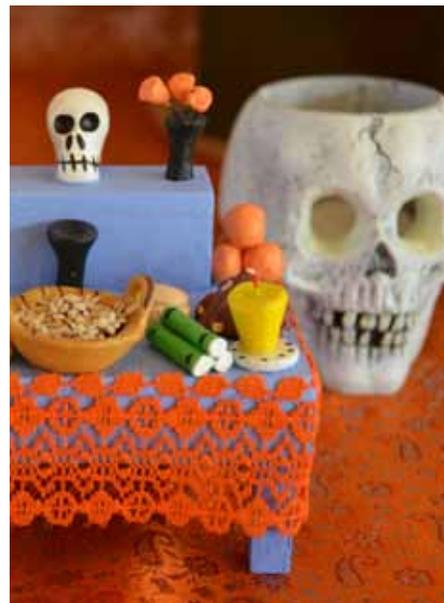
According to legend, Moggallana, a disciple of the Buddha, was plagued by nightmares of his mother being tormented in a realm in which she could neither eat nor drink. The Buddha told Moggallana that his mother was in the realm of pretas, and he should try to help her overcome her bad karma through a 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 the offerings are 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 29 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.

Indian Cooking Course: Chaat

Saturday, October 1

Chaat are the savory-spicy-tangy snack foods enjoyed in India. They are delicious and addictive! Chaat originated in instructor Manju Selinger's home state of Uttar Pradesh, and she is an expert in their preparation. She will teach you how to make them, and all will have a chaat feast with tea at **1 p.m.** With a cookbook of recipes in hand and practical experience from the Zen Center's kitchen, you will be ready to prepare these enticing treats for your family and friends. No cooking experience is necessary.



Date: Saturday, October 1.

See website for more information and registration:
http://vermontzen.org/indian_cooking_chaat.html

World Peace Ceremony

Sunday, September 18, 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 the Sunday as close to that date as possible.

The World Peace Ceremony begins with a sitting and dokusan followed by 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

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 27** 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.



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*One end hanging over
The mountain,—
The Milky Way.*

—Shiki



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October 7-14 Jataka Sesshin

Application Deadline September 16

We are extremely fortunate to be able to offer once again a Jataka Tale/working person sesshin with Rafe Martin as the guest teacher. The sesshin begins on **Friday evening, October 7**, 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 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 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. —