

Walking Mountains

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

Dear Sangha and Friends,

Before March calls you to put away your boots, before winter ends, before the spring equinox, there’s Entertainment Day! And there’s no comparison—not from year to year and not even between Oscar and Golden Globe Awarded performances. Nope. Young and old break out their guitars and flutes, recite poetry, sing to their heart’s content and show us just how reverent irreverence can be. Sangha celebrating Sangha. And I never give up hope that someone will show up with a tuba or bagpipes.

April brings Temple Nights—altars dressed in shimmering saris and adorned with sweet candies, cookies, cakes, flowers, and lit with candles. Oh, to sit at one of the many altars with Kannon, Manjusri, Jizo, and the Buddha is to be reminded of who we truly are. Quickly followed by our spring Jukai Ceremony, we strengthen our resolve to practice and to realize the Buddhadharma. Please join us.

—Joan White



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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.

Garden Work by Jim Kahle



Spring is coming! The days are getting longer. The sun is getting stronger. It is the time of year when our thoughts turn to spending time outdoors. For many of us at the Center, our attention shifts to working in our beautiful gardens. In thinking about these outside activities, we can see that the workings of the natural world have always held a central place in Zen practice. The koans that we study are replete with examples of the natural world being offered up as sources of insight. A monk asked Joshu, “What is the meaning of the Patriarch’s coming from the West?” Joshu said, “The oak tree in the gar-

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den.” Once when the Buddha was addressing a gathering of monks on Vulture Peak, his teaching consisted of simply holding up a flower. The venerable Mahakashyapa responded with a smile.

Zen Master Hyakujo took it a step further. He worked in the gardens every day with his students, even when he was well into his eighties. Some of his students thought the effort might be too much for him. They decided to hide his tools for his own good. When Hyakujo saw that his gardening tools were missing, he retired to his room. He didn’t eat anything that day or for several days thereafter. His students realized their error and returned the tools at which time the Master returned to his work and his meals. “A day of no work is a day of no eating,” he told them.

There is great satisfaction in working in the gardens. Our focus on the task at hand opens us up to the dynamic and ever changing reality around us. Our senses awaken to the elements at hand: the wind, the rain, and the calls of the birds. The offerings of our gardens are always in a state of flux, impermanence. Crocuses are followed by daffodils, then tulips, azaleas, and peonies. The changes in the world around us happen moment by moment and season by season. We offer ourselves to the gardens and they offer themselves to us.

The Center is fortunate to

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have a dedicated band of gardeners, but there are always opportunities for people to get started in this important aspect of practice. For many years the garden work at the Center has been led by Jhana Piché, and she is normally present in the gardens on most days during the warmer months. She can point you in the right direction. She is ably assisted by Joan White, Heather Kelman, and many others. It is important to note that there are many outside jobs that don’t involve gardening in the traditional sense. We have teams of mowers and trimmers, and there is often necessary work involving the pruning of trees, repairing equipment, spreading compost and mulch, and more. There are many ways to get started, even if you don’t think that you possess a green thumb.

There are some scheduled times available for garden work at the Center. One of the best opportunities occurs on Friday mornings after the sitting. There is a 45-minute period of gardening followed by an incomparable tico breakfast. Satisfying work and an amazing breakfast. You can’t beat that. Also, for people who would like to get started, there are the

Sangha Garden Work and Social Weekends that take place in the spring and the fall. This is a chance to take part in the important work that occurs at both the start and the end of the growing season, and is also a golden opportunity to get to know Sangha members better. In the spring some people choose to adopt a garden which they maintain over the course of the entire season: a deeply gratifying practice.

If you spend enough time doing outside work at the Center, eventually you will be there when somebody arrives for the first time. Their first impression sometimes seems to be something like awe. What is it that they are seeing that affects them so profoundly? Certainly it is the beauty of the grounds, but there is something more. Jhana has mentioned that people appreciate how all the garden hoses are neatly arranged in a circular fashion. She has even talked about how some have taken photos of the insides of the tool shed.

At the most recent Rohatsu sesshin, Roshi said, “The cleanliness of our environment reflects the cleanliness of our minds.”

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Haiku Workshop at the Zen Center by Meredith Markow

Added to the rich lineup of courses available at the Vermont Zen Center, the most recent is the Haiku Workshop offered seasonally four times a year. The workshop extends an opportunity to those well-versed in haiku writing as well as to those brand new to it. I was able to participate in the Autumn '24 workshop, and it was wonderful to spend the morning with others in friendly, insightful conversation with time to enjoy and marvel at our beautiful gardens as inspiration for the craft of writing haiku poetry.

Participants were received with not only a warm welcome, but also a beautifully prepared pamphlet containing poems, a notebook for writing, and a wide selection of haiku books to peruse throughout the morning. The format of the workshop is well-planned and consistent. After introductions, information about haiku form is given, as is some background about the mothers and fathers of haiku: Basho, Busan, Chiyo-Ni, Issa, and Shiki. Joan White, the workshop leader, does this in a way that adds a meaningful layer of story to the history of these masters in such a way that they come alive. The workshop includes close readings of haiku written by these Japanese Buddhist writers. Participants then share in a contemplative and



safe way their various interpretations of the poems. It is a time of genuine listening—listening to the words and to each other. This quality of listening is something we so rarely and so genuinely can experience in our day-to-day routines.

Then it is time for the “Ginko,” or haiku walk, done outdoors in silent conversation with the natural world in order to be inspired by it. It is a time to experience the haiku way of life. The invitation is to leave the task-oriented mind behind, to simply notice, and then to write down observations

Next, participants return indoors to continue the writing process informed by what had been discussed in the morning and experienced outdoors. The mood is quiet and easy. We

were provided a beautiful set of Japanese rice and origami papers and pens to transpose our haiku poems and then artistically display them on the wall. The workshop closed with reading, sharing and appreciating the poems together. It was a warm and encouraging celebration of words, of nature and of each other.

Jean Hirshfield wrote in her book, *The Heart of Haiku*, “Zen is less the study of doctrine than a set of tools for discovering what can be known when the world is looked at with eyes wide open. Poetry can be thought of in the same way.” The Haiku Workshop at the Vermont Zen Center provides the perfect container for this very thing, the chance to learn from what is always there, but is rarely seen. —



Temple Nights

Temple Nights, on **Tuesday, April 1** and **Thursday, April 3**, are two special evenings set aside for people of all ages to sit informally before beautiful altars honoring Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. They take the place of regular sittings and **begin at 6:30 p.m. and end at 8:30 p.m.** with a special chanting service and circumambulation.

Anyone who has been to a Temple Night can attest to the strength of concentration that builds up throughout the evening. The sari-covered altars are beautifully decorated. Seated upon them, the figures not only remind us who we really are, they also help us express gratitude to and reverence for those who have transmitted the Dharma.

You will find Temple Night inspiring and invigorating. It is surely one of the most beautiful stops on the journey to our True Home. Please join us virtually.

All are welcome: www.vermontzen.org/ceremony_templenight.html —

Entering the Buddha's Family Spring Jukai Ceremony

On **Sunday, April 6**, we commemorate the Buddha's actual birthday, which is on April 8, with a Jukai Ceremony which starts at **9:00 a.m.** with a half hour informal sitting. The ceremony is hybrid. Please register online whether you are attending in person or via Zoom at www.vermontzen.org/ceremony_jukai.html

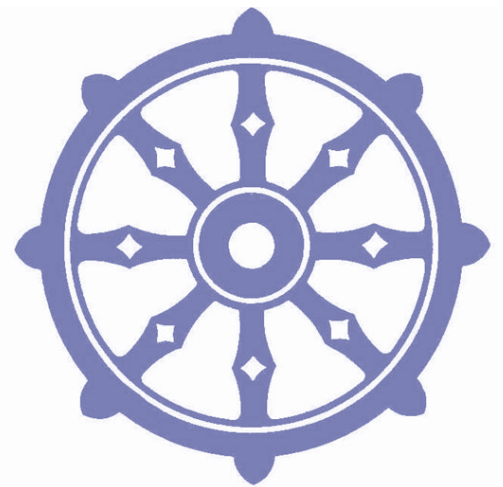
Our Center has two Jukai ceremonies each year, one in April and one in November. It is customary to take Jukai as often as possible. Each time you participate, your resolve to practice

and realize the Buddhadharm grows stronger.

During the ceremony, participants take part in a repentance ceremony, then take the Three Refuges, the Three General Resolutions, and the Ten Cardinal Precepts.

Jukai also entails making an anonymous monetary donation to the teacher, called an incense offering. This traditional gift represents the practitioner's desire to support the teacher's work in propagating Buddhism.

Jukai is one of the most solemn rituals we observe at the



Center, so please be sure to wear a clean and pressed robe if you have one. If not, please wear dark, solid-colored clothing.

Children of all ages are especially welcome to come to spring Jukai, which honors the birth of Shakyamuni Buddha. —

March Courses

www.vermontzen.org/courses.html

Lovingkindness Wednesday, March 12

Learn the ancient Buddhist meditation leading to the development of unconditional lovingkindness and friendliness.

A six-week course on Wednesday evenings starts March 12, conducted by Zen priest Nowa Crosby and lay priest Heather Kelman.

Register online at the Zen Center's website.

Indian Cooking: Chaat Saturday, March 15

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 the end of the class.

Register online at the Zen Center's website.

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This cleanliness of mind, this attention to detail is evident in all aspects of our life at the Center: in the gardens, in the kitchen, and in the Buddha Hall. It is a clear and compelling image that the Center offers up to the Sangha, to the neighborhood, and to the world.

Once Zen Master Obaku questioned Master Rinzai. "What is the purpose of planting so many pines trees here deep in the mountains?" Rinzai answered by saying "First, to leave an ancient monument to posterity. And second, to make a landmark for future generations." Maybe it is just a coincidence, but some of the earliest work on the property involved the planting of many pine trees along the northern boundary of the grounds. These trees were only a few

feet tall when they were planted. But look at them now! Past, present, and future walk together throughout the entirety of our beloved gardens. A lot of perspiration and love has gone into making them what they have become. Another growing season is currently upon us. There is much to be done. I hope to see you out there. —



Upcoming Workdays

TEMPLE NIGHT WORKDAYS are on Thursday evening, March 27, Saturday, March 29, and Sunday, March 30.

JUKAI WORKDAY is on Saturday, April 5.

2024 End of Sesshin Photos



February 2-day Retreat



April 7-day Sesshin



May 3-day in Costa Rica



July/August 7-day Sesshin (plus nine Zoomers)



October 5-day Jataka Sesshin



December 7-day Rohatsu Sesshin



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*The snow has melted
 On one shoulder
 Of the Great Buddha*



- Shiki

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Sangha Entertainment

Time to dust off your instruments, bring out the games, loosen the vocal chords, brush up on your Tango—it's Sangha Entertainment day on **SUNDAY, MARCH 16**, and all acts are wel-



come. Your family and friends are invited to a hybrid morning event of music, fun, and games. Kelly Story is the coordinator for this event; please give her a call if you want to perform. If you'd just like to sit in the audience, that's fine too. The entertainment begins at **10 a.m.**

Hope to see you there! More information online:

www.vermontzen.org/events_entertainment.html