

Walking Mountains

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

Dear Sangha and Friends,

This month we celebrate the Buddha’s birth and we honor Roshi Phillip Kapleau – two ceremonies connecting the events and lives of those more than 2,500 years apart – and in so doing, all that lies between them. Continuous practice.

And this spring continuous practice and continuous gardening. Have you heard the news? The Vermont Zen Center will be part of the Flynn Center for the Performing Arts’ Garden Tour this June – that is, our gardens. Wow! Hence, this spring and early summer is all about gardening (well, almost). What an opportunity for working together with Dharma brothers and sisters, for practice, for learning. Please don’t hesitate to check with Louise and sign yourself up – one hour a week, fifteen minutes before each sitting, Saturday mornings, any time that you have. It all adds up to cared for and beautiful gardens at our Center. Please join us.

— *Joan White*



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Solo Retreat by Eric Berger



If you’re considering a solo retreat at the new cabin, even a little bit, even as a passing thought, the recommendation is: Do it. Whether for a day or a week, it’s a powerful and beautiful way to deepen our Dharma practice.

This retreat cabin is already imbued with warmth and Metta. It feels like home, inviting and comfortable. And the altar – well, you’ll have to see for yourself. Inspiring at all times, it also takes on a wondrous radiance in the

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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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evening when the four electric candles are on, surrounding the Buddha figure in gentle luminosity.

Every practical need is met to ensure a smooth retreat: the kitchenette has a magnetic induction cooktop, pots and pans, utensils, and a microwave. The bedroom has a comfortable bed with a full washroom. The area for sitting zazen is cozy with a comfortable upholstered chair in the corner. Need a vacuum? Broom? Cleansing agents? Towels? They're all there. A small library is available if you wish to read books about the Dharma. As usual, our teacher has thought of everything.

I recently spent a week in solo retreat and cannot recommend it highly enough, for whatever duration appeals to you. For those who have attended sesshins, it's a bit like Dogen's Way for the entire retreat. Except in this case, you can sit zazen, rest, or eat at any time as practice flows naturally. Of course, sesshins are critically important and there's a reason for the pressure cooker of some of them. Let's get to work! Stay with your practice! The same applies to a solo retreat, but with an atmosphere of a different kind.

Of course, the most important fruits of a solo retreat are ineffable.

We've heard the same said about sesshins over the years, and this is no different. The practice flows as it does, whether sitting, standing, walking, eating. Seamless. The quiet and seclusion of a solo retreat is the quiet, seclusion, and attentiveness of the mind — a fusion of mindfulness and natural wisdom.

We know that Dharma practice is our life, with no fixed place or time. Still, the Buddha spoke of the benefits of seclusion. There are many aspects of seclusion, but finding a seat under a tree or in a warm and lovely cabin is a great place to start — and to keep going.

A Solo Retreat

by Louise Piché

When I was a child, a favorite pastime was building a cabin in the forest and dragging in various pieces of furniture from home. Sometimes I'd build a chair and table with scrap lumber for my little house. As a final touch I'd make an altar by sneaking a grotto from our home of the Blessed Virgin, placing her on a blue cloth, adding two candles (matching her robe, of course).

Recently, entering retreat at the solo retreat cabin at the Zen Center, I felt the same delight. I was embraced by the beauty and supportive environment of the



cabin as I eagerly began four days of contemplation, reflection, and prayer. The birds round and about the cabin sang, as did the heart in anticipation of seclusion.

The first step was a tour of the cabin graciously guided by Roshi. It was particularly helpful as she shared the workings of the house which will so ably support practice. The tour was not only precious for walking in the steps of one's teacher, but also for learning how to use the various components in the

house. And there is such quality, tenderness, and attention to detail to make the retreat comfortable and to feel well cared for.

Even though the retreat cabin is only around four hundred square feet, it is generously stocked with items to support one's solo journey. There is all that is needed at hand for cooking, housekeeping, sleeping comfortably, bathing, and practicing.

Most importantly, the quiet

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The Phone Call by Greg Heath

I had no serious plan for last autumn. I had just put the finishing touches on a summer-long project, a new garden inspired by our 2016 pilgrimage in Japan. I supposed it was time to finally get moving on the winter wood supply: cutting up the four-foot lengths, splitting, and stacking. I remember it was a Sunday, late morning. Hearing a car pull into the drive, I rose from sitting to find Ruth at the door returning early from Quaker meeting. That was odd. Something was up. Suddenly my “no plan” presented three imperatives: remember to breathe; be utterly present; do what’s next.

You see, Ruth received a phone call telling her that our son, Chris, had just been taken to the hospital by ambulance. He was paralyzed from the waist down, and that was all the information we had. Do

what’s next. Within an hour we were out of the house and driving south to North Carolina. There were no flights, and there would be none for days. Wilmington, Chris’s adopted home, had just sustained a direct hit from Hurricane Florence, and she stalled over the city dumping a deluge of rain for days.

With trees and power lines down, roads under water, it was a small miracle the ambulance team could even get to Chris. The city had become an island. All the roads in were closed. As we passed through New Jersey roadside warnings flashed “Do not travel to North Carolina. I-95 closed.” The phone lines to the hospital were down with calls routed to deployed National Guard personnel who could only confirm the hospital’s admissions roster.

What does the mind do with this sort of input? I’m remembering Al Pacino as Lt. Col. Frank Slade in *Scent of a Woman*. He’s the bitter, blinded veteran bellowing with rage, “I’m in the dark here!” That’s all he’s got. The last arrow in his quiver. Ultimately, of course, we have a choice of what to do with impossible circumstances. But lacking the tools offered through practice and spiritual discipline, there is little choice in practical terms. Time honored reflexive patterns burst forth. Whether it’s rage, withdrawal, hysterics, whatever, we have our modus operandi, and off we go.

Early in our Zen training we are taught by the pain in our legs that the discomfort will pass. The bell will ring. Felt often enough, we come to know pain’s ephemeral nature. Whether we feel a physical pain, psychic pain, or on the other hand, unbounded ecstasy, the bell will ring. Frankly, the reality of a complaining knee in the moment is so much easier to deal with than thoughts about it; thoughts running willy-nilly down the highway of sitting still. We learn to let thoughts go, let them fall by the wayside where we find freedom from them. Over time actively choosing how we will react to circumstances seems also to fall by the wayside. Gradually we are not so much in the roiling dark. With the support of our training, our teacher, and the Sangha, we can leave behind old and unskillful reflexive habit patterns. New ones emerge. Be utterly present. Do what’s next.

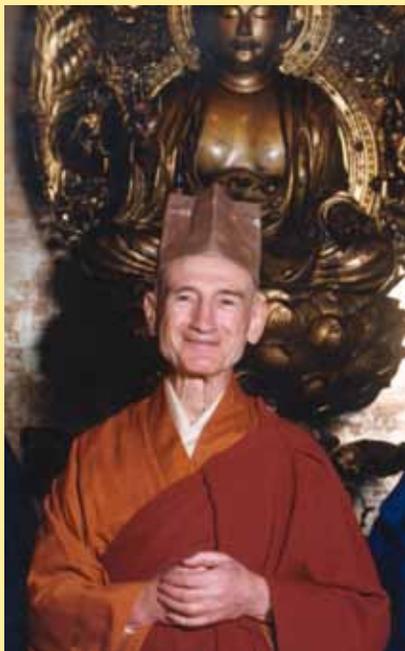
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natural environment of the retreat cabin is like being held in the healing arms of a large tree: It encourages letting it all go, every thought, emotion, judgment, and wonderings of world affairs. One moves freely, unencumbered by the wants, desires, and distractions of our very busy life on Earth. What is here in this beautiful, wish-fulfilling cottage environment is . . . everything. Nothing else needed or wanted. In this solo journey, supported by the cabin, the heartbeat of the Earth is here too.

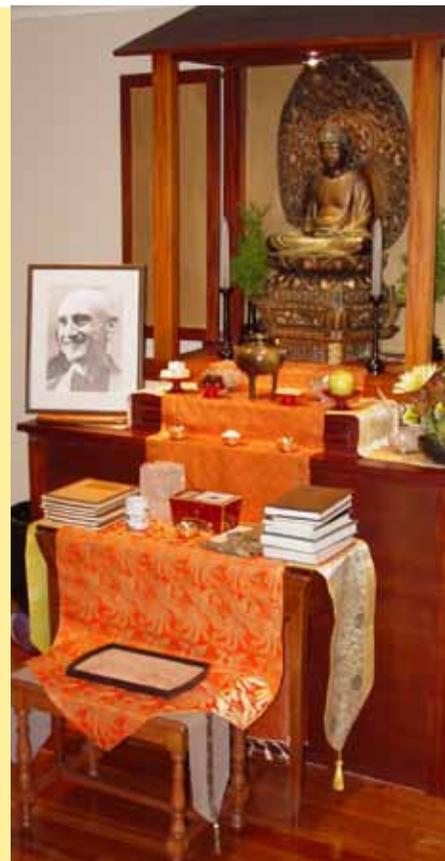
An inviting recessed altar has a Buddha, incense, flowers, and electric candles. One can choose either a chair or cushion to begin the solo journey. The ambience is so contemplative, the invitation is impossible to resist; practice begins right away. It’s surprisingly easy to slide right into heart-mind concentration. The quiet, loving, embracing arms of the house holds one steady and clear. Joy arises time and again, the heart opening with the gentle rain of tears in gratitude for this respite. It is truly coming home. —

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Events in Honor of Roshi Kapleau



Roshi Philip Kapleau passed away on May 6, 2004 at the age of 91. As is our tradition, a special **Day of Remembrance** honoring Roshi will be held at the Center on Sunday, May 5. On this day we will have an extended sitting **beginning at 8 a.m. and ending around 2 p.m.** with a pot luck lunch. During the day there will be a special chanting service including the memorial prayer. There will also be dokusan, and one of Roshi Kapleau's taped teishos will be played. Don't forget to bring some vegetarian food to share.



Indian Cooking Course: Weekend Lunch



Learn how to prepare a delicious and authentic weekend vegetarian Indian meal in the Vermont Zen Center's spacious kitchen under the careful guidance of Manju Selinger. Manju's courses are very popular and fill up quickly as they are limited to eight people. So, if you're interested, sign up soon!

Date: Saturday, May 25

Time: 9:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.

Fee: \$85 (\$75 member discount)

More information and registration is available on the Zen Center's website at:

www.vermontzen.org/indian_cooking_lunch.html

May 2019

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
			1 Tai Chi Course 2	2 PM ZAZEN	3	4 Ceremony Workday
5 Roshi Kapleau Memorial Extended Sitting	6 AM ZAZEN MON-FRI Finding Your Seat Meeting Tai Chi Course 3	7 PM ZAZEN Zoom Dokusan	8	9 PM ZAZEN Sitting & Workshop Prep	10	11 Workshop
12 TEISHO	13 AM ZAZEN MON-FRI Tai Chi Course 4	14 PM ZAZEN Zoom Dokusan	15 Tai Chi Course 5	16 PM ZAZEN	17 Vesak Workday	18 Vesak Workday
19 VESAK 	20 ZC CLOSED Tai Chi Course 6	21 AM ZAZEN TUE-FRI PM ZAZEN Zoom Dokusan	22 Garden Intensive Deadline	23 PM ZAZEN Chanting	24	25 Cooking Course: North Indian Lunch
26 ZC CLOSED FOR MEMORIAL DAY	27	28 AM ZAZEN TUE-FRI PM ZAZEN Chanting Zoom Dokusan	29	30 PM ZAZEN	31	

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To be sure the two days we spent with Ruth's cousin in Chapel Hill felt like a week. Each day, each hour we hoped for the water around Wilmington to recede. We turned every stone seeking a medivac. Our anguish was real, and we were fully present to it, holding each other. Another lesson that comes through practice is to swim like hell when caught in a flood. Zen people are not about passive acceptance. Our acceptance is full throated, whole hearted, from the hara. If there was a way to be with Chris, we were going to find it. Keeping our eyes on

every outlet for emergency road information, we learned some traffic was getting though on one state highway. With amazing help from Google Maps that awes me to this day, we navigated back roads and closures, shooting through during a small window of opportunity before roads were under water again for days more. We crossed roads with long lines of stopped vehicles as if holding the secret key to deliverance. As we crossed the Cape Fear River into Wilmington the elation and relief were real too. Anguish and elation; two sides of one coin. Real and empty in the

same breath.

Through this entire experience two points of gratitude prevailed. As I've said, one was having this Dharma practice, teacher, and Sangha. Your compassion seems unbounded. You are extraordinarily precious. The other was having Ruth, my love and partner in this life, the mother of our son, at my side. What wonderful karma! I am unable to imagine facing such circumstances alone.

My own compassion has grown, too, as I felt a unity with

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Vesak 2019



The Buddha's Birthday Celebration

Vesak, the celebration honoring the birth of Shakyamuni Buddha, will be on **Sunday, May 19, 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. (This year the celebration is one week earlier than usual.)

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 Pot Luck 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 17 and Saturday, May 18**



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 19—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
- Wrapped baby gift
- Vegetarian dish to share



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so many people, multitudes, who are going through this sort of trauma and much worse all the time. The doctor's delivery of a severe diagnosis. The dreaded call in the night. Families torn asunder. Tragic as such events are, they are utterly common occurrences. What possible use could it be to flail and wail "Why? Why is this happening to my son? Why me?" The "me" is so very extra and the karmic connections are impossible to follow.

What is useful is to be Kannon's arms. Heal the sick if we can and hold them close if we cannot. There are so many Bodhisattvas in this story: our friends and relatives who gave us shelter, food, and emotional support; the Sangha chanting in full force; medical professionals among friends and family who could help us understand and navigate the ocean that is the medical establishment into which we were plunged; store clerks who helped us along the highways; and strangers offering kind words in the elevator.

It was as if everyone had gotten the memo: "There is no other moment to act skillfully. This very moment is all there is." The urgency of our experience brought Chris into each moment with us. His entire life and more, present then and now in this moment: the fullness of the moment of birth; the infant's woven basinet beside us on the bed; the soft fabric sun music box that plays "You are my Sunshine"; the parental mistake after mistake making our best effort; the endless soccer

fields; academic honors; good and bad choices; the grown man lying helpless on the floor. These are not conjured thoughts and vivid memories strung out like individual pearls on a string or ticking seconds of desperation. They are the immense now. Not separate from the splintered trees, the calm in the eye of the storm, the first responder's "good morning" kiss and cup of coffee, or the passing of the storm, the unknowable healing that would come, the Sangha chanting, the packing and the driving. Nothing is left out of this moment. Dogen wrote, "Not having attained suchness, already suchness is attained." Be present. Do what's next. Breathe.

Does it take a crisis to see this? Maybe so. Our everyday life may seem tepid or uneventful, but "Just wait!" my old friend told me as a young man. Just wait for the phone call. It always comes. It already called, is calling now, and still it will call. Just wait. Just wait for the ancient pebble to strike the bamboo just so. Life is the crisis we inhabit with the ancestors, mistake after mistake made with sincere effort. And yet, in fact, there lies the ever-present Zen paradox. There is no need to wait. This moment offers all there is. As we sit in the dokusan line Roshi's hand bell rings out, "Look!"

Epilogue—*After three CAT scans and countless blood draws, Chris was diagnosed with a rare form of a rare condition, longitudinally extensive transverse myelitis. His neurologist was spot on, our hero even as we worried this hospital, an*

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island in a disaster zone, could not possibly get it right. They had been in lockdown for a week with a thousand staff members taking turns to grab sleep on mattresses hidden from our view, receiving supplies thanks to the National Guard. With the diagnosis made, treatment was begun just in time. Symptoms began to reverse ever so slowly. After two weeks of acute care and two weeks in rehab, Chris came home to us in New Hampshire, weakened but walking with only a cane. His recovery continues. "Soaha!"



Vermont Zen Center

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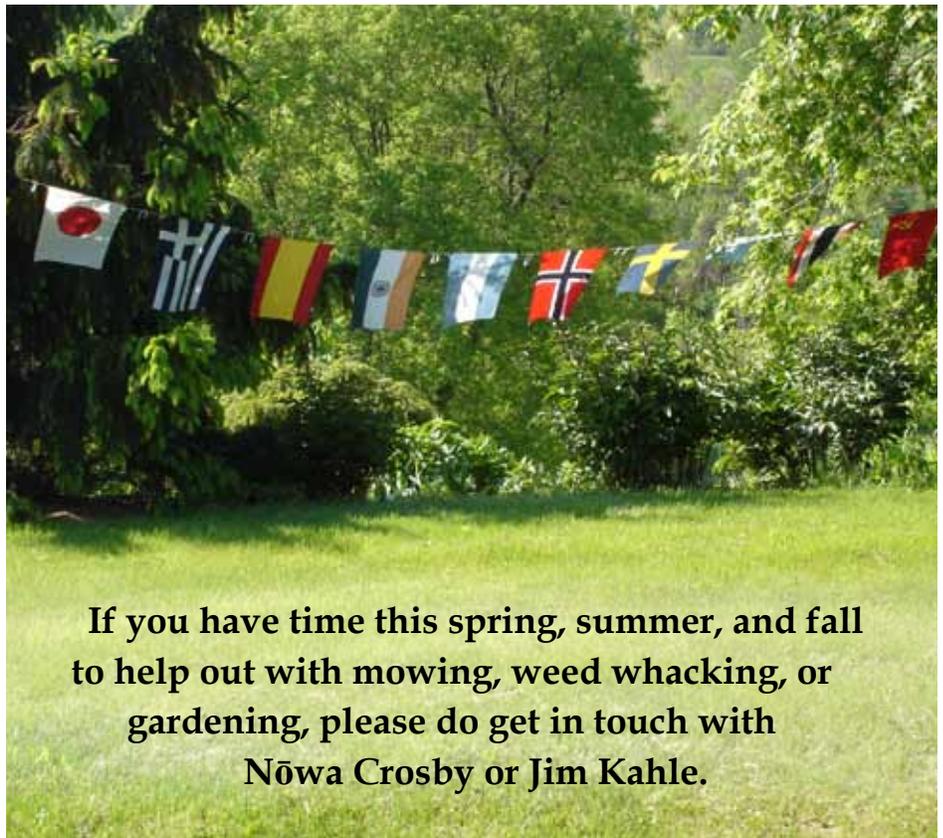
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*The soft breeze,
And in the green of a thousand hills,
A single temple.*

-Shiki

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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.**