

# Walking Mountains

“The green mountains are always walking” — Daokai

*Dear Sangha and Friends,*

It used to be that those from out of town communicated via Zoom over the Internet; now we are all “Zoomers.” Who would have thought? Sitting (virtually) in the Buddha Hall and Kannon Room. Dokusan with Roshi. Teisho and hearing the Dharma. We’ve been able to participate in ceremonies, and even gathered informally to just say hello, check in, and chat.

In the next few months, we can also look forward to three virtual sesshins, including the Jataka sesshin with Sensei Rafe Martin and Rohatsu. The Term Student Program will take place. All of our effort, whether on Zoom or sitting and chanting on our own reaches out to the world and all beings at this extremely difficult time. A deep bow of gratitude to technology, to Zoom, and to those who implement it at the Zen Center. Please join us.

*— Joan White*



## INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Solo Retreat Reflections	1
Samantabhadra	2
Opportunities of Giving and Receiving	3
October Jataka Sesshin	4
4th Quarter Calendar	5
World Peace Ceremony	6
Oxfam Fast for a World Harvest	6
Bodhidharma Day	6
Hungry Ghost Ceremony	7
2020 Term Student Program	8

## 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.



## Solo Retreat Reflections

by **Greg Heath**

I had a short chat with a Dharma sister on Sunday. In telling her that I had been on a solo retreat at the

retreat cabin, the descriptive word we readily agreed upon was “sweet.”

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The word does not sum up the experience or even come close to saying it all, but what a good start! Sweet.

Even a few days away from home requires a good deal of planning, so I put on my game hat. Well in advance lists were made: things to pack, the formation of a schedule, the menu, covering home responsibilities. Knowing that Eric Berger would be there to greet me at an appointed hour, I planned to leave an hour early. That would take care of unforeseen delays, and I could probably have time to go for a walk on the Center's back land across the river. You have probably heard the old Yiddish adage, "Man plans. God laughs." Pulling into the driveway a bit late, Eric was a gracious host. Along with my apology I made a note to learn from the day's unforeseen events.

The role of greeter is just one of several at the retreat cabin that help ensure the optimal environment for a solo retreat. Nothing was being left to chance from first contact with Ramiro as scheduler, to stepping inside the perfectly designed and appointed cabin (thank you, Roshi), to noting the spotless cleanliness and the stocking of necessary supplies (thank you, Gerry), and to receiving instruction on the various systems and appliances (thank you, Jhana). Your practice is being held up and supported and encouraged in every way by this Dharma field that Roshi spoke of in a recent teisho. One can feel it palpably.

When we are at home there is always more to do whether we are caring for an apartment, or a piece of this good earth, or our work and family. There is always more to do, and we don't just stop. Certainly that is as it should be. There is a time for action in the world and a time for intensive practice. This retreat cabin is a gift to us. It is the gift of just stop. This time of Covid-19 is a good time to put our antenna up for the gifts that are right in front of us. The solo retreat cabin offers us a means of pursuing

intensive practice when sesshin is not possible. What I did not truly grasp until I experienced it, is that the solo retreat is its own practice, unique from any other.

The settling in did not take long. Unpack the bag. Stock the kitchen. And there we are. A practitioner and a mat and cushions. Their presence and prominence in the space call to one another. They offer the chance to practice with no distraction but the mind, no place to go but deeper, our Great Vows to fulfill. Yes, sweet, but that's not all. —

## Samantabhadra

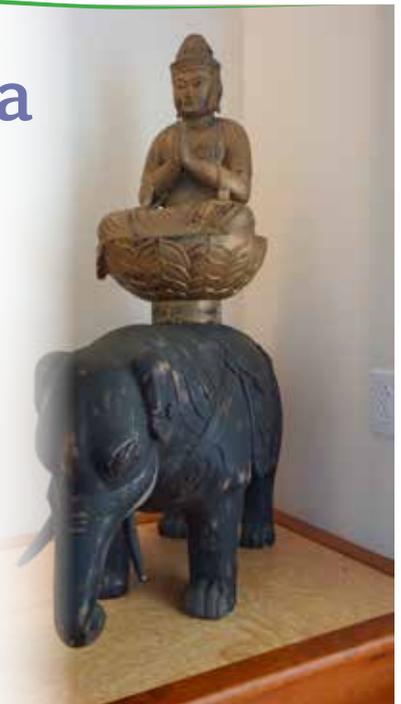
by Josh Kelman

Several years ago, a new resident arrived at the Zen Center atop an elephant. This striking figure now sits on the tokanoma outside the zendo. Bhadra (Samantabhadra) is the Bodhisattva of effort or enlightened activity. Another Bhadra figure sits on the zendo altar across from Manjusri, the Bodhisattva of wisdom. We might say that one represents the essence of wisdom, the other the application of wisdom.

Right effort is the sixth practice of the eightfold path. Right effort implies understanding as well as action. But most fundamentally, it says that effort is required. Practice clarifies the "how to" of this effort and the direction it takes in our lives. In *Faces of Compassion*, Taigen Daniel Leighton, speaking of Samantabhadra's right effort, calls it, "calm deliberate activity imbued

with clear, considered intention and dignity."

An early English translation of a portion of Dogen's Shobogenzo translates what we usually call continuous practice as exertion, a near synonym of effort. It says that our exertions are shared by all beings and that not only do



(Continued on page 3)

# Opportunities for Giving and Receiving

by Jhana Piche

This past spring, recognizing the need for food in our community, some members of the Zen Center who are avid gardeners were moved to partner with the Shelburne Food Shelf. With a grant from the Shelburne, Charlotte, Hinesburg Interfaith Community (SCHIP) the Vermont Zen Center vegetable garden of six hundred square feet grew to nearly four thousand square feet. This additional space allowed abundant planting of the most popular crops needed by the clients of the food shelf. We were

also called upon for food by the Dismas House and the Salvation Army, two organizations that provide evening meals every day of the week.

The food shelf in Shelburne serves individuals and families in the town who have challenges getting adequate food to their table. The food budget is the most variable piece of a family's budget—one can go without food in order to pay the gas or electric bill, or to buy medicine—especially if there's a local food shelf where the need can be supplemented.

There are many reasons for food scarcity in some of our neighbors' homes. Hardship can strike without a moment's notice. Presently, that can be the loss of a job due to the pandemic. Additionally, with increased demand at the food shelf, their own grant funds had been used up through the summer, so they looked to others such as the Zen Center to help with their stores.

What was most moving and striking to me in making deliveries to the food shelf, Dismas House, and Salvation

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the exertions of the Buddhas and Patriarchs make our exertions possible, but "in the exact same way" our exertions make the exertions of the Buddhas and Patriarchs possible. How can this possibly be? A hint may be found in the Bodhisattva of effort, where, as Taigen Leighton says, "Samantabhadra embodies the luminous interconnectedness of all beings."

One of the initial and continuing difficulties in practice is just how to apply effort in our zazen. Zen Masters of old warned against dead Zen which we might say is sitting without energy; just trying to feel good or perhaps feel nothing. The polar opposite, just as dangerous, is pressing so hard that our body clenches up and we end up just

fighting thoughts. Right effort is the middle way. And we must find this for ourselves. This is where practice is more art than rote. Gazing at this striking figure can give us a taste of this middle way.

Right effort of course is not simply for the zazen mat. Right effort is activity guided by the spirit of the precepts and by the four vows. And this does take effort. It takes right effort, and as our practice ripens our effort purifies and begins to bear fruit. In the Lotus Sutra, it says of Bhadra, "With every majestic step of the elephant's stately gait, Dharma wheels...spring up."

As this is written, we are experiencing unusual times to say the least. We cannot gather

to practice and have no idea, really, when this will resume. We sit together on Zoom, but otherwise are on our own. Where is right effort here? What are we doing with our time? How are we relating to our families? We are each of us threatened; we are each other's salvation. Samantabhadra the figure and Samantabhadra the Bodhisattva do not distinguish between zazen in the zendo, cleaning the Zen Center bathrooms, or hunkering down at home. We are presented every minute with opportunity. Bearing in mind Bhadra's countenance, we seek right effort in every moment. We expend effort every waking moment anyway, so why not make it right effort. —

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Army were the people standing in line waiting for the organization to open its doors. It saddened me to see families experiencing food scarcity. And it shattered all my previously held notions to find that the people in line looked familiar to me; in fact, could have been me or any one of us. It did not surprise me to learn that many of the folks in line have never had to ask for help before. They might even have previously been the givers.

The Zen Center vegetable garden became a vessel for good works sparked by the needs of our neighbors and friends. Many businesses and individuals contributed to the gardening mission. Rice Lumber donated lumber for the construction of borders, Red Wagon Nursery gave vegetable plants, Champlain Valley Compost contributed compost for the beds, and the Shelburne Supermarket and many Sangha members contributed time and



resources. And we have heard from Susan Stock, Shelburne Food Shelf Coordinator: *A short note to thank you and everyone at the Zen Center*

*for such wonderful veggies. The families loved them. Please express our gratitude—and that of the families—to everyone at the Zen Center! —*

## October Jataka Sesshin 10/23-26

*W*e are extremely fortunate to be able to offer once again a Jataka Tale sesshin with Sensei Rafe Martin as the guest teacher. The sesshin begins on **Friday evening, October 23, and ends on Monday, October 26.** The application deadline is **October 16.** It is possible to attend this and all Zoom sesshins part time as well as attending the Teisho portion only.

More information about Zoom sesshins is here: [www.vermontzen.org/sesshins.html](http://www.vermontzen.org/sesshins.html)



# VERMONT ZEN CENTER FOURTH QUARTER 2020

ZOOM SITTINGS: Monday–Friday 6-7 am | Tuesday & Thursday 7:00-8:00 pm | Sunday 9-10:15

OCTOBER

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
				1	2	3
4 BODHIDHARMA DAY	5 FINDING YOUR SEAT Tai Chi 4	6	7 Metta 6	8 First Term Student Begins	9	10
11 Teisho	12 Tai Chi 5	13	14	15 Term Student Meeting	16 Sesshin Deadline	17
18 Teisho	19 Tai Chi 6	20 OXFAM CEREMONY	21	22 Term Student Meeting	23-24 3-Day Jataka Sesshin	
25 3-Day Jataka Sesshin	26	27	28	29 Second Term Student Begins	30	31 Ceremony Workday

NOVEMBER

1 HUNGRY GHOST CEREMONY	2 FINDING YOUR SEAT Zen Center Closed Tai Chi 1	3	4	5 Term Student Meeting	6	7 Ceremony Workday
8 JUKAI	9 Zen Center Closed Tai Chi 2	10	11	12 Term Student Meeting	13	14 Ceremony Workday
15 THANKSGIVING CEREMONY	16 Zen Center Closed Tai Chi 3	17	18	19 Term Student Closing Ceremony	20	21
22	23 Tai Chi 4	24	25	26	27 Rohatsu Deadline	28
Zen Center Closed for Thanksgiving Break (11/21-28)						
29 Teisho	30					

DECEMBER

		1	2	3	4	5 4-Day Rohatsu Sesshin
6 Vermont 4-Day Rohatsu Sesshin (12/4-8)	7	8 BUDDHA'S ENLIGHTENMENT CEREMONY	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
Zen Center Closed for Holidays						
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
Zen Center Closed for Holidays						
27	28	29	30	31 NEW YEAR'S EVE		
Ceremony Workdays						

## World Peace Ceremony Sunday, September 20, 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 a Sunday close to that date.

The World Peace Ceremony begins with a 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. More information and registration:  
[www.vermontzen.org/ceremony\\_worldpeace.html](http://www.vermontzen.org/ceremony_worldpeace.html)

## Oxfam Fast for a World Harvest Tuesday, October 20, 7:20 p.m.

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 **Tuesday, October 20** 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.

If you know anyone who would like to participate, please feel free to invite them to the ceremony. The ceremony will take place at **7:20 p.m.**, during the evening sitting.



## 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 4**, we honor our great ancestor, Bodhidharma, the founder of Zen. Following a short 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 which begins at **9:00 a.m.** More information and registration here:  
[www.vermontzen.org/ceremony\\_bodhidharma.html](http://www.vermontzen.org/ceremony_bodhidharma.html)

# Ceremony for the Liberation of Hungry Ghosts

Sunday, November 1 at 9:00 a.m.

**A Ceremony for the Liberation of Hungry Ghosts will be held on Sunday, November 1.** During this observance, we offer food and drink to the hungry, thirsty inhabitants of the preta realm.

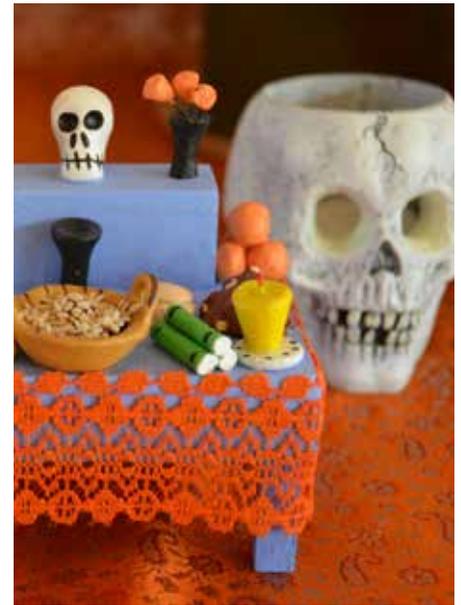
Hungry ghosts, or pretas, are beings in a subhuman state of development. Due to their extreme greed in prior lifetimes, they have been reborn into a state where they constantly suffer from hunger and thirst. Their stomachs are grossly distended, their limbs emaciated, and their mouths as small as the 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.

We hope you will join us in this ceremony of aid for the beings in the realm of the Hungry Ghosts. More information and registration here:

[www.vermontzen.org/ceremony\\_hungryghost.html](http://www.vermontzen.org/ceremony_hungryghost.html)





**Vermont Zen Center**

Post Office Box 880  
Shelburne, VT 05482

802-985-9746  
www.vermontzen.org

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## 2020 Term Student Programs

*The voice of the bell  
Eddies through the mist,  
In the morning twilight.  
—Basho*

### CONTRIBUTORS:

- Maria Delia Crosby, layout
- Roshi Sunyana Graef
- Greg Heath
- Josh Kelman
- Jhana Piche
- Greg Sheldon, copy editor
- Kelly Story, production
- Joan White, editor

If you want to strengthen your Zen training, invigorate your sitting, and learn how to incorporate practice into your daily life, consider joining one of the two Term Student Programs. The first program begins **Thursday, October 8**. The second begins **Thursday, October 29**. Both programs end on **Thursday, November 19**.

You will find that the Term Student Program is a shortcut to deeper concentration and greater understanding of Zen. As well, you will discover that you are capable of working far more intensely than you had ever imagined. Whether you are a new student or a long-time practitioner, you will derive benefit from participating in the program. It is an unsurpassed way to strengthen your commitment to the Dharma and deepen your practice.

For information about the program as well as Term Student Forms, please go to [www.vermontzen.org/termstudent.html](http://www.vermontzen.org/termstudent.html)

