

Walking Mountains

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

Dear Sangha and Friends,

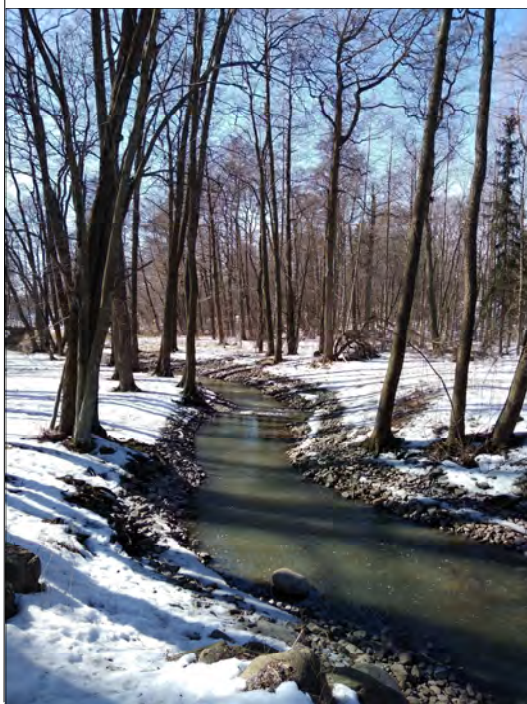
I’m not sure what a tuba has to do with the spring equinox, but I’m positive it has everything to do with Sangha Entertainment Day. What a great way to wake up the world that has been so fast asleep these last few months. Young and old break out their flutes and guitars, perform skits, recite poetry, and sing to their hearts content. Sangha celebrating Sangha. And my fingers are still crossed that someone shows up with a tuba.

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

—*Joan White*



Following Your Current by Victoria Wacek



When we’re able to take the time, it’s fascinating to reflect on new life experiences and the events that led up to them. Think back to the last new job you had—those first days at work, the coaching, the new experiences, and how day after day it was easier and easier to flow with the work. Think back to groups you may have joined, whether they were book clubs, soccer clubs, a PTA board, and others. We all start out as beginners, and as our knowledge grows, so do we.

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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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So here I sit, reflecting on an eight-month journey from a snowy March Introduction to Zen Workshop to a cool November day and reflecting on my newest experience—becoming a formal student of Roshi. The monkey-mind relates this experience to the many commitments I’ve made over my life to people, education, music, dance, and jobs. But none of those experiences came with the face-to-face verbal and heart commitment that Zen does. And my heart knows that this commitment doesn’t come from the need to stay in shape, provide an income to my family, or to fill the need of being part of a social group. Instead, this commitment comes from something deeper, something subtler, and something much more profound, important, and drastically more life changing than anything else taken on to date.

This subtle calling to come to Zen speaks from a wisdom unknown to the thinking mind. The calling speaks from a self-knowledge and a recognition of myself that intellect doesn’t (or isn’t able to) comprehend. When asked by loved ones why I’m choosing this path, the answer is always the same. *Because this feels right.*

“This commitment comes from something deeper, something subtler, and something much more profound, important, and drastically more life changing than anything else taken on to date.”

Because it’s warm, and I follow the warm things. The only life we get to experience on this planet is our own. It isn’t within our abilities to live others’ lives, regardless of how much we love and cherish them. And the journey of Zen is a deep dive into who we are.

My commitment to becoming a student has touched me deeply. The realization that this isn’t me just trying this out. A contract with my heart has been signed. I’ve reflected on my life and chose the stream that is taking me towards myself in a way that is unique from any other choice I’ve made previously.

It’s curious to consider what our world would be like if all beings were empowered to make choices with such thoughtfulness. What would colleges look like and the students within them if each student gave as much thought and commitment to their choice of school and

classes as we do in Zen? What would our governments be like if everyone involved made the empowered choice to be open hearted, curious, and attentive every day? Imagine the long term effects on relationships, families, and our planet!

We are each following our own current. We are blessed that Zen found its way into our attention, and that we then followed the calling to investigate, test out, and then commit to its flow. We are now empowered to become the bright, shining lights that we’ve always had within ourselves. —



Practical Zen Training by Meredith Markow

If each of us were asked to list the circumstances and reasons leading us to The Vermont Zen Center, it's doubtful that "learning how to properly clean a toilet" would be among them. Unlikely, as well, might be wanting to know how to accordion fold a hand towel, dead-head a balloon flower, or efficiently de-stem a stalk of kale. And yet, gaining the capacity to perform practical life skills such as these is an integral part of our Zen training.

While it might be a spiritual yearning that initially brought us to Zen and our teacher, we can't ignore the reality of tending to the physical building and grounds and preparing for the many ceremonies and events that take place to make it possible for us to practice together as a Sangha. Lending ourselves fully to the smooth functioning of our Center, guided by our supervisors and senior members, offers each of us a most valuable training opportunity to maximize our potential and become increasingly skillful as human beings navigating in a complex world.

In the various aspects of our practical Zen training, we



are given instructions for how to do what is being asked, be it transplanting a rose bush, blending a marinade, turning the compost pile, cleaning an incense pot, filling hand soap dispensers, vacuuming the Kannon Room, making a flower arrangement, or polishing brass candlesticks. And while there are very high standards at our Center, what strikes me repeatedly is that when we are given a task, we are *already* seen as capable of being successful at it. We are given the confident message that we can do more than we think we can. And therefore, we do. When someone else sees in us more than we are able to see in ourselves, it is a seedbed for our own believing.

Perhaps it's even a manifestation of trusting that the Buddha wasn't lying when he said that we are each perfect, whole and complete, lacking nothing.

Without contradicting this faith that our supervisors have in us, what is also being honed when we are training, is patience and humility. Even with detailed instruction and a vote of confidence, we are bound to make mistakes. We are bound to receive feedback and to have to start over, maybe even more than once. This can be frustrating, if not also bruising. But we strive to go gently with ourselves and to understand that whatever "corrections" are offered, they are done so for the well-being

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Temple Nights

Temple Nights, on **Tuesday, April 2** and **Thursday, April 4**, 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 7**, 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

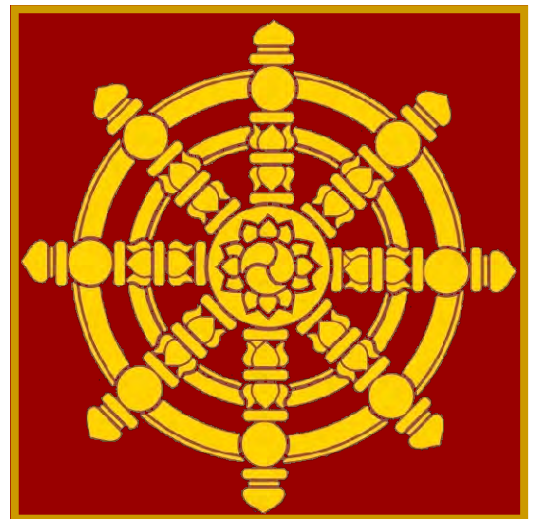
Our Center has two Jukai ceremonies each year, one in April and one in November. It is customary to take Jukai as often as possible. Each time you participate, your resolve to practice

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 & April Courses

Lovingkindness Wednesday, March 13

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

A six-week course on Wednesday evenings starts March 13, conducted by Zen priest Nowa Crosby and lay priest Heather Kelman.

Register online at the Zen Center's website.

Introduction to Zen Saturday, April 13

Conducted by Roshi Sunyana Graef and her students, Workshops are a practical and authentic introduction of the practice of Zen Buddhism. During the half-day schedule of talks, question periods, demonstrations, and guided meditation, participants are introduced to the body-mind disciplines of Zen Buddhism.

This is the second of five Introduction to Zen Workshops that will be held this year. Register online at the Zen Center's website.

www.vermontzen.org/courses.html

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of our Center, and for no other reason. Our supervisors are serving us all to help make our Center the refuge that it is. Because of this, we learn not to take "corrections" personally or defensively. Rather than over-explain or justify to protect our rascally egos, we come to say "thank you for the guidance" and mean it.

In the film, "Carving the Divine: Buddhist Sculptors of Japan," from Yujiro Seki, we are taken on a journey of an apprentice's growing pains learning from a master figure sculptor. The novice's one dream is to "leave no shameful works behind. To leave nothing but the great works to the world." When we train at the

Zen Center, we may not be living the austere life of the apprentice, and we may not be leaving behind "great works," but we can carry ourselves with the same gesture of respect as we evenly slice the tomato in complete and focused silence. —



Upcoming Workdays

TEMPLE NIGHT WORKDAYS are on Thursday evening, March 28, Saturday, March 30, and Sunday, March 31.

JUKAI WORKDAY is on Saturday, April 6.

Weekend workdays start at 9:00 a.m.

2023 End of Sesshin Photos



This was the first sesshin in Costa Rica since the pandemic began. The last sesshin there was in October 2019.



The eleven Zoomers disappeared before the end of Rohatsu photo could be taken.





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*The sparrows
 Look as if back from
 a pilgrimage
 To Zenkoji* 
 — Issa

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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 10**, 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