

Walking Mountains

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

Dear Sangha and Friends,

Spring is now in full swing in Vermont, and isn't it interesting how the gardens at the Center remind us what we were up to last fall? Tulips, narcissus, crocus, and the like are popping up everywhere as a result of our autumn planting. Terrestrial rainbows abound!

We begin the month of May honoring our teacher's teacher, Roshi Philip Kapleau, and in so doing, we pay homage to all ancestors. This memorial service is soon followed by Vesak, a celebration of the Buddha's birth with chanting, song, stories, and an elephant parade. And of course, birthday cake!

June brings the Sangha Gardening Weekend when we come together to rake and dig and plant the many beds residing at the Center. It's also a weekend full of camaraderie and fun among Dharma brothers and sisters. So, bring your backbone and muscle, shovels and shoes, help prepare food, drinks, and snacks, and keep water pitchers full for the thirsty. There's a place for one and all to participate. Please join us.

–Joan White

I Take Refuge In Sangha by Jim Kahle



Back during the term student program, I was invited to a Wednesday morning birthday party for Anna immediately following the morning sitting. It was very similar to the Friday morning Costa Rican breakfast at the Center except that cards, presents, and cupcakes were on the menu. It was a rollicking good time, replete with love, laughter, stories, and nonsense. Anna was in rare form. People brought

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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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themselves fully to the occasion. I relaxed into the welcoming atmosphere and couldn't help but feel close to all of the people who attended. I had so much fun that I told Joan that someone should write an article about how wonderful these gatherings can be. So here it is.

Practice can seem like such a solitary affair at times: lonely actually. A person can come to the Center, put on their robe, attend the sitting, change out of their robe, and leave without saying a single word to anyone. But it doesn't have to be this way. The Buddhas and Ancestors teach us to take refuge in the wisdom and warmth of the Sangha, because our spiritual life depends on it. Amen to that.

The Center offers many opportunities for the development of friendships. On Sundays after the sitting, we socialize over tea and bagels. There is Entertainment Day, the Sangha picnic, the Gardening and Social Weekends in the spring and fall, among other things. Over the years, however, members of the Sangha have creatively initiated other ways to get together, and these events have often paid dividends in relation to practice for the participants.

The possibilities are limitless, but here are just a few of them. The aforementioned Costa Rican breakfast on Fridays is a very tasty way to get together with the residents and

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with others. You are asked to make a small donation to help pay for the food. If you'd like to attend, contact Ramiro a day or more in advance so he can plan accordingly. An added bonus is being able to attend the Friday morning ceremony of aid, which is a terrific way to start the day.

If you live a ways from the Center, carpooling can be a great way to augment one's practice. I have been a member of the southern car pool for many years. It has been a vital part of my practice. Over the years it has evolved into a refuge, a safe space where one can broach any subject and expect to receive an honest but considerate reply. A Dharma sister reminded me that you don't have to live many miles from the Center to take advantage of this. The benefit, it seems, comes from getting together regularly for the journey and letting the process of familiarity work its magic.

There have been sledding parties and game nights. There have been a couple of astronomy

events over the years. You might not know exactly whom you're talking to at first out there in the darkness, but the collective viewing of the night sky inspires a sense of sharing something immense and mysterious. Aylie has asked me to bring my telescope to the Center for some after-sitting viewing so one of these events appears to be on the figurative horizon.

Taking care of the gardens at the Center is a big job. Jhana, Joan, Heather, and others can use all the help they can get as we enter the growing season. We can work with Sangha members weekly for an entire season or more. There is also time to chat. Last year I was interested in knowing how my Dharma sister Jhana incorporates Metta and chanting into her work in the gardens. We sat down on the bench off the vegetable gardens and talked about this along with other matters. It was very helpful.

Another possibility involves the precept buddy option during

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Blind Men Crossing a Bridge by Josh Kelman

Zen Master Hakuin, who reinvigorated Rinzai Zen in Japan in the 18th century, was also a great artist. As we might expect, his art was also a part of his teaching.

I have long been amazed at the power of sumi-e ink drawing and how much can be conveyed with just a few brush strokes. Anyone who has seen Picasso's Don Quixote ink drawing can testify to how that character's personality comes alive on paper.

Some years ago, my wife and I saw an exhibition of Hakuin's work in New York and "Blind Men Crossing a Bridge" was among those treasures. At first glance it seems like a very strange subject. But looking closely, we see the taut attention in the bodies of the blind men laser focused on the log bridge. Unable to rely on eyesight, they

must put every bit of tactile awareness into staying on the log. One slip and they fall. One slip of our attention and we too fall from awareness to separation. For the blind men, attention means life or death; the log is their life raft. We too must cling to our log, to our practice, for dear life. How do we do this? Hakuin's "how to" is right there on ink and paper.

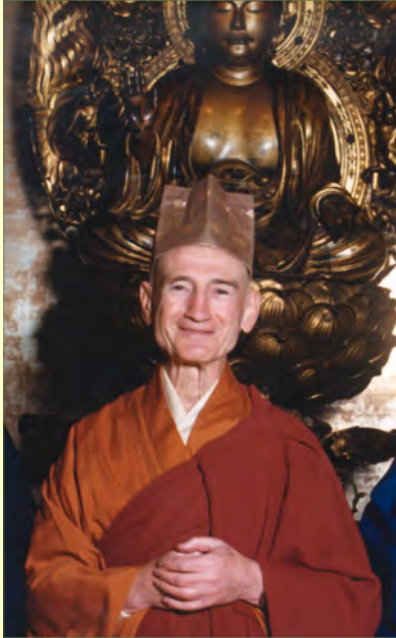
Looking at it this way, the blind men are fortunate to be blind. The average person might miss a wet spot on the log or trip over a knot and fall to their death. The blind men recognize that they must bring to bear every ounce of concentration and become intimate with every inch of the log. Their blindness protects them from the myriad of visual distractions constantly vying for attention and the resulting inattention that could

cost them their lives. Hakuin wants us to be blind. Blind to whatever separates us, on and off the mat. How much pain would be avoided if we could blindly accept rather than constantly picking and choosing? There are enough legitimate decisions we need to make. But our chronic need to have things our way is very worthy of a healthy dose of blindness.

Coming back to the power of art to communicate, just look at how powerfully this drawing can reach us compared to trying to describe what's happening. Just the word blind can elicit all sorts of reactions that move us away from the point. Art has the ability to bypass our small judging mind and go right to the gut. Gaze at a Buddha figure and the wisdom, compassion, and serenity is taken in directly. There are no words to describe just how a

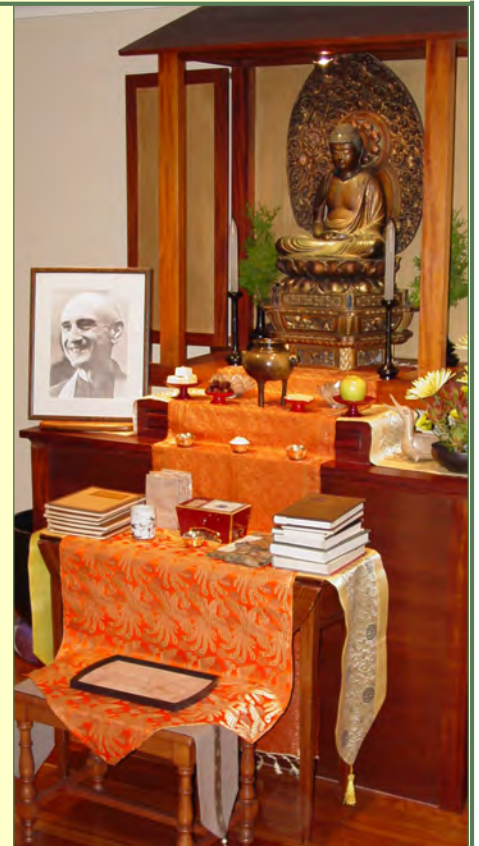
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All-Day Sitting in Honor of Roshi Philip Kapleau



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 7.**

On this day we will have an all-day sitting **beginning at 7 a.m. and ending at 3:30 p.m.** During the day there will be a special chanting service including the memorial prayer. There will also be dokusan, and we will listen to one of Roshi Kapleau's taped teishos. —



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the Term Student Program. Is there someone in the Sangha who is participating in the program that you would like to get to know better? Someone whose perspective on the precepts might positively impact your own? Maybe you could ask that person to be your precept buddy. I have been doing this for years and I haven't been turned down yet. Like carpooling, over time these meetings create a safe space to share openly. Sincere and heartfelt discussions can take place at the end of the program that wouldn't have been possible at the beginning.

When Sangha members make an effort to get together, good things happen. When planning activities, it might be worthwhile to take a minute and consider who else in the Sangha might be interested in participating, who might benefit. Someone was kind enough to offer me an invitation to Anna's birthday party and it was really appreciated. The first step seemingly is an awareness of the possibilities and then finding the boldness to reach out to others.

The opportunities are limitless and the benefits can be considerable. —

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Mozart concerto, or a vintage Motown tune brings us joy. Even poetry, which wholly consists of words, must often be grasped by abandoning trying to figure out the meaning and just absorbing the poet's intent.

A bridge of course can be a metaphor for the path we are all taking from ignorance to enlightenment. To walk this path, words like hard work, selflessness, faith, commitment and resilience all come to mind. Zen Master Hakuin transcends these words with one potent image. To truly walk this path, we must see like the blind. —

Spring Sangha Gardening Weekend

Thursday evening, June 8 – Sunday afternoon, June 11



Get together with Sangha members to work in the gardens, weeding, planting, and preparing our temple grounds for the warm weather ahead.

Lunch will be provided. **Registration is essential** so that we can prepare food, lodgings, work assignments, and more.

Additional information and **registration** here:

[www.vermontzen.org/
events_gardenweekend.html](http://www.vermontzen.org/events_gardenweekend.html)

May & June Courses

Indian Cooking: Lunch Saturday, May 20

Learn how to prepare a delicious and authentic vegetarian Indian meal in the Vermont Zen Center's spacious kitchen.

Manju Selinger will guide you through the process of preparing the meal, which all will enjoy for lunch. No cooking experience is necessary. Limited enrollment. Manju's courses fill quickly!

Register online at:

vermontzen.org/indian_cooking_lunch.html

Haiku Workshop Saturday, June 17

Learn the essential elements of traditional haiku and how the form has been played with by American poets. In this course you will gain an understanding of the interaction between spiritual practice and poetry as well as an appreciation of how haiku provides a way to engage in nature. There will also be time to write and share haiku.

Register online at:

vermontzen.org/haiku.html

Flower Arranging Saturday, June 24

Learn basic Ikebana and flower arranging elements: triangulation, depth, placement, color, container size and materials. Through understanding the interaction between spiritual practice and flower arranging, participants will gain an appreciation of the deeper meaning of flowers as offerings and as a way to bring a sense of tranquility to one's environment.

Register online at:

vermontzen.org/flower_arranging.html

Vesak 2023



Vesak, the celebration honoring the birth of Shakyamuni Buddha, will be on **Sunday, May 28, beginning at 10 a.m.** (There's no morning sitting prior to the ceremony.) According to tradition, the Buddha was born on April 8. However, for purely practical reasons we celebrate this event when the weather is warmer and we can be outdoors.

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, but please register if you are planning to attend in person.

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 by the young mothers. Please also bring a flower offering for the baby Buddha.

More information and **registration** at: www.vermontzen.org/ceremony_vesak.html. We hope to see you there! —



REMEMBER TO BRING:

- A flower offering
- A baby gift
- A vegetarian dish to share



Ceremony Reminders



- **All-Day Sitting in honor of Roshi Philip Kapleau** on Sunday, May 7. Register online: www.vermontzen.org/ceremony_roshi.html
- **Famine Relief Ceremony** on Thursday, May 18. www.vermontzen.org/ceremony_famincerelief.html
- **Vesak, the Buddha's Birthday Celebration is on Sunday, May 28.** Register online: www.vermontzen.org/ceremony-vesak.html
- **Sunday, June 18** is the seventh and final yearly memorial service for Casa Zen member Jorge Quiros.

Sangha Work Periods in May and June

CEREMONY WORKDAY on Friday, May 6 for the Roshi Kapleau all-day.

VESAK WORKDAYS on Friday, May 26 and Saturday, May 27. Please lend a hand whenever you can. Help is greatly needed and truly appreciated with setting up for the Buddha's Birthday Celebration.

SANGHA GARDENING WEEKEND SET UP WORKDAYS on Sunday, June 4 and Tuesday, evening June 6.




Vermont Zen Center

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*A basket of grass,
And no one there, —
Mountains of spring.*
—Shiki



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If you have time over the next several months to help with mowing, weed whacking, or gardening, please contact Jhana, Jim, or Nowa.

Thank you for helping to keep our land beautiful and welcoming.