

Walking Mountains

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

Dear Sangha and Friends,

No matter what season, leaving the Zen Center after morning sitting, there is always a solitary crow at the top of the poplar tree calling to us. I cannot help but wonder if its Caw! Caw! Caw! could be translated: Attention. Attention. Attention. And with summer waning and activity at the Center waxing full throttle, there are many opportunities to do just that.

The gardens call for our collective attention to begin preparing them for the winter ahead, and we heed their call with a weekend filled with gratifying work and socializing. The Term Student Program begins quickly thereafter, and our collective commitment fuels our energy for the World Peace Ceremony, the Jataka Sesshin, Bodhidharma Day, and the Hungry Ghost Ceremony. Meanwhile, keep your eyes peeled for that robe of color ascending the mountains. Please join us.

—*Joan White*

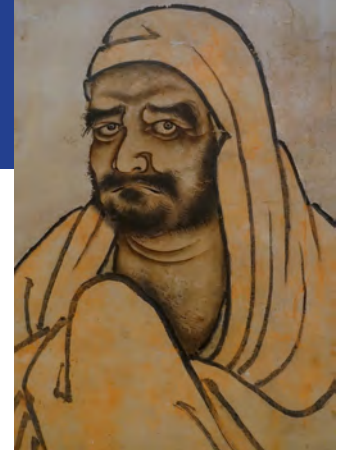
Bows and Prostrations

by Josh Kelman



When I began practicing, woefully green and immature, I was looking to attain some sort of great wisdom that would put an end to my fears and troubles. To that end, as I saw it, a painful regimen of zazen was required, and the rest was merely to be endured. This is what can come from listening to one’s teacher through a filter. As practice matures, we find that there is really nothing to attain; we are inherently Buddhas, and that each

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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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of the practices we engage in at our Center has profound value. None more than bows and prostrations.

We know that bowing has been part of Asian culture for millennia. It is not hard to learn to love to *gassho* (“bow” in Japanese). Particularly with Dharma brothers and sisters, it is such a simple and heartfelt way to express our love, respect, and affection. Prostrations, however, cut against the grain of our inherited western culture. Initially, it may smack of idol worship or servile submission. Of course, prostrations in Buddhism are nothing of the sort. Prostrations are a physical manifestation of *zazen*. And a way to express our kinship with and gratitude for this practice and the efforts of our Dharma ancestors. It is an expression of our own Buddha nature, the full discovery of we have vowed to devote ourselves to. Bowing or prostrating before a Buddha figure becomes, really, the only appropriate way to address this artistic representation of our own perfection.

What we do repeatedly can become rote habit. Bows and prostrations can become dry gestures. Like the rest of practice, we need to be attentive and on guard for this. Bowing as we enter the *zendo* can be a reminder to put our game face

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on. Better yet, let’s just bow. Similarly with prostrations, we want to put our entire body and mind into it. This act may sometimes elicit emotions of joy and gratitude. A bonus.

Feeling frustrated with endless wrong answers presented in *dokusan*? There is a foolproof way to “win” in *dokusan* every time. The bows and prostration we do in the *dokusan* room are not mere formalities. They are a presentation of our practice. No great wisdom or years of experience are required. We come as we are. By bowing and prostrating before *Roshi*, who is standing in the place of our very own Buddha nature, we bow and prostrate before Buddha nature itself. There is nothing to prove. We merely need to be fully present. And it can feel wonderful.

Here’s a koan to grapple with: How to do credible prostrations at the end of three rounds of sitting with stiff wobbly knees and a robe that keeps tripping us up? And the bells seem to come so fast. It can be done. Because, of course, it is

all about the mind state and no one is scoring style points. Yet, I must admit to struggling to find a way to prostrate with some dignity using an indignant body. More grist for the mill of practice.

It has been said, “We bow to Buddhas, we bow to ourselves.” It is so easy to get discouraged with what we perceive as lack of progress or the seeming drudgery of practice (for this we can thank demon ego). Bows and prostrations are physical reminders of our own perfection. When we throw ourselves into it, there is no room for negativity. They become another tool, a skillful means, to stop being a lackey for ego and act from our true selves. What great fortune it is to have found this practice, this Sangha and this teacher. How best to express our gratitude? One way is to lower that mast of ego, and with head buried into the mat, raise our palms filled with the feet of the Buddha and offer thanks for our fortunate karma, resolving not to waste it. —

Meeting our Dharma Ancestors by Greg Sheldon

At the April Temple Nights there was an ancestors' altar in the Buddha Hall foyer. In the center stood a figure of Bodhidharma, who brought the Zen to China from India. He was flanked on the altar by photos and prints of six of our Dharma ancestors. Perhaps a little biographical information about each would be helpful.

Immediately to the right of the Bodhidharma figure was a photograph of Hui-neng, the Sixth Chinese Patriarch of Zen and the final ancestor given the title of Patriarch. He lived from 638–713. It is written that Hui-neng was awakened as a young man when he was selling firewood to support his widowed mother and he heard a monk reciting the Diamond Sutra. He left home, studied with the fifth Patriarch, and after composing a poem to show his understanding, he was given transmission. Hui-neng then taught the Dharma for thirty-seven years and is one of only two people other than the Buddha whose teaching is recorded as a sutra (*The Platform Sutra*). The five Chinese schools of Zen all trace their lineage to him.

Next we met the great Chinese master Joshu, who lived from 778–897. It is said that Joshu's mind was so clear that when he spoke light emanated



from his lips. Ordained as a monk at the age of eighteen, Joshu studied with the great teacher Nansen for thirty-nine years. Nansen gave Joshu transmission, and after Nansen's death Joshu travelled through China for over twenty years, deepening his understanding. When he felt ready, he settled in a small temple and taught for forty years. Joshu lived to the age of one hundred twenty. Many Zen students have come to know Joshu intimately through the koan Mu.

On the far-right side of the altar was a portrait of Eihei Dogen (1200–1253). This extraordinary teacher, dissatisfied with his understanding and unable to find a capable teacher in Japan, traveled to China where he studied with Zen Master

Rujing, who gave him transmission. Dogen, the founder of Soto Zen, was a prolific writer whose brilliance can be experienced through his monumental work the *Shobo Genzo* (*Treasury of the True Dharma Eye*) where he wrote, "Although the inconceivable dharma is abundant in each person, it is not experienced without realization."

At the far left of the altar was a photo of Harada Sogaku Roshi (1871–1961), the abbot of Hosshinji monastery in Japan where he taught Yasutani and Kapleau Roshi. Although Harada Roshi was a Soto teacher, his teaching was a synthesis of Rinzai and Soto Zen with a strong emphasis on awakening.

To the right of Harada Roshi was a photograph of Hakuun Yasutani Roshi (1885–1973).

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Sangha Garden Work and Social Weekend

A SANGHA GARDEN WORK & SOCIAL WEEKEND will be held from **Friday evening, September 8 through Sunday afternoon, September 10**. The purpose is to work together on buildings and especially grounds, enjoying the beauty of our land and the company of our Dharma family. Sangha members and their families, including children of all ages, are invited. You are welcome to stay at the Center. **There is no fee for this event, but you must be a member of the Sangha.** Roshi will offer doku-san on Thursday evening (as usual) and possibly on Friday morning.

We will schedule the bulk of the work for the morning in order to leave most of the afternoon free for unstructured activity. It is important to know who is coming for planning purposes, so **please send a reservation to the Center by September 1.**

WHAT TO BRING: Work clothes, boots or other sturdy footwear, a hat, water bottle, sitting robe, (bedding and a towel if staying overnight). If you are allergic to wasps or bees, remember to bring your medication.

WHEN TO ARRIVE: The weekend schedule starts on Friday evening, September 8, although you are welcome to arrive earlier.

CHILDCARE: If you are bringing young children, childcare will need to be arranged by parents for formal sitting times. Children need to be watched at all times and should not enter the fenced area around the fire pond. The sides are steep, slippery, and dangerous, which is why it's fenced.

MEALS: Meals are provided. Breakfast and lunch will be eaten together, and in the evening soup and leftovers will be available.

REGISTRATION: More information is on the VZC website: vermontzen.org/events_gardenweekend.html

Term Student Program

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 three Term Student Programs. All three programs begin on **Tuesday, September 12**. They end on different dates. Registration forms are due by **September 5** for all three programs.

You will find that Term Student 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 detailed information about the program as well as Term Student Forms, please go to www.vermontzen.org/termstudent.html

May Peace Prevail on Earth!



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.

World Peace Ceremony

At the Zen Center, we have a **WORLD PEACE CEREMONY** on a Sunday as close as possible to the United Nations' International Day of Peace. This year it is on **September 17 from 9:00 to 10:30 a.m.**

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 members and trial members are welcome to attend in person. Non-members are welcome to attend via Zoom.

More information at www.vermontzen.org/ceremony_worldpeace.html

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While raising a family, Yasutani Roshi had a career as a teacher and principal and worked with a number of Zen teachers. He eventually trained with Harada Roshi with whom he completed his formal Zen training and was given permission to teach at the age of fifty-eight. A tireless teacher, Yasutani Roshi also wrote books of commentary on five major koan collections. It was Yasutani Roshi who gave Kapleau Roshi permission to teach.

The last photo was of Philip Kapleau Roshi (1912–2004), Roshi Graef's teacher, hence our Dharma grandfather. Haunted by what he witnessed as the chief court reporter at both the Nurem-

berg and Tokyo War Crimes Tribunals, Philip Kapleau gave up his business and moved to Japan in 1952 to practice Zen. After working with both Soen Nakagawa and Harada Roshi, he completed his training under Yasutani Roshi, who gave him permission to teach Zen in 1965. Kapleau Roshi's first book, *The Three Pillars of Zen*, published in 1966, introduced thousands of people to Zen practice in the western world. He moved to Rochester, New York, in 1966 where he founded the Rochester Zen Center. Kapleau Roshi was a teacher of impeccable character and deep understanding. He offered authentic Zen teaching at a

time when it was very difficult to find in the western world.

When reciting "The Ancestral Line," I feel gratitude for our many Ancestors who have kept the path open for us to follow. From world cycle to world cycle, from India to China, and from Japan to the United States, Canada, Costa Rica, and beyond, from time immemorial to this very moment, we have this rare and precious opportunity to practice. These words from the Repentance Gatha come to mind: "The Buddhas and Bodhisattvas in the past were like us, and we will in the future become Buddhas and Bodhisattvas." —

Ceremony for the Liberation of Hungry Ghosts



A CEREMONY FOR THE LIBERATION OF HUNGRY GHOSTS will be held on Sunday, October 29 at 10:00 a.m. 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 sub-human 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.

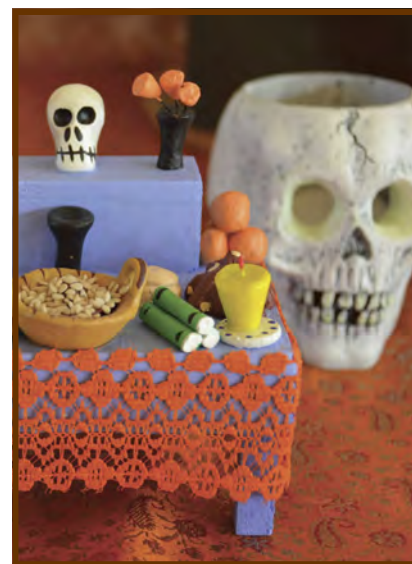
During the Hungry Ghost Ceremony, we chant sutras and make offerings of food and water to the beings of the preta realm. In making this gift we must overcome our own greed, thereby setting an example for the hungry ghosts. This freely-offered food and drink does not turn into poison or fire, which is 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 per-

sonal 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.

Members are invited to attend in person. You may also attend via Zoom. For full information visit: www.vermontzen.org/ceremony_hungryghost.html



Upcoming Courses at the Vermont Zen Center

www.vermontzen.org/courses.html

Flower Arranging September 16

Learn basic Ikebana and flower arranging elements used at the Vermont Zen Center. Through understanding the interaction between spiritual practice and flower arranging, participants will gain an appreciation of the deeper meaning of flowers as a way to bring a sense of tranquility to one's environment. More information and registration on the Zen Center's website.

Haiku Poetry September 23

Through close readings of Japanese poets, participants learn the essential elements of traditional haiku and gain an understanding of the interaction between spiritual practice and poetry, as well as an appreciation of the deeper meaning of haiku. More information and registration on the Zen Center's website.

Festive Indian Cooking September 30

In this course you will learn how to prepare a festive meal for a special occasion. Manju Selinger and the experienced cooks in the Zen Center's spacious kitchen will guide you through the process, and you'll enjoy the results for lunch. More information and registration on the Zen Center's website.

October Jataka Sesshin—Deadline September 15

We are extremely fortunate to be able to offer once again a Jataka Tale sesshin with Roshi Rafe Martin as the guest teacher. The sesshin begins on **Friday evening, October 13**, rather than the usual Saturday start of a sesshin. The first two days (Saturday and Sunday) will be full-time, the last three days there will be sittings in the early morning and the evening, with nothing scheduled during the day so that people can go to work. Roshi (Graef) will be giving do-

kusan three times a day during the first two days, and twice a day during the last three days.

The sesshin will be devoted to working with Jataka tales. Roshi Martin will be conducting discussions of the Jatakas during the weekend, and giving teishos using the Jatakas throughout the rest of the sesshin. The emphasis will be on how these ancient stories of the Buddha's previous lifetimes relate to our own lives and practice.

A reminder that there is a flat rate \$70 surcharge for all those

who attend this sesshin either part time or full time. This is the honorarium for our guest teacher. This year once again, there will be the option of Zooming in for the Jataka talk portion of the sesshin. —





Vermont Zen Center
 Post Office Box 880
 Shelburne, VT 05482-0880

802-985-9746
 www.vermontzen.org

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*At the altar,
 In the chief place,
 Cries a cricket.*



—Issa

CONTRIBUTORS:

- Roshi Sunyana Graef
- Josh Kelman
- Greg Sheldon, *copy editor*
- Kelly Story, *production*
- Joan White, *editor*



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 1, we honor our great ancestor, Bodhidharma, the founder of Zen.

Following an hour of 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 and will begin around 9:40 a.m. —