

Walking Mountains

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

Dear Sangha and Friends,

As the Term Student Program comes to a close, and the end of the year approaches, we settle into colder days and nights, and I am reminded of Mumon’s words, “*If the mind is not clouded with unnecessary things, no season is too much for you.*” It is continuous practice that makes this possible.

And now *ceremony season* at the Center provides us with ample opportunities to take refuge in the Three Treasures — Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. Renewing our vows in the Jukai Ceremony, giving thanks at Thanksgiving, joining the worldwide Sangha during the Rohatsu Sesshin, and ringing in the New Year with repentance and resolve further strengthens our practice. Our efforts spill into the world around us, lighting the dark days of winter. Please join us.

—*Joan White*

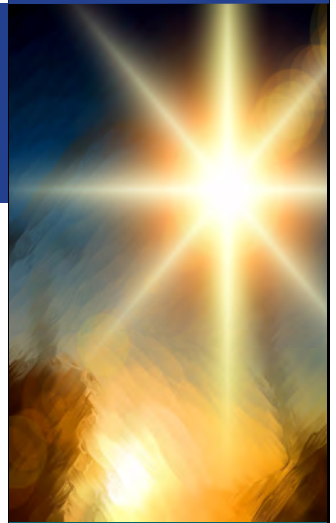
A Year in Residence by Alison Gardner



Over the years I occasionally wondered what it would be like to be a resident at the Zen Center. What goes on after events are over and cleaned up? What would it be like to take time away from “my life” to focus more on my practice and be of greater service? After I decided to build a house on my lot next door to the Center, the way opened.

As my year of residency ends, there is so much to reflect on and digest. It’s been quite a year with remarkable events such as the Triple Sangha pil-

(Continued on page 2)



INSIDE THIS ISSUE

A Year in Residence	1
Maintenance & Repair	3
Oxfam Ceremony	4
Jukai Ceremony	4
Thanksgiving	5
The Buddha’s Enlightenment	5
New Year’s Eve	6
Home Purification	7
Temple Cleaning	7
Term Student News	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.

(Continued from page 1)

grimage to India and recently the celebration of the 50th Anniversary of Casa Zen and the priest ordination of Bodhi (Carlos) Murillo. This was juxtaposed with sittings, ceremonies and workshops and the more intense periods of practice, the Term Student and training programs and sesshins. Residency also involves participation in workdays along with performing tasks to help maintain our temple and grounds. Many events are experienced differently as a resident; many start sooner with preparation and include tasks following clean-up, and others involve flexibility as the use of some shared space is temporarily restricted.

Several things stand out: the seamless comings and goings of Sangha members—the many hands of Kannon—taking care of oh so many tasks; the support of the residents by the Sangha; and the harmony of the Sangha and residents expressed in how we live, practice, and work together. Along with the fun and comradery of Tico breakfasts (especially the surprise birthday celebrations), residency increases the chance of meetings and conversations with Sangha members, often leading to deeper friendships. And how wonderful, as a resident, to have a zendo and Kannon Room nearby and always at the ready.

“ I didn’t know what to expect and hadn’t thought much about being a resident before moving in. I knew it would be difficult. It was a commitment based on my faith and trust in Roshi, my practice, and our Sangha. ”

The short, hot summer passed quickly, and the heat of residents’ rooms was endured with fans, facetiousness, and humor. During the growing season, a cooperative vegetable garden was formed with the vegetables grown tended by residents and other members and harvests shared with the Center and those in need of food. But it wasn’t only vegetables that grew—we mentored each other in gardening skills and beyond as relationships smoothed and deepened through “rubbing up” against each other while working together. When the walk-in cooler was broken for several weeks in July, the concern and the many hands that restocked the pantry and repaired the cooler in time for the Training Program, was moving. We were a team, and the relief was palpable.

And, of course, there was my personal journey. As expressed by another resident, residency is a pressure cooker. It’s difficult to get away from your “small

self” as your unskillful habits loom large when sharing responsibilities and working as a team, sharing communal spaces, and cooking and eating together—particularly for me, after having lived alone for many years. Residency provided many opportunities to let go of judgments and unhelpful thought patterns—and just do what needed to be done.

I didn’t know what to expect and hadn’t thought much about being a resident before moving in. I knew it would be difficult. It was a commitment based on my faith and trust in Roshi, my practice, and our Sangha. It was a tumultuous year dealing with a health problem (now resolved) and building a house (nearly completed) made less so with the increased practice residency requires. Many thanks to all. I am so grateful for the support, acceptance, and compassion shown by my fellow residents and the Sangha, and to be walking this path with all of you!

Maintenance and Repair

by Josh Kelman

Our Sangha is blessed with members having talents and useful skills and who create for our grounds, our buildings and our ceremonies an environment conducive to practice. We have restaurant quality cooks and bakers, flower arrangers and gardeners, artists, finish carpenters, and possessors of high-level computer skills. We have members who teach courses in Indian cooking, haiku, flower arranging and lovingkindness practice. This is not to diminish equally important work that enables the Center to function. There are the cleaners, the wheelbarrow pushers, the weed pickers, lawn mowers, newsletter folders, and dishwashers. It is all equal grist for the practice mill. It takes an entire Sangha to add up to the thousand arms of Kannon creating a practice environment for the sake of all beings. Over the years, having participated in these tasks along with everybody else, I seem to have found a place in maintenance and repair.

It is enormously satisfying any time we can be of benefit, particularly in the functioning of a Zen Center. At the same time, the standards are high. We have a clean, spare aesthetic and a repair must not stand out. One small drywall repair I took on needed about 8 coats of spackle and sanding to get right. And this was inside a cleaning closet! Another effort several years ago was to switch all lighting to LED. Meeting Roshi's standards for low color temperature and non-flickering required many iterations. The toughest part of putting in a system to irrigate the vegetable gardens was to make it nearly invisible. And my heart is in my throat

anytime I drill a hole in our natural wood window trim for shades, air conditioners. etc. One hole in the wrong place lives forever as an eyesore. A carpenter's adage is to cut once but measure twice. At the Zen Center, I measure about 6 times.

One of the more enjoyable responsibilities is dealing with contractors. They genuinely respect the environment we have created and I haven't met any yet who resent taking off their shoes. For these professionals too, it requires additional attentiveness to meet the standards we have. We need plumbers, electricians, HVAC and control techs, carpenters, and whole house vacuum technicians. Sometimes our needs are desperate. The walk-in cooler failed the week before our training program and sesshin began. And last year the zendo air conditioner failed just before the August sesshin. Our contractors came through for us, cutting into their own busy schedules. This year's August sesshin was a perfect storm of high temperature and humidity with 50 plus human furnaces in the zendo. The cooling system bent but did not break.

I take pleasure in restoring a whining vacuum to health. Or setting door hardware to latch properly without undue noise. I love sharpening the gardening tools and fixing the flat wheelbarrow tires each spring and so aid the gardeners. (Please don't tell them how easy it is!) It was particularly rewarding to replace light fixtures in front of the Buddha Hall altar that had flickered for years. The real trick was fitting the small diameter fixture into a larger diameter opening with the aid of custom-made metal rings (plus help from a licensed electrician).

Plumbing can be frustrating. We replace a leaking sink trap using what basic knowledge we have and, in the process, break an old brittle nut that connects to the sink. Another trip to the hardware store. We then find that the pipe the nut connects to cannot be reused and so the whole unit must be replaced. Another trip and repair. All the while, fearing that at the end of the day, a slow drip will inevitably appear at the bottom of the trap because of some unknown poor practice that professionals manage to avoid. Reminds me of zazen, actually. Fearful, unnecessary thoughts intruding into what we naively believe ought to be a mind free from disturbances. Well, practice is practice. We live with the uncomfortable.

When we begin to practice at the Zen Center it may take a while to feel we really belong here. The ceremonies and practices may seem strange, zazen brings up things we may wish to avoid, and the grizzled veterans in crisp brown robes all seem like they somehow have it. All this is overblown of course and the best way to get a sense of belonging is participation. Vacuuming in the midst of a few dozen others coming and going with their own tasks, weeding as part of a garden plot crew and gabbing about everything and nothing during post-work period bagels. We all get to contribute. The giving is a receiving. And over time, given our backgrounds and skills, we can find a small specialty and give in our own unique way.





Fast for a World Harvest

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 **Thursday evening, November 7** 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.

Participants 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 generously as you wish.

The ceremony will take place during the evening sitting. All are welcome. Please remember to bring a vegetarian boxed or canned food offering as well as a monetary donation. We hope you can attend! —

Jukai: Entering the Buddha's Way

Sunday, November 3, at 9:00 AM we will have a sitting followed by the **Jukai Ceremony** to formalize our commitment to the Buddha's Way.

Jukai is the single most significant ceremony for a Zen Buddhist, since it expresses one's resolve to uphold the moral principles of the Buddha's Way. Zen Master Dogen said, "The Buddhas and Patriarchs have all stated that receiving the precepts is the first step to entering the Way." And Zen Master Basui called the precepts, "a shortcut for entering the Buddha gate."

Taking part in this ceremony means you have formally entered the Way of the Buddha.

Because the Precepts are difficult to keep, it is inevitable that they will be violated from time to time. Each time they are broken, one has fallen from the Buddha's Way in a sense. For this reason, and because repeatedly taking them fortifies one's resolve to uphold the vows, it is customary to take part in Jukai as often as possible. Each time you do so, your desire to practice and actualize the Buddha-dharma grows stronger.

During the ceremony, participants take part in a repentance ceremony, and then take the Three Refuges, the Three General Resolutions, and the Ten Cardinal Precepts. Jukai also entails making a monetary donation to the teacher, called an in-



cense offering. This traditional gift represents the practitioner's desire to support the teacher's work in propagating Buddhism, and it is always made anonymously.

Jukai is one of the most solemn rituals we observe at the Center, so please wear a clean and pressed robe if you have one. If not, wear dark, solid-colored clothing or, better yet, borrow a robe from the Center. It is also customary to bathe before receiving Jukai and to clean one's living quarters as well.

Please join us for this important ceremony. —

Thanksgiving Ceremony: Expressing Gratitude



A Ceremony of Thanksgiving will be held on **Sunday, November 10 at 9:30 A.M.**, after a short sitting. Family members of all ages are welcome to attend this special ceremony. The sitting begins at the usual time of 9:00 AM.

During our annual Thanksgiving ceremony, we make food offerings, read words of gratitude, chant, offer incense, circumambulate, and end with a special gatha of gratitude. At the end of the ceremony all are invited for refreshments. Pies are welcome!

An illustration of a large, leafy tree with a bright, multi-pointed star in the sky. The tree has green leaves and small white flowers. The star is yellow and white, with a soft glow. The background is a light blue sky with a white mist or smoke effect at the bottom.

Shakyamuni Buddha's Enlightenment

At the age of twenty-nine, the Prince of the Shakya Clan, Siddhartha Gautama, saw for the first time: one old man, one sick man, one dead man, one monk, and with that he was plunged into a struggle for Truth which was to continue until Buddhahood itself had been attained.

The ceremony of Shakyamuni Buddha's Enlightenment will take place at the Center on **Thursday, December 5, during the evening sitting.** The ceremony this year is not during Rohatsu sesshin, so all are welcome to attend.

The Buddha's Enlightenment Ceremony commemorates Shakyamuni Buddha's spiritual realization and opening of the Way. His experience, the culmination of years of intense effort, came after seven days of deep meditation when he saw the morning star.

The ceremony begins with an account of the Buddha's Enlightenment, followed by chanting and a symbolic reading of all the sutras. Please join us for this special event either virtually or in person.

New Year's Eve Ceremony 2024-2025



On Tuesday evening, December 31, the Center will celebrate the beginning of the New Year with zazen, repentance, chanting, the Precepts, and a prayer for peace. Chanting and silence—with a bit of Buddhist bedlam at midnight—is a truly wonderful way to welcome the New Year. Friends and family are cordially invited to join us for this ceremony which will take place at the Zen Center.

For the New Year's Ceremony, have some type of noisemaker with you, such as a kazoo, harmonica, recorder, or drum. Part of the ceremony is a noise-making kinhin to "drive out the demons." We will also read the (unsigned)

resolutions of ceremony participants. The schedule for New Year's Eve is below.

We hope you will join us for this hybrid event. More information as well as registration is online at www.vermontzen.org/ceremony_newyears.html

- | | |
|------------|--|
| 9:00 P.M. | Formal zazen with kinhin. |
| 10:30 P.M. | Repentance ceremony followed by break. |
| 11:15 P.M. | Formal zazen. Reading of resolutions. |
| 11:45 P.M. | Purification of Altars. |
| 11:50 P.M. | Driving out of Demons circumambulation:
Chanting and Noisemaking |
| Midnight | Cacophony, ending with —
"Happy New Year! May Peace Prevail on Earth!" |
| 12:01 A.M. | Moment of silence. Chanting: Prajna Paramita.
Abbreviated Jukai Ceremony. |
| 12:20 A.M. | Candle-lighting Ceremony. New Year's Prayer. |

Home Purification Ceremony

Entering 2025 With a Contented Home

Buddhists love cleanliness and orderliness both in their temples and their minds. Therefore, it is no surprise that the traditional preparation for the New Year is to thoroughly clean one's home. Surfaces are dusted, closets straightened, drawers cleaned, everything put in order. To welcome the New Year, many people set up special altars throughout their homes with candles, incense, and greenery.

Once the cleaning is complete, you can perform a **Home Purification Ceremony**. Through this ceremony, all the

unseen pollutants of greed, anger, and ignorance are ritually driven away. It is a spiritual cleansing, which complements the physical one. Since our environment is an extension of ourselves, by cleaning it we, too, are purified.

The ceremony consists of chanting, prostrations, and a circumambulation throughout the house with doors open and lights shining. At every altar incense is offered and candles are lit while the *Sho Sai Myo* is chanted. You can actually feel your house responding happily, and you, too, will feel renewed. It is a wonder-



ful way to enter the New Year, with body, mind and home cleansed and purified.

Please contact the Zen Center at info@vermontzen.org for the full service. —

Temple Cleaning for New Year's Eve



Friday, December 27 through Monday, December 30, will be devoted to cleaning our temple in preparation for the New Year. Altars are set up throughout the Center, the buildings are cleaned from top to bottom, and everything is refreshed for the coming year. There will be no formal sittings during that time.

If you can spare an hour or two or help any time during the week, it would be greatly appreciated. With our temple cleaned and purified, we will usher in the New Year. —



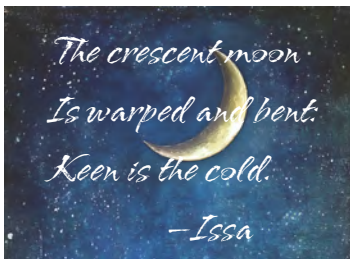
Vermont Zen Center
 Post Office Box 880
 Shelburne, VT 05482-0880

802-985-9746
 www.vermontzen.org

Nonprofit
 Organization
 U.S. POSTAGE
 PAID
 Shelburne, VT
 Permit No. 60

Term Student News

For the past few weeks, sittings, both in person and virtual, have been full and there has been a corresponding increase in energy throughout the Center. Term Student Program 3, the longest program ends on **Tuesday, November 12**, with a special ceremony. Family members are cordially invited to attend, as are all Sangha members. We hope you will come to celebrate the end of the successful intensification of practice by the 42 participants in this year's three programs.



CONTRIBUTORS:

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