

Walking Mountains

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

Dear Sangha and Friends,

Outside my back door window sits an apple tree loaded with ripe fruit. So much in fact that applesauce production could become a cottage industry at 265 Thomas Road. These apples are grown “organically” in the truest sense of the word—they simply receive no attention whatsoever. For that reason they serve as hosts to a whole range of visitors, including worms, scab, and other parasites and diseases I don’t know anything about. And when they fall to the ground the yellow jackets appear in droves from out of nowhere.

So if you want to eat one of these apples you have to pick them over carefully to avoid surprises. It’s quite a practice, this careful inspection. And you come to know the apple you’re about to eat intimately. I also find that I come to see the apple’s beauty and the gift of this piece of fruit in a whole new light. Almost as if I am seeing the apple for the first time. There’s no wolfing one down in one or two gulps. This is Zen practice—careful attention to the practice without giving way to thoughts.

Summer is waning and we move into the next season with a practice strengthened by the training program and the August sesshin. The Term Student Program will soon be upon us and a special working person/Jataka Tale sesshin. And it’s also time to begin clean up of the Center’s gardens, which is boosted with a short work sesshin. So our efforts do not wane with summer and we continue to polish the apple.

—*Joan White*



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In the Garden **by Jim Kahle**



To paraphrase Paul Simon, something tells me “it’s all happening” in the garden. “I do believe it. I do believe it’s true.” As many of you know, I am a charter member of the Zen Center Lawn Patrol. The few,

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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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the proud... During the warmer months, we cut the grass. Every three weeks I spend some time making an extended tour of the grounds on the riding mower. It is a wonderful way to make a contribution to the Center. Out in the fresh air, the smell of the grass, the sounds of the frogs out by the pond; it seems that there is always a new and colorful batch of flowers to appreciate thanks to Ti'an, Joan, Louise, and many others.

Not long ago I was buzzing around the trees on the west side of the complex, and I noticed something new. There were two new markers, one under each of the maples. They were in memory of Sensei Taigen Henderson's parents.

I remembered when I had planted the two magnolias out front in memory of my mother and brother. I had written an article about that experience, and Taigen Sensei had commented that he had enjoyed it. I don't know exactly why, but seeing those new markers brought home to me how full the gardens at the Center are, and I don't mean just the landscaping. Past, present, and future, especially in the summer, are readily on display there. The markers certainly evoke the past. The marker for my mother has an inscription underneath. It is the famous stanza from Zen Master Dogen's Genjokoan. *Flowers fall despite our longing. Weeds rise up despite our loathing.* It is interesting

that Master Dogen describes the realities of life in the garden as a means of elucidating the nature of existence.

The present is always on display in the garden. The flowers, the wind through the pines, the mosquitoes; there is always something to catch ones interest. The trick is to stay in the present. It is so easy to drift off into reverie. I am grateful for the trees and the flower beds which demand my attention and presence. If I spray grass clippings into the flower beds, that's just going to make more work for Ti'an and others. Attention, attention, attention!

The future; where am I going to find the future in the gardens?

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Coming around a corner, there is Joan planting flowers in the bed in the back. It is a hot day, but she is hard at work. The plants she is working with are small. I'm sure Joan has hopes and dreams for them. Hopefully some time in the future, some of the fruits of the plantings will grace the altars in the zendo, or, maybe, the dining room tables.

Past, present, and future seem to be at once as clear as a buttercup, and, at the same time, deeply mysterious, essentially unfathomable. One time Kathy Clarke and I were talking with Sensei in the kitchen. I don't remember the

nature of the conversation, but she said, "Sometimes the future extends so far out that it curves around, and becomes the past." I think our collective reaction was something along the order of, "Huh?!"

There is something about that statement, however, that actually makes things clearer. The past is part of the present. The present is part of the future. The future is part of the past. All are varying aspects of now. It helps shed some light on experiences that would, otherwise, defy any sort of explanation.

There is a story about the ancient Chinese Zen Master Tokusan, a scholar of the Diamond Sutra, before

he began practicing Zen. An old woman at a tea stand hands Tokusan a cup of tea and says, "The Diamond Sutra says past mind is unattainable, present mind is unattainable, future mind is unattainable. Which mind, venerable monk, are you going to refresh?" Tokusan is stumped. "Is there a Zen center nearby?" he asks.

Riding around in the garden on the mower; with which mind do I see the cardinal in the birch tree? With which mind do I move the levers on the steering mechanism? I'm sure I don't know, either. Glad there is a Zen Center nearby. In the meantime, Jim, just keep the mower away from the pond, and out of the daisies. It's a lot safer for you that way. —

Working Person Sesshin: An Interview with Sensei

by Emily Cross

By the end of the working person sesshin, I was convinced that this style of sesshin somehow gets to the heart of bringing our practice into daily life, in a way no other practice does. There was a fusion, an injection of this One Mind into the world at large. The feeling was one of being a carrier of the Dharma, without any self-conscious effort. The whole sesshin was there

at work, and throughout the day. Sometimes I wondered whether my co-workers could see the other 15 people sitting at my desk with me! I was so intrigued, I asked to interview Sensei on the origins of this sesshin.

EC: When did you first think of offering this type of sesshin?

SG: Many years ago, though

I can't remember exactly when. It probably evolved from my own experience of attending sesshin part-time after my children were born. Jed and I would split sesshin: he attended the evening and early morning portion, and I attended during the day. At that time I had a wholesale bakery and worked from 2 or 3 a.m. until 7 a.m. Jed would

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arrive home around 7:00, I'd deliver the baked goods, then go to sesshin at 9 a.m. and stay until 4:30 p.m. I'd come home, have dinner with the family, crash, then repeat. Total exhaustion, no time for anything other than what was directly in front of me. I was too tired even to think. Yet, those were some of the most powerful sesshins of my life.

Also, much later, when I began teaching in Vermont, it occurred to me that by having a part-time sesshin, people who had to work during the day would be able to attend a sesshin without taking time off or using vacation days. It seemed like it would be a "free" sesshin in that sense.

EC: How has the sesshin evolved (if at all) since the first working person's sesshin? When was the first one offered?

SG: The schedule is driven by when people need to leave for work and when they return from work. Since that remains fairly static, there haven't been any schedule changes over the years. The first working person sesshin was offered in June 2004.

EC: What has been the feedback from your students who attend this sesshin? My own experience with it has been very powerful—positive and profoundly meaningful.

SG: The feedback has been extremely positive. Once someone attends this type of sesshin they really "get" the connection between

sesshin training and everyday life—that they are not two different things, they are not separate. This has a powerful impact on them and on their practice. The people who attend working person sesshins tend to come back again and again.

dissimilar to a 'regular' sesshin. Of course there are differences, but not as many as might be supposed. From your point of view, what differences do you see in how students work with the different types of sesshins. I guess my question is, how is it that it

“ At every working person sesshin people report the same thing. Their concentration, and thus their work and their practice, is as strong as it would be if they were sitting much longer hours. ”

EC: Do you know whether any other centers offer this type of training?

SG: I heard that the Rochester Zen Center offered one a few years ago, but I don't know if they still do.

EC: It seems to be the consensus that the training at a working person's sesshin has an intensity not

can be 'as good' as a regular sesshin in terms of my Zen work—it feels like it is, just can't put my finger on it. Could you talk a little about the main difference between a working person's sesshin and a regular sesshin?

SG: When we first offered this type of sesshin, I didn't know

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what to expect. I knew from my own experience that it could be transformative, but the sesshins that I had attended part time were full-time sesshins for almost everyone else. In fact, it was extremely rare for Roshi Kapleau to allow anyone to attend sesshin part-time.

When we had our first working person sesshin (and, by the way, I am still not comfortable with that name, but haven't come up with anything better), it became evident almost from day one that this was unlike anything I could have anticipated. There was a solidity, a solidarity, an intensity and an energy that seemed way out of proportion to the number of hours people were sitting and the number of people who were at the sesshin.

I found that I was able to do much more during the day than I had expected. And this was true for others as well. What was this all about? I thought, that first time, that maybe this was an anomaly and wouldn't hold true for subsequent working person sesshins. Not so. At every working person sesshin people report the same thing. Their concentration, and thus their work and their practice, is as strong as it would be if they were sitting much longer hours.

Maybe this type of sesshin is a shortcut to samadhi? Maybe there is a sort of "release valve" in the daily leaving and attending to business which enables people to have fewer

thoughts, greater concentration on their practice and more attentiveness during the hours when they are in sesshin? Maybe the fact of everyone being in sesshin part time and then bringing their practice out into their everyday life has an effect that is much greater than the sum of its parts? To tell you the truth, I don't know. But I find it fascinating and impelling. It's why, even though not nearly the number of people take advantage of this sesshin as I had hoped and expected would, I continue to have them. At every one of these sesshins I have had the thought, "This is the way to live!"

EC: You mentioned not being happy with the name 'working person's sesshin'. Perhaps it does not fully convey all of the enriching aspects of this type of sesshin? What other names have you thought of? Is there a Zen Master who was a layman/householder, who may be a likely suspect, such as we have Dogen's Way sitting during a regular sesshin, we could have a something's Way Sesshin?

SG: What a great idea! You may have solved that koan for me, Emily. We could call these sesshins Layman P'ang Sesshins or P'ang's Way Sesshins. P'ang Yun was perhaps the most famous layman of ancient China. He lived from 740-808 and was the Dharma Successor of Shih-t'ou and Ma-tsu. He had a son, a daughter, and a wife, all of whom practiced the Way and were deeply enlightened. He said that his Zen

practice and daily life were always in "spontaneous harmony." For him, "wondrous action and supernatural forces" consisted in hauling water and cutting wood. I have always held the deepest admiration for this ancient worthy, and this would be a fitting way to honor him.

EC: Some people stay at the Center full time during the sesshin. Is their experience similar to a personal retreat, or is it different?

SG: I don't know. For me, working at home sewing rakus or working on writing projects, working person sesshins are more like regular sesshins than retreats, which have a distinctive gentle, quiet energy of their own.

EC: You have held working person's sesshins in Costa Rica. Are there any differences that stand out between different countries and cultures?

SG: The traffic is a lot worse in Costa Rica than in Vermont, so people are more concerned about making it to work in the morning and back to the Casa Zen in the evening on time. Other than that, and the fact that more people attend working person sesshin in Costa Rica than in Vermont, no difference.

Thank you Sensei! —

See the announcement about the upcoming Jataka Tale/P'ang's Way/Working Person Sesshin in this issue on page 6.

Metta Course

Metta bhavana is an ancient Buddhist meditation leading to the development of unconditional love and friendliness. Through the practice of metta, we become more empathetic, considerate, kind, forgiving, and in general, happier people.

The Vermont Zen Center is offering a six-week course in Lovingkindness Meditation, or metta bhavana, beginning September 9. Each hour-long Wednesday evening sesshin will include meditation instruction,

practice periods, and discussion. Please note that the first class is 1½ hours. The course is conducted by Zen priest Dharman Rice.

TIME: Wednesdays 7-8 p.m.

(The first class is 7-8:30) **9/9, 16, 23; 10/7, 14, 21**

LOCATION: Vermont Zen Center

CONTRIBUTION: \$75 for the six classes

More information and registration is available on the Zen Center's website at www.vermontzen.org



October Sesshin

The next P'ang's Way (formerly working person) Sesshin will be

October 23-30 and will be devoted to working with Jataka Tales (hence the title on the quarterly calendar). The format will be slightly different from previous working persons' sesshins: the first three days will have the option of full-time attendance, the last four days will be the usual schedule of sittings in the early morning and the evening, with nothing scheduled during the day. People may attend the first three days, the last four days, or all seven days. Sensei will be giving dokusan three times a day during the first three days, and twice a day during the last four days.

The full seven days of sesshin will be devoted to working with Jataka Tales. Lay ordained Jataka teacher

Rafe Martin will be in attendance conducting discussions of the Jatakas during the first three day, and giving Dharma Talks using the Jatakas throughout the seven days. The emphasis will be on how these ancient stories of the Buddha's previous lifetimes relate to our own lives here and now.

Many of you know Rafe from his compelling storytelling workshop last year, as well as from the numerous times he has mesmerized us with stories of the Buddha's previous lives during special events over the past 20 years.

*The application deadline for this special sesshin is **September 26.***

SEPTEMBER 2009

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
		1	2 Dismas House	3 Chanting	4	5
6 Teisho	7	8 Chanting	9	10	11	12
13 Ordination of Randy Crosby	14	15 TERM STUDENT BEGINS	16	17 Sitting & Set up	18	19 WORKSHOP
20 Teisho	21	22 Term Student Meeting	23	24	25 VT 2-Day Work Sesshin	26 Oct. Deadline
27 Sesshin Ends	28	29 Term Student Meeting	30			

Term Student Forms

A reminder that Term Student forms are not accepted on the day the Term Student program begins, so please get them in on time—or even early!

September 2-Day Work Sesshin

The 2-day sesshin from **Friday, September 25** through **Sunday, September 27** will be a much-needed work sesshin. During work sesshin the focus is on the garden. In addition to longer outdoor work periods, there is morning and evening zazen, private instruction, and talks. Sensei will be attending this sesshin.

Ordination of Randy Crosby



On **Sunday, September 13**, Randy Crosby will enter the Way as a Zen Buddhist Priest. All members of the Sangha are cordially invited to support Randy by attending his ordination, one of the most important ceremonies in Buddhism. Randy will be the fourth person ordained by Sensei Graef. Many years of training and a deeply rooted commitment to practice are just some of the pre-requisites for ordination. The ceremony will take place from 9 a.m. to approximately 11 a.m. and will be followed by a reception. Children are welcome to attend the reception.





Vermont Zen Center

Post Office Box 880
Shelburne, VT 05482

802-985-9746
www.vermontzen.org

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*How lovely,
Through the torn paper-window,
the Milky Way
— Issa*



July 2009 Training Program Participants

Back Row: Gina Lee, Toronto, ON, Canada; Randy Crosby, Shelburne, VT; Larry Johanson, Oshawa, ON, Canada; Mark Pioro, Toronto, ON, Canada; Dharman Rice, Westford, VT

Middle Row: Joanne Sheldon, Penfield, NY; Ti'an Callery, Shelburne, VT; Rose Martin, Rochester, NY; Joan White, Shelburne, VT; Bonnie Coulter, Weybridge, VT; Sensei Sunyana Graef, Shelburne, VT

Front Row: Sergio Carioni, Managua, Nicaragua; Lynne Davis, Peterborough, ON, Canada; Greg Sheldon, Penfield, NY

CONTRIBUTORS:

- Ti'an Callery
- Emily Cross
- Sensei Sunyana Graef
- Jim Kahle
- Kelly Story, *production*
- Joan White, *editor*
- Maria Zamora-Crosby, *layout*