

# Walking Mountains

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

*Dear Sangha and Friends,*

For the last three years, I've patiently waited for an oak leaf hydrangea I planted in my front garden to bloom. And each year it disappoints. And every year, I research it again and make sure that this Vermont native plant gets all that it needs to ensure the emergence of the gorgeous lacy white blooms I so yearn for — to no avail. So this year, I said the heck with it; in other words, I let it go and left it to its own devices. And guess what? It's covered with blossoms! Just another lesson in letting go, and the wonder therein.

This month the Water Baby Ceremony takes place at the Zen Center — a much more solemn letting go. We gather in the dining room to sew garments, place them ever so mindfully on the Jizo figures, and return them to the Jizo garden in honor and remembrance of the children lost in our lives. Whether they be known or unknown, we let them go. Please join us.

— *Joan White*

## The Land Sings **by Alex Sokolow**



We all have a deep and special relationship with plants. Once we give up eating meat, we are constantly aware of this. But all manner of plants provide us with much more. They give us building materials for our homes, fibers for our clothing, medicines to treat our illnesses. And plants speak for us when words fall far short of what we want to express from the depths of our hearts. (continued on page 2)



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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.*

*(continued from page 1)*

We bring flowers to a wedding, helping us to share in the joyful start of a couple's new life together. We bring them to a funeral, marking the end of this phase of a loved one's life and the entry into the next. Wreaths are placed at war memorials, helping us to remember and express gratitude for the tremendous sacrifices made by those who went to battle. And bouquets are brought to a young mother in a hospital as she gently cradles her newborn, still in awe of the mysterious miracle of birth.

Whether we plant trees in memory of those who have passed away, or bring a rose to someone we love, the events in our lives that move us with love, with joy, with grief, all seem to call upon plants of one type or another to help us express our feelings.

So, since they have given us so much, since they so selflessly care for us, it is fitting and appropriate that we return their generosity, and care for them.

In early June, more than twenty members of the Sangha gathered together to care for the grounds of the Center, to show our gratitude to the myriad plant-beings of the world that sustain and enrich our lives. Over a period of four days, the Sangha worked together to

remove the last remnants of winter that had cluttered the Zen Center grounds – dead leaves and branches of trees, the dislodged rocks, the overgrown flower beds – and to prepare flower beds, trees, shrubs, paths and lawns for the new season.

New plants were placed in beds where they could display their beauty. Tree limbs were pruned to bring out balance and harmony. Overgrown ferns and hostas were carefully moved to new homes where they could more easily flourish.

Everywhere in the gardens, new soil was added to provide nourishment for flowers, shrubs and trees. Throughout the property, mulch was spread to hold down weeds and retain moisture.

Retaining walls of rock were rebuilt to undo the damage of winter frost and erosion. Paths were cleared and raked clean.

At the end of the four days, on a beautiful sunny day, Jizo figures were placed in the Jizo garden, and all the gardeners made their way around the grounds chanting and taking in the results of their efforts. Peonies and irises glowed with their colourful radiance, and tall-stemmed daisies gently swayed in the light breeze. Trees stood stately and elegant. The lawns provided a carpet of neatly trimmed borders.

In the Zen Garden, the mosses and ground covers patiently went about their ever-so-slow process of growing a protective blanket over the exposed soil. The entire grounds seemed to glow with radiance and clarity.

Many years ago, the Rochester Zen Center published a poem called "Flowers" in its newsletter, *Zen Bow*. Here are some portions:

*Such a solemn world of flowers!*

*Such a spectacle*

*This rich world of the flowers!*

*All beings are living brightness,*

*Fulfilled with brightness*

*On the earth, under the heavens.*

*There is no gap between matter and man,*

*Between sentient and non-sentient beings:*

*All are living, all are dancing –*

*Slate and pebbles are whispering,*

*Dust and trash are shouting,*

*Trees and grasses speak, the land sings.<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup>Original Japanese poem by Rev. Haya Akegarasu.

Translated into English by Rev. Gyoko Saito, (Buddhist Temple of Chicago).

Adapted by Philip Kapleau, (The Zen Center, Rochester, NY)

# Just Pull the Weeds **by Greg Heath**

The drive to the Vermont Zen Center from my home in New Hampshire is a period of transition. It's a helpful time that allows me to reflect on the opportunity ahead and to settle into the reason, indeed, the great purpose for which we set the time and space aside to attend sesshin. In this case I was on my way to the June Garden Intensive. The radio, generally talking away as I drive around my home environs, was firmly off. I get to begin the process of leaving behind my daily cares and responsibilities. Driving just below the speed limit on Interstate 89 allows the traffic to glide past, and I seldom need to engage the get-there-fast part of my psyche. I've travelled this road in every season, all types of weather, day and night, and I never tire of it. Why? There is its natural beauty. But most importantly it offers the route to my true home.

Just as we each take different routes, we have our own work to do as we seek that home. It all comes down to the particular karmic load we bring to the mat. That being the case, we are so fortunate to have such varied forms of practice. If one route doesn't work very well there are others open to us.

Consider. We have the retreat when the schedule is mostly open and practice unfolds at a pace we set for ourselves. There is the working person's sesshin when we practice early and late at the Center and go off to work to practice in the midst of the fray during the day. The Term Student Program encourages us to expand our daily practice and discover that we are capable of imbedding practice in our days. Rohatsu attunes us especially to dropping our expectations

and letting go of all self-imposed or perceived limitations. Then there are the many ceremonies through the year. While they are certainly opportunities to express devotion, they offer lessons and open doorways to understanding.

Yet another offering is the new Garden Intensive just held this June. It is truly practice in motion. I'm recalling one of the many tales of Hyakujo, also known as Pai-Chang. His monks, concerned for his wellbeing in his advanced age, and feeling he deserved his rest, hid his garden tools from him. In response Hyakujo decided to skip his meals famously saying, "A day of no work is a day of no eating." The monks learned a lesson about unintended consequences. Before long the tools reappeared. No surprise there. Since that ancient time Zen has acknowledged the value and dignity of physical work.

But why? It's not just tradition. In a recent Buddhadharma interview the Rev. Angel Kyodo Williams noted that as Zen adapts to Western culture we should take care to maintain the traditions that count, one of them being physical labor. It is not the body that works, but the body-mind. There is a muscle memory that learns deeply the lessons provided by our work. The teacher in any moment may be Roshi, our work supervisor, a worm, or even a rock.

One would think that knowing how to properly clean a bathroom would be in the skill set of a forty-five year old man. I have to admit that I learned this valuable skill at the Vermont Zen Center. More importantly I learned why we do our best — not our fastest.

I learned that pleasant and unpleasant tasks are simply notions we create and embellish ad nauseam, that when we just do the work there is no pleasant or unpleasant. Without this work training at the Center, I dare say I would still be making up reasons, twenty years later, why this job or that job is simply drudgery.

It's interesting that we have lots of well written instructions at the Center. They effectively cut off the need for spoken words during sesshin. But they do not teach. The teaching comes from the repetitive motion of fully pulling the entire weed, scraping the last grain of rice from the pot with a rubber spatula, and scrubbing that tiny crevice with a toothbrush again, and again, and again. Sure, we make mistakes. We break the root. We forget to use the spatula. So we try again using the body-mind memory to help us to do our best, to be our best.

I'm especially partial to the work sesshin which has now evolved into the Garden Intensive. Part of the reason is that the first sesshin I attended was a work sesshin, one that opened doors I didn't know existed. But at a deeper level we all want our practice to be our life. What's the point if it's not? And what better teacher can there be for practice in motion than this special opportunity to work and practice at once intensively?

So a few days later as I drove south toward New Hampshire, grateful for the time of transition before the world reasserted its demands, aglow with the comradeship that accomplished so much in the gardens, I thought of the garden bed at the end of the driveway where I labored. The weeds that were choking it are gone for now. Yes, they will be back, but so will I. —

# Garden Intensive **by Jim Kahle**

Zen Master Dogen said, “Flowers fall despite our longing. Weeds rise up despite our loathing.” Nowhere are these truths more evident than in the changes continually emerging and evolving in the natural world. It’s no wonder then that gardens have been an integral part of the Zen landscape throughout the world for hundreds of years.

The gardens at the Vermont Zen Center have always assumed a position of central importance, and every year time is set aside to prepare them for the summer season. The work takes place sometime in the spring. This year it was in June. It’s often been labeled as a work sesshin, ranging anywhere from four to seven days. This year it was called a “Garden Intensive” with intensive being the operative word.

This year the Intensive lasted for four days. There was formal zazen in the mornings and evenings. There was five hours of outside work in the morning. The afternoon was labeled as free time. This could mean working inside or outside, doing meditation, or resting. It was up to you. It was unusual for there to be so much free time available at an event such as this. On the one hand, the garden work was strenuous, and so a fair amount of rest time was appreciated. On the other hand, there is usually very little unstructured time at a sesshin. It took some getting used to.

At the start of the Intensive, Roshi cautioned us about getting involved with judgments and opinions. This was easier said than done, at least for me. The work was very hard. It ranged from weeding to building stone walls. Some people hauled

compost and mulch hour after hour, day after day. Exhaustion is a state that is familiar to anyone who has attended sesshin. The attendant aches and soreness that were a part this event, however, brought new meaning to the word.

There was a wide variety of jobs, and they all had their inherent challenges. It was easy to get caught up in comparing the degree of difficulty of one’s own work with the work of others. I often found myself entering into the familiar world of separation. These negative thoughts and opinions had the ability to germinate and grow like weeds in fertile soil. They were like an anchor, weighing me down. I dragged them around with me in the rain, in the mud, and in the heat of the afternoon sun.

Over time, however, our practice shows us that these judgments have no abiding reality. These dead weights are not attached to us, we actually hold on to them voluntarily. We have it within our power at any time to simply let them go. When we can do this, the ensuing feelings of lightness and buoyancy are a testament to the power of zazen to transform our lives as well as the lives of all of those around us.

It was still light outside when the last round of the evening sitting came to a close. On the last night of the Intensive, I just had to walk around in the receding light; fireflies flickering and rising out of the surrounding gardens. An amazing amount of work had been done. A retaining wall built out of stone had just been completed by a couple of the participants on that day. It was on the hill behind the Jizo garden, next to the stone stairway that had been completed last year. It wasn’t

long ago that this area was just a hill, overgrown with all manner of weeds. Now it was a terrace, something you might find in a shaded Italian grotto, or in an elegant garden somewhere on the outskirts of Kyoto.

I couldn’t help thinking about the pilgrimage to Japan that I had been fortunate enough to attend some years ago. The monasteries and gardens there have lasted for hundreds of years. Who built them? Were they as sore when they went to bed in the evening as I was? How long would the Vermont Zen Center continue to be a beacon for spiritual inquiry? How long would that just-completed stone retaining wall exist in its newly completed form?

Native Vermonters love to talk about out-of-staters, a.k.a. flatlanders. Here’s one: How can you tell if someone is a flatlander? Easy, they plant trees. That makes sense if you’re trying to keep sumac out of your pastures. However, Zen Master Lin Chi had another perspective. When his teacher, Huang Po asked him, “What’s the use of planting so many pine trees in the depths of the mountain?” Lin Chi replied, “In the first place, they will beautify the scenery of the mountain temple. In the second place, they will set up standards and patterns for posterity.” Huang Po finally remarked, “Our family tradition will bloom forth in your generation.”

Isn’t that what we all really want in the final analysis? We want the Dharma to flourish in our generation. We’ve gotten so much over the years from this practice, from our teacher, from each other. It is our hope that liberation will bloom forth, like the magnolia tree in the front garden, now, and for many generations into the future. —



# August 2017

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
		1	2	3	4	5
Vermont 7-Day Sesshin 7/29-8/5 <b>ZEN CENTER CLOSED DURING SESSHIN</b>						
6 <span style="border: 1px dashed red; padding: 2px;">ZC CLOSED</span>	7 AM ZAZEN MON-FRI	8 PM ZAZEN Chanting	9	10 PM ZAZEN Workshop Prep	11	12 <b>Workshop</b> Ceremony Workday 2 p.m.
13 Water Baby Ceremony	14 <span style="border: 1px dashed red; padding: 2px;">ZC CLOSED</span>	15 AM ZAZEN TUE-FRI PM ZAZEN	16	17 PM ZAZEN Chanting	18	19 <b>Annual Yard &amp; Bake Sale and New this year: CRAFT SALE</b>
20 Taped Teisho by Roshi Kapleau (in honor of his birthday)	21 AM ZAZEN MON-FRI	22 PM ZAZEN Chanting	23	24 PM ZAZEN	25	26 <span style="border: 1px dashed gray; padding: 2px;">ROSHI IN CR</span>
27 Taped Teisho	28 AM ZAZEN MON-FRI	29 PM ZAZEN	30 <span style="border: 1px dashed gray; padding: 2px;">Metta Course 1</span>	31 PM ZAZEN Chanting	September 1	
Costa Rica 5-Day Sesshin 8/27–9/1						

## Annual Yard & Bake Sale PLUS All-New Craft Sale Saturday, August 19

Our Annual Yard & Bake Sale will be on **Saturday, August 19**. Donations for the sale may be left in the basement common room after the **August sesshin**. This is a wonderful fund-raiser for the Center, as well as a great way to clean out your unwanted, unused, and unneeded stuff.

This year, for the first time, we will have a Craft Sale running concurrently with the yard sale. Actually, the yard sale will be more of a house sale since it will be indoors as it was last year. The craft sale portion will be in the living room; the bake

sale in the kitchen; the yard sale in the Sangha Building upstairs and downstairs.

Having the sale indoors makes the setup much easier than outdoors and eliminates the uncertainty of weather as well as the need for expensive tent rentals. With the sale indoors, we can begin the setup on Monday, August 14, or even start after the Water Baby Ceremony on Sunday, August 13.

The only downside to an indoor yard sale is the havoc it wreaks on the house. LOTS of help will be needed after the sale for clean-up. Although many

portions of the Center are off-limits—the upstairs of the Sangha Building, the whole of the Buddha Building and portions of the Dharma Building—nonetheless, the areas that are used are left in a state of disarray after the sale. This places a huge burden on house residents, especially if there are not enough volunteers to help with the take down and clean up. So, we hope you can sign up to volunteer some time to restoring the Center to its temple state. Sign-up sheets are posted on the bulletin board in the Dharma Building. Please lend a hand to make this the best sale ever!

# Water Baby Ceremony

## Remembering Lost Children



On **Sunday, August 13**, the Zen Center will hold a Water Baby Ceremony after a one hour sitting with a short talk.

The Water Baby Ceremony is a Buddhist service for adults who have lost an infant or young child through still birth or early death, have lost a fetus through miscarriage or abortion, or have lost a child of any age, in any way. It is also appropriate for people who wish to remember a child who has passed, even if it is not their own, to attend this ceremony.

Jizo Bodhisattva presides over the Water Baby Ceremony. He is considered to be the protector of women, children, travelers, the helpless, and the needy. In Japan, there are thousands of Water Baby shrines. Often many figures are placed together in a garden or on a mountainside.

For this ceremony we will gather in the dining room after the sitting. The ceremony itself takes

place in the Jizo garden, weather permitting. Everyone is asked to bring some scraps of fabric (red, with or without pattern, is the traditional color, but you may bring other bright colors) as well as scissors, needle, and thread. The Center will provide these items for those who don't have them. In silence, working together, each of us will sew a small, simple garment such as an apron, cape, bib, or hat which will be placed on one of the many Jizo figures at the Center. The garment represents the being we are remembering, and thus commemorates a death and rebirth, a passing from one form of life to another. Those who wish may also write the name of the child or a verse on a piece of paper which will be placed between the rocks in the Jizo garden.

While we work in silence, anyone may speak about his or her experience of loss. When we have finished sewing, we will carry the figures to the Jizo garden where we will chant the Prajna Paramita, the Kannon Sutra, and the Sutra of Jizo Bodhisattva, followed by a special Eko to return the merit of the ceremony to the children. Each person or couple will then offer incense and put their garments on a figure.

Participants are welcome to stay after the ceremony to talk or just sit quietly. This ceremony is not limited to members of our Center. However, everyone who comes should participate. While many people who attend do so to mourn for a personal loss, it is also appropriate to come if you wish to mourn for children not individually known to you – for example, children who have died from starvation or through violence. Such disasters touch us all, even if we have never met those who died. This is the only ceremony at the Center where we ask that you not bring young children. *Om Ka Ka Kabi Sam Ma E Sowa Ka* —

### Workday for the Water Baby Ceremony

Please help set up the dining room for the Water Baby Ceremony during a workday on **Saturday, August 12**. The work period begins at 2:00 p.m., after the workshop, and will last an hour or two depending on the number of people who lend a hand.

# Rakusu Request Form



**Please Return to the Vermont Zen Center by August 20**

**Requirements:** If you have been a member of the Vermont, Toronto, or Casa Zen Sangha for a minimum of three years, have become a formal student of Roshi Graef or Henderson through participating in a New Student Ceremony, and have previously taken Jukai, you may request a rakusu and a Buddhist name. Rakususes are presented only during Fall Jukai, which this year is on **Sunday, November 12.**

**Please Note:** To receive your rakusu from Roshi, you must attend the November Jukai in Vermont (Vermont and Toronto students of Roshi) or the Jukai in Costa Rica (Casa Zen members). Do Not request a rakusu if you cannot attend Jukai.

**Payment:** Please complete this form and mail it to the Center with a \$175 U.S. check or money order payable to the Vermont Zen Center. If you are paying in cash, place it in an envelope at the Center with your name and this form. If you use PayPal the cost of the rakusu is \$182.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Rakusu Measurement \_\_\_\_\_

**Measuring for your Rakusu:** Sit in your usual zazen posture, in your sitting robe, with your hands in the zazen mudra. Have someone drape a cloth tape measure from the base of your thumb to the base of your other thumb over the back of your neck. The measurement needed is this length. For most people, this will be between 40-50 inches. Measure more than once and use a cloth, rather than metal, tape measure. For greater accuracy, have someone help you. If in doubt, go with a longer, rather than shorter measurement. Too long rakususes can be shortened. Too short rakususes cannot be lengthened.

## 2017 Term Student Program 3 Begins September 26

The first two of the three Term Student Programs will begin on **Tuesday, September 26, and end on Tuesday, November 14.** If you want to strengthen your Zen training, invigorate your sitting, and learn how to incorporate practice into your daily life, consider joining this program. You will find that it 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, there is a Term Student Program that will fit your needs. This program is an unsurpassed way to strengthen your commitment to the Dharma and deepen your practice.



**Vermont Zen Center**

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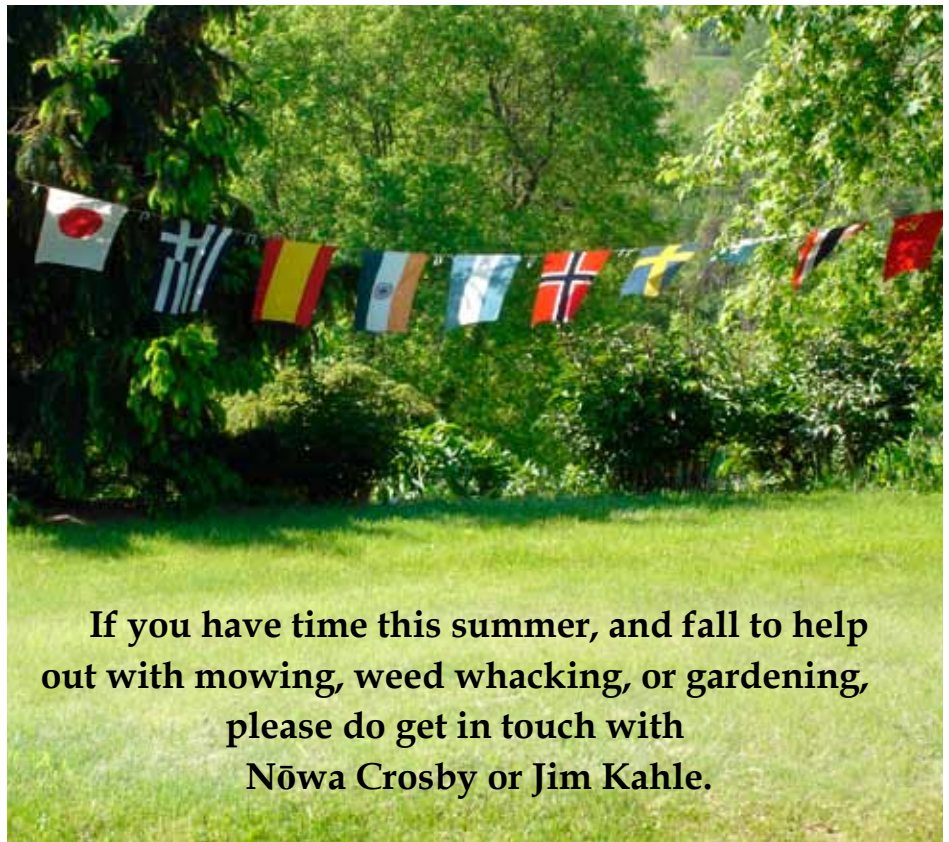
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*A sudden summer shower;  
The village sparrows  
Hang on to the grasses.  
—Buson*

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**If you have time this summer, and fall to help  
out with mowing, weed whacking, or gardening,  
please do get in touch with  
Nōwa Crosby or Jim Kahle.**