

Walking Mountains

“The green mountains are always walking” — Daokai

Dear Sangha and Friends,

You might call this a late winter, early spring issue of *Walking Mountains* as we cover the months of February, March, and April. I like to think of it as an unfolding as the daylight grows longer, buds break, and petals and leaves open. The rising waters of rivers push banks to open a new turn or meander, and hibernating animals stretch and rise from their winter dens. The Zen Center gardens grow greener, and Sangha members, friends, and volunteers begin to dig and plant and pull weeds.

Our plans for the new year at the Center continue to unfold as well. We move from the Parinirvana Ceremony, commemorating the Buddha’s final Nirvana to Entertainment day, where Sangha celebrates Sangha, to temple nights, culminating in the Jukai Ceremony where we take and renew our vows. Please join us.

— Joan White

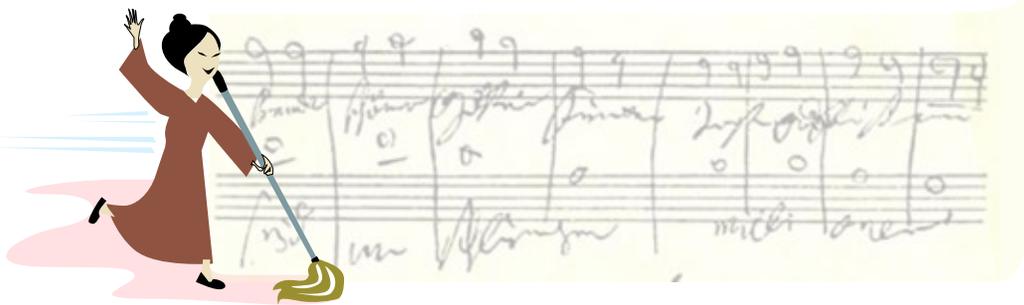


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Roll Over Beethoven

by Josh Kelman



Thirty-two-year-old Ludwig van Beethoven had struggled nearly to the point of suicide with his growing deafness. Beethoven’s struggle had less to do with composing than with humiliation, given his position as a shining musical star of Viennese society. But out of this struggle came an understanding that his suffering was

actually a driving force for the growth of his art. It was a struggle he would carry on throughout his life, battling self-centered habits and transcending them in music. His Eroica (“Heroic”) Symphony portrayed this struggle as well as the glorious, heroic transcendence.

There are few Beethovens among us, but who does not struggle with how

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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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we appear to others or with other personal knots? Unpleasant though it is, we do have the opportunity for transcendence just like Beethoven. Sadly, Beethoven was rarely able to actualize his musical understanding into his life. Fortunately for us, our Zen practice does exactly this.

We don't have to search very far to find the sticky habits we struggle with. They noisily intrude, uninvited, into our zazen. And while they may lead us around by the nose much of the time, during zazen we can see them for the shameless thieves they are. They may not go away quietly, but just this understanding takes some of the life out of them.

But what of the transcendence? Where is our heroic victory? Terms like these, of course, exude a terrible stink in Zen. Simply eating when hungry and lying down when tired says it better. Performing the work before us wholeheartedly is victory enough. Beethoven had the Moonlight Sonata, we have weeding the Jizo garden.

And yet, dealing with these personal struggles can sure get old. A common discovery when first coming to practice is that instead of finding peace, we find these unwelcome traits that can be quite disconcerting. We'd hoped to waltz to enlightenment on a gleaming dance floor. Instead we're handed a mop and bucket and told to scrub the floor. Rather than the progress we'd hoped for, we find flaws. Well, these flaws are the material for the work that becomes necessary to make this progress.

Why then do these clinging, reflexive habits have such a hold on us? The more energy we expend

in shooing them away, the more energy they come back with. It is truly humbling if nothing else. Family dynamics, workplace interactions, and raising children turn out to be breeding grounds for what we do not want and yet seem unable to resist. It seems oxymoronic that we must strive to summon the will to do the work which is to simply let them go. Simply, patiently letting them go, again and again.

There is a humorous story of the Dalai Lama in this regard. He was on a tour of a monastery, the end of which led to refreshments from the dairy and bakery. He suddenly began laughing and was asked why. He said he had been expecting sweets and felt disappointment. He was

laughing at himself. This laughter is one way an advanced practitioner deals with nagging habits.

As we wrestle with these difficulties, it is important to remember what our teachers have taught us. We are fundamentally perfect and complete, and these habits have no substance. There is no question that we can do this work; we simply need to muster the will to stick with it. We have Sangha rowing alongside us. We have a clear behavioral guide in the precepts. And in zazen we have a machete to cut through the thickest jungle of distraction.

Need more inspiration? Listen to Beethoven's last great symphony, the Ninth and hear how the impossible is indeed, possible. —

The "Course" of Practice

by Meredith Markow

Lovingkindness, Flower Arranging, Indian Cooking, and Tai Chi are the four courses offered at the Vermont Zen Center that are available to members as well as to the wider community. It is not just the skills gained and content learned that I believe are beneficial in taking these courses; it is also the manner in which they are taught that exemplifies much of what we strive for in walking the Buddhist's path. What I experienced from taking these courses shows up repeatedly in my life and greatly informs my practice.

The first course that I took was the Lovingkindness course. I had been a member for only a month or so

when I enrolled. Each week we would gather in the living room and share with one another how our lives and the lives of others were affected by extending metta. Guided as a group, we explored how to approach the practice in the coming week, after which we repaired to the Buddha Hall, where we were led through a Lovingkindness meditation. Learning about the practice of Mettabhavana is on its own intrinsically rich, but of equal significance is that the course itself was taught in the very spirit of Lovingkindness. The process was patient, nonjudgmental, generous, and embracing. It laid

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the groundwork for my own metta practice, and I continually draw upon what I learned in those foundational and valuable six weeks. The course demonstrated the true potential of the flowering of the heart from which our most noble deeds, words, and actions stem.

The Flower Arranging course was my introduction to the beauty, both inward and visible, inherent in Buddhism and our Center. We toured our glorious and carefully tended gardens at the start of the course, and then we were taught the significance of the altars as we visited them throughout the buildings. In this way, we bore witness to the flowers and plants growing at their source and then how they are lovingly presented as an offering. We also discussed the symbolism of the candles, tea, fruit, grain, and incense presented on each altar. This not only deepens my relationship to our altars at the Center but also supports me in creating my home altars with respect and understanding. We learned about the considerations of geometry, color, and placement of the flowers, and with expertise and encouragement we were assisted in creating our own unified arrangements. Beautifully arranged flowers form an integral community demonstrating how we, too, can comport ourselves harmoniously in the world.

The Indian Cooking course brings our attention to the health, beauty, reverence, and joy in our food and in our food preparation. In the course, we were instructed with great levity and much laughter, but also with the seriousness that what we were doing in our handling, preparing, and serving food was of significant consequence.

We learned about the sources of our ingredients and how to properly cut and measure them. We learned

the proper order in which to mix them, how to maximize their flavor potential, and how to harmonize the different flavors and ingredients so that they blend to support one another. We learned about the historical significance of recipes and how they are used to bring health and love to communities and festivals. We were shown that we don't waste our food and that we clean up properly.

We worked together that day, many hands creating a beautiful, delicious, and nutritious meal. Finally, we gathered around the table to enjoy what we had prepared while engaging in cheerful conversation and showing true interest in the other. This is Sangha, caring for each other and caring for the world interdependently.

The Tai Chi course is a perfect companion to ongoing practice. We are continually reminded in class, always with patience and gentle guidance, about the importance of balance in our movement—how we must be soft and nonresistant and yet always prepared and attentive. We work to stay rooted, keeping our energy center focused at the

dantian (or hara). We are shown how the practice of Tai Chi is never-ending, that one does not ever master the movements but rather continually works to refine them. We not only work on improving our individual postures, but also directly experience how the manner in which one person moves affects another. Moreover, we are told that the degree to which we involve our ego in our Tai Chi practice is the degree to which our Tai Chi practice is inhibited.

Developing the art of Tai Chi reminds me of this poem from Zen Master Bankei:

*“When someone tosses
you a tea bowl—
catch it!
Catch it nimbly with
Soft cotton
With the cotton of your skillful mind!”*

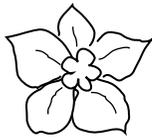
When one considers the collective of courses that are offered at the Vermont Zen Center: Lovingkindness, Flower Arranging, Indian Cooking, and Tai Chi, then one recognizes practice in action, available to all, whether or not a student of Zen. —

All-Day Sittings at the Zen Center

For many years it hasn't been possible to include all-day sittings in our jam-packed schedule. This year, with Roshi on sabbatical, there are fewer sesshins and therefore more free weekends, so that makes space for all-days.

In Japan, all-days are called zazenkai and at some Zen centers, they are referred to as one-day sesshins. They are great way to dip your toes into advanced training in preparation for full-length sesshins.

All-day sittings will be held on February 9, March 15, July 19, and August 23. They begin at 8:00 a.m. and end at 4:00 p.m. For the full schedule, more information and registration, please go to www.vermontzen.org/all-day.html



The Buddha's Parinirvana

For 45 years the Buddha, after attaining Perfect Enlightenment, preached the Dharma to all who would listen, devoting himself to the welfare of all living beings. But in his eightieth year, during the seclusion of the rainy season, he suddenly fell ill. Feeling that his time, though near, had not yet arrived, he entered a deep samadhi to free himself of the disease. Emerging from his meditation he said:

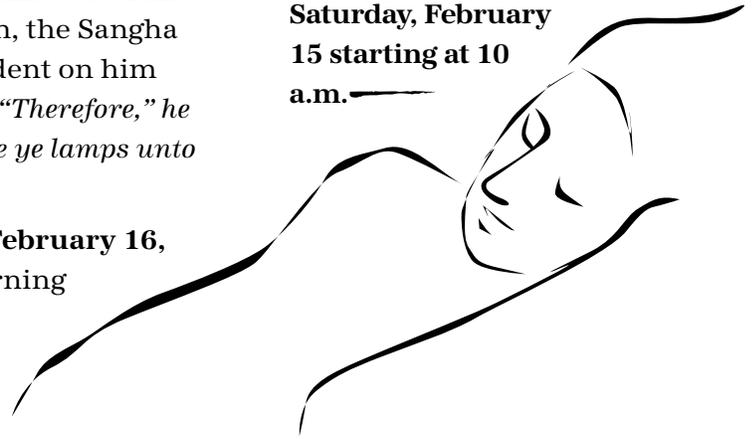
This body has become worn-out and is like an old cart which can only be kept rolling along with great difficulty. My time to be set free from the bonds of becoming, as a chick which on hatching

finally breaks free of its shell, will be in three months.

He reminded Ananda that although his bodily journey was nearing fulfillment, each person was to continue to work at his own Enlightenment. He said that since he only taught the Dharma out of his own Realization, the Sangha was not dependent on him for leadership. *"Therefore," he told Ananda, "be ye lamps unto yourselves."*

On **Sunday, February 16**, during the morning sitting, we will commemorate

the Buddha's final departure from the realm of birth and death. Taking part in this ceremony is a way of paying homage to Shakyamuni Buddha, the founder of our faith. Everyone is invited. There will be a short workday to set up for the ceremony on **Saturday, February 15 starting at 10 a.m.**



Sangha Entertainment

Time to dust off your instruments, bring out the games, loosen the vocal chords, brush up on your Tango—it's Sangha Entertainment day on **SUNDAY, MARCH 1**, and all acts are welcome. Bring your family and friends for a morning of music, fun, games, and vegetarian pot luck fare. Kelly Story is the coordinator for this event; please give her

a call if you want to perform. If you'd just like to sit in the audience, that's fine too! Informal sitting beforehand (no dokusan that day). The entertainment begins at 10 a.m. Hope to see you there!



FEBRUARY

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
						1
2 Taped Teisho	3 FINDING YOUR SEAT Tai Chi 5	4 Chanting	5	6	7	8
9 All-Day Sitting	10 ZC Closed	11	12	13 Chanting	14	15 Ceremony Workday
16 PARINIRVANA CEREMONY	17	18 Chanting	19	20	21	22
23 Taped Teisho	24 Tai Chi 6	25	26	27 Chanting	28	29 Indian Cooking Course: Festive

MARCH

1 Sangha Entertainment	2 FINDING YOUR SEAT Tai Chi 1	3 Chanting	4	5	6	7
8 Taped Teisho	9 Tai Chi 2	10	11 Metta 1	12 Chanting	13	14
15 All-Day Sitting	16 ZC Closed Tai Chi 3	17 Chanting	18 Metta 2	19	20	21
22 Taped Teisho	23 Tai Chi 4	24 Roshi returns to Vermont	25 Metta 3	26 Sitting and Worknight	27	28 Workday Sesshin Deadline
29 Workday for Temple Night	30 Tai Chi 5	31 TEMPLE NIGHT				

APRIL

Roshi is in Costa Rica from June 21 through September 15.			1 Metta 4	2 TEMPLE NIGHT	3	4 Jukai Workday
5 JUKAI 	6 FINDING YOUR SEAT ZC Closed Tai Chi 6	7	8 Metta 5	9 Chanting	10	11
12 Sesshin Set up	13 Tai Chi 1	14 Sitting & Sesshin Set up	15 Metta 6	16 Informal Sitting/ Sesshin Set up	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
VERMONT 7-Day Sesshin (4/18-25)						
26 Zen Center Closed	27 Tai Chi 2	28 Chanting	29	30		



Temple Nights

Tuesday, March 31 and Thursday, April 2 from 6:30 to 9:00 p.m. are Temple Nights at the Center. This takes the place of regular sittings, and there is no dokusan on those evenings.

At Temple Night people of all ages come to sit informally, offer incense, chant, and do prostrations before Buddha and Bodhisattva figures set up on special altars. Participants often walk around the zendo looking at the many different figures. The sitting, though informal, is focused and deep. Anyone who has been to a Temple Night can attest to the strength of concentration that builds up through the night. The sari-covered altars are beautifully decorated. Seated upon them, the figures not only remind us who we really are, they also help us express gratitude to and reverence for those who have transmitted the Dharma. —

Entering the Buddha's Family Spring Jukai Ceremony

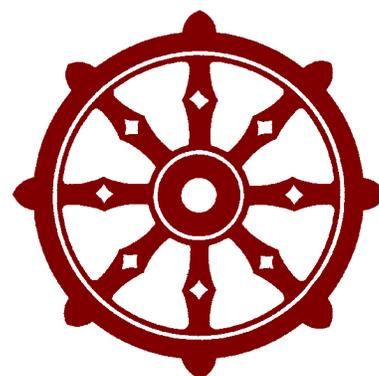
On Sunday, April 5, we commemorate the Buddha's "real" birthday with a Jukai Ceremony at 10 a.m. Prior to the ceremony, starting at 9 a.m. there is a one hour sitting. Dokusan will not be offered that day.

Our Center has two Jukai ceremonies each year, one in April and one in November. It is customary to take Jukai as often as possible. Each time you participate, your resolve to practice and realize the

Buddhadharma grows stronger.

During the ceremony, participants take part in a repentance ceremony, then take the Three Refuges, the Three General Resolutions, and the Ten Cardinal Precepts.

Jukai also entails making an anonymous monetary donation to the teacher, called an *incense offering*. This traditional gift represents the practitioner's desire to support the teacher's work in propagating Buddhism.



Jukai is one of the most solemn rituals we observe at the Center, so please be sure to wear a clean and pressed robe if you have one. If not, wear dark, solid-colored clothing or borrow a robe from the Center. *Children of all ages are especially welcome to come to spring Jukai, which honors the birth of Shakyamuni Buddha.* —

Workdays for Temple Night and Spring Jukai

Saturday, March 28 (from 10 a.m. to noon) and **Sunday, March 29** (from 9 a.m. to noon) are workdays to set up for Temple Night. We will also have a work night on **Thursday, March 26** during the evening sitting to

begin setting up altars. Please lend a hand to turn our Center into a beautiful temple for devotions on Temple Nights.

On **Saturday, April 4**, we will be taking down Temple Night and setting up for Jukai which is

on Sunday.

Saturday workdays begin at 10 a.m., though if you'd like to arrive earlier that's fine too. Members often start working at 9 a.m. Lunch will be provided on all weekend workdays. —

Courses



Indian Cooking Course— Festive Meal

Learn how to prepare a delicious and authentic festive vegetarian Indian meal in the Vermont Zen Center's spacious kitchen under the careful guidance of Manju Selinger. Manju's courses are very popular and fill up quickly as they are limited to eight

people. So, if you're interested, sign up soon!

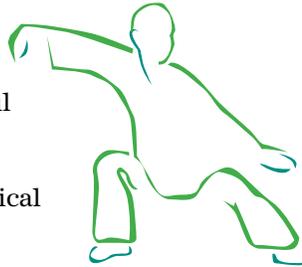
Date: Saturday, February 29 **Fee:** \$85 (\$75 for members)

Time: 9:00 a.m.–2:00 p.m.

More information and registration at www.vermontzen.org/indian_cooking_festive.html

Tai Chi Course

Tai Chi offers many benefits for health, relaxation, and concentration. A Tai Chi practitioner is mindful during each posture and movement, allowing the chi energy to flow throughout the body. There are numerous medical studies demonstrating the physical and mental benefits of Tai Chi, including for many people with arthritic and neurological conditions.



The course is conducted by Dr. Eric Berger, a long-time member of the Center and authorized teacher of Tai Chi. Eric offers several six-week courses for beginners and more advanced practitioners in Tai. The next courses begin on March 2. Each hour-long Monday evening session includes instruction, practice periods, and Q&A.

Time: Mondays 6:30-7:30 p.m. for those who have taken a minimum of 5 prior courses with Eric. 7:30-8:30 for all others.

Dates: March 2, 9, 16, 23, 30, April 6. A four-week course begins April 13.

Location: Vermont Zen Center

Fee: \$100 for the six classes; \$75 for the four-week course

More information and registration at www.vermontzen.org/taichi.html

Lovingkindness Course



Lovingkindness, or Mettabhavana, 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.

Dharman Rice and Nowa Crosby, Zen Buddhist priests, offer a six-week course in Lovingkindness Meditation at the Vermont Zen Center, beginning March 11. Each hour-long Wednesday evening session includes meditation

instruction, practice periods, and discussion. Please note that the first class is a half hour longer than the other classes. Class size is limited.

Time: Wednesdays 7-8 p.m. (The first class is 7– 8:30)

Dates: March 11, 18, 25, April 1, 8, 15

Location: Vermont Zen Center

Contribution: \$100 for the six classes

More information and registration at www.vermontzen.org/lovingkindness.html

Recipe

Greek Lemon Potatoes

by Heather Sowell

An easy dish to prepare on the weekend when you are prepping food for the busy work week.

Unlike refined flours and sugar, potatoes are a healthy carb to have in your diet: they are low in sugar and fat, and are a great source of healthy fiber, potassium, vitamin C, iron, and magnesium. Serves 4

2 pounds yellow or white potatoes

3-4 garlic cloves, minced

2 lemons, zested and juiced (8 tablespoons juice and about 1 tablespoon zest)

1/3 cup vegetable stock

3 tablespoons olive oil

1 teaspoon oregano

1/2 teaspoon salt, or to taste

1/4 teaspoon ground black pepper, or to taste

Chopped flat leaf parsley for garnish

Preheat oven to 400°. Peel the potatoes or leave the skins on for more nutritional benefits (most of the minerals are in the skin). Depending on the size of your potatoes cut them in half, quarters, or large chunks of roughly equal size so that they cook evenly.

Combine all of the remaining ingredients except the optional chopped parsley in a bowl large enough to hold the potatoes. Whisk to blend and then add the potatoes pieces and toss to thoroughly coat. Pour the potatoes and any remaining liquid into a casserole dish or roasting pan. Roast in the oven for 45-60 minutes, turning the pieces after about 30 minutes, until the potatoes are tender and you can pass a knife into the center of a piece without resistance. Garnish with the chopped parsley if desired.

Recipe from Rouxbe.com



Vermont Zen Center

Post Office Box 880
Shelburne, VT 05482

802-985-9746
www.vermontzen.org

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A spring breeze!

Led by a cow

To Zenkoji.

- Issa



CONTRIBUTORS:

- Maria Delia Crosby, layout
- Roshi Sunyana Graef
- Josh Kelman
- Meredith Markow
- Heather Sowell
- Greg Sheldon, copy editor
- Kelly Story, production
- Joan White, editor

*Thank
you*

Our deepest gratitude to all of you who so generously contributed to the 2019 Annual Appeal and to all of you who plan to do so. In running our temple, we turn to our members and friends to ask for

support. Your willingness to offer your time and energy, as well as your generosity with financial contributions, enables us to maintain this place of practice which is truly a treasure. Your contribution helps ensure that the Wheel of the Dharma keeps turning and the doors of our temple are kept wide open.

Thank you for your dedication, support, and generosity!