

# Walking Mountains

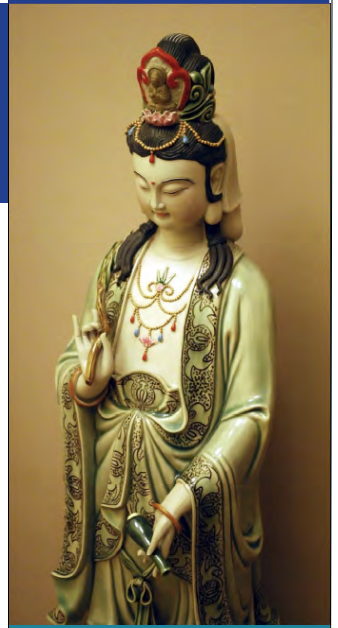
“The green mountains are always walking”—*Daokai*

*Dear Sangha and Friends,*

Ah, the light returns. The sun. Slowly, but surely. It never ceases to amaze me how it feels—like good health, the warmth of friendship, the love of compassion. How fitting we kick off the New Year with our Annual Sangha Meeting. Oh, to be among spiritual friends, sharing news, making significant decisions about projects and budgets and the like that keep our spiritual home vibrant. Warm indeed.

Then, in the first ceremony of the year, we pay homage to Kannon—a gesture of gratitude for her unceasing compassion. A retreat quickly follows, and we finish the month with the Buddha’s Parinirvana, commemorating the Buddha’s final departure from the realm of birth and death. Please join us.

*—Joan White*



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## Nothing is Permanent

by Sylvia Fagin



**B**irth, old age, sickness, and death. Once the first one happens, the rest are inevitable. I am fortunate that my parents are still living. Both are octogenarians, and after an unexpected medical event earlier this year, they have decided to move out of their house of 50 years and into an independent living facility. They have long talked about doing this “one day.” Well, one day has arrived—they’re moving in early 2023. I’m finding it all challenging, in many ways.

For starters, this house was my home for virtually my entire childhood—we moved in when I was one and a half, so it has a permanence in my mind. My house, my bedroom, my yard. The un-

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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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changing nature of the house, its fixtures and contents has given me the illusion of permanence for so many years, but of course that is not so. Everything changes, everyone ages. Things I thought would always happen, won't happen again. My dad's summer strawberry and raspberry harvests—now a thing of the past. Turning his own compost and fertilizing his tomatoes—won't happen again in the same way. When I think of it, I am sad. I love the ritual of it, and the joy it brings him. I'm attached, it turns out. How fortunate I have been to have had this stable foundation throughout my life. The place is changing but the love and support are not. What a blessing.

In November, I went home for Thanksgiving and was thrust into the cleaning-out portion of the moving process. So many things, so much memorabilia: photos, letters, childhood toys. What do we keep, what gets thrown away? I found myself unable to part with items I'd forgotten about for decades. Suddenly, an old doll which should have been given away 40 years ago was a dear treasure. A stack of letters from people I'd entirely forgotten was absolutely fascinating. I was both amused and frustrated by my thought process as I encountered each box of memories. Even as I watched my dad throw away his high school diploma, I put mine aside. For what?! While sorting through the piles of letters and notes from my childhood, teens, and twenties – after I got over being

“ So many things, so much memorabilia: photos, letters, childhood toys. What do we keep, what gets thrown away? I found myself unable to part with items I'd forgotten about for decades. ”

overwhelmed by the volume of paper—I came to a place of gratitude. At each stage of life, I have had the support of a network of friends and family as I navigated challenging situations and celebrated successes. As I was exploring my sexual orientation, I had the support of wonderful people. Throughout spiritual “dark nights of the soul,” I had friends walking with me. What tremendous good karma.

Watching my mom clean out the cupboards was a reality-check about their next phase of life: their new apartment will be smaller than the house, so they can't take all their things. The red soup pot, the cake pans, the big salad bowl—all in a pile to donate to refugee families. Memories of dinner parties and picnics came trickling back. Over Thanksgiving dinner, we took time to remember events from years past. Camping trips and exchange students who spent the summer—the memories brought laughter, and gratitude for the wonderful opportunities.

Change is hard. Me, my parents, my sister, we have all struggled with surprise, frustration, worry and fear

as we prepared for this move. Somehow, I was (mostly) able to take some deep breaths, hold my tongue, chant under my breath. Though the day, Kanzeon. Through the upheaval and stress and anticipation of the unknown, Kanzeon. Through the family dynamics, Kanzeon. Practice held me in many challenging moments.

This stage is challenging, for sure. Much about the coming months is uncertain, and for me that is stressful. Yet I know that I have the foundation of practice to hold me. I know that nothing is permanent—not my childhood home, not my parents' health, not any feeling of worry. I can breathe through the stressful times knowing that this is all part of the cycle of life, and that I have the resources to exist within it. I have this breath. I am grateful indeed.

***Addendum:** I have come to view the annual yard sale in a new light. If my parents had had an annual reason to lighten their load, there wouldn't be nearly as much to go through now. I vow to be more aggressive in my closet-cleaning next summer. —*

## Hunting Season by Jim Kahle



Our family has lived on an old farmstead in Ira, Vermont for over 40 years. We own about 120 acres that includes both forests and fields. We have a large picture window in the kitchen that looks out upon a rolling pasture, and a hill covered with maples and oaks. We often see animals like deer, turkeys, and foxes passing through there. Bears, and bobcats have been spotted in the back woods. Sometimes we hear packs of coyotes howling in the night. We are grateful to have their presence as a part of our lives. We watch them. The deer especially demonstrate how much they value their lives. They graze for a bit and then they quickly look up and around. Their ever-present vigilance shows us how much they just want to be contented and safe in a dangerous world, just like we do. And so the sounds of

gunfire during the annual fall hunting season have always signaled the start of a very difficult time of the year for me.

After living here for a couple of years, we decided to start posting our land, putting up “No Hunting” signs. This seemed like the right thing to do, but I found out over the years that it wasn’t as simple and straightforward as I thought it would be. Hunting is a treasured tradition and way of life here in Vermont. People plan their vacations from work around deer hunting season. Their fathers taught them to hunt just as they teach their own children. Some of my neighbors grew up hunting on the land that I was now posting. My actions had consequences that I’d yet to realize.

The laws in Vermont say that you have to check and date your signs every year in order for your land to be legally posted.

Imagine my surprise when during my second year of posting to find that some of last year’s signs had been torn down. While I don’t know everybody whose property borders our own, I have made a few calls. No one seems to know who is pulling the signs down. I’ve never actually caught anyone hunting here, but I have seen them on an adjoining property; crouching down behind large boulders, dressed in orange hats and jackets. Once I found a deer stand in a tree near our house. I took it down. No one ever claimed it. What is an arduous process in the best of circumstances had taken on a grim new reality.

My Zen practice added another level of nuance. Over time I began to realize that during hunting season, the animals being hunted weren’t the only beings in danger. There are grave karmic consequences for taking the life

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of another sentient being. Chagdud Tulku, in his book, *Change of Heart*, puts it this way. “If our motivation is truly to help everyone, we must reduce our negativity and learn to develop real love and compassion for all beings. This means we must try to help both the victim and the aggressor.”

So it is with a whole host of emotions buzzing around inside that I set out each fall to check the signs. It is beautiful in the woods, but ominous. There is really never an end to hunting in Vermont (in January it is the hares and rabbits that are in danger), and the sound of gunfire can sometimes be heard across the valley. It is mostly quiet, but I make my presence known. I chant the *En Mei Jiku Kannon Gyo* as I travel. There are a lot of ups and downs, both physically and emotionally. Frustration mounts when I find signs on the ground. There is relief when the signs are where I left them a year ago.

As I march along, there is the feeling that my efforts are a kind of offering: to deer, bears, turkeys, and hunters. Roshi has mentioned that Buddhas and teachers have their own fields of influence. These hills and hollows that we call home feel like that to me. It’s hard work and there’s no guarantee that it will make a bit of difference. But the words of Roshi Kapleau resonate,

“As I march along there is a feeling that my efforts are a kind of offering: to deer, bears, turkeys, and hunters.”

that “anything done with sincerity is never wasted.” Sometimes the offering seems to be for a wider audience.

*Just like space and the great elements such as earth;*

*May I always support the life of all the countless creatures.*

There’s an incident that needs to be mentioned. One year my wife and I were out walking on a dirt road nearby during hunting season. There was a young man there who was clearly out hunting. The land on either side of the road was posted, and I pointed out this fact very clearly to him. He said very calmly that he had the permission from the owners to hunt there. We talked for awhile and it became clear that here was a fine young man; clear-eyed, composed, and very respectful. The reality of this hunter was at great variance with the image that I carry around with me when I’m out there replacing tattered signage. It’s important for me to remember this. We are all whole and

complete, even hunters. My brother is a hunter and, at the same time, is a wonderful husband and father. While the compassion and care I feel for the deer feels genuine, the concern that comes up for hunters feels mostly like the theoretical variety. My battles with judging mind continue.

Sooner or later winter turns to spring here in the north country. Every year there comes a sunny day when the mother deer bring their new fawns down to the field in the back. They jump, cavort, and chase each other around. They made it! They survived the winter and now their lives get a little bit easier, for a time. I smile.

Of course I’ll never know if my efforts in the fall played any part in bringing about the joyous scene playing out before me. I hope so. It’s reassuring to think that in some small way you are making this little slice of heaven here on Kahle Road just a little more heavenly for the other beings who happen to live here. —

# Annual Meeting Sunday, January 8, 9:00 a.m.–11:00 a.m.

The Sangha is invited to participate in our Annual Meeting to help plan for the year ahead. We will discuss the Center's finances, the year's schedule, courses, special events, and more. Your input is essential and valued. Please come and help with the decisions and direction of the Center. A link to the meeting will be on the member page. A pot luck lunch follows the meeting. Please bring some vegetarian food to share.



## Annual Meeting Agenda

- 2023 Projects
- 2022 Financial Report
- 2023 Preliminary Budget
- Committee Review—reports from the following committees: *Ceremony, Kitchen, Housekeeping, Library, Outdoor, Courses, Newsletter, Finding Your Seat, Prison, Kannon*
- Miscellaneous

## The Buddha's Parinirvana

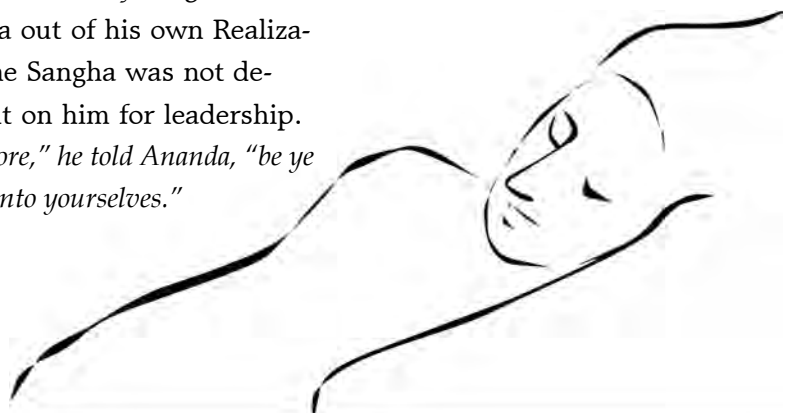
For 45 years the Buddha, after attaining Perfect Enlightenment, preached the Dharma to all who would listen, devoting himself to the welfare of all living beings. But in his 80th year, during the seclusion of the rainy season, he suddenly fell ill. Feeling that his time, though near, had not yet arrived, 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 **Thursday, February 16**, during the evening 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. All are invited.



# Special Ceremony Honoring the Bodhisattva Kannon

**On Sunday, January 22 from 9:00 a.m.**

**to 11:30 a.m.** we will pay homage to Kannon, the Bodhisattva of Compassion. This bodhisattva, so beloved in Mahayana countries, is the embodiment of tender compassion. Through this ceremony, we thank Kannon for her unceasing help.

After a half hour of zazen, we begin a series of rounds of sitting, bowing, chanting, and circumambulating. We chant the *Kannon Sutra* in English and Japanese a total of 108 times, recite the *Mantra of Kanzeon* (“Praise to Kannon bodhisattva”) 108 times, and chant the *Lotus Sutra Scripture of Kanzeon Bodhisattva*, and the *Dharani of Avalokitesvara* three times each.

By the end of the ceremony, we will have made 108 prostrations. Even if you are unable to do prostrations, you can still participate by making standing or partial bows. Members and their families, as well as friends of the Center and non-members are all invited. Anyone who wishes

to pay homage to Kannon Bodhisattva is most welcome to attend.

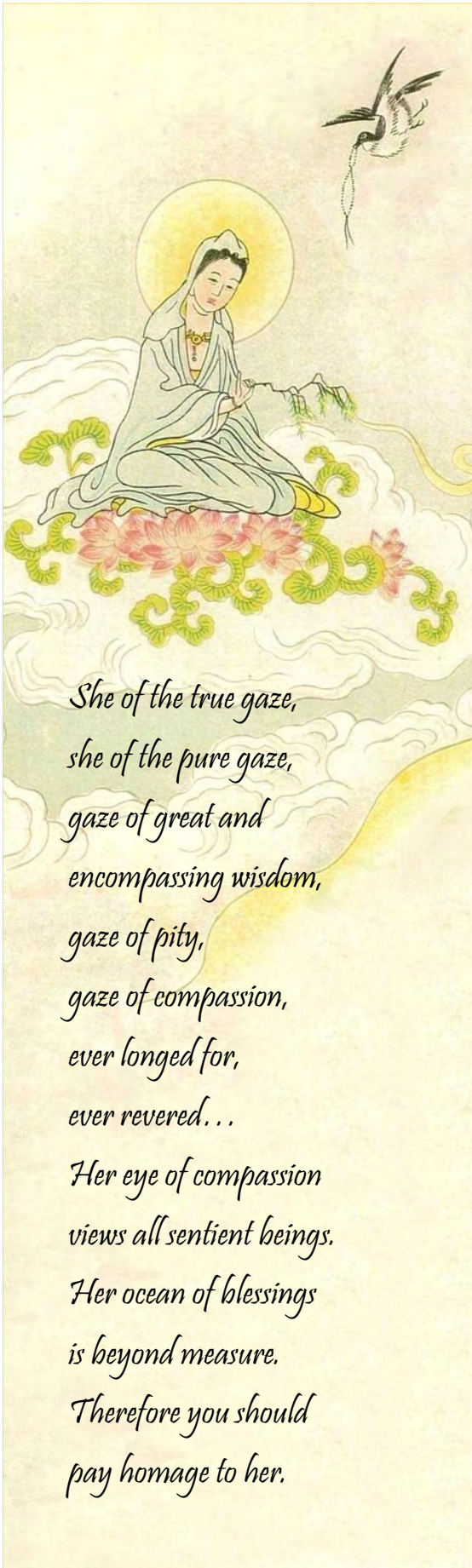
In addition to the bowing, there will be circumambulations, incense offerings, special readings, and a vigorous Rinzi-style chanting of the Kanzeon in Japanese. A few notes about the ceremony:

**DEDICATION**—You are welcome to dedicate the merit of this ceremony to whomever you wish. There will be a table for the names of those to whom you are dedicating the ceremony.

**DONATION**—As a concrete expression of compassion, please submit *a monetary donation* which will be given to COTS (Committee on Temporary Shelter). **Please note that checks should be made out to the Zen Center so that we can send COTS one check**

*The celebration of Kannon Day affords us a way to express our boundless gratitude to the Bodhisattva of Compassion for her ceaseless, wondrous help. We hope you will join us on this special day.*

More information: [www.vermontzen.org/ceremony\\_kannonday.html](http://www.vermontzen.org/ceremony_kannonday.html)



*She of the true gaze,  
she of the pure gaze,  
gaze of great and  
encompassing wisdom,  
gaze of pity,  
gaze of compassion,  
ever longed for,  
ever revered...*

*Her eye of compassion  
views all sentient beings.  
Her ocean of blessings  
is beyond measure.  
Therefore you should  
pay homage to her.*

JANUARY

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
1 ZC Closed	2 FINDING YOUR SEAT	3 Chanting and Altar take down	4	5	6	7
8 Annual Sangha Meeting	9	10	11	12 Sitting & Workshop Prep	13	14 WORKSHOP
15 Teisho	16	17 Chanting	18	19	20 Retreat Deadline	21 Ceremony Workday
22 Kannon Ceremony	23 ZC Closed	24	25	26 Chanting	27	28
29 Teisho	30	31				

FEBRUARY

			1	2 Famine Relief Ceremony	3	4
5 Retreat Prep	6 FINDING YOUR SEAT	7 Chanting	8	9 Sitting & Retreat Prep	10 Vermont 2-Day Retreat	11
12 ...Retreat	13 ZC Closed	14	15	16 Parinirvana Ceremony	17	18
19	20	21 Chanting	22	23	24	25 Indian Cooking Course
Roshi on Break through March 18						
26	27	28				
Roshi on Break						

MARCH

			1 Metta 1	2 Sitting & Workshop Prep	3	4 WORKSHOP
Roshi on Break						
5 Sangha Entertainment	6 FINDING YOUR SEAT	7	8 Metta 2	9 Chanting	10	11
Roshi on Break						
12 Taped Teisho	13	14 Chanting	15 Metta 3	16	17	18
Roshi on Break						
19 Roshi in Costa Rica	20	21	22 Metta 4	23 Chanting	24	25 April Sesshin Deadline
26 Taped Teisho	27	28 Chanting	29 Metta 5	30 Workday for Temple Night	31	





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*The crescent moon  
Is warped and bent:  
Keen is the cold.  
—Issa*



*Wishing you a  
Happy,  
Healthy,  
and Peaceful  
New Year!*

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