

# Walking Mountains

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

*Dear Sangha and Friends,*

We might have entered the dog days of summer, but at the Vermont Zen Center activity seems to have taken on a new meaning. July opens with an Indian cooking class, where participants learn to create a North Indian lunch under the guidance of Manju Selinger, whose cooking skills are, well, delectable. Our annual Sangha picnic, featuring food, games, and just sheer fun, follows. The border between July and August is bridged by a seven-day sesshin.

Our yard, bake, and craft sale in August is a crucial fundraiser for the Center, and a great opportunity to pitch in and enjoy the spirit of friendship and community with Dharma brothers and sisters. The month ends with the Water Baby Ceremony and the start of the course in lovingkindness. Please join us.

—*Joan White*



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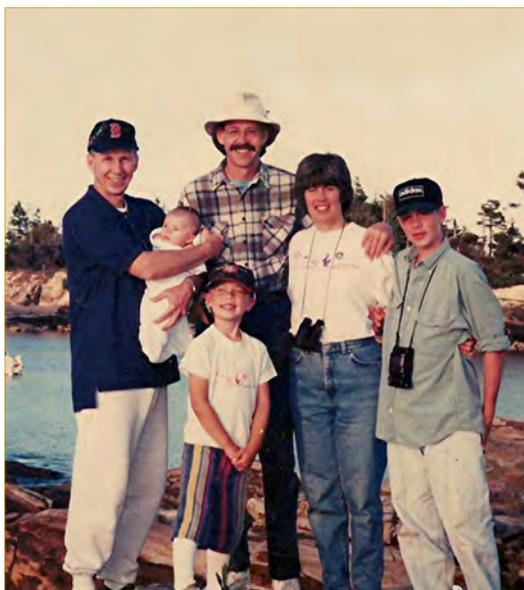
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## MISSION

*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.*

## Lessons from Graham, Lessons from Practice

by Greg Heath



There is such a joy in having a really close friend. Graham was really close. Such people are the family we choose. Early on we recognized a spark and fanned it. We planned weekly suppers together; two young couples with children in diapers being carried on hips or toddling around the knees of the adults. For more than twenty-five years we spent holidays and beach house vacations together. The photo albums tell a glorious tale of growing families and shared lives.

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We even spoke, not jokingly, of sharing porch rockers at the old folks' home. When lymphoma attacked Graham, then retreated, reappeared, and then would not let go, the other side of joy spilled over.

Impermanence, the tap root of suffering, is the nature of the phenomenal world. I was so immersed in the world of things, obligations, and busyness, that I did not see this reality any more than a lobster sees the Gulf of Maine. At an early age some suffer trauma and loss learning difficult lessons that others can successfully avoid even into midlife. Many of us find ourselves on the mat, driven to the mat, by just such experiences. To refer to them as wake-up calls is entirely apt.

I was so moved by Graham's presence through the final months of his life. He put a good deal of his limited energy to cleaning up loose ends, easing the burden for those left behind. People visited to offer solace and found even greater solace offered. He showed curiosity, generosity, utter honesty, and acceptance of his mortality, knowing full well that to live is to die. Though he was not a Buddhist, I have no doubt that Graham had experienced the absolute in a profound way.

It took me quite a while to realize I had not lost a thing in Graham's passing. I suppose

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that was one more step in working with this grief. Master Sengts'an's "Affirming Faith in Mind" has much to offer when facing the ultimate: *Both gain and loss and right and wrong—once and for all get rid of them.* The rocking chair never existed. It was just one of many *flowers of air*. Again from "Affirming Faith in Mind," the preceding couplet: *Delusion spawns dualities—these dreams are merely flowers of air—why work so hard at grasping them?* Indeed. Why? We acquire and cling to things and people, even ideas perhaps as ways to define ourselves, to provide a sense of substantiality where none truly exists.

So what does exist? One of the reasons I practice is to find out. This moment certainly does. Some may practice with the idea of being in training for some future event, such as one's eventual disaggregation. We recite the "Ten Verse Kannon Sutra" so

regularly that we best pay attention to keep it alive and fresh. *This moment springs from Mind. Nen Nen Ju Shin Ki.* The practice is for this thought/moment. Nen. And when it arrives, breathe in, the next moment. Nen Nen. We may think of the moment as arising in the mind, but the M is a capital M. It arises from Mind. And what is the next line? *This very moment is Mind.* Hearing that for the first time, that is to say truly hearing, is a tremor that shakes the earth.

Graham, through his example, gave me many lessons on how to live a good life and how to approach its end. Our well-worn mats and cushions, the repeated recitations of our chants, the Dharma expressed through Roshi's every word and act of attention all point to living this moment, breathing this moment, attending to this moment as very best we can. —

# Condo Living

by Liz Meller

Several years ago, I sold my house and bought one of 32 condominiums in my small New Hampshire town. This occurred just about the same time that I became a member of the Vermont Zen Center and Roshi's student.

My favorite occupation of this time was chatting with folks gleaned from many long years working as a visiting nurse in New York City and as a member of my local community volunteer government. My new neighbors have slowly become my friends or acquaintances and it is apparent that 50% of us have divergent views of how the US government should be run.

Originally, many of us made an attempt to convince others to follow our path of logic and correct thinking at coffee gatherings which are held several times a week at the condominium. I was quite willing to indulge in this pastime, but it eventually turned out to be quite confrontational and unfriendly, in part because each of us were watching different versions of "fair and balanced news" during the day and this news is now on a 24-hour cycle.

Often, we would meet each other with our latest thinking only to be met with "That is not true," or "I can prove that you are wrong," or "Let's look these

statements up on FactCheck." Nobody's mind was changed as a result of these exchanges and we soon began to avoid meeting each other or have any conversations at all.

Then came the challenge of Covid, the fear of catching or spreading the disease, the mandate that forced everyone to stay in their apartments, always wear a mask, and quite literally avoid each other.

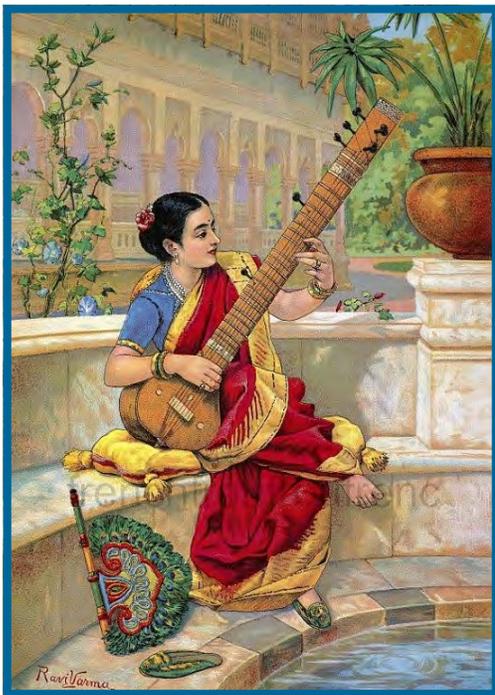
Almost two years later, the Covid restrictions have been lifted somewhat, and most of us prefer to look at the larger picture of neighborliness and the practice of choosing to focus on what makes us friends and not enemies. For instance, one neighbor who had been handing out newspapers and data that was quite opposite to my thinking, found out that my husband had been a Holocaust survivor and she immediately gave me a book that her daughter-in-law had written about her family's survival in Netherlands. Then

she arranged for me to meet the daughter in law for us to exchange stories about the remarkable endurance of so many people in our families. I told her about Mike's (my husband) mother working for Raoul Wallenberg, a Swedish diplomat, who saved thousands of Hungarians. Mike's family lived in Wallenberg's "safe house" and his father was fortunate to attend the work camps with other men until they were able to emigrate to Sweden after the war. The result has been quite remarkable and swift. Now my neighbor and I are quite good friends and walking buddies— never discussing politics but sharing our good family fortune.

All of my neighbors are good people. We sometimes share ideas and poems for meditation, but I found my source of inspiration in the poem we chant at the Center, "Affirming Faith in Mind": *If you would clearly see the truth, discard opinions pro and con.* —



## Music, the Middle Way by Emily Cross



Listening to our talented Sangha musicians perform at entertainment day last March, I was reminded that my favorite story in Roshi's Introduction to Zen Workshop is the one about the Buddha, who, sitting beside a stream while seeking to realize his true nature, hears a music teacher and student talking on a boat as they float by. The teacher asks the student, "How is it when your strings are neither too tight nor too loose?" and the student answers, "Then beautiful music can I play."

Music, a language beyond words, can open the door to a place where the intellect, however refined and well-intentioned, simply can't reach. Making mu-

sic is, at its finest, an act of love and intuition, an expression of truth, a wholehearted letting go of body and mind. Music resonates with the heart that only speaks music, the heart beyond words. Playing, chanting, practicing, is not merely making sounds, it shakes off the chaff of the dusty world. In another of Roshi's musician examples, then-80-year-old Pablo Casals, when asked why he still practices his cello daily, responded that he thinks he's making progress!

Learning to play an instrument is difficult. Likewise, sometimes in Zen practice the limitations of the senses and the physical body can create a mirage of unfairness. Like being asked to play when our fingers hurt and don't seem strong enough to even hold down the strings, like being asked to do what seems impossible. At first, we engage with our practice through words yet, in no time at all, discover words are not enough. The Zen student finds they are being asked to hear meaning with more than just the ears, and somehow produce an answer beyond words. Huh? This is problematic because the ego

expects, even demands, symmetry, reciprocity, and balks against what seems like an unfair proposition. Eventually we are faced with the inevitable question: now what?

If we keep going, self-conscious effort disappears like the sound of a bell, allowing our body-mind to focus wholeheartedly and single-mindedly on the meaning beyond words. Just as a koan, the breath, becomes inseparable from our activities, when we play, or sing, or chant, "we" disappear, and only music, only meaning, remains. One wistfully wonders how much easier sesshin might be if we were allowed to bring a musical instrument into the dokusan room with us. Then one day, an exchange between student and teacher becomes its own reward, when, without self-consciousness, without expectation of encouragement, we find we can answer. For a moment, it appears that maybe this voice, this very body, neither too tight nor too loose, is enough, whole and complete, lacking nothing. In no time we find our practice, the truth of who and what we are, is music to the ears.



# Training Program Sunday, July 24 through Friday, July 29

For five days this summer, the Zen Center hopes to be able to offer a residential Training Program. This will, of course, depend on the state of the pandemic. All those who attend must be fully vaccinated and boosted.

Training Programs are a way to experience the discipline of Zen training through total immersion similar to living in a monastery. During Training Programs, trainees live at the Center and participate in all aspects of traditional Zen training. A core element of the Training Program is learning how to bring Zen practice into everyday life is. Each day there is:

- Zazen
- Chanting
- Work practice
- Dokusan

- Teisho (Zen talk by the teacher) or
- Talks by senior students

Participating in a Training Program can help anyone, regardless of age, occupation, or previous exposure to spiritual disciplines, learn more about Zen practice, strengthen their spiritual training, and learn to practice meditation in the midst of everyday life.

The cost is \$175 for members (non-members \$275). Applications are available on line. **Please read “Information for Trainees,”** on the Zen Center’s website before applying.

The Training Program begins on **Sunday, July 24 at 9:00 a.m.** and ends on **Friday, July 29** after lunch. **Please note that the Training Program begins Sunday morning.** Local trainees

can arrive at the Center in time for the morning sitting. Out-of-town trainees should arrive at the Center by Saturday evening.

More information and applications for the Training Program is on-line at: [www.vermontzen.org/training\\_programs.html](http://www.vermontzen.org/training_programs.html)

## Daily Schedule

5:30 am	Wake up
6:00	Zazen
7:00	Chanting
8:00	Breakfast
8:30	Work
10:30	Tea break
10:45	Work
11:45	Zazen
12:15 pm	Lunch & break
2:15	Work
3:45	Chanting
4:45	Supper
6:30–8:30 pm	Zazen

## A Course in Lovingkindness

Lovingkindness (or Mettabhavana), is an ancient Buddhist meditation leading to the development of unconditional lovingkindness and friendliness. Metta is something you feel in your heart, a positive emotional state towards others as well as ourselves.

The Zen Center offers two six-week course each year in this gentle practice. The next one begins on **Wednesday, August 31.**

For more information and registration, please go to [www.vermontzen.org/lovingkindness.html](http://www.vermontzen.org/lovingkindness.html)





## Water Baby Ceremony— Remembering Lost Children

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.

**On Sunday, August 28,** 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.

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, and those who come must be fully vaccinated and boosted. 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* —

### Ceremony Workday

Please help set up the dining room for the Water Baby Ceremony during a workday on **Saturday, August 27**. The work period begins at 10 a.m. and will last an hour or two depending on the number of people who lend a hand.



## Yard & Bake Sale Donations

Donations for the sale may be left in the basement common room anytime **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. The yard sale will be on **Saturday, August 20**.

## Annual Yard, Bake & Craft Sale Saturday, August 20

 Our **ANNUAL YARD, BAKE, & CRAFT Sale** will be on **Saturday, August 20**. Donations for the sale may be left in the basement common room **after the August sesshin, which ends on August 6**. This is a wonderful fund-raiser for the Center, as well as a great way to clean out your unwanted, unused, and unneeded stuff.

Once again, 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 the last two years. The craft

sale portion will be in the living room; the bake sale in the kitchen; the 'yard' sale in the Sangha Building first floor and basement.

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 15, or even start after the teisho on Sunday, August 14.

The only downside to an indoor yard sale is that it wreaks havoc on the house. LOTS of

help is 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-like 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! —



**Vermont Zen Center**

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*The wind left in my hand.*

*-Issa*

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If you have time over the next several months to help with mowing, weed whacking, or gardening, please contact Jhana, Jim, or Nowa.

*Thank you for helping to keep our land beautiful and welcoming.*