

Walking Mountains

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



Dear Sangha and Friends,

If March is going to persist with cold winds, snow then mud, and more snow then mud, one very sure cure for this fever is Entertainment Day at the Center. It’s possibly the best reason in the world to leave the warm comfort of home and brave the elements. Young and old break out their guitars and flutes, recite poetry, sing to their heart’s content, and show us just how irreverent reverence can be. The most important reason not to miss it? Sangha celebrating Sangha. And yes, I am still holding out for someone with a tuba or bagpipes.

April brings Temple Nights—altars dressed in shimmering saris and adorned with sweet candies, cookies, cakes, flowers, and lit with candles. Oh, to sit at one of the many altars with Kannon, Manjusri, Jizo, and the Buddha is to be reminded of who we truly are. Quickly followed by our spring Jukai Ceremony, we strengthen our resolve to practice and to realize the Buddhaharma. Please join us.

—*Toan White*

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Entertainment Day by Jim Kahle



Spring is coming! The long, cold Vermont winter is almost behind us. That means that spring cleaning will commence both inside and outside. The Lawn Patrol will start mowing the grass, usually some time in April. And March brings Entertainment Day, an event at the Center that is like no other.

Entertainment Day has a history of which I am only vaguely familiar. I know that it was a tradition at the Rochester Zen Center, and that Roshi and Jed brought it

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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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with them when they came to Vermont, but I believe that it harkens back to even earlier times. It's my understanding that it was an annual ritual that took place in the Zen temples of old around the time of New Year's. As for our own history regarding Entertainment Day, beloved priest and member, Ti'an, described it best, "Entertainment Day is when Sangha celebrates Sangha."

In many ways, Entertainment Day doesn't change very much from year to year. Kelly is the organizer and emcee. If you see Kelly heading your way during the month of February, there is the strong possibility that she is looking to see if you are willing to sign up to participate in some fashion. I hope I'm not spilling the beans here but her husband, Glenn, is one of the longstanding mainstays as a very talented yo-yo performer. He has often been accompanied by their children in the act. There are usually some musical acts and there are readings, poetic and otherwise, offered by some of our very talented members. You will see a side of some of your Sangha brothers and sisters that you didn't know existed.

And then there are the skits. It's my understanding that irreverence has been a part of the Entertainment Day tradition dating back to ancient times,

“Our practice is about many things,
but part of it is learning to let go of
our sense of self.”

and some of our Sangha members volunteer to keep this tradition alive. I remember one skit from the early days during which we were allowed to peek into the dokusan room and witness Abbott and Costello (no not that abbot) working on the koan "Who's on First?" Then there was the time when the audience was able to peer into the thoughts and minds of three practitioners during the sitting before lunch during a sesshin. *Is that what they're really thinking?* The event has become so famous that even Sonny and Cher have been known to make an appearance.

It's fair to say that a good time is had by all. Another important part of this occasion is the potluck meal that follows. Here again is an opportunity for Sangha to show off talents of the culinary variety.

At first glance, the day can be kind of a mystery. There is nothing else that we do at our Center that is even remotely like it. Yet it has a history that dates back centuries in the annals of the monasteries of old. Why do we have something like Entertainment Day? What is its purpose?

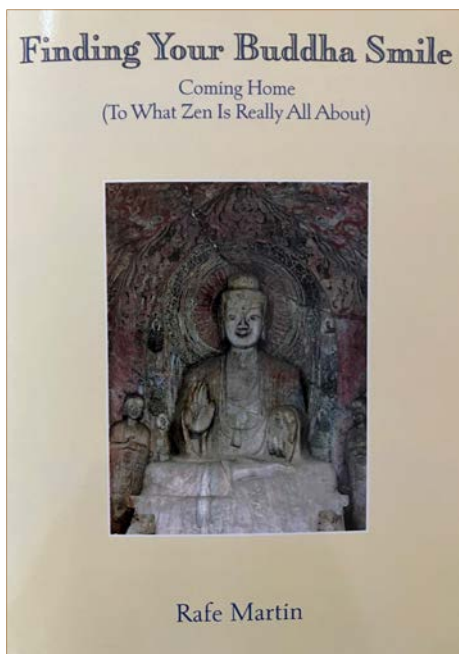
Our practice is about many things, but part of it is learning to

let go of our sense of self. We work so hard to protect our egos from the judgments of others. Entertainment Day is an opportunity to let all of that go. We can throw caution to the wind and show sides of ourselves that we usually don't want to reveal. We can learn to not take ourselves so seriously, and to have some fun. We can learn to do the thing that we think we are unable to do. There is a real value in this unusual form of practice.

I have purposely left out a very important component of Entertainment Day until the end of this article. That component is the audience. Let's face it: you can't have a performance without an audience. Our practice shows us that we are all connected and any performer will tell you that the kind of audience they have affects the kind of performance they offer. If you haven't attended Entertainment Day, please consider attending this year. I am sure that you will be happy you did!

And if you see Kelly heading your way with a certain gleam in her eyes, please don't head the other way. Your Sangha and your practice will thank you for it! —

Finding Your Buddha Smile (Book Review) by Joan White



koan practice has a reputation for being esoteric, but not in the hands of Roshi Rafe Martin. In his most recent book, *Finding Your Buddha Smile: Coming Home (To What Zen Is Really All About)*, we are taken by a master storyteller and Zen teacher on a journey, beginning with the Buddha's own quest for peace and happiness and traveling through several koans that are in Martin's words "not clever or tricky intellectual puzzles...but rather...rich expressions of the very essence of the non-dual Bodhisattva Way of wisdom and compassion." In so doing, we are left with a deep gratitude that we too can realize happiness and peace of mind, living full and satisfying lives in this difficult world.

At the Vermont Zen Center, Roshi Martin is well-known to our members, especially since he has been offering a Jataka Tale sesshin annually for fifteen years, sharing the stories of the Buddha's past

lives and his commentaries on them with us. Readers will find that the journey they embark on here is paved with his unique storytelling style, while questioning all the way, making this journey a true quest.

Roshi Martin opens with a Jataka Tale about the Buddha. As he says, "...not the smiling finished product [but] a god-like king who sought personal happiness above all." The Mandhata Jataka is a tale of endless desire, exploring hedonism, the opposite of the asceticism, practiced and abandoned by the Buddha to take his life-changing seat under the Bodhi tree. In this way the Buddha experienced two extremes, which Roshi Martin points out, likely helped to establish the Middle Way. We then encounter the Buddha as the fully Awakened One in the koan, "The World Honored One Ascends the Seat," revealing what the Buddha emphasized in his teaching. The two chapters paint a vivid picture of the Buddha's own journey, realization, and how he taught others to realize fulfillment.

Following the first two chapters, Roshi Martin turns to koans and how they can aid us in this journey. In the next three chapters he arranges three drawn from the life of Chinese Zen Master Te-shan (Tokusan) to see how Zen tradition views the ordinary person's journey to awakening. We first encounter Te-shan as an arrogant monk with a backpack full of notes on the Diamond Sutra. He has set out "to rout out the Zen

devils teaching that mind can be realized and Buddhahood attained without dependence on words and texts." Next we see what happens when Te-shan, having burned his texts and sure now of Zen realization, challenges others. Lastly, we meet him in "Te-shan Carries His Lunch Bowls," where he is a mature Master in charge of a large community, having attained, as the koan relates, "the last word."

Following this, we encounter Chao-chou's (Joshu's) "Oak Tree In The Front Garden" where a monk asks about the meaning of Bodhidharma coming from the West. To which, Chao-chou replies, "The oak tree in the front garden." The monk sincerely asking what was so important that Bodhidharma was willing to risk his life, making a notoriously dangerous ocean crossing to share it. As Roshi Martin puts it, Bodhidharma offered, "...the core, the root, the practice of awakening itself..." Which brings us to his disciple, the Second Patriarch (to be) in the koan "Bodhidharma and Peace of Mind." Roshi Martin notes that if we're moved to find the foundation of happiness and true peace of mind, then this koan can be our guide and ally.

As a true guide and ally himself, Roshi Martin takes the reader from seeking peace of mind to the question begged: "But whose peace of mind?" Here he shares his commentary on the koan, "Which Is The True Ch'ien?" (known also as "Sei and Her Soul Are Separated"). Zen

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Temple Nights

Temple Nights, on **Tuesday, March 31** and **Thursday, April 2**, are two special evenings set aside for people of all ages to sit informally before beautiful altars honoring Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. They take the place of regular sittings and **begin at 6:30 p.m. and end at 8:30 p.m.** with a special chanting service and circumambulation.

Anyone who has been to a Temple Night can attest to the strength of concentration that builds up throughout the evening. 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.

You will find Temple Night inspiring and invigorating. It is surely one of the most beautiful stops on the journey to our True Home. Please join us.

All are welcome: www.vermontzen.org/ceremony_templenight.html —

Entering the Buddha's Family Spring Jukai Ceremony

On **Sunday, April 5**, we commemorate the Buddha's actual birthday, which is on April 8, with a Jukai Ceremony which starts at **9:00 a.m.** with a half hour informal sitting. The ceremony is hybrid. Please register online whether you are attending in person or via Zoom at www.vermontzen.org/ceremony_jukai.html

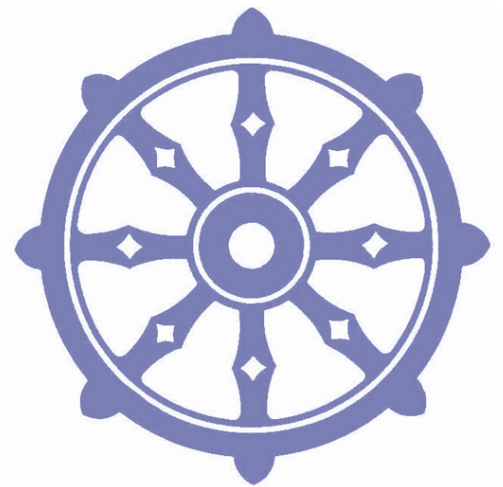
Our Center has two Jukai ceremonies each year, one in April and one in November. It is customary to take Jukai as often as possible. Each time you participate, your resolve to practice

and realize the Buddhadharm 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, please wear dark, solid-colored clothing.

Children of all ages are especially welcome to come to spring Jukai, which honors the birth of Shakyamuni Buddha. —

Upcoming Courses at the Vermont Zen Center

www.vermontzen.org/courses.html

Lovingkindness

Wednesday, March 11

Learn the ancient Buddhist meditation leading to the development of unconditional lovingkindness and friendliness.

A six-week course on Wednesday evenings starts March 11, conducted by Zen priest Nowa Crosby and lay priest Heather Kelman.

Register online at the Zen Center's website.

Indian Cooking: Chaat

Saturday, March 14

Chaat are the savory-spicy-tangy snack foods enjoyed in India. They are delicious and addictive!

Manju Selinger is an expert in their preparation. She will teach you how to make them, and all will have a chaat feast with tea at the end of the class.

Register online at the Zen Center's website.

Haiku

Saturday, April 11

Through close readings of Japanese poets, participants learn the essential elements of traditional haiku and gain an understanding of the interaction between spiritual practice and poetry, as well as an appreciation of the deeper meaning of haiku with instructor Joan White.

Register online at the Zen Center's website.

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Master Wu-tzu (Goso) uses a popular folk tale of his time to turn us directly facing the question, Who am I?—"...the root of our own dismay and lack of peace."

As Roshi Martin says, "The greatest journeys find completion in the simplest, most ordinary things," introducing "Layman Pang's Beautiful Snowflakes." The Layman's, "...response to the snowflakes is telling. It is not generic, bland, or 'empty' but intimate and personal... those falling snowflakes are 'beautiful' to him...as they fall 'nowhere'." The Layman is challenging the monks escorting him to the gate, as does Roshi Martin challenge the reader at the close of this chapter.

What more skillful way to close this book on a journey with a journey: "Ch'ang-sha (Chosa) Goes for a Stroll." We set out on the quest presented in

these pages in search of our Buddha smile. But once attained, what do we do with this peace of mind? Roshi Martin says, "The good news is that being sincere practitioners of Zen doesn't require us to turn our backs on our lives, isolate ourselves on some lofty peak, or sit forever facing a wall, as if our life were something to escape." Instead we become better partners, parents, teachers—better humans, gratefully engaged. —



Upcoming Workdays

TEMPLE NIGHT WORKDAYS are on Thursday evening, March 26, Saturday, March 28, and Sunday, March 29.

JUKAI WORKDAY is on Saturday, April 4. Weekend workdays start at 9:00 a.m.

2025 End of Sesshin Photos



January 3-Day Sesshin
in Costa Rica

February 2-Day
Retreat



April 7-Day Sesshin

First non-hybrid sesshin in
Vermont since the pandemic.



May 5-Day Sesshin
in Costa Rica

Last sesshin fully conducted
by Roshi Graef in Costa Rica.





July 3-Day Sesshin
in Costa Rica

Bodhi Murillo gave Dharma Talks at this sesshin; Roshi Graef gave dokusan. Her final dokusan in Costa Rica was at the end of this sesshin.



August 7-Day Sesshin



October Jataka
5-Day Sesshin



December Rohatsu
7-Day Sesshin



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*At every gate,
 Spring has begun
 From the mud on the clogs*



— Issa

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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 15**, and all acts are wel-



come. Your family and friends are invited to a hybrid morning event of music, fun, and games. 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. The entertainment begins at **10 a.m.**

Hope to see you there! More information online:

www.vermontzen.org/events_entertainment.html