

Walking Mountains

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

Dear Sangha and Friends,

In early May we honor our teacher’s teacher, Roshi Philip Kapleau with a memorial service and an extended sitting. With gratitude to technology, we will listen to a teisho given by Roshi Kapleau via recording. This memorial service is soon followed by the Sangha Garden Weekend when we turn our attention to the many gardens at the Center. Our time filled with raking, weeding, planting, and watering, not to mention tremendous gratification. It’s also a weekend of friendship and fun among Dharma sisters and brothers.

We close the month with Vesak, the celebration of the Buddha’s birth, with chanting, songs, stories, and an elephant parade. And, of course, birthday cake! And turning our attention to June when the American Zen Teacher Association five-day meeting will be held at our Center, the volume goes way up on preparing our temple and grounds for this important event. All hands on deck! Please join us.

–*Joan White*



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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.

The Heat at Retreat, by Meredith Markow



During the early morning sitting on Saturday of the February 2-Day Retreat, intermittent mechanical noises bellowed from the Buddha Building basement. The monitors investigated the issue, the sounds eventually quieted, and the retreat proceeded as usual. Or so we thought. At the end of the teisho, Roshi calmly informed us that the mysterious groaning from earlier was the sound of the furnace dying in the Buddha Building. We were told that the part that needed replacing was no longer manufactured, and with it being the weekend, there was

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little chance that the necessary repairs could be made before Monday. We were in the middle of a cold snap, and temperatures were supposed to drop to 20° below zero that night. We had some important decisions to make. Not only was there to be no heat in the zendo or Kannon Room, but also there were sixteen women housed in the Buddha Building basement. The choices included whether to carry on with the retreat and make necessary adjustments or end the retreat that evening. What followed was the presence of three essential components of practice: the determined spirit of Zen; responsive action; and the solidarity of Sangha.

Roshi asked for a show of hands from those who wished to carry on and those who wished to end the retreat early. Our Zen determination was fully apparent in that not one hand was raised in favor of ending. In short order, we rearranged the Buddha Hall to make it our zendo, and we moved the dokusan line to the living room. Lifting the usual rules for attire, Roshi encouraged us to bring shawls, blankets, hats, or whatever we needed to keep ourselves warm in the zendo. We were to come back together after lunch to get a further update, and also to start the process of moving those who were staying in the Buddha Building to other spaces. Those who were staying in the Dharma or Sangha Buildings were more than happy to welcome another resident to their room no matter how cramped the

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quarters would be. We were all in it together and we were going to make it work.

At our next update, we were surprised to hear that the boiler had been replaced, that there would be heat by sometime early evening, and that further steps were not needed to shuffle rooming arrangements. We returned everything that we'd moved earlier back to its original place; the sitting went back to the zendo, and the dokusan line returned to the Buddha Hall. The day's event could now be put behind us.

But as we know, the best laid plans are often thwarted, and just before the start of the evening sitting, we were told that now the igniter was not functioning. The heat would not be restored that weekend, after all. With many of us sitting wrapped in layers of clothing, posture sharpened by the cold, Roshi told us about the conditions at the monasteries in Japan and how her teacher, Roshi Kapleau, said that while he was training in Japan, he was never warm. We are given such comfort at our Vermont Zen Center. Our basic needs are well met and, in addition, we are afforded astonishing beauty in the gardens, buildings, altars, and figures. It

was refreshing to be reminded of how little one needs to practice with sincerity and dedication and how truly supported and fortunate we are.

At the end of the sitting, we had one more change to make, and those who needed move from the Buddha Building did so with the help of others carrying linens, luggage, and mattresses. Most stayed put, while Sangha members delivered blankets, sleeping bags, encouragement, and metta. And all of this was done in relative silence, keeping custody of body, speech, and mind.

While this loss of heat was an inconvenience, and while it might have caused some discomfort, the cold temperatures came with a gift. It gave us a window into another time and place. Those of us who have not been at the Center since its inception have to wonder about the earlier days and the radical transformation that has taken place since the land and building were purchased in 1991. One wonders about the stones that were lifted and carried to the otherwise barren property. One imagines the plants being put into the earth and the walkways being dug out. And what about those early sesshins when all of the

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The Training Program, by Lynne Davis



Vermont is deep in summer at the start of the training program. The gardens overflow with carefully cultivated flowers, lazy naturals and weeds. Somehow, the Center seems expectant as trainees arrive to fill the carefully cleaned bedrooms.

The training program has become part of my seasonal cycle over the years. In a highly structured academic schedule, summer is a time when colleagues leave to do research, go on holiday, and otherwise do their own thing. No one has expectations that you will be at your computer until mid-August. Perfect conditions for a five-day training program at the Vermont Zen Center.

The training program is designed to introduce participants to the discipline of living at a Zen Center. The schedule is strictly followed. There are morning sittings with dokusan. Everyone rotates daily through the

kitchen, garden, and house maintenance, becoming acquainted with the tools and procedures in each workspace. A work supervisor gives instruction and otherwise mentors everyone. It was through these mentorships that our beloved Ti'an taught me to weed with a special tool that she loved and to rake the gravel river in the Zen garden. Mitra taught a group of us how to work the kitchen's big Cuisinart and lemon squeezer. Roshi taught us how to use the rotary iron, a huge timesaver for projects like sheets. Everyone emerges with a deeper relationship with the Center and all its workings.

Unlike sesshin, there is talking at designated times. It is an opportunity to build relationships, learn about each other's lives, find points of connection, seek advice, and deepen the bonds of Sangha. Rela-

tionships, once established, spill over into other times of practice, like the Term Student Program and sesshins.

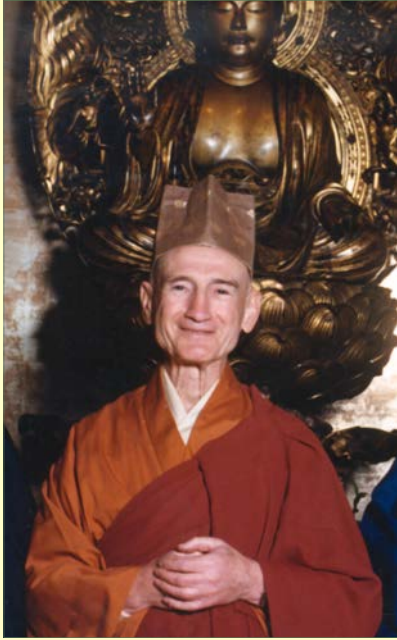
One of the formal aspects of the training program is the nightly sittings with an "Entering the Way" talk or a discussion group. One learns that while each of us has our own story, we come to Zen practice from a place of pain. As Roshi often reminds us, people living in the deva realm are unlikely to be drawn to practice. Here, we come to understand each other with appreciation, as stories are revealed and shared with vulnerability and courage.

Often there is a special project. In the last couple of years, this has been washing the windows in the zendo and the Buddha Hall. It takes a dedicated team to remove every screen, wash every frame and polish every window. Window-washing is hard to perfect. No matter how much care and effort goes into cleaning the glass, the changing light conditions are ever humbling as small imperfections appear and fade, reappear and widen as the sun moves through its daily cycles. Sometimes, I glance up to scrutinize, and then quickly lower the eyes again when overwhelmed with the deep urge to re-do and perfect. It has been a difficult lesson to just let go.

In 2025, we made a start on another special project. At the top

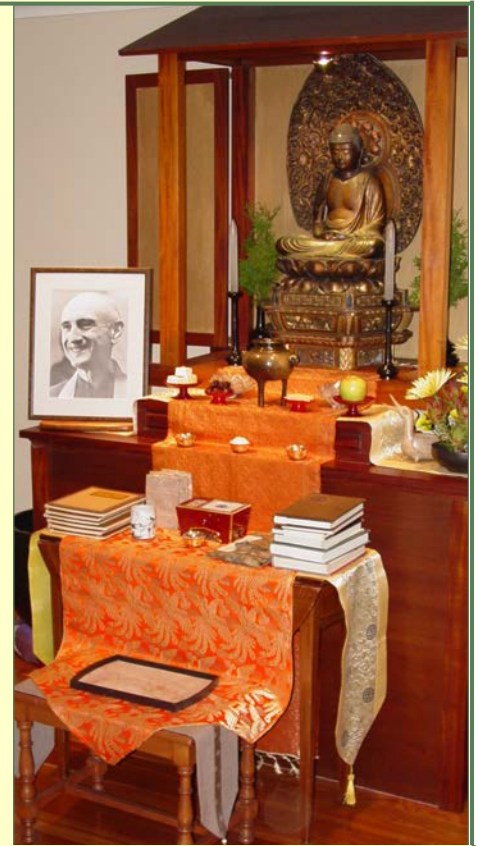
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All-Day Sitting in Honor of Roshi Philip Kapleau



Roshi Philip Kapleau passed away on May 6, 2004, at the age of 91. As is our tradition, a special **Day of Remembrance** honoring Roshi will be held at the Center on **Sunday, May 3.**

On this day we will have an all-day sitting **beginning at 7 a.m. and ending at 3:30 p.m.** During the day there will be a special chanting service including the memorial prayer. There will also be dokusan, and we will listen to one of Roshi Kapleau's taped teishos. —



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of the second story stairs in the Sangha Building, screened by curtains, is the library of Roshi Kapleau and an anonymous donor, an amazing legacy gifted to Roshi Graef. This special collection, hidden from view, is a magnet for dust. Margoth Vargas and I started on dusting the books shelf by shelf, book by book. It takes no imagination to realize the implications of touching this collection.

Here we find books from the days when Zen had so recently arrived in North America. Early translations of works, early editions of what would later become leading Buddhist journals, first editions of seminal texts as well as Roshi

Kapleau's favorite sources for teishos line the bookshelves. Here is the evidence of the curious minds that not only read and created Buddhist texts, but read widely and explored related topics such as psychology and philosophy, Asian arts and cultures. Here too is a record of the emergence of Buddhist studies as its own area of academic study.

When Roshi chose to focus on Zen Master Hakuin during the August sesshin of 2025, drawing on the translation by the well-known scholar Phillip Yampolsky, I smiled inwardly, recognizing that we had dusted volumes of translated texts by him in Roshi Kapleau's collection. Our dusting project was cut short by

the closing hours of the training program. No doubt, the project will be finished by others as the Center is polished and polished again before June's American Zen Teacher Association gathering.

The training program passes at a snail's pace and gallops in a flash at the same time. It is a simple slide into the August sesshin. Stoked with joriki and renewed vigilance from five days of training, the August sesshin arrives with a new wave of Dharma sisters and brothers. So this year, when you are plotting your summer schedule, think about signing up for the training program. It is a unique opportunity to extend, deepen, and delight. —

Spring Sangha Gardening Weekend

Thursday evening, May 21 – Sunday afternoon, May 24



Get together with Sangha members to work in the gardens, weeding, planting, and preparing our temple grounds for the warm weather ahead.

Lunch will be provided. **Registration is essential** so that we can prepare food, lodgings, work assignments, and more. —

Additional information and **registration** here:
www.vermontzen.org/events_gardenweekend.html

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women stayed in one room in bunkbeds and all of the men in another? How did all of that happen, and how do we have the temple and community that we now have if not for the spirit of Zen and the one mind of Sangha?

With the rising of the sun on Sunday morning, something had solidified. We had endured a challenge, together. There was a particular tautness to this retreat, and it invited vigor and unity. The furnace might have been broken during the February 2-Day Retreat, but the heat was most definitely turned up on practice! —

**And now, we are asking
for your help . . .**

The last time we had an appeal for funds was before the Pandemic. But with the death of our boiler – on a weekend (extra labor costs), during a retreat (we really couldn't wait until Monday), on the coldest weekend of the year (pipes, and retreat participants! might freeze) – we find ourselves with a large unan-

May Courses

www.vermontzen.org/courses.html

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| <h3 style="color: #800000;">Healing Herbs</h3> <p style="text-align: center;">Saturday, May 10</p> <p>Learning to live in right relationship with the natural world is a foundational tenet and natural outpouring of Zen practice.</p> <p>In this course you will gain a basic understanding of local plant medicine and how to work with the Wheel of the Year.</p> <p>More information on the Zen Center's website.</p> | <h3 style="color: #800000;">Indian Cooking</h3> <p style="text-align: center;">Saturday, May 16</p> <p>Learn how to prepare a delicious and authentic vegetarian Indian meal in the Vermont Zen Center's spacious kitchen.</p> <p>Manju Selinger will guide you through the process of preparing the meal, which all will enjoy for lunch. Limited enrollment. Manju's courses fill quickly!</p> <p>More information on the Zen Center's website.</p> |
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ticipated expense: \$9,000 to be exact.

Would you be able to help us cover some of the cost? Anything will help. Donations can be made through the Zen Center's donation page at www.vermontzen.org/donations.html or with a check, mailed to the Center at PO Box 880, Shelburne, VT 05482. We are deeply grateful for your warm support. —

Vesak 2026



Vesak, the celebration honoring the birth of Shakyamuni Buddha, will be on **Sunday, May 31, beginning at 10 a.m.** (There's no morning sitting prior to the ceremony.) According to tradition, the Buddha was born on April 8. However, for purely practical reasons we celebrate this event when the weather is warmer and we can be outdoors.

Of all the Buddhist holidays, this one is the most fun. After all, it's a birthday party! People of all ages are most welcome, but please register if you are planning to attend in person.

Following the ceremony is a Pot Luck Picnic. Please bring a vegetarian dish to share. The Center will provide plates, cups, and utensils as well as drinks and birthday cake.

Part of the ceremony is to present a small, wrapped baby gift for the Buddha which is later donated to the Lund Home. Presents need not be expensive—diapers, pacifiers, bottles, bibs, booties, rattles—anything is appreciated by the young mothers. Please also bring a flower offering for the baby Buddha.

More information and **registration** at: www.vermontzen.org/ceremony_vesak.html. We hope to see you there! —



REMEMBER TO BRING:

- A flower offering
- A baby gift
- A vegetarian dish to share



Special Event Reminders



All-Day Sitting in honor of Roshi Philip Kapleau on **Sunday, May 3**. Register online:

www.vermontzen.org/ceremony_roshi.html

Sangha Gardening Weekend from Thursday, **May 21 through Sunday, May 24**. Register online:

www.vermontzen.org/events_gardenweekend.html

Vesak, the Buddha's Birthday Celebration on **Sunday, May 31**.

Register online:

www.vermontzen.org/ceremony-vesak.html

The American Zen Teachers' Association Conference will be hosted by the Vermont Zen Center this year from Wednesday, June 10 through Sunday, June 14. Help is needed and greatly appreciated!

June Courses

www.vermontzen.org/courses.html

Flower Arranging

Saturday, June 20

Ikebana is an art form that arranges flowers, merging inside and outside. It is a symbolic process that is a form of meditation. The course begins with a discussion of the basic elements of Zen meditation and its relationship to flower arranging. After a short introduction to the Zen Center, participants will be instructed in basic flower arranging techniques through a lecture/demonstration followed by time to do their own arrangements.

Register online at the Zen Center's website.

Zen Center Gardening

Saturday, June 27

Learn the origin of Zen gardens and some of the principles unique to Zen gardening practice. A tour of the diverse gardens at the Vermont Zen Center will demonstrate various ways that these ancient principles are expressed. We will learn, through direct experience, how to work in the Zen gardening tradition with intention, mindfulness, and skill: cultivating, planting, pruning, weeding, and raking rivers of stone.

Register online at the Zen Center's website.



Vermont Zen Center

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*The turtle also
May tell the hour—
This spring moon!*



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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.