

# Walking Mountains

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

*Dear Sangha and Friends,*

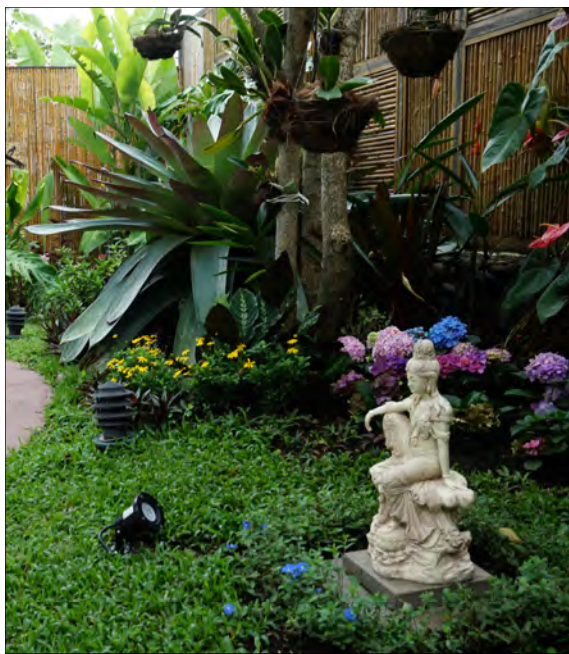
Although the gardens are still full of color and bloom, shorter nights and cooler days herald the new season and call us together to begin preparing the gardens at the Zen Center for winter. The Sangha Garden and Social weekend at the beginning of the month is chock full of work and, well, socializing. Soon thereafter, many of us head for warmer climes; that is, our sister Sangha in Costa Rica, to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Casa Zen, and to witness the ordination of our Dharma brother, Carlos Murillo.

Upon our return, our collective commitment in the Term Student Program fuels our energy for the World Peace Ceremony, the Jataka Sesshin, Bodhidharma Day, and the Hungry Ghost Ceremony. All the while in the hills and mountains around us the trees drape themselves in robes of saffron and gold and yellow. Be sure to lift your eyes; don't miss it.

–*Joan White*

## The Heart of Casa Zen

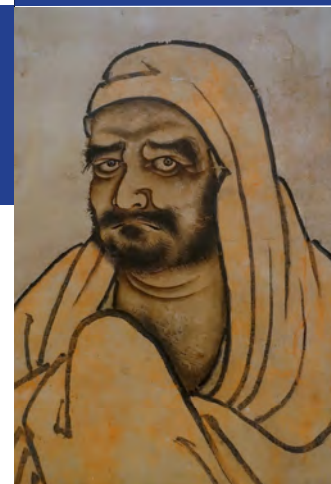
by Meredith Markow



**R**oshi has spoken many times in her teishos not only about the necessity of Sangha in practice, but also that no matter where you go in the world, Sangha will have your back. We frequently experience the “necessity of Sangha” in our community at the Vermont Zen Center, but the “no matter where you go in the world” was proven true for me during the pilgrimage to India.

We had gotten up before dawn to go to the Mahabodhi temple for

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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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sunrise. It was very crowded, and getting through security was no simple matter. The mass of pilgrims was thick, there were no lines, and people were pushing and cutting in front of us. We stacked our bags (including our passports) in one heap to go through the metal detector while we were crowded into another heap waiting to be patted down. We were separated from our belongings, and it was easy to be separated from the group. It was harrowing. But then in the midst of all of the commotion, a tico Sangha member swiftly pulled me from the crowd and moved me into the pat-down line, another tico put my bag on the pile-up, while a third was waiting on the other side of security to gather up our items.

In no time, I found myself on the other side of security, bag and passport in hand, all thanks to our tico companions. Simply because we were Sangha members, they had my back. Throughout the pilgrimage, I took note of the warm connections among the ticos in the way they jovially embraced one another with lovingly warm hugs and heartfelt conversation. It was there that I realized that I wanted to know our tico Sangha better, as well as to visit Casa Zen.

Making plans to go to Casa Zen for the three-day sesshin this past May, emails with ticos

“ While it is true that Casa Zen, the temple, is a rare jewel, its facets would not sparkle were it not for the ticos themselves. ”

always ended with some statement of “Te esperamos con mucho cariño.” That is to say, they looked forward to receiving me with love and care, and this was exactly my experience. Carlos picked me up at the airport, and I was welcomed like family. On our way to Casa Zen, he shared with me some of the rich history of the beginnings of Casa Zen, a history that runs very deep, and that reflects the manifestation of true commitment—a history to be respected. After traveling the winding streets of San José, we arrived at a house filled with activity, laughter...and food! Lunch was being prepared, and at Casa Zen what I experienced in the kitchen that afternoon was the beginning of savoring seven days of cuisine that was prepared with enormous care, joy, flavor, skill, and above all, love.

Meals are important at Casa Zen. The ingredients there are fresh and delicious; we ate our meals together, sharing stories and getting to know each other. At mealtime, we waited until everyone was ready to begin, we stayed at the table until everyone was finished, and we cleaned up together. Even the

Spanish to English gap was bridged smoothly, so that everyone was included. Mealtime at Casa Zen exemplifies true social awareness that flows easily because of conscious attention combined with a culturally ingrained social intelligence.

Casa Zen itself is enchanted. Similar to the Vermont Zen Center, when the house was bought, it was nothing like what it is today. Owing to years of hard work and dedication, Casa Zen is not only beautiful architecturally, but one senses in its walls that it is a container of practice. Designed with tasteful Asian accents, beautiful wooden floors and ceilings, an embracing, and a warm zendo surrounded by lush gardens, Casa Zen is a sanctuary. Even with the ongoing symphony of bird calls peppered with the occasional revving of an engine or near-by construction, it is quiet and peaceful. Although smaller than the Vermont Zen Center, there is a certain spaciousness due to the indoor-outdoor structure of the building. Unscreened large doors in the main community room slide open to welcome in the fresh air and sounds of nature. A rock-river water fountain flows

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# Spreading the Dharma by Joan White

Recently, a small group of Sangha members were invited to participate in a practice morning chanting service with Jacob Cribbs, a lead chanter in training. We gathered on a Monday evening in robes and joined Jacob and Ramiro, with whom Jacob has been training, in the Buddha Hall, and he lead us with the same care and attention that Ramiro undoubtedly instructed him with. I was so moved by the support of Sangha.

From the get-go a warm welcome and support for those who are new to the Zen Center is taken seriously under Roshi's direction. Newcomers, after having attended a workshop, have the option to become trial members. In other words, they can try us out for a month to get a good taste and feel for the practice (and us!) before becoming a member. Further, trial and new members are invited to come to our monthly Finding Your Seat meetings where questions like, "What is the importance of ceremonies?" and "How and why do we do prostrations?," are answered by senior members. Ongoing support continues, since when someone becomes a member, they are paired with a Dharma Buddy (a senior member) to whom they can turn with any



2024 Training Program Participants

doubts or questions. Workdays, gardening and social weekends, tico breakfast on Friday mornings, the Sangha picnic, our annual yard sale, all provide opportunities to get to know us outside of the silence in the zendo.

It is this care and attention that helps people keep going with practice, even though they are living busy lives in a demanding fast-paced world. We are also fortunate to have so many new people who are serious about practice and training. And yes, they not only show up for zazen on a regular basis, but they also help keep our temple clean, work in the gardens and kitchen, and fold, label, and stamp this newsletter, just to name a few things.

For those of us who came to the Zen Center in its early years, it is more than a breath of a fresh air to have new people of all ages join us. In fact, it is of the utmost importance. When Mitra, our head cook, reviews kitchen protocols; when Nowa meets with a newcomer before a sitting; when Jhana, our garden director, points to the weeds; when Marcela, in charge of ceremonies, details how to clean the altars; and when Ramiro teaches Jacob all the intricacies of lead chanting, we are bringing along the next generation. In this way, just as we honor our ancestors, so too, we're honoring those who will spread the Dharma to future generations. It fills me with joy and gratitude. —

# Sangha Garden Work and Social Weekend

**A** SANGHA GARDEN WORK & SOCIAL WEEKEND will be held from **Friday evening, September 6 through Sunday afternoon, September 8**. The purpose is to work together on buildings and especially grounds, enjoying the beauty of our land and the company of our Dharma family. Sangha members and their families, including children of all ages, are invited. You are welcome to stay at the Center. **There is no fee for this event, but you must be a member of the Sangha.** Roshi will offer doku-san on Thursday evening (as usual) and possibly on Friday morning.

We will schedule the bulk of the work for the morning in order to leave most of the afternoon free for unstructured activity. It is important to know who is coming for planning purposes, so **please send a reservation to the Center by September 1.**

**WHAT TO BRING:** Work clothes, boots or other sturdy footwear, a hat, water bottle, sitting robe, (bedding and a towel if staying overnight). If you are allergic to wasps or bees, remember to bring your medication.

**WHEN TO ARRIVE:** The weekend schedule starts on Friday evening, September 6, although you are welcome to arrive earlier.

**CHILDCARE:** If you are bringing young children, childcare will need to be arranged by parents for formal sitting times. Children need to be watched at all times and should not enter the fenced area around the fire pond. The sides are steep, slippery, and dangerous, which is why it's fenced.

**MEALS:** Meals are provided. Breakfast and lunch will be eaten together, and in the evening soup and leftovers will be available.

**REGISTRATION:** More information is on the VZC website: [vermontzen.org/events\\_gardenweekend.html](http://vermontzen.org/events_gardenweekend.html)

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through one hallway. One is simultaneously inside of a covered courtyard, but also in the outdoor Jizo garden.

After walking through a smaller corridor, the magnificent Bodhisattva garden is revealed; a haven of plantings and figures through which a winding path guides a round of kinhin with benches strategically placed for periods of meditation. Sitting on the patio overlooking a small tropical garden, I had courtside seats to a dramatic, hour-long rainforest thunderstorm, inches away, but not a drop wet. Was I inside or outside? I was both.

Perhaps that's one of the secrets of Casa Zen; spaciousness and intimacy, interiority and exteriority, quiet and cacophony—they all exist at once, and “distinctions such as large and small have relevance to you no more.”

While it is true that Casa Zen, the temple, is a rare jewel, its facets would not sparkle were it not for the ticos themselves. They are the heart of Casa Zen. I was repeatedly moved by their generosity, love, and welcoming spirit. We are the true beneficiaries of our Sangha family in Costa Rica. —

## Premonition

Even before  
the sun rises  
in the morning,  
the birds sing  
and the sky is  
light.

—Rose Martin



*May Peace Prevail on Earth!*



**A**N INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PEACE was established by the United Nations in 1981. In 2002 the General Assembly officially declared September 21 as the permanent date for the International Day of Peace.

## World Peace Ceremony

**A**t the Zen Center, we have a **WORLD PEACE CEREMONY** on a Sunday as close as possible to the United Nations' International Day of Peace. This year it is on **September 22 from 9:00 to 11:00 a.m.**

The World Peace Ceremony begins with a chanting service, which is followed by a group recitation of the names of all the world's countries along with the Peace Prayer—"May Peace Prevail in [name of country]." Please join us on this special day. All members and trial members are welcome to attend in person. Non-members are welcome to attend via Zoom.

More information at [www.vermontzen.org/ceremony\\_worldpeace.html](http://www.vermontzen.org/ceremony_worldpeace.html)

## Term Student Program

**I**f you want to strengthen your Zen training, invigorate your sitting, and learn how to incorporate practice into your daily life, consider joining one of the three Term Student Programs. All three programs begin on **Tuesday, September 24**. They end on different dates. Registration forms are due by **September 10** for all three programs.

You will find that Term Student is a shortcut to deeper concentration and greater understanding of Zen. As well, you will discover that you are capable of working far more intensely than you had ever imagined. Whether you are a new student or a long-time practitioner, you will derive benefit from participating in the program. It is an unsurpassed way to strengthen your commitment to



the Dharma and deepen your practice.

For detailed information about the program as well as Term Student Forms, please go to [www.vermontzen.org/termstudent.html](http://www.vermontzen.org/termstudent.html)

# Ceremony for the Liberation of Hungry Ghosts



**A CEREMONY FOR THE LIBERATION OF HUNGRY GHOSTS will be held on Sunday, October 27 at 10:00 a.m.** During this observance, we offer food and drink to the hungry, thirsty inhabitants of the preta realm.

Hungry ghosts, or pretas, are beings in a sub-human state of development. Due to their extreme greed in prior lifetimes, they have been reborn into a state where they constantly suffer from hunger and thirst. Their stomachs are grossly distended, their limbs emaciated, and their mouths as small as the eye of a needle. Whatever they eat turns to poison; whatever they drink turns to fire.

According to legend, Moggallana, a disciple of the Buddha, was plagued by nightmares of his mother being tormented in a realm in which she could neither eat nor drink. The Buddha told Moggallana that his mother was in the realm of pretas, and he

should try to help her overcome her bad karma through a special ceremony.

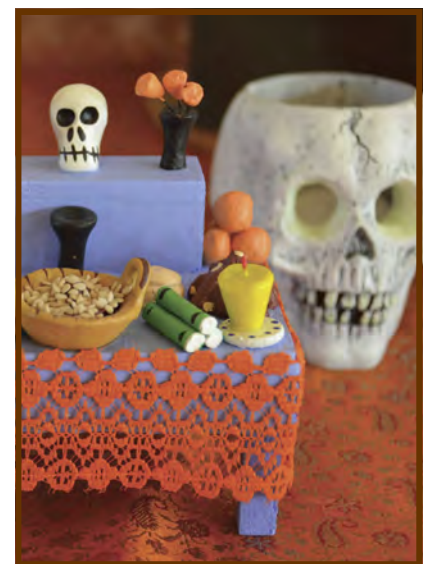
During the Hungry Ghost Ceremony, we chant sutras and make offerings of food and water to the beings of the preta realm. In making this gift we must overcome our own greed, thereby setting an example for the hungry ghosts. This freely-offered food and drink does not turn into poison or fire, which is why at many Buddhist homes and temples small bowls are passed at the beginning of each meal to make offerings to the hungry ghosts.

Although the ceremony is directed particularly to these beings, it is also a time to remember all beings who have died in the preceding year. After the ceremony proper, a fire is lit at which time people offer the names of deceased loved ones.

The ceremony is also an opportunity to appease our per-

sonal ghosts—the voracious demons who fill us with passions for food, drink, recognition, possessions, money, and all manner of unhappiness. As such, the ceremony is one of personal, as well as other-worldly, cleansing, appeasement, and renewal. It is an expression of our compassionate concern for beings in all realms.

Members are invited to attend in person. You may also attend via Zoom. For full information visit: [www.vermontzen.org/ceremony\\_hungryghost.html](http://www.vermontzen.org/ceremony_hungryghost.html)



# Upcoming Courses at the Vermont Zen Center

[www.vermontzen.org/courses.html](http://www.vermontzen.org/courses.html)

## Lovingkindness

September 18

Lovingkindness, or Metta, 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. A six-week course begins on the 18th. More information and registration on the Zen Center's website.

## Flower Arranging

September 21

Learn basic Ikebana and flower arranging elements used at the Vermont Zen Center. Through understanding the interaction between spiritual practice and flower arranging, participants will gain an appreciation of the deeper meaning of flowers as a way to bring a sense of tranquility to one's environment. More information and registration on the Zen Center's website.

## Festive Indian Cooking

September 28

In this course you will learn how to prepare a festive meal for a special occasion. Manju Selinger and the experienced cooks in the Zen Center's spacious kitchen will guide you through the process, and you'll enjoy the results for lunch. More information and registration on the Zen Center's website.

## October Jataka Sesshin—Deadline September 20

We are extremely fortunate to be able to offer once again a Jataka Tale sesshin with Roshi Rafe Martin as the guest teacher. The sesshin begins on **Friday evening, October 11**, rather than the usual Saturday start of a sesshin. The first two days (Saturday and Sunday) will be full-time, the last three days there will be sittings in the early morning and the evening, with nothing scheduled during the day so that people can go to work. Roshi (Graef) will be giving do-

kusan three times a day during the first two days, and twice a day during the last three days.

The sesshin will be devoted to working with Jataka tales. Roshi Martin will be conducting discussions of the Jatakas during the weekend, and giving teishos using the Jatakas throughout the rest of the sesshin. The emphasis will be on how these ancient stories of the Buddha's previous lifetimes relate to our own lives and practice.

A reminder that there is a flat rate \$70 surcharge for all those

who attend this sesshin either part time or full time. This is the honorarium for our guest teacher. This year once again, there will be the option of Zooming in for the Jataka talk portion of the sesshin. —





**Vermont Zen Center**  
 Post Office Box 880  
 Shelburne, VT 05482-0880

802-985-9746  
 www.vermontzen.org

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*Falling into the fields,  
 Falling from the fields,  
 The water of autumn.*



**CONTRIBUTORS:**

- Roshi Sunyana Graef
- Meredith Markow
- Rose Martin
- Greg Sheldon, *copy editor*
- Kelly Story, *production*
- Joan White, *editor*



## Bodhidharma Day

*“Once you stop clinging and let things be, you’ll be free, even of birth and death. You’ll transform everything. You’ll possess spiritual powers that can’t be obstructed. And you’ll be at peace wherever you are.”*

— Zen Master Bodhidharma

**ON SUNDAY, OCTOBER 6,** we honor our great ancestor, Bodhidharma, the founder of Zen.

Following a short sitting, we will have a chanting service with circumambulation and incense offerings. Children and family members are cordially invited. The ceremony will be during the morning sitting and will begin around 9:40 a.m. —