

# Walking Mountains

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

*Dear Sangha and Friends,*

Oh, the long days and short nights of mid summer, and the temptation to nap. And yet, there is so much going on at the Center. Vegetable and flower gardens alike flourish, but so do the weeds. It might look like no one is there among all the green, but then here and there a head pokes up, a wheelbarrow inches forward. Laughter rings across the landscape.

We take some time out for the Sangha picnic this month, and the croquet match will bring its usual competitive silliness. Later in July, we witness the lay ordination of two long-standing members, bringing yet more strength to our community. August brings the Water Baby Ceremony and a memorial service for our dear Ti’an Callery. Please join us.

—*Joan White*



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## Pilgrimage by Ramiro Barrantes and Josh Berger



It had been a long-held aspiration for both of us to make a pilgrimage to India, where Buddhism was founded. For us this was a no-brainer since we are alive, are human, and have encountered the Dharma. How could we not go to pay respect and honor the Buddha?

An early seed for our trip was planted in 2009 when we went to the IMAX theater in Boston and saw the documentary, *Mystic India*. The film gave us a glimpse of some of the people, culture, and places in India with its beauty, color, and chaos. Independently, over the years, we investigated how to make the trip possible: who to go with, when and how. Thirteen years later, after the fall

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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.



Pilgrimage Group at Bodh Gaya

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Jukai ceremony we went to lunch and discovered not only our mutual interest in going on pilgrimage to India, but that each of us had determined we wanted to go with Buddhapath, a Buddhist pilgrimage touring company. We agreed to make it happen! We booked the trip for February 2023, made preparations, and were off to India.

Upon arriving in Delhi the polluted air, rush of honking vehicles, rickshaws, crowds of people, and roaming animals caused a sense of shock. In India, with every turn of the head there is an interesting sight to be seen: markets filled with spices and fruits, colorful saris, buildings under construction, temples, rituals, and noise coming from all directions. Early in the journey, our guide told us, “India is the teacher. It can’t be explained in any one way—for anything you say about India the opposite also holds true.”

Beyond the immediate adjustments due to crossing nine time zones, there was also a gradual and

deepening shift in our sense of time in traveling to the sites of pilgrimage. All the stories we had heard about the Buddha and the Sangha came to life. We were walking in the same places where those events happened: under the same vegetation, across the same landscapes, and in the same places of practice as the Buddha himself. We were close to the Naranjana river where the Buddha bathed right before his final exertion; we walked along the narrow footpaths through the wheat fields towards the village where he collapsed from exhaustion; we stood before the stupa marking the area where he received a food offering from the young woman Sujata; and we sat before the Bodhi tree where the Buddha attained enlightenment. Words fall short.

During the pilgrimage, we also travelled with other Buddhist pilgrims which allowed us to deepen our bonds with them and to pay respect to the ancestors as a community. Participants included lay and ordained practitioners from

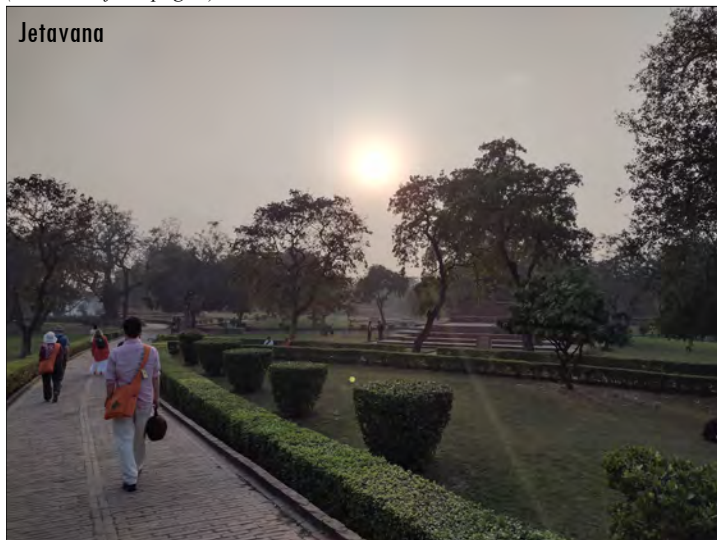
all over the world. From the start, both of us resolved to get up early each morning to do zazen and chant, and there was soon a group of pilgrims rising in the morning to chant the Heart Sutra and sit together before the start of each day. All of the pilgrimage sites in India were filled with other groups as well, from all over the world and from many Buddhist denominations.

When we first set out on the pilgrimage, we initially visited the Gandhi Smriti in Delhi, a memorial for Gandhi, and received an introduction to the trip. We then departed for Lucknow the following morning and traveled to Sravasti where we visited Jetavana monastery. The grounds of Jetavana, where the Buddha and Sangha spent twenty-five rainy season retreats, is also the location where the Buddha gave many teachings. The area was pervaded with a sense of deep concentration and spiritual power. The next morning, we visited the stupa of Angulimala, meditated at the

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Jetavana

stupa of Anathapindika at sunrise, and heard excerpt from the *Anapanasati Sutta* (*Mindfulness of Breathing Sutra*).

We next departed for Kapilavastu where prince Siddhartha grew up and lived until the time of his great renunciation at the age of twenty-nine. In Kapilavastu we visited a stupa containing the Buddha's relics which were given to the Shakya clan, and we sat in a mango grove like one where the Buddha was said to have often enjoyed shelter from the sun. Traveling further north, we next entered Nepal and visited Lumbini where the Buddha was born, marked by a pillar erected by King Ashoka about

was closed, we had an in as a member in our group was Vietnamese-American. She spoke with the caretakers who allowed us to see the main temple, where we chanted, and we offered tea.

Returning to India, we visited Kushinagar and the site of the Buddha's Parinirvana. When we arrived, there was a huge procession from Thailand led by elephants, monks, lay devotees, and patrons bringing relics of the Buddha to the Parinirvana Stupa.

300 years after the Buddha's death. The area around Lumbini has become a site where monasteries from all over the world have been built. We visited the extremely beautiful Tibetan monastery, and though the Vietnamese temple

morning. We then traveled to Sarnath, outside the old city of Varanasi, where the Buddha gave his first teaching on the Four Noble Truths to the five ascetics, and where the Sangha was first formed. There were the ruins of a very large monastery in Sarnath, which one could walk through, and make prostrations in areas around the inner sanctum. The city of Varanasi, also known as Kashi, City of Light, goes back to the 7<sup>th</sup> century BCE and existed at the time of the Buddha. In taking a boat ride along the Ganges and viewing the ghats (places of rit-

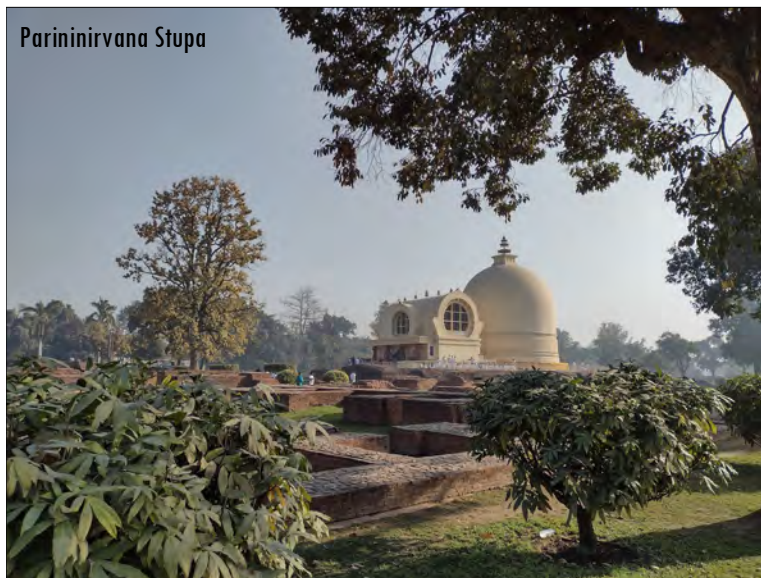


Lumbini

We couldn't compete with the elephants so instead first visited the stupa marking the location where the Buddha was cremated and saved our visit to the Parinirvana Stupa for the following

ual, including cremation rituals) during sunrise made the words of Mark Twain ring true, "[Varanasi] is older than history, older than tradition, older even than legend, and looks twice as old as all of them put together." [See photo ④ on next page.]

At Bodh Gaya, where the Buddha attained enlightenment, it was a dream come true to visit the Mahabodhi Temple and sit beneath the Bodhi tree, a descendent of the very tree under which the Buddha awakened. We woke early to do walking meditation to the temple complex and chanted the Ancestral Line beneath the Bodhi tree. True to India, the area was full of monks in varied



Parinirvana Stupa

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Sarnath



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colored robes from many Buddhist denominations and lay people from all over the world. Practicing throughout the temple grounds were people doing walking meditation, prostrating, giving talks, and chanting in many languages—one extended Sangha coexisting and sharing in practice at the location of the Buddha’s enlightenment. We felt blessed to practice here and were grateful for our extraordinarily good fortune.

After departing Bodh Gaya, we traveled to our final destination of Rajgir where the first plot of land, Venuvana, also known as Bamboo Grove, was granted to the Buddha

and Sangha by King Bimbisara of Magadha. The area is surrounded with rocky hills and includes the site of the first Buddhist Council and the wonderous Vulture Peak where the Buddha and his senior disciples often resided while in Rajgir. We chanted the Prajna-paramita, offered by the Buddha at Vulture peak. It describes how Avalokiteshvara gave Sariputra the teachings on form and emptiness in Sariputra’s cave. Sharing these experiences with our traveling Sangha, one pilgrim said, “This is what I came here for... understanding the true meaning of taking refuge in the Triple Gem.”



Mahabodhi Temple

At the conclusion of the trip, we watched the sunset from Vulture Peak which was likely the same view of the sunset enjoyed by the Buddha.

Throughout the pilgrimage, the shift in our sense of time left us feeling more deeply connected with our ancestors in the past, fellow practitioners in the present, and those in the future. In Bodh Gaya, we visited the Mahabodhi temple twice as it opened at 5 AM. At that time there is a simple yet profound chant of the Three Refuges being played in Pali—the Buddha’s language—which became an instant hit. It made such an impact that by the end of the pilgrimage one of the participants said, “When people ask me what I learned during the trip I will recite the chant, *Buddham saranam gacchami, Dhammam saranam gacchami, Sangham saranam gacchami.*”

I take refuge in Buddha.

I take refuge in Dharma.

I take refuge in Sangha. \_\_\_\_\_

Vulture Peak





## Lay Ordination Ceremony

### Sunday, July 23

Long-time practitioners Rose Martin and Ramiro Barrantes will be lay ordained on Sunday following a short sitting. All are welcome to attend in person or virtually.

Lay ordination is not the same as priest ordination, but, like priest ordination, it is a significant commitment and a sign of maturity in Zen practice.

## Training Program Sunday, July 23 through Friday, July 28

For five days this summer, we will have a residential Training Program. Training Programs are a way to experience the discipline of Zen training through total immersion, similar to living in a monastery. During the Program, 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.

The Training Program begins on **Sunday, July 23 at 9:00 a.m.** and ends on **Friday, July 28** after lunch. It's important to 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 at:

[www.vermontzen.org/training\\_programs.html](http://www.vermontzen.org/training_programs.html)

## July & August Courses

### Indian Cooking: Weekend Meal

Saturday, July 15

Learn how to prepare a delicious and authentic vegetarian Indian meal in the Vermont Zen Center's spacious kitchen. 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!** Register online at:

[www.vermontzen.org/indian\\_cooking\\_weekend.html](http://www.vermontzen.org/indian_cooking_weekend.html)

### Introduction to Zen

Saturday, August 12

During the half-day schedule of talks, question periods, demonstrations and guided meditation, participants are introduced to the body-mind disciplines of Zen Buddhism. Conducted by Roshi Graef and her senior students.

Register online at:

[www.vermontzen.org/workshops.html](http://www.vermontzen.org/workshops.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.

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. 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 come to the workday on **Saturday, August 12 at 9 AM** to help set up the dining room and prepare the Jizo garden for the Water Baby Ceremony on Sunday. The work period will last an hour or two depending on the number of people who can lend a hand. *Thank you!*

**On Sunday, August 13,** 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.



# Annual Yard Sale

## Saturday, August 19

Our **ANNUAL YARD, BAKE, & CRAFT Sale** will be on **Saturday, August 19**. Once again, we will have a **CRAFT SALE** running concurrently with the yard sale. 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.

Last year we had the sale outdoors—unlike the previous several years when it was inside the Center—and it was one of our most successful yard sales to date. This year we will make a decision as the date draws near. Vermont weather is hard to predict! —

## Zen Center Summer Events

July

- Teisho
- Sangha Picnic
- Indian Cooking Course
- Lay Ordination
- Training Program
- 7-Day Sesshin



August

- Workshop
- Water Baby Ceremony
- Yard Sale
- Roshi Kapleau Teisho
- Ti'an Gallery Memorial





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*A clear waterfall  
Into the ripples  
Fall green pine-needles.*

*-Basho*

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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.*