



TAIL OF THE OX

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DEAR SANGHA AND FRIENDS, "Springtime!" I am reminded of the first word spoken in a Dharma Talk given by our Sangha brother, Larry Johanson, many years ago. A single word, delivered from the hara of a beloved Dharma friend, still stretching across time and reverberating in our guts. "Springtime!" And here we are again. So fortunate to be able to walk the lush, blooming pathway down the side of 33 High Park Gardens – past the enduring figures of Kannon still shining after a long, hard winter. Grateful to put aside winter coats and boots and, accompanied by birdsong and the sound of spring rain, enter into the Temple that has offered inspiration and sanctuary to so many people for so many springs. Today, as I write, it is June 6, 2019. Seventy-five years to the day after nearly 150,000 troops, including 14,000 Canadians, put aside all concern for themselves and rushed headlong into the breach – determined to do whatever small part they could to help liberate the people of Nazi-occupied Europe. "Springtime!" Like that single word uttered in reverence for life renewed once more, the determination and selfless sacrifice of so many men and women who braved the beaches of Normandy all those years ago – enabling us to be here now; to work and live in the Dharma, now – echoes across time and strengthens our deep vow of practice to do everything we can to help liberate all sentient beings.

~ Bruce Roberts



My Road to Practice

by Bonnie Goodman

IT ALL STARTED WITH A RASH. An out of the blue, itchy, burning rash on my hands. A physical manifestation of the stress I was experiencing but unaware of until it broke out. I had heard of the benefits of meditation for a variety of physical and medical conditions and thought "Why not?" That was the first time I went to a formal sitting at the Toronto Zen Centre. It was 2002.

Now, I knew the Centre well having been married to a long time practitioner and com-

ing to every event and ceremony that was open to family, but I had never sat in zazen before. I had been to a workshop with Roshi Graef (an embarrassing ten years earlier), but now I knew that the time was right.

Truly what brought me here? I don't know. There was of course the example of my partner who had been working and practicing for many years before I met him. This was both a gift and hindrance at times, though, as his practice made him a deeply kind and loving

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person, but his years of experience also overwhelmed me when I first began my own zazen. How could I ever accomplish what he had? I had started so late by comparison. I felt nervous, clumsy and keenly aware of my shortcomings. So why start in the first place? Was the rest because of Luck? Fate? Kismet? No. Rather it is was because there was a deep, unanswered yearning from within me for which I had no language.

I remember being encouraged years earlier to “try it out,” but I was fearful. I felt that as soon as I started to sit I would start to cry and never stop. I did not want to explore the feelings of sadness and loss that had accompanied me all of my life. Indeed, I felt as if I had now found some solidity and security in my life – that I was no longer as worried and had found happiness. And yet, the yearning remained. So, in spite of those fears, I made the decision and started zazen. True, in the beginning there were many tears, but somewhere behind them there was also the most piercing joy that I had ever experienced. I felt a low, resounding “YES!” in the pit of my stomach like the distant, rumbling voice of whales. A sound I could not hear, but that resonated in my bones.

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YES!

Despite the surface turmoil, the “YES!” remained.

And then there was Roshi Graef. When we met I was years away from becoming her student, but from that first moment I knew that she would be important in my life. I immediately felt that she was the right teacher for my partner, but had no idea that she would someday be my teacher too. She was attentive, forthright, a good listener, and open to hearing everyone’s voice. Every voice mattered. She was also very skillful at helping to reorganize both the physical space and the spiritual practice at the Toronto Zen Centre and brought a bright and fresh perspective that was much needed at the time. Her energy and commitment were not only inspiring, but also contagious. Under her

direction, the Centre underwent many thoughtful renovations, introduced new ceremonies, increased workshops and Sangha events and hosted the American Zen Teachers Association. Who knew that one person could get so much done?

Fast forward seventeen years and truthfully it is hard to remember all that went on in between. There were many struggles, some real and some imagined, but throughout if ever the question came up for me “Do I really need to do this?” the immediate answer was always “yes.” In the first years I remember vividly the clutching fear I would feel going to Dokusan. I was so nervous that I would be shaking and it felt like a band of wild horses were galloping in my heart.

I also remember being tired, so often tired, and indeed after one of my first sesshin I was so exhausted that by the last bell at night I barely knew where I was, stumbling into walls like a punch drunk boxer in an effort to find my room. I remember struggling with the lifestyle changes that practice brought about: getting up early, giving up alcohol, curbing gossip and sarcasm, using vacation time for sesshin and all of the impacts that these changes had on my relation-

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ships. Friends who dropped away, family who didn't understand, and colleagues who were suspicious of the practice. I remember feeling that this is a solitary journey for such a social being as I. I remember feeling lonely.

Of course, there was no way to explain the change, but rather I just worked on my own feelings and reactions and sat with them. Sat with sadness, sat with hurt, sat with anger. Over time my own difficult feelings began to soften and dissolve, and as they did, the sense of separation that we often feel when starting something new began to wane and I no longer looked at what I had lost but rather what I had found.

How can one explain the subtle yet unshakeable strength of Sangha? And so, as an act of gratitude and for the benefit of all sentient beings, we practice. And for me that practice has now brought me to become a Novitiate with the intention of committing this life to practice and the Sangha. I have never felt it remarkable or singular in any way, but simply that this is the path that is unfolding before me.

The thought of ordination had come to mind a few times over the years, but I quickly dismissed it as ego and let it go. Still, it persisted and when the opportunity presented itself, I asked my teacher about the steps one would need to take to prepare for ordination. To my surprise, she said there was nothing that I would need to do to start except to ask again. And so I did, and here we are.

A number of years ago, my friend Tami found himself in the grotto of a nun's residence in a suburb of Bangalore. At the entry, he found a plaque that he translated from the Sanskrit and sent to me. It was inscribed with the story of Jesus and the Garden of Gethsemane. I was moved and deeply inspired by the fearless commitment that he and



How can one explain the ineffable feeling of trust and love that one has for the Dharma?

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others have shown in walking the path before us. Here is what it said:

"The road to Gethsemane is akin to a bridge which is crossed once and no more. It is burned when you cross it; you cannot even look back. Such moments come in every person's life, when he or she reaches a bridge. On this side lies the security of compromise, of petty, quotidian adjustment. On the far side is the difficult country of uncertainty, principles and sacrifice. Most people take a good look, weigh their options, and beat a dignified retreat. The bridge stands unused. The battle is not even joined, lost before it even began. But a few do not hesitate. They reach the bridgehead, walk across and welcome the new land on the far side. And as soon as they have walked over, they find the bridge burnt, destroyed. A conscious choice had removed it as an avenue of retreat.

Jesus was such a man, and so were many great souls. What binds them despite the minor differences in their beliefs is their fearlessness and their peace with those beliefs. Each was far, far ahead of his/her time.

The contemporaries of Jesus did not understand him because they did not have the courage to walk their own bridges. They reached their bridgehead, but returned to the comfort of their compromise. Very few had the courage to reach the land beyond because the bridge would no longer offer an escape route once it had been crossed. There was a certain irreversible finality about the choice.

When I dare to look back down the crowded corridors of history to see how many walked that path alone, how many crossed the bridge, how many placed compassion, truth and love over their own lives... in the darkness I see the profile of a tall figure – a man walking to Gethsemane garden. He was a man in a hurry. He had an appointment on the far side of the bridge and He was determined that He should keep it..."

And so I continue to walk the path. In gratitude for my teacher who has heard the music and shows me how to sing, for our strong and devoted Sangha who inspire me with their wisdom and compassion, for my family and friends who hold me in their warm embrace, and for my beloved husband who has supported me in every way. ☸



Special thanks to Sangeeta Kumar for the Temple Night photos!

Jataka Sesshin

by Will Lachance

THE JATAKA SESSHIN is sometimes considered one of the less difficult retreats at the Toronto Zen Centre: after a weekend portion with the normal sesshin schedule, the timetable changes to an arrangement where one is present for zazen and a teisho mornings and evenings only. During the day, one normally goes to work (either at the Centre or outside), which may seem as though it offers a break from the difficult routine of sesshin training.

The reality, of course, is that for a serious Zen student there is no break from practice: only changes in where and how it will continue. And one quickly learns that the world of work, with its constant demands for speech and action, is in some ways a much more challenging environment in which to do so. So, while one's legs might get slightly less sore during this type of sesshin, it is an equal (if not greater) test of the spirit.

This was my third Jataka sesshin: I'm lucky enough to make my living as a computer programmer working for a remote-work-friendly company, which allows me to take care of my work from almost anywhere in the world. While at previous sesshins I had

gone to work in my office during sesshin, I decided this time that I'd try to continue my work from the common areas inside the Centre, which would allow me to both help out with the various tasks that needed doing during the day, as well as take advantage of more informal zazen during time that would be otherwise spent commuting.

It seemed like a good plan. It was a good plan. But

Situations and encounters that seem trivial in retrospect can take on earth-shaking importance in the moment.

you quickly learn that, no matter what you do, sesshin will bring up unpleasant surprises and long-buried personality traits. Situations and encounters that seem trivial in retrospect can take on earth-shaking importance in the moment. And unlike a regular sesshin, where the



schedule is completely circumscribed and your responsibilities are specified, there is often ambiguity about what is or isn't correct conduct during the work week portion of the sesshin. Some things are obvious: don't listen to music while working (if you can help it), but other things are not (how should I speak to my coworkers? should I let them know about the sesshin?). Staying at the Centre, I had a constant feeling of guilt and not-doing-enough – there were a mountain of chores to be done during the day, and balancing that with my own employment responsibilities at times felt quite daunting.

To keep perspective during all of this, Sensei Rafe Martin's Jataka talks (after

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which the sesshin was named), proved absolutely invaluable. Each talk started with an account of one the Buddha's past lives - a "Jataka" from the Pali Canon - which ranged between the elated and famous (the tale of Hungry Tigress, where a previous incarnation of the Buddha sacrifices his body to save a female tigress from eating her own cubs), to the more obscure and down-to-earth (a tale where the Buddha-to-be was once an accomplished musician, worried about losing his status and prestige to an ambitious student). During the weekend portion, Sensei Martin also took questions from the sesshin participants, which helped reveal many, many levels of inner meaning as well as the multiple ways one could relate these stories to one's own life and experience.

I found these talks inspiring and they helped me carry on, knowing that while the future Buddha too made mistakes and got caught up in ego desires, over the course of lifetimes, he showed himself capable of remarkable acts of heroism and selflessness, hinting at our own potential. These tales of the Buddha's past lives show us that even our failures and disappointments can be important milestones on our path to awakening and fulfillment of the four vows.

Was the Jataka sesshin an "easier," lighter-weight alternative to regular sesshin practice? I would say no. An opportunity to deepen one's practice in multiple ways and gain deeper intimacy with the Jatakas, a unique teaching of the Dharma? Absolutely. ∞



Practicing at a Distance

by Lynn Ovenden

I JOINED THE TORONTO ZEN CENTRE about six years ago despite living east of Ottawa, a five-hour drive away. I was visiting my mother in Toronto once a month and needed something else to think about on those trips down the highway. As well, having visited the Centre a couple of times, I liked the atmosphere and obvious energy of the Sangha. I wanted to be part of a Zen Buddhist community and hoped that relationship would encourage, guide and inspire me to practice regularly.

I was pretty new to Buddhism in 2013. Initially, I attended about eight formal sittings a year. And since my mom's death in 2015, I have attended even less frequently. Nevertheless, I continue to feel like a Sangha member, to pay attention to the website and the informative emails to members, and to look for opportunities to show up.

How does this long-distance relationship work?

Roshi, the TZC program and the great wide world of books offer guidance and inspiration. So, I have picked and chosen my wandering way from an irregular sitting practice to a more-or-less-regular-morning sitting practice. I don't worry so much anymore about doing it "right." I'm a bit more relaxed about people and happy with these changes.

On the other hand, I've been unable to develop as close a relationship with Roshi or members of the sangha as I would like. Sharing conversation

during refreshment times and work periods during my visits has been valuable but it's never enough. Committee work seems out of the question. I appreciate very much that Roshi and Simon set up Skype and Zoom connections for out-of-towners and the teishos on Zoom work well for me. Paradoxically, for important online events in which I need to participate, like chanting services, term student meetings, and dokusan, these technologies and the distance feel like a barrier and I miss proximity.

My current strategy for continuing my practice is to attend two sesshins every year. And I'll continue to schedule other trips to the GTA around times when I can attend a sitting and dokusan. It doesn't always work but I try. Being able to stay overnight at the Centre is an important support for my brief visits. And chatting with Steve in the office, I bask in the warmth and generosity of the Centre. ~



Temple Night in Our New Buddha Hall!

by Fran Turner

AS WE WERE PREPARING for Temple Nights this spring, I realized how much I missed them because we had been away from our Centre for a year. Temple Nights are special, filled with beauty and reverence. While our Centre is beautiful, its beauty is in its austerity. But on Temple Nights the austerity to which we are accustomed is left far behind and we dive deep into rich and gorgeous colours and a deeply devotional celebration as a preparation for Jukai.

It is customary that on the Saturday before Temple Nights, we deep clean the Centre and follow up on Sunday with an extended work period to prepare the altars. Many of the splendid, vibrantly coloured saris and cloths stored in the special closet on the second floor are steamed and ironed. Roshi plans in considerable detail which colours go where. Then members apply their diligence and creativity with tape and straight pins hanging these fabrics behind and draping them over little tables, chests of drawers and other pieces of furniture that are transformed into altars.

Large figures, some from the Centre and others that make their homes with Sangha members, are placed on the altars in the Buddha Hall. There is also an altar draped with royal blue and silver fabric where pictures of the Ancestors are displayed. At the "home" altar just outside the zendo, dozens of devotional figures brought from members' personal altars are arranged together in a touching and powerful array.

Temple nights are a time for personal devotions sitting at any altar as long as you wish...

Besides the beautiful fabrics and the figures of Jizo, Kannon, and Buddha, there is more that adorns each altar. Bonnie and Marielle spend hours selecting flowers — tulips, freesia, chrysanthemums, roses, carnations, birds of paradise and forsythias — and then arranging them into gorgeous works of art that complement the colours of each altar. Offerings of fruit — cherry tomatoes, blood oranges, mandarin oranges, apples, and plums — along with attentively arranged, gorgeously decorated cakes, jelly beans, macarons, and gold wrapped candies add to the festive and joyful effect. Just the right candleholders are selected to hold the tea candles alongside the perfect incense pots.

By the time the first members arrived on the Tuesday evening, no one would have suspected the flurry of anxiety earlier in the afternoon. The electrical power to the house had gone out because of a broken mast-head, and then it was discovered our generator was not working because of a broken part. Roshi and Steve had candles and flashlights at the ready expecting a more atmospheric evening than had been anticipated. But luckily the workers found a replacement part for the generator, and the lights were on to welcome arrivals to the first Temple Night in our new Buddha Hall! It felt much too long since our last one.

Entering the Buddha Hall where there were eight beautiful altars, guests were awe-struck by the transformation. Temple nights are a time for personal devotions sitting at any altar for as long as you wish, offering incense, making prostrations, and moving quietly from one altar to another. We also chant several times in the course of the evening. Family members and friends join us. It made me happy to see members with their young children, older children, their parents. My

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Temple Night...

friend who attended for the very first time chose to sit the whole evening in front of one altar to which he was deeply drawn.

In the closing ceremony of Temple Nights, Roshi “opens” the eye of each figure on the home altar. Everyone gathers around for this seemingly simple and yet profound ceremony. In a few days we take our figures back to our altars at home, our own eyes more open to the preciousness and wonder represented and embodied in Temple Night and culminating in the ceremony of Jukai and the taking of the Precepts. ♪



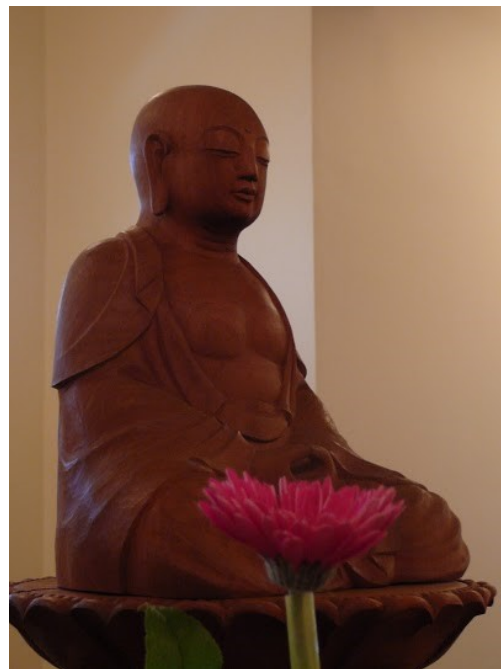
Our Manjusri

by Jim MacKinnon

THE MANJUSRI FIGURE IN THE ZENDO was originally a gift from Harada Tange Roshi to Philip Kapleau Roshi, in the late 1970s. This provenance is especially meaningful for the Toronto Sangha.

The late Tange Roshi (1924-2018) was a monk at the training centre run by Harada Daiun Sogaku Roshi (1871-1961), who served as abbot at several Soto Zen temples in Japan, most notably Hosshin-ji, near Obama, Japan. While training as a monk, Tange acted as translator and mentor for Kapleau, when he arrived in the early 1950s, and the two men formed a bond which lasted throughout their long lives. There is a wonderful picture in the Rochester Zen Centre website of the two sailing on Obama Bay on a windy summer day.

Near the end of World War II, in China, young Tange volunteered as a kamikaze pilot, which was viewed in Japan at the time as the ultimate way to sacrifice oneself in the defence of one's homeland and family. On August 15, 1945, after the traditional cup of sake, he was about to board his aircraft when the emperor's voice came over the radio announcing Japan's surrender. The shock of that, the senseless loss of so much life, and the revelation that much of what their government had told the people of Japan during the war had been completely false, drove young Tange to despair. After he was released from a Russian prisoner of war camp, he sought out Harada Roshi at Hosshin-ji in the town of Obama, about 100 km north of Kyoto. There he devoted himself to Zen training for ten years, and in 1955 he was given permission to teach. Harada Roshi sent him to the rundown nearby temple Bukkoku-ji, which he proceeded to restore and rebuild. Gradually, his reputation grew, and in time he



Our Manjusri is depicted as unarmed, but riding on a lion, which represents the use of prajna wisdom to tame the mind ...

attracted students from around Japan and beyond, accepting anyone, including foreigners and women, which was uncommon in Japan in the 1950s. He taught and practiced at Bukkoku-ji for nearly six decades.

In his obituary last year, Tange Roshi was described as "a warm, kind, spontaneous man who devoted himself to teaching meditation and sharing his insights into life. He emphasised the central

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Manjusri...

Buddhist teachings of mindfulness, simplicity, compassion and selflessness and implored his students to lead a life devoted to helping others."

Manjusri is the Bodhisattva of Wisdom, and is often ensconced in an altar in the zendo of Zen training centres at the beginning of sesshin. He is associated with prajna, and he is considered to be one of the oldest and most significant bodhisattvas in Mahayana literature.

Manjusri is one of the Four Great Bodhisattvas, along with Ksitigarbha (Jizo), Avalokitesvara, and Samantabhadra, these being the Sanskrit names for the Bodhisattva of children and lost souls, the Bodhisattva of Compassion, and the Bodhisattva of action who is said to have first made the great Bodhisattvic vows. Jizo and Manjusri are usually depicted as male figures, while the other two are often depicted as female. Wisdom, compassion and action are thought to be the characteristics of a bodhisattva, since the absence of any one of the three can produce unhelpful results.

Manjusri is often depicted wielding a sword, sometimes a flaming sword, in his right hand, this being the life-giving sword of wisdom which cuts down ego delusion. Our Manjusri is instead depicted as unarmed, but riding on a lion, which represents the use of prajna wisdom to tame the mind – as arduous as taming a wild lion.



Our Manjusri figure was placed in the zendo for sesshin in the Rochester Zen Centre during the early 1980s, and later given to the Toronto Zen Centre as a gift. Here he has a place of honour in the centre of the zendo, presiding over our practice of zazen every day. It is often said that a Bodhisattva is not really just a certain kind of person, but rather an activity, that of following the Buddhist path. Manjusri is a mythological figure in one sense, but at a deeper level, he is as real as the nose on your face – the brightness and freshness of your own True Nature, open and alive to each moment. This is one of the reasons why we pause inside the threshold and bow to the altar whenever we enter or leave the zendo.

Who better to lead us and inspire us in our practice? ∞

Toronto Zen Centre



33 High Park Gardens
Toronto, Ontario M6R 1S8

Phone: 416-766-3400

Fax: 416-769-4880

E-mail: info@torontozen.org
www.torontozen.org

*For thirty years I searched
for a master swordsman.
How many times did the
leaves fall
and the branches break
into bud?
But from the moment I saw
the peach blossoms, I have
had no doubts.
- Lingyun*

CONTRIBUTORS FOR THIS ISSUE

- Bonnie Goodman
- Taigen Henderson Roshi
- Sangeeta Kumar
- Will Lachance
- Jim MacKinnon
- Fabio Morettin
- Lynn Ovenden
- Bruce Roberts
- Fran Turner

Requesting a Rakusu

If you have been a member of the Toronto Sangha for three years, have become a formal student of Roshi Henderson through participating in a New Student Ceremony, and have previously taken Jukai, you may request a rakusu and a Buddhist name, by completing and submitting a request form to Roshi no later than July 21. Rakusus are presented only during Jukai, so please do not request a rakusu if you will be unable to attend the Fall Jukai in Toronto. For more information please visit the Toronto Zen Centre Member page. Thank you.

