



TAIL OF THE OX

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DEAR SANGHA AND FRIENDS, as I write, the first day of a new school year has just concluded – the quiet that had settled into many of the city's neighbourhoods during July and August replaced overnight with a mix of nervous, excited energy and a chance to begin anew. This Sunday marks the start of Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year – commemorating the creation of the world and the beginning of the days of Awe, the days of repentance. In much the same way that those days are intended as a time of reflection and introspection in the Jewish faith, this time in our calendar at the Toronto Zen Centre provides us with many opportunities to look inward, strengthen our resolve, renew our vows and deepen our commitment to practicing the Buddha way. Our beautifully renovated temple, now free of construction hoarding and beckoning any and all to return to its embrace, is once again fully open for the business of Zen.

~ Bruce Roberts



Homecoming

by Barbara Lamb

HOW CAN WE PINPOINT the moment the Buddha Hall renovation project began? Or when it ends? It seems to have begun as a modest plan to renovate a bathroom, but the roots of the project go far deeper. Years of visioning, planning, fundraising (and



chanting!) led to a beautiful and inspiring Ground breaking Ceremony last year on April 30. There followed a month of hard work done by Sangha and friends to pack up the house, find places to store everything and move a zendo into the third floor space next door.

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Homecoming...

The Montessori music room was a fine place to sit, with its bright and airy space, rows of sweet little shoes and a good view of the on-going progress of the renovation. Being there was helpful to Roshi, who worked in close collaboration with the builders, and crucial to the Sangha, as we were able to continue to sit together and hold workshops, ceremonies and the Term Student Program, all due to the incredible generosity of our neighbours.

Writing this article, it's been a good memory boost

for me to review the 26 Round-ups that were sent to the Sangha on a semi-regular basis. So many aspects to this project: removing trim from various rooms in the house; the demolition of the Kan-non Room which brought to light an endearing Bodhisattva inside the wall; the big hole in the ground, the steel beams, the asbestos under the roof tiles and mildew on the basement walls, digging trenches for waterproofing, writing sutras on studs, sweeping up drywall dust, scraping carpet glue from the floors. Finally: all the unpacking and endless cleaning.

Along the way we have received so much help! Monks

from the Gajang Tibetan Temple performed a tormo ceremony to remove obstructions. Donations came in from people around the world with no visible connection to the centre. Neighbours stopped us on the sidewalk to offer encouragement. And there was the extraordinary team of skilled tradespeople, attentive and careful, led by the indefatigable Andy.

Wouldn't it be instructive if we could each read a spiritual practice log to see how far we've come? Admittedly, there wouldn't be as much progress on a weekly or

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Homecoming...

monthly basis. For many of us, it can take a few years to “find our seat”. We may feel as if we are making no headway at all because the work is going on underground. We are laying a strong foundation to support our practice life, and it’s essential to keep that foundation in good condition. As Hakuin says, “It all comes from zazen” so if we keep sitting, through thick and thin, we won’t undermine our spiritual work; later we build on it by working on the precepts, practicing metta, bringing our focus into daily life. We have excellent blueprints, left us by our Dharma ancestors, as well as the guidance of our teachers and mentors. Our Sangha helps us in uncountable ways. But we have to do the building ourselves, with patience and faith.

Anyone who has been to

the centre since we moved back can see there is still much to do. Freshening up some parts of the house has highlighted other areas which are in need of repair. With a Dedication Ceremony scheduled for October, we want our temple to truly shine and so we look for both a good response to calls for workdays and special projects, as well as ongoing help in the many day-to-day chores like tending the garden, taking out garbage and sweeping the walks.

Like caring for a house, our practice is ongoing. We have an unlimited capacity to evolve and we can count on life to throw us some challenges along the way. In renovating 33 High Park Gardens we were often met with unanticipated obstacles. To learn to take these in stride, to see them as opportunities for growth and work with them, is how we develop

equanimity.

The doors are wide open at 33 High Park Gardens. No matter what your level of involvement in work days, your ability to contribute financially or the number of times you made it to a Montessori sitting, now is the time to come home and be grounded by the extraordinary energy in the zendo. We have revitalized our building, making it available to future generations of practitioners. And in doing so, right now we can reap the benefit of having a wonderful new space for our spiritual work.

When is a renovation finished? If we are renovating ourselves, then the work is never done. After all, we have vowed to liberate all beings without number. Let’s roll up our sleeves and keep going! ☸

Work Sesshin

by Fran Turner

SOMETIMES A SESSHIN is like a piece of coal being pressed into a diamond, intense, creating something precious and beautiful. Moving back into our Centre occasioned two five-day work sesshins in the past few months: challenging participants to deepen our practice through work, we helped with much needed

gardening and repairs to the house.

A work sesshin may sound less intense—fewer hours of zazen and daily chanting, but it is not. Paying one-pointed attention to our activities is a challenge to most of us, and furthermore, some of the jobs were strenuous and required concentration. In his daily talks, Roshi

urged us to go about our work with the same concentration as we bring to our zazen. As a reminder to maintain our practice at all times during the work, there were three five-minute periods of zazen, signaled by a bell, during which we stopped whatever task we were engaged in to do zazen, sitting or stand-

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Transformation in Progress!



Work Sesshin...

ing wherever we were.

In the mornings, after the work assignment meeting in the Buddha Hall that all were required to attend, everyone had an outside job to do; afternoons some of us had indoor responsibilities. The outside work included straightening the garage or garden shed, removing the hoarding around the pine tree in the front yard and trimming the thick Spirea hedge along the east side of the Centre's property. Along the west side, adjoining the Montessori School, a few strong individuals dug and built a beautiful new retaining wall out of long and heavy 6" X 6" planks. Whenever I saw our Dharma brothers hoist those beams, I felt my hara bear down as though in solidarity with them. Meanwhile, other sesshin participants were digging a trench for waterproofing a portion of the house or planting and watering the flower beds and lawn, while others scraped, taped and painted the window frames and the exterior of the house.

Inside, participants cleaned up after the lunch-time meal, prepared the evening meal, straightened up the zendo, vacuumed our lovely new carpet, washed laundry, and scrubbed bathrooms. Then, before the shower period, two members energetically cleaned the floors in the laundry room and back entry after the work crew had left their soiled shoes and

washed up in the laundry room sink.

The closing ceremony at the work sesshin was different from our usual sesshin closing ritual. Instead of the chants, we did a little procession around the property to contemplate all the work that had been done and the changes that had been accomplished. In the June sesshin, when we finished on a week day, the kids in the Montessori yard stopped their play and stared at all the blissful brown-robed people walking slowly past them. While, at the close of the more recent August sesshin, we walked slowly, absorbing all the transformations: the tidied garden

shed and garage, the evidence of the waterproofing, the attractive retaining wall, the gracefully trimmed tree and shrubs, the flowerbeds cleared of weeds, new plantings taking root, and the fresh coat of paint on the wrought iron railings, along the windows and the front of the house.

Perhaps some of us contended with aching muscles, since we were unused to such vigorous work, but at the end of sesshin no one complained. All of us were smiling. All of us, glowing like jewels, were filled with gratitude for the work that we'd done, for our magnificent Centre and for our practice. ☸



3 Square Feet of Practice

by Bruce Roberts

THE 13TH CENTURY ZEN MASTER, EIHEI DOGEN, wrote: "Do not ask me where I am going. As I travel this limitless world, every step I take is my home."

The summer is often a time of interrupted routines. For those of us who are parents, the school year ends and brings with it changes to our daily schedules – the morning alarm no longer carries quite the same sense of urgency, children's days are a little less harried and the warm weather beckons us to spend more time outside and to stay up later. And, of course, if we're lucky, there is an opportunity to travel – to head out from homes in the city to experience and explore new places and people. But what of our practice during that time?

During the rest of the year, we may have established a disciplined routine. Each day, our alarm wakes us at the appointed time and we rise, wash and either head to the Centre to sit in the zendo with our sangha sisters and brothers or find our seat in our house or apartment, when it is still quiet, others are not yet awake and the morning's tasks have not yet begun. Either way, our day begins with zazen. Daily, with that period of morning

sitting, we ground ourselves in our practice and renew our resolve to carry that practice with us throughout the day. Meeting with more or less success each day, our commitment to carrying on, in spite of the myriad obstacles we encounter, is supported by Buddha, Dharma and Sangha and by our own determination to keep walking this endless path, come what may.

Then, one day, school lets out. Or, maybe it's not about school. Maybe it's a trip back home to spend time with family and friends, or a once-in-a-lifetime vacation in Europe, or a hiking adventure with a bunch of old university buddies or a... well, you get the idea... whatever it is, the temptation to drop our practice, and the justification

for doing so, can suddenly and stealthily appear. What to do? Faced with the end of the school year, once again this summer, and my resulting nine-week reprieve from preparing breakfasts and lunches each morning, I resolved to fend off the demons of extra sleep and late-night TV and carry on my routine much as before. But then came my own two-week vacation and, as in many summers past, the need to take my practice on the road.

Speaking honestly, in my earlier years of practice, faced with what I often felt was a decision to *either* practice *or* vacation, there were summers (plural) when I completely let my practice drop for weeks at a time. Try justifying that to yourself and, if

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*I am grateful for another summer,
and for the opportunity to work on a
disciplined, daily zazen practice,
independent of conditions.*

Practice...

you get past that barrier, then try taking it up with your teacher. There's a reason one of the admonishments at the end of sesshin is to "do zazen" every, single day! And then it hit me, no matter what, no matter when, no matter where we are, all we need is three square feet. Three square feet to plant ourselves down in zazen and root our practice anew, in each new day.

When the Buddha accepted Sujata's offering of rice-milk and he drank, rose, washed and made his way to the Bodhi tree to where the grass cutter had placed a thick, supportive, square block of grass to act as the Buddha's cushion, the entire universe converged in those three square feet upon which the Buddha sat. And so it can for us, even if only in a very small way.

Whether sitting on our own cushions we'd packed into the back of a car and carried to a cottage on the shore of a lake in northern Ontario, or sitting atop a make-shift zabuton and zafu on the tenth floor of a bustling hotel in uptown Manhattan, across from a busy firehall, when we make the decision to bring our practice with us no matter where we go, then wherever we find ourselves, we can relish the

daily process of setting up our own three-square-foot zendo and embrace the opportunity to get down to zazen no matter what might be happening or what our surroundings might be.

Back now in Toronto, with the start of school and the Term Student Program upon us, I am grateful for the chance to have seen another summer and for the oppor-

tunity to continue to work on maintaining a disciplined, daily zazen practice, independent of conditions. I am thankful for those three square feet of practice be they at the Centre, at home or anywhere else — those three square feet of practice, that if we continue to put our minds to, can come with us wherever we go. ❧



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*"We are the sowers -
our children
are those who reap.
We labour so that future
generations will be better
and nobler
than we are."
- Maria Montessori*

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Upcoming Fall Events

Fall is always a busy time at the Zen Centre, and this year is no exception. We encourage all members and friends to mark your calendars and to keep an eye out for email communications from the office providing more detail on many of these upcoming special events and ceremonies:

SEPTEMBER

Sunday, Sept 16 - Ceremony for World Peace
Tuesday, Sept 18 - Term Student Group #3, Inauguration Ceremony
Saturday, Sept 22 - TZC Fall Yard Sale
Friday, Sept 28 - Bodhidharma Ceremony, 7pm
Friday, Sept 28 - Wednesday, Oct 3 - Five-day Bodhidharma Sesshin

OCTOBER

Tuesday, Oct 9 - Term Student Group #2, Inauguration Ceremony
Sunday, Oct 14 - Ceremony of Gratitude
Wednesdays, Oct 17 - The Fall Metta Course begins
Sunday, Oct 21 - Buddha Hall Dedication Ceremony
Tuesday, Oct 23 - Term Student Group #1, Inauguration Ceremony
Sunday, Oct 28 - Hungry Ghost Ceremony

NOVEMBER

Saturday, Nov 3 - Introductory Workshop
Thursday, Nov 8 - Famine Relief Ceremony
Sunday, Nov 18 - Jukai
Thursday, Nov 29 - Buddha's Enlightenment Ceremony

DECEMBER

Saturday, Dec 1 - Saturday, Dec 8 - Vermont Rohatsu Sesshin
Saturday, Dec 15 - Wednesday, Dec 26 - TZC closed
Thursday, Dec 27 - Sunday, Dec 30 - Centre reopens for special Temple Cleaning and preparations for New Years!

