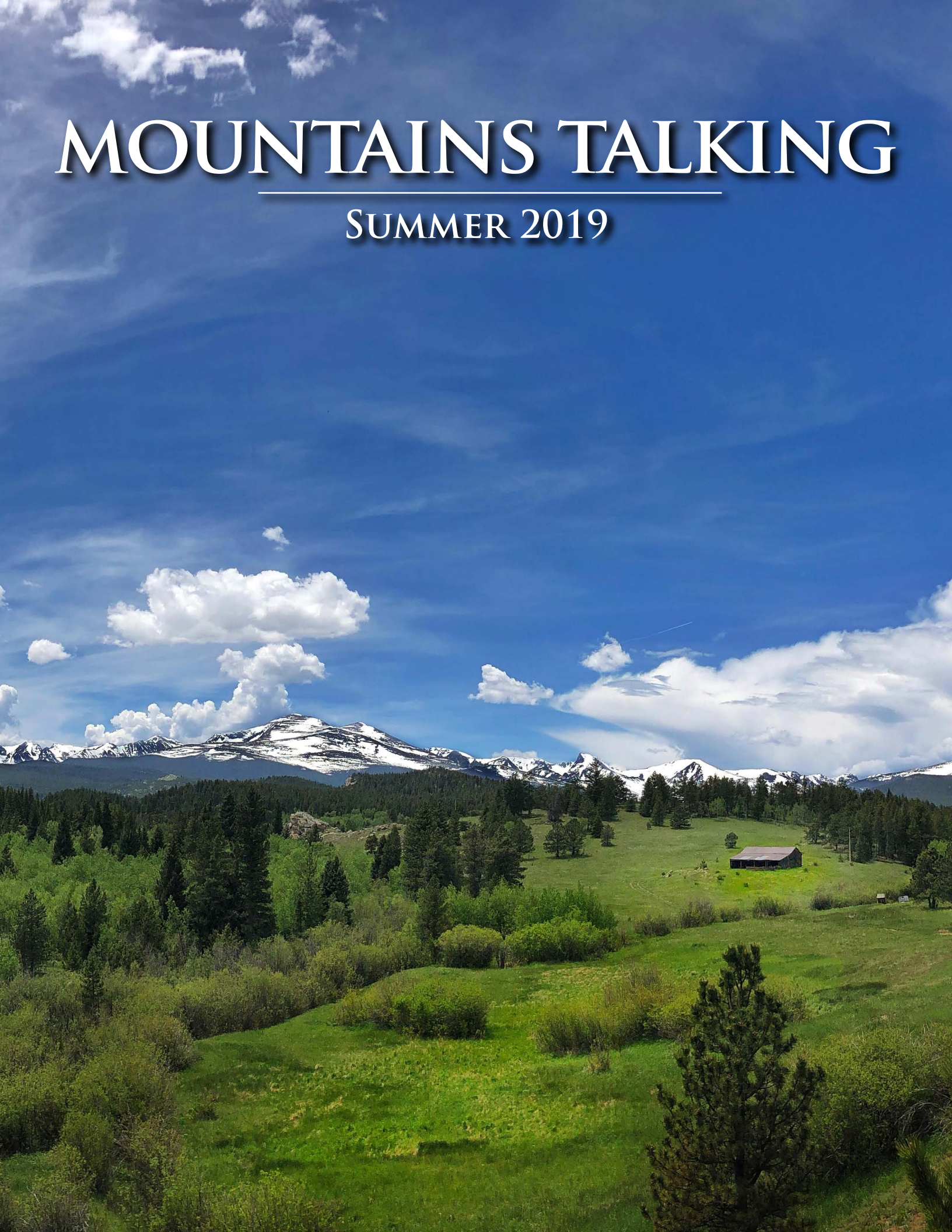


MOUNTAINS TALKING

SUMMER 2019



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FIVE HUNDRED LIVES OF GRACE

KARIN RYUKU KEMPE



Wumenkuan, Case 2: Pai-chang and the Fox:

Whenever Pai-chang gave a teisho, an old man was always there listening with the monks. When they left the hall, he would also leave.

Then one day the old man stayed behind, and the master

asked him who he was.

The old man replied, "I am not a human being. In the far distant past, in the time of Kasyapa Buddha, I was the head priest on this mountain. One day a monk asked me, 'Does an enlightened person fall under the law of cause and effect or not?' I answered, 'Such a person does not fall under the law of cause and effect.' Because of this answer, I was reborn five hundred times as a fox. Now, I beg you Master, please say a turning word on my behalf and release me from the body of a fox."

He then asked Pai-chang, "Does an enlightened person fall under the law of cause and effect or not?" Pai-chang said, "Such a person does not evade the law of cause and effect." Upon hearing this, the old man immediately was deeply enlightened. Bowing he said, "I have now been released from the body of the fox. The body is on the other side of this mountain. I wish to make a request of you. Please, Abbot, perform my funeral as for a priest."

The Master had the lead chanter strike the wooden block and announce to the assembly that after the midday meal there would be a funeral service for a priest. The monks talked about this among themselves, wondering how this could be since everyone was fine and there had been no one in the sick hall.

After the noon meal, Pai-chang led the monks to a rock on the far side of the mountain. And there, with his staff, he poked out the body of a dead fox. He then performed the cremation ceremony for a monk.

This is the first part of a very famous koan. Koans, as

you know, are phrases, stories, encounters, often about the Buddha or the other ancestral teachers, which like a finger pointing to the moon express some aspect of essential truth of our life. They can be used for study, or as a vehicle of transformative practice, as is the case in our training. Here the challenge is an apparent conflict between the freedom of the awakened mind without boundaries and the yoke of our very particular personal responsibility in the midst of our life circumstances. The resolution of any koan is not about greater psychological or intellectual understanding but a liberating insight into our life of here and now, into what it really means to be free in this moment. Koan practice, like meditation practice, is experiential.

Pai-chang (Hyakujo in Japanese) was one of the many dharma heirs of the great Mazu and lived 720 to 814. A seminal figure in the Zen way, he established the schedule of work, meditation and ritual that make up traditional monastic life in Zen. His way of teaching the great matter of life-and-death was very vigorous and direct, in accord with his own experience:

Once when Mazu and Pai-chang were walking together, a wild duck flew up. Master Mazu asked, "What is that?"

Pai-chang replied, "A wild duck."

Master Mazu said, "Where did it go?"

Pai-chang said, "It flew away." Master Mazu grabbed Pai-chang's nose and twisted it hard.

Pai-chang cried out, and Master Mazu asked, "When did it ever fly away?"

In this moment, Pai-chang met the duck as the real fact of his own life, closer than his own nose.

Getting back to this story of the fox, it was probably derived from an old folktale. Our founding teacher, Danan Henry, told me that Robert Aitken Roshi had framed it for him as upaya, a form of skillful means Pai-chang used to bring forward the teaching. Maybe one day while he was out walking, he came across the body

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FLOWER MOUNTAIN: A PLACE OF PEACE

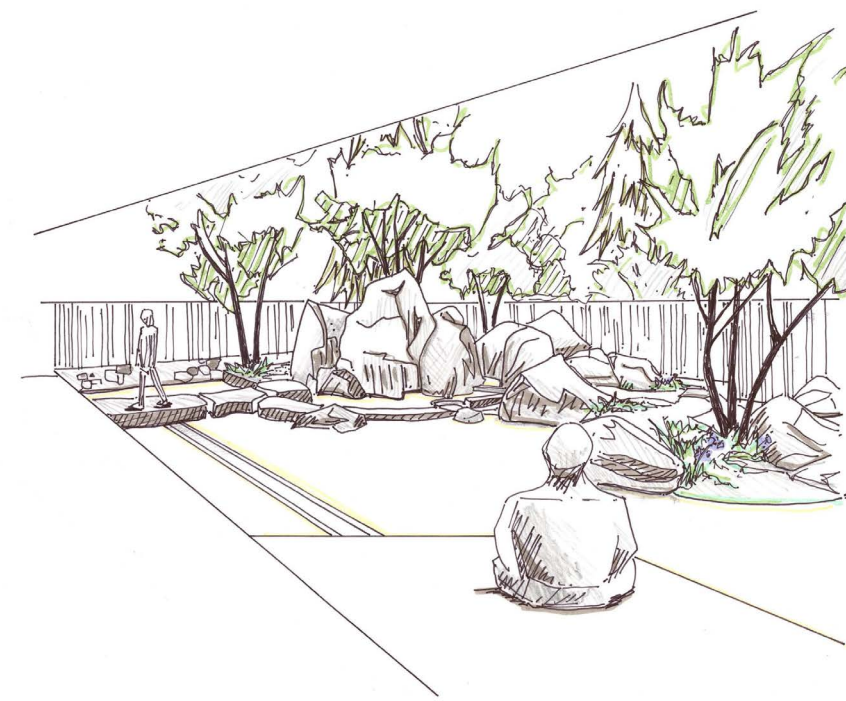
As our new temple at 1856 S. Columbine Street nears completion, we are tremendously excited to share these plans from Dobro Design, a company specializing in Japanese gardens. Once established, this meditation garden will complement the temple building with an outdoor space of exquisite beauty and serenity in the midst of our busy city.

FLOWER MOUNTAIN, the Zen Center of Denver garden, expresses the spirit of balance, harmony and timelessness through the creation of a drybed waterfall set in the midst of large boulders suggesting our Rocky Mountain peaks. The walking path leads through a Columbine meadow, shrubs and small trees. In the northwest corner, a shrine provides a sacred and private space for ceremony. Outdoor meditation and contemplative walking are supported by this intimate yet evocative design.

While the building is taking shape, the fundraising committee has also been active in building financial support for the garden. The total projected cost for the garden is around \$150,000. However, we are also very excited to announce that we have already received a \$50,000 pledge, AND we will receive matching funds up to \$50,000. This means every dollar given will receive matching funds, and when we have raised just \$50,000 we will have fully funded the garden!

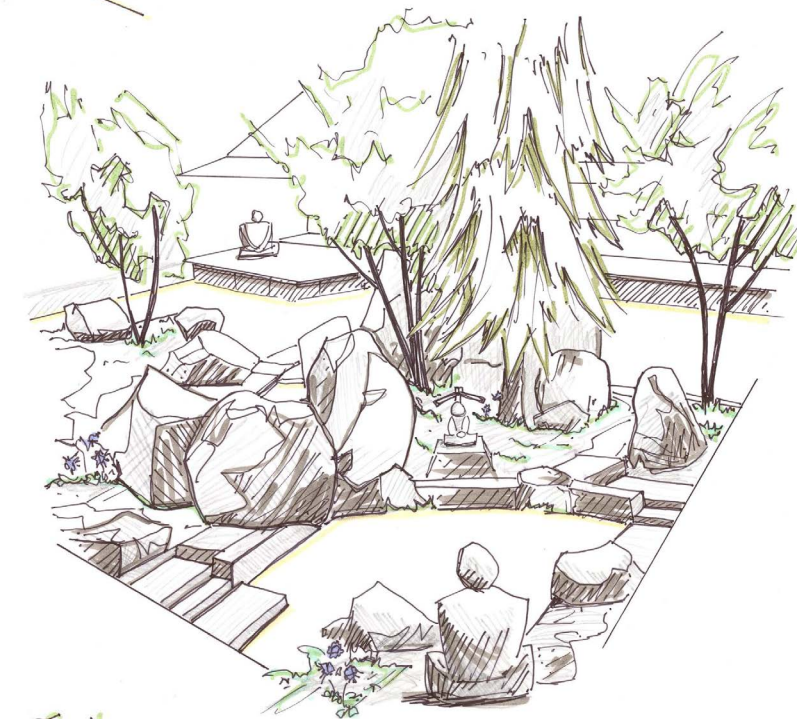
Our heartfelt thanks go to all those who have given their time, money and energy to this project. We're not quite there yet, however, so please give if you can. Every donation brings this beautiful vision that much closer to reality.

The seeds are sprouting and our gratitude is overflowing. Please contribute today at <https://zencenterofdenver.org/donate-2/> or send a check with "Garden project" in the memo to Zen Center of Denver, P.O. Box 101013, Denver CO 80250. Gassho!



A PLACE OF MEDITATION:
Safely enclosed, this abstracted dry waterfall and mountain scene balances with the empty space of the Golden Lake to calm and clear the mind.

A PLACE OF CEREMONY:
Hidden behind the mountaintop scene, a private shrine and place for ceremony is embraced by the Green Mountains.



A PLACE OF PRACTICE:
Immersed in the Blue Meadow, whether doing walking meditation along the path or nurturing the garden, one finds peace through practice.



Photos page 6, above left and above right by Stacey McConlogue.

A GIFT OF THE EARTH: SUMMER SESSHIN AT RMERC

On Sunday, June 30, we concluded our summer sesshin at Rocky Mountain Ecodharma Retreat Center, a simply stunning setting for a week of zazen in the mountains near Ward, Colorado. Really, words cannot express the depth of silence and beauty experienced there, and we can only bow in gratitude to the founders of RMERC and our hosts (Rosie and Sanshin), to our teachers, fellow participants and sesshin leaders, and to the living earth and great sky.

To recount just one memory among myriad, Friday evening saw a passing rainstorm through the valley. By then we had been sitting in zazen for three full days, and Friday was one of our days of silence: no talks, no chanting, just sitting upright with all senses open, moment by moment. The storm soon passed, and as the evening sitting concluded, a remarkable, vibrant rosy light broke across the valley.

Almost as one body, with no prior agreement or discussion, we all went outside to the deck, and stood gazing in wonder at one of the most spectacular sunsets I have ever witnessed. Resplendent hues of pink and gold played through an ever-shifting cloudscape, while below lay the magnificent mountain vista and a green valley fresh with the rain. Truly it was a gift of the living earth, which offers up its beauty without cease or limit; and I can think of few expressions of sangha more apt than this group standing in purely spontaneous awe and gratitude at the world in which we find ourselves. Svaha!

— Joel Tagert



Mountains and Waters Sesshin

Sitting silent, hour after hour,
bones ache, floors creak, dust settles.

Pink cumulus climbs
above snow-battered peaks.
A lone elk stalks the dusk.

Crickets sing, river dreams,
mountains walk all night.

Jeweled palaces
of fishes and dragons
begin to flow upstream.

Predawn chill stretches its legs,
stands and sips hot tea.

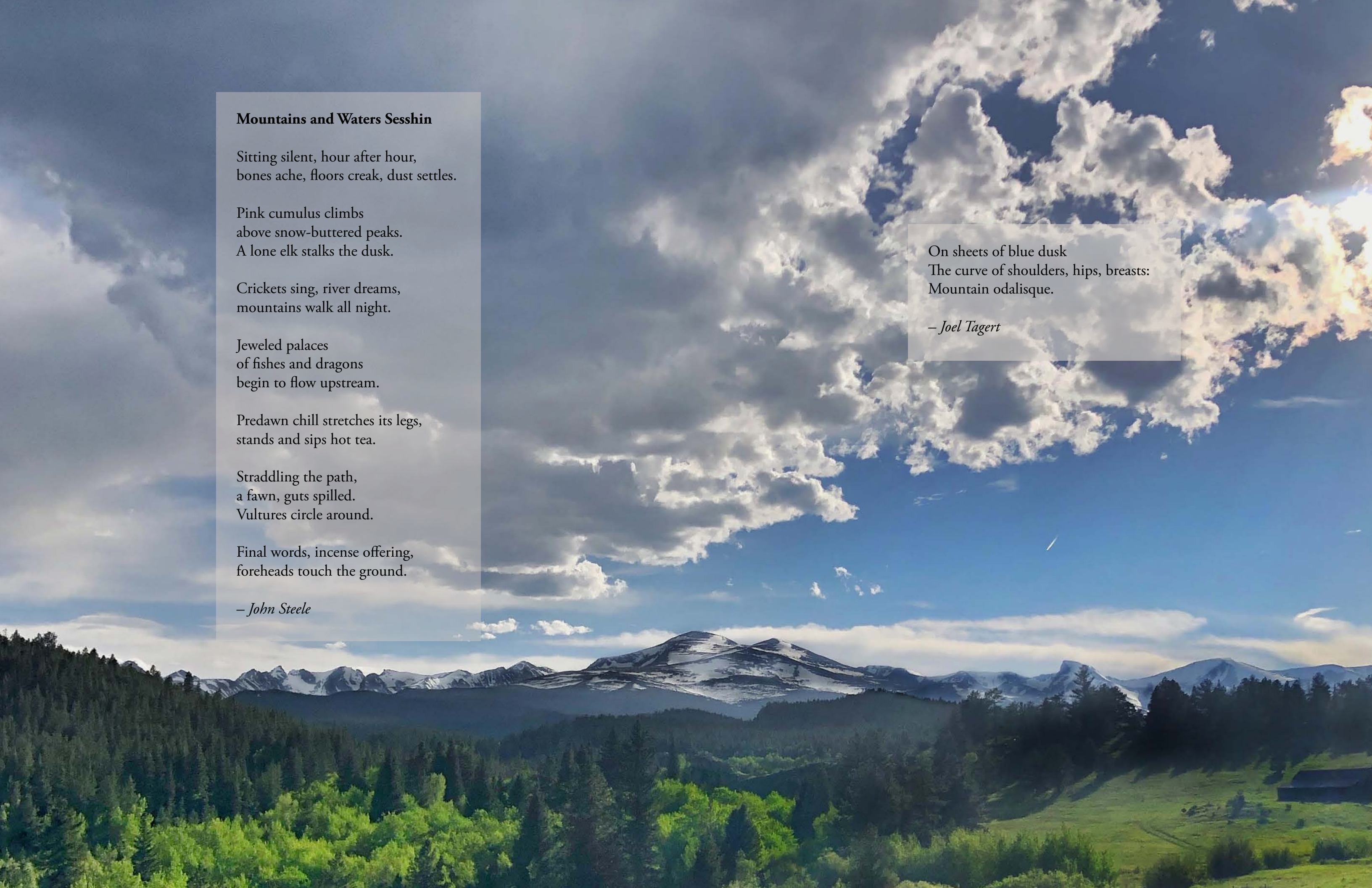
Straddling the path,
a fawn, guts spilled.
Vultures circle around.

Final words, incense offering,
foreheads touch the ground.

– *John Steele*

On sheets of blue dusk
The curve of shoulders, hips, breasts:
Mountain odalisque.

– *Joel Tagert*



MI CASA ZEN, SU CASA ZEN

FRED AND LOIS BECKER

In May Fred and Lois visited Costa Rica. While they were there, they had a chance to sit zazen three times at Casa Zen in Santo Domingo.

One of the sangha members there told them that Casa Zen de Costa Rica is the only Zen center in Central America. Founded in 1974 by Philip Kapleau Roshi, it is now led by Sunyana Graef Roshi. Under Graef, who resides in Vermont, the sangha practices in the Rochester tradition.

Fred and Lois arranged their vacation so that they could sit with Casa Zen at 5:30 a.m. on their first morning in Costa Rica, and then again on the evening before their last day and on the morning of their last day. On the first morning, group leader Carlos Murillo picked them up at the Hotel Bougainvillea and brought them to the Center. On their second visit, since they had a rental car, they decided to drive themselves. After some trial and error (in Costa Rica there are generally no street signs or house numbers), they found the Center and were warmly greeted by Rose Marie Ruiz, a resident caretaker. After both morning sittings, Rose Marie made breakfast for guests and several members who were able to stay longer. Everyone sat at a long table in the courtyard and talked (in Spanish and English) for an hour or so. After the Thursday evening sitting, soup was served and Fred and Lois had an opportunity to meet other members of the community.

The members of Casa Zen wear their robes for each sitting. They meditate, facing the wall, on mats and zafus placed on tan (raised platforms for sitting), and perform raihai on the tan as well. One senior member, Gerardo Selva, was ino and led the chanting with his beautiful deep voice.

Lois enjoyed chanting in Spanish and was particularly moved by the Lotus Sutra of Kanzeon, which honors the power of Kanzeon to hear and save all beings from their suffering. Fred was amazed when they chanted the Great Compassion Mantra, remembering chanting that mantra with the Chung-tai Chan group during the opening ceremonies for the Denver Dragon Boat Festival. Fred was taught at Chung-tai that the Great Compassion Mantra



was transliterated from the Sanskrit and had no direct English equivalent. Now, here they were in Costa Rica chanting the exact same mantra with a Spanish accent!

Gerardo Selva is also an artist and a professor who makes wonderful “neo-pre-Columbian” pottery. Fred and Lois were invited to visit his studio on their last day in Costa Rica. He gave the following directions: “Go past the grocery, and then you will see a street. After the street is a car place. Just after the car place is a green gate. That’s my gate. See you there!” When they couldn’t find his studio, they called him for further directions. “What! You’re lost?” he cried. “How can you be lost?” When they finally found his address, he laughingly joked, “Oh, you thought I meant the other grocery! I meant the ‘Más por Menos’ (More for Less)!” They all had a good laugh!

Fred and Lois feel like they have made some good friends at Casa Zen, and hope to return there for a sesshin someday. The members of Casa Zen also extended an invitation to all the members of ZCD to visit. Their website is <https://www.casazen.org>.

Continued from p. 3

of a dead fox on the path and decided to put it to use. As the former abbot of the same temple, the old man of the story would also have been called Pai-chang, since it was traditional for the abbot to take the name of his monastery mountain. So maybe we can see in this old man the views Pai-chang himself had held at an earlier stage of his practice, before he was fully mature in Zen. Or maybe that’s too fanciful. In any case, in Mahayana Buddhism, the fruition of practice and enlightenment is said to be full liberation from the chain of causation and suffering (nirvana or cessation), so from that standpoint, the old man’s answer was not incorrect. Then how, where was he caught?

And what about that fox? In Asian folklore, a fox is an unsavory character, a trickster, unreliable and devious. The fox life can be seen as the deluded life; to be reborn as a fox – is that a punishment for the wrong reply? This koan is also unusual in raising the thorny issue of rebirth and karmic retribution, which otherwise is not really addressed in Zen. Please try to hold this concept of rebirth lightly; don’t get too concrete about it. After all, don’t each of us live five hundred lives in one day? Breath in, breath out. Aren’t our lives a stream of constant birth and rebirth, death and resurrection?

The very first dharma point here is often passed over: the old man says “I am not a human being.” I am not a human being. What are we really? What are you? What is the journey of this human life? What is our intention, if we can use that word? How do we live a life of awareness, in harmony with all the varying circumstances of our lives?

This story comes pretty near the beginning of formal koan training but, as you can see, it is quite subtle; it’s a life koan, the koan of a lifetime. Over our life of practice, our understanding shifts and we come to see it differently. Many of the very first koans, called Dharmakaya koans, express underlying unity, ease, spontaneity. The constrict-

ing idea of a self apart falls away like discarded clothes, and there is “vast emptiness and nothing holy.” But how do we live out of that freedom? What choices do we make? Even with a clear initial experience, form – the so-called relative world – can seem somehow separated from that glimpse when everything falls away. It can be as if we live in two places; it may take time, years even, for these ways of seeing and being to become completely interpenetrated. It was certainly so for me.

So formal practice after the initial opening has much to do with making sure you don’t get stuck in that particular ghost cave and become nihilistic or fatalistic, as if nothing really mattered, as if everything is the same. Distinctions such as good or bad, high or low, right or wrong, all of these are fleeting ideas, not reality. “That is a

**We live right in the soup,
soaked in cause and effect;
one could even say we are
cause and effect, because they
are not separate from us.**

wild duck; it flew away.” Words, concepts – what is the reality? OUCH! What you thought of as your “self,” as “me,” is a collection of mental formations, stories – deep-seated maybe, but not the truth of the nose right on your face, not the air under your wings. At the same time, when it rains, the ground gets wet. If you step outside,

you too get wet. Every second is the coming together of myriad causes and effects, which in turn are the causes of other effects. No different for you and me. We live right in the soup, soaked in cause and effect; we could even say that we are cause and effect, because they are not separate from us.

If we imagine ourselves immune to conditions we encounter or independent of the welfare of other beings, we can cause deep suffering to ourselves and to others. It’s possible to train in Zen for many years, and still not have addressed basic issues of personal conditioning and character, to not really know yourself. My first teacher, Toni Packer, used to say that we have to become transparent to ourselves, like Ryokan’s little mountain stream. In Zen, we love that straight, direct path. But the drive to sink right to the bottom of the pool, missing the trip down, can be a blind spot in traditional practice if we shrug off our own karmic tendencies and personal history. This practice takes a ruthless personal honesty; only we know

for ourselves if we are using our practice to avoid life issues. And lay practice, while challenging, tends to keep us honest, as there are so many natural checks and balances in work and family life. We know that Zen practice is not just about insight but opening the heart and living out of that interdependence.

“An enlightened man does not fall under cause and effect.” When our conditioning drops away, when body and mind disappear, in that instant, cause and effect also disappear. But this does not mean that there are no consequences to our action – or inaction. If we live without separation in our lives, then these consequences are equally welcomed as the unfolding of the next instant. Why then would the old man be turned into a fox? And how would he live a fox life? Master Wumen, who compiled these koans, commented:

“Not falling under the law of cause and effect.” Why should this prompt five hundred lives as a fox? “Not evading the law of cause and effect.” Why should this prompt a return to human life? If you have the single eye of realization, you will appreciate how the former head of the monastery enjoyed five hundred lives of grace as a fox.

How could the five hundred fox lives be lives of grace? Is that the unenlightened life or the life of Buddha? If you think that the “not falling” answer of the old man shows the discriminating mind of the wheel of samsara, but that the “not evading” answer shows a realized acceptance of karma, isn’t that just more of the fox life of duality?

An old master said (from *Gateless Barrier: Zen Comments on the Mumonkan* by Zenkei Shibayama):

“Not falling into causation”

And he was turned into a fox – the first mistake.

“Not ignoring causation”

And he was released from the fox body – the second mistake.

Another master once described his life as “one continuous mistake.” What was he trying to express?

The original koan continues back at the monastery in the evening after the fox funeral:

That evening Master Pai-chang took the high seat before

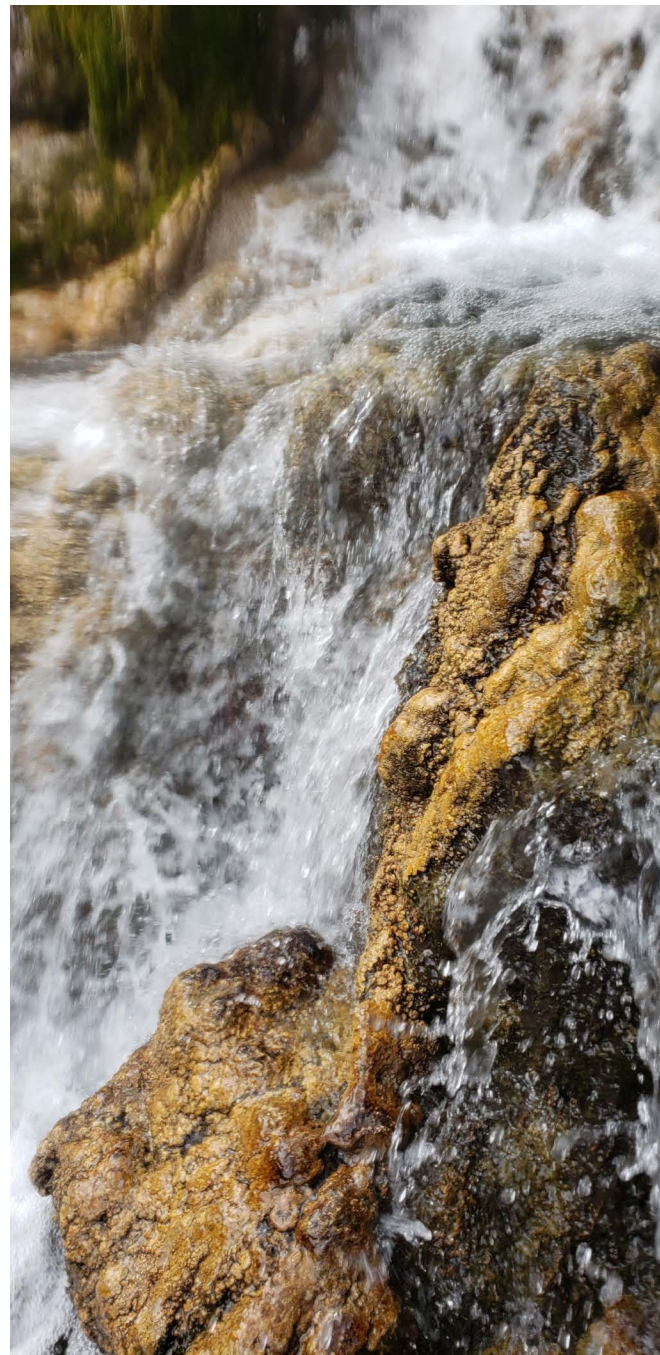


Photo: Geoff Keeton

his assembly and told the monks the whole story. Huang-po stepped forward and asked, “The old man failed to give the correct turning words and was made to live as a fox for five hundred lives, you say; if, however, his answer had not been incorrect each time, what would he have become?”

Huang-po was a huge man, very imposing, and later became Pai-chang’s dharma successor. Fortunately, he understood Pai-chang’s intention and caught an essential point. Suppose there was nothing to criticize in the old

man’s understanding or answer; could this old man have evaded his five hundred lives as a fox? And what did the old man realize when he heard Pai-chang’s answer: “Such a person does not evade cause and effect”?

Challenged by Huang-po, Pai-chang said, “Just step up here closer and I’ll tell you.” Huang-po went up to Pai-chang and slapped him in the face.

Pai-chang clapped his hands and laughed, saying, “I thought the Barbarian had a red beard but here is a red-bearded Barbarian.”

Yes, Pai-chang was delighted to be outfoxed! The red-bearded barbarian is of course a reference to Bodhidharma, so this is pretty high praise.

If you have the single eye of realization, you will appreciate how the former head of the monastery enjoyed five hundred lives of grace as a fox. Seeing with the single eye of realization, is a fox not only just a fox, but completely, perfectly a fox? An old man, a perfect and complete old man? Or is the old man a fox all along, and at the same time, the fox a human being, even one named Pai-chang or Huang-po or Karin? Dogen said:

Mountains, rivers, and the great earth are the cave of the wild fox. Receive and discard one piece of skin, flesh and bone. Cause and effect are very clear, and not a personal matter. Partridges sing incessantly in late spring and a hundred flowers vanish.

When it’s not a personal matter, is there anywhere to stick or get hung up? Anywhere or anyone that is not becoming and discarding the fox life? Can all ideas of fox or human beings come to a stop?

In *Two Arrows Meeting in Midair*, Daido Looi wrote:

This life is too precious to waste. It’s boundless. Whether we realize it or not, it’s boundless and when we do realize it, we free ourselves, each and every one of us, from that fox body. And not only do you free yourself from that fox body – you simultaneously free all sentient beings.

To be free in our life as it actually is, all we have to do is to turn into it with all our being, all our heart. To let all worries over the right path, the wrong path, fall to rest. To live our one continuous mistake without regret or hope, letting our hard shell of identity melt.

After all, within twenty-four hours, you may live your five hundred lives as a fly on the floor, the rumble of traffic and a cloud riding the wild wind. As a raging national politician or a crying child. As a dog racing for her ball and the postman walking over ice to your door. And maybe as a fox, roaming the forest. Is there really any barrier to your appreciation of each of these precious lives?

Together with all beings, we realize the Way. ☸

Calendar Highlights

- Sunday, July 28 - Zazenkaï at Willow Farm with Karin Ryuku Sensei
- Sunday, Aug. 4 - Dharma talk by Geoff Keeton
- Sunday, Aug. 11 - Sangha Circle meeting
- Sunday, Aug. 18 - Teisho by Peggy Metta Sensei

- Sunday, Aug. 25 - Zazenkaï with Ken Tet-suzan Sensei at Willow Farm
- Sunday, Sept. 8 - Dharma talk by Clark Dollard
- Sunday, Sept. 15 - Sangha circle meeting
- Sept. 22 - Zazenkaï with Peggy Metta Sensei at Mayu



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