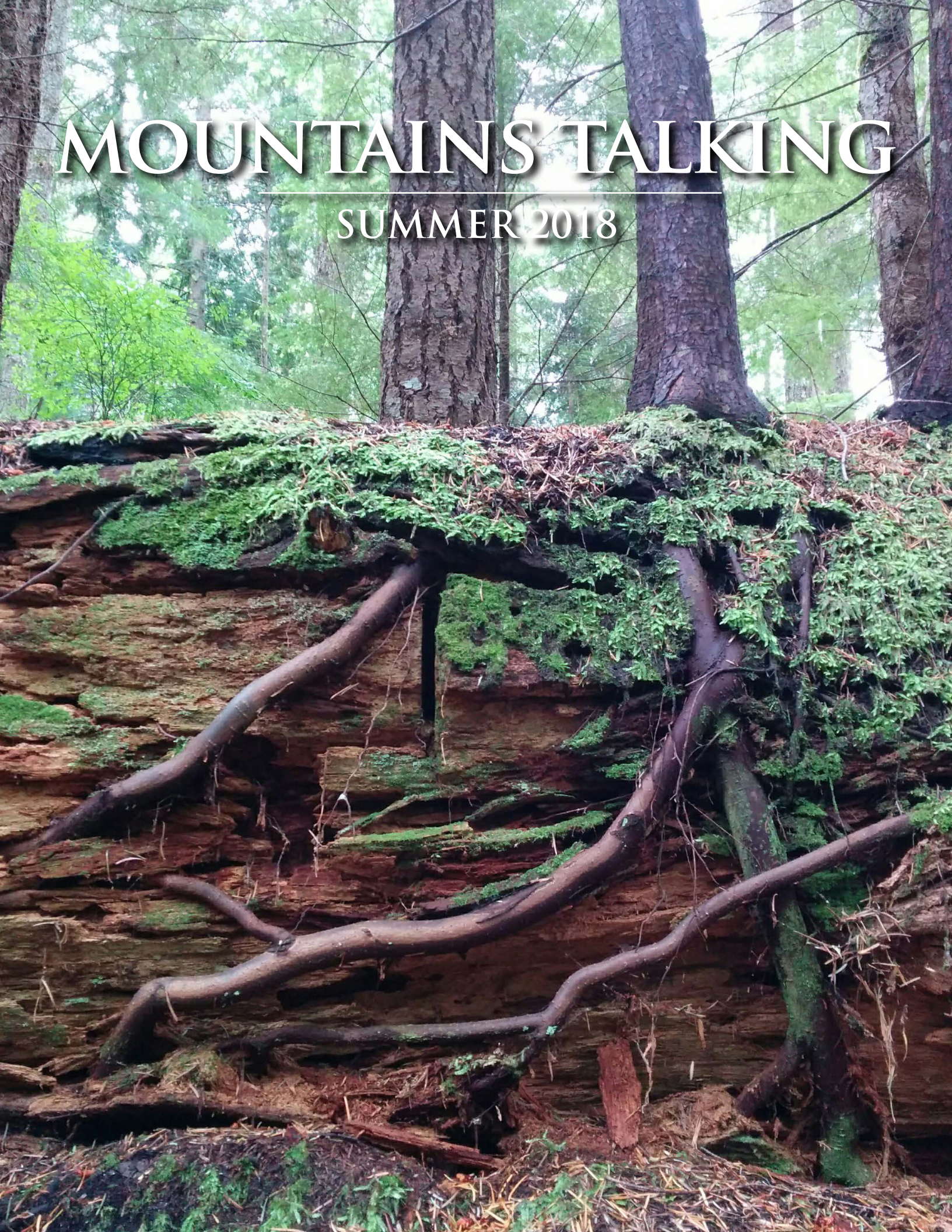


MOUNTAINS TALKING

SUMMER 2018



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SAMU AND SANGHA

PEGGY METTA SHEEHAN



I'd like to start with a reading by Zen Master Dogen from the *Shobogenzo Zuimonki*. At the end of each samu in the old temple we would sit together and Roshi or one of the teachers would choose a passage from this book, which was compiled from brief talks given by Master Dogen in 1235-1237, shortly after establishing his temple. We would read the passage three times and then talk about our samu practice for the day.

For those who are new, samu is work practice, and Aitken Roshi called it the fourth pillar of Zen practice. The other three legs are zazen, teisho and dokusan. And I think participation in those legs are pretty sturdy right now.

At the old temple, samu practice usually took place on a Saturday morning from 9 a.m. to noon. We would gather for zazen, a tea ceremony, and a short talk about work practice, and then we would get to work around the temple – dusting, cleaning bathrooms, mowing the lawn, cooking lunch, etc.

Work practice is more than traditional in Zen settings. It is the heart of community, essential to practice and to expression of the Way. When Master Pai-chang was getting on in age, his monks took his tools away from him, hoping to spare his energy. He stopped eating. After three days, his monks gave his tools back to him, for he said, “A day without work is a day without eating.”

After our samu work, we would then gather for an oryoki meal that the assigned tenzo had prepared. The tenzo job assignment and the oryoki meal were preparation for sesshin attendance. One got a glimpse of practicing together in silence for a week, a week of many hours of quiet zazen, of living and caring for our space and each other with kindness, attention and in deepest harmony.

I truly look forward to renewed samu practice in our new temple. Here is one of the passages from the *Shobo-*

genzo Zuimonki, by Dogen:

Ponder the fact that someone realized the Way by hearing the sound of bamboo; that another clarified the Mind at the sight of peach blossoms. How could it be possible to differentiate smart bamboo trees from dull ones, or deluded ones from enlightened ones? How could there be shallow or deep, wise or stupid among flowers? The flowers bloom every year yet not everyone attains enlightenment by viewing them. Stones often strike bamboo yet not everyone who hears the sound clarifies the Way. Only through the virtue of long study and continuous practice, with the assistance of diligent effort in the Way, does one realize the Way or clarify the Mind. This did not occur because the sound of the bamboo was especially wonderful, nor because the color of the peach blossoms was particularly profound. Although the sound of bamboo is marvelous, it does not sound of itself; it cries out with the help of a piece of tile. Although the color of peach blossoms is beautiful, they do not bloom of themselves; they open with the help of the spring breeze.

Practicing the Way is also like this. This Way is inherent in each of us; still our gaining the Way depends upon the help of co-practitioners. Though each person is brilliant, our practicing the Way still needs the power of other people [in the sangha]. Therefore, while unifying your mind and concentrating your aspiration, practice and seek the Way together.

I hope this inspires you and opens your heart of deepest gratitude for each other, for yourself and your practice, for our community, our ancestors and in particular our founding father, Danan Henry. It does mine. This practice and community continues to transform and define my life. Doing these readings and samu practice together over many years on Saturday mornings catapulted me into a new way of being and relating to my life and others, and I trust that I am not alone.

I trust that we have moved from our old temple into our current rental spaces in order to grow, change, cultivate and incubate. I am very grateful to Mayu and RMMC for their generosity. And I trust that something larger than us is at play here, as always. I trust that our

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PREPARING THE GROUND

From the four corners of the property echoed the sounds of the instruments – large densho, small densho, keisu, han – as the teachers processed to each location offering incense in our groundbreaking ceremony, held Sunday, July 29, at the site of our new temple, 1856 S. Columbine.

The sky was hazy at first, provided some much-appreciated shade for the fifty or so participants, which included long-time members, newer members, and many family, friends and curious neighbors. The occasion was marked by a quiet joy, from tasks coming to completion and the pleasure of envisioning the temple-to-be, its outline marked with chalk on the grass and bare earth.

On tables beneath a canopy we offered materials created for the event, including enlarged renderings of the building, an updated fundraising brochure, and new ZCD T-shirts with the message, “I’d rather be... here!”

Peggy Metta Sheehan led the ceremony, adapted from the groundbreaking ceremony for Dharma Rain Zen Center in Portland, Oregon:

Today we enter into this piece of land both physically and spiritually. We declare our wish and intention to

establish on this ground a temple: a seat for the Buddha, a treasury of Dharma, and a home for the Sangha. We ask that the spirits of the land and all the creatures that live here receive and welcome us, and we pledge to do our best to live in harmony with them. We ask all the buddhas and ancestors to recognize and trust our true purpose and support this undertaking.

May we be free from difficulties, keep our minds pure and our hearts aligned with our intentions. Please forgive us for disturbing this land as we begin construction and help us see the project through to a healthy and harmonious conclusion. May we be good neighbors and try to be of service to the people who live near us. May the practitioners who enter this land and this temple will be earnest in their pursuit of the truth, mindful in their work, and compassionate to all living beings.

Following the ceremony we enjoyed a potluck lunch and quiet conversation, making some new acquaintances and renewing many old ones, a continuation of the decades of community that have led us to this celebratory occasion.



Above: The crowd waits while the teachers light incense at the altar, Dennis Sienko standing ready at the han. *Bottom left:* Peggy Metta Sheehan, who led the ceremony, and Karin Ryuku Kempe. *Bottom right:* Ken Tetsuzan Morgareidge plants a stick of incense in the earth, while Bill Hamaker plays the small densho.

All photos by Jeff Black.

TWO JAPANESE ZEN TEMPLES

BOB KNOTT

Bukkoku-ji is a distinguished temple and monastery which has important connections to the Zen Center of Denver. It is located at the edge of the port city of Obama on the western coast of the main island of Honshu in Japan. Until his passing in March 2018, Harada Tange Roshi taught there for many years after receiving sanction from Daiun Sogaku Harada Roshi (1871-1961). Phillip Kapleau Roshi trained with Tange Roshi (described in *The Three Pillars of Zen* as “my wise monk-guide-interpretor-friend”) during the 1950s at nearby Hosshinji Temple. Our own Danan Henry Roshi and David Dunley (then ordained as Shonen) were likewise inspired by their training with Tange Roshi at Bukkoku-ji.

Reservations should be made in advance and transportation by train and taxi can be arranged. I was pleased to walk through the substantial gate and go to the Buddha Hall entrance to strike a large han with a mallet. A monk assigned to greet visitors came and took me inside to the office and guest quarters. Several monks, both foreign and Japanese, spoke functional English. I was assigned chores like washing dishes, sweeping sidewalks or picking weeds during work periods. There was no appreciable heating at night so I wore three layers of clothing to sleep, including ski parka and stocking cap.

Sitting rounds were thirty-five minutes long in a main zendo with some forty zafus and zabutons. Fifteen to twenty monks and lay staff currently stay long term at Bukkokuji, with another ten to twenty participants joining for sesshin or parts of ango (three-month training periods). It is preferable to visit for a full seven-day sesshin or several week period to gain better acquaintance with the practice. After feeling some uncertainty getting settled on my chair, the zazen with the monks and lay staff was riveting in its silence and stillness. It was apparent that one was sitting where generations had practiced before.

The large bells and han were deeply resonant. Chanting services were held in a separate, elegant shrine room for thirty minutes each morning. The chants were recognizable – Prajna Paramita, Dai Hi Shin Dharani, etc. – with somewhat different pronunciation and pacing than we are accustomed to in Denver. During my visit,



memorial chanting services were held for Harada Tange Roshi in an additional shrine room.

Lay Japanese also visited the temple to rehearse for a confirmation-type ceremony with children of a neighborhood family. In addition to monastic training, the facility provided pastoral services for area families, including funerals and cemetery burials of ashes. With its sloping tile roofs, the temple was an organic feature of the charming residential area and wider coastal region.

Lying in a narrow mountain valley, Eihei-ji temple and monastery is a larger compound founded by Dogen Zenji in the year 1244. I took a train and bus from the city of Fukui to a village and then walked up cobblestone paths alongside a rocky stream with moss and ancient forest looming above. A few cherry trees had pink blossoms, yet there were occasional patches of snow to be seen during those early days of April. Lay visitors are offered guided tours during selected periods each week. Hundreds of well-dressed, respectful Japanese from the cities make pilgrimage visits to this one of the two largest Soto Zen monasteries in Japan.



Photo: Bob Knott

I was able to participate in an overnight “sanroshin” introductory guest program, which required registration and moderate payment two months in advance. We were only allowed to move about the monastery with an English-speaking escort, who met us punctually for scheduled activities. For an afternoon sitting, we sat in a guest zendo that had superb, polished woodwork with a strikingly quiet effect. Yes, one sat very erectly – like a chair – in this solemn environment. Our young monk escort was a well-trained country youth from the northern island of Hokkaido who hoped to go to Europe and the U.S. to teach when he was fully prepared.

After sitting, we were taken to a graceful dining room for a delicious eight-dish meal. There were additional Japanese sanroshin guests, including a ten-year-old boy with his parents and grandmother, who were giving him an introduction to monastery practice. We then were taken to see a thirty-minute English video on the evolution of Eihei-ji from the time of Dogen through recent renovations. There currently are 150 monks, plus scores of lay staff who assist with administrative tasks and the streams of outside visitors. The monks have austere quarters with demanding sitting, chanting, sutra-study and manual-labor schedules. No women are ordained at this time.

We subsequently were given a talk and a question-and-answer opportunity with the roshi in charge of the International Department of Eihei-ji. He had spent fifteen years studying and teaching in Europe and the U.S., visiting Phillip Kapleau in Rochester and other teachers around the country. He praised the vitality of the Zen groups in the West and hoped that they would continue to grow. We were taken back to our rooms to sleep and would be retrieved for zazen in the morning.

After sitting in the serenity of the guest zendo again, we were taken to a morning chanting service with the full complement of 150 monks plus staff and visitors. The current abbot, Taiho Fukuyama Zenji, was attending. With decorated ceilings twenty feet high and multiple Buddha sculpture figures, the chanting hall was inspiring as the huge drums and wooden han were struck skillfully. Fully robed and walking in phalanxes by seniority, the monks’ procession filled the spacious chamber. Stirring recitations of verses echoed throughout the subtly adorned walls. At Eihei-ji as well, separate chanting services were held for the passing of Harada Tange Roshi. We finally were offered a tour of the wider grounds with numerous small shrines and a cemetery in the forested mountain valley.

Tree

You've been standing on one leg, palms
joined, so long that bark encased your skin.
You watched Eve yield, you shared her dark chagrin.
Siddhartha sat there in your shade so long,
awakened to the morning star's deep calm,
claimed he'd found the truth, snapped the lynchpin.
They nailed a blasphemous prophet to your limbs.
Soldiers follow orders, despite their qualms.

They killed Mansur for uttering these words:
"I am the Truth." Be careful what you say.
They'll take it out of context, cut you down.
Hold your tongue and listen to the birds,
let the wind sing through your leaves and pray,
palms together, one foot on the ground.

— *John Steele*





Photo: Jeff Black

teacher's vow to create a vital and genuine lay Zen practice community in the heart of the city is manifesting because it must, and because we are together.

I am so grateful for all of you. I am inspired every day by the dedication and commitment to practice that you each convey. I am delighted and humbled by new members that enrich our community and guide us in new ways of discovering and opening the dharma, and I am moved by the depth of practice and expression in our more seasoned practitioners. We are so lucky!

And soon enough we will have a new temple which will call upon each of us and our practice together in new and exciting ways.

Back to Dogen for a moment: The passage above was an introduction to assigning a new *shuso*, or

head monk. And he added this:

Thus, put your minds together in studying and practicing. It is not easy to uphold the dharma by myself [so I have asked the new shuso to assist me]. The Way the buddhas and patriarchs have practiced has always been like this.

I want to mention that the teachers are in dialogue about how best to use the depth of experience and practice that we have within our community. We are envisioning new possibilities for leadership in our sangha. More will come on that, but suffice it to say that we hear and see the bamboo and flowers all around us, and the sangha is thriving!

Gassho Corner

Special thanks to all those who helped with our groundbreaking ceremony, including members of the fundraising committee and those who attended the workday the previous Saturday.

Comings and Goings

We first welcome Jennie Kraemer, who recently undertook the Entering the Gate ceremony to become a supporting member. Jennie is a registered nurse whose interests include writing, photography, organizing events, hiking and running. She also loves animals, but especially dogs. Welcome Jennie!

We also welcome back former office manager Richard Miklic, who recently re-donned the mantle of membership.

Lastly, we bid a fond adieu to Billy Wynne, who is spending a year in France with his family. We trust he'll make good use of his time abroad, and look forward to seeing him again soon.

Calendar Highlights

- Sunday, Aug. 5 - Zazenkai with Ken Sensei (Willow Farm Contemplative Center)

- * Tuesday, Aug. 7 - Beginners' night (Mayu)

- Sunday, Aug. 19 - Clouds and Water meeting (RMMC)

- Thursday, Aug. 23 - Talk and discussion (RMMC)

- Sunday, Aug. 26 - Kannon Ceremony (RMMC)

- Sunday, Sept. 9 - Teisho by Ken Sensei (RMMC)

- Tuesday, Sept. 11 - Talk and discussion (Mayu)

- Sunday, Sept. 16 - Teisho by Ken Sensei (RMMC)

- Thursday, Sept. 20 - Beginners' night (RMMC)

- Sunday, Sept. 23 - Zazenkai with Peggy Sensei (Willow Farm)

- Sunday, Sept. 30 - Senior student talk (RMMC)



Photo: Geoff Keeton

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