

Zen Bow

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PILGRIMAGE

Zen Bow: Pilgrimage

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Lou Anne Jaeger

Zhaozhou's Cat

ABIGAIL LEVIN

I've always loved cats. For years, though, I resisted getting one, for fear that I would love the animal so much that I wouldn't be able to bear the eventual, inevitable sorrow of losing the creature. When I met my husband Rob, a hardcore cat person, I knew I would have to get over my fear of loss and plunge into this unknown realm of unconditional love that I knew would lead to certain pain.

Soon after we married, we adopted Timbit, a beautiful, radiant Maine Coon with whom I fell head over heels in love with. He and I were on the same wavelength from the very beginning—knowing intuitively what each other needed, and giving it to each other as much as we could, operating with an intimacy that is so much easier to achieve when the barriers of language are removed.

When I would go to sesshin, Rob always reported that Timbit would sleep in my laundry, because he missed me so much. When I made other trips without Timbit, I would show pictures of him to everyone I visited, urging them to appreciate his majesty as much as I did. He was the center of our family in many ways—an endless source of conversation, nicknaming, laughter, and snuggling.

A few weeks before I was to leave to go to China on the pilgrimage that I had been looking so forward to for almost a year, Timbit died completely unexpectedly. He was only three years old and had seemed perfectly healthy. He disappeared one day while out on one of the outside expeditions he loved so much. We searched for him for five harrowing, wrenching days until we found him deep under our porch.

We buried him in our backyard flower garden, where he had loved to romp.

The next few weeks were awful for Rob and me—we sobbed ourselves to sleep, we wondered what had happened to him, we hoped he hadn't suffered, and we missed him profoundly. This was my first experience of grief as an adult, and I was in uncharted territory. All the excitement I had felt about the trip went into the background, and I plunged into an aching sadness that I had never known before. I packed reluctantly, knowing that I was leaving Rob all alone at the worst time. I hoped, naively, that somehow getting on a plane and flying halfway around the world would allow me to escape the pain.

Of course, I was wrong. During the first two days in Beijing, the pain was more intense than ever, and I found myself sobbing spontaneously, often publicly. I couldn't wait to get to Bailin monastery, where Zhaozhou taught for forty years, just to get a chance to sit and try to come to grips with all that I was experiencing. At that point, I really wasn't thinking about Zhaozhou at all, though. I just needed a *zendo*, *any zendo*.

From the moment we arrived at Bailin, I felt completely at home and utterly comfortable with my surroundings and with the monks and lay people, who were very kind and dedicated dharma practitioners. Sitting in the simple *zendo* for a full day on the first day we were there, I very quickly felt settled and grounded in a way that I hadn't felt since Timbit died.

Having settled down, I was finally able to reflect on this amazing place I had traveled so far in order to come to know Zhaozhou, through his wonderful koans, in a whole new way. This would be the first time that I had really used the koans as tools—as friends, really—in my daily life, at least in any conscious way.

Reflecting on three koans in particular helped me come to grips with the loss of Timbit. First, of course, there was Zhaozhou's famous Mu, and the realm of the absolute that it points to. From the perspective of Mu, Timbit, Rob, and I, our pain and sorrow, didn't really exist; Timbit never lived and never died. There was certainly

much relief and insight in experiencing grief from this angle, but this alone—thinking of the Timbit that never was, and is not gone—didn't get to the heart of the matter, though it went a very important halfway. Simply to dwell in the realm of the absolute was tempting, but deep down, I knew I was merely hiding out there.

Zhaozhou's koan about the cypress tree in the garden—and that very cypress tree was literally right out in the courtyard!—was also very helpful. In his particularity, Timbit was expressing the absolute, just as the cypress tree, in its particularity, its uniqueness, expresses 'the meaning of Bodhidharma's coming from the West.' Timbit's wonderful particularity—his beautiful green eyes, the way he snuggled under the blankets with me at night, the way he would inevitably sit on the piles of papers I had to grade, forcing me to *truly* pay attention to him and let go of my compulsion to always work—that particularity was really and truly gone. I had to feel that, and feel that deeply. And I had been feeling that side of grief for all of these weeks. But *just* feeling that, which was all I was able to do before we arrived at Bailin, was only half the story too, of course.

In the koan 'Nansen Cuts the Cat in Two,' in response to finding his monks in the East and West halls (I think we were staying in the East hall!) arguing about a cat, diverted from their practice, Nansen cuts the cat in two. It was this story that finally allowed me to have the insight to truly come to grips with my grief. Nansen cuts the cat in two, but Zhaozhou, in his dynamic response to hearing about the cat's death, brings the cat to life. It is this being able to hold both sides of the story together at once—Timbit's death and his non-death—that was the place I needed to get to.

Grief, it seems to me, offers a wonderful opportunity to view both the absolute and relative at once and to honor them both, equally. While this opportunity is always available, when we are not in immense pain, it is easy to focus on the fun part of particularity—people, pets, and things can be mere amusements. Correspond-

ingly, in everyday life, it is easy for the absolute to become an abstraction, or to disappear from view altogether. In grief, we see the ‘downside’ of particularity—its transience—in vivid, almost unbearable, color. We are forced by our pain to participate in the realm of the deathless absolute, to truly dwell in it and to know firsthand from this experience that it is a place always available to us, at any time.

To me, experiencing and upholding both sides of this wondrous, mysterious life is the work of Zen and its reward. When times are easy, we can forget about doing this often arduous work. It is when times are hard—times when the First Noble Truth leaps into full view and we see how intensely indeed that change causes suffering—that we have the great opportunity and the poignant, always so poignant, relief of expanding our heart to hold the fullness of life and death, the wonder of the relative and absolute, and to express our gratitude to Zhaozhou and this wonderful tradition for making that rich experience available to us.

Later that day, we had a ceremony at Zhaozhou’s burial pagoda, where we offered incense made from the cypress tree in the garden. Each of us received one stick of incense for the offering, and Andy, our tour guide, invited us to keep half of this rare incense stick to take back home. I knew I would light it for Timbit at his grave when I got back. I would bow now to Zhaozhou, not a distant Zen Master anymore, but now a dear and treasured friend who had my back when I really needed him. I would bow

later to Timbit, for allowing me to share in his wonderful life and his wonderful death.

The next day, as we left the monastery for an outing to see Zhaozhou’s bridge, Lou Anne—my fellow crazy cat lady Dharma sister—and I saw three kittens, not more than a few weeks old, huddling by the monastery entrance among the bicycles parked there. We quickly formulated a plan. When we got back, we would feed these little guys the cat food I had picked up in Beijing as a souvenir for my other two cats back home. The kittens gobbled it up right before our eyes, and we both had a taste of what it feels like to bring cats back to life.

A week later, at Dingshan Temple—a very humble temple in Nanjing whose abbot, Zhi Guang, was such a vivid and remarkable example of monastic life in China—the temple cat came and sat on my lap throughout the formal lunch. I somehow managed to negotiate eating in silence with chopsticks while petting this wonderful being. I marveled at the mysterious, but always so perfect, operating of causality that brought us together at this perfect time, and at the way his delicious particularity—his big round face, white paws, and calm demeanor—mysteriously intersected with this cat I had never met, this temple I had never seen, and this pilgrimage I had never taken.

Abigail Levin has been a member of the Zen Center since 1992. She lives in Niagara Falls, NY with her husband and two cats.



Lou Anne Jaeger

What? Tea, Again?

NAOMI WOLF

Ever since I can remember I've existed in cultural and social spheres that typically consist mostly of men. I was a teenager in the 1980s and went to university in the early 90s. In high school, I was the only female in the physics class, and one of four (or somewhere around that number) in the advanced mathematics class. At university, my first degree was in mechanical engineering, and about 2% of the class was female. I then went on to pursue a mathematics degree, and the percentage of women was even lower. In the years after University, I chose a career in information technology (IT). There are many women in IT departments, but typically they are project managers, incident managers, and the like. I'm one of the few women who actually understand how emails travel across the globe and can rattle off some of the differences between Ipv4 and Ipv6.

(You ask, what the heck is that? Well, that's my point.) I happily exist in a primarily male tech/geek world, and it does not bother me in the slightest. I'm so used to it, I don't even think about it. Actually, I get a little disoriented when I'm doing something and there are lots of women about.

The fact that I might be seen as unequal to my male counterparts really never fired off the synapses of my brain. For years I've taken the women's movement for granted. All the crap they had to deal with, people assuming that a woman could not do something or is not competent or intelligent purely based on physiology—I still don't understand that way of thinking. My mother faced discrimination directly in her career and raised me to never think myself unequal to those around me. She really in-

stilled a good quality in me: Everyone is equal, no exceptions.

Years ago, when I first started practising Zen Buddhism, I was visiting an old friend from university. We had many late-night talks about religion, meditation, and all things associated with spirituality and the nature of existence. He was really into Chinese martial arts. One day something new came from him, which totally shocked me. The conversation went like this:

‘Naomi, you doing meditation is pointless, because there is no way you can be enlightened.’

‘Why is that?’ I asked.

‘Because you are a woman,’ he responded.

‘That’s a pile of bullshit, who the hell told you that?’

‘My kung fu teacher,’ he responded.

‘Well he’s a one-off idiot.’

Fast forward fifteen years later, and I’m off to China on a pilgrimage with a group of fellow RZC members. An opportunity to travel to China was just too good to miss. With Andy Ferguson, author of *Zen’s Chinese Heritage: The Master’s and Their Teachings* (Wisdom Publications, 2000) and founder of South Mountain China Tours, coordinating all the scheduling and arrangements, what’s not to like? No worries, no stress, just get a visa, book a ticket and go!

A few days after leaving Beijing, we arrived at Bailin Temple. We arrived in the early evening and were told that dinner is currently been served, so hurry up, just stow the luggage and head straight for the dining hall. I know there are strict rules and customs around eating at temples, as I’ve attended a few sesshins, traveled to Japan, and stayed at Sogen-ji. Rules generally do not bother me; I rather like rules when they make sense to my brain. (Rules annoy the heck out of me when I cannot see any logic behind a rule. I don’t have to agree with the logic—just knowing that some logic exists is typically enough). Andy had a scant two minutes to ex-

plain what we needed to do, even though some people in our group had never experienced temple life or sesshin. First instruction: women eat on the left side of the dining hall and men on the right. We even had to enter through separate doors, which were about ten meters apart. Women go to the last bench, which has bowls placed out. Two bowls sitting on the front edge of the table: one bowl for rice, the other bowl for the vegetables offered. If you could not use chopsticks, well, you had to learn fast or go hungry. The food was served, and I noticed that we women were served last. This was a result of having to sit in the back row. There was plenty of food, so no worries about going hungry, but it dawned on me that gender equality has not really hit rural China yet.

Beginning the next morning, we had a day of sitting planned. I could not wait. With all the sensory overload of China, traveling jet-lag, etc., I was well ready for some sitting. Chinese style sitting starts with kinhin. You enter the meditation hall and just join in. Kinhin is very informal. Faster people walk near the altar in the center of the room and slower folks along the outside. You go at your own speed. There is no corresponding order, no line, no particular position to take in the group of walking people. When kinhin ends, the monitor strikes the floor with a wooden stick and everyone takes a seat ... but wait ... women on the left side and men on the right. After a round of sitting, everyone is back up for more kinhin. Again the floor is struck to signal the end of kinhin, when everyone is to be seated again. But this time, we just sit on the tan with our feet on the floor. It’s tea time.

Two Chinese women who were sitting in a dark corner get up and appear with tea cups and pots. First, the monitor is served, then the men. Women are served last. This happened for the next few rounds of kinhin/tea/kinhin/sitting. The entire sequence of kinhin/tea/kinhin/sitting took about an hour. For some reason, in the afternoon the tea serving ritual changed a bit. One woman served the men’s side of the zendo, and another woman served the women’s side.

After we drank our tea, we did more kinhin and then returned to sitting meditation. The two women returned to their dark corner on the women's side. However, in the back corner there were about six or seven empty places between us western women and them. They fascinated me. I could not help but keep an eye on what they were doing during kinhin and tea. During kinhin they were always on the very most outside, never daring to stray to the middle where the altar stood. They sat the whole day with us. I admit I really appreciated having their presence there. I enjoyed watching them calmly serving the tea each round. They had a grace about them that I really found pleasant and welcoming.

The next morning, wake up occurred at 4:30 AM. We had a choice to do sitting again, or attend the chanting services with the Abbot, monks, and lay practitioners. A few of us decided to attend the chanting service. In attendance at the service I noticed our tea women, wearing brown robes. It dawned on me then that they are lay practitioners who live there. After chanting, we go directly to the dining hall for breakfast. It is 6:00 AM. Meals are all well ordered. On the 'women side' of the dining hall, the first eight or nine rows are filled with monks (who are always male). The next two rows are generally empty. After that, the next few rows are the lay women practitioners in their brown robes. The last two rows consist of visiting women, which is where we sat. We were not the only visitors. Local women who lived in the small town would come in to help and do things around the temple.

At one breakfast, we western women were standing outside the dining hall waiting for the 'OK signal' for our entrance into the dining hall. An elderly man passed and told us to be quiet! Well, he made the international sign for quiet, finger to mouth and 'Shhhhhhh.' Okay, that's fine, perhaps we should not be talking—it's also against temple etiquette to chat while waiting for a meal. I was new here and I certainly didn't know the rules. I then watched him continue on his way as he passed a group of men without saying a word—they were talking just as much as we were. I was starting to get annoyed now.

What the heck, being a woman does not give others the right to tell me to be quiet, certainly not when it only applies to the female half the group. At this point, always being relegated to the back and the continuous division between men and women started to get on my nerves. I got the sense that people at the temple were making special allowances for us, as we were Westerners and from a very different cultural background and did not understand the social norms of China.

The last night at Bailin Temple we had the privilege to have tea with Ming-hi, the Abbott. There are the two women again, serving tea! I really wished I spoke some Chinese so I could talk to them, find out more about them personally and ask them why they always seemed to appear from some dark back room to serve tea. What the heck, is that all they do, they just exist to serve tea? They never utter a word and always have the same look on their faces. The tea is served at regular intervals without anyone asking for it. They just appear with tea, calmly walking through the room. If you don't cover your cup with your hand, your cup will be silently filled with tea. When one person in our group accidentally broke a cup, they swooped into action and started cleaning. The abbot hardly even took note of the event or of them. I sat there getting annoyed with this whole business of two sets of rules, one for women and the other for men. Are these women merely servants? I started to think about how they probably do most of the domestic work around the place, thus freeing up the monks to do their studies or whatever monks do there. Apart from the women serving tea and our two chaperones (one who was from Taiwan and spoke excellent English), we had little interaction with the rest of the temple residents. All of a sudden things just seemed so unfair to me. Was the attitude of my friend's kung fu teacher really representative how women are treated in in China? I sat there not really paying attention to the conversation the Abbot and Andy were having. I believe Buddha nature is not just for men—we all have it. Rise up, tell them to go make their own bloody tea! Women have more



Wayman Kubicka

ability and far more to offer, and from what I could see, these women were restricted in what they could do and how they could practice.

Then I remembered back to one of the most beautiful moments I've ever experienced, where I felt connected to everyone in the room and each person was wonderfully unique. I was overwhelmed with joy and love for each person. What was I doing at that moment? I was serving tea.

It was the final tea ceremony in a sesshin a few years back. As I handed each person their cup, I remember how free I felt. The freedom that comes with total selfless service. Serving the tea was not a chore but a selfless act of kindness that drove me deeper into practice. For me, that act of serving tea was a small piece of liberation.

It appears to me that a social movement for equal status between women and men has not hit rural China and that there is a lot of room for improvement in the general condition of most rural Chinese women. The Abbot of Bailin

Temple is using his connections to help a nunnery get money to build and expand, so I suspect that he is very forward-thinking and deeply realizes that everyone has Buddha nature. Just as other places on the planet, historical ways of thinking about women cannot be broken down in a day. You have to work within the current framework, even as you strive for change. To be fair, I have no idea what the day-to-day duties of these women actually are. But as I thought about it further and drank more tea, I was impressed with these two women's dedication to the temple and to the Dharma. If the only way for them to practice and serve the Dharma is by serving tea, that's what they are doing. Who knows, perhaps as they served the tea, they saw the Buddha nature of our group.

Naomi Wolf became a technical geek shortly after her birth. She has lived and worked in London, England, since 2003 and has been a member of RZC since 1998.



Wayman Kubicka

Lost in China

PETER GRUELICH

In 2005 I had the privilege of joining Sensei Sunyana Graef of the Vermont Zen Center and ten members of her sangha on a pilgrimage to China. As for expectations, we had none, or at least we never knew what to expect, despite having an itinerary. All we knew is that we were in southern China, traveling roughly between Shanghai (our origin) and Hong Kong (our terminus). In truth, everything was so new and so different, each temple and geographic area so unique, that by the third day of our pilgrimage, we were ‘lost’ in China in the best sense of the word.

Our guides were Ksanti and Tenzin Ling, a Toronto Buddhist couple who spoke fluent Chinese. Ksanti, a former Buddhist nun, is a professor of Buddhist studies, and owns a Buddhist antiquities shop in Toronto. Tenzin is a practicing Buddhist and a computer programmer. As Buddhists, their knowledge of Bud-

dhist, Chinese culture, temples, monasteries, and China itself made the experience richly rewarding and fulfilling. As tour guides, they knew the lay of the land. As translators, we depended completely upon them for communication as very few Chinese speak English. Trusting our travel arrangements, lodging, and meals to our two skilled guides, we pilgrims were free to immerse ourselves in a thrilling, exhilarating, and eye-opening pilgrimage experience. What follows are my impressions of portions of that trip.

Mount Jiu Hua

Mount Jiu Hua is one of the four ‘holiest’ mountains in China and thus was one of the prime stops of our pilgrimage. It is home to a number of mountain-top temples, and perhaps my favorite of all the places we visited in China.

When we arrived on Mount Jiu Hua we had

to switch from our tour bus to a local bus near the foot of the mountain because the tour bus was not equipped to make the steep mountain climb. Standing at the large, but mostly empty bus terminal, I was awed by the extreme, jagged peaks jutting out of that mountain range only a few miles away. We switched our belongings to the local bus and began our ascent. The bus droned up the mountain road making a series of switchbacks as we climbed the steep precipice. The mountain dropped off the side of the road five or six hundred feet or more at numerous points. It was a thrill going up, but I wondered if it would be terror going back down? We'd find out soon enough.



When we arrive at the edge of the village, we are forced to stop at a manned gate with blinding, bright white klieg lamps aimed at our bus. The moment is completely surreal. The female officers check papers and a tense exchange begins between the authorities and Ksanti. The dispute is over whether Sunyana-sensei and Taigen-sensei (Abbot of the Toronto Zen Center and Dharma heir of Sunyana-sensei) are to be admitted for free or not—the issue being foreign monks versus Chinese monks, the latter getting a free pass. Ksanti simply agrees to pay the overage rather than engage in a protracted battle of wits. My immediate impression is that we are on the border of Tibet, although we are really not. For the next day or so I keep thinking this is Tibet! A village high up on the side of a mountain, temples built on the edge of cliffs, a small, tight knit, seemingly self-contained community and other similarities reinforce the illusion.



Our 'monastery stay' turned out to be a stay at a less-than-stellar hotel run by the Jetavana Temple. The room and bath reek of mildew and tobacco and are not clean. The amenities are limited to a thermos of hot water and a pair of paper sandals.

Needless to say, any preconceptions of staying in a temple setting for a few days and engaging in

Buddhist training are quickly dashed. As noted previously, temples and monasteries tend to be big places and this was no exception. In effect, the temples run businesses that provide funds to enable the temples' continued operation. The fact of the matter is that they are not necessarily setup in a way that allows wayfarers to join their ranks and engage in their activities, and yet they need to provide a practical way to facilitate the constant stream of visitors that come to pay their respects. Food and lodging are provided for a fee; the rest is up to you. Most Chinese lay-Buddhists' practice consists of incense offering and monetary donations to the temples and monks. It seemed fairly obvious to us that few lay people wanted what we wanted—to participate in monk's activities.



The next morning after our 6:00 AM breakfast we hiked up the side of the mountain behind our temple, being guided by a temple monk, 'Holy Gold.' Fortunately, a mere ten years earlier, a Thai family donated the construction of steps to reach the temple building at the top of our mountain. That was no small offering, as the steps slowly wind higher and higher and the hike proves to be a formidable challenge to our group. As our group struggles up the hill, we pass workers, cigarettes hanging out of their mouths, each carrying up two bags of gravel on a wooden yoke. The sacks must weigh at least seventy-five pounds each. We have no idea what the object of their backbreaking mission is. Eventually, we reach the first temple and performed our usual pilgrim's rites of chanting and circumambulating the Buddha figures there. We continue along the ridgeline to several other temples on the mountaintop, hiking along stone steps all the time. We see the relics (i.e. mummified remains) of several notable monks and a nun, and we also see the stupa where Jizo's relics are said to be contained. Jizo, in this case, being a Korean-born monk of the Tang Dynasty, whom locals believe to be an incarnation of that Bodhisattva and who practiced zazen at this locale. The outlook from this mountain provides

a breathtaking view of the substantially higher mountains immediately beyond. These higher mountains would be our destination tomorrow.

Looking down on our village below, I am struck by what a thriving place it is. It occurs to me that anything Buddhist in China encourages tremendous economic development within the local economy. Every Buddhist site that we have visited so far has been a hubbub of activity and seems to constitute a gravitational center for thousands of people. No wonder China has given free reign to religious expression—well, free reign within certain limits anyway. It's a tremendous economic stimulus!

In the afternoon another monk gives us a tour of a different temple nearby. There we see several new figures of much better quality than the usual run of the mill knockoffs that we encountered on each temple visit here in China. These Buddha figures are also quite large at 25 feet tall or greater, and include Shakyamuni, Quan Yin, and Jizo. There is some major temple construction (or reconstruction) going on, including a huge temple hall with fifty-foot ceilings supported by thirty-six-inch diameter wood columns imported from America. There is also a partially complete plaza in front of the temple with some very new, but well-crafted, larger-than-life stone carvings of dragons and other figures, as well as a two-week-old granite elephant.

The staggering amount of energy both in terms of dollars and effort put into the renovation and creation of Buddhist sites and temples here in China signifies a profound need for these spiritual icons. And although the faith may be real enough, there also seems to be a belief that quantity rules over quality. More than fifty-years of communism and the Cultural Revolution probably did considerable harm to Chinese Buddhism—damage that may take a long long time to heal, both physically and spiritually.



After breakfast on Thursday morning we take a bus to the next mountain. Our guide monk, Holy Gold, leads the way. Once again, we ne-

gotiate hairpin turns along precipices that fall hundreds of feet below us. This mountain is much higher than the one we climbed yesterday. A cable car takes us to the top while pumping canned Chinese Muzak, to alleviate our fear of heights, I suppose. The view is spectacular even as we ignore the music. When we get to the top we walk awhile to reach the first temple. This area is just considered the plaza; the real temple lies 1.5 kilometers and eight hundred steps above. Looking up, we see the main temple high above us perched on the edge of a precipice, as are so many of the mountain temples. How could it have ever been built exactly plane with the edge of a vertical cliff hundreds of feet high?

We begin our ascent once again. This mountaintop is really crowded; how did all these people get up here in those little cable cars? As we climb, we are accosted by beggars and vendors hawking the usual temple offerings—incense, food, drinks, jewelry, trinkets, etc. Along the way, every so often there is a small plateau, which affords the opportunity for a full-blown gift shop. So, the very place that you want to rest is the very place that you are most assaulted with incessant sales pitches. The 'happy' Amitabha music—not to mention DVD videos—assault you at each shop, and even in the temples. Eventually we reach the top and perform the usual chanting service amid the din and barely controlled chaos of hordes of temple goers, worshippers, and pilgrims. We also find Jizo's cave, a narrow slit in the rock face of the mountaintop. We go to the terrace and look down. The stone rail is only three feet high. The sheer drop to the temple below is the most dramatic vertical view I have ever seen, and I have been on a few mountaintops. Spectacular!

No sooner have we settled down than we head out again, once again led by our monk guide, this time over to the Jizo Museum. Everything on Mount Jiu Hua is Jizo. The museum includes a temple, and we do our chanting. The figures here are better than most of the local temples. One feels some deeper resonance here, not to mention that it's quiet. The museum, which of course charges a fee, effectively



Andy Stern

keeps out the throngs that might otherwise be here. Just before dinner, a rainbow appears following the afternoon shower. It arches between two of the temples on the mountain that we visited yesterday.



The next day we travel to the other side of the mountain range by bus. An hour later, we visit a forlorn temple off the beaten path. Here there are no visitors other than us, and yet the geography of the area is beautiful. This temple is very poor and contains the relics of a monk. A few hundred feet away is a relatively new tramway, but it's not operating. It goes to the top of the mountain to where Hsu Yun built a Buddhist University, long abandoned. The operators turn on the tramway in hopes of our group going up. We don't. Instead, Sunyana-sensei opts to visit the temple buildings at the foot of the mountain range, and we are guided by the lone temple monk and perform our chanting. At 7:30 in the morning it's already so hot that sweat is dripping down my pant legs. After an hour and a half, we leave and return to town.

Later in the day, Taigen-sensei and I climb the mountain we climbed two days earlier with the 'thousand steps.' He counts about 1,200 steps all told. When we get to the top we are drenched in sweat. After spending an hour on top taking in the spectacular view we take the 'Funicular' back down to the village. After dinner we go to 'our' temple, the one we stayed in the other day, and listen and watch the monks chant. It is a long service with many moving parts. There is a ceremonial hierarchy amongst the assembly and some of the monks wear symbolic crowns. The chanting is varied, interspersed with drum and cymbals, and the monks with the crowns manipulate their hands and fingers in a variety of mudras. Some of the monks are easily distracted by their observers, but the ceremony is beautiful to watch. It has its own unique cadence and rhythm and a spirit born of unconditional faith. After some time, we leave.

Huangmei

The temples of the Fourth and Fifth Patriarchs are located in the county of Huangmei. After

a five-and-a-half-hour bus ride from Mount Jiu Hua, we arrive at the temple of the Fourth Patriarch, Daoxin, at Double Peaks (mountain). This place is off the beaten path; we drive through rural areas and on narrow streets lined with brick homes. This is clearly a poor area—the houses are largely dilapidated and in need of paint and structural repairs. These neighborhoods and buildings are eyesores. Adding to the sense of impoverishment is that in most places we have seen, there is always a twenty or thirty foot strip of rough gravel and dirt between the roadway and buildings, which gives the landscape an unfinished appearance. Another quirk of many homes and buildings in China is that the first floor entrances or openings are garage doors. The space being behind the garage doors is not used as a garage, but rather serves as a dining room, living quarters, convenience/grocery store or storage area. With the exception of some of the newer and/or ancient architecture, twentieth-century Chinese architecture seems to be uniformly ugly—old communist era stuff.

Although far isolated and seemingly abandoned, Daoxin is magnificent. In traditional Chinese fashion, it consists of several dozen temple buildings surrounded by a high temple wall. We ascend the main steps and enter the temple gate and begin our exploration. In fairly short order, to our surprise, we are greeted by the monk in charge and given a tour. In particular we are taken to the Chan-tang ('Zen Hall' or Zendo). This is the first time that we have seen a meditation hall in China. Not only that, this is the first time that we are given indication that anyone in China actually does zazen. The Abbot tells us that the monks sit each day for several hours, their rounds of sitting being 50-minutes followed by 10-minutes of walking zazen. We are heartened to find it here.

As we prepare to visit the stupa of the Fourth Patriarch, a violent thunderstorm sweeps in. As lightning flashes and thunder booms, we begin our own kinhin for an extended period of time. As we so do, a monk beats the wooden fish drum, signaling the beginning of their chanting service. We follow the sound to the chanting

hall, and watch and listen to the service that lasts about an hour. As the storm finally passes, we return to our bus uncertain as to whether we will climb the steps to the stupa. Sunyana-sensei is concerned that the wet steps, which go uphill a good quarter of a mile or more, may be too slippery for some in our group, so we decide to go up the road by bus.

Near the stupa, a small tractor blocks the way and we get off the bus. An original structure, the stupa is undergoing repairs. The area around it is also being reconstructed, as is the small temple above. We enter into the stupa itself, which is somewhat cone-shaped and hollow. Inside, there are several new figures of the Fourth Patriarch and his descendents. We perform a chanting service and a traditional Buddhist circumambulation of the stupa.

After we finish our chanting, Ksanti motivates us to go up to the small temple above. It's a new place and the construction is ongoing as we walk among the construction debris. A worker tells Ksanti that Daoxin's cave is in the rear, so we go to check it out. This is the original cave, we are told, where the Fourth Patriarch gave one-on-one student interviews (dokusan). The temple has been built around this small cave, and in particular, an altar has been built around the cave itself. There is a figure shrouded in cloth to protect it from damage during construction. The worker removes the shroud and shows us a beautiful marble Shakyamuni figure. It's a new figure and worth the effort we made to climb and see it, as is the cave itself.

On the ride back, we drive through the same small village streets that we passed on the way in. But now it is pitch black outside. We can't really see the shabby houses on the way back. There are no streetlights and, with few exceptions, the darkness reveals only one room with a single light in each house. Our guide tells us that electricity has come to this general area only recently—backwards and primitive regions slowly coming into modernity, one baby step at a time.



The next morning we head out on a short drive to the temple of the Fifth Patriarch, Hongren, at East Mountain. This, too, is in a remote location, although in a different direction than Double Peaks; it is only ten kilometers away. Here again, we drive up a narrow mountain road to the temple site. It seems less precarious than some of our previous excursions, or is it that we are getting use to precarious heights?

As we enter the temple, two of the most famous Zen gathas in large Chinese calligraphy are written on either side of the main entrance. The head monk, Shenxiu, wrote:

The body is the tree of Wisdom,
The mind but a bright mirror.
At all times diligently polish it,
To remain untainted by dust.

And the (soon to be) Sixth Patriarch, Huineng, responded:

The Tree of Wisdom fundamentally does not exist.
Nor is there a stand for the mirror.
Originally, there is not a single thing,
So where would the dust alight?

We enter inside and find the place where the original gathas had been written. The building and courtyard have been rebuilt, the original having been destroyed, as is so often the case. We are also shown the Sixth Patriarch's rice pounding area, a stone mortar in the floor, and are told that this, in fact, is the original.

No sooner do we make our way in than we are surprised to see a vigorous chanting service with both monks and lay followers. We stand at the rear and watch. Just then a monk, who turns out to be the Abbot, Jian Ren, motions us to join in the ceremony, and we do. After we complete the ritual bowing, we are unexpectedly ushered by the Abbot out of the temple into another building and a reception area. There are chairs and a number of small tables loaded with various gifts of one kind or another that have been given by patrons of the temple. The abbot invites us to sit

down, gives us a warm welcome, and engages us in conversation through Ksanti, our translator. As Sunyana-sensei and the Abbot express their mutual gratitude for the occasion, the Abbot's attendants bring in gifts: two Buddhist books for each member of our group. The Abbot gives Sensei a symbolic bowl of the Sixth Patriarch of Zen, and then they exchange business cards. The Abbot tells us that next year he is traveling to Miami and would love to visit Vermont, and Sunyana-sensei grants the invitation.

We are told that the seventy or so monks do some fourteen hours of zazen a day, an unbelievable amount of time on the mat. Sunyana-sensei expresses her doubt about this. In any case, not all the monks are sitting at the same time, so there is a kind of rotation of duties in effect between sitting monks and working monks. This is probably in line with traditional Buddhist practice where the practical duties of running a monastery require a good number of the monks to be working in order to keep the place going. In any case, we are duly impressed. Chinese monks doing zazen—at two temples in a row no less!

After our temple visit, our next destination is Yun-men Temple. To get there, we drive four hours to the airport at Wuhan, the provincial capital. Located on the Yangzi River, it's the largest city in central China with a population of 8.3 million. At least in the big cities the streets are clearly defined and properly striped.

From Wuhan, our short flight takes us to Guangzhou, another large city with a beautiful ultramodern airport. That evening, as we leave the Guangzhou airport on our private charter bus, I look back at the graceful terminal building; its glass and steel architectural frame lit up in the night appears like a shining crystal. As is the airport, the new roads are in excellent shape. It's a nice change from some of the rough terrain we have been on lately.

Yunmen Temple

Yunmen temple was originally built by Master Yunmen, and subsequently rebuilt by Master Hsu Yun (Empty Cloud) in 1943 at the age of

104. It took him nine years to complete the effort.

Our day begins with a 6:00 AM breakfast and shortly thereafter we are taken to a reception area to make arrangements to meet the Abbott. We are served tea and cakes even though we just ate breakfast. We go to meet the Abbot in another building and are served tea, pistachios, and fruit—remember we already just ate twice! The Abbot himself is down-to-earth and unpretentious and Sunyana-sensei, Ksanti, and the Abbot converse for a while. When our greetings are completed we are given a tour of the temple, including the temple university and Hsu Yun's memorial hall. Then we are shown the nunnery, another elaborate set of buildings with courtyards and so forth. Since this is a monastery, monks and nuns are segregated by sex. Basically, everything they do is in their own separate facilities. We are invited into the nuns' reception area. We are served tea, fruit, and cakes again. And at 11:00 AM it's time for lunch.

This temple has about 300 monks and 100 nuns, although not all of them reside at this locale. We have lunch with the monks in a large dining room with rows of long tables and benches. The elder monks enter the dining room first, followed by the child monks, and then presumably the most senior monks enter last. The monks begin with a short chant followed by meal servers walking up and down the aisles serving soup, rice, and various vegetarian dishes out of large buckets with ladles. Although there is no talking allowed, it is noisy from the scraping of the benches and so many people being crowded together. It is also hot. As we eat, the servers continue to offer food to each person and one can take as much or as little as he or she wants. There are many courses offered, far more than you can possibly eat. We are told the reason for this is that the people here are from all over China and are used to certain diets, so they need to provide options that reflect the regional eating requirements. Although eating takes place in silence, a couple of the ten- or twelve-year-old monks are goofing off. One kid-monk keeps

punching the kid next to him, who punches back, another is rolling his apples back and forth on the table, and a couple of them are secretly whispering and giggling. Many of the monks, young and old, take turns craning their necks or looking up to view the strangers in their midst. These people are really no different than anyone else.

In the afternoon we go by bus to visit Nanhua Temple. This is where the Sixth Patriarch lived and taught Zen. We are led to the temple building with his relics. Unlike the mummies, Buddhist relics bear an amazing lifelike resemblance to the actual person, and Huieng's facial expression and posture radiate gravitas and deadly seriousness. We feel his presence as he seemingly is absorbed in deep samhadi. According to Buddhist teaching, the relics of great Zen Masters are not so much artificially preserved, but rather are preserved by the samadhi power of the master himself. It is only years after the death of the master that devotees seal the self-preserved body with gold paint or other material. At least that's the belief. Presumably there is some truth to this, as several of the relics we viewed at Mount Jiu Hua, were relatively recent masters, or so we are told. In any case, the Sixth Patriarch of Zen is a seminal figure of Buddhist history and not to be taken lightly. This temple also houses the relics of two other great masters, Han-Shan and another unknown teacher, both Dharma Heirs of Huineng.



The next day we attend part of a morning sitting. Here, too, the monks sit on some kind of rotation schedule. We sit for about an hour and a half; the monks are sitting from 4:00 to 11:00 AM, more or less. There are periods of fast walking zazen followed by longer periods of sitting. Each place has a hand fan that the monks use to cool themselves off as they sit. A zendo monitor walks around occasionally hitting dozing monks once lightly on the shoulder with a short flat wooden stick. The walking zazen is very fast and makes a tight circle around the altar in the

center of the room. After about thirty minutes, they shut the door and it immediately becomes very stuffy in the already warm zendo.

Today we have lunch in the nuns' section of the temple. This is a separate facility from the monks' place. It's also much nicer. It was built in 1984 and the main building surrounds an attractive courtyard with two circular pools, lush trees, and greenery. There are beautiful color paintings depicting Shakyamuni's life story. Everything seems to be nicer and a little cleaner on the nuns' side of the monastery, that goes for lunch, too. It's quieter during lunch, the food is exceptional, and the appearance is neater and cleaner. When we leave we walk through the ex-

tensive gardens that the nuns maintain to grow food. It's quite a layout.



The notion that we stood at the very place where Yunmen (not to mention Hsu-yun) taught Zen is mind-boggling. For those of us who have sat in zazen for many years, read the historical accounts, and seen them through the lens of teisho, actually being there is a profound experience in and of itself. In truth, words fail.

Peter Gruelich is a long-time RZC member and currently struggling to get his software business off the ground.

Pilgrimage: China and Disney World

ANDY STERN

I am not generally one to be moved by historical or sacred places, so I was surprised to find myself tearing up as I stood on the grounds of the Shaolin Monastery in Sung-shan, China, before the cave where, as legend has it, Bodhidharma faced the wall for nine years. Why would someone engage in such an extreme act, anyway? The Buddha himself is said to have sat under the Bo Tree for a mere week. If your buddy announced such plans you wouldn't hesitate to say he was certifiable. Yet, as I stood at the cave entrance I sensed some deep connection there, and with the founder of Chan (Zen) Buddhism.

Put simply, what Bodhidharma sought, and found in the cave, was *direct* experience. While I am not exactly sure what direct experience is, I have exhaustive knowledge of what it is not. Put simply, direct experience is not experience that is *mediated*. The Zen notion 'to see things as they are' means to experience directly, without mediation.



Just a few days after returning from the Rochester Zen Center pilgrimage tour of China this past September, I left for another pilgrimage, one that actually conforms more to the romantic notion of pilgrimage—that is, throngs of believers with sore feet and legs from the miles of travel on foot, arriving on hallowed ground where events larger than life are honored. I refer to Walt Disney World where I traveled to celebrate my daughter's sixteenth birthday. I was struck by some surprising similarities between China and Disney, which seemed to highlight some challenges and pitfalls of pilgrimage rituals in modern times. Both the government of China and the Disney Corporation have undertaken the mediation of experience with an unprecedented thoroughness and zeal—China, for the purposes of ideology, economic efficiency, and political control, and Disney, for the purposes of entertainment and profit.

In China, foreign tours are apparently required to be led by Chinese guides, so that at each new locale during our tour another young



Andy Stern

Chinese man or woman hopped on our bus. Both these Chinese guides and Disney employees are well trained, heavily scripted, and far more intrusive than a pilgrim might prefer. For example, on one occasion in China, our guide regaled us about the beauty, history, manufacture, and subtleties of jade for forty-five minutes over the loudspeaker system. As the presentation ended, our bus arrived at the tourist jade store where prices were grotesquely bloated. The next day, as our bus approached Tiananmen Square our guide extolled the great dynasties of antiquity that had their capitols in Beijing, but uttered not a word about the elephant in the middle of Tiananmen Square. In 1989 as many as 3,000 political dissenters were massacred there, but China has never acknowledged the event as anything but a 'disturbance that was addressed' and specifically denies that any deaths occurred. Now, to Westerners this seems like pretty heavy-handed mediation of experience, but for most Chinese people, as all references to the event have been removed from school curri-

cula and history books, it probably doesn't seem like anything at all.

The only memorial in Tiananmen Square is the mausoleum of Mao Zedong, where Chinese citizens line up for blocks to pay their respects. Westerners know that Chairman Mao, among many policies of terror, engineered the deadliest famine in human history during the 'Great Leap Forward.' In 1958–1962 it is estimated that thirty million Chinese peasants were directly starved to death, and many more died in the aftermath, a casualty number exceeding that of World War I. Do the Chinese people wait in line thinking about that? As the event has also been removed from history textbooks in China, it seems likely that few, if any, even know about it. On the square the atmosphere is far more carnival than memorial. Some of us bought Chairman Mao watches from the many street vendors, with the second hand depicted as the waving arm of Mao. Fifty dollars was the asking price, but they accepted three after a little bargaining—cheaper than Mickey watches with mouse hands!

Our Chinese guides were excessively cheerful at all times, even as one informed us that during the Cultural Revolution some monks and nuns had to continue their sutra studies at home rather than at the temples (while this is probably accurate, the more complete account is that 6,000 Buddhist monasteries were destroyed, and thousands of monks and nuns executed). A similar cheeriness nearly overwhelmed at Disney. Each phone call was answered, 'Hello! Celebrate today!' and ended with, 'Have a magical day!' five, ten, fifty times a day. I myself was nearly ready to flee—cheerfully—to a cave for nine years!

In China, for three days we stayed at the Bailin temple, the largest working monastery in northern China and the Dharma Seat of Zhaozhou (Joshu). Here there are trees in a courtyard that are said to be descendants of the original cypress tree referred to by Zhaozhou in the famous koan. The monastery is very grand and quite breathtaking. There are many very large traditional buildings and meditation halls, one wallpapered with literally 10,000 gilded Buddha figures in glass cases. However, we learned that except for the Pagoda, the rest of the site had been a vacant lot only ten years ago. While it appears traditional and even ancient, in fact, there is no documentation of what the site might have looked like in the 9th century, at the time Zhaozhou taught—so the entire look and layout had to be invented. The buildings appear to be authentic vast wooden halls, but they are all of cement cast and painted to look like wood. The massive construction project was financed by the owner of Jeans West whose corporate headquarters are in Hong Kong. Instant temple! Just add water! Pure Disney!

At the entrance to Buddhist temples in China one typically first encounters a golden plump and laughing Buddha, Maitreya, sometimes twenty feet tall or larger. Equally large representatives of the Chinese Buddhist Pantheon often flank him, frequently quite animated figures that guard the temple gate. In the temple known for the burial stupa of Bodhidharma, the revered First Ancestor known for his extreme austerity, these giant, cartoonish, and brightly

colored figures made it seem more like the entrance to, well, The Magic Kingdom!

We also visited a poor rural temple in which a spring arises from the earth in the spot where, by legend, Bodhidharma touched his staff to the ground. The spring gives rise to a small stream, which winds its way off the monastery grounds onto the property of a very posh resort where it feeds a water hazard on the golf course. Disney again!



Experience can be mediated by agencies outside ourselves, such as governments, corporations, advertisers, family, teachers, etc. The nature of the mediation can be blatant or subtle, recognized or not, intended for our good, or not. However, the more pernicious mediation is not imposed by external sources but by ourselves, and it is pernicious because it is nearly always unconscious. Ideas, thoughts, feelings, and projections are examples of mediating filters through which we experience the world. For example, after we learn a new word, it is common experience to all of a sudden come across the word repeatedly. The word is not somehow appearing magically anew, but because we have changed (learned a new word) it seems to us that the world has changed (contains usage of the word). If an interaction has provoked a feeling in us—say, jealousy—we are far more likely to begin interpreting other people's behavior as expressions of jealousy.

Or, consider my experience, which I suspect is not unique as I walk down the cookie aisle in any grocery store and compare it to a walk in the woods through a glade of ferns. In the grocery store, as I look at the cookies—packages of Oreos, Lorna Doones, Fig Newtons, and Graham Crackers—I can taste them in my mind, and for nearly each brand specific associations or memories arise. In contrast, when I walk through the ferns, I may appreciate their beauty—perhaps a drop of dew on one frond—but I haven't a clue whether they are Crested Shield Fern, Water Horsetail, Quillwort, or New York Fern. No doubt, I am a far better cookie taxonomist than

fern taxonomist. For this reason I mostly feel ill at ease in nature, out of my element, separated from what is there, and far closer to blissful union in supermarkets. Part of my mediating filter allows for occasional awareness of my unease of being in nature, but nearly never any inkling of 'belonging' in the cookie aisle.

To 'see things as they are' is a miraculously subtle concept of infinite depth. How we experience the world is determined by who and how we are, conditions that easily obscure the clarity of seeing things as they are. By facing the wall in zazen we try to minimize the influence of both external and internal mediators of experience. In environments that favor passivity, lack of awareness, emotional or cognitive intensity, or especially projection, we are far less likely to have direct experience.



Any hope of direct experience during the China pilgrimage required a conscious stripping away of the layers of mediation. Strip away the gritty political realities of China, the unspeakable genocides and atrocities in its modern history, the central control of information, attitudes and

behavior, the frightening scale of the population, and the dizzying pace of economic growth and change. Strip away the Disneyesque tour bus captivity with the amplified and incessant 'guiding.' Strip away the commercialism. Strip away the near total absence of a rooted connection to the phenomenal sophistication and achievements of China's past, severed by the Cultural Revolution and leaving hardly anything authentic for a Buddhist pilgrim to directly witness. Then, strip away all our ideas about China, its past and modern presentation, no matter how compelling the ironies and paradoxes. Strip away the very ideas of Pilgrimage, Buddhism, and Zen. And as each layer is stripped away, maintain an attitude of blessing, without rancor or judgment, in order to allow a true and full release of the energetics of each layer.

Then, then, then, feel the true magic of pilgrimage. Ask Bodhidharma, in his cave facing the wall, to please move over, and make room for us next to his eternal rear end.

Andy Stern has been a member of the RZC for over ten years and serves as vice-president of the Board of Trustees. He is a neurologist in Rochester.

Countless Good Deeds.

If you're thinking about financial planning, estate planning, or both, please remember that there are myriad ways you can help the Rochester Zen Center through planned giving. The right kind of plan can help you reduce your taxes significantly while providing for a larger, longer-lasting gift to the Zen Center. Because there is a wide array of bequests, annuities, trusts, and other financial vehicles to consider, you'll want to work with your financial advisor to decide what's best for you. Long-time Zen Center member David Kernan, an attorney who concentrates his practice in tax law, has generously offered to help point you in the right direction at no charge. For more information about planned giving and David's offer, please contact the Center's receptionist.



Lou Anne Jaeger

Meeting the Ancestors

MARTHA HOWDEN

Bodhidharma, fierce, eyelidless monk,
a name, a puzzle
Huike even less connection
Zhaozhou's wu (Joshu's mu)
a very familiar sound
from a distant land
Ancestral Line a bunch of names
struggling to pronounce.

Step by step, circumambulating
Zhaozhou's burial pagoda
Lighting incense
Scent wafting through temple air
All senses alive
Meditating, cloth tucked around waist and legs,
containing Qi, I'm told
wu inscribed above our heads
Vibrations of mammoth drum and bell
and chanter penetrating sleeping mind
Chan meditation, sitting, briskly walking
Zhaozhou here.

Village women enveloping us in warm arms
Joining Amitabha chanting
Walking behind the giant Buddhas
Viewing earth broken for new Buddha Hall

Table laden with fruit offering
Hearts rich in faith filled practice
in this poor rural land
renewing Second Ancestor's village
Huike here.

Step by step up China's mountains
Entering Bodhidharma's caves
Circumambulating his burial pagoda
slowly, very slowly
Chanting Prajna Paramita
Bodhidharma, past,
present in this moment
Each of us very present in this moment
tasting water from spring opening up
where his staff touched this spot of ground
Looking down from this same mountain
Bodhidharma here.

With deepest gratitude
To my children who gave me the gift of this
trip,
To all who shared these incredible experiences,
To the Sangha whose support was with us,
To our Chinese brothers and sisters in the
Way.



From Indra's Net

The Parlor

Not all construction takes place at Chapin Mill! We've recently redone what was formerly the reception area—clearing out an ancient carpet, sanding and refinishing the floors, and laying down an oriental rug bought at Paddock's going-out-of-business sale. We also brought a beautiful couch (on loan to us from an old Center member whose grandfather made it!) in from the Mill House. The receptionist and his or her desk are now in the next room—the former 'General Office.'

Winter Term Student Trainees

There have been some new faces in the zendo of late, including our latest class of Winter Term students from Oberlin College in Ohio. As part of their education, Oberlin students pursue independent projects during the month of January, and the Center has been offering half-month training programs through the college's independent study office. Last winter, we hosted two students; this year, we've got four! A hearty welcome to Camille Brunel, Daniel Gould, Jake Kosinsky, and Max Zahn.



Tom Kowal



Chapin Mill Report

Thanks to the amazing generosity of several Center members and their families, we have money enough now to complete everything envisioned for our final phase of construction. We hope to have the teacher's quarters and dokusan room, as well as a number of new bedrooms, up and running by April sesshin. It will be a bit of a challenge, since Wayman just underwent surgery on his second knee and will be limited in what he can do for a while. Nevertheless, several members with carpentry skills have volunteered to help out. If you'd like to help with this final push, contact John Pulleyn at the Center or Wayman Kubicka at Chapin Mill.

Sweetcake Enso

Calling all sangha artists and writers! Later this year the Rochester Zen Center will be hosting a *Sweetcake Enso* art exhibit. These exhibits are traveling from zendo to zendo and include the work of some well-known exhibiting artist practitioners as well as local sangha artists. The underlying conceptual theme of the exhibit is the enso. Everyone in the Sangha is invited to submit material and will likely be included in the exhibition.

You can learn more about these exhibits on the *Sweetcake Enso* website at <http://sweetcakeenso.blogspot.com>. If you're interested in participating, please contact local sangha member Devin Wiesner at tracdev.dudley@gmail.com.



Tom Kowal

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Chapin Mill: A Celebration

With the final phase of construction of the Chapin Mill Retreat Center soon coming to a close, it's time to celebrate! This special double-issue is dedicated to everyone who helped make our country retreat center a reality, starting with Ralph Chapin and his family and continuing through 15 years of outstanding Sangha support. Sangha members are invited to submit articles, brief reflections, photographs, and illustrations to the editors, Donna Kowal and Brenda Reeb, at zenbow@rzc.org (or mail to the Center). The deadline for submission is Friday, April 1, 2011.

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