

February 2012

# SHINGI

Newsletter of the Tendai Buddhist Institute



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## February Events Calendar



**Weekly Meditation Services (WMS)** are on Wednesday evenings. They begin at 6pm with a discussion or talk (see below for this month's discussion topics). At about 7pm there is a meditation service, followed at 8pm by a potluck supper. All of Wednesday evening's events are open to the public. There is no fee, and reservations are not required.

### February Wednesday Meditations and Discussions

- 1            Tendai-shu Established in Japan Observance.** This is an opportunity to recognize our root school and recall why it is important to Buddhism as it expands in the West.
  
- 8            What is prayer in Buddhadharma?** If there is no monotheistic god in Butsudo, to whom or what do we pray? Or is there another conceptual framework that we should be addressing? We will examine this aspect of our practices.
  
- 15          Vernacular Buddhadharma East and West!** When discussing Buddhist philosophy and practices I often make a distinction between orthodox and vernacular Buddhist faith and practices. We will develop the idea while we ask an important ancillary question -is there a vernacular Buddhadharma outside of Asia?
  
- 22          On Developing a Tendai Elevator Speech.** A number of people have asked 'what is a short and informative response to friends and relatives who ask

about 1) Buddhism and 2) Tendai. I don't have a stock answer myself. We will study this together.

**29 Ownership and the Buddhadharma.** Non-attach- ment is a fundamental tenet of Buddhist teachings. Therefore, is ownership an impediment to awakening? Should we divest all of our material possessions? We will examine ownership and its impact on living a Buddhist life.

## Other Events

**4 Sutra Class and Morning Service, 8:30 - 10:30 AM - *Vajrachedika Prajnaparamita Sutra (The Diamond Sutra)*.** Please obtain the following book for this class: *The Diamond Sutra: Transforming the Way We Perceive the World*, by Mu Soeng; Wisdom Publications (2000). It contains one of the earliest Mahayana Sutras and is considered by many scholars as foundational to subsequent Mahayana thought. We are moving along at a breakneck pace. Don't miss this scintillating class!

## Notes

**Food Pantry at Jiunzan Tendai-ji** - The number of families who now depend on the food pantry has grown as a direct result of the continued economic recession. There are fewer and fewer resources going to more and more people. Please bring non-perishable food items to the Tendai Buddhist Institute on Wednesdays. We contribute these items to the Chatham Silent Food Pantry.

### Jushoku's Meanderings



The centerpiece of the Tendai Daily Service is the sutra. Before reciting the *sutra* we chant *Kaikyoge*. It is a short recognition of the importance of the teaching . . .

*"Such an unsurpassed, marvelous teaching is rare to meet even if we count the many lifetimes we have waited. Now I have a chance to discern and listen to the Dharma. I wish to understand the real intention of the Tathagata."*

It is the second and third sentences on which I would briefly like to focus, "Now I have a chance to discern and listen to the *Dharma*. I wish to understand the real intention of the *Tathagata*."

'Discern' is defined in *Merriam-Webster* as, 1:a : to detect with the eyes, b : to detect with senses other than vision, and 3: to come to know or recognize. In other words the dharma or sutra that is recited is not just a text read as a matter of belief; it is a document that is intended to be examined carefully, with both the intellect as well as the senses. We place

special emphasis on *sutra* as text which may contain wisdom, and perhaps even convey revered meaning. Meaning which is not to be taken at face value, but scrutinized.

The last sentence - "I wish to understand the real intention of the *Tathagata*" - speaks of understanding, not believing, nor accepting. It also addresses understanding the real intention of the Awakened One. Do we take these words to be literally spoken by Shakyamuni Buddha, the historical figure? No. It recognizes the once-removed nature of *sutra*.

*Sutra* is a human device that attempts to convey the wisdom of Shakyamuni Buddha and other awakened beings that came after. We are not reading what Shakyamuni Buddha really said. Shakyamuni died long before any of his teachings were committed to writing; we can't possibly know what he really said. We want to know what he meant. What was his intention?

Further, we accept that all writings, not the least of which *sutra*, are open to widely different interpretations. We want to see beyond such delusion. Let the words we read give us insight into the nature of reality, not because of attribution to a divine source, but because they speak to our unconscious mind as awareness.

As I recite that simple phrase - "I wish to understand the real intention of the *Tathagata*" - I am opening my heart/mind to delve further into the wisdom conveyed by the sages. The very act of reading, chanting, and thinking about the *sutra*, brings me closer to *bodhicitta*, of all sentient beings.

Gassho . . .

Monshin, Shumon, and Koki

**Our Other Sangha:**

[Blue Mountain Sage Sangha--Denver, CO](#)

[Celestial Drum Sangha--Indian Lake, NY](#)

[California Tendai Buddhist Monastery](#)

[Tendai Denmark](#)

[Flowing Waters--Ottawa, Ontario, Canada](#)

[Great River Ekayana Sangha--Arlington, VA](#)

[Nagado Sangha--Springfield, MA](#)

[Nishi Sangha--Albany, NY](#)

[Red Maple Sangha--Renfrew, Ottawa, Canada](#)

The Third Jewel--Where sangha members share ideas, poetry, and art to enrich everyone's Buddhist practice.

An exciting time is coming! Devoted sangha member Peter Donahoe will be taking over the editing and production of the *Shingi*. His thoughtfulness, creativity, and conscientiousness will prove a wonderful gift to us all. Thank you, Peter; and thank you, all, for the opportunity to help bring the *Shingi* to you over the last couple years.

Gassho . . . [Koho](#)

**Call for material:** Please [send the Shingi](#) photographs, artwork, poems, book reviews, articles, etc. that you have created that you consider an outgrowth of your Buddhist practice or that you think reflect Buddhist themes, ideas, questions, etc. If submitting an image, you may wish to include a short statement sharing some of your thoughts to accompany it.

**Questions? Comments? Suggestions? Contact . . .**

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