



Monthly Bulletin

Tendai-shu New York Betsuin

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Meanderings

AT THE monthly Saturday morning class at Tendai Buddhist Institute, we are currently reading the *Lankavatara Sutra*. Written in the 4th century C.E., this Mahayana sutra is especially appreciated by the Zen schools of Buddhism.

The early chapters are an exposition of the *Yogachara* School of Buddhist philosophy, which has been dubbed the 'Mind-Only' School. Central to this thinking is the view that the world as we know it is produced by the mind. One's ordinary mental functioning is dualistic in nature, objectifies phenomenon through discrimination and conceptualization (thinking), and gives rise to the notion or belief of an independent 'self' among a world of independently existing objects. This process leads to clinging or attachment to things and ideas perceived as 'good' or pleasant, and avoidance of that seen as 'bad' or unpleasant, as well as attachment to one's 'self' as a separate, independently existing entity. This process of objectification and clinging is at the root of human suffering (dissatisfactoriness) in life since all things are, in truth, dependently arising, interdependent, transient, and empty (of independent existence).

"My teaching transcends the whole conception of being and non-being; it has nothing to do with birth, abiding and destruction; nor with existence and non-existence. I teach that the multitudinous-ness of objects have no reality in themselves but are only seen of the mind and therefore, are of the nature of Maya (illusion) and a dream. I teach the non-existence of things because they carry no signs of any inherent self-nature. It is true that in one sense they are seen and discriminated by the senses as individualized objects; but in another sense, because of the absence of any characteristic marks of self-nature, they are not seen but only imagined. In one sense they are graspable, but in another sense, they are not graspable". (Lankavatara Sutra, BIONA Version, page 11).

As a psychiatrist, I am familiar with and utilize what has been called a 'constructivist' view of reality in a particular form of psychotherapy known as Brief Problem-Focused Therapy. Constructivism asserts that the reality we know is constructed by human thought, and does not exist independently. The meanings of things and phenomena are constructed by our opinions and beliefs. This philosophy coincides with the *Yogachara* teaching of the *Lankavatara Sutra* that the world is produced by mind. The premise of Problem-Focused Therapy is that problems and suffering people bring to therapy arise from their points of view, beliefs and conceptualization regarding the nature of the problem, together with the repetitive, ineffective actions taken by the client (or others) which while intended to resolve the problem in fact only perpetuate it. "Doing the same damn thing over and over, expecting different results." The therapist's task is to influence the 'viewing' of the problem, and/or the 'doing' of the perpetuating behaviors, creating a change in the 'vicious cycle' and resolving the problem. While more limited in scope than the Buddha, the therapist operates on the principle that 'reality is a construct of the mind', and positive change in suffering can occur with a different view of the problem and different actions taken in the problematic situation.

Returning home after sutra class, pondering the teachings of 'Mind Only' philosophy, I had a cup of coffee in our solarium. The sun came out on this cloudy day, illuminating a shimmering red male Cardinal pecking at seeds on the ground beneath the bird feeder. I had a sudden sense of wonder and joy on seeing this magnificent bird – experiencing the 'suchness' or 'Ah This' of the scene. I spontaneously exclaimed, "What a beautiful bird!," and watched the conceptual/discriminating mind emerge – concepts of beauty in nature, naming the bird and its color and gender. This was quickly followed by comparison of the Cardinal to the obnoxious, squawking blue jay gobbling up the seed in the bird feeder and keeping smaller birds at bay. Pondering my mind-generated perceptions and discriminations of this scene, I 'realized' that to the female Cardinal perched nearby, the male's bright red color is probably a signal for mating, and to the hawk who has been frequenting the feeding area, the red bird could be a signal for 'lunch'.

The world as we know it is produced by the mind.

Gassho,
Mushin



Jiunzan Tendaiji and Mahasangha

May Events

❖ *Meditation Meetings every Wednesday 6 p.m., discussion, Meditation Service and pot luck dinner*

Lectures and discussions for the month of May will center on *Shige – The Four Vows*. One of the hallmarks of Japanese Tendai Buddhism is the variety of practices in addition to meditation. In some cases, these practices are an adjunct to the meditations, enhancing the meditation experience. Many traditional practices have not been available to lay practitioners, not because they are restricted to the ordained, but because in Asian cultures the laity did not have the time or literacy to participate. Today in the West many people have the opportunity to be involved in these very valuable trainings. The Four Vows of *Shige* are 1) Invocation, 2) Joyfulness, 3) Transference of Merit, and 4) Making the Vow. *Shige* is the seventh section of the *Hokke Sembo* or *Morning Lotus Repentance Service*. From my perspective it is an exquisite section that helps bring a focus to mindfulness. Each week we will discuss one of the vows and how to incorporate the collection into one's practice. Some people may choose to incorporate *Shige* into their meditations, while others may not. Everyone can have deeper insight into the Dharma through the discussion.

❖ 5 **Morning Service and Sutra Class**, 8:30 a.m.–10:30 a.m. The class begins at the conclusion of the service, about 9 a.m.

We are studying the *Lankavatara Sutra*, chapter four. The sutra can be found on-line in its entirety at http://www.buddhisminformation.com/lankavatara_sutra.htm.

❖ During May and June we have another young Tendai priest, **Gikyo Sugitani**, staying with us at the Tendai Buddhist Institute. He is attending college in Michigan and wanted to spend some time observing Western Tendai. Welcome Gikyo-san when you meet him.

❖ **Food Pantry at Jiunzan Tendai-ji**. Please consider those who suffer the most during lean times. Bring non-perishable food items to the Tendai Buddhist Institute on Wednesdays. We contribute these items to the Chatham Silent Food Pantry.

❖ Please send your articles, sangha news, artwork and photographs for the June issue of *Shingi* to fitterer@acmenet.net by May 15.

Washington Tendai Sangha

❖ *First through fourth Tuesday nights of each month from 7 pm to 9 pm in The Walden Room of The Unitarian Universalist Church of Arlington, located at 4444 Arlington Boulevard, Arlington VA 22204. The Walden Room is located downstairs. There is no Sangha meeting on the fifth Tuesday of any month.*





Shaka-do at Hiei-zan

Celestial Drum Tendai Sangha

❖ *Meditation Service and Dharma discussion, every Monday, 6:30 p.m., introductory meditation instruction offered at 6:15 p.m., in Indian Lake, NY. For directions email fitterer@acmenet.net.*

May Events

Parables of the Lotus Sutra. The *Lotus* is the foundational sutra of Tendai, with its explication of the harmony of all the teachings. Using parables and stories, this sutra relates the themes of “skillful means”: that the many teachings reflects the varied capacities of listeners to understand and practice the Dharma; of *ekayana*, or “one vehicle”: that all the many practices lead to Buddhahood for all; and of the “eternal life-span of the Tathagata”: that the Buddha is not merely an historical figure who lived and died 2,500 years ago, but is ever present. We will explore and reflect on these parables each Monday evening in the coming weeks.

❖ **Looking Ahead:** Later this summer we will offer a weekly seminar on the development of Mahayana Buddhism in India and its transmission into China. This period of Buddhist history is especially interesting since it was at this time that many of the teachings and practices we take part in today began to take shape. Additionally, the evolution of a true Chinese form of Buddhism from Indian roots reflects many of the same cultural issues we are experiencing today as Buddhism enters the West from Asia. Looking back helps to give us a clearer perspective in looking into the future. If you are interested in taking part, inquire regarding the reading list and meeting times.

Danish Lotus Sangha

❖ *Meditation Service, every Thursday, 9:30–10:30 a.m.*
Meditation Service and discussion, every Tuesday, 7:30–9:30 p.m.

June Events

Classes in **Beginning Meditation** continue on Thursdays, 7:30–8:30 p.m.

15–18 **Retreat**

25 **Advanced Lay Training**, Open meditation for all sangha members, 10 a.m.–1 p.m.

Nishi Sangha

❖ *Meditation Service and Dharma Discussion every Tuesday, 6 p.m., Friends’ Meeting House, Madison Avenue, Albany, NY*

May Events

- 6 Incense Offerings and *Visakha* Celebration
- 13 Money, Sex, War, Karma: Notes for a Buddhist Revolution
- 20 Work at Regional Food Bank
- 27 *The Lankavatara Sutra*



May 2008

Tendai Buddhist Institute

Tendai-shu New York Betsuin and Karuna Tendai Dharma Center www.tendai.org



Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
				1 Danish Lotus Sangha Meditation Service Danish Lotus Sangha Meditation for Beginners	2	3 Jiunzan Tendaiji Class
4	5 Celestial Drum Meditation Service <i>New Moon</i>	6 Nishi Sangha Meditation Service Danish Lotus Sangha Meditation Service Washington Tendai Sangha Meditation Service	7 Jiunzan Tendaiji Meditation Service	8 Danish Lotus Sangha Meditation Service Danish Lotus Sangha Meditation for Beginners	9	10
11	12 Celestial Drum Meditation Service <i>First Quarter Yakushi Nyorai Day</i>	13 Nishi Sangha Meditation Service Danish Lotus Sangha Meditation Service Washington Tendai Sangha Meditation Service	14 Jiunzan Tendaiji Meditation Service	15 Danish Lotus Sangha Meditation Service, Danish Lotus Sangha Meditation for Beginners <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; width: fit-content; margin: 5px auto;">Danish Lotus Sangha Retreat</div>	16	17
18 <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; width: fit-content;">Danish Lotus Sangha Retreat</div>	19 Celestial Drum Meditation Service	20 Nishi Sangha Meditation Service Danish Lotus Sangha Meditation Service Washington Tendai Sangha Meditation Service <i>Full Moon</i>	21 Jiunzan Tendaiji Meditation Service	22 Danish Lotus Sangha Meditation Service Danish Lotus Sangha Meditation for Beginners	23	24
25 Danish Lotus Sangha	26 Celestial Drum Meditation Service	27 Nishi Sangha Meditation Service Danish Lotus Sangha Meditation Service Washington Tendai Sangha Meditation Service	28 Jiunzan Tendaiji Meditation Service <i>Last Quarter</i>	29		

Jiunzan Tendaiji Higashi Tendai Sangha Nishi Tendai Sangha Danish Lotus Sangha Nyoirin-An
 Washington Tendai Sangha Celestial Drum Tendai Sangha