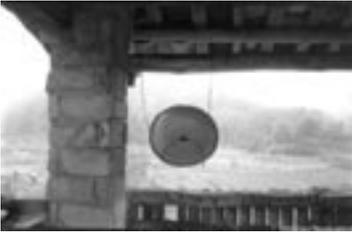


2008



TENDAI BUDDHIST INSTITUTE

SHINGI

Meanderings

SEPTEMBER is a special month. The summer has passed and the swallows, bats and other creatures have returned to their southern range. As the days get shorter, the leaves begin to change color, we are preparing for a shift of seasons and a shift in our daily routines. September also hosts *O-Higan*, which is the week around the autumnal equinox, this year is from the 19th through the 25th. It celebrates the spiritual move from the world of dissatisfaction with one's existence to the world of awakening to the nature of reality. We see the world of *samsara* (cycle of rebirth) as one shore and the world of awakening as the other shore. The practices of the Six Paramitas, or Six Perfections, are the Buddhist principles which clear our minds of obscurations and allow us to live our lives with greater grace, dignity and clarity.

Nature is highlighted during *O-Higan*; the equinox, the change of seasons, the cyclical nature of existence. We can see the concepts of rebirth and karma inherent in the continual cycling of seasons. There is an agricultural aspect of *O-Higan*. In spring it is the period before planting after the long winter, in the fall it is a period that coincides with the end of the harvest. A time to reflect on our lives and appreciate the gifts we have received. Due to the equal length of light and dark, it is felt that the spiritual world and the material world are in close proximity. It is a time to commune with one's ancestors and to remember the recently departed.

A philosophic basis for the observance of this period is the *Alagaddupama Sutta*, best known as the Discourse on the Simile of the Snake, in the *Majjhima Nikaya* (Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha) of the Pali canon. Among the many lessons found in this short sutra we are cautioned not to base our lives sensual gratification, to learn the Dharma for the sake of bringing about happiness to ourselves and others, and that discontentedness arises from our attachments to self and permanence. It is in this sutra that we also read the Simile of the Raft. This teaches us that the Buddhist Path is like a raft which carries us from the shore of fear, anxiety and delusion (discontentedness) across a great expanse of water to the shore of liberation from *Dukkha* (unsatisfactoriness or suffering).

In the Mahayana, *Ullambana Sutra*, we see a further elaboration of what becomes known as *O-Higan*. The term *ullambana* is translated as 'deliverance from suffering,' Shakyamuni Buddha instructs his disciple Mahāmaudgalyāyana to obtain liberation for his mother, who had been reborn into the *preta* (hungry ghosts) realm, by making food and other offerings and reciting certain mantra.

To quote the sutra,

"At that time the Buddha commanded the assembled Sangha of the ten directions to recite mantras and vows for the sake of the donor's family, for parents of seven generations.

After practicing *dhyana* concentration, they then may accept the food. When first receiving the basin, place it before the Buddha in the stupa. When the assembled sangha has finished the mantras and vows, then they may accept it.

At that time the bhikshu Maudgalyayana and the assembly of great Bodhisattvas were all extremely delighted and the sorrowful sound of Maudgalyayana's crying ceased."

Quote taken from the Buddhist Text Translation Society version.

More elaborate instructions from Shakyamuni Buddha were performed in China and then passed on throughout East Asia. An interesting side note is that Taoists in China originally celebrated the Ghost festival (*Zhongyuan Jie*) at exactly the same time. The parallel was striking, both Taoists and Buddhists performed rituals to alleviate and transform the suffering of the deceased so that the ancestor would be absolved of their past transgressions. The Ghost Festival and the *Ullambana* Festival at the vernacular level merged into a single observance sometime during the Tang Dynasty (616-907 C.E.). In the last few centuries the practice, as Ancestor Day, spread to South Asia and is now also a Theravada (*Continued on page 2*)

Monthly Bulletin

Tendai-shu New York Betsuin

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Jiunzan Tendaiji and Mahasangha

September Events

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

September Meditation Meeting discussions will revolve around the Six Paramitas and *O-Higan*. By practicing the six perfections, even a little every day, we will begin to see the nature of reality, gradually attain spiritual wisdom, and steadily we will awaken to perfect compassion, perfect loving-kindness, perfect equanimity, perfect sympathetic joy. This is our true inner-being, our true Buddha-nature.

3 Paramitas 1) *Dana* (generosity) and 2) *Shila* (morality and ethics)

10 Paramitas 3) *Kshanti* (patience) and 4) *Virya* (forbearance)

17 *O-Higan*—the background and observance of this very important time in the Buddhist calendar.

24 Paramitas 5) *Dhyana* (meditation) and 6) *Prajna* (wisdom)

❖ **6 Morning Service and Sutra Class** We are studying the *Lankavatara Sutra*, Chapter 6. These classes examine the teachings, context and lessons to be learned the specific sutra. The sutra itself is worthy of our attention, but, just as important are the discussions that arise out of the text itself in often surprising ways. The classes can be taken by anyone at any level of practice and understanding. The sutra can be found on-line in its entirety at, http://www.buddhistinformation.com/lankavatara_sutra.htm

❖ **19–21 O-Higan Retreat.** The Autumn O-Higan retreat will be devoted to **Living a Sacred Purposeful Life**. We begin at 7 p.m. on Friday evening the 19th and will end about 1 p.m. on Sunday the 21st. The teachings will come from a number of sources and will deal with issues revolving around how to bring Buddhist teachings into our everyday world. The practices will include shikan meditation, devotion and shakyo. On Sunday during Mahasangha Sunday Service we will prepare and conduct a *Segaki-e*.



A specially constructed Segaki-dan will be arranged for the service on Mahasangha Sunday.

❖ **21 Mahasangha Sunday.** All sangha members are encouraged to participate in a meditation service and a *Segaki* ceremony. If you have had a death close to you in the last year, and/or wish to remember someone who has died in years before please send me their names so we can include them in the service. Please bring a food item that the person enjoyed with you to the service.

❖ **Food Pantry at Jiunzan Tendai-ji.** Bring non-perishable food items to the Tendai Buddhist Institute this month. We contribute these items to the Chatham Silent Food Pantry. The first of the Six Paramitas is *Dana*. This is a 'perfect' opportunity for practice.

❖ **Notes on Practice for September:** Examine and consciously be aware of the six Perfections—each day.

The Six Perfections:

1. *Dana* (Generosity) Give of oneself, time, money and heart.
2. *Shila* (Ethics and morality)
3. *Kshanti* (Patience)
4. *Virya* (Energy)
5. *Dhyana* (Concentration and Contemplation)
6. *Prajna* (Wisdom)

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

Meanderings (Continued from page 1)

observance.

Originally practiced for a three day period around the 15th day of the seventh month of the lunar calendar the dates of observance now vary from place to place. It is celebrated in July in parts of Japan, more typically August in other parts of Japan and Asia, and September in yet other areas. It is worth noting that this is considered to be a joyful period because at the time of Shakyamuni Buddha the bhikkhus emerged from their three month retreat during that period thus many practitioners were considered to have attained awakening and Shakyamuni Buddha was very pleased. We have chosen to make autumn O-Higan the time of the observance here in the North America.

On Mahasangha Sunday there will be a brief *Segaki-e*, an esoteric ceremony based upon sutra and folk practices, for the benefit of those who have died during the previous year, a remembrance of our parents and ancestors and a seasonal renewal of our practices. This month is an active period for spiritual discovery. Join us in the many activities, as a means of enhancing your spiritual life.

Gassho,
Monshin



Shingi

Nishi Sangha

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

September Events

- 2 Four Noble Truths
- 9 Lotus-like
- 16 Tendai Ritual
- 23 *Juhachido* Ceremony (No meditation this evening only)
- 30 What is "Money"?

❖ Arrangements are complete for Koyo Susan Spang to perform the *Juhachido* ceremony on September 23 at Nishi Sangha. This is the first performance of the ceremony in the Albany area and everyone is looking forward to the beautiful ritual. Many thanks to Koyo for her dedication and hard work.

Danish Lotus Sangha

September Events

Meditation service and dharma talk every Tuesday at 7:30 p.m.

Meditation every Thursday at 9:30 a.m.



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.*

September Events

This month we will discuss the life of Shakyamuni Buddha; his birth and early life in his father's palace, his decision to leave home, his 6 years of searching and practice culminating in his awakening, and his ensuing 45 years of teaching and practice. Through these stories we learn how we may replicate his experience and apply his lessons in our own lives today.

There will be no meditation service on September 1, Labor Day.

Washington Tendai Sangha

❖ *The Washington Tendai Sangha meets on Tuesday nights at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Arlington, Virginia. See our updated website at www.washingtontendai.blogspot.com for the address and directions. We meet downstairs in The Walden Room. Weekly meditation services begin at 7 p.m. All are welcome*

Kaikyoge Verse Before Opening the Sutra

*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.*

Each week *Kaikyoge* is recited in the Meditation Service just before the Heart Sutra. It serves to remind us that we are fortunate to be able to hear and practice the Dharma. The familiar Buddhist tale relates the story of the sea turtle who swims the oceans of the world. On the surface of the oceans drifts a single ring of wood. One time, as the old turtle comes up for a breath he surfaces in the middle of that ring. What are the chances of that? How many times has that turtle come to the surface? And now he happens to come up through the center of the single ring of wood! The story sums up by comparing the chance of finding yourself in the center of the Dharma with the turtle's chance of coming up through the center of the ring.

While it might seem that the Dharma is everywhere now in bookstores, on the web, in the popular media, it is still difficult for many to find an opportunity to practice in your own community with a group of like-minded folks with an authentic teacher. It is still difficult for many to carve out the time from busy lives to devote to study and practice. It is still difficult to break old conditioned ways of being in the world. It is still difficult to see Dharma-nature that is right in front of your eyes.

Implicit within the text of *Kaikyoge* is a sense of gratitude for obtaining this opportunity in acknowledgement of just how rare such an opportunity is. In the *Lotus Sutra*, Shakyamuni's disciples respond to his prediction that they will become fully enlightened Buddhas by saying, "We have heard his voice, Giving the prediction of utmost ease. Rejoicing in this unprecedented experience, We bow to the Buddha whose wisdom is immeasurable."

Creating a strong vow to "understand the real intention of the Tathagata" can energize and sustain your practice. By acknowledging just how rare this opportunity is and using it to the fullest leads to attaining the fruits of the practice. Too often we focus on what we don't have—a recipe for continued suffering. By expressing gratitude for what we *do* have we can, like Shakyamuni's disciples in the *Lotus Sutra*, "universally rejoice in body and mind."

Gassho,
Seishin



September 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	2 Nishi Sangha Meditation Service Danish Lotus Sangha Meditation Service Washington Tendai Sangha Meditation Service	3 Jiunzan Tendaiji Meditation Service	4 Danish Lotus Sangha Meditation Service	5 <i>New Moon</i>	6 Jiunzan Tendaiji Morning Service and Sutra Class	
7 <i>First Quarter</i>	8 Celestial Drum Meditation Service	9 Nishi Sangha Meditation Service Danish Lotus Sangha Meditation Service Washington Tendai Sangha Meditation Service	10 Jiunzan Tendaiji Meditation Service	11 Danish Lotus Sangha Meditation Service	12 <i>Yakushi Nyorai Day</i>	13	
14	15 Celestial Drum Meditation Service <i>Full Moon</i>	16 Nishi Sangha Meditation Service Danish Lotus Sangha Meditation Service Washington Tendai Sangha Meditation Service	17 Jiunzan Tendaiji Meditation Service	18 Danish Lotus Sangha Meditation Service	19 <table border="1" style="margin-left: auto; margin-right: auto;"><tr><td>O-Higan</td></tr></table>	O-Higan	20
O-Higan							
21 Mahasangha Sunday <table border="1" style="margin-left: auto; margin-right: auto;"><tr><td>O-Higan Retreat</td></tr></table>	O-Higan Retreat	22 Celestial Drum Meditation Service <i>Autumnal Equinox Last Quarter</i>	23 Nishi Sangha Meditation Service Danish Lotus Sangha Meditation Service Washington Tendai Sangha Meditation Service	24 Jiunzan Tendaiji Meditation Service	25 Danish Lotus Sangha Meditation Service	26	27
O-Higan Retreat							
28 Danish Lotus Sangha Advanced Lay Training	29 Celestial Drum Meditation Service <i>New Moon</i>	30 Nishi Sangha Meditation Service Danish Lotus Sangha Meditation Service Washington Tendai Sangha Meditation Service					

Jiunzan Tendaiji Nishi Tendai Sangha Danish Lotus Sangha
Washington Tendai Sangha Celestial Drum Tendai Sangha