



Meanderings

*“Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva doing deep prajna paramita,
Clearly saw emptiness of all five conditions
Thus completely removing misfortune and pain...”*

So begins the *Heart Sutra* that we’ve all chanted innumerable times. “Completely removing misfortune and pain” sounds pretty appealing, but just what is it that Avalokiteshvara is *doing* when he’s “doing deep prajna paramita”? While the sutra continues on with an expression of the insight attained into the nature of *shunyata* (emptiness), it provides little hint as to the method of *how* to attain this insight.

Going to the typical Buddhist glossary and looking up “prajna” will generally provide a definition such as “wisdom; knowledge of truth associated with Awakening; liberating wisdom into the true nature of existence”. Looking up “Prajna Paramita” may reveal a definition such as “Perfection of Wisdom; the final stage of the Six Perfections of the Bodhisattva Path; designation of the early Mahayana Sutras”. This, likewise, provides little clue as to method of Prajna Paramita.

Prajna has taken many subtle shifts in meaning over the past 2,000 years as various commentators have examined and experienced it. Likewise, there are many forms of meditation on “emptiness” that could be considered “doing deep prajna paramita.” To find the original meaning, however, we must become familiar with the milieu in which it developed. Early India had already developed a sophisticated system of logic, analysis and debate and it was in this context that the Buddhadharma was investigated. Early Buddhists, in the *Abhidharma* texts, extensively examined phenomena in light of Shakyamuni’s teaching on ‘dependent origination’ or ‘conditioned arising’ and in various ways came up with lists of what they considered as fundamental elements of reality; those that cannot be further broken down into smaller parts.

Others, though, continued this examination and found that there were no fundamental elements that existed independently, but that every last phenomenon existed only conditionally. The Indian monk Nagarjuna who lived in the 2nd or 3rd century C.E. is most closely associated with the Prajna Paramita literature and with the development of the Madhyamaka (Middle Way) school. In his most important work *Mulamadhyamakakarika* (Verses on the Middle Path) he uses relentless logic and analysis to demonstrate that all phenomenal reality only exists dependent upon ever-changing supporting causes and conditions. It has no inherent, permanent “essence”.

This morning I had pancakes for breakfast. “Pancakes” are conventionally considered to be an independent object separate from, say, “dirt”. I definitely would not want to sit down to a plate of “dirt” for breakfast so the two must be separate and independent. Yet, as we examine “pancakes” we find nothing that is enduring, permanent, unchanging. There are only various components that have been joined together at this moment in time. “Pancakes” exist on the plate before me only because of myriad supporting conditions. Among others, these include “flour”, which comes from “wheat”, which draws up “elements” from the “soil” of a North Dakota farm. Eliminate any of these conditions and there are no “pancakes”. I’ve since eaten the “pancakes”. They existed only a brief moment in time, from griddle to plate to mouth, so “pancakes” are not enduring any more than any of the previous conditions that made up the “pancakes”. The “pancakes”, the “flour”, the “wheat”, the “elements”, the “dirt” of the North Dakota farm now are incorporated into my body making up my muscle and bone—my “form” to use the language of the *Heart Sutra*. My body has no independent existence. It exists only because of conditions, such as “pancakes” for breakfast, which support life.

The *Heart Sutra* mentions four conditions in addition to “form” that together create the appearance of our self as a seemingly independent being. Because we have a physical body (form) that has five sense organs through which we perceive information from the environment, we have “sensation”.

We have a mind that names and classifies the sensations (“conception”). Another aspect of mind expresses preferences for some conceptions and dislike for others (“discrimination”). Lastly, we are conscious of all this occurring (“awareness”). *(continued on page two)*

Monthly Bulletin

Tendai-shu New York Betsuin

PO Box 323
Canaan, NY 12029 USA
518-392-7963

Tendai@msn.com
www.tendai.org

©2008 Tendai Buddhist Institute

Jiunzan Tendaiji and Mahasangha

October Events

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

Discussions: We are continuing our series on 'Basic Buddhism' for the month of October. We are addressing the why, how, where, of a Buddhist Practice. We have a number of people who are just starting their Buddhist explorations. This series is intended to be helpful to them. Then there are other people who have a long standing practice. For them it is a refresher that we all periodically need. Amazing as it may sound there are people who have been in a Buddhist practice for many years and they discover, through a series like this, that they had misconceptions that are banished, or had slipped into complacency and are reinvigorated.

- 1 Buddhism – Philosophy, Religion or Lifestyle
- 8 What is a Buddhist Practice?
- 15 Establishing and Maintaining your Practice
- 22 Finding the Right Spot for Practice at Home

Meanderings (Continued from page one)

Just as "pancakes" only conventionally and momentarily exist, but have no enduring essence, we, too, only conventionally and momentarily exist. Likewise, we have no enduring essence.

While ordinary reality is true in this conditional sense (*i.e.*, we're not figments of our imagination) there is nothing that can be grasped and held on to as ultimately 'real' or permanent including our self. This is the idea of 'emptiness' or *shunyata*, which means 'empty of self-nature'. Nagarjuna demonstrates that nothing can ever positively be stated to exist outside of its supporting conditions. And since words, concepts, ideas, or theories (even his own) are the stuff of conventional reality, they are not ultimately true. Even "emptiness" is empty of self-nature and is not to be understood as some formless essence underlying conventional reality. As one wag put it, it demonstrates that the Ultimate Truth is there is no Ultimate Truth. Nagarjuna goes on to demonstrate that since conventional truth is conditioned and ultimate truth is conditioned, they are both one and the same.

Prajna, then, in its early Indian context, is wisdom that is attained through meditative analysis. We generally now think of meditation as something that excludes cognitive or intellectual activity (and how this understanding came to be is a story for another day), but here it uses the intellect to transcend the intellect. This form of meditation consists in one-pointed analysis of the conditioned nature of all phenomena and particularly those "five conditions" which gives rise to the sense of independent and enduring self. One comes to a conceptual understanding of the conditioned nature of conventional reality: everything that can be observed or imagined exists only because of supporting conditions so is empty of any essence or self-nature. Through continued absorption in meditation, the duality between the one who meditates and the contents of the meditation dissolves and one comes to the direct, non-cognitive, non-intellectual, non-

29 Buddhist Perspectives on Politics and Nation

❖ 4 **Morning Service and Sutra Class** We are studying the *Lankavatara Sutra*, Chapter 7. 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

❖ Recent Events

Mahasangha Sunday, September 23rd, was the conclusion of the Fall O-Higan Retreat as well as the 2008 Segaki Ceremony. The retreat was reserved by the maximum number of people we could comfortably accommodate. It was a wonderful opportunity for new people, as well as more advanced Sangha, to share their practices, questions and experiences on a magnificent week-end. People came from around the States, as well as Canada and Japan.

(Continued on page three)

conceptual experience of emptiness which is initial Awakening. One gains understanding of the ultimate truth through examining the nature of conventional truth. Nagarjuna writes:

*Without a foundation in the conventional truth,
The significance of the ultimate cannot be taught.
Without understanding the significance of the ultimate
Liberation is not achieved.*

Chih-i writing in the 6th century C.E. in his shorter manual on meditation, *Hsiao chih-kuan* (Lesser Calming and Contemplation), introduces the practice of *shamatha/vipashyana* as a similar method of analysis:

"Stop all rising causes to ensure the embodiment of [absolute] reality by realizing that all things arise from the mind due to direct and circumstantial causes and are devoid of any nature of their own. If this is understood the mind will not grasp them and its stirred condition will come to an end."

"The right contemplation consists in looking into all things having no reality, but are creations due to direct and circumstantial causes. Since causes also have no nature, they are identical with the underlying reality from which they arise. As the objects thus contemplated are unreal, it follows that the mind which contemplates them will cease to arise."

Avalokiteshvara, then, as an awakened celestial Bodhisattva was contemplating the conditioned nature of phenomenal reality. As one way of practicing Prajna Paramita, we can do the same, beginning with analysis of conventional reality and leading to the experiential, intuitive insight of *shunyata*, so completely removing misfortune and pain.

Gassho Seishin



Nishi Sangha

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

October Events

- 7 Lotus-like
- 14 The Four Noble Truths
- 21 The Development of Mahayana
- 28 Working at Regional Food Bank



Nishi Sangha had the privilege of having Koyo Susan Spang perform the Juhachido Ceremony in Albany on September 23. This moving ritual has only been performed a very few times here in the states. Koyo has been practicing the ceremony for over a year and the results were very moving for those in attendance. Our entire sangha thanks Koyo for her dedication and inspiration.

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.*

October Events

On Monday evenings this month we continue our investigation of basic Buddhist teachings. On Saturday, October 18, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. we will hold a half-day of practice centered around Pure Land practices as Meditation. Often supporters of these two forms have been at odds with one another, each claiming that their's is the only 'effective' or 'true' way. Yet just as often, practitioners have found a way to harmonize the two.

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*

Danish Lotus Sangha

October Events

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

Meditation every Thursday at 9:30 a.m.

Meditation class beginning Thursday, October 9, 7:30 p.m. and continuing for the remainder year

Giunzan Tendaiji (Continued from page two)



Sunday, September 30 we had an unexpected *Chanoyu*, or **Japanese tea ceremony**. Tea Ceremony Master Sen So-oku had been in contact with Tendai Buddhist Institute about a visit just a few weeks before. Sen-sensei is a direct descent of the 16th century founder of the tea ceremony, Sen No Rikkyu (1522–1591), and is next in line to be the head of the Mushakouji Senke Tea School. He also is a Tendai priest and wanted to perform the tea ceremony for the Tendai-shu New York Betsuin. We had many members and guests who were able to attend. We have been in contact with him by e-mail since his visit and he has confirmed that he will be back to offer another Chanoyu in the near future. It was a great pleasure to be able to host this young master. For more information the following is an informative link. <http://int.kateigabo.com/aut04/kyoto-tea-ceremony.html>

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



October 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 Jiunzan Tendaiji Meditation Service	2 Danish Lotus Sangha Meditation Service	3 <i>New Moon</i>	4 Jiunzan Tendaiji Morning Service and Sutra Class
5 <i>First Quarter</i>	6 Celestial Drum Meditation Service	7 Nishi Sangha Meditation Service Danish Lotus Sangha Meditation Service Washington Tendai Sangha Meditation Service	8 Jiunzan Tendaiji Meditation Service	9 Danish Lotus Sangha Meditation Service Danish Lotus Sangha Meditation Class	10	11
12 <i>Yakushi Nyorai Day</i>	13 Celestial Drum Meditation Service	14 Nishi Sangha Meditation Service Danish Lotus Sangha Meditation Service Washington Tendai Sangha Meditation Service	15 Jiunzan Tendaiji Meditation Service	16 Danish Lotus Sangha Meditation Service Danish Lotus Sangha Meditation Class	17	18 Celestial Drum Half-Day Practice
19	20 Celestial Drum Meditation Service	21 Nishi Sangha Meditation Service Danish Lotus Sangha Meditation Service Washington Tendai Sangha Meditation Service	22 Jiunzan Tendaiji Meditation Service	23 Danish Lotus Sangha Meditation Service Danish Lotus Sangha Meditation Class	24	25
26	27 Celestial Drum Meditation Service	28 Nishi Sangha Meditation Service Danish Lotus Sangha Meditation Service Washington Tendai Sangha Meditation Service	29 Jiunzan Tendaiji Meditation Service	30 Danish Lotus Sangha Meditation Service Danish Lotus Sangha Meditation Class	31	

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