

November 2009

SHINGI

Newsletter of the Tendai Buddhist Institute



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Jushoku's Meanderings

I walked outside to do chores shortly after sunrise today. The sun was shining. The fragrance of smoke from our wood stove punctuated the coolness of the air. Dry leaves crunched under foot. The sound of geese flying south was a pleasant accompaniment to a glorious morning.

As I lingered for a few minutes taking it all in, the Native American greeting to the sun and

November Events Calendar



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

November Wednesday Meditations and Discussions

4th Zhiyi's Five Periods - as presented in the T'ien-t'ai ssu-chiao - (Jp., Tendai Shikyogi). The discussion will be a brief summary of this important work that stands as one of the most important texts in Chinese T'ien-t'ai thought. It influences Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese and Japanese Buddhism to this day. It is one of the seminal works of East Asian Buddhism, yet it is seldom taught outside Asia.

11th Is Meditation an Alternative to Psychotherapy? Please read the article [Medicate or Meditate](#) in *Buddhadharma: The Practitioners Quarterly* for this discussion.

18th Buddhist Art in India - We will discuss the development of Buddhist sculpture, architecture and iconography before the 2nd century C.E. The discussion will be accompanied by visual representations of the art.

25th Buddhist Thanksgiving - We associate Thanksgiving with the Abrahamic traditions. As a non-theist tradition, one might ask to what or whom is it that Buddhists give thanks? Please note that we have a tradition of pizza night the evening before Thanksgiving. As such, don't worry about

mountains, along with the salutation to the buddhas in the Ten Directions arose in my mind. I mouthed the words quietly.

This simple informal action transformed a mundane enjoyable pause in my routine into a sacred observance. It was an act of true mindfulness, a moment of veneration of the Buddha nature that resides all around us, a joyful expression of spirit.

The Buddhist Path is a path of clarity and tranquility through its many practices. It may satisfy the intellect, as well as guide us morally and ethically.

Because it is all these things and more, do not lose sight that it is equally a path overflowing with simple pleasures. By adhering to the Six Perfections this path can better nourish our essence moment to moment. Linger just a tad and soak in the joy of the moment, you will be fulfilling the promise of the Buddhist Path.

Gassho . . . Monshin



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bringing a shared dish; we will be ordering pizza for the evening.

Events

7th Morning Service and Sutra Class, 8:30-10:30 a.m. The class continues our monthly exploration of the Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment. This class is useful for people who may not have attended previous discussions; it is more than just an exploration of a specific text. Click [here](#) for a copy of the sutra. A more complete version of this sutra, translation with commentary by A. Charles Muller and Kihwa is available. It is published by State University of New York Press, 1999.

Food Pantry at Jiunzan Tendai-ji: The holidays are a time the pantries try to collect more than usual. Please bring non-perishable food items to the Tendai Buddhist Institute on Wednesdays. We contribute these items to the Chatham Silent Food Pantry.

Beginner's Mind—"Kisa Gotami and The Parable of the Mustard Seed"



I hadn't seen Louis, my best friend from high school, in over 15 years. My parents had moved out of the town I grew up in and I always seemed just too rushed to stop and visit as I drove past on my way home from college on breaks. From

time to time I missed him, and more than once I promised myself I would get back in touch with him soon.

And so, when I received an email from him a few weeks ago, I was surprised and glad that he still thought enough of me to drop me a line. The e-mail included his phone number and the short message "Dan, it's Lou. Call me if you get a minute." Wallowing amid swelling stacks of papers to grade, though, I set his message aside thinking I would call him as soon as I finished this round.

A day later, I received an e-mail from another high school friend. This one read, "I hope you're not too late. Let me know how everything is," and there was a web link.

The link took me to Louis' wife's obituary. She was 35. No one knew why she lay down that Sunday afternoon and never woke up. High school sweethearts, Lou and Jenny have two children, a daughter, 16, who had been practicing ballet from the age of two, and a 12 year-old son who had taken up wrestling and boxing. It seems I missed whole lifetimes.

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After I had wrapped things up at work, ending my last class of the day early and canceling my office hours, I prepared to head south to Endicott, New York--my old home--for the first time in almost two decades.

On the way out I stopped by the office of a fellow teacher, Jai Misir, a Hindu Pandit, and a friend. As I told him what happened, he listened with silent gravity.

"That's hard, Dan. What you going to do?"

"I'm going down to the funeral."

Jai smiled gently and responded that that was good. "It will be good for you to be there with him, Dan, with your strong sense of spirituality."

He asked if I was going to speak. "No, thank God." I explained that, coming from my Buddhist perspective, I wasn't quite sure what comfort my spirituality could be for those grieving a death. "I haven't learned enough yet." I felt a little like a medicine bottle that didn't get filled but was impressively labeled.

Then Jai told me that he recalled hearing a Buddhist story, the gist of which has stuck with him for many years. I returned to my office and fumbled for the story online. I'll admit, at the time I wasn't too concerned with determining the provenance of the website where I found a version of it.

Please take a moment and read [the story](#) before going on.

This parable was beautiful, I thought, but it would be cold comfort to offer someone who had just lost his wife. The Buddha's final words in the story echoed what I had been afraid I already knew: "Destroy the attachment that causes your grief, and you will lead a better life." I knew this would not help my friend; the sadness I felt for him was being joined by the inevitable fear that one day I too might lose my wife, and feel as Lou must now, like a chair suddenly with only three legs.

Though, as I sat there in my office staring into the words on the computer screen, an image of Kisa Gotami--the bereft woman in the story who lost her son--going from house to house, shambled into my imagination. And what played out in my mind next made me realize that Jai didn't mean the story for Lou, he meant it for me.

Here was this broken woman, once lauded as wise and blessed, for the first time in days liberated from carrying the weight of the body of her dead and decaying son. At the Buddha's instruction, she was going from house to house in

the great city of Savatthi, childlike, hopefully requesting a mustard seed for use in a cure for death. At each door she dropped her eyes when she learned that death, too, had touched even there.

But, no doubt, the person in the doorway--the daughter, the sister, the mother, the widow--would begin to recount her own loss. And though Kisa's request had stirred sad memories for the person telling the story, I am sure there was something curative for them both in it. They were there on that threshold together, sympathetic and utterly human.

Before Kisa turned to leave, I imagined the pair embracing one another, two trees weakened by storms but strengthened by the weight of this leaning. And as Kisa Gotami walked away, down the dusty path and back into the night of the thronging city, I pictured the householder silhouetted in the light of the door watching her go, both of them a little lighter.

And though, yes, indeed the proclaimed moral of the story is that we should release ourselves from our attachments, even those of loved ones in death, I believe there is more to the Buddha's cure, that it isn't quite as cold as it sounds. Instead of spreading pity wherever Kisa went, she presented compassion. We exchange the desperate clutching of attachments for the embracing support of connections.

When I eventually walked into that funeral home, Lou standing and all the more desolate-looking because huddled by the shorter figures of his children and an expanse of seated mourners, I did as I imagined Kisa did. I stood with my friend on that threshold, sympathetic and utterly human.

Gassho . . . [Koho](#)

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



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, please include a short statement explaining some of your thoughts to accompany it.

Questions? Comments? Suggestions? Contact . . .

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