

December 2009

SHINGI

Newsletter of the Tendai Buddhist Institute



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December 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.

December Wednesday Meditations and Discussions

2 The Gifts to the Tendai Buddhist Institute. This is the time of year when gifts are on our mind, both the giving and the receiving. The Tendai Buddhist Institute has been graced with many art objects, ceremonial items, and artifacts. We will be looking at the many items with a discussion of who donated them, what they represent, and why they were given. This is a bit of our history, it also provides insight to interconnectedness.

9 "A Catholic priest, a Jewish rabbi, and a Buddhist monk walk into a bar . . ." Buddhist Joke Night. We will be sharing humor, laughter and providing a lighter take on enlightenment. Humor provides an interesting way to learn about Buddhism without the worry lines.

"Some people think that Buddhist practice and meditation are about stopping thoughts. As the saying goes, if that were true, a coconut would be enlightened..... Let's remember that upon attaining enlightenment the Buddha smiled. This is very important. He didn't have to smile. He could have grimaced or remained neutral, but he smiled..... After

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reading Milarepa 25 times I had the insight that Mila was in fact a comedian."

--Prof Robert Thurman, talking in Cleveland.

If you know some Buddhist jokes bring them along.

16 Shinran's way of true entrusting. Discussion of interview of Alfred bloom, 'Beyond Religion', by Jeff Wilson in Tricycle: A Buddhist Review. The discussion will focus on the quote in the article, "Shinran saw nembutsu as a response to something that is supporting and helping your life, but you don't create it and you don't manipulate it. You can't do something to get it. And so the gratitude that Shinran advocates is a kind of wonder, a kind of awareness of "I owe so much." Read the article on the [Tricycle website](#) and be prepared to join the conversation.

23 A Buddhist Winter Solstice. The word "solstice" derives from Latin *sol* (sun) and *sistere* (to stand still). Interpretations of the winter solstice vary by culture, society and their proximity to the equator. But most cultures have held a recognition of rebirth, involving holidays, festivals, gatherings, rituals or other celebrations around this time of the year. What does a Buddhist Solstice celebration look like?

30 No Wednesday Evening Service this week because we have the New Year's Service the next evening. Join us Thursday evening for the New Year's Service.

31 New Year's Eve and New Year's Meditation Service. 10:30 PM - 2:00 AM January 1st. We gather for a general discussion at about 10:30 PM and begin the meditation service at about 11:00. We finish the meditation service around 12:30 AM and proceed to the main house for a New Year's celebration. Meditating and celebrating with the sangha is a great way to start the new year!

Events

5 Morning Service and Sutra Class, 8:30 a.m. - 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 as it is more than just an exploration of a specific text. Go to [this website](#) for a copy of the sutra. A more complete version of this sutra, translation and commentary by A. Charles Muller and Kihwa is available. It is published by State University of New York Press, 1999.

13 Capital District Religious Leaders Conference 2009, from 10:30 AM to 1:00 PM. Theme: World Peace and Harmony. Participants from Baha'i, Buddhism (represented by Monshin), Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, and

Sikhism. Sponsored by the Hindu Community and Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, at the Hindu Community Center, 450 Albany Shaker Road, Loudenville, NY 12211. There is no admission charge, a Complimentary Brunch will be served. For further information please contact Dr. Tariq Malik at 518-542-5801.

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 and even toiletries to the Tendai Buddhist Institute on Wednesdays. We contribute these items to the Chatham Silent Food Pantry.

Other Events

On April 23 and 24 there will be a Tendai Studies and Arts Symposium at the University of California, Berkeley. There will be papers presented by several Tendai scholars from Japan and the U.S. for the morning and



afternoon of the 23rd Among the scholars will be Ichishima Shoshin, Shiori Hodo, Paul Groner, John Stevens, Monshin Naamon, and Ryuken Duncan Williams and others to be announced. We are loaning our calligraphy to the University's art museum for an exhibit on Japanese calligraphy. On the 24th we will be traveling about 2 hours north of San Francisco to the California Tendai Monastery, founded by Keisho Leary for a consecration of his temple and a goma ritual. There will be more about this later. For more information contact either Shumon or Keisho.

Jushoku's Meanderings



You're having a conversation with an acquaintance and the topic of Buddhism arises. If that person is not knowledgeable about Buddhism he or she is likely to ask at least these three questions: "Is Buddhism really a religion? Is Buddha a God? What is Buddhism about? You find yourself struggling to answer without sounding like an entry in a Buddhist dictionary. So what's a good way to answer these questions? "

Is Buddhism really a religion?

Background - Clifford Geertz provides an effective definition of religion in his seminal work in symbolic anthropology, *Religion as a Cultural System* (1973). "A religion is a system of human thought which usually includes a set of narratives, symbols, beliefs and practices that give meaning to the practitioner's experiences of life through reference to a higher power, deity or deities, or ultimate truth." From this definition it is important to point out that Geertz writes that religion 'usually includes' those features. Any given religion does not necessarily contain all.

From the above definition, Buddhism most certainly is a religion. It does include a set of narratives, symbols, beliefs and practices that give meaning to the practitioner's experiences of life. Contrasted with other religions, however, Buddhism does not assert the existence of a higher deity. Though it does not reject such an existence, it does claim several truths. I would stress that Buddhism emphasizes narratives, symbols and especially practices over belief.

Simply put - religion helps us to transmit our values from one generation to another, and influences the way we interact with the natural environment. It teaches us how to see ourselves in light of the universe and gives purpose and meaning to life.

Is Buddha a God?

No! There were no claims by Shakyamuni Buddha, the historical originator of the tradition, or his disciples that he was a god. He was an awakened human who taught and served as an example of awakening. Of great importance, he declared that such awakening is possible for all sentient beings.

There are many who venerate Shakyamuni Buddha, and the many forms of him that are represented. This is not the worship of a god, it is a sincere devotion to the power inherent in the teachings.

What is Buddhism about?

Buddhism is a path of practice and spiritual development leading to Insight into the true nature of life. Buddhist practices such as meditation are means of changing oneself in order to develop the qualities of awareness, compassion, and wisdom. This statement by Sangharakshita is eloquently simple.

I would suggest the following as a minor elaboration: Buddhism is a universal faith tradition that affirms the awakening of all sentient beings. Natural laws demonstrate flux and causality. There is interdependence of all things. Nirvana is a state of peace from a world of discontentedness.

There is a succinct website that explains the basics of Buddhism in a five minute read. It is: [BuddhaNet](#).

Ok - now you are prepared for the questions that may come up while drinking eggnog. Have a happy and safe holiday.

Gassho . . . Monshin

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

Objectivity

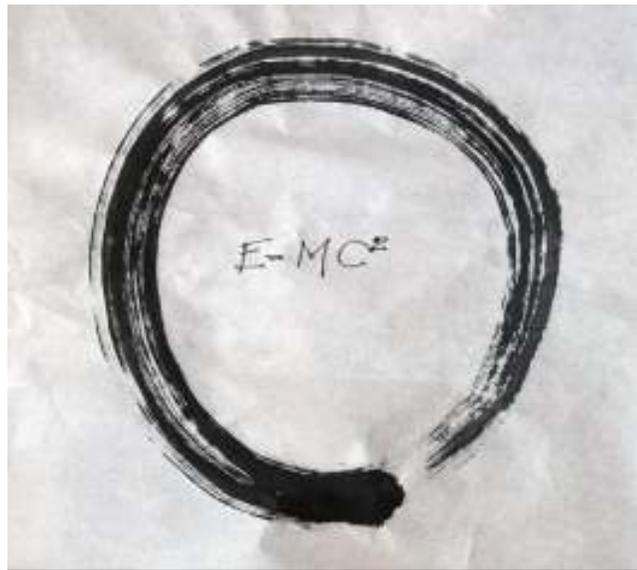
Went for a walk
stopped to listen to a brook,
well, it was the child who stopped to listen;

Then the child stepped closer to the brook
to look at the water
as it slipped over rocks and stones.

The child wondered if there was a message
in the babble of the brook or
some signal in the flashes of light
as the water spilled over the rocks;

Then the grownup had a flash of reality go through his mind
and the child slipped away.

-by Philip Bues



Enso, courtesy
of Bill Wilson

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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