

February 2010

SHINGI

Newsletter of the Tendai Buddhist Institute



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Meanderings

In last month's Shingi, Monshin reminded us that this is the Year of the Tiger--a time of "volatility, contention and disagreement". Unfortunately, the events of January have lived up to these predictions and the following months of this year--and every year-- will also. [\(cont.\)](#)

February Events Calendar



Weekly Meditation Services (WMS) are on Wednesday evenings. They begin at 6pm with a discussion or talk (see below for this month's discussion topics). At about 7pm there is a meditation service followed at 8pm by a potluck dinner. All of Wednesday evening's events are open to the public.

There is no fee and reservations are not required.

February Wednesday Meditations and Discussions

3rd The Four Divine Abodes (Brahmaviharas) - Cultivating love, compassion, joy, and equanimity through practice. --Mushin

10th Components of Practice --Shoshin

17th *Foundations of Buddhism*, Rupert Gethin (Oxford University Press). Chapter 2 - "The Word of the Buddha: Buddhist Scriptures and Schools." Please read this chapter for discussion on Wednesday. --Mushin

24th Poetry as Practice - Buddhism has sometimes viewed poetry as a distraction from one's practice and as yet another obfuscation of the real; certainly we, with the myriad demands upon our time could be tempted to agree. However, during this investigation we will see that these views are not necessarily correct and that the doctrine so essential to Tendai in particular--that of The Three Truths--



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presents fertile conditions for poetry to be developed as a powerful practice. --Koho

Events

6th Morning Service and Sutra Class, 8:30-10:30 am. 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 http://zen.extra.hu/sutra_of_perfect_enlightenment.html for a copy of the sutra. A more complete version of this sutra, translation, and commentary by A. Charles Muller and Kihwa is also available. It is published by State University of New York Press, 1999.

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.

Meanderings (cont.)



The unimaginable suffering of the beings in Haiti seems overwhelming. Although we have contributed monetarily to aid the fight against the disaster, we can feel in our entire nature that this is not sufficient. Yet, what else can we do? This situation is only different in magnitude from what we see in our own lives when friends and family fall victim to suffering that is beyond our control: disease, job loss, accidents etc.

As Buddhists we know life is characterized by suffering and discontent; but the Buddha-dharma provides many positive ways to deal with suffering.

Monshin reminds us regularly that our practice is compassion and our method is meditation. What better way to help relieve suffering--our own and others at the very same time--than through our meditation?

Chih'i developed the meditation system we use. First we do *shamatha* meditation with a focus on our breath to help still the active mind. Once having calmed the mind, the second meditation is a *vipashyana* meditation in which we meditate to see things in an insightful or extraordinary way, ultimately to see the essence of what is. Intellectually we may understand the interpenetration of all things, but in practicing *vipashyana* we hope to actually experience this oneness with all reality.

Often when we do *vipashyana* meditation we practice taking in the suffering of others and sending out compassion. Remembering our Bodhisattva Vows, I would like to suggest doing this meditation regularly, especially for the people of Haiti.

This is not an easy practice and must be developed in stages, but truly exchanging ourselves for others is the ultimate goal of our practice and here is an excellent time to begin working toward that Bodhisattva ideal. The Year of the Tiger is not only a time of turmoil and unrest, but also an auspicious time to generate real courage in the face of suffering.

Are you willing to actually exchange yourself for the other? If not, then here is a great opportunity for further practice.

If you find that truly taking on the suffering of others is too much, practice sending compassion using the the Lovingkindness Meditation. February is the month to send traditional loving wishes to those dear to us, so it is a wonderful time to increase cultivating lovingkindness for all sentient beings.

Commit to your meditation regularly and perhaps increase the time you meditate or the number of occasions this is done each week. In this way, your compassion is developed as a great gift, and your meditation also benefits yourself, helping you drop attachments and ego.

The great teacher and poet Shantideva wrote:

If this "I" is not relinquished wholly,
Sorrow likewise cannot be avoided.
For if he does not keep away from fire,
A man cannot escape from being burned.

To free myself from harm
And others from their sufferings,
Let me give myself away,
And cherish others as I love myself.

-from Bodhicharyavatara (The Way of the Bodhisattva)

Gassho . . . Shoshin

*The image is the Thousand-Armed Kannon at Sanjusangendo in the Higashiyama District of Kyoto.

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

"Seeds"

"Why, it's a nighthawk!", my Dad said, his excitement, his glee filling our phone conversation. There I was in the bedroom, actually one shared with my future brother-in-law, talking with and asking my birder father about a bird call I had been hearing every evening out the back of the house. Miles and miles from my suburban boyhood home and a few years from my childhood in New Jersey, I had always been irritated at my fathers love and enthusiasm about birds. Silly little things, I thought, give me horses or dogs, deer or bobcat instead, please! But we would go on trips to see birds, or so my father thought, then we children would run off to the beach as fast as we could. So, here I was living with my future in-laws and this sound, this strange call kept

happening night after night. I called my Dad, probably one of the first times I had reached out to him since childhood. This is the same man who said while putting me on a plane after a college break, "I don't like you right now, Eric." I was stunned, I was angry. Years later, I think he had a point. Now we were talking about a bird.

Years later, from my vegetable garden in upstate New York, I hear the same call. I am looking past a fall garden with root crops ready to be pulled and old lettuce fit to feed the chickens. I hear a nighthawk call again. I look past a gigantic sunflower, now in its last stages of bloom. I say stages because this is an odd sunflower. It must have been a cross between an old-fashioned seed-producing sunflower, which are very tall, and an ornamental sunflower. It was huge, with small heads of colorful flowers producing one after the other for three months. My two sons and I had a lot of volunteer vegetables in the garden last year. Some were squashes, crosses also, seeded by themselves. The crossed squashes were fit only for chickens to eat. But the huge sunflower with its radiant multiple flowers was the king of the garden, out showing even the scarlet pole runner beans. Now, both my sons are in college. It is September. I am alone listening to a nighthawk again and wondering at the beauty of this strange volunteer sunflower. My father's life is gone, but the call carries on. My sons' lives are a surprise, a joy and a radiant wonder.

Here, as winter sets in, the nighthawk seems to have pushed on, vacated the woods out back, and the sunflower is now a shriveled blackish stalk. But, I think many of its seeds fell into the earth beneath it, before the snow came.

Eric Johnson,
January 2010



Artwork by 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, you may wish to include a short statement sharing some of your thoughts to accompany it.

Questions? Comments? Suggestions? Contact . . .

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