

March 2010

# SHINGI

Newsletter of the Tendai Buddhist Institute



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## Seishin's Meanderings

Will you still be practicing in 30 years? Many come to the Dharma, practice for a bit and then move on. How you answer the question, "What is the opposite of suffering?" may provide some hint as to the longevity of your practice. People come to Buddhism for many reasons and a goodly number come because of some discontent, sorrow, pain, stress, illness, suffering or grief (collectively called *duhkha* in the sutra) in their lives and have heard

## March 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.

### March Wednesday Meditations and

#### Discussions

**3rd 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-presents fertile conditions for poetry to be developed as a powerful practice. Koho will lead this talk.

**10th Pilgrimage to 33 Sites Sacred to Kannon** - In the 25th chapter of the Lotus Sutra, Kannon (Sanskrit: Avalokiteshvara) appears in 33 different forms to save all sentient beings. A famous pilgrimage in Japan commemorates these 33 manifestations. In this illustrated talk, we will discuss the pilgrimage as a whole and then focus on the six forms of Kannon believed to save beings in the six realms of birth. This talk will be led by Elizabeth ten Grotnhuis, Professor for Japanese/Asian Art History, Boston University.

that Buddhism has some antidote. [\(cont.\)](#)



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**17th O-Higan and the Six Paramitas** - Shumon will lead this talk.

**24th The Foundations of Buddhism** - We will continue our study of Gethin's *The Foundations of Buddhism* with Chapter 3, "The Four Truths". This is definitely the most important chapter in the entire book and explores the ultimate "foundations" of Buddhism. Chapter 3 is both a wonderfully clear presentation for beginners and a thought provoking one for those heeding the imperative to "get back to basics." Shoshin will lead this talk.

**31st Buddhism Without Beliefs** - Stephen Batchelor (1997). In this controversial book, Batchelor challenges the appropriateness of Buddhism as a religion and the belief in karma and rebirth. He says that the Buddha taught a method (dharma practice), not another "-ism", and suggests an "agnostic faith" approach to Buddhist practice. He suggests Buddhism as a religion be replaced with the notion of 'a culture of awakening'. Mushin will review Batchelor's work.

## 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](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.

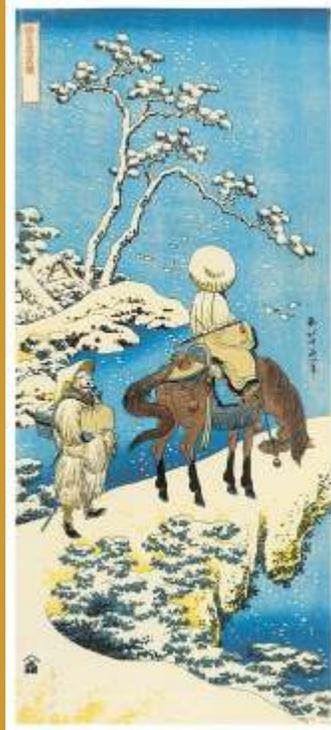
## Other Events

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

### Meanderings (cont.)



If you define the opposite of *duhkha*, or suffering, as 'happiness' or 'joy' as you might be led to do by the titles of many popular Buddhist books and workshops, or if you hear or read of enlightenment stories that end with an amazing experience in which all doubts of the protagonist are resolved, then you may be disappointed with your practice because you fail to eliminate those experiences that appear to give rise to *duhkha* and so fail to achieve lasting happiness; you fail to have a dramatic *satori* or *kensho* experience, and even if you do, the euphoria of the moment fades over time and you still find that negative emotions later arise and cause you discomfort. And after a little time you may take your

disappointment with you out the door, leaving the Dharma behind convinced that it doesn't do what it claims.

After Shakyamuni Buddha's awakening, he found his former companions on the path at Deer Park in Varanasi and to them he gave his first teaching, the Four Noble Truths, on exactly this: the nature of *duhkha*, its cause and the way to its release. Reading and understanding the text of this first teaching as it appears in the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta* (Setting in Motion the Wheel of the Dharma Sutra) provides clear instruction in what Shakyamuni meant when he spoke of suffering, its causes and its release, and will help prevent your misunderstanding what he was saying and so avoid disappointment that arises from false expectations of 'happiness' or 'enlightenment'.

*"Now this, monks, is the [first] noble truth of dukkha: Birth is dukkha, aging is dukkha, illness is dukkha, death is dukkha; sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair are dukkha; association with the unbeloved is dukkha, separation from the loved is dukkha, not getting what is wanted is dukkha. In short, the five aggregates [skandhas] onto which one clings [form, sensation, conception, discrimination, awareness] are dukkha."*

Here Shakyamuni provides three categories of *duhkha*. The first are physical conditions and common to all life: birth,

aging, illness and death. Who can escape these? Even Zen masters get cancer and die. No one has lived forever.

The second category is the emotional conditions: sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, and despair. These seem, on the face of it, possible to eliminate, yet they are inherent in life: who would not lament the death of their child; who would not experience distress when their home is foreclosed on?

The third category of conditions includes two factors: being forced into contact into that which you find distasteful; and being prevented from contact with that which you want. Again, these seem, looked at casually, as if they could be avoided, but no matter how you try to surround yourself with only the pleasant and shut out the unpleasant, it is futile.

Lastly, Shakyamuni foreshadows the second noble truth when he says that everything to which we cling turns in to a source of suffering. The root misunderstanding leading to disappointment is the mistaken thought that the way to eliminate *duhkha* is to eliminate these conditions. Yet, what he is clearly presenting is that these conditions are all existential facts: once born you will become sick, you will die; you will experience lamentation, grief and despair; there will be times when you are surrounded by that which you dislike and other times when you will be prevented from being surrounded by that which you love. There is no escape from these conditions. If you seek happiness in any of the five *skandhas* you will be disappointed.

*"And this, monks, is the [second] noble truth of the origination of dukkha: the craving that makes for further becoming - accompanied by passion and delight, relishing now here and now there - i.e., craving for sensual pleasure, craving for becoming, craving for non-becoming.*

In this second noble truth, Shakyamuni reveals the cause of *duhkha* is not the conditions mentioned in the first noble truth, but simply craving, desire, grasping the conditions in three forms. First is 'passion and delight' or sensual pleasure, which needs little explanation; second is 'craving for becoming' by which he means a desire for a state which does not currently exist such as "I want to be happy" when in actuality I am not; third is 'craving for non-becoming' by which he means a desire for a state that does exist to vanish such as "I want to be free from this misery".

*"And this, monks, is the [third] noble truth of the cessation of dukkha: the remainderless fading and cessation, renunciation, relinquishment, release, and letting go of that very craving."*

Here Shakyamuni states very simply that the way to be free

from *dukkha* is to remove the cause of the *dukkha*-that cause being only desire, not the phenomena to which the desire is attached. Ironically, in this formulation, the desire for 'happiness' is just another cause of further suffering. If you recognize that the conditions that conventionally precipitate suffering are intrinsic, existential reality rather than something possible to banish, then you won't be surprised or wounded when they arise. If you have a *kensho* experience you know not to expect that the euphoria will last, as the *Annica Sutta* (Sutra on Impermanence) says,

*"The three kinds of feelings, O monks, are impermanent, compounded, dependently arisen, liable to destruction, to evanescence, to fading away, to cessation -- namely, pleasant feeling, painful feeling and neutral feeling."*

Negative or positive, or neutral, you can then relax about them knowing they have arisen for a time and will fade in time.

Practicing year after year; does this seem to be a harvest of small potatoes? What? No grand resolution through enlightenment? Endless hours of meditation and study, but anger and despair still arise? Is it worth it? Yes, if you count as "release from suffering" freedom from the desire to be free of suffering. What the Buddha awoke to is reality as it is, rather than how he thought it should be. The origin and cessation of *dukkha* is presented so simply, yet intellectual comprehension is not sufficient. Practice over time yields a comprehension that sinks deep and may yield a state of being where, as the inscription on the well at Ryoan-ji temple says, "I know only contentedness"-even when feelings of discontent arise.

Through your own practice and observation you, too, can awaken to reality as it is by clearly comprehending in your own life how desire, even desire for 'happiness' can cause you to experience *dukkha*. From this greater awareness of the ebb and flow of negative and positive emotion in your own life, you may gain a greater tolerance and understanding for the same in others, giving rise to compassion for their struggle, so similar to that of your own. And out of this may arise *bodhichitta*-the mind of awakening aimed towards, as the Four Bodhisattva Vows concludes, "Sentient beings are numberless, I vow to save them." In this way you may maintain your practice through months, years and decades.

*Gassho . . . Seishin*

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





Artwork by Onyou Susan Bues

**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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