

October 2011

SHINGI

Newsletter of the Tendai Buddhist Institute



 Forward to a Friend

[Join Our Mailing List](#)

In This Issue

Events Calendar

Meanderings

The Third Jewel

Jushoku's Meanderings

During a recent Wednesday evening discussion someone asked the pertinent question, does one need to believe in rebirth to be a Buddhist? This issue comes up often.

There are two parts to the question. The first regards belief and the Buddha Dharma. That is to say, does one need to believe in this or that to be a Buddhist? The unambiguous answer is no; following the Buddha Dharma does not require 'belief'. There is a more nuanced response, but I won't pursue it at this time.

[\(cont.\)](#)



Quicklinks

[About Us](#)

[Tendai International](#)

[Glossary of Terms](#)

[Contact Jushoku Monshin Naamon](#)

[Contact Editor](#)

Our Other Sangha:

[Blue Mountain Sage Sangha--Denver, CO](#)

[Celestial Drum Sangha--Indian Lake, NY](#)

[California Tendai Buddhist Monastery](#)

[Tendai Denmark](#)

[Great River Ekayana Sangha--Arlington, VA](#)

[Nagado Sangha--Springfield, MA](#)

[Nishi Sangha--Albany, NY](#)

[Red Maple Sangha--Renfrew, Ottawa, Canada](#)

October 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 supper. All of Wednesday evening's events are open to the public. There is no fee, and reservations are not required.

October Wednesday Meditations and Discussions

5th Jushoku Q&A. It is that time of the month again. Got a question you have been yearning to ask? What about a point raised in a previous discussion that needs more explanation? Write it down so you don't forget it, and ask during this evening's Q&A session.

12th Japanese Art and Aesthetics and Buddhism.

Many of the well known Japanese art and aesthetic forms such as, ikebana (flower arrangement), chanoyu (tea ceremony), shodo (calligraphy), and waka and haiku (poetry), were a direct result of the Buddhist influence on Japanese society. The presentation will examine this relationship and demonstrate how this association was instrumental to ways in which we view Japanese culture today.

19th Hot Button American Issues - Where does the Buddha Dharma stand on these?

These issues include the death penalty, politics, right to life, etc. We'll discuss these important questions and many more. There may be issues you have wondered about and never asked. This is a discussion for all to participate in.

26th Article - Let's Be Realistic. Chan Master Sheng Yen reminds us not to be discouraged that we haven't attained enlightenment. After all, we're only human. Read this short article and be prepared to discuss what it means to attain enlightenment. The link to the article is: <http://bdtest1.squarespace.com/web-archive/2011/5/16/lets-be-realistic.html>

Events

1st Sutra Class and Morning Service, 8:30 - 10:30 AM Vajrachedika Prajnaparamita Sutra (The Diamond Sutra) Please obtain the following book for this class - *The Diamond Sutra: Transforming the Way We Perceive the World*, by Mu Soeng; Wisdom Publications (2000). It is one of the earliest Mahayana

Sutras and is considered by many scholars as foundational to subsequent Mahayana thought. The book should be readily available. We are moving along at a breakneck pace. Don't miss this scintillating class!

22nd The Buddhist Heritage of Pakistan: Art of Gandhara is on view at the Asia Society Museum. The Tendai Buddhist Institute is taking a road Trip to NYC for this acclaimed show. We will be carpooling or taking the Chinatown Bus. Many people have already signed up for the trip. This is a not-to-be-missed opportunity to see works that may never be in the U.S. again, at least not for a very long time. Information on the exhibit:

<http://asiasociety.org/arts/asia-society-museum>

We can facilitate rides for people, or people can meet us at the museum at 11 AM on Saturday October 22nd.

The address is:

Asia Society and Museum

725 Park Avenue (at 70th Street)

New York, NY 10021

Tel: 212-288-6400

After this exhibit we may very well go to the Rubin Museum of Art to see *Pilgrimage and Faith: Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam*.

Expenses for the Asia Society visit - Admission: \$10.00, \$7.00 for seniors, and \$5 for students with ID (free for members and persons under 16). A cell phone audio tour is included in the price of admission. **Driving per car** (range includes fuel, parking tolls) is estimated at \$80 - 120, thus if there are four persons in a car the price per person will be about \$20 - \$30. **Meals:** We will have a small lunch and dinner in the city. Prices depend on our choices of meals and individual preferences.

The Rubin Museum's prices are about the same as the Asian Society. For those interested in the Chinatown bus the roundtrip cost is \$35. The bus starts in Albany at the Asian Market 1245 Central Avenue or 128 Central Avenue, and it stops at 1045 W 34th Street and 133 E. Broadway (near Canal St.) go to the following for more info: <http://www.chinatown-bus.org/>. Contact Koki for further information.

-
Notes

Food Pantry at Jiunzan Tendai-ji - The number of families who now depend on the food pantry has grown as a direct result of the continued economic recession. There are fewer and fewer resources going to more and more people. Please bring non-perishable food items to the Tendai Buddhist Institute on Wednesdays. We contribute these items to the Chatham Silent Food Pantry.

Meanderings (cont. from side bar at left)



The second part of the question is rebirth. The person asking the question placed it in the context of references to rebirth in various sutra and other Buddhist writings. At its very basis what is reborn is an evolving consciousness. It occurs within a lifetime, moment-to-moment, over stretches of time, and at the time of death.

This consciousness is conditioned by karma, that is to say negative and positive volitional acts, cause and effect, accumulating on the consciousness.

The personality or ego of the individual is often thought of as the 'self' and people mistake this self, or however else we might perceive, as that which is consciousness and evolving. This is especially true of those whose frame of reference is an eternal soul, such as is posited in the Abrahamic and Hindu traditions. The notion of an eternal soul (or other entity) that is reborn is quite contrary to Buddhist teachings.

It is worth noting that Shakyamuni Buddha, to the best of our knowledge, never taught a doctrine of rebirth. In the Majjhima Nikaya 38^[1] the monk Sati was severely rebuked for declaring that 'this very consciousness' transmigrates, whereas in reality a new consciousness arises at rebirth dependent on the old.

On the other hand we have reports of Shakyamuni Buddha after his enlightenment recounting stories of previous lives.

These two positions seem to be contradictory. Contradictory teachings are evidence of the dynamic and evolutionary nature of Buddhist teachings. They do not conform to Western notions of internal consistency that is so valued in logic. The Buddha Dharma is a transcendent, rather than a logical method.

So why do we find rebirth featured prominently in sutra, śāstra and other writings? From a historical perspective rebirth was, and still is, a prominent concept of human thought around the world. It arose to some degree independently in virtually every civilization. Those writing Buddhist texts would make reference to rebirth in order to demonstrate the transience of all things and to demonstrate the profound nature of dukkha and karma, not only in this moment, but in each and every moment up to and including death.

Ultimately rebirth is not an essential perception to following the Buddhist path. What is essential is to recognize that our volitional actions have an effect on our consciousness, and this in turn has an effect on the persons we are. If we live a life following, to the best of our ability, the Six Perfections and certain other

Buddhist teachings, rebirth is inconsequential. There is no 'self' identifiable as 'me' that will benefit after death. But the provisional 'me' and all other sentient beings that exist in this moment and after will benefit immeasurably.

[1] <http://www.leighb.com/mn38.htm>

Gassho . . . [Monshin](#)

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

Seishin Jack Fitterer's artwork . . .



This Sanskrit calligraphy contains the 'seed syllable' (central red character) and mantra (smaller green characters) of Maitreya Bodhisattva, the manifestation of universal loving kindness. The mantra *om maitri maha maitri maitriye svaha* contains within its sounds all these beneficent qualities reduced to a few words.

The literal meaning is not important. Meditation upon, or recitation of, this mantra fills the mind with universal loving kindness and overflows outwards towards all others.

The seed syllable, likewise, reduces all the qualities contained in sounds of the mantra and reduces them to a single sound: *maim* (pronounced "mime").

May all beings everywhere be free from hostility; may all beings everywhere be safe, secure, and healthy in their bodies; may all beings everywhere be filled with peace, contentment, and happiness in their minds.

Lettered on September 11, 2011

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 . . .

Shingi Editor

Koho J. Daniel Beaudry

beaudryjd@mac.com