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Jushoku's Meanderings

This is the month of many holiday practices. December into January in Japan there are three distinct periods. We incorporate some of these ideas into our end of year and New Year holidays with some North American adaptations. As we approach the holidays in North America it might be worthwhile to reflect on these.

(cont.)


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December Events Calendar

Weekly Meditation Services

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.


December Wednesday Meditations and Discussions

5 Shaka Jōdō-e (Bodhi Day) - The observance of Shakyamuni Buddha's awakening is December 8th. We will discuss the nature of awakening and the hagiography, as well as the sutra presentations about this important event.

12 Dhammapada - The work is included in the Khuddaka Nikaya ("Minor Collection") of the Sutta Pitaka, composed about 250 BCE. The slim anthology of verses constitutes a compendium of the Buddha's Nikāya teaching, selected from forty-odd volumes of the Pali canon.

19 Amida Nyorai The Buddha of the Western Paradise, Buddha of infinite light, makes this figure a natural to examine as the shortest day of the year approaches.

26 Buddhism, Commodification and Overcoming Insatiability - A major focus of Buddhism regards our attachments and how they lead to dukkha. We will discuss the challenges of living in a consumer driven society while seeking a non-materialist way of life.

31 O-Shogatsu (New Year's) Service - This is a Monday evening - We begin to assemble about 10:30 PM in the house, the Meditation Service in the hondo begins at about 11:15 PM. Following the service, (about 12:30 AM), we gather together for a New Year's celebration in the house. Please bring finger foods, appetizers, and drinks that you would like to share. We will have sake and non-alcoholic sparkling beverage, as well as soft drinks. The emphasis on the evening is bringing in the New Year with equanimity and celebrating with sangha, friends and family. All are welcome. **We will not have a regular Wednesday Evening service this week.**

Other Events in December:

1 Sutra Class and Morning Service, 8:30 - 10:30 AM - The *Maha Prajna Paramita Hridaya Sutra* (Heart Sutra) is the most often chanted, cited and best known sutra in the Mahayana canon. We will read and discuss two different translations and commentaries (Mu Soeng's and Red Pine's) as a set throughout the classes.

8 Family Day, 10:30 AM Join the families and children for a Bodhi Day celebration. There will be a service and meditation for adults while children will be treated to a program that is appropriate for them. The little one's will join with the adults in the Hondo at the end. We will finish with a pot-luck lunch.

NOTES:

Food Pantry at Jiunzan Tendai-ji - Gratitude is best shown by extending to others the thoughtfulness we have received. Please bring non-perishable food items to the Tendai Buddhist Institute on Wednesday's. We contribute these items to the Chatham Silent Food Pantry.

Meanderings (cont. from side bar at left)



Throughout Japan in December there are *bonenkai* or "Forget-the-year Parties". These are not family gatherings. They are related to work, school and other social groups. *Shogatsu* celebrations are from the 1st to 3rd of January, and *Shinnenkai* or "New Year Parties" are held in January.

Bonenkai have both a Buddhist and a totally secular meaning. In a secular context they are an opportunity for a group to gather and deliberate on the events of the last year, at the same time to blow off a little steam from the pressures of work, school, etc. A necessary, healthy activity. In a Buddhist context these "parties" are an opportunity for reflection about the last year and a kind of penitence to rededicate one's life for the year to come. This year this function seems especially appropriate. Not only should we observe penitence and rededication, but also recognize that there are times of darkness and times of light, relish each for what they provide us. This year my mantra is "Hope for the best, and prepare for the worst". Each day requires *Smṛti* (authentic mindfulness).

Shogatsu or "Observance of the New Year" is celebrated during New Year's. In the days leading up to New Year's there is a kind of Japanese "spring cleaning", so the New Year will be a fresh start, clean and orderly. This has its origins in Buddhist purification. Offerings of *mochi* (pounded rice cake) and sake are made to the temples. Families usually get together and attend assemblies at Buddhist temples and Shinto Shrines during this period. The ringing of a gong 108-times on New Year's Eve and Buddhist services are observed from December 31st until the morning of January 1st. This is a family and friend time.

Shinnenkai is usually work related and is more dedicated to a show of gratitude to one's co-workers and to join one together without the hierarchical system that normally dominates work gatherings. Often, they are company sponsored, though there may also be more casual get-togethers.

Taken together these periods are about observing our relationships with each and striving to improve are shared understanding of each other. We will gather together on New Year's Eve and sit into the New Year, followed by finger foods, drink and conviviality. Let us use our time this holiday season to be mindful of our interrelatedness and our shared humanity. Enjoy our friends and family relationships.

Shumon and I wish everyone, family, friends, acquaintances and strangers - they very best for a joyous season and New Year..

Love and Gassho Monshin

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

The Shumidan decorated to celebrate
Shaka Jōdō-e (Bodhi Day)



And as always, please do send us news from your sangha!
Your poetry, your images, your suggestions!
Gassho!

Questions? Comments? Suggestions? Contact . . .

Shingi Editor
Peter Chorin Donahoe
pdonahoe2010@gmail.com