



**THE ANNUAL REVIEW OF ACTIVITY  
AND  
STATEMENT OF INTENTION  
2009/2010**

## A SUMMARY OF ANNUAL ACTIVITY, 2009

As we conclude this year of practice, we take time to reflect on what have been important expressions of our Sangha's practice intentions over the past twelve months.

I have used here the categories of the Life Cycle exercise and, in doing this, I have reflected on what we set out last January and what we actually did.

First may I remind all of us that what I describe is the activity of our community. As with our practice, there is no value in looking for a single actor or cause. None of this would have been possible without the active support and participation of all of our sangha, and countless and nameless others.

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### PHYSICAL EXPRESSIONS

We improved the physical layout of our practice space this year, rearranging the entry to produce a more formal and dignified entrance for practitioners and for the opening of practice sessions. Introducing the permanent presence of Kwan Yin at the entry and the two *mandalas* beside the *butsudan* further refined the space. Much effort went into improving the property and garden entries. The first excavation of the front pond was completed, along with stone outlining and filler. All that dirt went to good use too, as filler for the expanded parking space. The back garden was re-designed after the design of the *acer japonicus* which, unlike the sangha which bears its name, couldn't tolerate the severity of our winter. Finally, the year ends with us beginning a major renovation and redesign of the zendo.

This we do in anticipation of continued growth in attendance.

We held a work day where we stripped and refinished our back deck.

We contributed to the physical strengthening of ourselves this year as well. We held monthly walking practice, with frequent visits to Hurd Lake. The most ambitious of our walks was our Annual Pilgrimage walk in October. This took us back to the K and P Trail for two walks. At our summer retreat we introduced the body-mind practice of the 24-Form Yang-style tai chi. This is now part of our practice routine, whenever we have sufficient room. We fed our bodies too, with Judy's excellent Mahasangha meals, and her half-day cooking class.

## **EMOTIONAL EXPRESSIONS**

Our Sangha and its practice routine provided emotional support for its members. All of the Mahasangha events and frequent spontaneous post-service socializing, on the deck or by the fire, has built genuine friendships. We provided support and encouragement to each other as many of us faced difficult personal situations.

Our annual Memorial service gave structure to the emotions we all experience in acknowledging the passing of lives and relationships.

## **KNOWLEDGE EXPRESSIONS**

Deepening our understanding through formal and informal learning continued this year. We learned the tai chi practice, in body and mind. We spent a half-day learning some new approaches to cooking. We explored *chakra* theory, one of the central parts of the Vajrayana Schools that shape both Tibetan and Japanese traditions. We expanded our familiarity with our sutra tradition, especially the Lotus Sutra, the central text of the Tendai style. Every month we set aside practice time for readings of interest, to explore and discuss with each other. There were frequent exchanges in person or via e-mail as we delved into teaching and commentary.

Over the year we added substantially to our book shelf, adding titles on Tendai teaching and history, the influential Shingon sect, Dharma arts - painting and mandala, Buddhist spirituality and more. Sangha members were all generous in sharing articles and websites of interest.

## **SPIRITUAL EXPRESSIONS**

We took several opportunities to deepen our appreciation for the spiritual dimension of practice through familiarizing ourselves more with our key quartet of Bodhisattvas. We explored the precepts and how they could be expressed in our lives. All members contributed to preserving a sound, dignified and supportive practice environment.

## **SANGHA-DIRECTED EXPRESSIONS**

Its worth reminding ourselves that we all helped to keep a schedule of weekly practice opportunities going. Every Saturday and alternate Sundays saw the practice of Dharma continuing in Renfrew County, the only local, regular and authentic presentation of Dharma in this region.

We hosted monthly Mahasangha events, discussions and learning opportunities. For most of the year we inspired newcomers to practice with the weekly, (at times thrice-weekly) series of Peaceful

Mind sessions. The growth in formal service attendance was due, in no small part to introducing people to mindfulness practice.

We held our first mutli-day retreat which allowed us to explore the experience of full-day and over-night practice.

It should also be acknowledged that all of our activities were supported financially by generous dana. We enter this new year, a year of great promise and opportunity with appropriate financial “start-up capital”.

A major development in the presentation of RMS was Innen’s decision to pursue ordination within the Tendai tradition. This has brought all of us face-to-face with one of the major teachings in Dharma, and a style of teaching which, more than any other, shows a harmony with the Red Maples’s original posture of openness to multiple practice forms. This is an undeniable turning point for RMS. It provides us with the strength and reliability of a sound teaching platform, one which encourages us to seek practice forms which resonate with the shifting capacities of our individual growth. It also offers all of us a clear and time-proven learning trajectory, one where we can each develop the deepest and most skilful practice. Further, we have easy access to the spiritual head of Tendai outside of

Japan, Monshin sensei, a man of enormous generosity, vision and learning - someone who encourages us and our aspirations as a Sangha.

This direction of our practice to harmonize more clearly with Tendai also reveals a greater clarity of Red Maple for our community. We have grown, in these past six years, from an informal group of interested practitioners, gathering out of a common interest in practice, into a well-defined presence and voice for the Dharma in a previously untouched corner of Eastern Ontario. It is no small matter that we now stand not just on the thresholf of unfolding dharma in this rural county, not simply being another Dharma community reaching out to this corner of the province. We are poised to introduce a distinguished and largely unknown and unappreciated school of Dharma into our national Dharma community. We have suddenly been bestowed a great gift and have the invitation to make it available to Canadian practitioners, English and French, new Buddhists and those who have arrived here from Buddhist traditions in Asia. The coming years will offer countless opportunities for us to share in this great undertaking.

## **FRIEND-DIRECTED EXPRESSIONS**

We have used our practice events, most notably our monthly Mahasangha brunches as a means to reach out to those who want to meet Dharma perhaps for the first time. We have new ways to do more than talk about Dharma, we can express it through our friendliness and generosity towards these new friends.

We can also take pride in extending our friendliness and caring to the many canine companions who have joined us over the year. We acknowledge that presenting Dharma requires skillful means – giving in a manner appropriate to the needs of the seeker. Opening our events to the unadorned presence of our dog-friends has enriched understanding in both directions.

## **LOCALLY-DIRECTED EXPRESSIONS**

We have been active participants in our local community. Every practice event has seen donations of food and other necessities for the Renfrew County Food Bank and the Animal Shelter. I have personally delivered baskets to individuals in urgent need.

One unique expression of community dana was the gift of a cottage stay by a member to a stranger in need. The stay was made available to a needy single mom who had a precious two weeks with

her sons, enjoying the lake and the country. She described it as the high point of her year.

We responded to invitations by the Almonte United Church and the Unitarian Fellowship in Ottawa East. Innen presented a talk on walking practices, and several members joined him for an introductory presentation and chanting demonstration. Both presentations earned heartfelt thanks from the inviters. New invitations for the coming year have already been accepted.

Our Peaceful Mind project was a very concrete expression of community-directed practice. Every week small groups met in Pembroke, Beachburg and Renfrew to learn the fundamentals of traditional mindfulness. Several members took the lead in presenting these introductory skills, training others and advancing their own practices.

We undertook two other initiatives which may one day bear fruit. We knocked on the editorial door of the Ottawa Citizen to offer to write for their Religion Experts feature. As of this date they have not finally declined not only our offer, and it looks promising that we may assume a role in presenting a public Buddhist perspective.

Over the year, a group of us looked for ways to sponsor some form of mindfulness

facilitation program. As the year ends we are exploring yet another possibility for 2010.

## **WORLD-DIRECTED EXPRESSIONS**

We continue to uncover new ways to express our practice for the benefit of our wider world. Several articles and/or letters have added our unique voice to the world-wide dharma dialogue.

No doubt, our most promising step into the Dharma-presence of our world is our outreach to international Tendai. Through Innen's training and our own community exploration, we join together with dharma brothers and sisters in Japan, the US and Denmark. More significantly we join in practice with those who have been shaping and promoting Tendai for nearly 1500 years.

In closing, we can each accept congratulations for participating in a rare and ground-breaking endeavour. We have each pushed our own practices into new realms, we have faced our reluctance, bad habits and dullness, bringing a determination to pursue this Noblest of Paths for ourselves and the benefit of each other and all beings. We have begun to inscribe our names along with those unnumbered thousands of Dharma ancestors who keep the Light of dharma burning brightly.

## RED MAPLE SANGHA - INTENTIONS FOR 2010

As we enter Year 7 in our Sangha's story, we step into what I hope will be remembered as one of our most important years and phases - both individually and as a Sangha. Today I would like to outline some of the directions, as I see them, and invite all of you to share your views. Later I invite you to share your reflections on personal intentions. I hope you will listen for ways to collaborate with the Sangha and individual initiatives. Together, we can then begin to unfold this exciting narrative.

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### **PHYSICAL EXPRESSIONS**

#### ***Zendo***

Sitting here, we can't escape the main physical development for this year, the renovations to our practice hall. We have taken up hammers and paint brushes to create a new and stronger practice environment. The rebuilt entry and more compact butsudan will offer several more seats, allowing us to be more spacious for smaller sittings and to accommodate new members in the coming year. In our February Mahasangha we will offer afternoon time for those who can help finish the painting. There will be several smaller jobs in the Spring, aiming at completion by Vesak, in May.

Later in the year I would like to have my teacher, Monshin Naamon visit us from New York. In addition to other events described below, Monshin would officially "open the mountain", that is, perform a formal dedication of this practice hall.

This gesture would resonate with many of the other intentions for this year and establish a connection between this sangha and our dharma family internationally

#### ***Yard and Woods***

In the yard, we will finish the pond entrance and continue the gardens - both vegetables and flowers. We will make special efforts to improve the garden space immediately out the back door, to make deck use more enjoyable. We will hold a Garden Work Day, probably as part of our preparation for Vesak and another later in the summer. As we did last year, we invite all members to share in the development, maintenance and harvest of the Akashaloka garden.

Walking will continue to be an integral part of our physical practice with monthly walks to the Lake and our fall Pilgrimage Walk.

## **EMOTIONAL EXPRESSIONS**

We will continue to build friendship and support through monthly brunches, Annual Memorial Day, informal discussions - in person and online.

## **KNOWLEDGE EXPRESSIONS**

### ***Library and Library Thing***

We will continue to expand our Sangha library, which is now re-located to the Sangha Office in the main house.

Members have been fairly active in borrowing books. I would encourage all to share their study, as Don recently did with a book by the Dalai Lama.

Thanks to Joe Parchelo, we are building a virtual database of our Sangha resources through the *Library Thing* webservice. This will document all the books at Akashaloka first, and then enable all members to add titles from their own collections, so we can share the books that have been helpful to us in our growth. Eventually we can share comments on books we've read and even interact with people outside the sangha who have read a book in our library.

### ***Mahasangha Topics***

Over the year, we will assign one of the practice forms for study during in each Monthly gathering. These topics will explore a wide range of practices, like chanting, sitting practice, *mikkyo* ritual

and so on, with special attention to familiarizing ourselves with the history and practices of Tendai.

### ***Monthly Discussion Topics***

During the 3<sup>rd</sup> Saturday or the Sunday following, we will explore the contents of our new chanting manual. Each month we will select a few chants and look more deeply into the language, history or use of each.

### ***On-going Readings***

From time to time I will distribute readings of interest and I encourage all of us to comment. I also encourage everyone to share readings. I can scan and publish to PDF any documents you only have in a hard version. Links to web-based readings can also be shared.

The Tendai website provides numerous readings of interest through the *Shingi* newsletter. I encourage all of us to acquire a subscription.

### ***Cooking - Class II and The Red Maple Cookbook***

Judy has proposed doing a cooking class to follow-up at some point this year. Last year's class was very successful and popular - more to follow.

Judy also is looking into preparing a *Red Maple Cookbook* which would include recipes for her most popular Mahasangha recipes, along with cooking tips.

## **SPIRITUAL EXPRESSIONS**

### ***Jukai***

Each of us will be attending to our own spiritual growth, in whatever way we determine. For some of us we will want to deepen our practice and formalize our commitment to Dharma, in particular through making a home for ourselves within Tendai. The traditional means for doing this is *jukai*, or receiving the precepts. In this ritual, a dharma teacher will perform the ceremony which provides you with a dharma name. Through this re-naming we announce the importance of dharma in our lives and formally join the world-wide sangha.

At very least, we can arrange for *jukai* during one of the O-higan (Equinox) events at TBI. However, we also have an opportunity to arrange a weekend visit by Monshin sensei, where he could complete the zendo dedication ceremony, *jukai* for those who wish it and any possible regional events we can organize for him. I will be circulating more information on *jukai* in the coming weeks.

### ***“Nature of Dharma” Project***

Our practice is one of paying attention. This project, *The Nature of Dharma*, allows us to engage with the natural world within which we discover ourselves. We will attend to the life forms that are our neighbours. Here at Akashaloka, we will begin by surveying the property for

the unique forms of wildlife - both plants and animals- that inhabit our space. With this profile, we can consider how we might act to benefit these co-inhabitants of ours. This might extend to some joint activity with local organizations. From the template we use here, each of us can duplicate a similar exploration in our own home areas, which can inform how we might act in our own locale.

## **SANGHA-DIRECTED EXPRESSIONS**

### ***Practice Schedule***

We will continue 3-4 formal practice opportunities per week, in two locations, including Mahasangha;

We will evaluate and initiate a parallel practice group in the Almonte/Kanata area, similar to the Pembroke group.

We will consider at least one multi-day retreat;

Within the regular schedule we will place more emphasis on providing opportunities for participation and responsibility by regular members. This can take the form of set-up/clean-up and also special one-time tasks that people can do on their own schedule.

We will ensure we document more of our Sangha activities through audio recordings which will be available to members. Our history needs more consistent recording, so we are all invited

to share in recording photos of events and gatherings, so we can build a Sangha collection.

### ***Expanded Sangha***

Since our first practice sessions in Carleton Place, we have invited and welcomed new members. We have the strength of encouraging participation at the member's pace. People come as they can, and, as we have seen, will stay when they can grow into a participation that fits the wider demands of their lives. Over the years we have grown gradually and this year we will work to make use of our newly expanded practice capacity. I hope we can grow through the addition of 3-5 regular members by

1. the expansion of participation on the Pembroke group.
2. the development of a new practice group serving the Almonte/Kanata area.

### ***Non-profit Status***

As we move into an organization-building phase through our new affiliation with international Tendai, it is time for us to acquire non-profit status. This has many tax advantages for us and our supporters. However, its primary value is to locate the administration of Red Maple, which can become considerable in future, separately from our teaching and study function. By identifying and working with a member-based Board of Directors, we can confine

those functions to specific people and times, so as to avoid any interference with our dharma practices. For this Board we will need myself and an additional two people prepared to sit as Board Members for the next two years. Over the next few months details of this will be announced and all will be invited to help build such an administrative capacity. This is a special and defining period for Red Maple, and I encourage all of you to reflect on how you can contribute to making this come to fruition.

### **FRIEND-DIRECTED EXPRESSIONS**

#### ***Socializing***

As members of our home communities, we have opportunities to express our practices for non-practitioners. The simplest form of this sharing is within our own group of friends and family. We will continue to welcome partners and other family members who want to share the more social events of our schedule, like the Mahasangha Brunches. As always this includes our four-legged friends, too.

#### ***Vesak***

This year we will make an effort to use the traditional celebration of Vesak in May as an opportunity to reach out to new interests. This might include an *Entering the Dharma Path* workshop, the first in about 18 months. We can discuss this in the Sangha to see what events might be appropriate for this year.

## **LOCALLY-DIRECTED EXPRESSIONS**

### ***Community Partnerships***

We will continue to collect for the RC Food Bank and Animal Shelters.

We will explore and initiate new relationships with local partners who share a concern for wildlife conservation, environmental protection and the interaction between humans and animals.

We will stay current with needs, for financial support as it may arise during the year, caused by events such as natural disasters, and make occasional collections and donations in support of urgent needs.

### ***Writing***

This year we will make efforts to have the community know about and understand what Red Maple through media presentations, such as local newspapers and radio

We will continue efforts to be included in the *Religion Experts* feature of the Ottawa Citizen.

### ***Tendai Event***

We will work towards a visit by Monshin sensei by evaluating/ sponsoring a Tendai Arts event in collaboration with an Ottawa-based partner, such as the Japanese embassy or Japanese Community Association.

## **WORLD-DIRECTED EXPRESSIONS**

This will be area of most dramatic expression for us this year as we align our sangha closer with the international Tendai Sangha. As we do, let me explain more of why this is happening and what it offers to us individually and together. To do this we should go back to the origins of Red Maple in 2004. RMS arose that summer to fill the vacuum in our rural community of a permanent Buddhist presence and access to a reputable and affiliated teacher, through:

1. the establishment a permanent locally-based, on-going vehicle for the study and practice of Buddhadharma; and
2. pursuing individual and collective practice which offers both a broad exploration of many Dharma traditions and prepares members to deepen their practice through a long-distance affiliation with a reputable Dharma group.

At that time I felt capable of providing introductory instruction in dharma history, teaching and practices, but not in accepting responsibility to act as a dharma teacher to members. (My understanding of the teacher's role is that the teacher makes a life-time commitment to prepare the student for the full path to

Awakening.) We have always welcomed practitioners who may have been students of distant teachers but lacked a local practice environment.

Last year, as you all know, I determined that the Japanese Tendai tradition was very compatible with the broad study style of RMS. Even more importantly, the base for Tendai outside of Japan is located within a reasonable distance to RMS and that the resident teacher, Monshin Naamon, met all of my criteria as my own teacher. Since then he has agreed and I have begun to prepare myself as an authorized teacher-priest within Tendai and can now offer deeper commitments to members. Consequently, it is my firm belief that an affiliation with the Tendai sangha allows us to preserve the opportunities for broad study and practice while opening up huge new opportunities for growth within a legitimate Dharma school.

Therefore, this year will be the occasion for RMS to extend how it presents itself to the world, as the first Tendai sangha in Canada. In fact and effect we will become seed-bed for the cultivation of the 1200 year-old tradition of Tendai. Tendai itself was the tradition which transformed the earliest forms of practice, a largely monastic and static tradition, into a powerful tradition, open to monks and

laypeople. The great traditions of Zen, Shingon and Jodo Shin all grew from Tendai. Tendai stands as one of the most respected Dharma traditions in the world, and can now join the religious mosaic of Canada. We can now play a foundational role in bringing this into our modern world and home communities.

We can now join the family of Tendai communities outside of Japan in New York, Washington DC, California, Hawaii, Britain, Germany and Denmark. And, by consequence, we join the larger family of Tendai practice in Japan, as well. This provides us with opportunities for virtual and face-to-face learning with authorized, English-speaking and experienced teachers.

It opens the path for each of us to pursue whatever extent of dharma practice we define for ourselves. I don't see any disadvantages for us in make this major change in our Sangha, and I see innumerable advantages for all of us in doing so.

This year will mark a turning point for ***The Red Maple Sangha*** when we went from being an independent study/practice, unaffiliated and, as Don would have called us, “free-range Buddhists” group and became the first unfolding of the millennium-old Tendai tradition in Canada. We moved from an lightly-structured group of friends who shared some common interests into being a dedicated not-profit organization with a single-minded purpose in service of the Buddhadharma. From my perspective, we have not lost anything in this transformation, but rather have inherited an inestimable treasure, one that can enrich the lives of everyone we meet in our daily lives.

Submitted to the Sangha  
by R. Innen Parchelo, doshu,

January, 2010