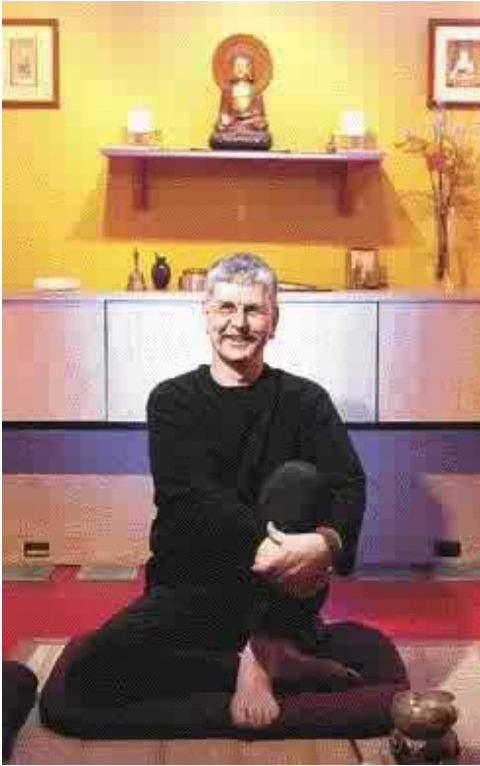


# Choir helps mark Buddha's birthday

BY JENNIFER GREEN, THE OTTAWA CITIZEN    MAY 10, 2009



Ray Parchelo, who practices with the six or so members of the Dharma Tabernacle Choir, spoke about Buddhism to about 30 people Saturday at the Almonte United Church.

**Photograph by:** Jean Levac, the Ottawa Citizen, The Ottawa Citizen

Even the members of Renfrew's Dharma Tabernacle Choir laugh a little at their name. But it does hit on a paradox: Can modern Buddhism and Christianity complement each other, or must they collide at their heart?

On Saturday, about 30 people made their way to the Almonte United Church, where they meditated, heard Sanskrit chants and listened to dharma instructor Ray Parchelo explain the origins and outlooks of Buddhism as part of an event to mark Buddha's birthday.

For a few, it was a puzzler: "If there is no eternal soul, how can there be eternal life?" asked one. "I don't have an answer for that," replied Parchelo. Some Buddhists would say God is an illusion; others, that we are surrounded with "incalculable space filled with Buddhas."

As to the Dharma Tabernacle, they are not really a choir, but six or so Buddhists who practise with Parchelo, using chants and mantras to become aware of their breathing. "It activates certain energies," he told the audience. As for the Sanskrit, "it's respect for tradition."

At 19, Parchelo was asked to become a sessional lecturer in religious studies at Carleton University. He accepted gladly, but had to improve his knowledge of Buddhism and Islam. As he read about Buddhism, he thought, "That's it! That's right!" and joined a Zen community.

He started the Red Maple sangha in 2004. Red Maple is non-sectarian, meaning it does not subscribe exclusively to any individual practice. That may change, however.

Parchelo, a Beachberg social worker, is to start training soon to become Canada's first priest of Tendai, a form of Japanese Buddhism that is almost unknown in the West. The training takes about five years. He will attend the Tendai Buddhist Institute in East Chatham, New York, the only place offering training outside Japan.

Next weekend, the Red Maple group will hold chanting, walking meditations, a seminar on vegetarian cooking, and a lunch to mark Vesak -- Buddha's birth, death, and attainment of Nirvana.

The new Tisarana Buddhist monastery in Glen Tay, which follows the Thai forest tradition of Theravada Buddhism, will also have a potluck lunch, and a dharma talk, open to the public. Call 613-264-8208.

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