

## **IBMC Monthly Guide - March 2006**

### **108 Bows Ceremony**

The first Sunday of the month at 10 am, we perform the Adoration of the 88 Buddhas ceremony, wherein we honor all of the known Buddhas. On March 5 the ceremony will be led by Thich Tam Khong, Rev. S'unya Karuna. We invite you to join us for this simple, but moving ceremony. It is a good prelude to our Sunday service.

### **Seminar on the Heart Sutra**

A Seminar on the Heart Sutra is being offered by Ven. Dr. Karuna Dharma on Saturday, March 11 from 1-4 pm. The seminar will focus on what the Heart Sutra means, with its many opposing viewpoints. If you have difficulty understanding passages like: there is. . . "no suffering, origination, extinction or path," come and all your questions will be answered. The Heart Sutra is the final distillation of the Prajna Paramita literature and is indicative of the difference of attitude between Theravada and Mahayana Buddhist viewpoints. The discussion will be interspersed with occasional meditation periods to help us to see more clearly. Call Ven. Karuna directly to sign up at 213 382-9972. Suggested donation is \$10.

### **IBMC's Sunday Shop**

Our Sunday shop has just gotten a few new bells. They are four inches in diameter and are colored a beautiful reddish brown. We also have mokkugyo (wooden fish) to accompany them. They will make a lovely addition to your altar and sell for \$60 each.

The IBMC Sunday Shop has gifts to provide you with everything for your spiritual needs. Check the Sunday Shop for items from all over the world: brass Buddhas from Thailand and Buddhas from Sri Lanka, hand carved from jak, mahogany and ebony woods. We also have statues of Ananda, Buddha's closest disciple, who convinced him to ordain women as Bhiksunis, thus placing women on equal status with men. We also carry 10 oz. coffee cups, with the footprints of the Buddha and the logo Following the Path. We carry prints of Rev. Sunya's paintings and whimsical creations, a number of hand malas and 108 bead malas, from \$2 to \$25. And we also carry Dharma books.

**A Bubble in a Stream** - by Rev. Kshanti Karuna in a talk at IBMC on December 11.

My talk today comes from some thoughts I've been having because of the Diamond Sutra. My title comes from the Diamond Sutra. It comes toward the end--

"Thus shall you think of all this fleeting world,  
A star at dawn, a bubble in a stream.  
A flash of lightning in a summer cloud,  
A flickering lamp, a phantom, and a dream."

It's kind of sweet. Wordsworthian. Romantic, pastoral, innocent.

But the longer you think about it the more terrifying it becomes. And I do mean terror. Some of you are finishing a retreat today. During the retreat you spent long hours meditating. Or they seemed long. Anyway, we meditate. We try to quiet the monkey mind. Find tranquility. And for many that's enough. A few moments of rest before we go back to the "real world". We try to move from the world of samsara, of illusion, to Samadhi, tranquility. Nirvana or enlightenment is a whole other issue.

The Diamond Sutra is really a Socratic dialogue between Subhuti and the Buddha about the delusions of existence. It's about emptiness. But that's really too easy a word. It's about no self, about there being no thing to hold on to. The diamond cuts through our delusions, especially our delusions about there being separate, isolated things. Every accomplishment gets shot down, because there is nothing to accomplish. Every merit is no merit if you think of it as merit. A Bodhisattva is not a bodhisattva if the Bodhisattva thinks it's a Bodhisattva. No one is saved until every one is saved and then no one is saved because there is no ONE.

The sutra starts with the Buddha cleaning a bowl and then sitting down to meditate. It is about a man just doing stuff. And then they talk. Back and forth until it leads you to a conclusion.

The Third Patriarch, Seng Tsan, in his Hsin Hsin Ming says that the moment you experience something is enlightenment, the moment you make a distinction all of that is lost. He says:

"The Great Way is not difficult  
For those who have no preferences.  
When love and hate are both absent  
Everything becomes clear and undisguised.  
Make the smallest distinction, however,  
And heaven and earth are set infinitely apart."

In the Fifth Patriarch's run-off for patriarch the runner up says you must polish the mirror on its stand so that no dust can alight.

"The body is the Bodhi tree,  
The mind is like a clear mirror,  
At all times we must strive to polish it  
And let no dust alight."

A good, conscientious monk.

The winner, who then ran for his life, said

"No stand, no mirror, no place for dust to rest.  
"Bodhi originally has no tree,  
The mirror also has no stand,  
From the beginning not a thing is  
Where is there room for dust?"

It's all about distinctions. Words bring with them a host of resonances. If we say tree each of us has a favorite tree that gets conjured up. Words cause a bit of delusion. Take a map of France. This is France. No, it's a map. Draw a line on the ground, on this side we have France. This side isn't France. Why? What makes it so? Because we say it's so? Think of the Middle East. After WW I, we drew lines and made countries. And there's been blood shed ever since. Because in a culture that doesn't even make distinctions between now and last week, how can you say I've crossed a border and the rules are different here than the ones there.

Rev. Bodhi ran a Monday meditation class. We sat. Just sat. Because to his mind, there was no use for words. Zen was sitting and from that came preparation to experience without distinctions.

In the Dhammappada the Buddha cries out that he has broken the lodge pole and reached enlightenment. He broke all the superstructure that holds things up. Our assumptions. Our preferences. Our knowing what is what

To think a thought with no thought. To not think about something. The Buddha said, "Arouse the mind without resting it upon anything." When I meditate I sometimes think of a slate grey field. No counting. No object. Except the slate grey field is grey and a field, so it is something. And there's still me thinking of it. Not there yet.

You have to destroy the SELF. That's where the terror comes in. The letting go. The stepping off the cliff. Is it faith or suicide?

In Christianity you come to God/Christ after you have given up all hopes, dreams, wishes, fears. When there is nothing left that you called your world, then you turn to God.

In Zen, koans are a furnace for this stripping away. You come to the point where going on as one's self makes no sense and you surrender. Meditation is slower, but its point is the same. We gradually give it all up. We give up the thing we thought we were, the thing that made life not seem pointless and absurd. The thing we could point to and say that's who I am. Hopes, dreams."And far from all fantasy there is dwelling in nirvana."

In Zen you don't come to anything. There is nothing to come to. And how do you feel about that? In Christianity it's called "the dark night of the soul" In the Diamond sutra it is "If anyone listens to this discourse and is not filled with alarm or awe or dread, be it known that such a one is of remarkable achievement."

Coming out on the other side can either bring bitterness and resentment and shutting down. Or peace. The peace that comes from feeling part of the whole--no me, no you.

In the Heart Sutra we chant ---"till we come to no old age and death and no ending of old age and death."

We live in the culture of ageism with an industry of death. Old age carries with it much dread and fear. Death is something people ignore, but spend thousands of dollars preparing for. Within emptiness we don't fall for those distinctions "Now I am old. Now I am about to die." Dogs don't think of themselves as old. They have the Buddha nature. They just don't know it. And at the same time there is the reality of getting old. and dying.

This is followed by "No wisdom and no attainment."

Enlightenment is not something we attain or are awarded or earn. There is no final exam and a degree bestowed. It is. Unlike a dog, we can know it. A monk said to a brother monk, "I went to my teacher with nothing and came away with nothing." The brother monk asked, "Then why did you go to your teacher?" The first monk replied, "How else would I know that I went to my teacher with nothing and came away with nothing?"

Zen mind is everyday mind. You have to let go of the rules of samsara. The rules of the game. It is a game"it's not real. Homo ludens. Mankind at play. If you don't take it too seriously it brings you to

"No suffering, no origination, no extinction, no path."

Which brings us to:

Thus shall you think of all this fleeting world,  
A star at dawn, a bubble in a stream.  
A flash of lightning in a summer cloud,  
A flickering lamp, a phantom, and a dream.

May you be well and happy, peaceful, and free from suffering.

### **Instructions for Life - By Rev. S raddha Karuna (Thich Tam Tin)**

A few months ago I received an e-mail from Rev. Chitta that was the Instructions for Life from the Dalai Lama. Today, I would like to share my thoughts on these instructions. But first of all, I would like to talk a bit about the Dalai Lama.

As you all know, the Dalai Lama is the spiritual and temporal leader of the Tibetan people. When most people in the world think of Buddhism, they think of the Dalai Lama. He was born into a peasant family in a small village in northeastern Tibet. At the age of two he was recognized as the reincarnation of the 13th Dalai Lama. His formal education began at six and was completed at twenty-five when he received a Doctorate of Buddhist Philosophy.

At 16 (in 1950), the Dalai Lama assumed full political power as Head of State and Government when Tibet was threatened by the Chinese. In 1954 he went to Peking to talk with Chinese leaders including Mao Tse-Tung. In 1959 the Chinese military occupied Tibet and His Holiness was forced to go into exile in India. To this day he is still working to re-establish Tibet's separate identity and restore the fundamental rights of the Tibetan people.

Unlike his predecessors, His Holiness has traveled widely and has met and talked with many political and religious leaders of the world.

Here is what he had to say about religions. "I always believe that it is much better to have a variety of religions, a variety of philosophies, rather than one single religion or philosophy. This is necessary because of the different mental dispositions of each human being. Each religion has certain unique ideas or techniques, and learning about them can only enrich one's own faith.

In 1989 he won the Nobel Peace Prize. Here are some quotes from his acceptance speech.

"I am very happy to be here with you today to receive the Nobel Prize for Peace. I feel honored, humbled and deeply moved that you should give this important prize to a simple monk from Tibet. I am no one special. But, I believe the prize is recognition of the true values of altruism, love, compassion and nonviolence, which I try to practice, in accordance with the teachings of the Buddha and the great sages of India and Tibet."

Later in his speech he talked about China. "In China the popular movement for democracy was crushed by brutal force in June this year. But I do not believe the demonstrations were in vain, because the spirit of freedom was rekindled among the Chinese people and China cannot escape the impact of this spirit of freedom sweeping many parts of the world. The brave students and their supporters showed the Chinese leadership and the world the human face of that great nation.

Last week a number of Tibetans were once again sentenced to prison terms of up to nineteen years at a mass show trial, possibly intended to frighten the population before today's event. Their only "crime" was the expression of the widespread desire of Tibetans for the restoration of their beloved country's independence.

The suffering of our people during the past forty years of occupation is well documented. Ours has been a long struggle. We know our cause is just. Because violence can only breed more violence and suffering, our struggle must remain nonviolent and free of hatred. We are trying to end the suffering of our people, not to inflict suffering upon others.

The Dalai Lama has never been afraid to be politically engaged. But always with the idea of non-violence. As Buddhists, one of our goals is to eliminate suffering or not create it. I believe what Zen Master Robert Aitken once wrote. "We have reached the place in international affairs, and in local affairs too, where it is altogether absurd to insist, as some of my Buddhist friends still do, that the religious person does not get involved with politics. What is political? Is torture political? As a matter of fact, the denial of politics in religious life is itself a political statement. The time when politics meant taking a position of allegiance to one government faction or another has long passed. Politics in our day of nuclear overkill is a matter of ignoring the First Precept or acting upon it. And may I add, inaction can create suffering.

The Dalai Lama ended his talk with this: "With the ever-growing impact of science on our lives, religion and spirituality have a greater role to play by reminding us of our humanity. There is no contradiction between the two. Each gives us valuable insights into the other. Both science and the teachings of the Buddha tell us of the fundamental unity of all things. This understanding is crucial if we are to take positive and decisive action on the

pressing global concern with the environment. I believe all religions pursue the same goals, that of cultivating human goodness and bringing happiness to all human beings. Though the means might appear different, the ends are the same.

As we enter the final decade of this century I am optimistic that the ancient values that have sustained mankind are today reaffirming themselves to prepare us for a kinder, happier twenty-first century. I pray for all of us, oppressor and friend, that together we succeed in building a better world through human understanding and love, and that in doing so we may reduce the pain and suffering of all sentient beings."

Several years ago Rev. Karuna brought us to a breakfast meeting to meet the Dalai Lama. It was an intense and beautiful experience. The moment that made me smile was when the Dalai Lama wanted to make sure Rev. Karuna had a proper chair to sit in.

I have a great fondness for this man. He is practical. There is a PBS film about him that warmed my heart. There is a moment when he is talking with a young man with AIDS. The young man is telling him how spirituality and meditation are helping him. And that is all he needs. The Dalai Lama asks him if he has a good doctor and suggests some Tibetan doctors. Practical. We live in an all too real world. An old nun approaches him; she is afraid of dying and afraid she will be reborn in the animal realm. He looks at her and tells her not to worry since she has many more years to live. He takes away fear. We are all going to die. Don't worry. Ignore the mouse. His manner of teaching is the manner in which the Buddha taught. He met people on whatever level they were on. And he'd begin his teaching from there. Someone once said that the Buddha was the world's first great "shrink."

### **Instructions for Life** by Rev. Sraddha Karuna, Thich Tam Tin

The first sentence of all these instructions is the Dalai Lama's. The editorializing---good, bad, indifferent is mine.

1) Take into account that great love and great achievements involve risk. When I think about that I think of the great risk the Buddha took. He left a privileged life and his family to try to come up with an answer to why we suffer. To go on such a journey his love for all humanity must have been enormous. He went on this journey not just to answer the question for himself, but to try to ease the suffering of all sentient beings. If we are to live an abundant life, there will be moments when risk will be involved. Retreating to what we feel is our safe space is not always such a good idea. For everything changes. And our supposed safe space may not be so safe after all. While living, you cannot escape from life. So why hide? Live it fully.

2) When you lose, don't lose the lesson. This is a hard one. No one likes to lose. And when we do, we often feel like utter failures and that we have wasted our precious time. The Buddha spent a few years as an ascetic. He starved his body hoping to become enlightened. When it did not work, he took another path, never regretting what he had done. He did not lose the lesson. The great Eisenstein spent years working on a certain theory. The theory did not work. An interviewer said to him that he must be very sorry for the wasted years. "What wasted years?" Eisenstein asked. "I found out that the theory didn't work. I wasted no time." If we learn from our mistakes and don't repeat the same history, then a lesson has been learned. Win or lose, a lesson has been learned.

3) Follow the three R's. Respect your self. Respect others. Responsibility for all your actions. As Buddhists, we cannot look to God to solve our problems. Or blame God for our unhappy life. We have to take responsibility. (And hopefully with a little help from our friends.) Every moment we live we are creating our own karma. Our actions begin a huge chain reaction. Cause and effect. And no matter how small our skillful or unskillful actions are, they will affect the universe.

4) Remember not getting what you want is sometimes a wonderful stroke of luck. I have to really think about this one. Too often what we want is wrapped up in something material. I need more money. Which is true. I want my career to be going better. Which is also true. But the craving for it only causes more suffering within me. Because it will never be enough. The wanting is craving. And craving, even when momentarily satisfied, will only lead to more suffering. Does that mean I should give up? Of course not. All I can do is my work and take joy in it. And take joy in the process. And to be in the present. And often not getting what you want opens your heart to others. To those who are not getting what they need. Not getting what you need is very different from not getting what you want.

5) Learn the rules so you know how to break them prop-erly. I like this one a lot. Because this is also the rule of art. Every great artist or thinker or philosopher who created some-thing new or gave us a new idea knew the rules of his or her craft or culture and knew why they were breaking them. Again, it is skillful actions.

6. Do not let a little dispute injure a great relationship. I find that this is a sweet message. The Dalai Lama is telling us to value our relationships. To respect sentient beings. Too often our disagreements stem from our desire to make another being conform to what we want them to be. But it definitely does not mean we should take any "shit" or destruction behavior. Be present with an open heart.

7. When you realize you've made a mistake, take immediate steps to correct it. Again, the Dalai Lama is telling us that zoning out is not the answer. We, as Buddhists, have to be a part of the world. We should be conscious of our actions. We should be conscious of the

karma we are creating for ourselves and the universe.

8) Spend some time alone. Alone time. I, as a writer, may have too much time alone. But it is not the alone time that the Dalai Lama is probably talking about. I have broken every New Year's resolution I have ever made. But I made a simple one this year. I haven't kept it every day, but I am doing better with it than I have ever done. I've decided in the morning, I will spend a certain amount of time meditating and reading something Buddhist. I sit in my study, light incense; sometimes my dog, Tess, joins me, and I meditate. I chant. It's time alone I've become addicted to. It's probably the best respect for myself I've ever acknowledged. It's something for me. It makes me happy. I recommend this to everyone. There is no excuse, no matter how busy, how important we think we are, to not carve out some private time that will help our spiritual growth.

9. Open your arms to change, but don't let go of your values. That's kind of a funny Buddhist statement. "Open your arms to change" What else can you do? One of the basic premises of Buddhism is that everything changes. And one of the basic truths of life. But as you open your arms to change, approach the change as a Buddhist. We are lucky that in this lifetime we have been exposed to the dharma.

10. Remember that silence is sometimes the best answer. Too often all our responses are invaded by ego. Sometimes it is just better to sit quiet and experience what is going on. Be in the moment. And do not let your ego think you have to respond to it. We should remember that too often our opinions are just cultivated prejudices.

11. Live a good, honorable life. Then when you are older and think back, you'll be able to enjoy it a second time. I love this statement. I don't feel old yet, but I have made so many mis-takes in my life. So many unskillful statements, actions. But there are a few things I am proud of. And sometimes I rest easy at night because of them.

12. A loving atmosphere in your home is the foundation for life. How simple. How true. The Buddha came up with precepts and rules so that the community of monks could live together. He wanted a peaceful home. The sangha. We have the ability to create a home wherever we go. And if we create a home on the principles of Buddhism, we will create a loving atmosphere.

13. In disagreements, with loved ones, deal only with the current situation. Don't bring up the past. This is great advice. It is all about being present. Being in the moment. And is the disagreement more important than our loved one?

14. Share your knowledge. It is a way to achieve immortality. As a dramatist, I believe more in what people do than in what people say. When the Buddha became enlightened, he

questioned what to do with the knowledge. And he made the great decision to share it. I am grateful to all the monks, dharma teachers and Buddhists here who generously share their knowledge. .

15. Be gentle with the earth. Need we say more? Maybe as Buddhists, we should do one small gesture each day that helps our planet. Picking up a piece of litter, watering a starving flower, being aware of the universe we live in.

16. Once a year, go someplace you've never been before. I love this idea. When I read it, it sort of woke me up. I've become too cocoon like. I used to be adventurous. But not lately. I like going to the same places all the time. So this idea resonates with me. Go someplace different. Try something different. Be open to different experiences. Be open to this adventure called life.

17. Remember that the best relationship is one in which your love for each other exceeds your need for each other. There is a lovely essence of Buddhism in that statement. The need is the attachment. And a great attachment can cause suffering. But great and pure love doesn't. When the Buddha talked about attachments, he didn't mean that we should stop loving. In fact, he wanted us to open our hearts to all sentient beings.

18. Judge your success by what you had to give up in order to get it. If you do that, you will be living a skillful life. One that is self-aware. One that is open to change. One where you can correct the mistakes of the past.

19. Lastly, approach love and cooking with reckless abandon. Just think about that one.

It is always an honor to speak before you. May you all be happy, peaceful and free from suffering.

### **Equanimity** - by Rev. Jñāna Vajra, Thich Tam

"Dharma gates are limitless. I vow to study them all." Thus do we chant each Sunday morning from the Bodhisattva Vows in our chant book. These weekly dharma talks are one way we study dharma gates when we are here together. The dharma gate we pass through today is that of equanimity. What exactly is equanimity and what does it mean to us? In exploring that question, some dictionary and etymological definitions will provide a foundation for our search. A review of the very significant role of equanimity in the sutra tradition will then provide the necessary support for some modern insights in to the importance of developing equanimity.

There is a wealth of meaning beneath the simple dictionary definitions of the word equanimity which is worth pursuing. In English the word is normally defined as evenness of mind, calmness or composure, especially under stress, or as right disposition. Our English word comes down to us from a Latin root, which means impartial, even-tempered. These understandings only hint at its full nature in Buddhist terms.

We get closer to the mark when we turn to the two Pali words for which equanimity is a translation, the first being, the more common term upekkha. Its broad interpretation is "to see," "on-looking" or "to look over". It refers to the equanimity that arises from the power of observation-the ability to see without being caught by what we see. When well developed, such power gives rise to a great sense of peace. Upekkha can also refer to the spaciousness that comes from seeing a bigger picture. Colloquially, in India the word was sometimes used to mean "to see with patience." We might understand this as "seeing with understanding."

Alternatively, upekkha is also the Pali counterpoint of the Latin word respicere, meaning respect. Here respect means to look at, to see an object as it is. Equanimity is the product of the mental process whereby one fully sees things for what they are, in and of themselves.

Still more qualities of equanimity are revealed by the second Pali term, tatra-majjha-tata, a long compound made of simple Pali words. Tatra, meaning "there", sometimes refers to "all these things". Majjha means "middle" and tata means to stand or to pose. When combined together the elements collectively become "to stand in the middle of all of this" or "keeping in the middle of all things." As a form of equanimity, this "being in the middle" refers to balance, to remaining centered in the middle of whatever is happening. This form of balance comes from some inner strength or stability.

To quote Gil Fronsdal, who has also provided much of the preceding: "A simple definition of 'equanimity', considering the various Pali roots, is the capacity to not be caught up with what happens to us."

Before turning to the specific applications of the concept of equanimity in Buddhist theory and practice we may note that the concept of equanimity predates Buddhism in India. It most likely was transmitted in to Buddhism from older Vedic or pre-Brahmanic practices. Also, Buddhism does not have a monopoly on equanimity as it also appears as a precursor to and expression of enlightenment, as a wonderful and necessary quality of mind and heart, in both Sufism and Kabbalah.

In the sutras equanimity is regarded as one of the seven factors of enlightenment, that is, the factors that lead to enlightenment. Equanimity is also an integral element of the

experience of nirvana. The higher state of consciousness that is the nirvanic state involves, among other attainments, the fullness and perfection of equanimity.

In the fifth century C.E. the monk Buddhaghosa summarized that portion of the Abhidhamma section of the Tripitaka dealing with meditation into a separate work entitled Visuddhimagga or the Path of Purification. In this context purification was strictly taken to refer to nirvana. In the Visuddhimagga Buddhaghosa isolates ten, partly-overlapping kinds of equanimity as discussed in the Pali canon. The actual variations between the ten types do not concern us here except to illustrate that one could pursue the notion of equanimity, at least scholastically, considerably further than we are doing here this morning.

In the earliest Buddhist scriptures the three realms of existence are identified—the desire realm, the form realm, and the formless realm. One characteristic of the formless realm, which utterly transcends all physical sensation, is that existence in this realm is permeated by an abiding state of perfect equanimity.

However, it is in the desire realm, characterized by the experience of sensual desires and pain, that human beings and animals exist. It is in this realm that the Buddha lived and promulgated his teachings, including the Noble Eightfold Path, as the fourth of his Four Noble Truths. The final element in the Eightfold Path is Right Concentration or Right Meditation. This means training the mind to achieve the state of focused attention necessary to enter the jhanas.

Much could be said about the jhanas but their importance to us is their incorporation of equanimity as the highest state.

The jhanas are states of deep meditative absorption characterized by lucid awareness. They result from the centering of the mind upon a single object with such a degree of attention that the discursive activity of thought is slowed down and eventually stopped. Right concentration thus consists of the attainment of the four preliminary stages of contemplation, the rupa jhanas, each building on the preceding one. This culminates in the development of unprejudiced perception or equanimity with regard to what is perceived in the fourth jhana. The moral state of consciousness attained in equanimity helps the meditator transcend bliss and suffering.

To quote from Peter Harvey: "The fourth jhana is a state of profound stillness and peace, in which the mind rests with unshakeable one-pointedness and equanimity, and breathing has calmed to the point of stopping...it seems to have been the state from which the Buddha went on to attain enlightenment." At the end of his life, it was also from the stage of equanimity that the Buddha experienced his parinirvana.

The incumbent difficulties and the time investment of years, if not a lifetime, of training in working with the jhanas naturally limited their practice to monastics. Accordingly, achievement of the enlightened status of arahat, when it did occur, was normally limited to monastics. An alternative, somewhat parallel, meditative approach was provided by the Buddha in the practice of the Brahma Viharas.

While there have been previous dharma talks by others on the Brahma Viharas it is necessary here to provide an overview of them to better understand equanimity's place within them. The Brahma Viharas, or the divine abidings, as their name literally translates, and also known as the four immeasurables. The term Brahma in their name means that which is the highest or holiest, thus divine. Their constituent elements are, of course, immeasurable loving-kindness (metta); compassion (karuna); sympathetic joy (mudita); and equanimity (upekka).

These divine abidings embody the higher reaches of Buddhist ethical values. The four specific virtues, as states to which Buddhists aspire to, constitute subjects for the deepest reflective contemplation, with the hope of relating the results to ongoing lay life and to be developed towards all sentient beings without qualification or exclusiveness. They are meditational devices to get rid of all emotions and attachments, both negative and positive. Like the jhanas each quality builds on the one before it in a logical progression. Equanimity as the highest of the four suggests the same progression found among the jhanas movement toward detachment and neutrality, toward cooling the emotional temperature of involvement with others. The peace of psychological isolation and neutrality to self and the world is to found in upekkha. Here a sense of the non-reality of one's own self or other selves is the dominant feeling. This was the ideal state achieved by the Arahants in early Buddhism, but now attainable by non-monastics as well.

Each of the four sublime states have a "far enemy", which is the clear opposite of the quality and a "near enemy", which is like a deceptive substitute we settle for, instead of the real thing. Both sets of attitudes are to be distinguished and avoided as dangerous in establishing the desired dispositions as meditation subjects. The far enemy of equanimity is resentment, greed or aversion. The near enemy is apathy or indifference.

Buddhaghosa, in his aforementioned Visuddhimagga, provided an exhaustive but quite useful breakdown of nine major characteristics of each of the Brahma Viharas, with one of the nine being a description of the near and far enemies. As regards equanimity the other eight categories he identifies are, first with the category name then with the nature of that category:

Characteristic: promoting objectivity toward beings; Function: to see equality in beings; Manifestation: the subsiding of acquisitiveness and resistance; Proximate Cause: seeing ownership of deeds; Succeeds When It: makes acquisitiveness and resistance subside; Fails When It: produces mundane equanimity of the uninformed; The Way to Purity: for one who has much attachment; Like a Mother: with a son who is busy with his own affairs, for she is not worried about what he does.

Equanimity is also a forceful influence in Tantric Buddhism. In Tantrism the four Brahma Viharas are seen as the manifestation of the four great elements of the ordinary body earth, water, fire and wind. Thus, the quality of equanimity is associated with the wind.

As we have seen equanimity has been an important concept throughout Buddhist history and practice. But where does its meaning lie for Buddhist practitioners today, particularly Western Buddhists, and how might we best cultivate it?

The meaning and relevance of equanimity has not changed over the millennia since wise teachers first recognized its value. It is as important in the practice of 21st century Buddhism as it was at the time of the Buddha's teachings. Some additional thoughts on the nature of equanimity can help make this point.

Soyen Shaku, the Japanese Zen master whose tour in 1905 introduced Zen to the United States, summarized the effect of equanimity as a serenity of all of the senses, an increased kindness of heart, and a retiring from the field of consciousness of those passions of anger, infatuation, greed, excessive sexuality, and egoism.

On the meditation cushion, as in life lived daily beyond the cushion, equanimity means looking at whatever comes up in the process of mindful inspection and accepting it fully, without reacting for or against; without attaching oneself to pleasant sensations or recoiling from unpleasant ones, but simply observing each and every one of them as-in the traditional phrase-"a sensation among sensations".

Accordingly, one must train oneself not to react. Repressing reactions that arise is useless, since the very act of repression already implies a desire, volition. When there is a reaction to the observation, this means one is still identifying with the experience. The correct strategy in such a case is not to repress the emerging impulse but to make at once the reaction itself the object of mindful, detached observation, thus disidentifying from it.

Put yet another way, to work toward equanimity, we let go of attachments. In this we distinguish between the normalcy of caring and loving from the slavery of being bound and chained by identification and clinging. The latter may, at any moment, drag us out of

presence and down into the world of reactions. Unwelcome events do send ripples across the calm ocean of equanimity, ripples informing us of the need to respond. But it is precisely the quality of equanimity that helps us to respond effectively instead of reactively.

We can practice with equanimity by studying the ways that we get caught. Instead of pursuing the ideal of balance and nonreactivity directly, we can give careful attention to how balance is lost and how reactivity is triggered. Trying to fit into some idealistic model of what being equanimous is supposed to look like can all too easily produce such threats to equanimity as indifference, aloofness, rigidity, or complacency. But when the obstacles are understood and removed, then the resulting equanimity can be the foundation for caring, presence, flexibility and diligence.

One author I consulted has this wonderful description of equanimity: "...there is equanimity, which is diametrically opposed to attachment and aversion. The more you cultivate equanimity, once again, it's like having an immune system that enables you to carry a peace zone with you wherever you go."

Gil Fronsdal, another author, whom I quoted earlier, suggests that one approach to developing equanimity is to cultivate the qualities of mind that support it. I can imagine no better conclusion than to offer his seven supports for equanimity, as they appear in the Winter 2005 issue of Tricycle magazine:

1. Integrity: When we live and act with integrity or virtue, we feel confident about our actions and words, which results in the equanimity of blamelessness. The ancient Buddhist texts speak of being able to go into any assembly of people and feel blameless.

2. Faith: While any kind of faith can provide equanimity, faith grounded in wisdom is especially powerful. The Pali word for faith, *saddha*, is also translated as "conviction" or confidence. If we have confidence, for example, in our ability to engage in a spiritual practice, then we are more likely to meet its challenges with equanimity.

3. A well-developed mind: Much as we might develop physical strength, balance and stability of the body in a gym, so too can we develop strength, balance, and stability of the mind. This is done through practices that cultivate calm, concentration, and mindfulness. When the mind is calm, we are less likely to be blown about by the worldly winds.

4. Well-being: In Buddhism, it is considered appropriate and helpful to cultivate and enhance our well-being. It is all too easy to overlook the well-being that is easily available in daily life. Even taking time to enjoy one's tea or the sunset can be a training in letting in well-being.

5. Wisdom: Wisdom can teach us to separate people's actions from who they are. We can agree or disagree with their actions, but remain balanced in our relationship with a person. Or we can understand that our own thoughts and impulses are the result of interpersonal conditions. By not taking them so personally, we are more likely to stay at ease with their arising. One of the powerful ways to use wisdom to facilitate equanimity is to be mindful of when equanimity is absent. Honest awareness of what makes us imbalanced helps us to learn how to find balance. Wisdom can also be an important factor in learning to have an accepting awareness, to be present without the mind or heart contracting or resisting.

6. Insight: Insight is a deep seeing into the nature of things as they are. One of the primary insights is the nature of impermanence. In the deepest forms of insight, we see that things change so quickly that we can't hold onto anything, and eventually the mind lets go of clinging. Letting go brings equanimity; the greater the letting go, the greater the equanimity.

7. Freedom: Freedom comes when we begin to let go of our reactive tendencies. We can get a taste of what this means by noticing areas in which we were once reactive but are no longer so...In Buddhist practice, we work to expand the range of life experiences in which we are free.

I thank you for your equanimous attention.

### **Prison Dharma, a column devoted to the writings of prisoners around the country**

**Life, - by Corey**

What is Life?

A baby being born to a mother  
A family outing on a spring day  
On a Sunday morning gathering at church

What is Life?

A child waking up on Christmas day  
A homeless person who has been given a place to stay  
Or someone who has been saved

What is Life?

Togetherness of Love and Peace, of all God's children  
Doesn't matter what creed or nationality  
That's Life to me

**Venerable Master:**

I turned 41 today and thanks to your teachings and those of the Buddha all is well! I was told today that I looked older than I am. This is ok as it shows that I have achieved the look of great wisdom. I did not feel wise a few years ago. I just felt stupid and very much a failure. Through my studies with you I have picked myself up and dusted myself off. I am in college trying to finish my degree and I feel very much at peace with my life such as it is. I am where I belong right now and that will change when it is time for that change. I have 3 years left to do on an 8 year sentence and I can see now that I have found myself spiritually, that this experience is what I needed. Prison pulled me out of a horribly destructive relationship and placed me in an atmosphere where my spiritual self could assert itself. I am certain my life has changed for the better. Most prison inmates worry about the big black X on their back when they get out. I believe that the big black X is 90% self destruction and an excuse to remain on the path to self-destruction. My studies have taught me something much more valuable than material things. I would much rather leave this world with hundreds or even thousands of people who know me as a good loving man than to leave this world with millions of dollars. The money will not follow me, but the good merit will. It's not really that simple, but that's a western way of looking at it, I think. I do a correspondence course with Richard Baksa in Florida, and not too long ago I made up a word to describe two things. It turned out that I later found that word. Paramartha which can mean absolute truth or absolute ultimate reality, exactly the two words I was trying to convey to Mr. Baksa. My spelling was off, but the word I "made up" bore an uncanny resemblance to paramartha. I am not sure if I had seen the word before or not, but I know that the thought that this sprang from was deeply rooted in my nature. I often find myself at a loss for words in this way and I believe it comes from my past lives. In this life my spelling is horrible, but perhaps college combined with your patient, blessed teaching will help? I live in the Dharma which I do not hold on to. As with all things it is transient. Be well, Teacher, and free from all things.

Thank you so much, Karunadasa Karuna,

**Dear Karuna:**

There's no other way to express this. You've been a real gift of guidance and knowledge. And I can't thank you enough. I feel I owe you everything. Without you this wouldn't even

be possible. You have given me the tools to help me communicate with my people. Now our conversations become more worthwhile listening to. To answer your question, yes I am Cambodian and black and looking forward to learning more about my mother's homeland of Cambodia. In this environment we live in, most young people don't have a clue about their culture. So, we depend on the elders for their advice to help us.

However, since I've met up with you, nothing but good has come from your study. I feel like this is a dream due to my being in prison. Nobody is supposed to care about us. We are considered to be the scum of the earth. The low lifes, and yet you talk to me like I'm a real person. It's a beautiful feeling and it makes me want to live again. You help me realize life isn't just about me. This is why. My journey is about being willing to help and never worry about how I look while doing it. People try to avoid their true calling. then walk around chanting they don't have a reason to live.

Well, you reminded me what I've always been known to do: Help people!!! under any circumstance, not take credit for good deeds. Appreciate life and everything it has to give., whether it be "good" or "bad". Just be able to know to carry one's self. I can't say enough. You're the gift everyone always talks about: the gift of wisdom.

Thank you. Patrick

**Dear Venerable Abbess:**

I wanted to share a lesson that I learned from a very close relative. It was a lesson I was not expecting, and it struck me into a state of awareness that was very beneficial.

I have an uncle who lives in a coal town in Northeastern Pennsylvania. He lives very near to a river, and it is notorious for flooding at least once a season. For the last decade his house has been under five feet of water every spring. Our winter has been very mild and very rainy. The flood waters have come several times, totally ruining the contents of his home again. I questioned him about why he continues to live in such a place when he can afford to move to higher ground that does not flood. It would be a matter of moving only seven blocks away.

His answer was very humbling. He told me, "On a regular basis, all of my worldly things are destroyed. When this happens I am reminded that nothing is permanent, and I must remain focused on what is the most important--my desire to better myself. If I would move my life again would be motivated by the common greed that drives humanity, and I am content to have this reminder, as it helps me on my path to liberation."

This was a very sobering reminder about placing priorities on practice instead of on what

what goes on in life's little trivialities. It was not until that moment that I knew my uncle was Buddhist. I thought that this conversation might be of interest to you.

Yours in the Dharma, Your Student Mahakas'yapa Karuna

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### **IBMC teachers' email addresses**

IBMC email: [IBMC@myway.com](mailto:IBMC@myway.com)

Ven. Karuna's email: [Karunadh@comcast.net](mailto:Karunadh@comcast.net)

Ven. Shanti's email: [Hshanti1@yahoo.com](mailto:Hshanti1@yahoo.com)

Rev. Kusala's email: [Kusala@kusala.org](mailto:Kusala@kusala.org)

Rev. Chitta email: [Kchitta@yahoo.com](mailto:Kchitta@yahoo.com)

Rev. Hanasi's email: [Hanasi@Comcast.net](mailto:Hanasi@Comcast.net)

Rev. Vajra email: [Madmonk88@aol.com](mailto:Madmonk88@aol.com)

Rev. Jñana's email: [Lsipe@usc.edu](mailto:Lsipe@usc.edu)

Rev. MaitriDasi's email: [Mira@Miramarmango.com](mailto:Mira@Miramarmango.com)

Rev. Ksanti & S'raddha's email : [VictorTom@aol.com](mailto:VictorTom@aol.com)

Rev. S'unya's email: [HeartlandZen@yahoo.com](mailto:HeartlandZen@yahoo.com)

Br. Dharmadasa (Gary)'s email: [Dharmadasa@urbandharma.org](mailto:Dharmadasa@urbandharma.org)

Sr. Chandana: [Sandechan@yahoo.com](mailto:Sandechan@yahoo.com)

### **March Events**

#### **Sunday Talks**

3/5 Walking Meditation

11am Rev. Kusala Ratna Karuna, Thich Tam-Thien

3/12

11am Rev. S'unya Vajra Karuna, Thich Tam-Khong

3/19 To Choose or Not to Choose

11am Ven. Karuna Dharma, Thich An-Tu

3/26 Tibetan Buddhism and Chanting

11am Rev. Lobsang Palmo, a Tibetan nun from Mongolia

### **Classes at IBMC**

Mon Lam Rim (Tibetan) Meditation  
7pm Rev. Kelsang Chitt

Wed Every Day Buddhism  
7 pm Rev. Kusala Ratna Karuna

Thurs Writing Class  
7 pm Sr. Candana Karuna

Fri Beginning Buddhism  
7 pm Rev. Hanasi, Thich Tam-Hy

Sun Women's Chat Group  
7 pm Rev. Hanasi , Thich Tam-Hy

### **Special Events**

3/5 108 Bows Ceremony, led by Rev. S'unya

3/11 Seminar on the Heart Sutra, 1-4 pm  
led by Ven. Karuna Dharma, Thich An-Tu

### **Meditation**

Some weekday mornings: 6-7 am - led by Rev. Hanasi Karuna, call Rev. Hanasi at 385-5292 to be sure it is meeting on a particular day.

Mondays, 7 pm, Lam Rim Meditation - led by Rev. Kelsang Chitta Karuna

Tuesdays, led by Sr, Candana, from 11 am -1 pm

Fridays, 7:30-9 pm, led by Rev. Kusala

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### **Web Pages**

IBMC Web page: [www.IBMC.info](http://www.IBMC.info)

Ven. Karuna's web page: [www.Karunadharm.org](http://www.Karunadharm.org)

Rev. Kusala's web page: [www.Urbandharma.org](http://www.Urbandharma.org) / [www.Kusala.info](http://www.Kusala.info)

Rev. Chitta's web page: [www.KChitta.tripod.com](http://www.KChitta.tripod.com)

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**International Buddhist Meditation Center**

928 S. New Hampshire Avenue

Los Angeles, CA 90006

phone: 213 3984-0850