

IBMC Monthly Guide - April 2006

Koan class begins April 4

Rev. Vajra is teaching a 6 week course on Zen koans, beginning April 4 in Ananda Hall from 7-8:30.

Koans are the sacred literature of Zen. In many cases they replace the regular Buddhist Sutras. The reasons for this are complicated, but one of the main reasons is that the Sutras, like most sacred writings, are written to accommodate the reader's very logical, non-paradoxical ways of thinking. As far as Zen is concerned, trying to logically think one's way to enlightenment is a very slow and very uncertain process. To by pass this process Zen developed the koan system.

A koan, in its barest sense, is a stated or implied question, the purpose of which is to try to exhaust and defeat the student's addiction to normal or unenlightened intellectual dual-thinking and force the student's mind into non-normal or enlightened non-dual thinking.

Hanamatsuri, April 9 Bathing the Baby Buddha

The founder of our Center, Ven. Dr. Thich Thien-An, often said that the Buddha's birthday is everyone's birthday. Please join us in bathing the baby Buddha as we celebrate the Buddha's birthday in Japanese style on Sunday, April 10, followed by a potluck luncheon in the Zendo garden. Please bring a vegetarian dish or drinks to the lunch. If you would like to bake a birthday cake please call the office to let us know.

The historical Buddha was born 2647 years ago in a garden at Lumbini in the Himalaya mountains, as Queen Maya was attempting to get from Kapilavastu to her parents' home in Devadaha. She held onto the branches of a fragrant sala tree and gave birth to the prince, who was bathed by the gods with sweet waters and flowers falling from the heavens. Legend says that he took seven steps as lotus flowers bloomed under each footfall, and raising his right hand towards the heavens and his left to the ground, declared, "Under heaven and above the earth, I am the most honored one. This is my last birth. I will put an end to the suffering of birth, old age and death."

While the traditional day observed differs from school to school, we observe the Japanese date of the Flower Festival - Hanamatsuri. In May we celebrate the traditional Vaisakha (the triple blessed day of his birth, enlightenment and death) with a retreat. The Hanamatsuri ceremony ends with all of us reenacting the bathing of the new born

prince.

Celebration for Ven. Karuna's 25 years as Abbess of IBMC

Ven. Karuna officially was made Abbess of IBMC in April of 1981. She had been acting abbess since Ven. Dr. Thich Thien-An's death in November 1980. It is also her 66th birthday. So, her students felt it was a good time to honor her.

We invite all of you to come to the party on Sunday April 30, following the Sunday service. The party begins at 12:30 with a luncheon, followed by an afternoon of music, poetry readings, etc. If you have anything to offer, such as music, dance, poetry, etc., please contact Rev. Chitta at 213 383-3248 or our office at 213 384-0850. Call by April 25 if you plan on attending. Gifts are not necessary.

Ven. Shanti and Ven. Karuna in Taiwan

Abbess Karuna and Vice-Abbot Shanti are going to the World Fellowship of Buddhists Conference in Kaoshiung, Taiwan. They are leaving April 13. Ven. Karuna returns on April 23 after doing IBMC shopping, while Ven. Shanti continues on to Sri Lanka to attend to his temple's business.

He is planning to build a large Dharma school building for the kids to have a place to receive their Buddhist education. Right now they meet in an outdoor pavilion, but fitting 350 kids into it in different classes is impossible. Now many of the classes sit under the trees, but with the frequent rainfall in Sri Lanka, their classes are sometimes unable to meet. If you would like to contribute toward the building of these classrooms, make out a check to IBMC with the note for Sri Lanka Dharma school. That way your donation will be tax deductible.

108 Bows Ceremony

The first Sunday of the month at 10 am, we do the 108 Bows ceremony, celebrating the 88 known Buddhas. We invite you to help us to perform the ceremony. It is a good practice before our service at 11 am. This month the ceremony will be led by Sr. Candana Karuna.

Vaishaka retreat

IBMC will hold its Vaishaka weekend retreat from May 12-14. Mark your calendars now and let the center know no later than May 7 if you plan on attending.

Who Are You, Who am I - by Ven. Karuna Dharma at IBMC on February 12.

There are several different levels on which we can speak about a person. For instance if we are going to speak about me, I could say, I am a female Caucasian, age 65 years. My paternal ancestors came from England in 1629, the year before the great Puritan migration, to start what was later called the Massachusetts Bay Company. They wanted him to see if it would be worthwhile to trade with the New World. He ended up staying in the New World. He lived in Salem and was a magistrate. Fortunately he was not in Salem during the Salem Witchtrials. He had already moved to an adjacent town. In fact, I have never wanted to know which side my family was on, because both sides were rather terrifying.

And then my maternal grandfather came from Norway in the 1880's at the beginning of the great Norwegian migration. He settled in Wisconsin where he met my grandmother and eventually they married. So, we could talk about these less important things of who I am or we can look deeper.

Theistic religions, such as Christianity, when they look at people to find out who they are, they peel off all that is unimportant, such as what I gave you, until they come up with a little of the divine, which they call soul, or the Vedics call the atman.

But in Buddhism when we do that we come up with nothing. The Buddha declared anatman, no atman - no soul. On that point he was adamant. saying that when a person died, nothing was left over. Well, then, if I have no soul, who am I? I thought we would explore this a little today.

The Buddha taught us that the human, in fact, all sentient beings, are made up of five skandhas - collections of collections. The first of these skandhas is rupa or body form. Our bodies are made up of four elements: solidity, fluidity, air movement and heat. 1) Solidity is found in bone, muscle, things like that. 2) Fluidity is the things that flow through our body such as blood, urine, and things of that nature. 3) the third factor is air movement. When we breathe in we take in air, which goes into our lungs, where carbon dioxide is breathed out and oxygen is eventually dispersed into blood, which ends up in our cells, which nourishes them. 4) The fourth factor is heat. When we eat food, it becomes transformed into calories, which warms our body. You all know these sorts of things. When any one of these functions stops, the body dies. All are needed for the body to have life.

Then he goes on to state that there are also four mental collections. 1) The first of them is vedana, which is sensation and the perception of sensation. 2) The second is samjña, or conception. Because what we sense we think about. 3) the third is samskara or volitional

habit patterns. To my thinking everything we do is volitional, except for our autonomic behaviors such as breathing. We can control our breathing, but not the breathing itself. because if we stopped breathing we would then die. 4) The fourth is vijñāna, or consciousness itself.

Now let us look at these four functions individually. Vedana is the perception of the sensations we receive. Ordinarily they do not occur one at a time. For instance when we see a flower we ordinarily smell its fragrance as well. And we can almost feel it without touching it. And we hear insects buzzing around it. Mahayana calls the five vijñānas the sense consciousnesses: eye consciousness, ear consciousness, nose consciousness, tongue consciousness and skin or feeling consciousness. These five consciousnesses then are integrated together by what we call the mano vijñāna or mind consciousness. The sixth consciousness brings all of them together and tries to make sense of them. Then the seventh consciousness is manas or mind. The eighth consciousness is alaya vijñāna or storehouse consciousness that store all of our karmic seeds, rather like Freud's subconsciousness.

I did not discuss the seventh consciousness or mind for a reason. The first six consciousnesses are what we encounter in our daily lives, in our external world. The alaya vijñāna is completely an internal world. You cannot see it. You cannot hear it. You cannot smell or taste it, etc. So the seventh consciousness is the bridge between our external consciousnesses and our internal consciousness. So that is very important. This is where we come up with the mistaken idea that we have a permanent identity or ego or soul. The seventh consciousness where we become very mixed up, is basically just a bridge between the external consciousness and the internal. Does everybody understand that?

So then let us look at this in terms of paticcasamuppada, (pratityasamutpada) in sanskrit. That is basically conditioned things. Because in Buddhism all things are conditioned except for enlightenment or Nirvana itself. They come about because of certain things. If you have "this", you have "that". If you put "this" together with "this" you get "that". They come about because of certain things. So if we look at pratityasamutpada we can see how our bodies and minds become involved in this. There are 12 links to the chain of dependent origination. You can start at any point, but for convenience sake we usually start at avidya or ignorance. the first link is avidya, the second is samskara, or karmic habit patterns. Because we have ignorance, we have karma. Because we have karma we have 3) vijñāna, or consciousness. because we have consciousness we have body-mind, 4) nama-rupa . If we have body-mind, we then have 5) salayatana, sense bases; When we have sense bases we then have 6) phassa, spars'a in Sanskrit, or sense contact or sense impression. Then we have 7) vedana or reaction to contacts. Then from these contacts there arises 8) trisna or tanha, thirst or craving. Once we contact something we ordinarily say that was lovely or distasteful. bad. Ordinarily it's either good or bad. Sometimes it is neutral, but not very

often. So once we experience we call it pleasurable or not pleasurable and our thirst arises. Then we want to try it again and again. It is called thirst. I think that is a wonderful translation of trisna. It is like an uncontrollable thirst. And that is where karma begins.

Then after thirst, 9) clinging, upadana, arises. We have to have this. We cannot let go. From there then comes 10) bhava, becoming. From bhava there is 11) rebirth, jati. Once we have birth, there is jara-marana, old age and death. Lamentation, suffering, grief and despair. It really makes us want to live, doesn't it? Whenever we have a memorial service, Ven. Shanti chants the verses on impermanence that tells how all this comes about and then chants it in reverse telling us how we can be rid of them.

So if that is who I am, who are you then? Once we become enlightened, all this disappears. Then what is left over? Just pure enlightenment, pure Nirvana. The Theravadans describe Nirvana in two ways: Nirvana with substrate (with a body) and Nirvana without substrate, after death.

Would you like to be enlightened? We always say we want to be enlightened. In fact, that is the goal of Buddhism. But most of us really do not want enlightenment. Do you to be reborn back here? I believe that most people sincerely want to be reborn here. We cling to life so much that we want to be reborn. When we get older this life does not look as good. We have aches and pains and when you wake up in the morning with your back barely able to move, you think life is not so good. But after a few hours when your body is working better and better and you forget what it was like when you first woke up, that's when you say, "This life is not so bad."

but to think of going through this millions and millions of lives, going through the same process time after time, again and again. The details change, but that is all. Our lives are basically the same as each other's; only the details change. We all get caught up in desire; we are all deluded. We all want this thing. We say, "If I only get this I will be happy." That is utter nonsense. Our desire for things will never end. So when you get that job you want, after a while you say, "Gee, this job is not all that it was cracked up to be. I thought I would be happy after I got this job." but after a while it seems to be unfulfilling. I have a theory as to why this happens. When we work very hard for something, when we attain it, we feel let down because we have dreamed about it a lot. So, when you get that girl that you were so fascinated by, realize that that fascination will disappear after awhile. Everything changes.

The Ten Meritorious Deeds - A talk by Ven. Havanpola Shanti , February 19

Good Morning. Today I am going to speak on the Ten Meritorious Deeds. In Buddhism

there are so many numbers, such as 2, 4, 5, 8, 10, 17, 40 and so forth. Here I am going to talk about the Ten Meritorious Deeds, beginning with Dana. Dana is the first; it is the first in so many things. It is generosity. Why is dana important to us? We have a lot of tanha or trisna, craving, I, myself. The biggest enemy in life to reach Nirvana is this I. The Buddha said that dana is the way to remove this I, myself part. Giving away things is not easy. Even giving away \$1 is difficult. We have a lot of things: money, property, etc. Why do I want to give it away? I make money. You can also.

When we get sickness we pay a doctor for medicine. For example, we have our body, our mind, material things: money, clothes, computer, cell phone; we have so many things. Sometimes we have to give money to protect our body. Say I am kidnapped and the kidnapper says, "I need \$10,000 or I will kill you." Even if I do not have \$10,000, I will try to get it. If I have sickness I pay money to a doctor to get medicine to protect my body. The second time money may not work. So what happens if I have a disease, say Diabetes. The doctor says to me, "I will have to remove your leg." OK. remove my leg. Still I want to keep the rest of my body. You see how you protect your body. You remove part of the body to protect yourself. I try to keep myself. You try to protect yourself. Well, finally money and body both are going. You try to protect yourself at the last moment. That is how strong our desire is. Buddhism teaches us to remove that I, me part. If you really want to practice the Path, you have to understand that. You have to destroy that I, me part.

At some point you will die sooner or later. You have a little, short life. Enjoy that life without making trouble for others or yourself. That is basic Buddhist teaching. You can enjoy your life, but you are not satisfied with your enjoyment. One hour you are happy; then two or three hours you are not happy, very upset, big trouble. Today you are happy, tomorrow you will have a lot of trouble. That is life. Once we are happy, laughing, having a party. Equally once we are upset, crying, we don't like each other at that time. It is not easy. We have to practice dana. There are three types of dana. The first is material dana, where we give material things to people. It is practiced by every religion around the world. People need all kinds of help: food, medicine, clothes, etc. In Buddhism we remove our craving by giving dana. The second dana is giving life to people who are in danger of losing their life. We can give blood or a kidney. I have given blood several times and a friend of mine gave a kidney to his friend..

The third dana is giving the truth or dharma to people. Buddha said one time, "The gift of truth excels all other gifts; the flavor of truth excels all other flavors. The flower of truth excels all other flowers. The pleasure of truth excels all other pleasures." So, teaching the Buddha's truth is the highest dana. We do that at this Center. We are always teaching the Dharma. Our monks and Dharma teachers are always giving Dharma. Again, when you practice dana, you lessen your craving. One time Buddha mentioned the results of

giving dana. If we have a paddy field, one seed will cause a harvest. In the same way what you give you will receive. But it depends upon to whom you are giving and how you are giving. If you make money in the wrong way, such as by selling drugs or weapons, you get less results than if you give good money to good people. Just practice a little bit in your life. Sometimes giving \$1 or a cup of tea is enough. When you die are you going to take your money with you? No, you cannot do that, so practice dana when you are living.

The second meritorious deed is sila, morality. Buddhist people have to keep the five precepts. Take five, break four, but keep at least one of them. Then the second year, keep two of them, the third year, three and so on. Everywhere in the world there are rules that need to be kept. So why do we need precepts? To protect ourselves. An upasaka or upasika keeps the five precepts. It's up to you if you want to do them. At times you will break them because you are human. On the full moon days people go to the temple to observe eight precepts. Whether you observe Buddhist precepts or your own, keep them.

Sometimes you see a good monk like the Dalai Lama. You may feel a little scared because he is great. He has great power because he keeps sila. Then go talk to him. You respect him. When you respect other people, they will respect you.

The third meritorious act is bhavana, meditation. We have just finished a meditation retreat. It is not easy. I always recommend breathing meditation for ten minutes a day or Loving Kindness meditation. When you get up in the morning, practice meditation for five or ten minutes. When you go to bed, practice five minutes. See how much you will progress in two months.

The fourth is pati. Whatever good things you do, you offer the merits from them to others. Every Buddhist school, whether it is Theravada or Mahayana does this offering of merits. With the fifth, you receive merits that others send to you. I went to India to see the Buddhist holy places, like Bodhgaya and Sarnath. When I came back here I offered all the merits to people. When people say "Sadhu, sadhu" to you, you are receiving merits. Sometimes when you feel very happy, it is because you have received merits that are being sent to you.

The sixth is to help people, give respect to people. Here we have all different kinds of people, people of all different ages, young people, older people, and all different educational levels. You have to respect all. Some may be older than I am; some have more education. We ought to respect them all.

The seventh is to respect people worthy of respect. The Buddha said everyone has two Buddhas in their house, the mother and father. Then teachers and the oldest people and sick people. Buddha himself helped sick people. He told us that when we help the sick, we

are helping him.

The eight meritorious deed is giving Dharma talks. I know you all like to hear Dharma talks. You don't have to be a Buddhist nmonk or nun. As a regular person you can give good advice. Monks do not accept anything for their Dharma talks. If I were to accept \$100 for a talk, that would be wrong. Giving Dharma talks, Buddhist books, publishing books, etc. If I cannot give you good advice because I don't have the experience to do so, then I will ask someone who has the experience to give you advice.

The ninth action is to listen to Dharma talks. I know you all like to listen to Dharma talks. Right now you are doing one of the meritorious acts. You not only listen, you will try to practice. And the tenth meritorious act is to have right understanding or thinking. This is a brief description of the ten meritorious deeds.

Prison Dharma, a column devoted to writings of inmates from around the country Ven. Karuna Dharma,

I am thankful for the literature you have sent. I am at a point in my life where it is necessary for me to make a change. Attempted suicide, heavy drug use, deep depression, loneliness, fighting, gambling, I could go on and on. What would surprise most people though, is that despite these things, I am a very loving and compassionate person (even after 11 years in prison). I have friends who wrap both arms around me and tell me that they love me because I am a strong source of love to them in their lives. I've never found happiness, even with my pockets "full" of money. I always wonder why such a nice guy like myself would end up alone and sad. I go home in 5 years, but I'll be 35. I've been doing time since I was 20. I have no children to hold, nor a wife or girlfriend who'll love me. My most prized possession is my beautiful, loving mother. Anyway, one day I was reading some literature given to me by your student. I read a phrase that was like a splash of cold water in my face. I don't remember the exact phrasing, but it pointed out that all sadness comes from desire. What you want or wish for, for example. And that true happiness is not in obtaining happiness from the world around us, but by first finding happiness inside ourselves. Once we are strong and have the necessary understanding, then we can help our brothers and sisters. Of course we do help our brothers and sisters before we have reached a full understanding, but I'm talking about helping mankind in general. I have the desire and compassion. I'd like to request from you that which you spoke of in your letter. You indicated that there were more materfials that you could send me. I have plenty of time and I'd appreciate any books or newsletters you could send. I can easily receive then if they are maked as religious material. Thank you.

Sincerely, P.J.

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April Events

Sunday Talks

4/2 Phenomena & Emptiness
11am Ven. Dr. Karuna Dharma

4/9 Karma
11am Ven. Havanpola Shanti

4/16 Benevolence
11am Rev. Abhaya Hanasi Karuna

4/23 The Buddha Nature
11am Rev. Vajra Karuna

4/30 Morning of Tibetan Chanting & Meditation
Rev. Kelsang Chitta Karuna

Classes at IBMC

Mon Lam Rim (Tibetan) Med't
7pm Rev. Kelsang Chitta

Tues Koan class
7 pm Rev. Vajra Karuna

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

Special Events

4/2 108 Bows Ceremony, led by Sr. Chandana

4/9 Hanamatsuri celebration & garden luncheon

4/30 Celebration of Ven. Karuna's 25 Years

Meditation

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, 11 am -1 pm, led by Sr.Candana

Wednesdays, 7-9 pm - led by Rev. Kusala

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