

IBMC Monthly Guide - May, 2006

108 Bows Ceremony

The 108 Bows Ceremony which honors the 88 known Buddhas of different time periods will be led by various monks and Dharma Teachers every Sunday at 10 am until September. Rev. S'unya will lead it on May 7. It is a good prelude to our Sunday service and we invite you to join us.

Mother's Day Celebration

On Sunday May 14 IBMC will honor our mothers during Sunday service. We invite you to bring a photo of your mother, either living or dead, to place on our altar to honor her. Please bring a vegetarian dish or drinks to share with us at the lunch in the Zendo garden that follows the service..

Marking the Sima

At monks' training class, Tuesday, May 16, Ven. Karuna will lead us in marking the sima, or the temple perimeters, within which monks' training takes place. This ceremony indicates the beginning of the training period and is believed to protect the monks and their temple during the training period. The ceremony begins at 6:30 and you are invited to join us.

Vais'aka Retreat May 19-21

IBMC will hold its annual celebratory Vaishaka retreat to mark the Thrice Blessed Day of S'akyamuni. (his birth, enlightenment and death dates) which were all supposed to have happened on the full moon day of May. A weekend retreat is only the beginning of deepening the state of samadhi, one pointed concentration, that allows us to have insights into our true nature. The process of meditation is to watch, see, accept and let go. If we spend time on the zafu every day, changes will occur in our life. And when we spend time in intensive meditation for a weekend with like minded people, the process speeds up. This year the IBMC monks will lead the retreat.

The focus of this retreat is sitting and walking meditation. Mornings begin at 5:30 am with our daily practice of chanting the veneration to the 88 Buddhas, zazen and daily chants. We do about ten hours of sitting on Saturday. interspersed with periods of Kinhin

(walking) and Samu (quiet work). We retire at 10 pm.

Please call the IBMC office at 213 384-0850 by May 15; Fee for this retreat is \$100; \$75 if you are a full time member, and \$50 for residents. You will be expected to stay at the Center for the entire retreat. Work exchange is available for those whose cash is tight now. Please wear comfortable clothing (not jeans) and bring your bedding and personal toiletries. Food is vegetarian, simple but plentiful.

Join the 3 month training

Participate in Three-Month Training

Three-month training is required for monks who are novices working toward further ordination or who are fully ordained and wish to advance in dharma age. However, it is also a good opportunity for lay practitioners to intensify their practice. It is a limited amount of time, and everyone can decide just how much more time and effort they can commit to. And, because the program at IBMC is intensified, there are more opportunities to join in. The meditative energy in the zendo becomes stronger, making it easier to practice. The community effort is reinforcing.

The opening ceremony for our three-month summer training is done to invite the Dharma Protectors to come to the four corners of the monastery grounds. Since the monks stay in the compound during this time, the Dharma Protectors come and stay with them to protect them. They also protect the monastery itself. These four strong Dharma Protectors can help create a spiritual atmosphere which brings peace and safety to our neighborhood. Please join us.

Some Suggestions For Intensifying Your Practice

We encourage you to intensify your practice during this three months. If you meditate once a week, try for twice. If you meditate 20 minutes a day, make it 25 minutes. Come to Sunday services more often.

Become a vegetarian for three months. Mahayana monks are traditionally vegetarian. This reflects the practice of ahimsa or not harming. As we know now, animal protein, especially in the amounts most Americans eat, is not healthy. However, if you have never been a vegetarian before, be sure you are replacing the meat in your diet with vegetable protein such as tofu or beans and rice. Some people eat eggs and dairy products. If you have any health problems, please check with your doctor before making this decision. Also, it may be better to cut back on meat gradually so your body can adjust.

Start off each day with taking refuge and reciting the precepts. When you wake in the morning, say "I take refuge in the Buddha, I take refuge in the Dharma, I take refuge in the Sangha." This means that we go to these three jewels for guidance. When you do this, think of what each of them means. The Buddha, of course, is the teacher, a human being who became awakened. As we are all human beings and all have the same nature, Buddha nature, we too have the potential to become awakened. The Dharma refers to the teachings, what the Buddha discovered and then taught, what others who have followed the path have shared; it also refers to what we learn from living in the world. The Sangha is the community of practitioners, the monks as well as others who follow the Buddha's way. Together we learn and support each other's practice.

Repeat the five basic precepts accepted by all Buddhist practitioners. "I vow not to take life. I vow not to take what is not given to me. I vow not to indulge in improper sexual acts. I vow not to speak that which is harmful. I vow not to become intoxicated." Think of how these vows fit into your life. It will help you to see your daily actions more clearly. If you do not keep the precepts 100%, it is not a problem. The important thing is to become more and more conscious about the effect our actions have on ourselves and others.

The Advanced Class

This class, taught by Ven. Dr. Karuna Dharma, is open to laypeople who have been practicing and studying for at least a year. It is a part of the summer training program, so class members are at various levels of understanding, including fully-ordained monks, novice monks, eight-precept laypeople and others. Contact IBMC for more information on course topics and schedule.

Reflections on Mara - by Rev. Jñāna Vajra, Zen Dharma Teacher

This morning's talk presents reflections on the subject of Mara. First we will consider some of the essential stories from the sutras. This will provide the background for briefly touching on the historical origins of the Mara mythology. We'll then shift to a consideration of the meaning of Mara as symbol in relation to Buddhist doctrine as well as metaphor, not only historically but for the present moment. Please understand that this presentation must necessarily distill a very deep vat of information into the simple vessel of a Sunday dharma talk, merely skimming the foam off the top of a complex brew.

Mara is a familiar figure in the rich lore of Buddhism, most especially as the deva, or supernatural being, whose forces attack the bodhisattva Siddhartha Gautama as he sat beneath the pipal tree prior to his Enlightenment. In the sutras there are numerous

variations on and elaborations of this account, some of them approaching the phantasmagorical in their detail and embellishment. Here is a much abbreviated version of standard canonical accounts. Siddhartha's meditative calm proved so powerful that the deadly forces hurled at him by Mara were transformed into flowers of offering that showered gently down upon his head. Gautama was equally unmoved when, according to some traditions, Mara sent his beautiful daughters in an attempt to seduce the bodhisattva. In a final attempt to unseat him, Mara insisted that he, not Gautama, had a right to the throne of enlightenment by virtue of his previous meritorious deeds, while all of Mara's hordes thundered forth their support. In response, the solitary bodhisattva reached down and touched the ground, calling upon the earth goddess to bear witness to his countless past deeds of merit. In acknowledgement the earth gave a great shudder, at which Mara's fearsome elephant bowed down before the bodhisattva in submission, and Mara and his armies fled in terror. At this moment hosts of devas arrived to proclaim Gautama's victory and to witness his final illumination.

The Buddha's fateful encounter with Mara at Bodhgaya, was not his initial experience with the Evil One, as he had also been tempted by Mara in the period between his renunciation of secular life and his attainment of Enlightenment. However, it is from the immediate pre-Enlightenment conflict onward that Mara figures most prominently in accounts of the Buddha and with the Buddha's subsequent disciples. The second most important encounter of the Buddha with Mara took place shortly before the Buddha's death. On this occasion Mara tried to persuade the Buddha to pass away into parinirvana, but the Buddha knew that he must delay his passing for a few months.

In the sutras the great majority of Mara's approaches are to the Buddha, usually when the Buddha is alone, frequently in meditation. Mara also appears however, when the Buddha is surrounded by bhikkhus whom he is instructing, or when he is addressing a large gathering, when he is on his alms-round, or when he is preparing for sleep. The sutras make clear that Mara may approach at anytime, day or night.

In each instance Mara's mission is to either discourage the Buddha from propagating his teachings or to prevent disciples from attaining emancipation from samsara, whereby they become free from his grasp. Those who have realized emancipation are beyond Mara's control and whenever Mara tries to lure them to his snares, he finds himself completely failing. The sutric accounts of Mara are thus records of his foiled attempts, even in his many fearful guises and in a multiplicity of approaches. A primary theme running through the Pali Canon is that it is primarily the Buddha, and subsequently the Arahants, who can discern Mara at all. Initially only the Buddha could recognize the approach of Mara even though others were present. Later Mahayana teachings came to extend this ability to be aware of the presence of Mara to bodhisattvas as well.

To quote Trevor Ling, a scholar of Buddhism: "What these legendary stories appear to emphasize is the Buddhist insight into the fact that there appears to be a 'power' which is opposed to Enlightenment, an enemy who besets the way of all who would enter into that state. This power seeks notoriously to disturb the disciple in his meditation. And always he seeks to prevent knowledge of Enlightenment being communicated to others. With the majority of mankind his work is easy; but against those who threaten to leave his realm his greatest effort is put forth; against those who are Enlightened, he is totally powerless, and all his attempts are folly. It is he who has been defeated when a disciple continues in meditation, or becomes fully enlightened."

Put in terms of the conclusions inherent in the Pali Canon with regard to the Buddha and the Mara legend: (1) In the course of his Enlightenment the Buddha has won a crucial victory: ignorance was dispelled...darkness was dispelled; (2) being Enlightened, he becomes fully aware of the nature of the opposition against which he has been struggling; (3) to this opposition is given the name of Mara; of Mara it is said that no power is so hard to subdue.

As Buddhism developed it created a theory of four kinds of Mara, as a way of 'reading' Mara. The four are:

- (1) the Mara of psychophysical existence;
- (2) the Mara of compulsions;
- (3) the Mara of death;
- (4) the Mara who is born of a god.

A fifth kind of Mara is sometimes added, the Mara of conditioning. These classifications helped early Buddhist teachers to disentangle Mara's key features.

Where did the notion of Mara come from? The Mara legend is indisputably connected with the doctrine of the Buddha, but it also seems safe to say that it was the Dharma coming into contact with the popular demonology of the time that produced the symbol of Mara. Just as there can be no shadow without a body to cast it, there can be no Mara without a Buddha (an awakened one) to know him. Comparisons between the prevailing attributes of yakshas, a malevolent form of nature spirit in pre-Buddhist Indian mythology, and the character of Mara, show significant similarities. Material belonging originally to the former has, without much apparent readjustment, been pressed into the service of the latter. One particularly important borrowing from Vedic mythology is the drought-demon, Namuci. While Namuci initially appears in the Pali Canon as himself, he came to be transformed in early Buddhist texts to be the same as Mara, the god of death. In Buddhist demonology the figure of Namuci, with its associations of death-dealing hostility, as a result of drought, was taken up and used in order to build up the symbol of Mara; this

is what the Evil One is like—he is Namuci, threatening the welfare of mankind. Mara threatens not by withholding the seasonal rains but by withholding or obscuring the knowledge of truth.

As important as the concept of Mara is to the Buddhist teachings the notion of a mythological being responsible for death, evil, etc. was not limited to Buddhism. This notion formed part of the common Vedic Brahmanic mythological traditions. Evidence outside of Brahmanism shows that a mythology of evil, similar in most respects to that of Mara was known among other non-Brahmanic religious sects like the Jains. Jain texts from the early Buddhist period show that they too believed in the existence of some evil power as obstructive and as powerful as Mara in Buddhism. This evil power manifests in different forms, either as god or demon, to obstruct the sage in his attempts to attain enlightenment.

Let's turn now to the symbol of Mara in relation to Buddhist doctrine and as a metaphor in our daily lives. A first and foremost symbolic aspect of Mara is that of death, the ender of an existence which is not ready to be ended as it has not yet succeeded in attaining enlightenment. Death is the supreme ill. It was regarded by contemporaries of the Buddha as the inevitable precursor of further karmic existence, existence that would therefore be filled with further dukkha. Etymologically, Mara's very name indicates the god who slays or causes to die, the killer. Death does not exist in Nirvana, as the cycle of birth and death has ceased. Not surprisingly, one way in which Nirvana is described is as the "deathless".

Further didactic evidence of Mara's symbolic role can be discerned in a series of questions that might be asked. This approach, for which I am again indebted to Trevor Ling, confirms that Mara is to be regarded in whatever way it is most useful to regard him; he is a doctrinal device, not an item of doctrine.

First, what is Mara's domain? Where does he operate? At one point the Buddha indicated that each of the five skandhas, or the five aggregates, as well as the mind, mental states and mental consciousness are all declared to be Mara. Thus, Mara symbolizes the entire existence of unenlightened humanity. In other words, Mara's realm is the whole of samsaric existence. Mara saturates every nook and cranny of life. Only in Nirvana is his influence unknown. Second, how does Mara operate? Herein lays the key to Mara's influence over all unenlightened beings. The Pali Canon gives initial answers, not as alternatives, but as varying terms. First, Mara behaves like one of the demons of [then] popular thought. He uses deceptions, disguises, and threats, he possesses people, and he uses all kinds of horrible phenomena to terrify or cause confusion. Mara's most effective weapon is sustaining a climate of fear, whether the fear be of drought or famine or cancer or terrorism. Identifying with a desire or fear tightens the knot that binds one to

it, and, thereby, the sway it can have over one.

On a more abstract level are all of the unwholesome moral states identified collectively as Mara's army or Mara's forces, the same forces identified by the Bodhisattva during his pre-Enlightenment struggle with Mara. These are desire, aversion, hunger and thirst, craving, sloth and torpor, fear, doubt, self-will and cant, and various forms of self-exaltation. Most prominent among these, and especially closely connected with Mara, is the first, passion.

Mara's army is just as real to us today as it was to the Buddha. Mara stands for those patterns of behavior that long for the security of clinging to something real and permanent rather than facing the question posed by being a transient and contingent creature. "It makes no difference what you grasp", said Buddha, "when someone grasps, Mara stands beside him." The tempestuous longings and fears that assail us, as well as the views and opinions that confine us are sufficient evidence of this. Whether we talk of succumbing to irresistible urges and addictions or being paralyzed by neurotic obsessions, both are psychological ways of articulating our current cohabitation with the devil.

In the course of the Buddha's Enlightenment it is stressed that he overcame ignorance and darkness, conceptions which are also used prominently in connection with Mara's activities. Both are readily associated with the capacity to blind men, in terms of confusing their understanding.

By whom is Mara conquered? The obvious answer is the Buddha; an ancient and essential part of the Buddha's title is that of Mara Conqueror. Mara is also conquered by those who walk in the path of the Buddha. In the Buddha's case, Mara is, as Stephen Batchelor describes, "Buddha's devilish twin. Buddha needs to let go of Mara in order to be Buddha. And not just once as an episode in the heroic drama of enlightenment. As long as Buddha lives, he is constantly relinquishing Mara. For Mara is the self to Buddha's selflessness, the fear to Buddha's fearlessness, the death to Buddha's deathlessness. The two are inseparable. Buddha has 'become invisible' to Mara, yet Mara still stalks him. Mara addresses Buddha as though he were a stranger, but he is really Gotama's own conflicted humanity....Buddha and Mara are figurative ways of portraying a fundamental opposition within human nature. While 'Buddha' stands for a capacity for awareness, openness, and freedom, "Mara" represents a capacity for confusion, closure, and restriction." Batchelor goes on to say that "Buddhanature and maranature are inseparable from each other. Like a valve that can either be opened or closed, this organism has the capacity to unfold (buddha) or shut down (mara)."

Finally, how is Mara conquered? It is in the answer to this question that the especially Buddhist nature of the symbol of Mara appears, for the means by which he is conquered

are precisely the means of liberation which are emphasized in Buddhism generally. Thus the means of conquering Mara coincide very largely with the means by which the central purposes of Buddhism are realized; that is, in general terms, by following of the eightfold path (with a special emphasis on right concentration) and, in particular, by the practice of meditation. As the Dhammapada states, "Those who enter the path, and practice meditation, are released from the bondage of Mara."

To summarize the justification for speaking of Mara as a symbol of the Evil One is that he is part of the natural order, he is a 'natural thing'. On the other hand, he is the negative representation of moral and spiritual truth. From whatever point of view it is seen, the symbol conveys hostility. He is a continual reminder of the dukkha which adheres in man's existence, and which is concealed beneath the appeal of all sensory life; he is a reminder also that wisdom consists in taking the necessary steps to ensure the cessation of dukkha.

May we all be peaceful, happy and well. May we all come to attain release from the grasp of Mara.

Prison Dharma, a column devoted to the writings of prisoners across the U.S.A.

Dear Roshi Karuna:

I hope this letter finds you well. I apologize for the delay in sending my answers to the first four chapters. The Arkansas Department of Corrections in its bureaucratic wisdom has seen fit to move me to another facility. This was a good move, though, and I have a purposeful job now and better living conditions. I am finally getting settled in and acclimated.

I have read and re-read and contemplated what I have been studying over the past two months. It has provoked a great deal of introspective self-analysis. If you'd have asked me in November if I thought I knew myself, my answer would have been, "Yes, certainly"; Now, however, my answer would be different. I am learning truth, and must determine my place in it. Much of my attitudes and beliefs were - and still are - enmeshed in illusion and as I struggle for clear comprehension of reality on reality's terms, I am forced to constantly reappraise that image I saw as myself. I truly understand why I was forewarned that this would require great courage. It is an intimidating experience to see that the unshakeable foundation of one's reality - awareness of self - is built on shifting sands in transcending those self-imposed limitations. Frightening, perhaps, but also exhilarating as well, once one realizes that there is great freedom to be found in transcending those self-imposed limitations.

I have come up against a difficult challenge already. I have conditioned myself over time to view much of the world with a very cynical, judgmental attitude, and no group of people more so than my fellow prisoners. Deviates, predators, many devoid of any sort of honor, most of whom cling to ignorance willfully, surround me. I do not wish to know these people and utilize my physically intimidating size and appearance to exist in a vacuum.

And along comes loving kindness meditation. . . Let me tell you, Roshi, this has been one of the most trying efforts of my life. I have to introspect, analyze and eliminate more false assumptions and attitudes in the past several weeks than I ever knew I had. And this is only the beginning! All I can say is thank you for leading me to the necessary steps of purging some of the poison from my heart. Already I can feel the difference and know the catharsis was necessary.

Sincerely, Yours in the Dharma, Bryan

May Events

Talks at IBMC

5/7 Ven. Ananda - 11am - Rev. Kusala

5/14 11am - Br. Dharmadasa Karuna

5/21 Vimalakirti Nirveda Sutra - 11am - Rev. Jñāna Vajra

5/28 Two Wings of a Bird - 11am - Ven. Dr. Karuna Dharma

Classes at IBMC

Tues

Monks' Training 7 pm Ven. Karuna Dharma, begins 5/16

Wed

Every Day Buddhism 7 pm Rev. Kusala Ratna Karuna

Fri

7 pm Beginning Buddhism Rev. Hanasi

7:30 pm Sitting Meditation, led by Rev. Kusala

Special Events

5/1 108 Bows Ceremony, led 10 am by Rev. S'unya
5/15 Mother's Day celebration & garden luncheon, 12:30
5/19-21 Vais'akha Retreat

Meditation:

Tuesdays, 11 am -1 pm, led by Sr.Candana
Wednesdays, Meditation & Discussion - 7-9 pm - Led by Rev. Kusala
Fridays, 7:30-9 pm - Led by Rev. Kusala

Web Pages and eMails:

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