

IBMC Monthly Guide - June, 2006

Father's Day Celebration

June 18 is Father's Day. In commemoration of that, we ask that you bring a photo of your father or a father figure in your life to put on the altar. You will be handed a red flower if your father is still living and a white one if he has already died.

The close of service will be followed by a potluck garden celebration. We hope you will join us. Please bring either cold drinks or a vegetarian dish to share.

Seeking Rowers

IBMC is looking for rowers to row for IBMC at the Dragon Boat races at the Lotus Festival to be held July 8-9 in Echo Park. We need four men and four women. Youth, strength and coordination are highly desirable, although not necessary. If you are interested in joining the fun as a rower, call Rev. Hanasi at 213 385-5292, or the office at 213 384-0850.

108 Bows Ceremony

This month's ceremony will first be held June 5 and led by Rev. Hanasi. Each Sunday during Monks' Training, from 10-10:30, we perform the Adoration of the 88 Buddhas ceremony. The ceremony is led by one of our monks. We invite you to join us for this simple, but moving, ceremony. This weekly ceremony began in May, so do not miss the June ceremonies.

Ven. Karuna in Kuala Lumpur

Ven. Karuna is leaving June 15 for the Sakyadhita, International Buddhist Women's, conference which is taking place in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. She is going to speak on the topic Making Bhikkhuni Ordination Possible for Every Woman. She will explain IBMC's Grand Ordinations and make suggestions on how Theravada and Tibetan novice nuns can become ordained as Bhikkhunis. Following the conference she is flying down to Jakarta, Indonesia, to visit old friends. She is returning June 28.

Ven. Karuna was one of the founders of Sakyadhita in 1987 in Bodhgaya, India. She served the first two years as co-chair of the organization.

Rev. Chitta in Indianapolis

Rev. Chitta left IBMC reluctantly on May 2 to return to Indianapolis to care for her ailing father. Although she did not want to leave IBMC, she recognized that he needed help and wanted her with him. Although she thinks that this move is permanent, we hope that it will not be and that she and her little dog Thor will return here in a few months. She has been quite valuable to IBMC, organizing events such as the 2004 Grand Ordination and the celebration of Ven. Karuna's 25 years as Abbess of IBMC. She also was Ven. Karuna's assistant, accompanied her on her treks out of the country and

was invaluable in aiding Ven. Karuna in her massive prison correspondence. Ven. Karuna, when asked about Rev. Chitta's leaving, commented: "I already miss her and hope she will return to us some day."

Stay in touch with her by emailing her at: Kchitta@yahoo.com.

Thanks to Everyone!

Ven. Karuna wants to say to everyone who attended the party held for her on April 30 "Thanks a bunch for making my party a big success. I was particularly moved by the various gifts, including \$350 in silver coins, the new rose garden, which I believe Rev. Chitta was responsible for, the massive numbers of flowers, gift certificates and other gifts, too many for me to remember. Especially since we had printed in the *Monthly Guide*, "Gifts not necessary." I use the gift cards for the Coffee Bean nearly every day. Sixty people showed up for the service led by Rev. Chitta, who performed the Tibetan long life ceremony for Ven. Karuna and the party that followed had 80 people in attendance.

Buddha Nature, a talk given by Rev. Vajra Karuna on April 23, 2006

In standard Zen the Buddha-nature is considered both the true self and the inherent good of every individual. This concept is not found in early Buddhism, but evolved from a Chinese understanding of the Indian Mahayana idea of the Tathagatagarbha, as well as the Amala-vijnana (innately pure mind). This is a rather metaphysical term which is one reason why the Ch'an master Lin-chi I-hsuan chose the more psycho-social term The True Human of No Rank. Nonetheless, the Buddha-nature is an idea that can be traced back to such proto-Chan texts as the Erh-ju ssu-hsing lun attributed to Bodhidharma.

There has been considerable controversy about Buddha-nature in that if it is thought of as a sub-stantialist (divine soul-like) concept it comes into conflict with the fundamental Buddhist idea of no soul/self. To avoid this it is probably better to understand Buddha-nature as meaning that, since the Buddha was a human being, all human beings have the same basic nature as he did. Another way of saying this is to use Lin-chi's idea that Buddha-nature is the unconditional worth that every human being, good or bad, innately possesses. Still a third, and very Zen, way of conceptualizing the Buddha-nature is to say that it is the mind of the child that is still a part of us and which before socialization had no hatred, but only unconditional acceptance for self and others. This last way of defining the Buddha-nature has sometimes been compared with the New Testament saying that "Whoever does not accept the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it" [Mark 10:15]. If we substitute enlightenment for the kingdom of God we may have something close to the ideal enlightenment as experienced by a Zen master.

The concept of innate Buddhahood is not to be confused with some sort of belief that there is just a seed of or potential for Buddhahood in everyone. This seed idea is certainly found in early Indian Mahayana thought, but in the Sino-Japanese view the Buddha-nature is a fully mature aspect of every sentient being, not merely a seed. If the Buddha-nature is just a seed, then enlightenment must be a gradual cultivating and nurturing of that seed as it gradually matures into enlightenment. East Asian Buddhism, however, is essentially committed to the idea of sudden, not gradual, enlightenment. This permits no such gradual maturation. Again comparing it to a familiar Christian

concept, the Buddha-nature is not a spark of God in man, it is God as man.

The above definition of Buddha-nature must be distinguished from the use of this term as a synonym of ultimate reality as in the Dharmakaya or even S'unyata. This broader meaning is found in some Indian and Tibetan texts, but is rarer in a Zen context.

For the more skeptical person it may be as difficult to believe in the above idealized Zen concept of the innately good Buddha-nature within all persons as it is for some to believe in the supposedly all good Western God. This is problem of belief in both cases is clearly grounded on the obvious enormous amount of evil that human beings are capable of committing. Greed, hatred, cruelty, self-centered pride and sheer self-destructiveness seem to come so totally natural to us that at times it seems to be impossible to believe that we are capable of being good, other than in the most superficial way; yet good in some profound ways we are capable of being. Human beings have always shown an ability to share, to love, to be kind, to be humble, and to be surprisingly constructive and even self-sacrificing. This suggests that we, at least, seem to be a balance between an evil and a good in which neither side is able to dominant for more than a very short time. To complicate matters it seems that one side can not even exist without the other. For example, love is usually thought of as a good in direct opposition to hatred which is thought of as evil. The problem with love is that it generates hatred towards any thing or any one that threatens the object of our love. Also, love tends to have the seed of jealousy within it. This jealousy is easily converted into hatred. Perhaps as a source of anguish little can compare with the situation we experience when we have two or more persons we love who are incompatible with one another and we are forced into choosing one over another. This usually leads to hatred on the part of the one we did not choose. Similarly compassion by any human being seems to have its limits, and when those limits are reached our compassion turns into apathy or indifference. With this in mind it is easy to be a pessimist and say that the good of love or compassion exists only in balance to evil or worse that the good of love and compassion exists merely to serve the evil of hatred or apathy, so life can not be judged as particularly good.

Human beings, however, can not feel psychologically secure with a mere balance, much less a preponderance of evil. Instead, we need to believe that good, in some manner, is greater than evil and/or that evil in some way serves good. In Western religion this imbalance in favor of the good is called God, in some forms of Buddhism it is simply called Nirvana, or Amitabha Buddha, while in Zen the Buddha-nature.

No matter which of these traditions we may favor, the fact is that, none of us can prove that any of these preponderances for good really exist, but to keep our sanity alive we must believe or have faith that they do exist. Such simple faith, however, may not be sufficient to sustain our belief in our ultimate good, which is why we tend to appreciate the existence of saintly figures or mystics who claim to have had personal experiences of this pre-ponderance of good, and the ultimate subordination of our evil tendencies to this good. In deed, such saintly individuals may even encourage us to believe that there is even a good beyond ordinary or relative good that merely holds its own against evil. In other words, such saintly or mystic persons help us to believe that there is what we called self-transcending or absolute good which has no connection to evil which for Zen is our Buddha-nature.

The natural inclination to want to believe in our goodness plus the words of holy individuals seems for the majority of people to be sufficient proof that there is an absolute good, but for a minority these alone are not sufficient proof, yet offering more is not easy, because all the major religious traditions agree that the ultimate good is not directly or immediately accessible to our ordinary self-centered minds. This agreement, however, does not continue on beyond this point.

In Western religion, especially in Christianity, human nature is considered to be so deeply corrupted by sin that there could not possibly be anywhere in human nature for an incorruptibly good element to exist. The Western denial for greater proof of absolute goodness further rests on the belief that the absolute good or God is for the most part too transcendental to experience too personally. If one accepts these views of mankind and God then a totally transcendental source for goodness, more or less permanently inaccessible to the believer is a very logical conclusion.

If Western religions generally deny any possibility of too direct access to and proof of the absolute good, most Eastern religions, including Zen belief just takes the opposite view. This opposition to the Western view is based on the Zen view of a total immanence or inwardness of the absolute good, alias the Buddha-nature. This immanence is such that human corruption, although very deeply rooted in us, is still not capable of penetrating to the very core of human nature which remains forever incorruptible. It is an incorruptibility as great as that attributed to the Western God, but it is not so inaccessible as to deny personal access to it. This access comes in the form of the Zen experience called Kensho or Satori.

Belief in the innate goodness in everyone may still be a problem for some people simply on the basis that with or without a personal enlightenment experience it still is as purely a metaphysical belief as is a belief in the innate goodness of the Western God. The difference is that in Zen the metaphysical aspect of absolute goodness is connected to a very provable ourselves, where as in Western religion the metaphysical aspect of absolute goodness is connected to a very unprovable secondary metaphysical factor called God. To further complicate the Western problem of proof is the fact that God, as the supposed creator of ourselves, must then be assigned some responsibility for the evil in us. This automatically compromises the supposed absolute goodness of God. Since Buddha-nature has so assigned part in our original creation, it has no responsibility for our evil and thus its goodness remains uncompromised.

If the above argument for an all good factor at the core of human beingness is still open to doubt there is yet another perspective from which Zen can argue for the concept the Buddha-nature. As in all Mahayana Buddhism reality is said to be inter-dependent which means that in the fashion of Indra's Net everything is dependent on everything else for its existence. In other words, everything creates and is created by everything else. If this is the case, then in a positive sense everything must be equally valuable or full of worth, or in a negative sense everything must be valueless or worthless. This may be a difficult concept for the average person whose dualist thinking habitually assigns worth to some things worthlessness to other things. To the individual who has transcended such dualist thinking (who has experienced Satori) such an assigning of equal value, positive or negative, to everything comes quite naturally. The non-dualist thinker, however, understands that to assign worthlessness to everything leaves no reason for living, so intuitively experiencing the ultimate value or sacredness of life he is obligated to assign equal worth to all things. This unconditionally equal worth is then designated as the Buddha-nature of all things.

In an encouragement to believe in or more strongly to have faith in the Buddha-nature there is one more approach which can be taken, an approach that is just the opposite of comparing and contrasting Buddha-nature with Western theism. That approach is to compare and contrast the Buddha-nature ideal with Western secular or non-religious humanism.

Secular humanists in their disdain for the non-logical nature of religion give supreme value to the logical aspect of the human mind. They believe that the mind freed from religious superstition can be inherently trusted to be and to do what is good. But history has shown that human logic can be as corruptible and untrustworthy as can any non-logical or religious thinking. Indeed, clever reasoning has been used time after time to justify enormous evils. From the Zen perspective the flaw in totally trusting logical thinking is that such thinking is dual based, and this is what automatically divides people into the categories of good and evil. The non-logical or paradoxical faith in the universality of the unconditionally good Buddha-nature allows no such division and, therefore, might be judged as a far better basis for human goodness than the logical mind of secular humanism.

Regardless of which way one might argue for the Buddha-nature, be it in relationship to a Western religious or humanist view, it must still be admittedly that it can always be challenged by one or more opposing intellectual arguments. Therefore, ultimate proof of the Buddha-nature must depend on each person's own inner examination, for in Zen not even the best of masters can assure you of its truth. The master can only, like a midwife, help you give birth to the truth of the Buddha-nature from within yourself.

This experiencing the truth of the Buddha-nature within yourself, and not depending on mere Zen dogma, is why in the practice to attain one's own proof of Buddha-nature. Rinzai Zen instructs the practitioner to hold on to a great doubt about the Buddha-nature at the same time as having an equally great faith in it. It is the struggle between this doubt and faith that can lead to an authentic seeing into one's own nature (kensho) rather than an inauthentic dogmatic acceptance.

Finally, it should not be thought that just experiencing the bliss of one's Buddha-nature is the end-all of the Zen spiritual path. For this would result in a loss of much of the motivation of the ordinary self to functioning socially. The goal of Mahayana Buddhism and Zen is not to enter and stay in some oceanic bliss aspect of non-dual Buddha-nature consciousness since this makes it difficult to return to the suffering world to give Bodhisattva help to others. In fact, it can be said that the Buddha-nature of a person can not really manifest itself in isolation. It must do so by interacting with others. This interaction may be as limited as that between a student and a teacher or between one person and the multitude of other people that one encounters in everyday life. What it does not mean is becoming a hermit, not even a high holy hermit.

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

The Sutra of Eight Realizations found in the burning of an incense stick, using MahaPrajña Paramita Sutra

The three elements have been rolled into form, the perfume and dung cling to the stick. When lit the four elements are present using prajña. Impermanence is suddenly realized. See the essence of the cause of suffering, the clinging to of the false duality and of cherishing the self and being

bound to desires and attachments. binding and turning you around the wheel of becoming. Be mindful of Buddha who wasn't turned but turned but turned round using the skillful Dharma. With this experience of truth you've found the path to release. The smoke rises, the ashes fall, burning away all unwholesome mental clinging, this being ignorance dissolved. This is Nibbana, the fragrance of enlightenment that is without partiality. For gone are the conditions of clinging awake in awareness. Life has been seen for what it is, this fire of birth, old age, sickness and death was raging, but with no more fuel there'll be no more drifting on the endless waves of the sea. The experience of appearance of all phenomena is Emptiness-- a mirage. All phenomena is impermanent with Prajña the great Transcending wisdom. You've broken the spell of the delusional thought of existence.

To the far shore through Amita the Pure Land of Utmost Joy. His ocean of merits, virtues and vows are the cause. Buddhahood is the effect. As this life ends by the mention and reciting of his name we will be ferried to this Land of Limitless Light, reaching Buddhahood for the sake of all drowning, adrift on the sea of Samsara.

gate, gate, paragate, parasamgate, Bodhi swaha! (Maha Prajña Paramita) 1000 x

Ven. Karuna, many bows to your endeavor for good progress. Samantabhadra's Admonition says, "To just keep impermanence in mind and guard against looseness."

I wrote the Sutra of the Eight Realizations found in the burning of an incense stick, by combining two sutras, the heart of which is seeing life for what it is and transcending samsara. I hope you enjoyed it.

May you and Ven. Shanti be blessed with safe travels and have all your basic needs supplied. A quote from the Prayer of Milarepa's disciple Gompapa. "Grant your blessing so that my mind may turn towards the Dharma, Grant your blessing so that Dharma may progress along the Path, Grant your blessing so that the path may clarify confusion, Grant your blessing so that confusion may dawn as wisdom.

25 years--Bless you and your virtues and merits for the sake of all. Many bows, blessings and a smile. Hands in the Lotus Posture I bow to you.

Sangha Miitra

June Events

Sunday Talks

- 6/4 Is Enlightenment Religious? - 11am - Rev. Vajra Karuna, Thich Tam Thi
- 6/11 Staying or Straying? - 11am - Ven. Dr. Karuna Dharma
- 6/18 The Buddha's Compassion - 11am - Ven. Havanpola Shanti

6/25 My Experiences with Buddhism - 11am - Rev. Hanasi Karuna, , Thich Tam Hy

Classes at IBMC

Tues Monks' Training - 7 pm - Ven. Karuna Dharma
Wed Every Day Buddhism- 7 pm - Rev. Kusala Ratna Karuna
Fri Beginning Buddhism - 7 pm - Rev. Hanasi, Thich Tam-Hy
Fri Sitting Meditation - 7:30 pm - Rev. Kusala Ratna Karuna

Special Events

Every Sunday 108 Bows Ceremony, 10 am - led by various monks
6/18 Father's Day celebration & garden luncheon, 12:30

Meditation

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

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