

## **IBMC Monthly Guide - July, 2006**

### **Saturday, July 8 - Lotus Festival at Echo Park**

Every year the county of Los Angeles celebrates its Asian-Pacific Islander cultures by holding the Lotus Festival at Echo Park Lake. And every year IBMC participates by rowing in the Dragon Boat races. We invite you to participate with us in this fun event by being an oars person or coming along to support the team.

We begin the festival on Saturday by Ven. Karuna and the IBMC monks performing the ceremony of Opening the Dragons' eyes, in order to assure the safety of the races. Ever since the dragon boat races began more than 30 years ago, IBMC has been starting off the races with this ceremony.

The festival features Asian food booths, and Asian craft tables where you can buy Asian arts, from henna tatoos, jewelry, clothing, to Tibetan bells. They also have a section where they sell birds and plants and flowers. This is a great festival and we urge you to join us. We will be leaving IBMC at 10 am. The ceremony will occur around 11 am. IBMC will row in the first race at 11:30.

If you are interested in being an oars person, call Rev. Hanasi at 213 385-5292 or the office at 384-0850. We need four men and four women. We have newly designed t-shirts to wear that day. And every oars person is given one.

### **Kwan Yin Bodhisattva Day**

We will celebrate Kwan Yin Bodhisattva Day on Sunday, July 16, with a vegetarian lunch at 12:30, followed by an afternoon of sitting in meditation from 1:30-4:30. So, please bring drinks or vegetarian food to share.

Then, if you are able to stay for the meditation period following, we hope that you will. The meditations will center around meditations attributable to Kwan Yin, the Bodhisattva of Compassion, such as meditating upon the sound of the bell. We will also discuss the power that she can impart to us. This mini retreat will be led by our Abbess, Ven. Karuna Dharma.

### **Ven. Karuna Back Home**

Ven. Karuna returned home from Indonesia on June 28. She was in Malaysia for a week and a half, attending the Sakyadhita conference. Sakyadhita is the international

organization of Buddhist women. Then she went on to Jakarta, Indonesia, to visit old friends. When she left Los Angeles, she had also intended to visit magnificent Borobodur, the world's largest Buddhist stupa, if it was not terribly damaged by the earthquake that struck central Java last month close to the monument.

### **The Gate of Refuge** - By Dharmadasa Karuna, Gary Goldblum, May 28, 2006

The inward gates of a bird are always open  
It does not know how to shut them  
That is the secret of its song

From - *On a Raised Beach*'by, Hugh MacDiarmid

Why is it that the song of a bird is such a perfect expression of existence, and yet we have such great difficulty in knowing how to live: as individuals, as families, and as communities? It is believed that birds evolved from dinosaurs, over 100 million years ago. Our evolutionary timeline started about five million years ago, so clearly birds have an unfair advantage.

How can we open our inward gate, and learn how to live? This is the challenge of human existence. If we look at native cultures, there is wisdom from Africa to the Arctic. But we have assaulted those cultures, instead of asking to be their students, so we have lost a precious opportunity to learn and live their ways.

One path of wisdom that has survived is Buddhism. But its survival, on a state level, is also under assault. Tibet lost its independence, Burma was overrun by a military junta, Thailand is facing a Muslim insurgency in the south, and Sri Lanka's truce with the Tamil Tigers is fragile at best.

On a personal level, the Buddhist Path is still intact. The first step on that path is called Taking Refuge. There are three things we take refuge in: Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. They are called the Three Jewels.

Buddha was a human being, not a God, and he neither confirmed nor denied the existence of God. Buddha's teachings are a guide for spiritual life, and you do not have to turn away from your religion to follow those teachings. Buddha means one who is awake, and Buddha became awake through his own efforts. We too can awaken if we follow a spiritual path. Whether that path leads to God or ourselves, is for each of us to discover.

What Buddha taught was a way to find what we already possess, and he offered guidance

to help us reclaim it. So while we can think of taking Refuge as coming home to ourselves, we also sense that there is something in Buddhism that can help us find our way. That something is called Dharma.

Dharma is the Buddhist teachings, and the truth of life itself. While the Buddhist scriptures are vast, their essence is found in two teachings: the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path. The Four Noble truths are that life is suffering, that there is a cause of suffering, that suffering can end, and that the path to the end of suffering is the Noble Eightfold Path.

If we were given instructions for how to make a lantern, those instructions would be the Four Noble Truths. Once we made our lamp and lit it, we would follow the Noble Eightfold Path on our journey. The former is our guide for understanding, the latter is our guide for living.

The teachings are not laws or commandments, but proposals that we must test for ourselves. We study the Dharma because it gives us a framework for studying ourselves. Dharma also includes the teachings of life, beyond the scriptures. In a revered Zen text called the Lotus Sutra, Buddha preached by holding up a flower. It was a sermon without words. There comes a time, after absorbing the teachings, that we can leave them behind and learn from life itself.

Sangha was traditionally understood to be the community of monks and nuns. As Buddhism evolved, the meaning of community deepened to include all living things: humans, animals, and the earth itself. There is a belief among some Buddhists that there will be a future Buddha, another fully enlightened being, who will help guide us again.

Another possibility is that the Sangha - you and I who struggle to walk the path - are the Buddha of the future. There is already enough wisdom, in Buddhism and other cultures, to teach us what we need to know. What we need most is to commit ourselves to finding the compassion and wisdom within us.

We face unprecedented challenges from global warming, poverty, injustice, and war. This is the time when we must seek what unites us so that we can help each other, each in our own way, to save the biodiversity and people of this planet. We are the Sangha that must do this. There is no one else. So when we take refuge in the Sangha, we take responsibility to do what we can: whether it is to drive less, assist the homeless, or simply be kind and supportive to each other. Our kindness helps to relieve the suffering of others, and there is nothing we need to accomplish in our lives that is more important than this. When we join the Sangha, we dedicate our practice to serving others.

We all face difficulties, both internal and external, as we try to make sense of our lives. We read books, but living those books is not so easy. We reach a point when we no longer want to keep repeating the same mistakes, hurting ourselves and others, over and over. This is when we are ready, not to read another book, but to start a spiritual path.

Taking Refuge is the gate to that path. Once we walk through the gate, our life will change forever. We will still fail, and try to walk away from what we know is right. But we know in our heart there is no going back. The power of Refuge is the vow to make the effort of a lifetime to grasp what is within us. The gift of Refuge is the Three Jewels that we will carry for that lifetime of effort, so that we too, can sing like the birds.

### **A Pocketful of Zen Stories - by Rev. Jñana Vajra, given May 21, 2006**

If you consulted the *Monthly Guide* for the subject of this morning's talk you will have found that it was to be on the Vimalakirti Sutra. Since selecting that topic and now reality has intervened and I've had significantly less time to research and prepare a talk than I normally do. While the turbulence of daily living helps keep us all on our toes, it's kept me on my heels in the past couple of weeks. Accordingly, I've been obligated to pursue expedient means to identify an alternative topic in a timely fashion. Thus, *A Pocketful of Zen Stories* which I'll be sharing with you today.

Zen, like almost every other religious tradition, is rich with stories. These stories help to convey, in an easily transmitted and assimilated form, aspects of the history and teachings of the tradition. Such stories go to the heart of Zen. They can be amusing or startling, moving or perplexing. As we consider the experiences of others as recorded in the stories they can assist us in the search for our true nature as we fulfill our presence in this world.

The pocketful that follows is a personal selection of some of my favorite Zen stories. Many of these will be familiar to some of you here; perhaps a few of them will come as a first hearing. The familiar stories remain familiar to us because they resonate across the years with their message and I, for one, never tire of periodically re-hearing them. Several of these I first heard recounted by someone right here on this tatami. Let me begin by offering you a cup of tea.

"Nan-in, a Japanese master during the Meiji era (1868-1912) received a university professor who came to inquire about Zen. Nan-in served tea. He poured his visitor's cup full, and then kept on pouring. The professor watched the overflow until he no longer could restrain himself. 'It is overfull. No more will go in!' 'Like this cup,' Nan-in said, 'you are full of your own opinions and speculations. How can I show you Zen unless you first empty

your cup?"

Hopefully having emptied our cup let's go on the road for these next three stories. First, "Tanzan and Ekido were once traveling together down a muddy road. A heavy rain was still falling. Coming around a bend, they met a lovely girl in a silk kimono and sash, unable to cross the intersection. 'Come on girl', said Tanzan at once. Lifting her in his arms, he carried her over the mud. Edkido did not speak again until that night when they reached a lodging temple. Then he no longer could restrain himself. 'We monks don't go near females' he told Tanzan, 'especially not young and lovely ones. It is dangerous. Why did you do that?' 'I left the girl there' said Tanzan. 'Are you still carrying her?'"

Nothing quite sums up living in the moment as does this account. "Buddha told a parable in a sutra: A man traveling across a field encountered a tiger. He fled, the tiger after him. Coming to a precipice, he caught hold of the root of a wild vine and swung himself down over the edge. The tiger sniffed at him from above, Trembling, the man looked down to where, far below, another tiger was waiting to eat him. Only the vine sustained him. Two mice, one white and one black, little by little started to gnaw away the vine. The man saw a luscious strawberry near him. Grasping the vine with one hand, he plucked the strawberry with the other. How sweet it tasted!"

This next story about trading Zen dialogue for lodging I know I first heard here at IBMC and it has remained a favorite of mine ever since. "Provided he makes and wins an argument about Buddhism with those who live there, any wandering monk can remain in a Zen temple. If he is defeated, he has to move on. In a temple in the northern part of Japan two brother monks were dwelling together. The elder one was learned, but the younger one was studying and had but one eye. A wandering monk came and asked for lodging, properly challenging them to a debate about the sublime teaching. The elder brother, tired that day from much studying, told the younger one to take his place. 'Go and request the dialogue in silence', he cautioned. So the young monk and the stranger went to the shrine and sat down. Shortly afterwards the traveler rose and went in to the elder brother and said: 'Your young brother is a wonderful fellow. He defeated me.' 'Relate the dialogue to me', said the elder one. 'Well,' explained the traveler, 'first I held up one finger, representing Buddha, the enlightened one. So he held up two fingers, signifying Buddha and his teaching. I held up three fingers, representing Buddha, his teaching, and his followers, living the harmonious life. Then he shook his clenched fist in my face, indicating that all three come from one realization. Thus he won and so I have no right to remain here.' With this, the traveler left.

Where is that fellow?' asked the younger one, running in to his elder brother. 'I understand you won the debate.' 'Won nothing. I'm going to beat him up.' 'Tell me the subject of the debate,' asked the elder one. 'Why, the minute he saw me he held up one

finger, insulting me by insinuating that I have only one eye. Since he was a stranger I thought I would be polite to him, so I held up two fingers, congratulating him that he had two eyes. Then the impolite wretch held up three fingers, suggesting that between us we only have three eyes. So I got mad and started to punch him, but he ran out and that ended it!"

Further self-centered behavior is the theme of the following brief story of the black-nosed Buddha. A nun who was searching for enlightenment made a statue of Buddha and covered it with gold leaf. Wherever she went she carried this golden Buddha with her. Years passed and, still carrying her Buddha, the nun came to live in a small temple in a country where there were many Buddhas, each one with its own particular shrine. The nun wished to burn incense before her golden Buddha. Not liking the idea of the perfume straying to the others, she devised a funnel through which the smoke would ascend only to her statue. This blacked the nose of the golden Buddha, making it especially ugly."

I once gave a dharma talk on Hakuin and a variation of the next story, which was my first exposure to it, was included. For some reason this particular story has come to the front of my mind time and again whenever I've found myself in distressing circumstances with colleagues or supervisors, including some I'd politely characterize as idiots.

"The Zen master Hakuin was praised by his neighbors as one living a pure life. A beautiful Japanese girl whose parents owned a food store lived near him. Suddenly, without any warning, her parents discovered she was with child. This made her parents angry. She would not confess who the man was, but after much harassment at last named Hakuin. In great anger the parents went to the master. 'Is that so?' was all he would say. After the child was born it was brought to Hakuin. By this time he had lost his reputation, which did not trouble him, but he took very good care of the child. He obtained milk from his neighbors and everything else the little one needed. A year later the girl-mother could stand it no longer. She told her parents the truth--that the real father of the child was a young man who worked in the fish market. The mother and father of the girl at once went to Hakuin to ask his forgiveness, to apologize at length, and to get the child back again. Hakuin was willing. In yielding the child, all he said was: 'Is that so?'"

A variation on right and wrong is provided by the next story. "When Bankei held his seclusion--weeks of meditation, pupils from parts of Japan came to attend. During one of these gatherings a pupil was caught stealing. The matter was reported to Bankei with the request that the culprit be expelled. Bankei ignored the case. Later the pupil was caught in a similar act, and again Bankei disregarded the matter. This angered the other pupils, who drew up a petition asking for the dismissal of the thief, stating that otherwise they would leave in a body. When Bankei had read the petition he called everyone before him. 'You are wise brothers,' he told them. 'You know what is right and what is not right. You may go

somewhere else to study if you wish, but this poor brother does not even know right from wrong. Who will teach him if I do not? I am going to keep him here even if all the rest of you leave.' A torrent of tears cleansed the face of the brother who had stolen. All desire to steal had vanished."

A nice contrast to stealing is provided by the story of giving contained in the following account of publishing the sutras. "Tetsugen, a devotee of Zen in Japan, decided to publish the sutras, which at that time were available only in Chinese. The books were to be printed with wood blocks in an edition of seven thousand copies, a tremendous undertaking. Tetsugen began by traveling and collecting donations for this purpose. A few sympathizers would give him a hundred pieces of gold, but most of the time he received only small coins. He thanked each donor with equal gratitude. After ten years Tetsugen had enough money to begin his task. It happened that at that time the Uji River overflowed. Famine followed. Tetsugen took the funds he had collected for the books and spent them to save others from starvation. Then he began again his work of collecting. Several years afterwards an epidemic spread over the country. Tetsugen again gave away what he had collected, to help his people. For a third time he started his work, and after twenty years his wish was fulfilled. The printing blocks which produced the first edition of sutras can be seen today in the Obaku monastery in Kyoto. The Japanese tell their children that Tetsugen made three sets of sutras, and that the first two invisible sets surpass even the last."

My pocket is getting empty and I have but a final story to share with you. "Zen teachers train their young pupils how to express themselves. Two Zen temples each had a child protégé. One child, going to obtain vegetables each morning, would meet the other on the way. 'Where are you going?' asked the one 'I am going wherever my feet go', the other responded. This reply puzzled the first child who went to his teacher for help. 'Tomorrow morning', the teacher told him, 'when you meet that little fellow, ask him the same question. He will give you the same answer, and then you ask him: 'Suppose you have no feet, then where are you going? That will fix him.' The children met again the following morning. 'Where are you going?' asked the first child. 'I am going wherever the wind blows,' answered the other. This again nonplussed the youngster, who took his defeat to his teacher. 'Ask him where he is going if there is no wind,' suggested the teacher. The next day the children met a third time. 'Where are you going?', asked the first child. 'I am going to market to buy vegetables,' the other replied."

Wherever you are going, may you be peaceful, happy and well on your journey. Thank you for your attention.

**Two Wngs of a Bird** - by Ven. Dr. Karuna Dharma, given at IBMC May 14, 2006

I am sure that many of you have already guessed what this talk will be about. We all know that a bird requires both of his wings in order to fly. If one is damaged, he will be unable to fly until it is repaired. If it does not heal correctly he will never be able to fly. Likewise, the simile of the two winged bird is frequently used in Buddhism to stand for the two qualities that must be perfected before one can become enlightened. When these two qualities are perfected then the person attains Buddhahood; that is he becomes enlightened and his/her journey toward that goal is ended.

What are the two qualities? Wisdom and compassion.

Wisdom is the passive understanding. If one has gained wisdom, compassion is the end result and it becomes the active acting out of wisdom. Wisdom is not knowledge. Knowledge can be taught, or rather skills can be taught, with knowledge as the end product. One can be taught all the parts of an automobile, how they work, symptoms of not working properly and how to repair the problem. That is knowledge. When one becomes knowledgeable about the automobile, one then can take better care of it and repair it when it is necessary. To gain wisdom regarding the automobile requires more than just knowledge. One needs to take time to observe it and its interactions with people and its environment. If one is observant, then one comes to understand better how it affects the environment and its people. One also sees how our lives have been changed by the automobile. One then sees its complex relationships and can discover how the gas it uses pollutes the environment and how the automobile helps make people lazier because they do not have to walk everywhere or ride a bicycle or a horse to do their chores. This awareness is the beginning of wisdom.

We can gain common wisdom about our lives rather easily. That sort of wisdom grows up out of our daily lives. Our grandparents developed a lot of wisdom regarding relationships and our place in society, which is why in Asia older people are revered.

But I am not speaking of common wisdom. I am speaking of intuitive wisdom. The kind of wisdom that Buddha attained. It is available to anyone who wants to gain it. How does one get this kind of wisdom? Again, awareness of our surroundings at all times and concentration will slowly develop wisdom. In other words, if you wish to attain wisdom, you must meditate. There are, of course, many kinds of meditation. Ordinarily when we speak of meditation, we think of sitting meditation. But that is only one kind. There are four postures, according to the Buddha, that can be used in meditation. Sitting meditation is the most common, but meditation can also be done in the walking form, in standing and in lying down also. Meditation in these four forms has its own set of difficulties associated with it. For instance, meditating while lying down always ends when one falls asleep. Walking meditation has different things to observe than sitting meditation. Here one ought to meditate, or concentrate, upon the act of walking, with the minute observation

of the act of walking. Feel how the body moves, the feel of the earth beneath the feet, etc. Why can you not still use the object of meditation that one uses when sitting? Easy. When one is in a deep meditative state, one is not paying so much attention to one's surroundings. That lack of attention can cause problems. You do not want to run into anything, which clearly can happen when you are not paying attention to the act of walking.

Compassion, on the other hand, is the result of wisdom gained during meditation. It also comes more directly through observance of s'ila, morality or ethics. I use the terms interchangeably. In Christianity, morality too frequently refers only to one's sexual behavior. In Buddhism it is used to mean all of our interactions, not just sexual relations per se, but rather how they are used. If one engages in sex that is harmful to another individual, then it is immoral. Sex itself is neither moral nor immoral, but how one uses it determines whether it is moral or immoral, as are almost all other activities. A mother says to her child, "I love you." A nice act, one that is needed for children to grow up to have a good self image. But if a mother uses it to foster guilt in a child, or to manipulate the child to do what the mother wants him to, then it is not a good gesture; it is harmful. That is immoral, according to my definition of morality.

So, if we wish to attain enlightenment we must develop both wisdom and compassion. Wisdom by itself is rather useless. It becomes dry and academic. Compassion by itself puts one at great risk at being able to determine if the compassion they show will help or harm others. A parent who allows their child, even a two year old, to determine everything they want is not really showing compassion. A child raised that way does not have any structure to his life; he will grow up to either think everything must be his way or he will have fundamental problems in judging his role in society. That is not compassion; it is merely ignorance. And a very dangerous ignorance to be teaching young children. We know that some survivors of the concentration camps of World War II ended up dying because the compassionate liberators fed them so much that it overtaxed their systems and the kindness done to them killed them. Compassion requires wisdom if it is going to be true compassion.

I wish all of you good fortune in developing your path to Buddhahood.

### **Is Zen Enlightenment Religious? - by Rev. Thich Tam Thi, Vajra Karuna, given 6/4/06**

Is Zen enlightenment religious? The reason I chose this topic was that I have recently been studying some of the writings of a not well-known, but nonetheless, influential Japanese organization called the Sanbo Kyodan which can be translated as the Order of the Three Treasures. This organization was established by Hakuin Ryoko Yasutani (1885-1973) to train lay students in either the Rinzai or Soto way depending on the needs of the trainee.

Yasutani believed that Zen Kensho, which is traditionally defined as seeing into one's nature, was open to anyone with the time and motivation to seek it, be it priest or lay person. This is not, in fact, a new idea, but one that has risen and died a number of times throughout Zen history and it has always been compatible with the real spirit of Zen. Yasutani, however, went farther than this to insist that the only authentic Zen was that which focused entirely on the production of kensho as simply the experience of the non-duality of reality; furthermore, Yasutani began to criticize both the orthodox Rinzai and Soto establishments as too specifically religious and doctrinally Buddhist.

The Sanbo-kyodan was actually established after Yasutani renounced his former connections to the Soto School in 1954. This organization he then opened to Westerners as well as Japanese. Koun Yamada (1907-1989), Yasutani's successor, went even farther than Yasutani in secularizing the views and training of the order. Yamada claimed that authentic Zen was not so much a religion, as it was the true experience underlining all religions; therefore, the study of Buddhist doctrine was abandoned. This allowed Sanbo-kyodan to become not only a training center for laypersons, but one for Christian, especially Catholic priests and nuns, who wished to be initiated into the Kensho experience. For Christian students, the requirement of taking Buddhist lay precepts and any doctrinal faith in the Buddha-nature was dropped. This, in turn, allowed the Sanbo-Kyodan to certify a number of Christian clerics as Zen Masters.

Four questions arise from this view about Zen. First, if no faith in Buddhist teachings is required, is the kensho-like experience that results from the Sanbo-kyodan training sessions genuine kensho or is it merely a Peak Experience? This question is particularly relevant in that the Koans that are given to the students in the Sanbo-Kyodan are done so without requiring the student to apply any kind of personal Great Doubt to them. When this is done the koan simply becomes a Mantra, and as in any intense mantra practice this can lead to a peak experience.

Second, claiming that Zen is the underlining of all religions, rather than a specific religion, has in the past been used by the Japanese to claim spiritual, if not cultural, superiority over other cultures. Just such a view of Zen was extremely prevalent before the end of the Second World War, and one of the most well known names associated with this view of Japanese cultural superiority was D. T. Suzuki.

Third, the Sanbo-Kyodan attempt to accelerate the kensho or enlightenment process leads one to ask if the end result is not simply a very premature kensho? The long pre-kensho training of traditional Zen serves the very vital function of conditioning the mind to fully integrate the kensho experience when it comes. Zen has long understood that without such preparatory training period any kensho experience is apt to leave very little mark on one in the future. If kensho is to be truly valued then it ought to be worth a very patient

training.

Fourth, should not genuine kensho have a strong humbling effect on the experiencer? The denial of religiosity, and the accelerated method of Sanbo-kyodan seems to eliminate any likelihood of humility, and instead, fosters great pride in accomplishment. This is most noticeable in the way they conduct graduation ceremonies in which the kensho graduates publicly receive certifications of enlightenment. This is unheard of in traditional Zen.

While a number of well known American Zen teachers have taken their training in Sanbo-kyodan the attempt of the order to keep these teachers under the control of the Japanese leadership has resulted in the Americans breaking away from Sanbo-kyodan and becoming entirely independent of it. Among the most well known names associated with such breakaways are Robert Aitken and Philip Kapleau.

I would like to examine three points especially associated with the Sanbo-Kyodan view that Zen enlightenment is not religious; a view not only held by the Sanbo-kyodan, but more generally by a number of Western advocates of Zen.

First there has been a centuries old understanding that Zen enlightenment is synonymous with faith or trust in one's own inherent Buddha-nature or Buddha worth, the inherent Buddha-nature of all others, and the inherent Buddha-nature of the world. In fact, Zen enlightenment could traditionally be called nothing more than this tri-part faith (trust). This may sound as if enlightenment was an easily thing to acquire, but it is not. Practitioners often think after little or much practice that they have gained such faith, but when put to the test it usually turns out to be false-enlightenment faith, because one or two of the components of complete enlightenment faith are missing or underdeveloped.

This tri-part definition of enlightenment can lead to the question, "If someone is not a Buddhist but still has developed such faith or trust in the inherent worth of self, others, and the world is he enlightened? He could be as long as he understands that this inherent worth does not depend on any outside power or source such as a God who gives and can take away this worth at his pleasure. This Buddha worth not only does not depend on any outside agent, but it does not depend on the good or bad of self or others. A person may be very evil, but this does not take away any of his Buddha-nature worth, nor can a saintly person add to that worth. This of course leads me to my second point about Zen enlightenment being, not just a fully religious experience, but a Buddhist religious experience.

This second point can be stated as the question "Can a committed Christian also be a Zen master?" To fully understand this question we must remember that starting with the ecumenicalism of Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) a number of Catholic priests, mostly

Jesuits, openly entered into Zen practice; moreover, a handful of them have been certified as Zen masters both in Japan and America. This leads to the further question of how does this effect the meaning of Zen mastership; furthermore, how does this effect the whole definition of Zen enlightenment? As previously mentioned, Zen enlightenment has traditionally been defined as the absolute awakening to the universality of the Buddha-nature or the unconditional worth of all sentient beings. It is easy enough to drop the sectarian term Buddha-nature, but not the concept of unconditional worthiness. Such worthiness is not inherent to Christian doctrine, since that doctrine clearly states that all humanity is born into sin and is inherently depraved. It would be logical to assume that those Catholic priests/masters who had been ecumenical enough to have entered into Zen practice in the first place may have been willing to compromise on such doctrine in order to qualify as authentic Zen masters. That such a compromise was made is suggested by the reactionary attitude of the Vatican beginning in the late 1980s which has since greatly criticized, if not outright condemned, any mixing of Catholic and what it now considers atheistic and nihilistic Oriental religious practices. The Catholic Church to a great degree has even more recently abandoned the more liberal attitude of Vatican II, and has strongly reinterpreted the absolute necessity of sinful humanity accepting Jesus Christ as the one and only factor for making a person spiritually whole. This, of course, is a direct challenge to the Zen view that not only is such acceptance unnecessary, it is repugnant; moreover, a truly committed Zen practitioner is expected to acknowledge that Shakyamuni Buddha had a more fundamental understanding of reality than did any other great teacher. This reality is that of suffering (Dukkha) and the response to it is compassion (Karuna), this reality also includes the inherent lack of an immortal soul. On the other hand, and rightfully so, the committed Christian is expected to acknowledge that Christ had a more fundamental understanding of reality than did any other great teacher. Of course, this reality is that of the universality of sin and the response to it is divine or theocentric love (agape).

This brings us back to the original question of whether or not a committed Christian, Catholic or Protestant, can be a Zen master. If such a commitment is not personally incompatible with the Zen view of humanity as inherently sinful then the answer could be "Yes". If it is incompatible then the answer must be No. A more important aspect to this question is whether or not an authentic Zen master should under any circumstances subordinate fundamental Zen Buddhist teachings to an incompatible view of another religion. The fact is that most of the pro-Zen Christian practitioners end up saying that the Zen kensho experience can be a very beneficial way-station to the even higher realization of a greater oneness with the Christian God. A good example of this is the statement by the Catholic Zen historian Heinrich Dumoulin in his *A History of Zen Buddhism* where he writes on page 290 "Therefore without desparaging the significance of Zen enlightenment for the earnest Zen disciples, we are driven to question its claim to be the norm of truth. Furthermore, as a mystical phenomenon, the kensho experience is

imperfect. No human effort to attain to enlightenment, no matter how honest and self-sacrificing, can ever lead to the perfect truth, but only the eternal Logos [Word of God] who coming into the world enlightens every man. (John 1:9) Zen, however, does not teach that kensho is only a way-station to something else. For Zen kensho is comprehending reality as it truly is. It is the ultimate spiritual experience. Clearly, if it is "acceptable" to subordinate Zen teachings to Christianity then someone can be a Christian first and a Zen master second. But since Zen, taken as a complete truth in and of itself, has no place for the Christian concept of God, the Logos, or sin than anyone who is first a Zen master can not be secondarily a Christian, unless he abandons the orthodox Christian view of Christ (the eternal Logos) for a more Zen compatible view of reality.

The third point I wish to cover concerns moral training and commitment. Every authentic Zen practitioner has for centuries been expected to start that practice, not with a vow to attain kensho, but minimally with a vow to follow the five lay precepts. In fact, the desire to attain kensho is expected to also be a desire to cultivate and perfect the precepts. Now in general there is nothing in the Buddhist precepts that a Christian ought to have any problems with, but those precepts are decidedly religious and are not compatible with a non-religious striving for kensho. Returning to a Sanbo-kyodan view of non-religious kensho seeking, one can not help note that after Yasutani's death a book Yasutani had written in Japan in 1943 came to light. In it Yasutani reinterpreted Dogen's teachings in a way that was made to encourage deification of the emperor, to prove Japanese cultural and racial superiority, to justify anti-Semitism, to support Japan's aggression against its neighbors, and to sanction the extermination of Japan's enemies. To say the least this created a considerable controversy in American Zen circles. A number of his disciples, including Kapleau who is part Jewish, actually sought to defend or excuse Yasutani's early activities and attitudes. However, there was some question as to whether this defense was done because Kapleau and others genuinely felt that Yasutani had renounced his past, or because as Yasutani's heir an unmitigated criticism of Yasutani's status as an enlightened Zen master threaten their own status as masters. The fact that Yasutani supported the American military activity in Vietnam might suggest that any religiously motivated dedication to non-violence was even later on not a part of Yasutani's™ view of enlightenment.

If favoring non-violence is not part of the ideal in Zen kensho then a non-religious and amoral approach to kensho may be justifiable, but if true Zen enlightenment means to have absolute faith in the universal unconditional worthiness or Buddha-nature of each and every person than a Yasutani-like view of enlightenment ought to be questioned.

What then does that leave us with as far as the so-called non-religious kensho experience is concerned? Well that question was actually answered at the beginning of this talk, the Sanbo-kyodan view is that the only authentic kensho is that which focuses entirely on the

production of the experience of the non-duality of reality or more specifically, it is just a religiously neutral experience of non-dual consciousness.

One way of explaining such non-dual consciousness is that the practitioner has a profound breakthrough to a realization that there is no duality of good self versus a bad self, of pure self versus an impure self, of profane self versus sacred self. Under the influence a strong belief in the Buddha-nature of self, others, and the world there is a dissolving away of our sense of self-alienation, and a feeling of peace with our very ordinary and very mortal human nature.

If this non-dual consciousness has no connection to a Buddhist or other religious view, then such non-dual consciousness can make the so-called enlightenment experience seem synonymous with an irrational and amoral state of mind.

This is dangerous because as long as human beings remain in society they need their judging ability for obvious practical, as well as moral, purposes. We can only have knowledge of self and others and of right and wrong through our mature rational and discursive consciousness. It is for this reason that the authentic Zen enlightenment experience is not a realization of a non-dual cognition that dwells on the other side of the rational mind, but instead is a non-dual cognition within the rational mind. In other words, it is this rational mind that is most in touch with moral awareness. Under no circumstances should we ever allow ourselves to think that an enlightenment experience means somehow transcending morality. On the contrary, the goal of realizing ourselves as truly Buddha requires being moral. Too often both Western and Eastern students of Zen think of the awakening process as a private and totally inward event which, therefore, should be neutral with regards to morality. This is not authentic Zen awakening.

Ever since the 9th century Zen master Lin-chi I-hsuan, the founder of the Rinzai Zen School, defined enlightenment as that of the True Person of No Rank. Enlightenment in the Rinzai School has been seen as something relational. This means that enlightenment truly manifests itself only in how the person relates to or treats others. If the treatment is anything but of the highest moral nature no genuine enlightenment has occurred. Clearly then, a moral orientation towards humanity, rather than just a non-dual consciousness, must be dominant in any authentic Zen enlightenment experience.

This means that if the Zen practitioner does reach the state where subject and object self dissolve, even if only temporarily, this must be regarded as more of an extra perk, but not necessarily as a superior form of enlightenment. It also means that only after attaining the realization of the Buddha-nature of self, others, and the world, and the moral properties that go with this realization are we even remotely qualified to consider ourselves or others enlightened.

The final reason that Zen must caution against any non-religious non-dual consciousness is because it can be so blissful that it tends to minimize or ignore the world's suffering. This in Zen is what is called Dwelling in the Cave of the Devil and Poisonous Ecstasy, and is called this because it become an excuse for not helping others which is a gross violation of the Bodhisattva Vow.

## **Prison Dharma, writings of inmates across the country**

### **Life in the Dharma - Coming to the Dharma**

There were many experiences in my life that eventually resulted in my finding Lord Buddha. My life prior to prison had become unmanageable and reckless. In the process I hurt many people who loved me.

I truly had experience with my karma after coming to prison. I got trapped in a room that was set on fire during a riot. This happened within the first two weeks of my being in prison, and I was trapped for three and a half hours. I lost control of my bodily functions and could not stop getting sick. I suffered from second degree burns and was hospitalized three times. I thought I was going to die. In the riot I prayed as I had never prayed before. They were answered. I knew intuitively to begin to use my experiences to help others. I began to do so, little by little. At first I did paralegal work for twelve years. The strangest thing happened. It was Christ who led me to Buddha. For many years, up to that time, I enhanced my Christian upbringing and studied the Bible deeply and applied those teachings to my life as best I could. I also became a Sikh for some time and learned a great deal. But I felt there had to be more than I could learn about the mind and about living my own life.

A friend came into my life who had such profound peace and happiness. He was a Buddhist and he initially triggered my interest in Buddhism. Eventually I began to study the dharma, and I took Refuge. I became a Buddhist and began reading and practicing every day. I began meditation. My life began at that time, and it continues to transform itself for the better. I have become, at long last, a person I love. But in a much deeper way. I try now to follow the precepts in living my life. I pray and confess when I fall short of upholding them. And I just keep "practicing", as we call it, trying to get better at what I should do as a Buddhist.

I try to act as a Bodhisattva would act, and I reach out to others and attempt to help them. When the time is right I share some Dharma with others. Some get hooked like I did and become Buddhists. With others I have planted a seed.

I try to follow the insights Lord Buddha and the Dharma give me now when I live my life and know to what extent I can help others. Sometimes it may only be to radiate some happiness and treat others with compassion and loving-kindness. People follow the Path at different paces, and we all have our faults, But we can grow and change,

If we apply the Buddha's teachings to our life and meditate daily, we can reach enlightenment. We must pray and follow the intuitive guidance we receive. We must do our best. Here I am now, reaching out to you, sharing with you what I have learned and what I know has changed my life for the better.

There is a great deal to learn and to apply to our lives, but what I find most intriguing is the fact that we never run out of teachings that can help us grow on a daily basis. In Buddhism we call what we do a "practice" because that is exactly what we do. We constantly strive to perfect ourselves until that journey on our Path turns into an awakened state, enlightenment, and we reach Buddhahood where we can work on a much deeper level for the sake of all sentient beings and help them reach their own enlightenment.

I am like you. I slip and fall sometimes, but I get back up and keep striving to reach enlightenment. It is a task in and of itself and has its own challenges in prison. But I am here to tell you now that the time in prison and its sufferings can be used to benefit yourself and others. When you leave prison, you no longer have to be the person you were who put you into that cell. You can become a much better being, one you love. One others can love. And you can help others achieve the same. So, here I am, writing to help. I hope what follows will help you gain a deeper perspective of the truth that the Buddha taught. Use it to grow and never turn back. Never stop growing. And remember this: you can reach enlightenment in this lifetime if you are true to the Dharma teachings. That is a fact.

Peace be with you! Scott

## **Foundations of Buddhism**

Now that I have briefly shared with you some experiences in my life that led me to Buddha, I will now begin sharing through a series of articles those things which I have learned. I do this in order to help you in your own walk on the Path. What I would like to do now in this first article is share with you the foundations of Buddhism that you must learn to understand in order to end suffering in this lifetime and in the next life that you now face so that you can reach the ultimate goal of perfect enlightenment. This foundation consists of the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path, and a daily

meditation practice.

The Four Noble Truths are: Suffering (and its nature). The Cause of Suffering, The Cessation of Suffering and the Path to save you from suffering and lead you to Enlightenment.

The First Noble Truth, the nature of suffering, relates to the very nature of our experience in this current life as suffering human beings. With this statement it may be easy for some, especially non-Buddhists to say that that is a very negative view of our existence. Surely we experience happiness and elated feelings in this life. Why, we even experience joy, pleasure and peacefulness. That is true. The connotation of Buddha's teaching here is saying that it is never long lasting. There are two kinds of suffering that Buddha taught. They are physical suffering and mental suffering.

Physical suffering is pretty clear. Birth, old age, sickness and death. We all suffer pain of one kind or another at one time or another. We suffer from accidents where we injure ourselves and suffer from various diseases or afflictions of the body. All one has to do is look around to witness the suffering of others as Buddha witnessed in order to have empathy and compassion for them. At times this can make our own suffering seem insignificant. The point here that we should make is that this suffering, like happiness, is transient, fleeting and impermanent. Everything changes. Even a new car, a stereo or a toy gets "old" after a short time.

Mental suffering can take the form of mental illness, or it can occur at times of loss, stress, anger, anxiety, or many other situations, such as separation from loved ones. Our nature of suffering in our samsaric (earthly, human) existence should be clear and is taught as the First Noble Truth because -- well, let us liken it to a physician. In order to treat anything you have to first be able to recognize what it is you are treating. To examine it prior to coming up with any diagnosis. Once you recognize it, you want to look at its cause. And this brings us to the Second Noble Truth.

The cause of suffering as taught by our Buddha, is multi-fold in nature. Buddha taught that its primary cause stems from ignorance, ill-will and craving. When we think of our own ignorance, we can feel insulted. However, ignorance as used in Buddhism is our lack of knowledge in a particular area. An example might be in our failing to see things as they really are. For instance, things being empty of any inherent existence independently.

In Buddhism, we most often apply this to the mind and our lack of control or training of our mind, or our styles of living and our ability to follow the precepts. When a child learns to walk, that child stumbles often at first, but with determination the child gets back up and keeps trying until it masters standing, walking and running. Think about mindfulness

and one-pointed concentration. Both of them require mastery. Mindfulness is being fully aware of each movement we make, what the mind is doing--everything at every moment rather than acting so spontaneously without a thought. Keeping inner calm and peace regardless of the situation.

One pointed Concentration is being able to focus the mind on one thing with no other thoughts intruding. For example, focusing on a candle, a picture, a statue, etc.

Ill will is doing things with a bad intention, causing harm to another sentient being. When we do harm to something that is living, like slaughtering or injuring something living, that is ill-will. Doing something with a selfish, ulterior motive would be another example. Doing something to someone that causes one of the forms of suffering to be experienced is acting with ill-will.

Craving is our seemingly insatiable desires at work and can include addictions of any sort: Alcohol, drugs, sex, ego clinging, material things that are more than what is necessary in our life. Greed plays a role here as well. It is interrelated to craving, that desire to have more of anything than what we need. I think we Americans can relate to this. Craving external existence to the point of its being a cultural obsession, is just such an example of craving, done consciously or not. Now that we are able to see the cause, like a physician would examine something, we can now seek a cure.

The Cessation of Suffering is something which Buddhism offers us on the way to ultimate liberation. This is something we can accomplish during this lifetime, and is something that can be a permanent accomplishment. This is the final goal of Buddhism: ultimate Nirvana, being fully awakened. While this brings with it the cessation of suffering, the lack of suffering is something that must be experienced directly. There is no way of describing it to others. Yet it is, in a nutshell, ultimate bliss. It is happiness, fortunate circumstances, prosperity, success, health and well-being. It is rebirth into the Buddha Pure Lands where we can also work for the liberation of others, something we should always strive for and try to do in this life as well. Think of it as the proper medical prescription for what ails you.

The next installment will deal with the Fourth Noble Truth, the Eightfold Path, which leads us into liberation from suffering.

If you liked this writing by Scott, I will include more of his teachings whenever we have room. So, let me know your reactions to it.

Those prisoners to whom I sent a copy of the Vimalakirti Sutra, please let me know if I have forgotten to send you the quest over it

## July Events

### Sunday Talks

7/2 - Love and Acceptance - 11am - Rev. Kusala Ratna Karuna

7/9 - 11 am Ven. Dr. Karuna Dharma

7/116 - Is This It? - 11am - Rev. Ksanti Karuna

7/23 - Zen Poetry - 11am - Rev. S'raddha Karuna

7/30 - Morning of Meditation and - 11am - Chanting - Ven. Havanpola Shanti

### 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 7:30 - Sitting Meditation, led by Rev. Kusala Ratna Karuna

Special Events - every Sunday - 108 Bows Ceremony - 10 am - led by various monks

7/8 Lotus Day Festival at EchoPark

7/16 Kwan Yin Bodhisattva Day - 12:30 - Luncheon - 1:30-4:30 - Meditation on Kwan Yin

### 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

### Web pages and email addresses

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

IBMC email: [Karunadh@comcast.net](mailto:Karunadh@comcast.net)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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