



IBMC Monthly Guide - August, 2006

108 Bows Ceremony

Every Sunday during our monks' training we hold our 108 Bows ceremony. We meet at 10 am to allow more people to join us for this lovely ceremony. Our monks in training take turns in leading this ceremony. We invite you to join us. It is a good prelude for our Sunday service. Starting in September the ceremony will be performed only on the first Sunday of the month.

Ullumbana Retreat to be held August 25 - August 27

This year we will hold the Ullumbana Retreat August 25 - August 27. So, mark your calendar for this important weekend. If you have not yet taken refuge, that is to officially become a Buddhist, you may do so at the end of the retreat.

He who has not realized Essence of Mind and seeks for Buddha without
Is on a wrong path and acting foolishly;
He who seeks Buddha by practicing certain doctrines
Knows not the place where the real Buddha is to be found.
He who is seeking to realize Buddha within his own mind
He only is sowing the seed of Buddhahood.

The retreat begins at 7 pm on Friday and culminates at 12 noon on Sunday with giving refuge to anyone who requests it.

Wear comfortable, loose fitting clothing, bring your necessary toiletries, and be prepared for periods of zazen (sitting), interspersed with kinhin (walking) and samu (work meditation). Meals will be simple but ample vegetarian.

The fee for the retreat is a mere \$75 (\$50 for full members). Call the office at 384-0850 or Rev. Karuna at 382-9972 to sign up.

Ullumbana Ceremony for the Dead, September, 10

Every year we perform the ceremony of sending merits and our best wishes to those people who have died within the past three years, the traditional mourning period for Mahayana Buddhists. This day is known as Ullumbana Day, and we will perform the ceremony on Sunday, September 10, at 11 am, holding our garden luncheon at 12:30.

If you have family or friends that you would like remembered, regardless of when they died, please either send us the information or call the office and leave the information on the answering machine. Give us your name, the name of the persons to be remembered, and if you can, their birth and death dates. We will also remember pets, so give us their names as well. You can remember people who died more than three years ago, as we will wish those who have already attained rebirth a happy life. We also pray for all those lost persons who are wandering between births, whether or not we know them.

We will begin the ceremony by offering dana, or food, to our fully ordained monks. That ceremony will begin at 10:15 am, with the ritual, formal dana ceremony called *Gua Du'ong* in Vietnamese. Anyone wanting to share in this ceremony, should contact Doug Solomon at 213 384-0850. It is traditional that everyone having someone remembered that day brings food to feed the monks at the formal luncheon served before the ceremony. So, combine bringing food for the monks with your donation to the garden lunch that will follow the ceremony. We hope to see you on that very important day in the Mahayana calendar.

Buddhist Way of Life, with Rev. Kusala

An interview that Rev. Kusala gave to Japanese cable TV station in June, 2006

Kusala Bhiksu lives and works at International Buddhist Meditation Center in the Koreatown section of Los Angeles.. He cares for the grounds and use skillfrul menas facilitates meditation and discussion groups. "The thing that brought me to Buddhism was that I turned 30 and I knew I would be dead soon. Because everyone over 30 died quickly, I was a child of the 60's. And in the 60's it was very important to question all authority and not trust anyone over the age of 30. I watched a movie called Logan's Run. Here people were given a little c rystal put in the palm of your hand. When they turned 30, the crystal began to blink and they came and arrested you. And they took you away and no one ever saw you again.

In that whole culture there was no one over thirty. I was sort of brainwashed into thinking that once I turned 30 I was very old and I would have to die, Because I was an agnostic, I was born a Lutheran and became an agnostic in high school, I didn't know what God was. I bought a book by Huston Smith called the Religions of the World. And I read that book. It had a chapter on Buddhism. And that chapter on Buddhism made me get another book: the phone book and I found the International Buddhist Meditation Center. So in 1980 I walked through that front door to learn how to meditate.

The International Buddhist Meditation Center was founded in 1970 by Ven. Dr. Thich Thien-An, a scholar-Zen Master from Vietnam. IBMC was one of the four original Zen centers founded in the U.S. to cater specifically for the needs of Westerners. Our founder, Thich Thien-An was very clever. He came to America in the mid-sixties to teach a class at UCLA. His students wanted him to stay on and start a center so they could practice meditation and practice Buddhism. So he started this center for Americans. He also started 2 or 3 Vietnamese temples. And the reason this temple was named International Buddhist Meditation Center is because he wanted all kinds of Buddhism to be practiced here. We have had Zen Roshis teach here, Tibetan lamas, Vietnamese monks, Theravada monks who have taught and lived here. So our Center although it was started by a Vietnamese monk it is a little Vietnamese, but you will find also Japanese Kwan Yin statues, a statue of Ananda from Sri Lanka. You will find a variety of Buddhist practices going on here. Because he thought that that was the only way to establish Buddhism in America, not to have one kind of Buddhism, but many kinds so the Americans could choose what kind they wanted. In Mahayana Buddhism, which we are, celibacy is part of being a monk. Married people often think that celibacy is the hard way. But I think it is the easier way. If you have a wife or a girlfriend it takes up a lot of time, money, energy. Being single is much easier.

When did you decide you wanted to be single? It took me a very long time. I was in my 40's. When I first studied Buddhism I was 30. I felt sorry for the monks. I thought, think what they are missing. They did not have girlfriends; they did not have any fun. I thought I would never be like that. As I studied the dharma, as I meditated, as my understanding deepened, I saw that if I did not have a girlfriend, or a full time job, I would have a lot more to find out about who I was, to find out about Buddhism, and to be of service to others. The Meditation Center gives me a small room where I live, they give me health insurance so if I get sick, I don't have to die, and a small amount of money so I can buy new socks and underwear, etc. So that gives me so much more time to go out into the world to be of service to the community, and to help people. I've been out at UCLA. I have been a chaplain in prison, a chaplain at Juvenile Hall. Currently I am a chaplain for the Garden Grove police department, and I ride along with the police. So I have a lot of extra time since I don't have a wife and kids. Also I don't have a lot of money so I doubt that any girl would want to go out with me! A lot of Americans are very unhappy. They're working two or three jobs, they have a beautiful house, but they're very unhappy. Something's wrong.

In Christianity what they say is that you'll get your reward after you die. You'll be able to spend the rest of eternity with God or Jesus. And what they say in Buddhism is that you can have a good life right now, in this very present moment. What you need is wisdom and compassion. The path of Buddhism teaches us how to become wise. Buddhism teaches you how to have an open heart. This day we are now living becomes the best day of our life. You can be happy right now, so as Buddhists you don't have to wait until after they die to be happy. You can do it right now. Do your seventh graders understand you?

Yes, they do. In America people don't understand about suffering. They can't quite figure it out. One of my favorite stories is about suffering. A teacher asked me to speak to his class, which was a World History class. They found out about Buddhism, and asked me to speak. After I gave my presentation, one little girl stood up.

A girl named Esmeralda said, "Ven. Kusala, I understand the difference between pain and suffering.

Suffering is when you don't want to have the pain." Suffering happens when you have a Ford and you want a Honda. Suffering happens when you're married and you don't want to be. Suffering happens when you're not married and you want to be. Suffering happens when things are different when they are supposed to be. That little girl understood that, I don't know how, but she did.

What characteristic defines American Buddhism?

First of all, American Buddhism will have more equality. Ordained men and women will have more equality. At Shasta Abbey, which is a traditional Japanese Soto monastery, they call all their ordained men and women, "monks." About two-thirds of them are women, and one-third are men. They all wear the same robes. They all do the same jobs. Secondly, by a lot of diversity, which will slowly turn into unity. There won't simply be one kind of Buddhism in America. There will be more dharma teachers than monks. We don't have a strong monastic tradition in America. The ones I can think of are the Catholics. Or the Protestants, but they are married. They are able to have a job, they have a church that they run. But in America, we are always going to have a strong lay clergy. But there will also be monastics. Because they are the link to the Buddha. The Buddha was a monastic after all; he renounced the world. So those two things will be part of American Buddhism. And as we talked about earlier, we need to have an American Buddha. When I look at a Burmese Buddha statue, he looks Burmese...a Japanese Buddha statue looks Japanese...and we need to have an American Buddha statue that looks American...but I don't know what an American Buddha Statue will look like because we have so many different kinds of Americans...And last but not least, we're going to have to have our own robes. We're color coded. If I was a Sri Lankan monk I'd have saffron robes, if I was a Japanese priest, I'd have black robes; if Korean, grey robes, Tibetan, maroon with yellow trim...I think in the future western monks will have blue denim robes...

Western Style.

When the Buddhists talk, we have so much to offer other religions. Because we have found our place, our place is about suffering and the end of suffering. We talk about nirvana, and never having to be sick, and never having to die. In the mid-sixties to teach a class at UCLA. His students wanted him to stay on and start a center so they could practice meditation and practice Buddhism. So he started this center for Americans. He also started 2 or 3 Vietnamese temples for Vietnamese. And the reason this temple was named International Buddhist Meditation Center is because he wanted all kinds of Buddhism to be practiced here.. We have had Zen Roshis teach here, Tibetan lamas, Vietnamese monks, Theravada monks who have taught and lived here. So our Center although it was started by a Vietnamese monk it is a little Vietnamese, but you will find also Japanese Kwan Yin statues, a statue of Ananda from Sri Lanka. You will find a variety of Buddhist practices going on here. Because he thought that that was the only way to establish Buddhism in America, not to have one kind of Buddhism, but many kinds so the Americans could choose what kind they wanted. In Mahayana Buddhism, which we are, celibacy is part of being a monk. Married people often think that celibacy is the hard way. But I think it is the easier way. If you have a wife or a girlfriend it takes up a lot of time, money, energy. Being single is much easier.

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studied the Dharma, as I meditated, as my understanding deepened, I saw that if I did not have a girlfriend, or a full time job, I would have a lot more time to find out about who I was, to find out about Buddhism, and to be of service to others. The Meditation Center gives me a small room where I live, they give me health insurance so if I get sick, I don't have to die, and a small amount of money so I can buy new socks and underwear, etc. So that gives me so much more time to go out into the world to be of service to the community, and to help people. I've been out at UCLA. I have been a chaplain in prison and a chaplain at Juvenile Hall. Currently I am a chaplain for the Garden Grove police department, and I ride along with the police. And that is very interesting. So I have a lot of extra time since I don't have a wife and kids. Also I don't have a lot of money so I doubt that any girl would want to go out with me! A lot of Americans are very unhappy. They're working two or three jobs, they have a beautiful house, but they're very unhappy. Something's wrong.

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The youngest group of kids I've spoken to were seventh graders.

Do your seventh graders understand?

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When Buddhists talk, we have so much to offer other religions. Because we have found our place, our place is about suffering and the end of suffering. We talk about Nirvana, and never having to be sick, and never having to die. So Buddhism is as relative today as it was 2600 years ago. Some of us think war is the answer, and some think that having a lot of money is the answer and some of us think having two girlfriends is important. But it is not. I am lucky that I live in the United States and I was able to study Buddhism and to become a monk here in my country and was able to stay and teach Buddhism in my country. And some of the best books on Dharma are written in English. I understand that some Asian monks are learning English so they can read translations of texts in English. A hundred years ago if you wanted to study Buddhism, you had to read Chinese or Sanskrit or Tibetan. But today you can walk into a bookstore and find hundreds of books on Dharma written in English. So it is a very special time.

This is the end of the first section on Rev. Kusala. The second section will occur in another Guide.

*To view/download the interview... Please visit: www.DharmaTalks.info

Anitya - by Ven. Dr. Karuna Dharma

Anicca (anitya in Sanskrit), impermanence, underlies all Buddhist thought and practice and is the foundation of Buddhist understanding of reality.

For many centuries most Western people had thought that the universe was a permanent thing, put into place by a Creator God, with the earth at its center. They reasoned that such a complex system could not come into existence except through the creation of a superior intelligence. They named that superior intelligence God and declared his permanence. They believed that humankind reflected the image of God and contained also an immortal essence, which they termed soul. So, while things around them might change, they reasoned, at least they were assured of permanence, an eternal existence after death if they lived in accordance with God's will.

In India twenty-five centuries ago, Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha, proclaimed that there is no permanence anywhere. In his enlightenment experience he witnessed the arising and disappearing of entire universe systems. He saw very clearly that all things are impermanent, that they arise, mature and pass away. He recognized that all things are comprised of conditioned states and that there is no permanent essence to anything. He also realized that the arising and disappearing of states of existence occurred because of various conditions. Should any condition change, the object changed or disappeared.

Even those things which appear to be permanent and unchanging also are in a constant state of change. The mountains appear to be permanent and unchanging, but their very existence is the result of tectonic forces within the crust and mantle of the earth. Volcanoes, inactive for many centuries come alive and new ones pop into existence. Earthquakes build mountain ranges. Ocean becomes land and land becomes ocean. These changes never cease. All matter itself is alive with constant change. Its very nature is a mass of constantly moving energy. Rocks may appear to be inert objects, but in actuality, their very structure is one of constant movement.

The Buddha taught that all conditioned things are impermanent and constantly changing and that they have no permanent essence. He explained that while we may think of ourselves as single objects of existence, in fact humans are made up of a collection of five conditioned, impermanent states: body (rupa), sense contacts and sensations (vedana), perceptions and conceptions (samjna), volitional actions and karmic tendencies (samskaras) and basic consciousness (vijñana). These collections (skandhas) of things are the true nature of the person and they are constantly changing. The body grows old, becomes ill and dies. Sense contacts lead to perception and conception and these are constantly changing. Our karmic activities never cease and underlying all these is the basal consciousness, which at death also disappears with all of the other samskaras.

The Buddha explained that we should not become too attached to our bodies and their sensual experiences and thoughts that arise from them, because the attachment to our bodies and to life causes us great dukkha, suffering and misery. Sense contact brings us sense experiences which we then term as desirable or undesirable. From this judgment arises the desire to re-experience similar sensual experiences, which lead directly to attachment. This attachment then leads to a great thirst or craving for the experience. Soon we are entrapped in the need to continue such experiences, for we feel we need or want them. But all experience is very momentary. Hardly have we grasped onto one, when it disappears and a new attraction grabs our minds. Soon we are enmeshed in a great, complex web of desire, all of which is very transitory, and thus unsatisfactory.

The Buddha stated that for us to become free from the constant round of rebirth and suffering, we would need to realize the changing nature of things in its true perspective, so that we could free ourselves from the need for certain experiences, attachment to self and to the illusion of permanence.

One of the major causes of dukkha is our puny attempts to make impermanent things permanent. We want to amass and hold on to things which please our ego concepts. We strive to hold on to youth, to wealth, to fame, to romance. All of these experiences are fleeting. They arise, mature and disintegrate. It is not change itself which causes the greatest pain, it is our resistance to this change that causes the real dukkha. The Buddha again and again explained: "Impermanent indeed are all conditioned things; they are of the nature of arising and passing away. Having come into being, they cease to exist. Hence their pacification is tranquility."

He urged his disciples to truly understand the ultimate nature of all things, that is their impermanence. He had his disciples meditate upon the disintegration of things, including their own bodies, in order to try to break their inordinate clinging to objects of all kinds: physical, vocal or mental.

Once the individual truly sees that things cannot be grasped for more than a few moments, then these unhealthy attachments and aversions can be given up and the practitioner can be freed from the enslavement he has produced for himself.

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Prison Dharma...

A column devoted to writings of prisoners from across the country

Dear Ven. Karuna:

Thanks so much for your kind letter and beautiful pictures of your trip to Taiwan. I have all the pictures you have ever sent me of the trips you have taken. They are so fun to look back on and it's like having a guided tour of Buddhist points of interest around the Far East. Once again, congratulations on celebrating your 25 years as Abbess of IBMC; what a great milestone. I can never thank you enough for introducing me to the Dharma. The first time I opened up Zen Philosophy, Zen Practice, I knew I had finally found my spiritual home. It's been about three years now and my love for Buddha, Dharma, Sangha has continued to grow and mature. I have found a way to live my life that actually makes sense to me. Although I am still a babe in my understanding of the Dharma, I continually enjoy the experience of awaking to the Buddha's lessons as I walk the Path. Once again, Ven. Karuna, thank you for your help, guidance and patience in showing me the path. May you always be blessed with peace and happiness.

Ven. Karuna, I made a request to the chaplain to receive a phone call from you in order to do the

Refuge Ceremony with me. I was turned down. To be honest, I was shocked as I know that other inmates have been not only received phone calls, from their Christian and Islamic ministers, but also have been allowed to call them long distance at the cost to the state. I was really upset as I was looking forward to speak to you, my teacher, in person. I could have made a big stink about it and written a letter to the warden and filed a grievance against the chaplain, but after a lot of contemplation and meditation, I decided against that as I could see that I would be giving my "ego" a great opportunity to cause a whole lot of delusion and pain for myself and others. I realize there is a time when one must take a stand against religious bigotry, but for now I've decided to bite my tongue and take a good look at the emotions that surfaced when this happened. After letting a few weeks go by to sort through things I decided to write one of the nuns that come here twice a month to worship and study with us. I sent her a copy of your letter to me and the Refuge Ceremony that you sent me. I explained what had happened and asked her if she would do the Refuge Ceremony with me on an upcoming Monday night. She has agreed to do the Refuge Ceremony on July 3. I am going to place your photo on my altar during the ceremony to honor you as my teacher and friend. I am also most thankful to Ven. Dr. Thich Thien-An, although I have never had the good fortune to meet him in this life, I feel like I have met him through you, Ven. Karuna! His writings and wisdom have influenced me greatly and I really feel so blessed to have been able to read some of his works.

Ven. Karuna, I have read the Diamond Sutra you sent me, although I've not started on the questions. I have primarily been meditating on the Heart Sutra and studying it. I have read Thich Nhat Hanh's book on the Heart Sutra and am currently reading a book about and commentary on the Heart Sutra based on the translation from the Tripitaka Master Hsuan Tsang of the T'ang Dynasty. Both books are very good and have been an aid to my meditation and wisdom regarding this great sutra. I have also reread parts of Zen Philosophy, Zen Practice that you suggested. I really love the Heart Sutra and it has been a part of my practice for over two years now. I'll be starting to study and work on the Diamond Sutra in the next few weeks. Ven. Karuna, I hope you have a wonderful time in Malaysia and Indonesia. I look forward to hearing from you on your safe return.

Yours in Peace, Irving

August Events

Sunday Talks

- 8/6 Insight Into Koans - 11am - Rev. Vajra Karuna, Thich Tam Thi
- 8/13 Effort - 11am - Rev. Hasnasi Karuna, Thich Tam Hy
- 8/20 History of the Bhikkhuni Movement - 11am - Ven. Havanpola Shanti
- 8/27 How to Be Happy - 11am - Ven. Dr. Karuna Dharma

Classes at IBMC

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

Wed Every Day Buddhism - 7 pm - Rev. Kusala

Fri Sitting Meditation - 7:30 - Rev. Kusala

Special Events

Every Sunday 108 Bows Ceremony - 10 am led by various monks

Friday August 25, 7 pm - Sunday 12 am - Ullumbana Retreat, led by IBMC monks

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

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