



## I BMC Monthly Guide - September, 2006

### Ullumbana Ceremony for the Dead, Sept10

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 Gaa 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.

### Garden Luncheon, 9/10

Please join us for the Potluck luncheon following the Ullumbana ceremony. It will be held in the Zendo garden immediately following the Sunday service. Please bring either a vegetarian dish to

share or drinks.

### Rev. Chitta's Father Dies

We are sorry to inform you that Rev. Kelsang Chitta's father died the afternoon of August 6 in Indianapolis where he lived. As you know, Rev. Chitta left May 1 to return to Indianapolis to care for her father, who was in his 80's and quite ill. She was with him at his passing, which was quiet. On August 13 Ven. Shanti and the IBMC monks performed a service for him.

### 108 Bows

The 108 Bows ceremony is back to being held the first Sunday of each month until June

### ZEN POETRY - by Rev. S'raddha Prajna Karuna, Thich Tam Tin

A few weeks ago, I received a very early call from Rev. Karuna. Well, it was early to me and obviously not early for Rev. Karuna. She wanted to know the topic of my next dharma talk. I said Zen Poetry. Don't ask me why. I'm hardly an expert in the field. I could have said World Literature. Because Zen Poetry is that vast. Since the dawn of Zen Buddhism, monks, nuns and lay people have been writing poetry. What is a Zen poem? One scholar said, "It is nothing other than an expression of the enlightened mind, a handful of simple words that disappear beneath the moment of insight to which it bears witness."

From the beginning of Buddhism, poetry has been a valuable tool in understanding its basic concepts. But it was really in the 1950s when the Beat poets and writers, including Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg and Alan Watts, introduced Zen poets to America. Clearly these poets and poems help us obtain a greater understanding of Buddhism.

Poetry is a distillation of experience. It is not literal. To paraphrase Emily Dickinson: "Tell the truth but tell it slant." Zen practice's aim is to come to the truth. Sometimes that words cannot express. So it uses indirection. But sometimes it tells the truth, but tells it slant. Therefore, poetry is a perfect vehicle.

Two of the earliest poems play an important role in Buddhism. When a great Chinese Master, Shen Hsiu, wrote this verse:

The body is the Bodhi tree.  
The mind is like a bright mirror  
Polish it and keep it clean,  
Let no dust mote settle there.

Hui Neng, an illiterate woodcutter, wrote:

There is no Bodhi tree.  
No bright mirror exists.  
Since all is emptiness,  
Where would a dust mote settle?

Poetry can often express what prose can't. And a Zen poem can often express the fragility, beauty and the transitory nature of life. Zen poetry deals with every topic imaginable. There are thousands and thousands of Zen poems that have to do with gardening. Some poems express the beauty of Buddhism, some the beauty of life, some the horrors of life. Some are whimsical, some are beautiful, some are funny and some are down right scary.

So today, be patient with me. Times before I've asked you during my dharma talks to be like children. Today, I ask you to meditate on what you hear. I have some Buddhist inspired poems to read. I will pause for a few seconds after each of them so you can experience their message and their beauty and grasp the Buddhist thought behind the poem.

Here is a short poem from Han Shan. He was an 8th century Chinese Zen tramp. Quite a character. It is said that he wrote his poems on his cave walls, on rocks, trees, temples and monasteries. Types of graffiti have always existed. His poetry was countercultural in his time.

Human beings live in the dirt,  
Like bugs in a filthy bowl.  
All day long crawling around and around,  
Never getting over the edge.  
Even spiritual masters can't make it,  
wracking their brains for schemes and plans.  
The months and the years, a running river:  
Then there's the day you wake up old.

Another:..

Pigs eat the flesh of dead men  
Men dine on dead pigs.  
Pigs don't mind the stink of man.  
But if a pig just dies, people throw it in the water.  
And if a man dies, he's buried out of sight.  
Then they lose interest in each other.  
Yet the Buddha's lotus is born in boiling water.

Some say Li Po (701-761) was China's most famous poet. He was imprisoned for a time as a traitor and then pardoned. He was a panhandler and an epic drinker. However, he practiced zazen.

The birds have vanished from the sky.  
Now the last cloud drains away.  
We sit together, the mountain and me,  
until only the mountain remains

are doomed to return like gold  
To die again and again.

Another poem:

Before the Buddha  
lay sweet cherry blossom garland  
if you should wish to ease my entry  
Into the world to come.

These two short poems are by an anonymous priest.

Chanting Buddha's name  
is the deepest pleasure  
of one's old age.

Another:

To learn how to die,  
Watch cherry blossoms, Observe  
Chrysanthemums.

A few haikus: A haiku is a short poem with 17 syllables. Traditional haiku always included a word or words to express the season. For example cherry blossoms could be used to represent spring, cicada for summer. In a more modern haiku it is not necessary to include a seasonal word. A haiku poem has three lines. The first line is supposed to have five syllables. The second line seven. The third line five.

At the flowerpot  
the butterfly listens:  
true Buddha dharma

Don't kill that poor fly!  
He cowers, wringing  
his hand for mercy.  
Buddha beside a field,  
And blooming from his nose,  
A long icicle.

A world of dew  
and within every dewdrop  
a world of struggle.

Now, we can enter the modern world and take a look at one of my favorite Zen poets, Thich Nhat Hanh One of my favorite poets, period. Thich Nhat Hanh is a Vietnamese Buddhist monk Born in 1926. During the Vietnam War he dedicated his life to bring reconciliation between North and South

Vietnam. His lifelong efforts for peace made Martin Luther King, Jr. nominate him for the Nobel Peace Prize in 1967. In 1966, at the age of forty, he was banned by both the non-Communist and Communist governments for his role in undermining the violence he saw affecting people. He's been living in exile from that time. He leads many retreats, gives many talks, and is a prolific writer. Many Western people have been introduced to Buddhism from his books.

#### For Warmth

(He wrote this poem after he heard of the bombing of Ben Tre and a comment made by an American military man.)

"We had to destroy the town in order to save it."

I hold my face in my two hands  
No, I am not crying.  
I hold my face in my two hands  
to keep the loneliness warm  
two hands protecting,  
two hands nourishing,  
two hands preventing  
my soul from leaving me in anger.

The next poem was written during 1978. He was helping the boat people.

Please Call Me By My True Names  
Don't say that I will depart tomorrow---  
Even today I am still arriving.

Look deeply: every second I am arriving.  
to be a bud on a Spring branch,  
to be a tiny bird, with still-fragile wings,  
learning to sing in my new nest,  
to be a caterpillar in the heart of a flower,  
to be a jewel hiding itself in a stone.

I still arrive, in order to laugh and to cry  
to fear and to hope.  
The rhythm of my heart is the birth and death  
of all that is alive.

I am a mayfly metamorphosing  
on the surface of the river.  
And I am the bird  
That swoops down to swallow the mayfly.

I am a frog swimming happily

in the clear water of a pond.  
And I am the grass-snake  
That silently feeds itself on the frog.

I am the child in Uganda, all skin and bones  
my legs as thin as bamboo sticks.  
And I am the arms merchant,  
selling deadly weapons to Uganda.

I am the twelve-year-old girl,  
refugee on a small boat.  
who throws herself into the ocean  
after being raped by a sea pirate.  
And I am the pirate,  
my heart not yet capable  
of seeing and loving.

I am a member of the politburo  
with plenty of power in my hands.  
And I am the man who has to pay  
his debt of blood to my people  
dying slowly in a forced-labor camp.

My joy is like Spring, so warm  
it makes flowers bloom all over the Earth.  
My pain is like a river of tears,  
so vast it fills the four oceans.

Please call me by my true names,  
so I can hear all my cries and laughter at once,  
so I can see that my joy and pain are one.

Please call me by my true names,  
so I can wake up  
and the door of my heart  
could be left open,  
the door of compassion.

Oneness

The moment I die,  
I will try to come back to you.  
as quickly as possible.  
I promise it will not take long.  
Isn't it true  
I am already with you,

as I die each moment?  
I come back to you  
in every moment.  
Just look, feel my presence.  
If you want to cry, please cry.  
And know that I will cry with you.  
The tears you shed will heal us both.  
Your tears are mine.  
The earth I tread this morning transcends history.  
Spring and Winter are both present in the moment.  
The young leaf and the dead leaf are really one.  
My feet touch deathlessness,  
and my feet are yours.  
Walk with me now.  
Let us enter the dimension of oneness  
and see the cherry tree blossom in Winter.  
Why should we talk about death?  
I don't need to die  
to be back with you.

Here's one of my favorite poems.

Bhunisparsha

Death comes  
with his impressive scythe and says,  
"You should be afraid of me."  
I look up and ask,  
"Why should I be afraid of you?"  
Because I will make you dead.  
I will make you nonexistent."  
How can you make me nonexistent?"  
Death does not answer.  
He swings his impressive scythe.

I say, "I come and I go. Then I come again. And I go.  
I always come back. You can neither make me exist nor nonexist."  
How do you know that you will come again?" Death asks  
"I know because I have done that countless times,"  
"How do I know that you are telling the truth?  
Who can be the witness?" Death frowns.

I touch the Earth and say,  
"Earth is the witness. She is my mother."

Suddenly, Death hears the music.

Suddenly, Death hears the birds singing from all directions.

Suddenly, Death sees the trees blossoming.  
Earth makes herself apparent to Death  
and smiles lovingly to him.  
Death melts in the loving gaze of Earth.

Oh my beloved,  
Touch Earth every time you get scared.  
Touch her deeply,  
and your sorrow will melt away.  
Touch her deeply  
And you will touch the Deathless.

Moon Viewing  
If there is no self,  
there will be no samsara.  
Why then do you have to dissolve the self?  
Why do you have to stop samsara?

There is no self,  
but there is belief in a self.  
There is no samsara  
but there is the idea of samsara.

Is the full moon tonight a self?  
No, it is not a self.  
Is the moon viewer a self?  
No, he is not a self.

How then can the moon viewer enjoy the moon?  
It is precisely because the moon has no self  
and the moon viewer has no self  
that both moon and moon viewer are wonderful,  
and that moon viewing is a wonderful thing.

Moon viewing is our practice.

Thank you for being here. Thank you for listening. May you all be peaceful, well and free from suffering.

Prison Dharma, A Column Devoted to Writings of Prisoners from Around the Country

Dear Venerable Abbess:

I have read the Vimalakirti Sutra through several times. But perhaps more importantly, I have undertaken meditation upon several points of the sutra. One aspect I have become aware of is the sutra's explanation of different Pure Lands/Buddha fields, and the Bodhisattvas residing therein. Thus, the sutra does provide a bit of Buddhist cosmology. But I am struck by the fact that a practitioner is capable of generating a field of merit upon application of proper pure practice. The sutra does allude to this. When one generates bodhicitta (the desire to help all living beings) one is in harmony with the Dharmakaya. In this sense, engaged Buddhism is the direct application of bodhicitta to the given situation of the moment!

that a practitioner is capable of generating a field of merit upon application of proper pure practice. The sutra does allude to this. When one generates bodhicitta (the desire to help all living beings) one is in harmony with the Dharmakaya. In this sense, engaged Buddhism is the direct application of bodhicitta to the given situation of the moment! Without the "application" aspect, there is no positive karmic result. And through such application I have seen very positive results for myself as well as others, even here in a prison environment. In society it is needed all the more so. The current wars, conflicts, killing, armed strife provide an all too unfortunate example of the utter lack of bodhicitta on the part of the persons who are responsible. I cannot believe how so many persons can lament the state of daily world as being so horrible and tragic -- then resort to resolving their differences by killing each other! They are only continuing to fuel a terrible karmic cycle not only on themselves, but others as well. They are feeding karmic seeds which in the future will reap the similar consequence which they now enact. Those who kill will in turn be killed. They will experience rebirth in the hell realms or in situations of poverty, war torn environments, etc. I now realize these things, whereas before I had totally ignored such concepts. Yet they are not mere intellectual speculation; through application they become reality, be it bodhicitta or war. I pray that society chooses the former rather than continuing the latter course. Such causes and conditions only feed a negative reaction to others who impute only negativity and then enact/react with emotional response.

I had written to you about a state experienced during meditation. There are subtle levels beyond this. There is a point when you experience an awareness of the impact karmically of causes and conditions. As odd as it sounds, one does become very aware of the far ranging impact of one's own thoughts, words and deeds, as well as those of others. Through such awareness one understands the need for bodhicitta. For without such, our thoughts, words and deeds have no value. While they may not harm others, without bodhicitta they do not contain the level of merit to overcome negative habitual karmic seeds/patterns. At least this is how I perceive it to be through meditation.

There also is a point where one becomes aware that one has the constant habit of imputing conceptions to everything. By habit we stick a label upon all of our perceptions. I have noticed that even the most simple emotions are the result of karmic habit and the act of labeling in conjunction with cause and effect. The mechanics of this are so simple, yet very profound. Most people are quick to impute horrible samsaric conditions yet they wholly overlook their Buddha nature. Each person's perception of what is reality is dictated by their karmic seeds. It is upon the basis of their imputations as to how they think, act and speak. Most unfortunately, upon review of my past, I am aware that I was very ignorant and made many bad, self-serving choices in life. I have made it a point to remain more alert, mindful and aware of my thoughts, words and deeds. In this manner I am better able to stop feeding a cycle of negativity and progress. In this manner I have cut down on

the constant feeding of the "self." - Your student, Dale

## September Events

### Sunday Talks

- 9/3 Continuing the Tradition - 11am - Rev. Chong Do
- 9/10 The Tradition of Ullumbana - 11am - Ven. Dr. Karuna Dharma
- 9/17 The Five Hindrances - 11am - Rev. Kusala Ratna Karuna
- 9/24 The Tradition of the Buddha's - 11am - Robe - Sr. Chandana Karuna

### Classes at IBMC

- Wed Every Day Buddhism - 7 pm - Rev. Kusala Ratna Karuna
- Fri Sitting Meditation - 7:30 - Led by Rev. Kusala Ratna Karuna

### Special Events

9/3

108 Bows Ceremony, 10 am

9/10

- 10:15 Dana for the Fully Ordained
- 11:00 Ullumbana Ceremony
- 12:30 Luncheon in the Zendo Garden

### Meditation

- 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.Karunadhharma.info](http://www.Karunadhharma.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.Urbandharma.org](http://www.Urbandharma.org)  
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