



- March 2007 -

Seminar on the Heart Sutra

A Seminar on the Heart Sutra is being offered by Ven. Dr. Karuna Dharma on Saturday, March 10 from 1-4 pm. The seminar will focus on what the Heart Sutra means, with its many opposing viewpoints. If you have difficulty understanding passages like: there is. . . "no suffering, origination, extinction or path," come and all your questions will be answered. The Heart Sutra is the final distillation of the Prajna Paramita literature and is indicative of the difference of attitude between Theravada and Mahayana Buddhist viewpoints. The discussion will be interspersed with occasional meditation periods to help us to see more clearly. Call Ven. Karuna directly to sign up at 213 382-9972. Suggested donation is \$10.

Monks Attend Unveiling of 28 Buddha Statue in Sri Lanka

Vens. Havanpola Shanti and Karuna Dharma returned on February 3 after spending 15 days in Sri Lanka, during which time they viewed the unveiling of a 28' Buddha statue (36' including the lotus base) done in Aukana style at Ven. Shanti's temple in the small village of Iriyawetiya. On the Friday before the unveiling, there was a perahera (religious procession) which featured the Dharma school children. The small boys rode bicycles and carried long branches of flowers, while the girls did Singhalese dancing. They were followed by Kandyan musicians on drums and cobra flute and Kandyan dancers. (The musicians and dancers from Kandy reflect Singhalese culture and are used in every important occurrence.) The Buddha relic was lovingly carried on a palanquin. On Saturday the relic was displayed for the villagers and on Sunday the unveiling was done. Three men rode in a cherry picker to release the monks' clothing in which the statue was wrapped, after an artisan painted on the Buddha's eyes. This beautiful statue rests in the center of the temple's grounds.

Following the unveiling a sumptuous meal was offered to the 20 attending monks and 2000 villagers, including government dignitaries.

The last 10 days they spent visiting friends and Ven. Shanti's relatives, along with a visit to Havanpola, the village in which Ven. Shanti was born and raised. A trip to Kandy and the elephant orphanage where 40 elephants live was also included.

108 Bows Ceremony

Rev. Maha Candana is leading the Adoration of the 88 Buddhas ceremony, every Sunday morning at 10 am, wherein we honor all of the known Buddhas. We invite you to join us for this simple, but moving ceremony. It is a good prelude to our Sunday service.

IBMC's Sunday Shop

Come see our beautiful new library and gift shop. It was lovingly painted by Rev. Chong Do and restocked by Rev. Maha Candana and upasaka Romeo Kassarian.

The IBMC Sunday Shop has gifts to provide you with everything for your spiritual needs. Check the Sunday Shop for items from all over the world: brass Buddhas from Thailand and Buddhas from Sri Lanka, hand carved from jak, mahogany and ebony woods. We also have statues of Ananda, Buddha's closest disciple, who convinced him to ordain women as Bhiksunis, thus placing women on equal status with men. We carry 10 oz. coffee cups, with the footprints of the Buddha and the logo Following the Path. We carry prints of Rev. Sunya's paintings and whimsical creations, a number of hand malas and 108 bead malas, from \$2 to \$25. And we also carry Dharma books, incense and altar supplies, including bells and mokugyo (wooden fish).

The Development of the Buddha Image / by Rev. Vajra Karuna

For the first two or three centuries of Buddhist history there is a complete lack of any iconic images of the Buddha himself. Only aniconic symbols, such as the Footprint, the empty Throne, the umbrella, the wheel, the Stupa, or the Bodhi-tree were used to represent him in Buddhist devotional art. At this early date it was presumably felt that since the Buddha had become liberated from all material form, to depict him in any kind of such form was sacrilegious.

The footprint has always been a symbol of the Buddha as one who came into the world, gained liberation, and departed from the world with only footprint-like traces left behind.

The empty throne has always been a symbol of the Buddha as a spiritual king.. It is sometimes referred to as the Lion Throne. In Buddhist iconography when a Buddha figure is depicted as sitting on a Lotus flower this is also called his throne. Other iconographic thrones are chairs, demons and lower deities, or animal supports (Vahanas). An umbrella, like the throne, represented the Buddha as a spiritual monarch. The wheel or chakra originally represented the chariot in which a king used to ride both in peace and war; and so, in particular, it came to symbolize conquest. In the Buddha's case it was the conquest of the passions and ignorance. This meaning soon expanded to symbolize the first sermon given by the Buddha after his enlightenment, which was called the Turning of the Wheel of the Law (Skt. Dharmachakra). The use of the wheel symbol is of solar in origin. As the sun

and/or the wheel of the sun god's chariot eliminates the darkness and awakens us, so the religious Law or Truth eliminates ignorance and brings awakening (Bodhi). Of all of the above mentioned aniconic symbols this wheel motif became, by far, the most commonly used symbol for Buddhism, especially the wheel with eight spokes which to represent the Eight-fold Path.

When it came to the subject of devotionism, on the other hand, the earliest concrete manifestation of Buddhist practice was found in the worship of his presumed relics. Legend tells us that when the Buddha died his cremated remains were placed in eight separate burial mounds, or stupas, with the bowl used to collect the ashes placed in a ninth and the remains of the funeral pyre placed in a tenth stupa. Eventually, similar stupas were erected throughout India to house the sacred remains of arahants, those Buddhist monks who were thought to also have attained liberation. As was the case for the Buddha, it was believed that the great holiness of these individuals was also somehow still present in their remains, and that the veneration of them, especially by ritual circumambulation of the stupa, could be used to expiate sins (bad karma), and to acquire spiritual merit beneficial to this life as well as the next. Later on when genuine bodily relics were less available, copies of sutras were often buried in the stupas as substitutes.

The stupa cult is probably pre-Buddhist, and even pre-Vedic and was adopted into Buddhism from an earlier more primitive pre-Vedic cult. One of the reasons for believing this is that Vedic Brahmanism, regarded mortal remains as unclean, and had a horror of them, so worshipping them was out of the question.

While the starting time of stupa worship is clouded, we can be sure that in the time of king Ashoka (270-230 B.C.E.) his favoring of Buddhism gave the cult an enormous boost. In fact, he disinterred the original ashes of the Buddha from their original resting places and divided them still further, rearing stupas for them all over his kingdom.

After the stupa the next most honored representation of the Buddha in pre-image Buddhism was the tree under which the Buddha supposedly sat during his enlightenment. Indeed, any member of that botanical species came to be venerated for the sake of spiritual and material rewards as in the case of the stupa.

The earliest Buddhist texts referring to the tree under which the Buddha sat do not specify what kind of tree it was. Somewhat later texts state that it was the sacred Indian fig tree. This particular species of tree (*Ficus religiosa*), therefore, became sacred to Buddhism and was given the name the Bo or Bodhi (wisdom) tree. Archaeological evidence tells us that this species of tree had been regarded as sacred before the Buddha's time, and the most likely explanation for this particular species' inclusion in the Buddha legend probably stems from its association with a pre-Buddhist cult focusing on the worship of this species of tree, a cult whose followers eventually were absorbed into Buddhism. Their absorption would have been facilitated with identifying the object of their worship with the sacred circumstances of the Buddha's Enlightenment. That a tree worshipping cult was absorbed into early Buddhism may seem strange to those who have grown up in Western monotheistic religions, but not so if we compare the view of the sacred or divine in India in the past and the present with that of the West. In Western monotheism the sacred (the divine) has been placed so far above or outside of the natural world as to de-sacralize all of nature. No Indian religion has done this. In India, or for that matter in Eastern Asia, nature is considered to be as

much a manifestation of the divine as is anything else. Therefore, the incorporation of such natural objects as trees, serpents, monkeys, and cows into the divine is to be easily understood, and if possible, appreciated.

The original Bo-tree is said to have been destroyed in the 7th century, but an offshoot of that tree was later planted in the same spot, and it is this tree that is present there to this day. While stupa and tree worship may have satisfied Buddhist devotionism during the earliest centuries of Buddhism, by the first century of the Common Era, or possibly a little earlier, the needs of Buddhist followers had changed. While we can not be completely sure of the reasons for this change we can be very sure of where this change first occurred. The location, or rather locations were in what is now northern Pakistan, but was then called Gandhara; and in the area just south of present-day Delhi called the Mathura region.

The antecedent for the Mathura images is archaeologically difficult to understand; as is any possible relationships they may have had with the Gandharan images. At this time all that can be said about the Mathura images is that they appeared simultaneously with the Gandharan ones, and that it was these Mathura images that would later influence the Buddha images in Southern India, and Southeast Asia.

The antecedents of the Gandharan images are far clearer. Some three centuries before the first Gandhara images arose, that part of the world had been conquered in the 4th century by Alexander the Great and a large number of Greeks had settled in the area bring with them classical Greek sculpture. This Greek influence, not only lasted until the 1st century of the Common Era; moreover, by that time it was reinforced by Roman sculptural influence. When one looks at the Gandharan Buddhas the Greco-Roman toga-like form of the Buddha's robe is obvious, and even more obvious is the fact that these images were in particular based largely upon Greco-Roman view of the sun god Apollo. Another major characteristic of these Gandharan images is the hair style given them. Despite the Gandhara's clear understanding that Buddhist monks, and the Buddha like-them, had shaved heads Gandharan images not only show the Buddha with a full head of hair, but sporting what is called the Greek hair knot. This is where all the hair is pulled up and tied at the top of the head into a knot. From the second century of the Common Era on Buddhist people forgot that this was a particular hair style of a former age and culture. As a result they interpreted the knot as a supernaturally significant protrusion from the Buddha's skull; and the hair itself was re-depicted as a mass of short tightly wound curls. This head and hair motif can be seen on most of the Buddha figures in East Asia up to the present because it was this Gandharan area imagery that influenced that part of the world.

Most of you have heard about the monumental Buddha figures in Afghanistan deliberately destroyed by the Taliban. These were, in fact, late Gandharan style works. Their destruction was not merely a crime against the art world in general, but even worse, against the very history of the Afghan people whose pre-Islamic ancestors created them.

Anitya, / by Ven. Dr. Karuna Dharma

Anitya (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.

Web pages

IBMC Web page: www.IBMC.info

Ven. Karuna's web page: www.Karunadharma.info

Rev. Kusala's web site: www.Urbandharma.org

Rev. Kusala's web page: www.kusala.info

March Events

Sunday Talks

3/4 More Insights on Koans

11am Rev. Vajra Karuna

3/11 The Five Precepts

11am Rev. Kusala Ratna Karuna

3/18 Spring Flowers

11am Ven. Dr. Karuna Dharma

3/25 Iconic Female Figures in Buddhism

11am Rev. Jñana Karuna Vajra

Classes at IBMC

Mon Zen Koan Study

7 pm Rev. Vajra Karuna, Ananda Hall
Wed Every Day Buddhism
7 pm Rev. Kusala Ratna Karuna, Zendo
Fri Sitting Meditation
7:30 Rev. Kusala Ratna Karuna, zendo

Special Events

Every Sunday 108 Bows Ceremony,
10 am led by Rev. Maha Chandana
3/10 Seminar on the Heart Sutra
1-4 pm Ven. Dr. Karuna Dharma

Meditation

weekday mornings, 6-6:30 am
led by Rev. Abhaya Hanasi Karuna
Wednesday nights, 7-9 pm
led by Rev. Kusala Ratna Karuna
Friday nights, 7:30-9 pm,
led by Rev. Kusala Ratna Karuna

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