



- April 2007 -

### **108 Bows Ceremony**

Every Sunday of the month at 10 am, we do the 108 Bows ceremony, celebrating the 88 known Buddhas. We invite you to help us to perform the ceremony. It is a good practice before our service at 11 am. This month the ceremonies will be led by Rev. Maha Candana.

### **Hanamatsuri, April 8 / Bathing the Baby Buddha**

The founder of our Center, Ven. Dr. Thich Thien-An, often said that the Buddha's birthday is everyone's birthday. Please join us in bathing the baby Buddha as we celebrate the Buddha's birthday in Japanese style on Sunday, April 10, followed by a potluck luncheon in the Zendo garden. Please bring a vegetarian dish or drinks to the lunch. If you would like to bake a birthday cake please call the office to let us know.

The historical Buddha was born 2650 years ago in a garden at Lumbini in the Himalaya mountains, as Queen Maya was attempting to get from Kapilavastu to her parents' home in Devadaha. She held onto the branches of a fragrant sala tree and gave birth to the prince, who was bathed by the gods with sweet waters and flowers falling from the heavens. Legend says that he took seven steps as lotus flowers bloomed under each footfall, and raising his right hand towards the heavens and his left to the ground, declared, "Under heaven and above the earth, I am the most honored one. This is my last birth. I will put an end to the suffering of birth, old age and death."

While the traditional day observed differs from school to school, we observe the Japanese date of the Flower Festival- Hanamatsuri. In May we celebrate the traditional Vaisakha (the triple blessed day of his birth, enlightenment and death) with a retreat. The Hanamatsuri ceremony ends with all of us reenacting the bathing of the new born prince.

### **Pot Luck Lunch for Abbess' 67th Birthday**

This year our Abbess, Ven. Dr. Karuna Dharma, turns 67, so we are holding a party for her on Sunday, April 22, following our Sunday service. If you have any talent, such as singing, dancing, playing a musical instrument, flower arrangement, poetry reading, martial arts, etc., call our office at (213) 384-0850, and we will add you to our talent lineup that afternoon. The party will begin at 12:30 pm with a potluck luncheon, followed by a lineup of cultural activities. The program will run until 3 pm. Please bring drinks or a vegetarian dish to share. Gifts are not necessary.

### **Vaishaka retreat**

IBMC will hold its Vaishaka weekend retreat from May 11-13 Mark your calendars now and let the center know no later than May 7 if you plan on attending.

### **More Insights into Koans / by Rev. Vajra Karuna.**

The following koans are from the Blue Cliff Record Collection.

BCR 87 Yun Men, teaching his assembly, said, "Medicine and illness cure each other: the whole earth is medicine; where do you find yourself?"

Comment by Rev. Vajra: This very short koan has a very important Buddhist message in it. Buddhist teachings have always been seen as analogues to medicine that is used to cure the illness of dukkha and liberate the patient into the health of enlightenment. However, Buddhism, unlike most other spiritual traditions has from its beginning pointed out that once cured you do not need the medicine any longer, and in fact, if you continue to take it that medicine can become poisonous. That is why we have in an ancient Buddhist sutra called The Simile of the Raft, which says that once you have used a raft to cross a stream you would be very foolish to put the raft on your back and continue on with it. So too this sutra says that since Buddhism itself is only a medicine, once cured you do not need to continue to hold on to it, for if you do you have just turned it into another enslaving attachment or illness.

The final phrase in the koan is: Where do you find yourself? And is asking where are you in this medicine illness scheme or where do you find yourself in this understanding?

BCR 90 A monk asked Chih Man, "What is the body of enlightened wisdom?" Chih Men said, "An oyster swallowing the bright moon." The monk asked, "What is the function (action) of enlightened wisdom?" Chih Men said, "A rabbit conceiving a pup."

Comment by Rev. Vajra: I chose this particular koan because it shows that some koans can only be understood if one has some insight into ancient Chinese folk tales. In one of those folk tales, it is said that at the time of the full moon the oyster rises to the surface of the sea opens up and swallows moon light, conceiving a pearl. In another folk tales it is said that a rabbit conceives also by swallowing moon light. Here we have the same metaphor of swallowing moon light and conceiving which suggests that the essence and function of enlightened wisdom are the same, but we also have a difference in the form of an oyster and rabbit suggesting that there is also a difference.

The koan does not go beyond this to explain what the difference is, but in traditional Buddhist thought it is generally stated that the essence is passive potentiality, while the function is the turning that potential into action.

BCR 92. One day The World-honored one took his seat on the platform. Manjushri (the bodhisattva of enlightened wisdom) struck the table with the gavel and said, "Clearly understand the Lord of Dharma's Law, the Lord of Dharma's Law is like this." The World-honored one descended from his seat.

Comment by Rev. Vajra. "Clearly understand the Lord of Dharma's Law, the Lord of Dharma's Law is like this" is a traditional formula stated at the very end of a Dharma talk. The fact that it is given at the beginning and technically at the end, with nothing said in between is a typical Zen way of reminding the practitioner that the most precious of all Dharma lessons can never learned through another, not even a teacher as great as a Buddha. Far from it, any too great a dependency on such a teacher can and will slow down or even prevent spiritual progress. The truth or Dharma Law must ultimately come from within the practitioner.

BCR 94 In the Surangama Sutra the Buddha says, "When unseeing, why do you not see the unseeing? If you see the unseeing, it is no longer unseeing. If you do not see the unseeing, it is not an object. Why is it yourself?"

Comment by Rev. Vajra: Unseeing is pure subjectivity, and can not be aware of itself, just as the eye can not see itself. If it is seen as in a mirror it ceases to be the unseen, which is to say that it has become an object, which is being viewed by the original subject.

Why is it yourself? We are constantly making the unseen or our real no-self as a seen or object. The koan does not go beyond this statement, but Buddhist teachings do by stating that this objectification of self is the source of our

suffering

BCR 18 The emperor asked National Teacher Hui Chung, after you die, what will you need?" The Teacher said, "Build a seamless monument for me." The emperor said, "Please tell me what such a monument looks like." The teacher said, after remaining silent for a while asked, "Do you understand?" The emperor said, "I do not." The teacher said, "I have a disciple to whom I have transmitted the teaching, Tan Yuan, who is well versed in this matter. Please summon and ask him. After the death of the National Teacher, the emperor summoned Tan Yuan and asked him about it."

Tan Yuan replied, "South of Hsiang, north of t'an." [Hsueh Tou added, "A single hand does not make random sound."] "In between there is gold sufficient to a nation." [Hsueh Tou added, "A rough-hewn staff."] "Beneath the shadow-less tree, the community ferryboat." [Hsueh Tou added, "The sea is calm, the rivers are clear."] "Within the crystal (emerald) palace, there is no one who knows." [Hsueh Tou added, "He has raised it up/All is finished."]

Comment: According to Sekida in Two Zen Classics the seamless means the formless, the formless pagoda is the metaphor for the formless body (kaya) of the Buddha (Dharmakaya). "South of Hsiang, north of t'an" refer to the two rivers between which Zen was flourishing at the time, so they are the equivalents of the south and north poles (the whole world).

"A single hand does not make random sound." While it is very silent (unobtrusive) in between these rivers is gold sufficient to a nation which is the supremely worthwhile teaching of Zen and which is also represented by "A rough-hewn/mountain staff" carried by a Zen master.

This teaching ferries the community of followers across the river of samsara (birth and death) to the other shore or shadow-less realm (the Pure-land where all is the light of Amitabha-Buddha). "The sea is calm, the rivers are clear" means that the voyage there will be peaceful. "Within the crystal (emerald) palace, there is no one who knows." Once there you will find the heavenly palace of no self. So Tan Yuan raised up (described) the seamless pagoda and so all is finished.

This same koan is found in the Book of Serenity 85.

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**Anatman, The Teaching on No Self / by Ven. Dr. Karuna Dharma, (Thich An Tu), Abbess, I.B.M.C.**

Twenty-five centuries ago when the Buddha turned the wheel of the Dharma and began to teach, he presented a philosophy which differed significantly from the current belief systems of India, by presenting a profound spiritual path, which had at its very core a denial of God and soul. The Buddha proclaimed the three characteristics of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and insubstantiality (anitya, dukkha and anatman)

These three characteristics are seen as applying to all phenomena. The one great law of the universe, then, is change. Phenomena come into being, mature and disappear. They are the result of conditions; when the conditions change, they also change or disappear. Even those things which appear as permanent are impermanent. Entire universes come into being, mature and disintegrate. Buddhism does not recognize a primal cause, nor does it recognize the existence of a permanent, unchangeable substance in anything. Rather, it sees all things as constantly changing, as conditionally created. The constant creation and modification that occurs is seen as being the natural result of the influence of all beings that live within that sphere. We, then, along with all other beings, create our own world. This is sometimes called collective karma or collective action. There is no beginning and no end to this process which continues endlessly, because desire and aversion, which is followed by craving and clinging, produces the constant re-enactment of bringing into existence all manner of things, physical, mental and emotional.

Things do not exist because they have an innate quality to them. Rather, they come into existence because they have no innate quality. They are created out of our own desires. Because there is no fixed quality to anything, anything can be created. Each creation carries within it its own seeds of destruction, because the conditions which brought it into existence cannot continue ad infinitum.. So there is the endless round of process of production and extinction, fueled by desire, which arises from a profound ignorance of the conditionality of things, of what causes our own suffering. This ignorance comes from a basic misunderstanding of the nature of all things. The mistaken and fabricated notion of an ego creates within us a need to make permanent those things which we desire. Since we desire more than anything immortality, we will create the notion of an immortal self or soul. This belief in an immortal soul is viewed as the cause of the endless round of our unsatisfactory existence.

Buddhism, then, sees all beings as a result of conditions. The human is viewed as being a collection of five conditions, called skandhas. These are body-form (rupa), sensations and perceptions (vedana), conceptions (samjñā), karmic predilections or tendencies, or habit energies (samskara), and basal consciousness (vijñāna). All five of these conditions are necessary for a sentient being to exist, These are clearly all conditional. When the person dies,

these five skandhas break apart and disappear. There is no substrate or bit of divine substance, no personality or soul which remains.

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.

**Prison Dharma, a column devoted to writings of prisoners around the country**

**Dear teacher:**

I enjoyed Refuge and have decided to follow the path of Zen Buddhism. I have grown in many ways, and I'm starting to understand the illusion that my life has

been. but most importantly I am very aware of my karma. Therefore, I have altered my behavior and I meditate daily. At first I found meditation boring and somewhat difficult to maintain focus, but by sticking with it I noticed my mind quieted and my overall being more relaxed. As I continued I knew that I wanted some kind of profound experience, a realization, so much so that I made this the focus of my meditation--which was a mistake. The words of the Buddha kept swimming through my mind, "Let it go," so I did. Not long after meditating, I had that experience or realization. I began to doze off (as I unfortunately sometimes I do while meditating) and had what I believe and had what I believe to be a dream. In this dream I was staring into a mirror, but could not see my face. I saw the Earth. I rubbed my eyes and looked again to see another person looking back at me. I rubbed my eyes again only to see the Earth and then again yet another person. I immediately woke from this dream and realized that I am the Earth and I am that other person in the mirror and they are me and when tuned into this reality I can harmonize, not only with other people, but with all countries. When they hurt - I hurt. When they laugh, I laugh. Things got messed up the moment I began to think. We are of the Universe and we are the Universe. I now know that knowledge does not suffice, only realization, which is knowledge come to life.

Ven. Dharma, thank you for being my teacher. This course has forever changed my life. As the days passed after this "dream", I began to dwell on it a bit and even wondered why it wasn't happening again and again. I reminded myself of those three little words, "Let it go", and so I have. Again, thank you, teacher.

Yours in the Dharma, Dale

**Dear Ven. Dr. Kareuna Dharma:**

I hope this letter finds you in good health. I am very excited to be studying with you. I know I have a long path, but feel that I have made great strides in my studies and self-awareness over the last year. I have found happiness and clarity of understanding during my short time as a Buddhist than in 40 years of being Catholic. I want to continue learning for as long as I can, and to grow in the Sangha, helping others. I try to carry the Dharma in my heart and actions every day. I live in the present, for I know my future is born out of today and today is the result of the past. I will choose right thoughts, speech and actions from now on. I hope to share my thoughts with you. I don't have much money, but I can give you my time, thoughts and feelings and an occasional stamp

Happiness and tranquility arise from concentration.

Frustration and worries arise from desire.-- Heart of a Buddha  
yours in the Dharma.

Gassho, Jodel

## **April Events**

### **Sunday Talks**

- 4/1            Karma  
11am    Rev. Sunya Vajra Karuna
- 4/8            The Importance of Hanamatsuri  
11am    Ven. Dr. Karuna Dharma
- 4/15    Other Tales  
11am    Rev. Sraddha Karuna
- 4/22    Vipassana, Insight Meditation  
11am    Ven. Havanpola Shanti
- 4/29            Morning of Chanting & Meditation  
11am    Rev. Abhaya Hanasi Karuna

### **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 at 10 am / 108 Bews Ceremony led by Rev. Maha Candana

- 4/8    Hanamatsuri celebration  
          Vegetarian Lunch in the garden
- 4/22    Birthday Celebration for Ven. Karuna  
          vegetarian garden luncheon

### **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

IBMC email addresses

IBMC email: Karunadh@ca.rr.com  
Ven. Karuna's email: Karunadh@ca.rr.com  
Ven. Shanti's email: Hshanti1@yahoo.com  
Rev. Kusala's email: Kusala@kusala.org  
Rev. Hanasi: Hanasi@ca.rr.com  
Rev. Vajra: Madmonk88@aol.com  
Rev. Jñana: Lsipe@usc.edu  
Rev. MaitriDasi: Mira@Miramarmango.com  
Rev. Ksanti & S'raddha: Victortom@aol.com  
Rev. S'unya: Heartland Zen@yahoo.com  
Rev. Chong Do: Pure Path@yahoo.com  
Rev. Chitta: Kchitta@sbcglobal.net  
Rev.Candana: Chandanakaruna@yahoo.co  
Doug Solomon: Dougibmc@yahoo.com.  
Gary Goldbloom: bluegreenarch@gmail.com