



August Guide 2002

108 Bows Ceremony

Every Sunday during our monks' training we hold our 108 Bows ceremony. We now 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 Ceremony... Ceremony for the dead... August 26

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, August 25, at 11 noon, 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 enclosed form or call the office and leave the information on the answering machine. 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 10:30 am, with the ritual, formal dana ceremony called Gua Dong in Vietnamese. Anyone wanting to share in this ceremony, should contact Kathy Whyte at 213 385-5292. 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.

Rev. Vajra to Give Sewing Workshop

Rev. Vajra Karuna is presenting a sewing rakasus workshop on Saturday, August 17. The workshop will run from 10 am until 1 pm. If you would like to learn how to sew your own rakasu (the yellow bib like thing that practitioners whenever they practice) this workshop is for you. It is required for all those in monks' training. Call the office at 213 384-0850 or Rev. Vajra directly at to sign up. A donation of \$10 is asked for.

Ullumbana Retreat to be held... August 29 - September 1

This year we will hold the Ullumbana Retreat August 29 - September 1. So, mark your calendar for this important weekend. If you have not yet taken refuge, that is 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 the ordination of four students as ten vow Novice Dharma Teachers, one person as an attha sila, an eight vow monk, and a number of upasakas (laypeople).

Wear comfortable, loose fitting clothing, bring your necessary toiletries, and be prepared for periods of zazen (sitting), interspersed withkinhin (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

August Events

Sunday Talks

8/4 Is Zen a Religion or a Philosophy?

11am Rev. Vajra Karuna (Thich Tam Thi)

8/11

11am Ven. Havanpola Shanti

8/18 The Good, the True and the Beautiful

11am Bro. Sangha Mitra Karuna

8/25 Ullumbana Ceremony

11am led by Ven. Karuna Dharma

Classes at IBMC

Most classes are on vacation and will return in late September.

Wed Buddhist Discussion and Meditation

7-9pm... Rev. Kusala

Fri Sitting Meditation

7:30-9... Rev. Kusala

Special Events

Every Sunday 108 Bows Ceremony

10am led by a trainee

8/25 Dana for Monks, 10:30 am

11am... Ullumbana Ceremony for the Dead
led by Ven. Dr. Karuna Dharma

8/29-9/1 Ullumbana Retreat

**9/1 11am... Ordination of Novice Dharma teachers, Attha sila
and Lay people**

What Do We Believe? From Birth to Bereavement by Ven. Dr. Karuna Dharma,

Given at a panel discussion at Temple Bn'ai Hayim in Encino. CA

Introduction

I have been asked to speak on this evening's topic from a Buddhist perspective. As you may know, there are many Buddhist perspectives across the world and we American Buddhists are privileged to have them all alive and well in our country today. So I am going to talk with you about some of the ways the various Buddhist traditions ritualize and celebrate these marker events of life for both ethnic and western practitioners, all of us American Buddhists.

Birth

Unlike the other religious traditions represented here, Buddhism requires no ritual to enter a social or spiritual community of believers. In some traditionally Buddhist countries, such as Sri Lanka or Thailand, after the birth of a child, the parents bring the

child to the temple for a blessing within a few weeks, sometimes on the way home from the hospital. Or the monks will be invited to give a special blessing done in the parents' home. The monks will be presented with a meal and special gifts. The Chinese will not present the child to society until the 100th day after its birth. The Japanese cut the infant's hair for the first time on a ceremony on its 100th day of life. In the U.S., many temples offer naming ceremonies for children born to temple members. Most of these ceremonies have been developed over time by congregations in order to meet their peoples' needs.

Coming of Age

Everything is understanding. Buddhism is a daily practice. As a child grows in the midst of a Buddhist family, s/he naturally takes part in whatever rituals the family observes; most Buddhists have an altar and care of the altar is an important part of Buddhist practice, together with chanting, meditation, and visits to the temple/meditation center.

Many centers provide Dharma classes and family retreats, which are oriented to needs of children. There are also certain ceremonies (such as the celebration of the Buddha's Birth), which highlight the participation of children. In many Buddhist families the visits of monks or nuns to the home is an important event.

Usually somewhere between the age of 13 and 18 the child of a Buddhist family will voice the desire to "Take Refuge" or "Take Precepts." (sometimes become a monk or nun) and embrace the Buddhist path as an adult. Traditions vary according to centers but refuge is never given other than by the request of the person who must prove their understanding to the Precepts Master. For instance, when my daughter Chrystine was twelve, she asked my master to give her refuge at the close of a three-day retreat that she was attending along with all the adults. She did not ask me before hand, but he asked my permission before he performed the ceremony. She was the first child he gave refuge to in the U.S. When my daughter Elan was four she demanded to be given refuge; she was a very determined child and after some discussion, he agreed and gave her refuge. She was the youngest child to whom he ever gave refuge.

After taking precepts the young Buddhist continues to practice and is encouraged by family and friends to grow in cultivation.

Marriage

There is no Buddhist wedding ceremony. In traditionally Buddhist countries marriage is viewed as a social contract, so non-religious ceremonies are either performed in the home or government offices. But, a lovely tradition of having monks come to the home on the morning of the wedding to chant Blessing Sutras is followed in these countries. In the U.S. where weddings frequently are religious, Buddhists want to have their ceremonies performed

by Buddhist clergy, often in the temple itself. Both ethnic and western Buddhists plan the ceremony with the help of clergy using established guidelines, which incorporate chants and readings from the appropriate Buddhist tradition.

For instance, I have performed numerous weddings and assisted in many as well, for both Buddhist as well as non-Buddhist couples who want a religious element to their ceremonies. I will not perform a wedding without first counseling the couple; then together we plan the ceremony.

I always incorporate the following Buddhist elements:

Chanting the three refuges begins the ceremony: I take refuge in the Buddha. I take refuge in the Dharma. I take refuge in the Sangha, and affirming the lay Buddhist precepts (moral code) by which they live. Rather like saying the 10 Commandments. The next step is to have the couple thank their parents by prostrating themselves before them, thanking them for all their help and support. The groom will thank the bride's parents for raising such a wonderful woman that he loves. The bride thanks his parents in a similar vein. This recognition of the parents is central to Buddhist attitudes toward family and society and implies the Buddhist belief in the inseparable interconnectedness we have with all living beings.

Toward the end of the ceremony, I will quote the Buddha's advice about marriage, since following it assures a long lasting, loving relationship. Those are from the Sigala sutta where the Buddha tells Sigala that to retain happiness in the family that a husband and wife have five responsibilities toward each other. That is 1) they must love and respect each other, never belittling or disrespecting. 2) they ought to be hospitable to their spouse's family and friends. 3) they must take good care of their resources 4) they ought to be faithful to each other 5) they should remember each other frequently with small gifts and tokens of affection. And I always bless the couple with both incense and water.

Of course, we also incorporate many Western elements as well, such as blessing the rings, kissing the bride, presentation of the couple to their guests etc.

Death

From the Buddhist perspective, the only ritual of passage that is religious is the rites concerning death. Because of the Buddhist concept of rebirth, it is essential that we assist the dying person into his next life.

Therefore, when a person is dying, he is always surrounded by Buddhist clergy who will recite to him the Buddhist teachings significant to that person's tradition. They will recite the proper sutras and chant the names of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas to help him on his journey. Particularly they will help him to recite the

Three Refuges and the Lay Precepts. They will end by having the dying person meditate and urge the person to concentrate on the Buddha. No one is allowed to weep or grieve in the room of the dying person, since that would be distracting to the dying person and make him want to stay to solace the grieving one. It also distracts from the issue at hand: helping the dying to focus upon the coming birth. I remember that when my teacher was dying, my duty was to help grieving people from his room back to the waiting room for them to recover before they returned back to his room.

After the death, the body is allowed to lie without handling for a number of hours, then cleaned and dressed in appropriate clothing. Since some cultures bury, others cremate, and the Tibetans break the bones and place the body parts for vultures and other beings to consume, there is a need for options of burial and cremation.

If the person is to be cremated, there is a private ceremony to which only relatives and close friends are invited. Sutras and chants are performed. Then the closest relative starts the body into the consuming flames. The monks continue chanting throughout the cremation. If the body is buried, there will be a funeral, followed by a cortege to the cemetery, where again, chants and recitations are performed.

Every day for seven days a ceremony is held (ordinarily as part of the family's daily practice of chanting before the altar.) The first big ceremony is held on the seventh day. Then a ceremony every week for the next six weeks culminating with a large memorial service on the 49th day which all friends, relatives and associates will attend. Then there is also a big ceremony on the 100th day and first year anniversary. During these ceremonies sutras will be recited, mantras chanted (short sayings repeated in a ritualistic manner) and prayers will be offered to the dead person, wishing him well along his journey. In my tradition, we use many loud instruments to catch the dead person's lingering consciousness and to urge him forward on his journey. For instance, the monks will circumambulate the casket, knocking on it, to catch his attention and to help him "wake up" to his journey to a new life. We have a relative or friend play the role of the dead person by holding his photograph, and another person holding a memorial tablet on top of their head, facing the altar, and saying the three refuges, chanting the important chants and making a confession to misdeeds committed over lifetimes. In Thera-vadan temples, the relatives offer merits to the departed by emptying water from a jug into a large bowl.

The end of the formal mourning period comes on the third year anniversary, although other lesser important remembrances will also be held. Of course, all Buddhist ceremonies end with offering Dana to the assembled monks, that is a meal and gifts, so that the family will passany merits which they have reaped to the dead. This also helps to support the Sangha (community of monks and nuns, who live on thre generosity of the lay followers.).

Zen and the Ten Commandments

by Rev. Vajra Karuna

The Ten Commandments as listed in the Old Testament are

- 1) Worship only the god that took you (the Jews) out of Egypt.
- 2) Do not make or worship carved images.
- 3) Do not take (the true) gods name in vain.
- 4) Keep the seventh day holy.
- 5) Honor one's parents.
- 6) Do not commit murder.
- 7) Do not steal.
- 8) Do not use bear false witness.
- 9) Do not commit adultery.
- 10) Do not covet your neighbor's property.

These commandments can be divided into two sets. An exclusively religious set and a non-exclusively religious set. Commandments five through ten are decidedly non-exclusively religious in that every society in the world to some degree acknowledges them as essential for social harmony. In fact, even the most anti-religious secularist will acknowledge the importance of these rules. Since these commandments, in the form of skillful means, are also an essential component of Buddhism we need not deal with them further. Commandment number four, keeping the seventh day holy, is also found in a modified form in Buddhism. Buddhism requires that four times a month, namely on the new, full and two quarter moons, at least monks reserve these days for reciting the monastic rules, for confession of vow violations, and for renewing of their vows. Lay people, while not required, are encouraged to observe these more or less once a week holy days by taking on three extra precepts for that day. Even the third commandment of not taking the holy name in vain is compatible with Buddhism. Buddhist have their own holy names and thus do not want these taken in vain. Also, in that Buddhists are expected not to use speech that is harmful to others, this by extension should mean not being disrespectful to any other person's objects of devotion, especially a religious one.

This leaves only two commandments to examine for compatible or incompatible with a Buddhist tradition. I have no doubt that both the commandments to not worship any god but Yahweh, and to not make or worship carved images, are entirely incompatible to most forms of Buddhism. But this is not necessarily entirely true for Zen. From a Zen perspective if at least the second command can be inter-preted as warnings against what is called religious titanism, then Zen may be able to acknowledge it as compatible with its thinking. Titanism is the exalting of human beings to be the measure of all things. A kind of ultra-deifying of humanity. The

great danger of such exaltation is that it easily justifies the right of one so-called perfect leader to assume god-like authority. This is true whether the titanism is of a secular or religious kind. Secular titanism at its worst can be used politically to justify the right of a dictator or some totalitarian elite to oppress the masses. But even in its seemingly benevolent secular form, as secular humanism, it is a form of titanism in that it glorifies human reason above all things which has helped to justify humanity's indiscriminate and ruthless exploitation and destruction of so many non-human species, as well as pollution of the environment. This is arrogance. Religious titanism, on the other hand, especially as manifested by Buddhism and some other Indian religions, teaches that perfected mankind is ultimately greater than the gods. Furthermore, such titanism teaches that the ultimate religious goal can only be achieved by an ascetic minority. This is elitist titanism. We can thus say that the main problems with titanism, secular or religious, is that it can lead to an oppressive arrogance and a discriminatory elitism.

Barring the fact that the Old Testament teaches that man is made in the image of God, which in itself can be titanist, the idea that mankind should not exact, much less worship, anything that is clearly of this world is a preventative to titanism. The very anti-iconic or extreme objection on the part of the Old Testament to carving or otherwise making images of worldly creatures or beings is the practical or concrete manifestation of this anti-titanism.

One of the most remarkable aspects of Old Testament religion is that it never deified Moses. This prophet is the most important figure in the entire Old Testament. It is upon his revelations that the entire Jewish religion is founded. Most other major religion have to some degree deified their founders; this certainly includes Buddhism. To emphasize the uniqueness of Judaism in this regard we should note that, not only has Moses not been deified, but instead he has been made a subject of humiliating castigation. The Old Testament says that after forty years of sacrifice and misery in the desert Moses is finally allowed to lead the Israelites to the border of the promised land, only to be told by God that all but he may cross into the land. He is ordered to remain behind to die, and not even have his death spot is to be recorded. Thus no cult around him as a holy man, much less as a god, was to be allowed. This is an ultimate expression of anti-titanism.

Zen, as a form of Buddhism, is not immune to titanism. Nonetheless, it has an Old Testament quality about it when it comes to the iconoclastic way it so often treats the Buddha, as well as its own holy patriarchal lineage. This is manifested in the Zen toilet jokes about the Buddha, (such as, What is Buddha? Buddha is a piece of dried shit on a stick.) and in the stories that tell of the surprising disrespect with which patriarchs are sometimes treated by their students. This Zen "bringing the Buddha and patriarchs from heaven back down to Earth" can be said to serve the same anti-titanist function as the story of Moses does. If we look at the Old Testament story and the Zen stories

from this perspective we might find that, if not the letter, at least the spirit of the second commandment is not as alien to the Zen tradition as they might at first appear.

Coming finally to the first commandment there seems to be little, if any commonality between the Old Testament Yahweh and Zen which could make this commandment compatible with Zen. The Kyoto school, however, has suggested a number of possible ways for Zen to related to this God, including equating him with s'unyata. But the philosophers of that school are still in the process of formulating this and similar equations and we will have to wait until this process is further along before making a final judgement on this compatibility.

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