

## **The Berkeley Buddhist Priory Newsletter September - October, 2005**

This is the fifth formal Dharma talk in the Female Buddhas: The Equality of Buddha Nature retreat, given by Rev. Master Koten Benson at Shasta Abbey in May 2004.

Reprinted from the Lion's Gate Buddhist Priory Newsletter, May 2005.

Homage to the Buddha Homage to the Dharma Homage to  
the Sangha

Yesterday we spoke about dawn and the East. Today this Buddha Family is about the South, and the full light of the sun, entering into the full light and warmth of the Dharma.

In order to do this we need to address the particular poison related to this family, the poison of pride, and in this particular case, the poison of the pride of inadequacy, the stubborn clinging to our sense of an inadequate self, the stubborn clinging to our inability-seeming inability-with regards to spiritual matters. When we cling to this we are in fact full of pride; of a pride in a type of self; indeed, of selfish pride. And it is worse because we do not see it as selfishness. We see it rather as a type of humility.

In the Buddha Dharma faith means confidence. This is confidence and faith in the ability of the Dharma to help us, in the ability of the Buddha and compassionate teachers to guide us. When we cling to the idea of an inadequate self we put vast obstacles in the way of the Dharma and of

compassionate teachers to benefit us. This poison can become stubbornness, a refusal to let go of past patterns, behaviors and ideas because of stubborn clinging to the ideal of an inadequate self. This is just as much pride and self-grasping as having vast, high sense of oneself, and must be let go of in order for the Dharma to benefit us. We must not think that the Dharma is for anyone else but ourselves. We must not simply admire other practitioners of the Dharma, as if from afar, but practice it ourselves, thoroughly apply its principles to ourselves, and not neglect to apply them because of selfish craving for and clinging to the idea of an inadequate self.

It is sometimes said that those in our society who devote themselves to others in a way that completely exhausts themselves have no sense of self. It is even sometimes said that the Buddha Dharma is not useful to them, particularly women, because there isn't a strongly developed sense of self. But this is a total misunderstanding of the Buddha Dharma. It is just as much of a delusion to put aside the self in order to exhaust oneself for the "benefit of others" as is any other type of self-grasping. Indeed, the proof is in the consequences. People who do these things to the point of exhausting themselves often become spiteful and angry and exhausted and fed up and even annoyed and angry at the very people that they "benefit," which is precisely an indication of how much self there is involved in it.

There is no separate self from the very beginning. All attempts to move it, set it up, exalt it, abase it, shift it from side to side are delusion-dancing around in a ring around something that is simply not there. The Buddha Nature is not another variety of self but rather something which is

universal and not limited to a particular person. No person has more Buddha Nature than any other person, or for that matter, than any other living thing, so we do not start out with more of what is necessary to train, than anyone else. Some of us bring into this world, seemingly, a greater load of karma than others, but this can be seen not as an impediment but rather as an opportunity so that at the end of that person's life they can have cleansed so much more karma through being able to sit still. Do not think that because you are besieged by difficulties, pains, aches and sorrows that these are impediments to training. These are the very stuff of training. The very road that we need to walk down. The very companions on the way. The very things that benefit us, and we should not seek for ease before we begin training, but rather we should apply the Precepts and training right now, to what arises in the mind right now.

Similarly, it is a mistake to think that the arising of confusion and the inability to see is an impediment to training. Rather apply training right then, right now. Try to be still, try to allow the confusion to arise and pass. In other words, do the best you can in all situations, and do not long for easier ones. The world of samsara which we are in is the world of suffering. It is not fair, in the usual way that people look upon such things. From the broader perspective, from the perspective of the Dharma, it is all the arising and passing of karma. Someone by accident set the wheel of karma in motion, and we experience the consequences. What we can do is sit still and apply the antidotes of training.

The one who clings to the idea of a separate inadequate self is very difficult to teach, because any remedy applied serves

to cause the person to draw their shell even tighter and thicker around them. "Compassion" poured forth simply pours over it like water off a duck's back. "Fierce compassion" results in the being, the person, drawing further into their shell. Such a poison, therefore, can only be adequately addressed by the person themselves. And by clinging to the idea of a separate inadequate self they create a self-fulfilling prophecy, because if you think continually and act as if everybody hates you, sooner or later you are going to find people who do precisely that, even if it is out of impatience.

A horrible cruel upbringing is not an impediment to training, and we need not wait until we have gotten all our eccentricities straightened out before we can train. In the depictions of the throne of the Medicine Buddha one sees little beings hiding underneath it, which are called yakshas-sometimes what is called in the West, demons. They hide underneath the Buddha's throne so that they can begin training. They do not wait for a more fortunate existence. They begin training as they are. We do not need to wait, to be straightened out, to be calm, to be nice people, to be well adjusted, to have a nice relationship, to have enough money, to begin training. We can begin training-applying of the Precepts, and trying to sit still-right now!

We ourselves have to pour the water over ourselves. When we cling to selfishness, to the idea of an inadequate self, then it is as if the five waters of the five Buddha Families stain us because the water cannot soak through us, so the various colours stain us in our grasping, after jealousy and pride and greed and anger. When we let go of this selfish craving for an inadequate separate self then the waters of

emerald, of ruby, of sapphire, of crystal can pour over us, transforming our jealousy into the ability to act wisely, transforming our greed into compassion, because that is their essential nature.

To start training is really quite easy. We only have to try to be still when we don't feel very much like being still. We only have to try to apply kindness when we don't feel very much that we like the object of our kindness. We only have to apply faith and confidence when we don't feel like applying it because our dark hole is much more comfortable to us and known.

The wisdom that arises out of the conversion of this poison is the wisdom of seeing all things as equal, the Wisdom of Equality. This is also the Buddha Family of Offering. The True Perfection of giving is to let go, for if you let go of attachment you have already fulfilled the perfection of giving. The Buddha Mother Mamaki is She Who Regards All Beings as Her Own Children, which is the very basis of metta, of loving kindness.

The idea of an inadequate separate self is stuck in the skandha of feeling, and with the idea that feeling is the ruler of our lives—"I don't feel like doing this. I don't feel like talking to that person. I don't feel like getting up today." Feeling is one of the skandhas that arises and passes. Rather, focus on what is good to do. And, even while applying confidence, hold the mantra "I could be wrong." I could be wrong, and I will trust in the Dharma's ability to benefit me, in the ability of compassionate teachers to benefit me, and I will loosen my grip upon my inadequate self. The clinging to the inadequate self is a whole world, a very mountain of selfishness. It makes one useless to

sentient beings, deaf to compassionate teachers and blind to the possibility of change. Clinging to the idea of a separate inadequate self is as sitting with the hands tightly closed. Open the hands. Open the Lotus of the heart. Accept the medicine of the Dharma. Accept the advice of compassionate teachers. The Dharma is able to be practiced. Meditation is something we can do. Training is something for which we have the ability. Because it is arisen for us to seek, we are the type of people to find. An ancient master said, "You are like This, I am like This, all sentient beings are like This."

When you cling-cling to the idea of a separate inadequate self-you steal from yourself, and steal from others. You kill something of yourself and kill something of others. You speak against yourself and you speak against others. You are proud of yourself and are devaluing the ability of others to help you. You are selling the wine of delusion for yourself and others and defaming the Three Treasures. If you do not move because of the clinging to the idea of an inadequate self you are in fact breaking all of the Precepts.

Do not say that the Way is for other people but not for me. Study the Dharma, listen to the words of wise and compassionate teachers, apply meditation. Study the Precepts. The means are already within your hands. The valuable treasures that have been given to us are already within your hands. You must take them and apply them to your daily lives, and not cling to the dubious fruits of the idea of the inadequate self. We must forgive ourselves for having bought the deluded ideas of our parents and society, and walk past them, walk out of them as if they were falling-down old houses, in which we can no longer safely dwell.

And let them go. Stop trying to prop them up or understand them. Just simply let them go.

The clinging to the idea of a separate inadequate self is due to a severe lack of perspective on the actual level of one's own suffering. There is suffering, that other people have, that we could not bear for an instant without losing our minds, and yet there are people who bear this suffering. Most of our suffering is caused by the clinging to selfish ideals, which, if we let go and put down, an enormous amount of our personal suffering would be dealt with. But we must have faith and confidence in our ability to do this, in the ability of the Dharma to benefit us.

In How to Grow a Lotus Blossom, it shows a whole lot of people bowing down and worshipping the path instead of treading it, instead of walking it. They wish to admire the path and the symmetry of it. They wish to admire people who go further down the path. As it is said, "The wise do it for themselves, fools wait to ask a Bodhisattva." This way is for nobody else but you. Apply yourselves to it. Let go of this clinging to the idea of a separate inadequate self. Walk the way, make it true for yourself, and benefit innumerable sentient beings thereby.

This is my great compassion to you.

## **Priory News**

Rev. Karuna had ankle surgery this June. The recovery has been slow and difficult but her ankle is getting better. Rev. Karuna has had the wonderful opportunity to spend most of

August at Rev. Meido's temple in Lostine, Oregon. We appreciate Rev. Meido's hospitality and we offer our best wishes for her efforts to establish a Buddhist refuge in the quiet and rural Wallowa Valley of Oregon.

Jet, the Priory cat, seems to have recovered from her recent illness. She had stopped eating for awhile and we thought she was about to die but we then tried force feeding her and her appetite slowly recovered. Jet has had a serious problem with increased paralysis of her legs and that also has shown a sharp improvement and Jet again is getting around well for a cat with only one back leg.

The Priory had a picnic for July 4. We charcoal grilled burgers and hot dogs in the Priory's backyard and enjoyed the usual American picnic fare. The Priory's July 7- 9 three day meditation retreat went well. We focused on a chapter, the Deeper Meaning of the Precepts, from newly published Roar of the Tigress Vol II, by Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett. It is a very helpful practice to have a block of time to meditate and concentrate on a specific Dharma teaching.

## **Beginner's Class- October 29 (10am - 12:30pm)**

This class is designed to be a follow-up to the basic meditation instruction that we offer every Thursday evening. It will include a short talk on meditation practice, then a period of meditation and then another short talk on bringing mindfulness and compassion into our daily lives. There is no charge for the class but we ask that people register in advance.



## **Meditation Retreats Sept. 15-17, Oct. 22, Nov. 10-12**

Retreats are an excellent way to deepen our meditation and training. For the three day retreats, since many people will not be able to free themselves to be here for all three days, it will be fine to attend these retreats for just one or two days. Please register in advance and let us know which days you can attend.

### **With Gratitude**

Charity is one of the four wisdoms and demonstrates the Bodhisattva's aspiration. Deep appreciation and gratitude is extended to all those who contribute their spiritual practice, money, time, energy, and various gifts to the Priory. The Priory does not charge for anything and is supported solely by donations. The generosity of the entire Priory Sangha and friends is what makes it possible for the Priory to exist, the monks to be supported and for the Dharma to be offered.

In recent months, we have been given many generous gifts, including human and animal medicines and medical supplies, silica kitty litter, candle holders and candles, meditation cushions and mats, several plants, paper goods, hardware and many books.

Donations provide most of the food for the monks living at the Priory. Providing monks with food is the traditional offering given when coming to a Buddhist temple, and we appreciate all the generous food offerings we have been given. Rev. Kinrei has become aware that he is allergic to cow dairy products. Although we are grateful for any gift of

food, the most helpful food donations are eggs, soy milk, goat milk, fruit, goat or sheep cheese, decaffeinated coffee, and herbal tea. We also have an ongoing need for such paper goods as toilet paper, paper towels and tissues. You are always welcome to ask what is currently needed at the Priory.

A Southern Californian bookstore has offered to try to sell any books that the Priory is given. We encourage Sangha members and friends to donate any unwanted books on an ongoing basis. A steady stream of books seems to arrive at the Priory and all of these generous donations are earning a considerable amount of money for the Priory. We very much appreciate these gifts of books.

## **Spiritual Counseling**

Rev. Kinrei is available to discuss your spiritual practice and to help you to better apply the Dharma to your life. Taking refuge in a senior member of the Sangha is an important aid in gaining a better perspective and deeper insight into our spiritual life. It is also helpful in learning to cultivate openness and trust. You are welcome to either sign the spiritual counseling sheet on the Priory bulletin board, or call the Priory and arrange a time to meet.

## **Helping the Priory and Work Days**

Buddhist training is based not just on receiving the spiritual nourishment that the Sangha offers us, but also our own willingness to cultivate gratitude and to be willing to find ways to give. Offering our valuable time to help with the work of the Priory is very much needed if the Priory is to

flourish. During the past few months, Sangha members have helped with many different tasks, such as gardening, cleaning, cooking, computer work, bookkeeping, construction, sewing, and laundry. Please contact Rev. Kinrei if you wish to help; the Priory always has plenty of work that needs doing.

In addition, the Priory has been having regular work days which have been a great help with fixing up and maintaining the Priory and its grounds. You are welcome and encouraged to come to the Priory whenever you can and offer your help. The next work days are scheduled for Saturday, October 1, from 9:30 am to 3:00 pm, but we welcome everyone to help for whatever part of the day they can come. Working together as a Sangha is a way of both giving to the Priory and sharing in the brightness of our fellow members of the Sangha. Work days include a lunch at the Priory which is a relaxed meal. Please let us know if you can attend as it is helpful in planning the work.

## **Meditation Instruction**

Meditation instruction and an orientation to the practice at the Priory are offered each Thursday at 6:45 pm. Please arrive a few minutes early so that we can begin promptly at 6:45. The instruction is followed by a 7:30-8:05 pm meditation period. We ask all people new to our practice to attend this instruction. The meditation instruction is free, as are all the activities at the Priory. If your schedule will not allow you to come on Thursday evening, you are welcome to call the Priory to try to arrange a different time for the instruction.

## **Shasta Abbey Retreats**

Attending a retreat at the Shasta Abbey is an excellent way to deepen one's Buddhist life by living and practicing together with a large community of monastic and lay members of the Sangha. The introductory weekend retreats are the recommended first step in practicing at the Abbey. For more information, you can go to their website at [www.obcon.org](http://www.obcon.org) or telephone the Shasta Abbey Guestmaster at (530) 926-4208.

Weekend Introductory Retreats  
September 23-25 October 14-16 November 18-20

Feeding of the Hungry Ghosts Retreat  
October 26 - November 1

## **Priory Membership**

The Priory has no fees for participating in meditation, Dharma talks, Buddhist services, retreats, spiritual counseling or any other service we offer. We are supported by the donations of our congregation and friends. All gifts of any kind, whether money or materials or labor, are deeply appreciated.

One of the best ways to help the Priory is to make the commitment to be a Priory Member. What this involves is making a pledge to contribute a certain amount of money to the Priory each month. There is no set or recommended amount as we leave it up to each individual to offer what he or she feels is appropriate. This commitment is a tremendous help to the Priory because it gives us a stable

financial base. More importantly, deciding to become a member has deep spiritual significance. It means you are choosing to help take responsibility for the continued existence of the Priory. Some of you may only be able to pledge a few dollars a month and think it is not worth making such an insignificant commitment. Yet it is important to offer whatever you can and be willing to make a formal commitment to be part of the Priory. The most important help members bring to the Priory and the Sangha is not their donations but their Buddhist training. By being willing to come to the Priory and train with others, we help make the Priory a true refuge of the Sangha.

However, we are not suggesting that everyone who occasionally attends the Priory or gives us donations should become a member. For many people, it is not appropriate to make such a commitment, and we welcome them to join us whenever they wish, to help us in the manner they feel appropriate, and to be valued friends of the Priory.

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