



*In
Remembrance
of*

*Ven. Dr.
Karuna
Dharma*

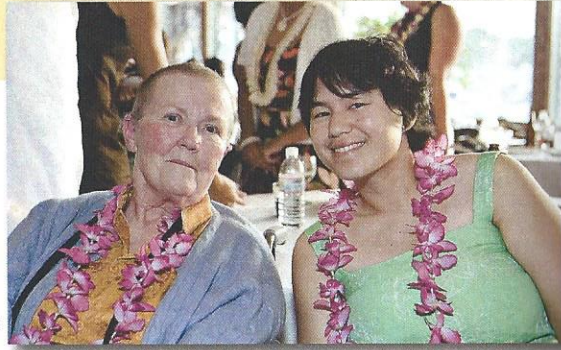
April 21, 1940 - February 22, 2014

International Buddhist Meditation Center
928 S. New Hampshire Ave.,
Los Angeles, California 90006

Sunday March 9, 2014
3:00 to 6:00 pm
Ananda House

Mom, I would like to thank you for the life you have given me. I would not be the same person without you. I remember when I was in first grade. I failed my spelling test and only spelled flower correctly out of ten words. You gave me a hug and said "Look, you spelled the hardest word." She let me know everything was going to be all right. And, if I kept trying, I would do better next time. I eventually did much better on my spelling tests. I still use what you taught me that day. I graduated from high school and college, worked as a zookeeper (my dream job), married and had children. I am very happy thanks to you Mom. You were there every step of the way. I love you with all my heart and will miss you every day.

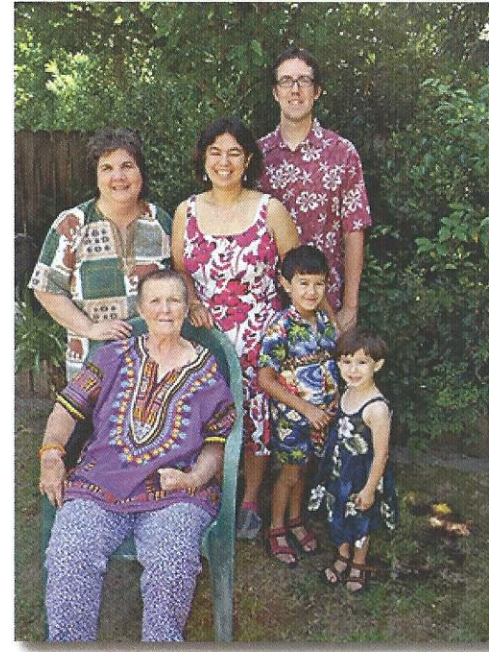
Elan



Mom and daughter, Elan

Mom tells the story of how she met my dad, Ben Lum, at the University of Wisconsin when they were both undergraduates. She was walking on campus one day when a pretty Chinese boy leaped out from over the bushes and landed in front of her, asking her out on a date. That's how it all got started. And oh how the Chinese girls on campus hated her for that! After they graduated and got married, like so many young Midwestern couples they moved out to California to seek their fortune. Dad got a job in aerospace working for North American Rockwell on the Apollo program. And mom worked on getting her teaching credential.

Chrys



Mom and the kids. Left to right: Chrys, Karuna, Elan, son-in-law Ryan, grandson Kiefer (5) and granddaughter Zoey (3)

Passion

In 1976, Venerable Karuna Dharma was the first woman to become a fully ordained member of the Buddhist monastic community in the U.S. She has continued to break new Buddhist ground by orchestrating three Grand Ordination ceremonies since 1994 for women of all Buddhist traditions. Close to fifty women have become fully ordained nuns, or bhikkhunis, in these ceremonies.

Our Aunt Karuna was a very passionate woman. When it came to her coffee, you didn't want to stand between her and it! One morning when she was visiting us, we were all sitting around enjoying the morning when Karuna came out of her room and headed for the door in her pajamas. We asked where she was going. "To get coffee!" she replied. We reminded her she was still in her pajamas, but that didn't faze her one bit. She 'jumped' in her car and headed for the local Starbucks where there is a convenient drive-thru! She got her coffee and all was well!

Auntie K, we will all miss you at our family gatherings. I'm so glad we got to share some great times, meals and music with you before you left. When I think of you I can hear your joyful laugh and that makes me smile.

Cass

I knew Judi and Janet's sister, Karuna. To me she was a peaceful loving person who accepted me, an outsider, to the family with an open heart. I enjoyed being around her because we laughed and joked a lot with each other. One thing I remember about her was she liked her coffee. I liked coffee also. She asked me to take her to Starbucks early in the morning. We went to the drive through for coffee and she was still in her P.J.s. I also enjoyed the times we went with her to coffee with her friends in L.A at the Coffee Bean. I have one really good memory about her and the fighting fish. Her niece, Tiphanie, had a new aquarium for one of these fish. Karuna and I drove all over Beloit to every pet store to find the perfect fish. It took us most of the morning. We laughed and joked and had fun together and finally returned around lunch time with a fish. Then we had to go and find a nice plant for the top of this jar. It took all day. I cherish the time we spent and will miss this lady.

Bill Wilson



Strength

Ven. Karuna's ordination work has been most significant for women in the Tibetan tradition who are denied full ordination in their own temples. While the Buddha ordained both men and women and the bhikkhuni lineage continued after him in Mahayana countries like Vietnam, China, and Korea, it died out in Theravada countries like Thailand and Sri Lanka, and never entered Tibet. Traditionally, ten bhikkhunis are required to ordain novice nuns. As of now—without ten bhikkhunis in any Tibetan temple—their teachers can bestow only the purple robes of a novice nun, and the students remain novices for the rest of their lives. The bhikkhunis she has ordained use her name, Karuna, as their religious surname.



Procession of ordaining masters at the Grand Ordination, 1994

Mom was a pot smoking, peace marching, "off the pigs" hippie who became a Buddhist monk. A self-described radical, on the Chinese horoscope she was a dragon who delighted in her own eccentricity. She had a fine appreciation for the ridiculous and could see the humor in any situation. She had a jovial laugh, a generous nature, and was slow to anger. If she did get mad, she would let it out in a quick burst and let it go, never thinking about it again. She had no time for rancor, and would disregard as a waste of time other people's pettiness or meanness. She taught me that one does a bodhisattva good deed simply because it is there to be done, not because we have an ego need to be thought of as a "good Samaritan". She showed me that our problems and our conditions are a direct result of our own mindset, how we think

and how we act. She showed me the folly of being driven by our own ego, but she also forgave it as being part of the human condition. In that, she was very much a Zen master. She enjoyed the pleasures of life without being attached to them.

From Mom I learned integrity, honor, and a strong work ethic. She taught me to think for myself, question authority, and use an independent sense of judgment to dispassionately see all sides of an argument. She showed me how to never be ashamed of, or apologetic for, who or what I am or how I think. She showed me how to recognize my own role in a problem, to recognize and own my own mistakes, and to always move forward. She taught me that to make peace with an enemy, you have to first change your own heart. From her I learned to believe in myself, with absolute certainty that I could accomplish anything I truly set my mind to. At our last big family gathering, I told her that everything I am capable of doing now as an adult--my writing, my teaching, my work in Africa-- is all a direct result of how she raised me. Mom taught, ordained, and influenced many people around the world throughout her long life. I am one of the many who is privileged to be able to continue her good work, in my own small way, through the work that I do.

Chrys

I remember travelling to Yellowstone National Park with Karuna and a bunch of other relatives; I think all the Pettingill sisters and their families were there, though I can't remember the group or the year. Many of us (and other tourists) had gotten out of our cars and were standing at a river's edge watching the amazing sight of a huge herd of bison swimming across the river, downstream of where we were. We were so distracted by this large group that we were late to notice a smaller group which had "put in" further upstream, and were now looking like they'd come ashore just about where we were. They were HUGE, and VERY close, and we had all heard over and over again about staying in our cars so as not to become one of the careless tourists killed every year by an angry, charging bison. So we turned around in a bit of a panic and started rushing to our cars.

I still remember Karuna a bit behind me, hustling along with her cane, shouting "Cathy! Don't run! Don't run!" I asked her if it was because she was afraid the animals might chase us, or if she just wanted to pass me. To this day I'm not sure which!



:-)

Courage

In 1994, Ven. Karuna suffered a serious stroke, but she regained speech and mobility that same year and managed to organize the first of three Grand Ordinations that included three major Buddhist schools: Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana. For each ordination she reached out to sramanerikas (novice nuns) who wanted to become bhikkhunis. Women came from all over the world to be ordained by her. This was a giant step on behalf of women in Buddhism, especially considering that in some Theravada countries, like Thailand, a nun can be arrested for wearing the robes of a bhikkhuni.

On a serious note, one summer after I'd started college, Elan and I decided to go rafting together on the American River. My mom and Karuna dropped us off upstream and were going to pick us up when we finished our float a few hours later. There was a strange man on a bicycle riding around, who at one point came over and called my name. We later realized he probably just heard others saying it, as I had no idea who he was. When we looked up, he said something very violent and threatening to us; shocking enough that I was very afraid (and in fact kept an eye out for him the rest of the trip, whenever the river came close to the bike path). Karuna very calmly looked him in the eye and asked him why he was speaking to us like that. And he spit in her face. I was absolutely shocked, and can still see her standing absolutely calm and still, looking at him as his spit ran down her face. She showed no reaction at all, he rode away, and we didn't see him again. It was only after he left that she wiped her face, and I still remember being amazed, intrigued, and impressed by her calm resolve and absolute control. It was a confrontation, but absolutely not an escalation (quite the opposite), and such an impressive show of strength. She was a remarkable woman.

Cathy



Mom and Cathy

Compassion

Karunā is both the Sanskrit and Pali word for “compassion”. Dr. Thien-An named his disciple well in giving her that religious name. Compassion was always a large part of her Dharma work. After her stroke, she established an extensive prison ministry and correspondence outreach program. During the Grand Ordination of 1994, five of the ordained were prisoners who officially took refuge as Buddhist laity. Ven. Karuna arranged a special phone conference with their prison chaplain, giving the men their vows and religious names along with a private sermon and counseling on how to live their lives,—even in prison,—free from fear, anger and hatred.

It was 1975. Saigon had fallen and the Vietnamese, our allies, were fleeing their homes by the tens of thousands. Marine Corps base Camp Pendleton in Southern California had become the largest processing center for incoming refugees. Back then, almost no one in the US spoke Vietnamese. The State Department called our Temple to ask if we could supply interpreters. Our master, the venerable Dr. Thich Thien-An, took what few monks he had plus his American disciples to go lend a hand. Every weekend Mom would go with them. They set up a large open-air pavilion on base, just across from the processing center, and held religious services and chanting all day and all night. You need to understand that the Vietnamese did not bring mundane items like clothes with them. They were so certain that there would be no Buddhism in the strange new land that they were coming to, that they packed religious items in their suitcases instead. As soon as they were through being processed, they would come running across the street to join the chanting ceremony. How astonished they were to see a blond haired, blue-eyed American nun chanting alongside the monks! Weeping, they would clutch of her robes (something Asians would ordinarily never do). After suffering a terrible journey, they knew they had come home.

While the true numbers will never be known, it is estimated that up to half of the 800,000 “boat people” who fled Vietnam by sea perished at the hands of pirates, storms and prolonged exposure. Dr. Thien-An and the monks frequently chartered a boat to go out and perform funeral services on the open water for those who died. Mom often went with them, chanting and praying to guide those lost spirits to safe passage.

Wisdom

In Buddhism, the twin to compassion is wisdom. Ven. Karuna had a great deal of wisdom not only in dealing with her fellow Buddhists, but also with those who walked other spiritual paths. In the late 1980’s, Los Angeles had become the incubator of a new and inclusive type of American Interfaith dialog and cooperation—one that expanded beyond the conventional Catholic-Protestant-Jew coalition. Ven. Karuna was part of the first delegation of Buddhists to join the Interreligious Council of Southern California, which also welcomed Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus, Baha’is, and many others. She was one of the founding members of the Buddhist-Catholic dialog, an official, ongoing program between the Buddhist Sangha Council of Southern California and the Catholic Office of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs. She played a key role along with her Interfaith colleagues in orchestrating the success of Hands Across L.A., the religious community’s response to the L.A. riots of 1992. During that event, 10,000 people of all faiths formed a human chain of solidarity across the most burned and ravaged parts of the city.

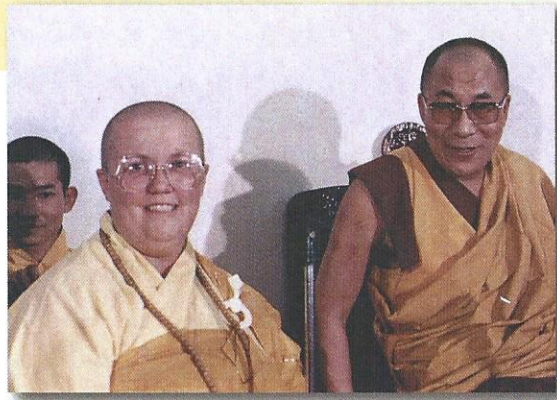
Ven. Karuna has received numerous commendations from around the world for her work, including a special recognition from the joint South Asian/Western Hemisphere Sri Lankan Sangha Council in 2006 (she travelled to Sri Lanka to receive the award), the Outstanding Women in Buddhism award at the United Nations International Women’s Day Conference 2010 in Bangkok, and a certificate of appreciation from the American-Vietnamese LGBT Community for her participation in a panel discussion of “LGBTs and Religions”. She has written, and been the subject of, many articles both at home and abroad, and has appeared in *Who’s Who in the West* and *Notable American Women*.

I remember Mom describing the early days of Buddhist-Catholic dialog. The Asian Buddhists, with their long memories of Christian involvement in western colonialism, had a lot of reservations about working with the Catholics. But they soon found them to be wonderful colleagues and dear friends. Mom said it took the group an entire month just to find a common vocabulary, where words had the same connotations and meanings, before they could even begin their conversation.

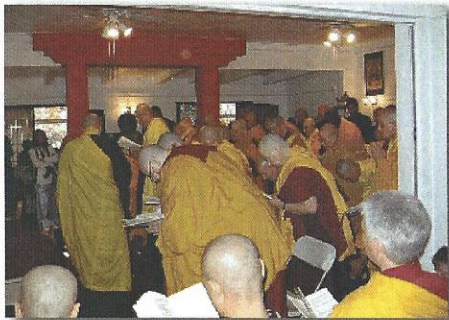
Mom worked with and knew so many people in the interreligious community around the world. The Dalai Lama visited our temple several times. Mom was also once

back stage with Pope John Paul II during his Nostre Aetate Alive dialog with other religious leaders in Little Tokyo in 1987. She told me she had great fun presenting the pontiff with the rosaries of some of her Catholic friends, asking him to bless them, which he very kindly and solemnly did.

Chrys



Ven. Karuna and His Holiness Tenzin Gyatso, The 14th Dalai Lama



Bhikkunis taking final vows at the Grand Ordination.



Ven. Karuna rings the bell during Sunday service.



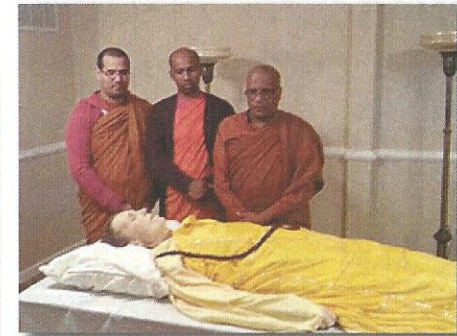
Ven. Karuna (second from right) at a Zen retreat lead by Dr. Thich Thien-An (front left) and Dr. Thich Man-Giac (front right)



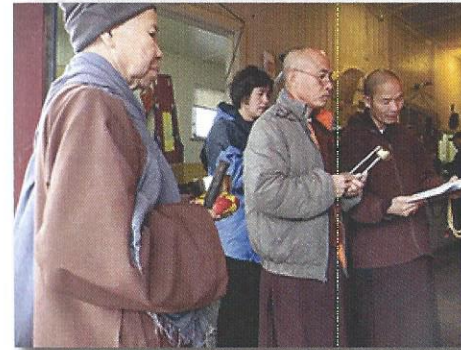
Ven. Karuna wearing the traditional Vietnamese bishop's hat



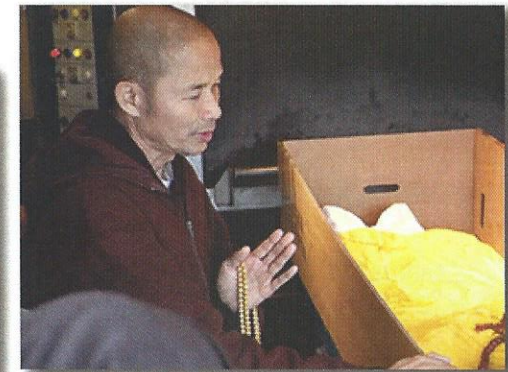
Elan, Chrys, Jan and brother-in-law Brian say farewell.



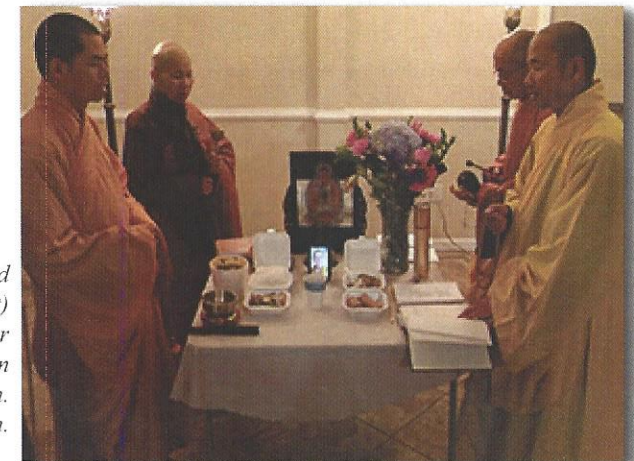
Ven. Havanpola Shanti (right) leads Sri Lankan monks in special prayer and chanting the morning of Ven. Karuna's passing.



Ven. Thich Tu-Luc (right) leads monks in the purification ceremony at Ven. Karuna's cremation.



Ven. Tu-Luc imparts a special blessing to Ven. Karuna's spirit to prepare her for her journey.



Ven. Thich Duyen (left) and Ven. Thich Tu-Luc (right) lead the blessing and prayer ceremony at Evergreen Memorial Chapel during Ven. Karuna's cremation.

Anicca / Impermanence

A Dharma talk by Ven. Karuna

Anicca, 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.

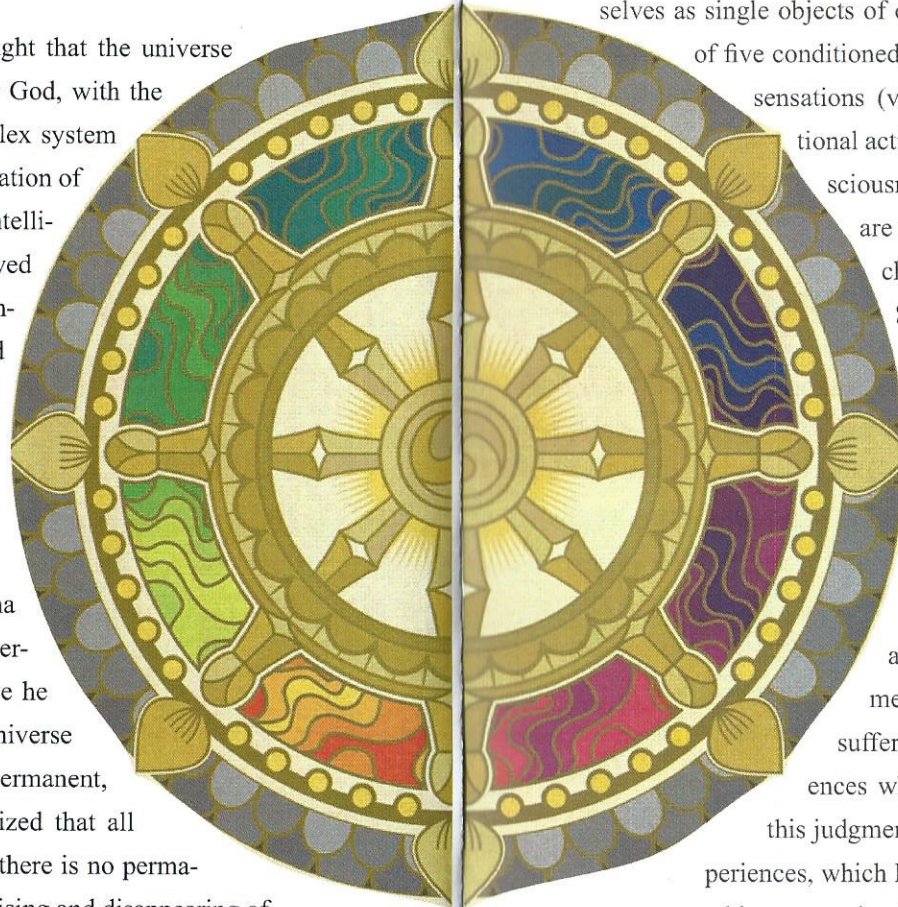
Even those things which appear to be permanent and unchanging also are in a constant state of change. The mountains appear to be permanent and unchanging, but their very existence is the result of tectonic forces within the crust and mantle of the earth. Volcanoes, inactive for many centuries come alive 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

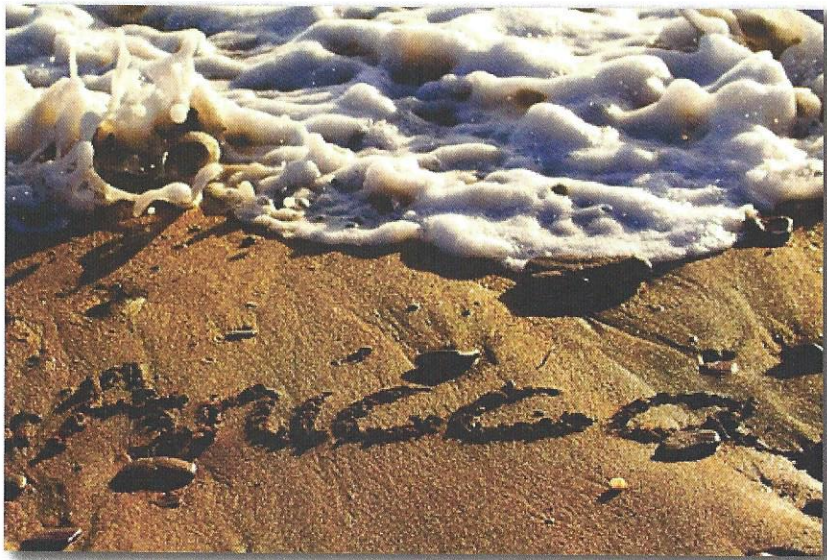


that we could free ourselves from the need for certain experiences, attachment to self and to the illusion of permanence.

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.



A Teaching on No-Self

A Dharma talk by Ven. Karuna

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.

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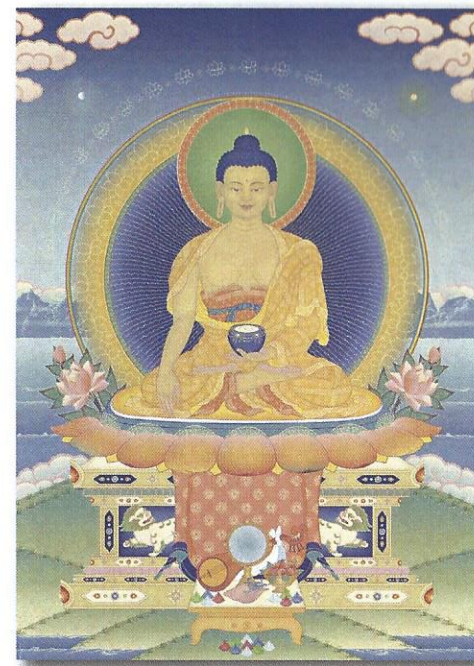
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And on the lighter side... Mom would've loved this picture!