



Summer Newsletter

For the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order

December - February 2006/7

Sydney Buddhist Centre

Illuminating the Path

"In the beginning of our spiritual career when we are still living imprisoned by our deeds and emotions, we will not even see so much as the face of a superior spiritual friend. Instead we will have to seek an ordinary human being who can illumine the path we have to follow with the light of his or her counsel, whereafter we shall meet superior ones."

Gampopa
from "The Jewel Ornament of Liberation"

Sangharakshita, the founder of the Western Buddhist Order, says that for most people spiritual growth does not take place without contact with someone more developed than oneself.

Sangharakshita makes an important distinction between the Dharma teacher as the 'bearer of the archetype' and as the 'exemplar of the ideal'. The former is a human being who has become, for some people, a living symbol for a higher dimension of reality - such as the Dalai Lama who is considered to be the manifestation of the archetypal Bodhisattva, Avalokitesvara. Sangharakshita sees that idealisation of human teachers may fulfil a necessary and healthy function by allowing access to deeper levels of meaning. We can make contact with our higher ideals, such as qualities we wish to develop, by projecting them on to others. However, he considers it best that those who bear the archetype are figures from the past, like the Buddha Shakyamuni Himself or other great Buddhist teachers.

The tradition also offers us the archetypal Buddha, Vairocana (the 'illuminator') who it is suggested appeared out of meditation on the Buddha Shakyamuni as teacher. This is the White Buddha at the centre of the mandala, the colour of sunlight on snow, wearing ornate white robes. His Wisdom, the *Dharmadhatu* (sphere of truth or the realm of the Dharma) is the totality of all wisdom, a panoramic awareness without any central reference point, the central experience of the spiritual life. In his hands is a great golden eight-spoked wheel held in the mudra (gesture) of 'turning the wheel of the Dharma'.

The 'exemplar of the ideal' on the other hand is a human being whom one sees as a human being - but a human being in the context of friendship who embodies spiritual ideals more fully than oneself.

Sangharakshita points out that this is a personal relationship based on genuine communication and mutual affection and regard. This can be seen even in ordinary friendship, when a friend has qualities one admires which we try to emulate. Our ability to access and to draw ourselves up to positive qualities or higher spiritual experiences is through real communication which cannot occur where there is too much idealization and projection.

By communication is meant not merely the exchange of information or ideas or feelings or experiences but a 'vital mutual responsiveness', an 'existential contact', an 'action and interaction of being'. Communicating in this way there is the possibility of inhabiting the *Dharmadhatu*, transcending the duality of self and other.

*Adapted from "Sangharakshita" by Subhuti and
"Meeting the Buddhas" by Vessantara.*



Vairocana—archetypal teaching Buddha at the centre of the 5 Buddha Mandala

**Don't forget the Sydney Buddhist Centre Benefit Concert
on Saturday December 9th.**

Come and celebrate the end of year and the marvelous talents of the Sangha
Music, Theatre, Poetry, Excellent food and company.
All proceeds go to the refurbishment of Vijayaloka

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Many fingers, one moon...

From the outside, Buddhism can seem bewildering. How can we reconcile such seemingly disparate strands of practice as the simplicity of Zen, the opulence of the Mahayana or the esoteric rituals of the Tantras? Even more to the point, do we need to reconcile them at all? One teaching reminds me that each of these approaches are just different guides that lead, ultimately, to the same truth.

The story told about the Finger and the Moon (accredited to the Sixth Zen Patriarch Hui Neng) poetically informs us that there is a difference between the goal and the going, the teaching and the teacher. We must remember that the finger which points us towards the moon isn't the moon itself; it is a wake-up call to be mindful of our purpose, not an end in itself. The spiritual life can be a bumpy ride unless we have a suitable and experienced guide to point the way. Spiritual friends and even special teachings can occupy this 'finger' role to help point us in the right direction. But, they are worth very little unless we have personal experience of what they direct us towards. We need to turn ourselves more and more fully towards the bright illumination of the moon. We also need to find the most skilful (and not always the most comfortable) guide that actually gets us to do the turning.

Below you will find some personal recollections of great 'fingers' (be they people, books or specific teachings) that have led some Sydney sangha members towards that cool, white, all-encompassing radiance of freedom.



Guy Holden pointing at the finger pointing at the moon

Steven Caldwell Editor



If you disregard the 70's television series Kung Fu, my introduction to Dharma was Sogyal Rinpoche's The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying. When I read about the Four Noble Truths I was cheering out loud: This was it! I'd suspected that what society told me was the way to happiness was self-defeating, but there it was printed: "All that samsara holds out to us to drink is a cup of salt water, designed to make us even thirstier".

Another interesting reflection on samsara is the story of Hui-Neng: A mix of the heights of the Transcendental and the intrigues of the political spiritual life. Along similar lines is the Autobiography & Maxims of Han Shan (a free download). The way these two Chan masters deal with the unsatisfactoriness of life can be summed up in Han Shan's words "If there is no ego, there is no agitation". Infuriatingly true! Yael Raz



'Were you not once a fine lute-player, Sona?'

'Indeed I was, Lord.'

'Tell me, when your lute strings were slack did the instrument play well and sound well.'

'No, Lord.'

'And when the lute strings were too tight did the instrument play well and sound well.'

'Certainly not, Lord.'

'But when the lute strings were well tuned, neither too slack nor too tight, did the instrument play well and sound well then.'

'Indeed it did, Lord.'

In this story from the Pali Canon, the Buddha gives Sona a teaching about balanced effort. This is a teaching that resonates strongly with me, and it's a teaching that I am still trying to learn. I was once a fine flute player, but I applied the wrong sort of effort to pursuing that craft. My strings were too tight, to use the metaphor of the lute, and eventually I lost my enjoyment and love of playing, until one day I stopped altogether. Now I'm trying to practice the spiritual life and I have another opportunity to apply a more balanced effort to my practice. I can see my wilful tendencies more clearly and I can try to work with them with awareness, patience and kindness.

Linda Kirkpatrick



In my meditation practice I have for some time included a regular 'just sitting' practice. Currently, I read a paragraph or two from a book, called 'The Art of Just Sitting' (edited by John Daido Loori, Wisdom Books, 2002) as a preliminary to my sit. The book gives a comprehensive account- through the recorded teachings of many zen luminaries - of the zen approach to just sitting, which they call shikantaza.

The zen masters' teachings can seem utterly bamboozling, even bizarre, but they are trying to express a very particular non-dual understanding that often fascinates.

Here are two samples:

'Set aside all involvements and let the myriad things rest. Zazen is not thinking of good, not thinking of bad. It is not conscious endeavour. It is not introspection.' (Dogen); and: *'So, putting a stop to all concerns, casting off all attachments, not doing anything at all, the six senses inactive-who is this, whose name has never been known, cannot be considered body, cannot be considered mind?'* (Keizan Jokin) John Keogh

What would we do without teachers?

I still remember with great affection and boundless gratitude my primary school teacher who inspired my imagination and encouraged our creativity. It seems that the guidance of others is crucial to our development as human beings - guidance through instruction, friendship, and example. I know that without the guidance of Sangharakshita (through his clear, relevant and inspired translation of the Dharma, and his life example) I would not have made a strong connection with the Buddha's teachings, and would not be a practising Buddhist today. Since starting out on the road of practising the Dharma too I have benefited enormously from the encouragement and guidance of good friends - friends who had traveled further along the path than I and who have developed more wisdom; friends who have inspired me through exemplification, encouraging me that I too can make progress. These are my teachers in an everyday sense, and very necessary they have been and continue to be to me. There are other teachers, as well, who I have never met, such as the teachers that inhabit the Refuge Tree of the Western Buddhist Order. Of these, Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche particularly inspires me through his tremendous dedication to practice (12 years of solitary retreat); his unwavering kindness; and his altruism - it is said that he never refused to give a Dharma teaching if someone sincerely requested it of him.

And if you're looking for holiday reading, it's hard to beat reading biographies of inspiring Buddhist practitioners. I heartily recommend reading about Dipa Ma - another extraordinary yet very ordinary Dharma practitioner and teacher, who taught without fanfare and without stint. The book is *Dipa Ma* by Amy Schmidt.

Sudrishti

New Meditation courses and retreats in 2007

Since the Sydney Buddhist Centre first opened its doors, meditation courses and retreats have been running successfully. Thousands of people have learned the foundation practices of the Mindfulness of Breathing and the Metta Bhavana (Meditation on Loving Kindness). This tradition will continue in 2007, in a new format.

Three courses will be available which will cater to the needs of beginning, intermediate and experienced meditators. These courses run several times during the year. Check the calendar and the website for dates, times and costs. There are also more retreats this year focusing specifically on meditation, including two long retreats in late June (for women) and early July (for men).

Extended retreats in 2007

- Buddhism and Meditation 17 - 24 Feb
- Order/Mitra retreat 5-9 April
- Women's Intensive meditation retreat led by Chittaprabha 9-23 June
- Men's Intensive meditation retreat lead by ex John Keogh (post ordination) 30 June - 15 July
- Women's Going for Refuge retreat 1-8 Sept
- Family retreat 29 Sept - 2 Oct
- Buddhism & Meditation 20-27 Oct
- Family Retreat for Young People (11-17yrs) 15-18 Dec

Festival Dates 2007

- Parinirvana Day 10 Feb
- FWBO/WBO Day 6/7 April
- Buddha Day 5 May
- Dharma Day 28 July
- Sangharakshita's birthday 26 August
- Padmasambhava Day 22 Sept
- Sangha Day 24 Nov

February Programme

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
			1	2	3	4
	Buddhism for the West course (7wks) and Learn to Meditate Foundation Course (6wks)				Sangha retreat: "Simplicity"	
5	6	7 Sangha Night: Parinirvana talk	8	9	10 PARINIRVANA DAY @ SBC	11 Meditation practice day 9-12pm
12	13	14 Sangha Night: tba	15	16	17	18
			Advanced Meditation Seminar 4wks 7-9pm		Buddhism & meditation retreat	
19	20	21 Sangha Night: tba	22	23	24	25
Buddhism & meditation retreat						Sunday 18th Qi Gong and Meditation day workshop 10-4pm
26	27	28 Sangha Night: tba				

December 2006 Programme

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
				1	2 ☪ SBC "Spring Clean"	3
4 ▲	ॐ 5 "Surviving the Holiday Season"	☐ ॐ 6 Sangha night: Bodhisattva ideal	☐ 7 ☉	8	9 ★ BENEFIT GALA CONCERT @ SUBUD HALL	10 Learn to meditate day 10-4
11 ▲	ॐ 12 "Surviving the Holiday Season"	☐ ॐ 13 Sangha night: Bodhisattva ideal	☐ 14 ☉	15 ★ Vairocana Puja	☪ 16	17
18 ▲	ॐ 19	☐ ॐ 20 Sangha night: Bodhisattva ideal	☐ 21 ☉	22	☪ 23	24
25 "Surviving the Holiday Season" meditation morning 9-12	ॐ 26	☐ 27 ★ Sangha Night Meditation and puja	☐ 28	29	☪ 30	31 New Year's Eve Meditation and Puja, 9-midnight

January 2007 Programme

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
1	2	3 Sangha Night: Learn to meditate drop-in class	4	5	☪ 6	7
Women's GFR retreat continues						Men's GFR retreat
8	9	☐ ॐ 10 Sangha Night: Learn to meditate drop-in class	☐ 11 ☉	12	☪ 13	14
Men's GFR retreat continues						
15	ॐ 16	☐ ॐ 17 Sangha Night: Learn to meditate drop-in class	☐ 18 ☉	19	☪ 20 ★ Public Ordination @ VJL	21
Men's GFR retreat continues						Mixed Order Event @ VJL
22 ▲	ॐ 23	☐ ॐ 24 Sangha Night: Learn to meditate drop-in class	☐ 25 ☉	26 ★ Akasadhatesvari Puja	☪ 27	28 Learn to meditate day 10-4
29 ▲	ॐ 30	☐ ॐ 31 Sangha Night: Meditation and Puja				



Men's study night 7-9:30



Women mitras' study night



Morning meditation 7-8am



Qi Gong class 5:45-6:45pm



Saturday meditation 9-10, 10:30-11:30 (Beginners drop-in)



Older women's meditation group 9:30-11:30



Puja (devotional practice) 7 pm on Friday nights



Yoga - Tues 5:45-6:45

February programme inside this issue.