

The Berkeley Buddhist Priory Newsletter December 2005 - February 2006

Turning the Stream of Compassion Within by Rev. Kinrei Bassis

When I first heard Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett speak, the words that resonated with me most were, "Buddhist training begins with compassion for the self." At the time, I really had no understanding what these words meant. Being critical of myself was a central aspect of my personality. I saw this trait as a virtue being very aware of my faults would keep me grounded and real, and that it would be impossible to make spiritual progress unless I recognized what I needed to change. What I didn't realize was that being aware of how I need to improve my behavior did not mean I should be critical and upset with myself. My problem was I had no understanding of what it meant to be nonjudgmental.

Cultivating a nonjudgmental way of looking at things is the key to opening our hearts to real compassion. But how does one go about this? What should I do when I see that something is wrong? How should I approach it? What exactly is the compassionate mind rather than the hard judgmental mind?

In the years since I first heard Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett speak those words, I have since learned that the mind of meditation is to see problems and failures without judgment. Not judging others but also not judging myself. If I make a mess of something, or if I am lazy or angry or proud, I am

breaking the **Buddhist Precepts**. However, being aware of this does not mean I have to judge and criticize myself. There is not something fundamentally wrong with me; there is only a problem with my behavior. And here lies a subtle but important point: There is a vital difference between being aware of the harmful nature of certain patterns of thought and behavior, and having harsh judgment of oneself.

It is an inescapable aspect of reality that everyone is imperfect everyone is making mistakes and having difficulty in one way or another. I can always look at myself and see ways that I can do better. Yet if I begin criticizing myself, being angry with myself, or despairing with myself, it's very important to recognize that in doing so I am taking refuge in my deluded view of who I am instead of taking refuge in the Buddha. "Do not criticize but accept everything," is Great Master Dogen's teaching in the Kyojukaimon. In her commentary on that teaching, Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett wrote:

Each expresses the Truth in his own way as do all things; they do that which they do in their way and express the Lord within it. Do not criticize the way of another, do not call it into question; look within it and see the Lord. Look with the mind of a Buddha and you will see the heart of a Buddha.¹ It is essential that we apply this teaching not just to our views of others, but to ourselves as well. I need to look at my imperfect self with the mind of a Buddha so that I can realize that this seemingly flawed heart of mine is the heart of a Buddha. If I am waiting for the day when I will see myself without flaws, I will never see my Buddha Heart. Looking back at my years of Buddhist training, I can only

smile when I realize it took me many years to recognize that when I criticize myself, I am breaking the Precepts in the same way as when I criticize someone else.

Compassion is really just the opening our hearts to suffering without allowing our judgments to get in the way. If someone is suffering and we judge them, this closes our hearts and fills our mind with harsh opinions. Compassion does not mean we do not see the mistakes others make; it means we have sympathy and understanding for their difficulties, knowing we are not really different from them. We are all born and live in this human realm in which ignorance and delusion strongly influences our lives.

When I see myself making a mistake, I need to take refuge in the Dharma and do whatever action will result in good rather than more suffering. It is easy to get stuck dwelling on our unenlightened actions of the past. The absurdity of this is that we can easily stay stuck, dwelling on wrong actions while losing awareness of what the right action should be in the present situation. Faith in Buddhism is having faith in the fact that although the stream of karma that has brought us to this present moment has both good and bad within it, all we need to do is what is good in the deepest sense in the present situation. Just doing this is enough, moment by moment, day by day, year by year, life by life, to bring ourselves and all sentient beings to Buddhahood.

Key to attaining this perspective is to see all our wrong actions everyone's wrong actions as just normal karma that needs help. When someone is making a mess of their life or someone else's life, I can choose to get upset and judgmental or realize that their actions are the result of

normal and understandable human karma, and then do whatever I can to help. And Buddhist training is just giving the most help we can within the limits of our situation. I always find that it is much easier to be upset with and judgmental about someone else's mistakes when I only focus on their seemingly wrong behavior. Yet if I gain a deeper understanding of the person, I find that the quick condemnation often dissolves, and sympathy and compassion arises.

When I look back on my years of Buddhist training, I can see how mistaken it was to be so upset with my own weaknesses. Once I gained a deeper understanding of my own karma, I saw how very difficult it was to let go of some of my desires and fears. Years of meditation has opened my heart and mind to recognizing how difficult it is for all of us to go through this human life, how hard it is to undergo this Buddhist training, and how difficult it is to take responsibility for our karma. Normal human karma makes it easy to indulge in blaming something, someone, or ourselves for our suffering, to live in a fog of ignorance. Instead, what we need to focus on is helping the karma that is causing the suffering. Offering that help to ourselves and others is the very ground of Buddhist training.

For example, if my house is a mess, I can be filled with judgments about myself or others who may be the source of the mess. That is how our judgmental mind approaches situations that it does not like. Training is about noticing that our mind is filling with judgments, but then letting go of them, and focusing on what we need to do in the moment. When I face a dirty room, I need to not judge why this room is dirty. Instead, I just need to clean the room. This is the

work of a Buddha.

In the same way, it does not matter why my heart is not pure; it is the work of a Buddha to do whatever will help to cleanse my heart. Instead of being upset or angry my impure heart, I need to understand that this is what spiritual life is all about doing the hard work of purifying my heart. I need to offer help to all the lost karma that is looking the wrong way for happiness. Rather than be upset with whom I seem to be, I need to awaken the desire to help my heart to turn to the Buddha.

The judgmental mind comes from a fear of whom we seem to be and fear of what this suffering world seems to be. The mind of meditation is the mind that is open and nonjudgmental. We trust ourselves because we trust that nothing in our karma stands against the truth that our real heart is the Buddha Heart. We trust that nothing can hurt our real heart no matter how the karma of our life unfolds. And we trust that the real life of the world and everything within, despite appearances, is the life of Buddha. When we see mistakes and the resulting suffering, we do not judge, but instead keep our hearts open and have compassion. All beings are just trying to be happy. Everyone confronts the same basic darkness, which is the darkness that emanates from feeling as though our deepest desires are not going to be fulfilled.

Turning the stream of compassion within is letting go of our opinions and desires so that the same compassion that fills the universe can also be experienced filling our hearts and our lives. Although it seems utterly impossible to believe, we are dreaming we are suffering, dreaming harsh judgments of ourselves and others, and dreaming we are lonely and

separate beings. The life of Buddha is the all-embracing life of compassion. That compassion flows through everything, washing away all impurity, and allowing everything to find its true place in the great Mandala of the Buddhas.

¹Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett, *Serene Reflection Meditation*, (Mt, Shasta CA; Shasta Abbey Press, 1996), p. 83.

Great Kanzeon views all the world in Truth,
Free from defilement, loving, knowing all.
Full of compassion; He must always be prayed to,
adored for all eternity.

He is a Light, pure, spotless like the sun,
With wisdom does He darkness all dispel,
subverting all effects of wind and fire;
His all-illuminating light fills all the world.

As thunder shakes the universe
does he control his loving body,
And his thought of great compassion,
like a cloud from which a rain of
Dharma comes, as nectar, down,
destroys the flames of evil passions all.

~Scripture of Avalokiteshwara Bodhisattva

Priory News

This newsletter is a month late, so instead of being a November-December issue, it became a December-February issue. We will go back to our usual bimonthly format with the March-April newsletter.

A change in the Priory schedule is we now offer a 11:15-

11:45 am meditation period, Tuesday through Friday. We have been holding this morning meditation period for a number of months and have been pleased that some Sangha members find it a helpful time to come to the Priory.

On September 11, the Priory participated in the Solano Stroll, Albany's annual street fair. The fair attracts over 100,000 people and we were surprised at the interest shown in the Priory and Buddhism. It was a good opportunity for the local community to learn about the temple and to ask questions meditation or other aspects of Buddhist practice.

Two long term members of the Priory Sangha, Helmut and Linda Schatz, moved to Spokane, WA, in October. The Priory Sangha wishes to express its heartfelt gratitude for the love and support that Helmut and Linda have given through the years. We thank them for their training and for their friendship. We will miss having them in the area and wish them the very best as they settle into their new surroundings.

On October 29, twelve new people attended a Beginner's Class at the Priory. This was a follow-up to our regular meditation instruction and provided an opportunity for new people to return to the Priory and review meditation instruction, hear a basic Dharma talk, and meditate. It seemed helpful and we will offer the class again this Spring.

On Sunday, November 6, the Sangha commemorated the ninth anniversary of Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett's death. Many Sangha members attended, some from quite a distance, to pay their respects and express their gratitude for Rev. Master Jiyu's life and teaching. The memorial ceremony was

beautiful and the sense of harmony and gratitude was evident. On that Sunday, the Sangha also expressed its gratitude and best wishes to Rev. Kinrei, whose 26th ordination birthday was on November 4th.

Buddha's Enlightenment: Sunday, December 18

The Priory will celebrate the great Enlightenment of the Buddha, on Sunday, December 18. Part of practicing at the Priory is learning to make Buddhism an integral part of our life. Growing up in America means we were raised and familiar with Judeo-Christian religious celebrations and we are not acquainted with comparable Buddhist traditions. An important aspect of human life is sharing and celebrating with others. Although we offer many different ceremonies and services at the Priory, there are certain holidays that it is helpful for the Sangha to make a special effort to come together and share their gratitude with others.

Commemorating the Buddha's Enlightenment in December is an occasion for the Sangha to gather together and express their gratitude and joy for the immeasurable gift of the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. We welcome everyone to join us for the ceremony and for a potluck lunch which follows the Dharma class.

New Year's Eve Meditation Vigil and New Year's Ceremony

The New Year's ceremony provides an opportunity to reflect on the past year and establish a direction for the year ahead. Starting at 9:00 pm on Saturday, December 31, there will be meditation at the Priory until 11:30 pm. Then we will

hold a New Year's ceremony to offer our gratitude and willingness to the Buddha for the upcoming year. After the ceremony there will be a festive tea in which the Sangha can celebrate the New Year in a peaceful and joyous way.

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 generosity of the entire Priory Sangha is what makes it possible for the Priory to exist and for the Dharma to be offered.

In recent months, we have been given many generous gifts, including two cabinets, a drill, office supplies, cleaning supplies, paper goods, altar furnishings and hardware.

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 which provide most of the food for the Priory. Although we are grateful for any gift of food, the most helpful food donations are prepared meals, soy milk, goat milk, fruit, goat or sheep cheese and vegetarian "meats". You are always welcome to ask Rev. Kinrei 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.

Animal Funeral

Aimee, Judy Brown's cat, had her funeral at the Priory on August 27.