

# BODHI BULLETIN

DHARMA NEWS FROM BODHI MONASTERY • NOV/DEC 2003

## News Briefs

### Shifu's Lectures on Madhyamaka Philosophy

Shifu resumes his Tuesday morning lectures on November 4th, from 9:00-10:00am (in Chinese only).

### "Exploring the Word of the Buddha" Bhante's Dharma Study to Resume on Nov. 18th

Bhante will begin a new section of our study of the Buddha's discourses from the Majjhima Nikaya. This section, on "The Path to Liberation," will extend over several weeks and will cover the following topics and suttas: The Purpose of the Spiritual Life (MN 29), The Gradual Training (MN 27, MN 39), The Marks of a True Practitioner (MN 40). Class is on Tuesdays from 7:00 to 8:00 pm.

### Ven. Xin-Xing's Dharma Talks

Ven. Xin-xing is currently giving a series of Dharma talks on Saturdays, from 1:45 to 2:30 pm. The talks, in Chinese, are intended to offer a brief introduction to dependent origination and its place in the Dharma according to the early sutras. The talks started on October 11th and will continue for ten weeks, branching out from dependent origination to other topics of relevant interest.

### Youth Dharma Class Continues

This class takes place on alternate Saturdays, between 9:30 and 10:30am. Classes will be held on November 8th, and 22nd, as well as December 6th and 20th. Children from ages 7 to 13 are learning from these classes and having fun while at it! The main teacher is William Bertolotti and if you need more information you can e-mail him at: williambertolotti@yahoo.com.

### Thank You to Ajahn Sundara and Ven. Analayo

We want to thank Ajahn Sundara for her participation at the monastery during her three month stay through mid-October, which included the 4-week program entitled "Working with the Mind". We also greatly appreciated the presence of Ven. Analayo of Germany, who stayed with us from mid-September to mid-October and gave a Dharma talk on the Satipatthana Sutta. We look forward to another visit from him in May 2004.

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## Crossing the Realm of Death

By Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi

In South Asia, during the rainy season, the monsoons rains come pouring down mightily and heavily. When the rains pour down, the rivers swell up and widen, and their current becomes fierce and tumultuous. Seemingly out of nowhere, many streams previously non-existent appear throughout the countryside. The water from the rain

**Those who in this well-  
expounded Dhamma**

**Practice in accordance  
with the Dhamma –**

**These people go to  
the far shore**

**Of the realm of Death  
so very hard to cross.**

sweeps down over the mountains and hills, filling up the creeks and brooks until they too become rivers. Yet despite the arrival of the rainy season, people still have to move from place to place – for business, shopping, or family affairs – and to travel to distant destinations they often have to cross these rivers. For this reason the image of crossing a river, of moving from this shore to the far shore, plays a prominent role in the different forms of Indian religion and spirituality, and Buddhism too makes ample use of this image.

Within this image, "this shore" represents samsara, the round of rebirths through which all unenlightened sentient beings have been roaming and wandering without any first point in time. Samsara is divided into various realms. Those beings who run up and down "this shore" are those who move from one plane of existence to another, without seeing any route of escape. Sometimes they go from a lower realm to a higher realm, sometimes from a higher realm to a lower realm. But, whether they go up or down, they are like animals in a cage, just running in circles without getting anywhere. What keeps us bound to this round of rebirths, according to the Buddha, is our ignorance and craving, which in conjunction with our volitional actions (karma) drive us to one realm or another.

Some modern interpreters of Buddhism say that this whole teaching about karma and rebirth is part of ancient Indian mythology that the Buddha just accepted and took on board as part of his Indian cultural heritage. They say that if we are to make Buddhism meaningful for modern people, we should strip away all these ancient cultural accretions and devise a version of Buddhism that applies exclusively to life here and now. If we take this attitude, it seems we're directly challenging the enlightenment of the Buddha. The Buddha didn't say that these teachings of karma and rebirth should be accepted because they belong to the Indian spiritual heritage. He says, rather, that he has realized and seen these things for himself. To remove these teachings from Buddhist doctrine is in effect to remove the world-transcending aspect of the Dharma, leaving us with a version of Buddhism that is little more than a sophisticated ancient psychotherapy. It's a little bit like taking a car and then thinking, "Why should we keep the tires on the car? It would really look much better without them." So we remove the tires, convinced that now we have a really super-looking car. But if we get in and try to drive, we don't get anywhere. From this we can see how important it is to preserve the integrity of the original teaching by retaining these doctrines.

So, in the Buddhist worldview, this shore is samsara, the cycle of rebirth driven by ignorance, craving, and karma; and the far shore is Nirvana, the birthless and deathless. Whereas samsara is the realm of suffering and commotion, Nirvana is the state of supreme bliss and peace. The task the Buddha sets before us is to move from this

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Please contact us for more information on any of our programs.

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## Crossing the Realm of Death *(continued from front)*

present shore of samsara to the far shore of Nirvana; and what takes us across from the near shore to the far shore is the Buddhist path. That is why the Buddha compares his teaching to a raft: it enables us to cross the stream and reach the far shore.

In the verse the Buddha says: “those who in this well-expounded Dhamma practice in accordance with the Dhamma.” If we examine the discourses spoken by the Buddha, we can easily see that they are well expounded. First, they’re completely clear. Even though they might be deep in meaning, the thinking they display is razor sharp, not at all vague or muddled. The teachings are consistent; they all fit together into one piece. Ethically, the teachings are impeccable; one can’t find any faults in them. They are realistic in that they describe things the way they really are; the teachings don’t lead us down a garden path into realms of wishful fantasy. The Buddha’s approach is non-dogmatic and experiential. When one practices the Dhamma, one can see for oneself that it brings beneficial results right here and now. On this basis, one can develop the confidence that if one practices diligently one will eventually win liberation from all suffering.

In order to gain liberation from the realm of death, it’s not enough just to have an excellent or well-expounded teaching. Above all, it’s of prime important to practice it. The practice of the teaching unfolds methodically and systematically, stage by stage. One has to begin by leading a moral life, by accepting the precepts and disciplining one’s conduct in harmony with the precepts. By accepting and following the precepts, one transforms one’s behavior so that it conforms to the ideal standards of the noble ones.

Then, on the basis of morality, one has to develop concentration or *samadhi*. Concentration is the process of learning how to make the mind calm, composed, and inwardly focused. When the mind is concentrated, one undertakes the development of *prajña*, wisdom. Wisdom is the insight or understanding that arises from direct contemplation of phenomena. It discerns, perceives, and recognizes the true nature of things, their true characteristics.

The true characteristics of phenomena as taught by the Buddha are threefold. The first is the *impermanence* of all conditioned phenomena. The second is the *unsatisfactoriness* of all conditioned phenomena, the fact that all conditioned phenomena are in some way bound up with suffering, unable to satisfy our yearning for perfect security. The third is the *selfless* nature of all phenomena, the fact that all phenomena are devoid of any substantial self or intrinsic essence. Of these three characteristics, the deepest and most difficult to see is selflessness, yet it is just this that must be seen if we are to cut the bonds that hold us to the round of birth and death.

As our wisdom matures, it cuts through subtler and subtler layers of ignorance and craving, until it cuts off the fetter of ignorance entirely, just like cutting through a leather strap. As we cut through the fetter of ignorance, the four bonds fall away. With the first cut, the bond of wrong views falls away. With the next cut, the craving for sense pleasures falls away. With the third cut, the craving for continued existence falls away. And with the last cut, the subtlest bond of ignorance falls away. When we accomplish this, we have crossed the stream and reached the final goal – the far shore of Nirvana.

*(From a Dharma talk given by Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi, Bodhi Monastery, August 10, 2002)*

### Venerable Dhammadipa to Visit Again In December

Ven. Dhammadipa who visited us and gave discourses on the Anapanasati Sutta during the 2002 Dharma retreat will return in December. Ven. Dhammadipa is a Buddhist monk from Czechoslovakia. Ordained in Sri Lanka in 1987, Ven. Dhammadipa has taught Sanskrit and Abhidharma at various Buddhist institutions in Taiwan, mainly at the Chung-Hua Institute of Buddhist Studies at Fa-gu Shan founded by Master Shen-yen. In 1996 he went to Sri Lanka and Burma, where he studied the Abhidharma as applied in meditation. He left Burma in 1999 and has since then been teaching meditation in Malaysia, China, and Europe. Ven. Dhammadipa has also translated Shantideva’s “*Bodhicaryavatara*” from Sanskrit into Czech, and the Buddhist poems of Han-Shan and Asvaghosha’s “*Arising of Faith in Mahayana*” from Chinese into Czech.

## November/December Dharma Schedule

### SATURDAYS

9:00 - 9:50 am	Refuges & Precepts; guided meditation
10:00 - 10:30 am	Devotional service
10:30 - 11:15 am	Work period
11:15 am - 12 pm	Lunch and cleanup
12:30 - 1:30 pm	Dharma discourse
1:45 - 2:15 pm	Dharma discussion
2:45 - 3:45 pm	Pali class*

\*Cancelled Nov. 1 & 8

### SUNDAYS

9:00 - 9:30 am (First Sunday of each month)	Beginners instruction in meditation* *Cancelled Nov. 2
9:30 - 11:00 am (Every Sunday)	Meditation Group guided by Bhante
10:00 - 11:30 am (dates to be determined)	Ven. Jen-Chun Dharma Talk at Ch’an Center

### TUESDAYS

9 - 10 am	Madhyamaka Philosophy* with Ven. Jen-Chun (in Chinese Only) *Resumes Nov. 4
7 - 8 pm	Sutta Study Class* with Bhikkhu Bodhi (in English only) *Resumes Nov. 18

### DAILY

4:30 - 5 pm	Chanting Liturgy
5:05 - 6 pm	Sitting meditation

### GROUP MEDITATION SCHEDULE

DAILY, 5:05 - 6:00 pm:	Sitting meditation after evening liturgy.
SATURDAYS, 9:00 - 9:50 am:	Sitting meditation before devotional service.
SUNDAYS, 9:30 - 11:00 am:	Walking and sitting meditation group.
FIRST SUNDAY (of each month), 9-9:30 am:	Beginners instruction in meditation.



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