

The All-Knowing Maker of the Day

Dharmavardhana-Jñānagarbha (for the 19th IBC convocation)

॥ नमो बुद्धाय ॥

धर्मरूपशरीराभ्यां बोधिमण्डाम्बरोदितः ।
जगत्स्फुरति सर्वज्ञदिनकृज्ज्ञानरश्मिभिः ॥

|| namo buddhāya ||

dharmarūpaśarīrābhyāṃ bodhimaṇḍāmbaroditaḥ |
jagat spharati sarvajñādinakṛj jñānaraśmibhiḥ ||

Ratnagoṭravibhāga 4.61

Homage to the Buddha!

With the Dharma-body and the Form-body,
Arise in the sky of the essence of Awakening,
The sun that is the Omniscient One
Pervades the world with rays of awareness.

This verse compares the Buddha to the sun (here called more precisely “the maker of the day”), a common simile in Buddhist praises. The verse is from the foundational treatise on Buddha-nature, and thus its context is that of Mahāyāna thought. I will offer an initial interpretation that is meant to align more closely with such context.

The Dharma-body of a Buddha can be understood as his empty nature, inconceivable and not something to be possibly perceived. The Form-body, on the other hand, is the aspect of appearance, what sentient beings can perceive, admire, and receive teachings from. Awakening is itself compared to the sky, as it has no center or circumference - it is ungraspable. The Buddha arises with the two bodies in the sky of awakening, and then, like the sun, he pervades the whole world with his rays of awareness. The word that I have translated with “awareness” is *jñāna*, that here refers to an awareness that is free of concepts, unobstructed, and unattached to anything. The same term has also been translated as “primordial wisdom” (partly due to the Tibetan rendering *ye shes*), and “gnosis.” In the context of Buddhist training, it refers to the pinnacle of the third type of wisdom, in the progression of wisdom from listening, from reflection, and from meditation.



All-Knowing Maker of the Day by Armin Kabiri

The second interpretation I will now propose is not based on specifically Mahāyāna ideas, and I hope it will be more readily apparent how it fits in our own activities and aspirations, here in IBC; it is based on a more basic and shared level of Buddhist understanding. From that perspective, Dharma-body can refer to the collection of the Buddha's teachings. Form-body refers primarily to the Buddha's physical presence. Both of these aspects continue to pervade the world, to this day – in the continuous

transmission of the Dharma and in the many images of the Buddha's physical form that we still find, in different styles and from different epochs, almost everywhere. Important images of the Buddha are also the ordained monastics, who replicate the Buddha's own attire; and more broadly, all Buddhist practitioners who follow the teachings of mindfulness in their bodily postures and speech, thus too harmonizing their form with that of the Buddha.

Our aspirations and activities may likewise be seen as reflecting the pervasive rays of the Buddha's awareness, unobstructed by partiality or time.