



Iowa Buddhist

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Vesak Day
Message from Ven.
Witiyala Seewalie

Buddhism as a 2
way of Life

Vesak Asiri - 4
Poem

Buddhists under- 5
stand globaliza-
tion as ongoing
change

Contribution 6

Vesak Day Message from the president of IABV

Dear Friends in the Dhamma,

I am so glad to present this special message on this utmost significant day of all Buddhists in the world. We, Buddhists, throughout the world commemorate the Birth, Enlightenment and passing away of the Buddha on this very special day of Vesak. Today we all commemorate 2633 birth day of the Buddha.

According to the teaching of the Buddha, on this 'Trice blessed day' we all should understand and practice as the Buddha has taught us. The Buddha never taught us a religion. As the greatest man ever born on this earth he has taught us how to live peacefully and harmoniously in society supporting each other. This is how Buddhists could practice Metta (loving kindness) and Karuna (compassion) towards each other. These two are very important factors in the teaching of the Buddha. Let us first of all understand the significance of practicing these two concepts in the teaching of the Buddha so that we all can see each other amicably.

As most of us know, Buddhism is not a religion but a way of life. As it is a way of life we all should be able to put it into practice in our daily life. When we apply it in our daily life we all can practice the major three steps in Buddhism namely; generosity, morality and meditation. When we think of these three, all of them are equally important. Therefore, let us understand the significance of practicing them all together.

When practice generosity, let us first understand how to share things with others. We can share many things with our friends, relatives and also with different spirits and animal beings around us. We, as humans undoubtedly, can share many things with others. The Buddha has taught us in many ways to share with others by sharing, giving and offering. If we are mindful enough we can share even our skills and merit etc.

As Vesak is a special Full moon day for Buddhists all over the world, we all can observe precepts on this very special day wherever we live and abide by them throughout the day. For lay persons five precepts are the daily precepts and the special day like the full moon day, they observe eight precepts, nine precepts or ten precepts. That is how they all purify their minds. One cannot develop one's mind without morality. Therefore, one should establish in morality first.

Practicing meditation is the third stage which is really important for all of us in this fast moving society. The Buddha recommended meditation as a way to calm our mind and also to see through which means to understand things as they really are. When one see things as they really are one sees the three characteristics of existence, namely; impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and soullessness. As we are aware these two methods are called calm and insight (Samatha- Vipassana). When one practices this method of meditation one can live happily and peacefully in society and finally one can attain the Supreme Bliss of Nibbana. Therefore, on this very special day, 2633 birth day of the Buddha let us all practice generosity, morality and meditation as a means of reducing and controlling our emotions and also strive to understand and realize the real peace, real happiness of Nibbana.

May all beings be well happy and peaceful!

With Metta,
Witiyala Seewalie Thera



Buddhism as a way of life

By Bhikkhu T. Seelananda

Buddhism is a way of life. It is not a religion which emphasizes worship or prayer to win the favor of any superhuman or supernatural agent. Even though there are some characteristics of religion and philosophy in Buddhism; it is neither a religion nor a philosophy. As most of us are aware there are four major religions in the world today. They are namely **Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam**. These four major religions can again be categorized into two groups. They are:

1. Theo-centric Religions
2. Anthro-centric Religions.

Buddhism can be categorized as an anthro-centric religion. There are **theistic religions, atheistic religions, and some that are agnostic. But Buddhism is in its intrinsic nature, a realistic teaching.** Buddhism does not believe in a supernormal creator who created the world and man. According to *Mahā Tittthāyatana Sutta* of the *Anguttara Nikāya*, in the time of the Buddha, there were three major beliefs. They are as follows:

1. Everything depends on past karma (*Pubbekata hetuvāda*)
2. Creation of a creator (*Issara nimmāna vāda*)
3. Things happen without reasons (*Ahetu appaccaya vāda*).

The Buddha put forward his justified rebuke towards all the recluses and *Brahamins* who believed those three kinds of 'isms', and denied all three. The Buddha pointed out that when fully examined, investigated and discussed they become inactive and futile. They had to accept the justified word of the Buddha. Thereafter, the Buddha introduced the Dependent Origination as the real teaching in the world. That is not a belief but a determinism which teaches how existence is a dependent phenomenon. According to this teaching, all beings, everyone, everything, in the world is interrelated, interdependent, interlinked.

The Buddha is not a creator. He is neither a savior nor an emissary. He is a man but he is not an ordinary man like you

and me. After his awakening from the darkness of ignorance, he became an extra-ordinary man, a superman; who achieved the state of human perfection which is known as *Nibbāna*.

What the Buddha Really Taught

The Buddha was born in the 6th century BCE, and with his birth Buddhism emerged in India towards the end of Upanishad period. According to the history of thought in India, before the emergence of Buddhism, there had been several other periods such as Vedic, *Brahmana*, *Aranyaka* and *Upanishad*. By this time there were 62 'isms', in religious currents. The Buddha categorized all these into two groups:

1. Eternalism (*Sassatavāda*)
2. Nihilism (*Uccedavāda*).

Buddhism avoids all 'isms' such as monism, pluralism or polytheism as well as nihilism, and eternalism. That is how Buddhism became a middle teaching (*majjhimā deshanā*) or intermediate path. That path, rediscovered by the Buddha, is an ancient path (*purānam anjasam- S. N. Nagara Sutta*). In the Buddha's first sermon the Buddha explained this Path as the Middle Path.

As we all know, Buddhism is the English term given to explain the teaching of the Buddha. However, we should understand that this term is insufficient and inaccurate to denote the very teachings of the Buddha. The teaching of the Buddha is not an "ism" like Hinduism, Catholicism, monism, eternalism, or nihilism and so on. What he taught was the Dhamma. This term, Dhamma, has multifaceted meanings. It is difficult to translate into English. So it is better we leave it untranslated. (Read: "Dhamma" by John Ross Carter -Prof., University Colgate, published by the Hokuseido Press Tokyo- 1978).

Continued from page 2

The Buddha's attainment of Enlightenment was the most wonderful and marvelous thing that took place after many eons of life on earth. This was a very rare happening among all beings in the universe. On that very special day he realized the real nature of himself and the whole system of the universe (how things come to be, how they exist and how they come to cease). Enlightenment is not something given (inspiration or revelation). It is, as said earlier, a realization by the Buddha himself. Through this awakening, he rediscovered the 37 factors of enlightenment. These became the essential teachings of the Buddha, which are everlasting in the world. The 37 factors rediscovered by the Buddha are called *Sathdhamma* meaning Sublime Dhamma or Seven kinds of Dharma. They are as follows:

Sath Dhamma (Seven/Sublime Dhamma)

1. The four foundations of mindfulness (body, feelings, consciousness, and mental objects)
2. The four right efforts (effort to avoid and overcome unwholesome thoughts and effort to develop and maintain wholesome thoughts)
3. The four roads to power (intention, consciousness, energy, investigation)
4. The five spiritual faculties (faith, energy, mindfulness, concentration, wisdom)
5. The five mental powers (faith, energy, mindfulness, concentration, wisdom)
6. The seven factors of enlightenment (mindfulness, investigation, energy, rapture, tranquility, concentration, equanimity)
7. The eightfold path (right understanding, right thoughts, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right efforts, right mindfulness, and right concentration).

When these 37 factors are condensed into three principles they are like the three sides of a triangle. The three factors are namely, the Four Noble Truths, the Dependent Origination and the Three Characteristics of Existence.

The nucleus of this triangle is mindfulness (i.e., the four foundations of mindfulness).

There is no Buddhism other than these 37 factors. Whatever descriptions, explanations in books, articles or any Buddhist writing, all are based on these 37 factors.

How should Buddhism be put into practice in daily life?

When one practices Buddhism in daily life, one has to practice three things.

1. **Generosity (*dāna*):** One has to understand clearly, how generosity is to be practiced. When giving things to others, what is to be given, to whom it is to be given, etc. The Buddha has very clearly explained them on many occasions.

2. **Morality (*seela*):** Observing Precepts. There are five basic precepts for all cultured people. They are the daily precepts for lay persons and then there are 8, 9, or tenfold precepts to be observed on the full moon day. For monks there are 220 rules and 304 rules for nuns.

3. **Meditation (*bhāvanā*):** Meditation, as the Buddha has taught, there are two levels: 1. calmness, serenity or concentration (*Samatha*) 2. Insight or wisdom (*Vipassanā*). Of the two, vipassana is the unique teaching in Buddhism. In order to realize and extirpate defilements and attain Enlightenment one has to practice *vipassanā*. *Samatha* alone leads to *samsāra* whereas *vipassanā* leads to *Nibbāna*.

The Buddha's especial teaching is to practice constantly for a happy life and attain the final goal, Nibbāna:

The Buddha while dwelling in Kuru (present day Delhi) addressing the monks said, "**O monks, this is the only way for the purification of beings, for the overcoming of sorrow and lamentation, for the disappearance of pain and grief, for reaching the path, for the attainment of Nibbāna, namely the four establishments of mindfulness**".

Continued on page 4

Continued from page 3

What are the four?

- 1. Contemplation of body in the body
- 2. Contemplation of feelings in the feelings
- 3. Contemplation of consciousness in the consciousness
- 4. Contemplation of the mental objects in the mental objects.

Of these four establishments of mindfulness, the first one is being mindful of body in the body. Body is twofold

- 1. This corporeal body
- 2. The breath body.

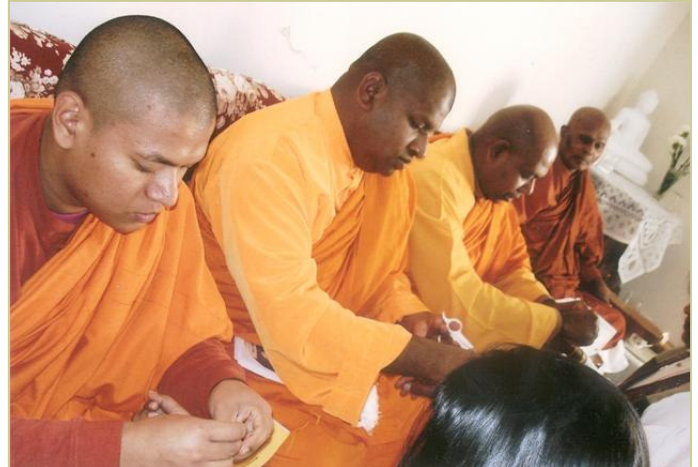
Body, according to this context means breath-body. That is practicing mindfulness of breathing. The Buddha clearly explained how to practice meditation focusing on breath body. For this purpose he delivered several discourses. Once the Buddha said, **“O monks, when mindfulness of breathing is developed and cultivated, it is of great fruit and great benefit. When mindfulness of breathing is developed and cultivated, it fulfils the four foundations of mindfulness. When the four foundations of mindfulness are developed and cultivated, they fulfill the seven factors of enlightenment. When the seven factors of enlightenment are developed and cultivated, they fulfill true knowledge and deliverance.”**

The most significant discourse to understand Buddhism as a way of life is, "The Great Discourse of the Establishment of Mindfulness" (*Mahā Satipatthāna Sutta*). According to this discourse the Buddha explained how one should be mindful while walking, standing, sitting, laying down, turning, when looking here and there, when extending limbs, wearing clothes, and ornaments, eating, drinking, biting, tasting, swallowing, and even urinating, defecating, etc. If we study and practice this teaching, we can understand that the Dhamma surely brings us calmness and peacefulness of life.

Let us understand this teaching and strive

to practice in our daily life so that we can lead a happy and contented life and finally attain the Supreme Bliss of Nibbāna.

May we all attain the perpetual Bliss of Nibbāna



Ven. Witiyala Seewalie Thera, Bhante G and other monks are binding pirith Nool (Blessing Thread) to the Devotees of Iowa.

Speech and Meditation November 2007

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Buddhists understand Globalization as ongoing change

By Shelton A. Gunaratne

[Elaborating on his essay titled “Globalization: A Non-Western Perspective: The Bias of Social Science/Communication Oligopoly” published in the current issue of *Communication, Culture & Critique* (Vol.2 No.1), Gunaratne says that from the Theravada Buddhist perspective, globalization

- has been going on ever since our globe came into being
- is an integral component of the doctrine of anicca (impermanence/change)
- connotes every dimension of the bio sphere, not just the concerns of human beings
- reflects the dhukka (unsatisfactoriness) co-arising with anatta (no-selfness/ interdependence)
- is the equivalent of samsara (cycle of becoming) at a given point in time]

The Buddhist view of globalization is very different from what the contemporary Western scholars profess it to be.

When the current debate on globalization began in the 1960s, the Western oligopoly of social science journals treated it as a new development. Heavily influenced by the works of sociologists like Max Weber and philosophers like Friedrich Hegel, the scholars who wrote to these journals and wrote ‘authoritative’ books were oblivious to the perspectives of Eastern thought or debunked them as metaphysics.

These Eurocentric scholars did not realize they were re-inventing the wheel when they ‘discovered’ globalization as a new topic for investigation. Among them, the Orientalists wanted to uphold Western thought and put down the non-Western while the others were only marginally ‘educated’ on non-Western thought, They were unable to separate Buddha’s own philosophy from the populist traditions of Buddhist ‘religion.’ Therefore, they rarely analyzed the Buddha’s teachings as a source for social science.

The movement toward

postdisciplinarity—the simultaneous investigation of issues from all disciplinary angles—has called on scholars, as well as journalists, to look at the cosmos/world as a ‘cooperative.’ Our globe is a cooperative network within the hierarchical level of planetary systems located below the hierarchical level of galaxies. Although Buddhist metaphysics (ontocosmology) recognizes these hierarchies, which affect the operation of one another, Buddha’s primary concern was to explain samsara (cycle of becoming) in terms of the three features of existence—dhukka, anatta, and anicca—that encompassed all living beings, not just the human species.

First, the Buddhist view is that globalization has been going on ever since our globe came into being 4.55 billion years ago. This happened when the solar system surrounding our sun, a second-generation star, came into being. Since the Big Bang took place 13.7 billion years ago, we can confidently assert that process of universalization preceded globalization by 9.15 billion years. In contrast, the contemporary (Western) concept of globalization is a very recent phenomenon traceable to the construction of a sophisticated Global Information Infrastructure.

Second, Buddhism sees globalization as an integral component of the doctrine of anicca (impermanence/change). Globalization is an ongoing dynamic process, which occurs as a result of the mutual interconnection, interaction, and interdependence of all global/universal elements with one another. This mutual causality is the reason for anicca. Concepts such as permanence, independence and autonomy are supreme myths although a case can be made to recognize the relative speed of change of different types of elements. The proclivity of Western empiricist scholars to predict outcomes based on linear relationships between so-called independent and dependent variables has produced tomes of worthless data. Darwin’s theory of evolution was another re-invention of the wheel because the Buddhist theory of anicca already contained the rudiments of evolutionary theory.

Third, the Buddhist theory of globalization connotes every dimension of the biosphere, not just what Sheila Croucher describes as “a cluster of related changes [not limited

Continued from page 6

to economic, technological, cultural, and political realms] that are increasing the interconnectedness of the world." Modern physics attests that electromagnetism, gravity, and strong and weak forces interconnect everything and everyone in the world/universe we inhabit. In contrast, the contemporary (Western) theory of globalization is highly anthropocentric because it looks at 'increasing interconnectedness' of the human species alone. Because the Buddhist definition of society includes all living beings, it places supreme importance on dealing with environmental concerns. Thus, Buddhism endorses the study of how human activities could interfere with resident bird migration patterns over long geographical distances. Because more than 7,200 animal species and 8,300 plant species are currently threatened with extinction, the Buddhist approach to globalization will enable us to detect their deleterious effects globally. One might even argue that some species of birds have been more 'globalized' than the human species.

Fourth, the Buddhist view of globalization reflects the co-arising operational mechanism of dukkha (unsatisfactoriness) and anatta (no-selfness/ interdependence). These two features of existence co-evolve with their counterpart anicca (impermanence/ change) to form the ti-lakkhana (three features of existence). Their mutual interaction could engender an unjust or a just society or something in-between. The 12 conditional factors—craving, grasping, contact, feeling, senses, ignorance, volitional formations, becoming, birth, decay-and death, and name-and form—entice living beings to hang on to various forms of matter/energy and information, which make up the entire world/universe. One indicator of this is ceaseless accumulation in capitalist systems and the immeasurable unsatisfactoriness it creates through cyclical recessions and depressions. Because of anicca, it is impossible for living beings to grasp on to what they crave. The result is dukkha. Moreover, because everything and everyone is interconnected and interdependent, all represent anatta (no-self)—another reason that engenders unsatisfactoriness.

Finally, one can surmise that the Buddhist concept of globalization is the

equivalent of samsara (cycle of becoming) at a given point in time. The ultimate result of the interaction of all elements in the global/universal system is the re-production of that system with varying degrees of on-going minor changes and cyclical major changes. Samsara is nothing but the interconnected/ interdependent world/universe wherein all its constituent elements bar two go through the cycle of birth, growth, and death. The exceptions are matter/energy and consciousness, which have co-existed, co-exist, and will co-exist for ever. Once a universe itself has gone through the cycles of birth, evolution, and death, these two elements remain in pure potentiality ready to give birth to another cyclic universe.

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Contributions

The objective of Iowa Buddhist Vihara provides Spiritual, Cultural, Scientific, and Educational activities of the Community.

The Iowa Buddhist Vihara is a registered non profit charitable organization in the State of Iowa. It is an affiliated temple of MN Buddhist Vihara.

Development of the Vihara and its activities depend solely on your support. Your contribution is greatly appreciated.

You can join to our future activities:

- *Dhamma School*
- *Abhidhamma, Pali & Dhammapada class*
- *Meditation group*
- *Sil Observance*
- *Volunteer activities*