



North Dakota Buddhist

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Message From Founder



Dear Friends,

I am honored to serve the mission of the North Dakota Buddhist Vihara: to share the Buddha's message of Peace and Happiness and help create peace and harmony within and ourselves and in the surrounding world. Vihara is open to people of all faiths traditions and cultures. We welcome you come and see, to participate in spiritual practices such as meditation, observance of precepts, discussions of Dhamma (Buddha's teachings) and Buddhist rituals.

Presently, I reside in Minnesota and serve as the Abbott of the Buddhist Vihara there. We have the vision of sharing the Buddha's teachings with all those who are interested, in the five state region of the Upper Mid-West. With this aim in mind we will be presenting Buddhist teachings to children and adults in North Dakota. We invite your active participation in the activities of the Vihara.

Opening a Buddhist temple has been compared to the closing down of many prisons. The teachings of the Buddha have the power to close many prisons within and without, when people live according to the Dhamma. Please join us in this noble endeavor. As the Buddha instructs us, "Dhammo have rakkhati dhamma cari", the Dhamma protects those who protect the Dhamma. Wishing you and all beings Peace and Happiness.

With Metta -- Loving Kindness to All
Ven. Witiyala Seewalie Thera

Vesak Day Message from the Founder of NDBV

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 2632 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, 2632 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,
Ven. Witiyala Seewalie Thera

VESAK

By Bhikkhu T. Seelananda

It so happened that the Buddha Sakyamuni Gautama was born, attained Enlightenment, and passed away on the same day, the Full Moon Day of May. He was born in 623BC, attained Enlightenment in 588BC and passed away in 543BC.

According to the history of Buddhism, the Buddha Sakyamuni Gautama was the 4th Buddha of this great eon called Maha Badra kalpa, meaning the Great Auspicious Eon.

Today, on this special day, the full moon day of Vesak-2008, we all are here to commemorate the 2632 birthday of the greatest man ever born on earth, the Buddha Sakyamuni Gautama. As the Buddha himself said, "The Buddhas are rare beings in the world".

The Buddha, Sakyamuni Gautama, was born as a prince at the place called Lumbini in India. He was the son of king Suddhodana and queen Mahamaya. This prince grew up in the midst of luxury, beauty and plenty. However, slowly and slowly he was getting weary of his surroundings and became more and more contemplative. Day-by-day his attitudes completely changed and he started to think differently. As a consequence of this changing attitude, he left behind all luxurious and sensual pleasures in the palace. He had gained a clear understanding of the transitory, unsatisfactory and selfless nature of fleeting pleasures. With this perception, realization of the real nature of things, at the age of 29, he went forth from home to the state of homelessness.

After leaving the palace, he reached Rajagaha (Modern Rajgir in Bihar) which was then re-

nowned as the abode of great Philosophers and leaders of thought. He met different teachers but unsatisfied with their teachings marched forward towards the forest Uruvela where he met some ascetics who were practicing severe austerities. As he was told, he also practiced rigid austerities and self mortification for six years. However, still he was unable to attain what he sought. Eventually, convinced of the futility of mortification of the flesh, he abandoned the path of fasting and accepted a bowl of rice pudding offered by a lady named Sujata.

Then, the 'Buddha-to-be' was left alone to pursue his own path to deliverance which he later termed, "The Middle Path".

The Ascetic Siddhartha while reflecting upon his past experience realized how he practiced mindfulness of breathing under a rose apple tree at a very young age while his father was plowing in the field. Upon this reflection, he reaffirmed that it must be the way to gain calmness and insight so that one would be able to realize the real peace and the real happiness of life. With that re-affirmation, he came to a large Pipal tree on the right bank of the river Neranjana the place now known as Bodh Gaya or Buddha Gaya which is about seven miles away from the present city of Gaya in Bihar.

The ascetic Siddhartha, with a firm resolution not to leave that place without attaining Enlightenment sat cross-legged and practiced mindfulness of breathing. On this fateful night Mara, the evil one attempted in various ways to thwart the Bodhisattva's efforts. But all the effort of Mara ended in vain and Siddhartha Gautama

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attained the Full State of Awakening. Thus, the ascetic Siddhartha Gautama became the Buddha, the Self-Awakened One in the world. He realized the real nature of all animate and inanimate things in the whole universe after Fully Awakening. In other words, he realized the Dhamma in the world based on the Four Noble Truths, Dependent Origination, and the Three Salient Characteristics of Existence: his mind became unconditioned. With all this: the vision of the Dhamma, the knowledge of insight, unparalleled deep wisdom, science, and an unsurpassed light arose in him. **“Knowledge and vision arose in me, the deliverance of my mind is certainly unshakable, this is my last birth, and there is no more existence (birth) for me here after”**, he said.

On this very day, the Vesak full moon day, right after his attainment of Enlightenment, as a paean of joy, he uttered, **“Through many a birth I wandered in samsara. Seeking, but not finding, the builder of the house. Sorrowful is it to be born again and again. O house-builder! Thou art-seen. Thou shalt build no house again. All thy rafters are broken. Thy ridge-pole is shattered. My mind has attained the unconditioned. Achieved is the end of craving.”** Thus by the extinction of all passion he gained coolness and attained Nibbana, the highest Bliss.

According to Buddhism, everyone can gain this coolness and attain this highest bliss of Nibbana. For this purpose, one has to practice and train one’s mind slowly, gradually and systematically. The Buddha pointed out very clearly that each and every one of us has that

potentiality, to develop and cultivate mind.

Mind according to Buddhism, is the most important part of beings. Fortunately, unlike other beings, human mind is a developed mind which can be further developed. Buddhist practice is prescribed for the development of the human mind. The Buddha has taught us a clear cut way to practice and develop mind so that one would be able to understand the Four Noble Truths and attain supreme bliss of Nibbana.

That way is nothing but the Middle Way which comprises the three types of training; namely morality, concentration and wisdom (sila, Samadhi, panna). Once the Buddha said, **“This is the only way; there is none other for the purity of vision. Do you follow this path. This is the bewilderment of Mara”**. So this is the real way, real teaching of the Buddha based on the Four Noble Truths. The Buddha, in his wonderful admonition to his disciples always said, **“ Friends, as a compassionate teacher I repeatedly say, here, there are root of trees, and empty houses, please practice, do not be heedless”**.

Therefore, let us understand these wonderful teaching of the Master and practice this teaching. Let us observe precepts and meditate gradually. As the Buddha once said, he who has no meditation has no wisdom who has no wisdom has no meditation. Let us all understand the Buddha’s Way for the attainment of Enlightenment and practice it in daily life starting on this special day of Vesak .

Budusaranai!

Morality, Concentration & Wisdom

By Bhante Gunaratana

In using the word morality for sila I would also suggest the words “discipline” or “restraint,” perhaps even in place of the word “morality,” which has a philosophical connotation. And, yes, it is correct to say that practicing sila—acting with discipline and restraint in daily life—lays an essential foundation for a good meditation practice.

Depending on how disciplined we are, our practice becomes successful. When we don’t have sufficient discipline, our practice will be difficult. Mindfulness may then be hard to attain or to sustain. We must have good discipline to be mindful. Most of the time we don’t remember to be mindful—we are not mindful of mindfulness! It’s harder yet when our minds are distracted or bothered by unwholesome actions we may have undertaken or be involved in.

The Pāli word sila recalls the word “sealant” in English. When you want to close a crack, you use a sealant and seal it off. You lay the foundation for a house and cover all the cracks, so no water will seep in, no insects will enter, and the foundation won’t

collapse. As a result, the foundation for your house remains firm and is sturdy enough to build upon. Sila is like that when it comes to meditation. It’s the foundation. Through restraint, through wholesome actions and decisions made in our daily lives, we lay this foundation.

If we don’t lay a good foundation for meditation, we can directly see the results in our practice. You may be meditating regularly, sitting a half-hour or an hour. All of a sudden one day, you can’t even sit for 10 minutes. Your mind is agitated, you’re constantly distracted, you simply can’t focus. Something you have done in your life—becoming enraged with someone, sexual misconduct, addictive behavior of all sorts or some other un-

wholesome action of body, speech or mind—has deeply registered in your subconscious mind. It keeps coming back up, making you feel remorseful, guilty, restless, full of worries. You just can’t sit!

On the other hand, it’s unrealistic to expect people to become paragons of virtue before they ever begin to meditate. If we wait until we are saints, if we put off meditation until our sila is perfect, then we will never meditate! Whatever our moral situation, we must begin. We make the commitment to root out unwholesome behavior and to encourage wholesome habits in our lives. It helps to make the commitment and to come back to it, time and time again: “OK, from now on I’m going to undertake this meditation practice and I’m going to try not to break my principles.”

If you do, then learn from those consequences. Feel the heaviness in your mind and in your life. Our goal is to make the mind light, to make our life light. After all, we are seeking to attain enlightenment, aren’t we?

Sila, though, should not be confused with a set of commandments. It is some-

thing you undertake by yourself, on your own accord. If you don’t make the effort, if you commit some unwholesome behavior, you reap the consequences and it affects your meditation practice. If you do make the effort, you’ll also see the positive consequences—it’s very cause and effect. We practice sila for own self-confidence and to overcome our weaknesses. So, sila is a way of behaving, that we ourselves choose. We undertake it by ourselves for the sake of a steady state of mind, for the sake of progress in our practice. Good sila strengthens our courage and ability. It gives support to our meditation practice and provides psychological strength. It is this foundation that is absolutely necessary to gain concentration.

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Through restraint, through wholesome actions and decisions made in our daily lives, we lay this foundation.

Purification of Mind

By Bhikkhu Bodhi

An ancient maxim found in the Dhammapada sums up the practice of the Buddha's teaching in three simple guidelines to training: to abstain from all evil, to cultivate good, and to purify one's mind. These three principles form a graded sequence of steps progressing from the outward and preparatory to the inward and essential. Each step leads naturally into the one that follows it, and the culmination of the three in purification of mind makes it plain that the heart of Buddhist practice is to be found here. Purification of mind as understood in the Buddha's teaching is the sustained endeavor to cleanse the mind of defilements, those dark unwholesome mental forces which run beneath the surface stream of consciousness vitiating our thinking, values, attitudes, and actions. The chief among the defilements are the three that the Buddha has termed the "roots of evil" -- greed, hatred, and delusion -- from which emerge their numerous offshoots and variants: anger and cruelty, avarice and envy, conceit and arrogance, hypocrisy and vanity, the multitude of erroneous views.

Contemporary attitudes do not look favorably upon such notions as defilement and purity, and on first encounter they may strike us as throwbacks to an outdated moralism, valid perhaps in an era when prudery and taboo were dominant, but having no claims upon us emancipated torchbearers of modernity. Admittedly, we do not all wallow in the mire of gross materialism and many among us seek our enlightenments and spiritual highs, but we want them on our own terms, and as heirs of the new freedom we believe they are to be won through an unbridled quest for experience without any special need for introspection, personal change, or self-control.

However, in the Buddha's teaching the criterion of genuine enlightenment lies precisely in purity of mind. The purpose of all insight and enlightened understanding is to liberate the mind from the defilements, and Nibbana itself, the goal of the teaching, is defined quite clearly as freedom from greed, hatred, and delusion. From the perspective of the Dhamma defilement and purity are not mere postulates of a rigid authoritarian moralism but real and solid facts essential to a correct understanding of the human situation in the world. As facts of lived experience, defilement and purity pose a vital distinction having a crucial significance for those who seek deliverance from suffering. They represent the two points between which the path to liberation unfolds -- the former its problematic and starting point, the latter its resolution and end. The defilements, the Buddha declares, lie at

the bottom of all human suffering. Burning within as lust and craving, as rage and resentment, they lay to waste hearts, lives, hopes, and civilizations, and drive us blind and thirsty through the round of birth and death. The Buddha describes the defilements as bonds, fetters, hindrances, and knots; thence the path to unbonding, release, and liberation, to untying the knots, is at the same time a discipline aimed at inward cleansing.

The work of purification must be undertaken in the same place where the defilements arise, in the mind itself, and the main method the Dhamma offers for purifying the mind is meditation. Meditation, in the Buddhist training, is neither a quest for self-effusive ecstasies nor a technique of home-applied psychotherapy, but a carefully devised method of mental development -- theoretically precise and practically efficient -- for attaining inner purity and spiritual freedom. The principal tools of Buddhist meditation are the core wholesome mental factors of energy, mindfulness, concentration, and understanding. But in the systematic practice of meditation, these are strengthened and yoked together in a program of self-purification which aims at extirpating the defilements root and branch so that not even the subtlest unwholesome stirrings remain.

Since all defiled states of consciousness are born from ignorance the most deeply embedded defilement, the final and ultimate purification of mind is to be accomplished through the instrumentality of wisdom, the knowledge and vision of things as they really are. Wisdom, however, does not arise through chance or random good intentions, but only in a purified mind. Thus in order for wisdom to come forth and accomplish the ultimate purification through the eradication of defilements, we first have to create a space for it by developing a provisional purification of mind -- a purification which, though temporary and vulnerable, is still indispensable as a foundation for the emergence of all liberative insight.

The achievement of this preparatory purification of mind begins with the challenge of self-understanding. To eliminate defilements we must first learn to know them, to detect them at work infiltrating and dominating our everyday thoughts and lives. For countless eons we have acted on the spur of greed, hatred, and delusion, and thus the work of self-purification cannot be executed hastily, in obedience to our demand for quick results. The task requires patience, care, and persistence -- and the Buddha's crystal clear instructions. For every defilement the Buddha in his compassion has given us the antidote, the method to emerge from it and vanquish it. By learning these principles and applying them properly, we can gradually wear away the most stubborn inner stains and reach the end of suffering, the "taintless liberation of the mind."

Contributions

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

The North Dakota Buddhist Vihara is a registered non-profit charitable organization in the State of North Dakota.

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***
- ***Sil Observance***
- ***Volunteer activities***
- ***Youth Club***



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