



# Minnesota Buddhist

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## **Significance of Vesak**

*By Bhikkhuni Satima*

‘Vesak or Buddha Day is a time for Buddhists around the world to reflect on the Buddha’s gift to humanity.’ (Bhikkhu Nyanaponika Thera)

Vesak the thrice Blessed Day is the most important and the holiest day for all Buddhists the world over. It is mostly a Theravada Buddhist holiday celebrated in countries like Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos and in some Western countries. Vesak full moon is the most powerful of all the full moon days.

The triple events, the birth, the Enlightenment, and the Parinibbana, which took place on the full moon day of the month of Vesak is also called Vesak. According to the Indian calendar that was used in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC, Vesak was the second month of the year. Now, according to the present Gregorian calendar Vesak is on the full moon day of the fifth month, the month of May.

In countries where the Theravada tradition is prevalent the celebrations run for a few days. The Temples, houses and the streets are decorated with lanterns, Buddhist flags, colored lights, oil lamps and pandols depicting the life of the Buddha. The lay people celebrate by doing different acts of charity, observing eight or ten precepts and in meditating and chanting. Some distribute free food and drinks to the needy, orphanages,

hospitals and to the inmates in the homes for the elderly. Children and adults visit the temples with flowers, candles, incense, and all sorts of offerings to the Buddha. But, as Venerable Mahinda says, ‘The significance of Vesak lies with the Buddha and His universal peace message to mankind.’

The three sacred events that took place on the full moon day of Vesak are;

### The birth of a unique and supreme human being

The first is the celebration of the birth of Prince Siddhartha in 563 BC. Queen Maha Maya had to travel from Kapilavatthu to her parents place in Koliya for her confinement as it was the custom at that time. On her way feeling tired she stopped at the Lumbini Park, now in Nepal to rest. There under a Sal tree holding on to a branch she gave birth to a baby boy. As the texts say it was a miraculous birth and soon after being born the infant prince took seven steps and proclaimed, ‘I am the Lord of both heaven and earth. This is my last birth.’

### The Enlightenment of Ascetic Gotama

The second celebration is the Awakening of the Ascetic Gotama. After the Great Renunciation, the Ascetic Gotama wandered around studying under famous and great masters of that time and indulging in severe self mortification in his quest for liberation for six long years. Realizing that none of these

worked, taking the Middle Path, he sat under a tree (later know as the Bodhi Tree) in Buddha Gaya with the determination that he will not get up till he realized the Truth. With the dawn of the full moon day in the month of Vesak Ascetic Gotama attained Supreme Enlightenment thus putting an end to old age, sickness, death and suffering. He opened the door to the Deathless not only for Himself, but for all beings. Ascetic Gotama became a Sama Sambuddha at the age of thirty five.

### The Parinibbana of the Buddha

The third celebration is the final passing away or parinibbana of the World Honored One - The Buddha. After setting the Wheel of Dhamma in motion and teaching for forty five years, He guided many beings to the Deathless. He established the order of monks and nuns so that the Dhamma can be preserved and passed on from generation to generation.

Finally, at the age of eighty in the city of Kusinagara, lying down between two sal trees He finally entered parinibbana. His last teaching and His last words were; 'Impermanent are all conditioned phenomena, be a refuge unto yourself, strive on with diligence,'

His whole Teaching can be condensed into this one verse from the Dhammapada;

***Sabba Pāpassa Akaranam  
Kusalassa upasampada  
Sacitta Pariyodapanam  
Etam Buddhāna Sāsanam.***

*Not to do any evil,  
To cultivate good,  
To purify one's mind,  
This is the teaching of the Buddhas.*

On this Thrice Blessed Day all Buddhists direct their minds to the Blessed One - The World Honored One who by his own strenuous

effort gained Supreme Enlightenment out of compassion for all beings.

*'Vesak offers Buddhists an opportunity to reflect on the life and teachings of the Buddha. It highlights the potential for inner peace and happiness that lies within us all.'*  
(Master Maha Thera)

### **Higher Ordination of Samanera Bishokirti Maharjan**



Samanera Bishokirti Maharjan was born in Kathmandu, Nepal. He was ordained as a monk at the age of 14 years at Sri Kirti Vihara, Kirtipura, Kathmandu, under the preceptor Most Ven. Buddhaghosha Mahathera, and under the teachers the late Ven. Sudharshan Maha Thero, the abbot of Sri Kirti Vihara and professor of Tribuwana University in Kirtipura, and Ven. Kirtijothi Thero, the present abbot of Sri Kirti Vihara.

Samanera Bishokirti Maharjan went to Sri Lanka for Buddhist studies at Parama Dhamma Chetiya Pirivena, Mount Lavinia under the directions of late Ven. Dr. Mapalagama Wipulasara Maha Thero, the abbot and director of the Parama Dhamma Chetiya Pirivena. There, he studied Pirivena Monastic Education and Oriental studies and obtained a University Diploma. He speaks seven languages.

Presently, Samanera Bishokirti Maharjan is a resident monk at Minnesota Buddhist Vihara. He is the Principal of Minnesota Buddhist Vihara Dhamma School. He assists in meditation, religious, social and cultural activities of the community. Samanera

Bishokirti is registered licensed minister of Minnesota for conducting religious activities.

Samanera Bishokirti Maharjan will obtain higher ordination on May 06, 2007 at Bhavana Society, West Virginia, under the preceptor Most Ven. Dr. Henepola Gunarathana Maha Thero, the founder and abbot of Bhavana Society and Chief Monk of the U.S.A., and under the teachers Ven. Witiyala Seewalie Thero, the founder/ president and abbot of the MN Buddhist Vihara, and Ven. Kirtijothi Thero.

## Minnesota Buddhist Vihara Main Activities

(October 27, 2006 to May 6, 2007)

### October 2006

- **27** - Meditation workshop at St. Cloud State University, St. Cloud
- **28** - Minnesota Buddhist Vihara Annual Robe offering ceremony (Katina Puja)
- **28** - Special dhamma talk at University of Minnesota by Ven. H. Gunaratana Nayaka Maha Thero
- **29** - Meditation workshop at Vietnamese Temple in Blaine
- **31** - Special dhamma talk at Iowa State University, Ames by Ven. H. Gunaratana Nayaka Maha Thero

### November 2006

- **01** - Meditation workshop Sprit Room, Fargo, North Dakota
- **02** - Special dhamma talk at University of North Dakota By Ven. H. Gunaratana Nayaka Maha Thero and Ven. Maitipe Wimalasara Thero
- **02** - Special dhamma talk at University of Minnesota Moorhead By Ven. H. Gunaratana Nayaka Maha Thero and Ven. Maitipe Wimalasara Thero

### December 2006

- **01** - Ven. Witiyala Seewalie and Ven. Bishokirti Maharjan joint as volunteer

teaching staff of City View Community School, Minneapolis

### January 2007

- **01** - Special blessing ceremony for New Year celebration

### February 2007

- **03** - Sri Lankan Independence day celebration

### April 2007

- **02** - Ven. Seewalie Thero was appointed McKinley Community board of directors to serve two years
- **14** - Bak Maha Ulela
- **20** - Memorial Ceremony at St. Cloud State university for Virginia Tech victims by Ven Seewalie, Ven. Maitipe Wimalasara Thero, Bhikkuni Sathima
- **30** - Meditation workshop at St. Cloud State University by Ven. Wimalasara Thero and Ven. Seewalie Thero

### May 2007

- **4** - Meditation workshop at Iowa State University, Ames by Ven. Maitipe Wimalasara Thero and Bhikkuni Sathima
- **5** - Vesak celebration, special dhamma talk by Ven. Maitipe Wimalasara Thero
- **6** - Higher ordination of Ven. Bishokirti Maharjan at Bhavana Society, West Virginia

## Establishments of Mindfulness

By Ven. Bhikkhu T. Seelananda

Since Buddhism is an unparalleled teaching of the Enlightened One, it is a unique teaching in the world. It is neither a religion nor a philosophy. There are three main universal principles in Buddhism. They are: **The Four Noble Truths, the Dependent Origination and the Three Characteristics of Existence.** In connection with

the teaching of the Buddha, the Buddha once revealed what he taught, as the Dhamma. In declaring them, he taught the 37 factors of Enlightenment. Of the 37 factors, the first is the Four Establishments of Mindfulness through which one can attain the Supreme Bliss of Nibbana.

In order to explain these four establishments of mindfulness the Buddha delivered a special Discourse called 'Maha Satipatthana Sutta' which means the Great Discourse of the establishment of mindfulness. This was delivered at the place known as Kuru in the present capital of India, New Delhi. In the very beginning of the Discourse, giving the preamble, the Buddha said, "**O monks, this is the one way for the purification of beings, for the overcoming of sorrow and lamentation, for the ridding of pain and grief, for reaching the path, for the attainment of Nibbana; namely the four establishments of mindfulness.**"

This is one of the most sacred and respected, as well as long discourses delivered by the Buddha. People read and re-read this discourse with a sense of great honor, especially in Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, and Laos. This is certainly a great source of inspiration.

At the end of this discourse with firm assurance, the Buddha said, if one would follow and practice this technique of meditation, one would either attain full bliss of enlightenment (Arahant-ship) or if residues of defilement remained, would attain the state of non-returnee (Anagami). This is absolutely the most significant discourse for understanding the teaching of the Buddha on meditation or mental development, both Samatha and Vipassana, meaning calm and insight. One can state that it is the practical manual of Buddhist meditation. So, let us now come to understand the technique of this meditation as it is dealt with in this discourse.

The Buddha at the very beginning said that there are four establishments of mindfulness, which when developed and cultivated are conducive to maintaining serenity, insight, and to attain enlightenment here and now. So, it is obvious that in this discourse there are instructions for both serenity and insight meditation through which one can attain enlightenment. So what are the four establishments of mindfulness?

The four establishments of mindfulness are:

1. The establishment of mindfulness of body as body.
2. The establishment of mindfulness of feelings as feelings.
3. The establishment of mindfulness of consciousness as consciousness.
4. The establishment of mindfulness of mental objects as mental objects.

### The establishment of mindfulness of body

Explaining the establishing of mindfulness of body, the Buddha once said, "**Monks, when mindfulness of breathing is developed and cultivated it is of great benefit. When mindfulness of breathing is developed and cultivated it fulfills the four establishments of mindfulness, when the four establishments of mindfulness are developed and cultivated they fulfill the seven enlightenment factors, when the seven enlightenment factors are developed and cultivated they fulfill knowledge and deliverance**" (M.N. Anapanasati Sutta)

As the Buddha said, first one has to practice and develop mindfulness of breathing, which then leads to the four foundations of mindfulness and to the culmination of the attainment of Nibbana. In the Maha Satipatthana Sutta, the Buddha elaborated how to practice and contemplate on the four establishments of mindfulness. Of the four beginning with the first one, the Buddha said clearly to practice the establishment of mindfulness of body as body. For this one should choose a suitable, congenial place. He recommended three places

1. go to the woods
2. go to the foot of a tree
3. go to an empty house

After selecting a suitable place one has to sit properly. The body should be straight, erect body, nose is in line with the navel, half-closed eyes, ears in line with shoulders, tongue should be rested against the upper teeth and then you should keep a calm and quiet mind, a steady and un-sluggish mind and completely relax your body and mind. That is the basic instructions given. Then you have to practice mindfulness of breathing. When you focus your attention on your breath you can understand the natural flow of your breath. That is your '**home object**'. One has to continue this meditation vigilantly, diligently and wholeheartedly. In this context, the first section of the discourse, the body means not the physical form, but one's breath. Therefore, first one has to

establish mindfulness of breathing for the success of this meditation. When practiced, there are 16 different steps of breath to be understood and that have been summarized into four in this discourse.

When we practice meditation, even before that, first of all there are four important factors to be understood and contemplated upon. These four are:

1. Practice Ardently, strenuously (atapi)
2. Clearly comprehending ( Sampajano)
3. Practice it mindfully ( Satima)
4. Keeping a Balanced mind by removing covetousness and aversion

Whenever you have a balanced mind there is no ignorance within you, instead, you are developing wisdom and insight. The practitioners should observe both the internal body and external body. Internal body is the breath body while the external body is the corporeal body. When one contemplates and trains one's mind in this manner, one would be able to understand and realize that there is nothing permanent, nothing to cling to in the world. The Buddha said, in Pali, the language through which the Buddha communicated "*Na ca kinci loke upadiyati*".

The Buddha again pointed out that there are five other objects to be developed for the establishment of mindfulness of body. We shall now examine these five objects in brief.

### 1. Mindfulness of the four postures:

In our daily lives, whatever we are committed to, our postures could be summarized into four; namely, standing, walking, sitting, and sleeping. So the Buddha admonished to be aware, mindful of whatever action we are doing while we are in these postures.

### 2. Mindfulness (clear awareness) of all actions:

The Buddha said, "When going forward and turning and when coming back, be aware of what you are doing. When looking forward or back, be aware of what you are doing. When extending or bending your limbs, be aware of your actions. When wearing your garments and ornaments be aware of what you are doing. When eating, drinking, chewing, swallowing and savoring, be aware of what you are doing. When passing excrement or urine, be aware of what you are doing (even when using toilet paper be mindful). When

walking, standing, sitting, falling asleep, waking up; in speaking or staying silent, be aware of what you are doing". That is how one has to be aware of one's actions. That is called clear comprehension.

### 3. Mindfulness on the repulsiveness of body:

In this section one has to reflect upon the nature of one's own body and honestly and realistically understand the nature of the different parts of the body such as: head-hair, body hair, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, blood, bones, kidney, pus, etc. The Buddha has classified this body into 32 parts. They are 1. *kesa* (head-hairs), 2. *loma* (body hairs), 3. *naka* (nails), 4. *danta* (teeth), 5. *taco* (skin), 6. *mansam* (flesh), 7. *naharu* (sinews), 8. *atthi* (bones), 9. *atthiminja* (bone-marrow), 10. *vakkam* (kidneys), 11. *hadayam* (heart), 12. *yakanam* (liver), 13. *kilomakam* (diaphragm), 14. *Pihakam* (spleen), 15. *papphasam* (lungs) 16. *antam* (large intestines) 17. *antaganam* (small intestines) 18. *udariyam* (contents of the stomach) 19. *karisam* (feces) 20. *pittam* (bile) 21. *semham* (phlegm ) 22. *pubbo* (pus) 23. *lohitam* (blood) 24. *sedo* (sweat) 25. *medo* (fat) 26. *assu* (tears) 27. *vasa* (grease) 28. *kelo* (spittle) 29. *singanika* (snot) 30. *lasika* (oil of the joints) 31. *muttam* (urine) 32. *mattakemattalungam* (brain marrow). All these are impermanent. We all strive to cling to them as our own, but in realizing the nature, one has to see each as, ***this is not mine, this I am not, this is not myself.***

### 4. Mindfulness on the four elements:

There are four great elements in the world. Things animate and inanimate, are composed of these four great elements namely; earth, water, fire, and air. When one practices meditation, one has to pay attention to the body and be mindful on the four elements of the body. If one is mindful, one can understand the four elements in one's daily consumption and activities. Especially when we practice walking meditation, we have to give attention to the feet in order to understand the four elements of the body.

### 5. Mindfulness on a corpse:

According to this teaching, one has to be mindful to understand the nature of a corpse. After one's death, if not embalmed, it will bloat, discolor and fester. In ancient times the corpses were thrown away into the charnel ground. Then the practitioners were able to go there and examine the corpse and compare them with their own body and understand the nature of death and impermanence

as well. What we could do today, in order to practice this meditation is we can be mindful of the corpse after visiting the funeral of a person, maybe one of our own relatives.

### The establishment of mindfulness of feelings

Consequently, the Buddha, in this discourse, very clearly explained how to practice the establishment of feelings as feelings. In line with the teaching of the Buddha, there are 108 types of feelings (2 kinds 3 kinds 5 kinds 6 kinds 18 kinds and 36 kinds and further extensive external and internal feelings, also 108 kinds of feelings) but in general, the Buddha points out three kinds of feeling in many of his discourses. Feeling arises dependent upon contact. The three kinds of feelings are:

1. Pleasant feelings
2. Painful feelings
3. Neither pleasant nor painful feelings.

When one is mindful, one can understand these different feelings. When there is a pleasant feeling one has to understand it as a pleasant feeling, when there is a painful feeling one has to understand it as a painful feeling, and when the feeling is neither pleasant nor painful one has to understand it as it is. It is to be clearly understood that it is because of feeling that craving which is the root of all unwholesome things and the cause of wandering in samsara (the cycle of births and deaths). Then dependent on craving, clinging arises and so forth.

### The establishment of mindfulness of consciousness

The third establishment of mindfulness, in accordance with this discourse, is the establishment of consciousness. Consciousness is the most vital energy in our body. Consciousness, itself, is a sense-base (manayatana). According to the *Abhidhammic* teaching, consciousness is classified into 121 types. When consciousness is based on eye, it is called eye-consciousness, ear, it is called ear-consciousness, in like manner, when it is based on nose it is called nose-consciousness, tongue, it is called tongue consciousness, body it is called body-consciousness and mind, it is called mind-consciousness. When one practices this meditation one has to be aware of the nature of consciousness. It means being aware of what type of consciousness arises and passes; whether the consciousness is lustful or free from lust, hating or free from hate, deluded or free from delusion etc.

### The establishment of mindfulness of mental objects:

The last, but not the least, is the establishment of mindfulness on mental objects. This is the consequence of practicing the first three establishments. In other words, this is the realization aspect of the entire teaching. When one practices, develops, and cultivates mindfulness of the first three contemplations, one can penetratively realize the nature of five hindrances. They are; sensual desire, ill-will, sloth-and-torpor, restlessness, and doubt. Then realizes the five aggregates of existence namely; form aggregate, feeling aggregate, perception aggregate, volitional formation aggregate, and consciousness aggregate. Then the six internal bases (eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind) and the six external bases (sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, and mental-object). Thereafter, the seven factors of Enlightenment namely; the factor of mindfulness, factor of investigation of the dhamma, the factor of energy, the factor of rapture, the factor of tranquility, the factor of concentration and the factor of equanimity. These seven factors of Enlightenment, the Buddha said, are to be perfectly developed.

Furthermore, one can realize the four Noble Truths, (suffering as a facet of truth, the cause of suffering as a facet of truth, cessation of suffering as a facet of truth, and the noble path leading to the cessation of suffering as a facet of truth). That, itself, is the realization of the teachings of the Buddha. If one can understand and realize the four Noble Truths, one can realize the three characteristics of existence. They are impermanence, dissatisfaction and soullessness. At the same time, s/he can understand the Dependent Origination also. With the realization of these three main teachings, principles of the Buddha, one can understand and realize the whole teaching of the Buddha and attain supreme bliss of Enlightenment. That is the goal of the teaching of the Buddha.

At the end of this discourse the Buddha assuredly stated that if one would practice this teaching perfectly for seven (7) years, as he had explained in the Discourse, one would be able to attain Enlightenment. Then the Buddha said, forget about seven years, within six years one would be able to do it. Then he said within five years, four years, three years, two years, in one (1) year one could attain Enlightenment. Then further reducing the period, the Buddha said, even within six months, within five months, four months, three months, two months, or one (1) month one could

attain Enlightenment. Lessening the burden further, the Buddha still said, within 14 days one would be able to attain Enlightenment. Then, finally, the Buddha said, one should not spend even 14 days, if practiced well; within seven days one would be able to attain the supreme bliss of Nibbana, the Enlightenment. Therefore, let us all strive to understand and practice these ancient teachings of the unparalleled Master, the Buddha. .

*May we all attain the supreme bliss of Nibbana!*

Abbot and Dhamma Advisor,  
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## **Buddha's Approach to Questions**

*By Prof. Kottegoda S. Warnasuriya Ph. D.*

Buddha just after his enlightenment decided not to preach what he realized in the process his meditation due to the deepness of Nibbanic experience. He thought that people are full of dust and their intellectual capacity is covered by a strong defilement called ignorance (Avijja). He emphatically said that this Dharma is meant only for the wise not for the unwise (pannavantassa ayam dhammo, na ayam dhammo duppannassa). Later he changed his mind and decided to preach thinking that there are people in the world with little dust. He thought of preaching first to his former teachers, Alarakalama and Uddakaramaputta.<sup>1</sup> Then he came to know that both the teachers have already passed away. His next choice was his former colleagues, five ascetics (panca vaggiya bhikkhu), who were attending on him while he was practicing severe self-mortification for six years. So the Buddha went to the Deer Park, Benares where the ascetics were living. Before delivering his first sermon he had to convince the ascetics that he was the Buddha, the Enlightened One. In this process he exclusively referred to his new achievement. He said that in the process of his meditation 'light arose in him, knowledge arose in him, wisdom arose in him, this is my last existence and I have no re-becoming' (aloko udapadi, vijja udapadi, panna udapadi natthi'dani punabbhavo).<sup>2</sup> This clearly indicates that Buddhism is an intellectual tradition or philosophy, and the emancipation depends on wisdom (panna).

During his time Buddha was considered a teacher of great wisdom and his popularity grew rapidly among other recluses and Brahmanas. Many householders, rulers, ministers, recluses as well as Brahmanas came to him with questions, philosophical problems and so forth looking for answers, sometimes for a second opinion. In this respect he stood aloof among the recluses and religious teachers in his day.

According to Pali Nikaya texts, Buddha had his own way of answering these questions. His way of preaching can be divided into two: 1 Preaching categorically (ekamsika desana), 2 Preaching non-categorically (anekamsika desana). This may be due to the nature of the problem in the question concerned. In this respect we have to accept the fact that the Buddha did not want talk about some propositions that he might have thought not fitting to the context. Let us see his approach to questions. This can be divided into four in accordance to Pali Nikaya sutras.

1. The questions that ought to be answered categorically (ekamsa vyakaraniya panha). This type of questions is very simple to answer. For example, if somebody asks a question regarding human existence in the Samsara Buddha's answer was suffering. Sometimes he used to use "yes" and "no" as the answer was depending on what was asked by the interlocutor.
2. The questions that ought to be answered analytically (vibhajja vyakaraniya panha). This type of questions was not simple, therefore the Buddha used a different method in answering: that is the analytical way. The contents of the question were divided into parts before answering. And then the Buddha answered part by part. For example if somebody were to ask a question regarding the truth, it had to be answered definitely analytically as the truth is divided into two and four.
3. The questions that ought to be answered with a counter question (patipuccha vyakaraniya panha). If the formulation of the question concerned does not convey the exact idea, definitely a counter question has to be asked in that case. For example if the question is regarding the world, some clarification is necessary before answering the question. Definitely Buddha had to ask the question: What do you mean by the world (loka)? Because there

<sup>1</sup> Vinaya, I. p.7

<sup>2</sup> Vinaya, I. p. 9

are two interpretations regarding the world, the universe and the individual.<sup>3</sup>

4. The questions that should be set aside without giving answers (thapaniya panha).<sup>4</sup> Even though these four types of answers to questions are found in Nikaya texts we do not come across illustrations for them. In the commentary to the Anguttara Nikaya,<sup>5</sup> the Milindapanha,<sup>6</sup> the Abhidharmakosa and the Sphutarthabhidharmakosavyakhya we find some illustrations. These four questions can be divided into two: categorical and non-categorical. The first three are categorical while the fourth is non-categorical.

Regarding the first three types of questions there is no problem, but the fourth, the Avyakata or non-categorical questions which were set aside by the Buddha without giving answers became very controversial in Buddhism. The commentaries do not give definite and acceptable answer as to why the Buddha set aside these questions. The commentators in very simple terms mention that these are not relevant to the path and realization of the truth. They are meaningless and not conducive to Nibbanic experience.<sup>7</sup> This is what the Buddha said when he was asked to give his opinion. Let us have these questions first before we go into details.

1. Is the world eternal (*sassato loko*)?
2. Is the world not eternal (*asassato loko*)?
3. Is the world finite (*antava loko*)?
4. Is the world infinite (*anantava loko*)?
5. Is the soul identical with the body (*tam jivam tam sariram*)?
6. Is the soul different from the body (*annam jivam annam sariram*)?
7. Does the emancipated one exist after death (*hoti tathagato parammarana*)?
8. Does not the emancipated one exist after death (*na hoti tathagato parammarana*)?
9. Does and does not exist the emancipated one after death (*hoti ca na hoti ca tathagato parammarana*)?

<sup>3</sup> “Api caham avuso Imasmim yeva byamamate kalebare sasannimhi samanake lokan ca pannapemi, lokasamudayan ca lokanirodhan ca lokanirodhagaminim patipadan ti.”

Anguttara Nikaya, II. p. 48

<sup>4</sup> Digha Nikaya, III. p.229; Anguttara Nikaya, II. 46

<sup>5</sup> Anguttara Nikaya Atthakatha, II. 308, 309 AA., II. 308, 309

<sup>6</sup> Milinda Panha, 144, 145

<sup>7</sup> Samyutta Nikaya, III. 182

10. Neither exist nor does not exist the emancipated one after death (*neva hoti na na hoti tathagato parammarana*)?<sup>8</sup>

There are some interpretations and conclusions made by some modern scholars regarding Buddha's attitude to these questions. One suggestion is that the Buddha was a practical man and he was not interested in what is not relevant to his practice and also he was not interested in metaphysics. Buddha emphatically said that without pondering over the origin, duration and extent of the world as well as the identity of soul with the body and the position of the emancipated one after death we can realize Nibbana. Therefore, it is a waste of time to go into metaphysics and speculations due to the fact that one cannot find proper answers to those hypotheses and simply we will be entangled in that abyss. In the Culamalunkya Sutta of the Majjhima Nikaya<sup>9</sup> Buddha likened the metaphysician to a man wounded by an arrow who before being treated wanted to know who shot the arrow, from which direction it came and what sort of arrow was it etc. The metaphysical inquiries are unnecessary for the spiritual life and they can lead one to speculation debate and argumentation which are harmful to spiritual development.

The second is the agnostic approach to these questions. Some scholars have maintained that the Buddha was an agnostic. Buddha simply did not know the answers to these questions. Therefore he set them aside without giving answers. Prof. T.R.V. Murti in his Central Philosophy of Buddhism states that these questions are similar to the celebrated antinomies of Kant and the cataskoti (tetralemma) of Madhyamikas.<sup>10</sup>

The first four questions (in Mahayana texts eight questions are formulated regarding the duration and the extent of the world in the manner: ‘is. is not. is and is not, neither is nor not is) are regarding the duration of the world in time and the extent of it in space. Human reason attempts to understand the ultimate unconditioned ground of objects. This is like a transcendent substance like the Prakrti (the primordial ground of phenomena) of the Sankhya philosophy. The Prakrti (the primordial ground of phenomena) is infinite all pervasive cause which is capable of producing all

<sup>8</sup> Majjhima Nikaya, I. 462, 484; II. 238. Samyutta Nikaya, III. 182, 204

<sup>9</sup> Majjhima Nkaya, Sutra 63

<sup>10</sup> Murti, T. R. V., Central Philosophy of Buddhism, London, George Allen and Unwin, p.39



things. The aim of rational cosmology (cosmological speculations) is to reach this ultimate unconditioned ground of empirical objects by means of regressive chain of reasoning (i.e. arguing from effect to cause). This is not a legitimate way of arguing. According to Kant, this is beyond the possibility of experience.<sup>11</sup> The first thesis is eternalist. The eternalism does not deny the empirical change of the world, on the other hand it emphasizes that there is an eternal transcendent ground or substratum of the changing phenomena. The antithesis denies the existence of this transcendent ground. Buddha knew both these theses, i.e. Samkhya conception of Prakrti and the materialist denial of the non-empirical transcendent ground.

The formulation of the problems in the form of thesis antithesis shows the conflict in reason. Buddha realized that the conflict is not on the empirical level and also they cannot be settled by empirical means. Reason involves in deep and interminable conflict when it tries to go beyond the empirical world to seek the ultimate ground of phenomena. The speculative metaphysics generates conflicts and it is not, therefore, not the right way to come to conclusions. If one theorist says 'yes' to a question the other says 'no' to the same question. According to the Buddha, these are nothing but wrong views (ditthis). In the Brahmajala Sutra of the Digha Nikaya, Buddha characterizes all speculations as dogmas (ditthivada).<sup>12</sup>

Buddha was an experientialist not a logician. He believed firmly that logic and reason establish conflicting theories. All these ten or fourteen questions can be divided into two on the ground of eternalism (sassatavada) and nihilism (ucchedavada). Buddha's position was neither eternal nor nihilist but middle. Therefore all these questions do not go with the middle. And also he said that he was not a categorist (ekamsavado), but an analyst (vibhajjavado).<sup>13</sup> The middle way is not the dualism. It is beyond language and is a wordless state.

The position of the emancipated one after death cannot be measured due to the fact that he has already beyond the empirical world. He has transcended all the means of empirical expressions, language and words. T. R. V. Murti

states that the Tathagata as the Perfect Man (uttama puriso parama puriso) is the ultimate essence of the universe.<sup>14</sup> His position is analogous to that of God of Rational Theology.

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## The Four Noble Truths

By Kasun Ranatunga

1. *Everyone knows unhappiness (sorrow)*  
*Anything can be sorrow from disappointment to losing. When you loose something, that's sorrow, when you win something, you feel happy, but in one way or another, you will be a loser too.*
2. *This sorrow has a cause*  
*When you break something, there is no "accident" in things. There has to be a cause to everything and this is "ignorance" or "sorrow" from people like you.*
3. *Sorrow can be brought to an end*  
*When something begins it has to end, Buddha taught us that ignorance is the something that causes sorrow and the way to overcome it is found in the fourth truths.*
4. *The way to bring sorrow to an end*  
*The Noble Eightfold Path is the way to end sorrow. This path is like a roadway that has a start and a finish only there are eight paths and eight things to learn to get to the finish line. The starting line is like the starting of sorrow and it's endless. The finish line is like the end of sorrow and you're happy, you're free, your sorrow fell right off the edge while you were in the safety of the Noble Eightfold Path so here they are:*
  1. *Right Understanding*
  2. *Right Thought (Aim)*
  3. *Right Speech*
  4. *Right Livelihood*
  5. *Right Effort*
  6. *Right Action*
  7. *Right Self awareness (Mindfulness)*
  8. *Right Meditation*

<sup>11</sup> Murti, Ibid., p.39

<sup>12</sup> Digha Nikaya, Brahmajala sutra (Sutra 1)

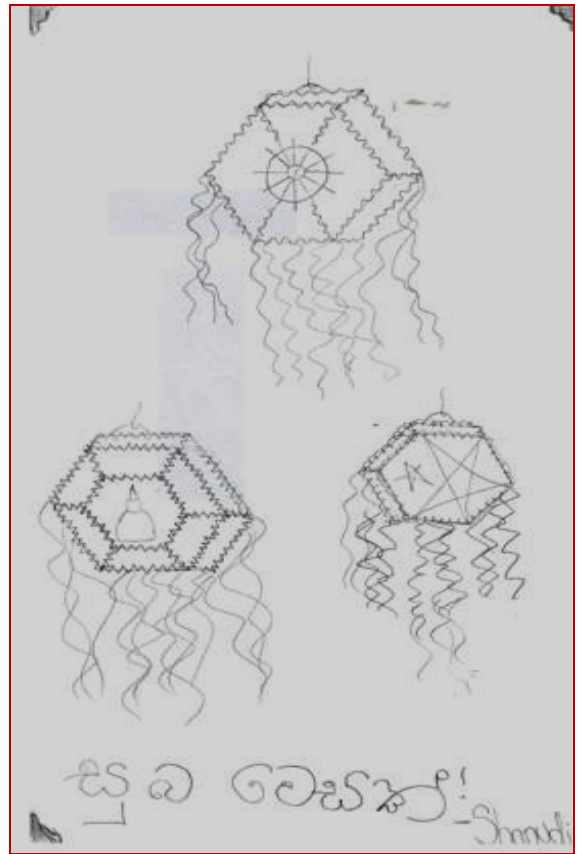
<sup>13</sup> 'Vibhajjavado'ham, naham ekamsavado.' Majjhima Nikaya, II. p. 197

<sup>14</sup> 'Uttamapuriso, paramapuriso' Samyutta Nikaya, IV. p.580

# Vesak

By Lahiru Samarasinghe

Vesak is the birthday and the passing away of the Buddha. It is also Buddha's day of Enlightenment. It is celebrated on the full moon day of May (Vesak). Buddhists celebrate Vesak by hoisting the Buddhist Flag, offering beautiful flowers, and observing the eight Precepts. Government, specifically in Sri Lanka closes all liquor shops and slaughterhouses. Devoted Buddhists will spend the whole day wearing a special white dress and observing the Precepts in temples. Some will make special lamps to light in their house or at a temple. Others will listen to monks reciting verses said by Buddha over 2500 years ago. Vesak isn't only celebrated in Sri Lanka, but in other countries too, such as Hong Kong, Macau, and South Korea, but in these cases Vesak is celebrated as the Buddha's birth. Vesak is also known in Japan as *Hanamatusuri*.

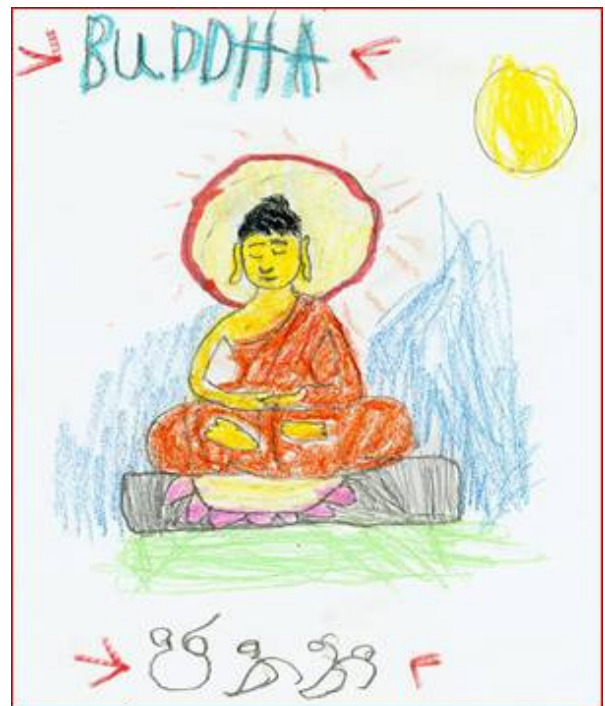


By Shanudi Herath

## Dhamma School Student's Artwork



By Sathira



By Janani Ranatunga

## MBV ACTIVITIES



*Dhamma School Senior Class Students*



*Banis Kema (eating buns) contest at the New Year Celebrations*



*Learning Sinhala at the Dhamma School*



*Bak Maha Ulela 2007*



*Paying respect to parents during Sinhala New Year Celebrations*



*Bak Maha Ulela 2007*