



Minnesota Buddhist

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Volume 5, Issue 1

Spring (Vesak) 2009

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Why should we practice meditation?

By Bhikkhu T. Seelananda

Meditation is a common practice in almost all religions today. Some religions had no formal practice of meditation or mind culture; but with the unprecedented increase of unrest and stress all over the world, various religions have become more innovative, to be more introspective to find solace rather from the outside invisible forces. As a result, in some societies the place of religious rites and rituals have become less significant, and meditation has gained remarkable new heights.

Today meditation is practiced with a view to attain a variety of ends. Mankind has practiced meditation going back some 3000 years or more and it is not new to some ancient religions and systems of thinking such as Hinduism and Buddhism. Basically, in Hinduism and Buddhism, meditation is recommended as a fundamental requirement to the attainment of Moksha or Nirvana. In theistic religions, there is no necessity to practice meditation to reach their goal. They consider it an essential need to build real faith in God the Creator or the Trinity.

For the purpose of this article, we will restrict ourselves to discussing Buddhist meditation or the methods of meditation taught by Samma Sambuddha, and strive to understand why we should practice this form of meditation.

Buddhist meditation, inevitably, is not a meditation. It is a mental development (Bhavana). The meaning given to the word 'Meditate' in the Cambridge Dictionary of American English is: "to think seriously about

something, esp. over a period of time. If you meditate, you give your attention to one thing, and do not think about anything else, usually as a religious activity or a way of calming or relaxing your mind." This definition does not give the real meaning of Buddhist meditation.

First, Buddhist meditation is not simply thinking. Secondly, the purpose of Buddhist meditation is not only to calm down one's mind or to come to a state of serenity. There is something beyond calmness or relaxation. The above definition is however, very correct with the first level of Buddhist meditation. That is serenity, concentration or calmness meditation (samatha), but there is another level in Buddhist meditation. It is more significant in comparison to other techniques of meditation used in the world today. It is to be stated that this is unique to the Buddha. Only a Buddha discovers this meditation or mental development, known as insight or wisdom meditation (Vipassana). The Buddha has encouraged humans to learn and practice these teachings for their own benefit as well as the benefit of others living in society. If one is practicing the Dhamma, the teachings of the Buddha, one lives righteously. A righteous life is always fruitful and beneficial.

In the time of the Buddha, many learnt and practiced both serenity and insight meditation, and reached one or more of the four stages to freedom from obsession with the five senses and mind.

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The four stages are:

- Stream enterer
- Once returner
- Non-returner
- Enlightened One.

In accordance with the teaching of Buddha, this Dhamma is for the wise not for fools. He who learns the Dhamma correctly and practices as instructed can become imperturbable from worldly changes.

In ancient times, there were many masters who practiced samatha or concentration meditation. The *Bodhisatva* (one who aspires to Buddha-hood) *Gotama* too, after the renunciation, went from teacher to teacher seeking what is skillfulness (*kusala*). He met two of the foremost masters of the day under whom he learnt serenity, concentration or calmness meditation (*samatha*). As mentioned in his discourses, he practiced this form of meditation to develop and gain the eight kinds of ecstasies under these two masters.

By the same token in Buddhist literature, we come across many sages (*Rishis*) who had developed these eight ecstasies and had performed many kinds of miracles. But what one must understand first and foremost is that the purpose of Buddhist meditation is not to perform miracles. Buddhists do not walk on water or fly through air. The Buddha himself denounced such performances. Since mindfulness is the watch-word in Buddhism, the real miracle for Buddhists is walking on earth with mindfulness and clear comprehension (*satisampajañña*).

With his own efforts the *Bodhisatva* ascetic, formerly prince *Siddhartha*, practiced meditation to realize *Nibbana* on the Full Moon Day of May (*Vesak*) and became the supremely Enlightened One in the world. His supreme Enlightenment was the result of his persistent practice. The technique he adopted for mental development was mindfulness of breathing. On that special day, *Vesak* full moon day, he practiced the same meditation for the attainment of enlightenment. When one practices and develops concentration one can gain different levels of mental tranquility or ecstasies. But what is unique to the

Teaching of the Buddha [*Sri Saddhamma*] as said earlier, is *vipassana* or insight meditation. A question asked instantaneously is, "What is insight?" And that is the insight of reality in oneself and the whole cosmos.

Within the universe there are some everlasting principles, applicable to animate or inanimate things. They are to be known and seen by oneself through one's own wisdom. Then only can one understand reality. Then with that understanding one does not cling to things in the world. When there is nothing to cling to, no attachment, then, there is no craving. If there is no craving and attachment, there is no way to renew existence or re-becoming/rebirth. That is the way to end the *samsaric* journey, the never ending cycle of death and rebirth.

The Buddha once said, "**Monks, this *samsara* is without discoverable beginning. A first point is not discerned of beings roaming and wandering on hindered by ignorance and fettered by craving. For such a long time monks, you have experienced suffering, anguish, and disaster, and swelled the cemetery.**" If one can reduce one's suffering, stress or distress one can lead a happy life, and if one can completely eliminate suffering and stress one will not be reborn. If there is no more re-becoming/rebirth to him or her, there is no more suffering; s/he is completely free from stress or distress (*dukkha*).

We Buddhists, as well as all humans, should practice meditation for this purpose. As we all live in society facing innumerable problems we need some solace, consolation, which can never be gained from an outside power; it is to be developed within. This simple mental exercise (meditation) helps us to keep a calm and steady mind and eventually that itself reaches the culmination of practice to attain the full bliss of liberation.

In order to understand this better, we have to understand the natural phenomena in the world. Basically there are three phenomena to be **understood**. They are as follows:

1. Any where in the universe, all beings have to face one truth which is the common truth to all beings, that is *dukkha* (stress).

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2. Everything under the sun and moon including both, are interrelated, interconnected.
3. Everything and everyone that exists in the universe has three characteristics, namely: impermanence, un-satisfactoriness, and soullessness.

These are the core teachings of all the Buddhas. (The four Noble Truths, the Dependent Origination and the Three Characteristics of Existence). Through insight, one can understand and realize this core Dhamma of the Buddha. First one could understand the three characteristics of existence, and thereafter the entire teachings of the Buddha. In short, Buddhist insight meditation means seeing through the real nature of existence (*anicca, dukkha, anatta*- impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and soullessness).

It is the intrinsic nature of beings that we hold the notion that "this body is mine, this I am, this is myself." The same possessiveness applies to feeling, perception, volitional formations and consciousness.

Again, we as worldlings think, "this is permanent, this is happiness and there is a soul within", but these are speculative views. There is no acceptable truth behind them. However, when they practice and understand things as they are, they realize that there is no such thing to be grasped as "this is mine, this I am, this is myself"; they then instead realize, "this is not mine, this I am not, this is not myself". That is really how one penetrates things and come to understand reality as it is. With this understanding one realizes stress as stress, the cause of stress as the cause of stress, cessation of stress as the cessation of stress and the path leading to the cessation of stress as the path leading to the cessation of stress. He then comprehends stress, removes the cause of stress, realizes the cessation of stress and develops the path for the completion of the tenfold path and attain Nibbana. That is the goal of Buddhist meditation.

As everybody is well aware, in this scientifically and technologically advanced fast moving society people are always busy with their daily activities. They are caught up in a rat race to earn more and

more money, to gain more and more things. Most people cannot understand why they are in this race and how they came to be involved in it. They are just holding on to the tiger's tail unable to neither release it nor hold on to it any longer while suffering increases due to a lack of contentedness with what they have. However, it is very gladdening to see that still there are some people who can understand the uselessness of this rat race. In order to illustrate the meaninglessness of the rat race I would like to mention a story adopted from Ajahn Brahm's "Opening the Door of Your Heart", with my sincere thanks to him:

"An American was watching a local Mexican fisherman in a quiet Mexican fishing village. The fisherman was unloading his morning catch. The American, a successful professor at a prestigious US business school, could not wait any longer to give the Mexican fisherman a little bit of free advice. He then reached him.

"Hey!" began the American. "Why are you finishing so early?"

'Since I have caught enough fish Señor', replied the genial Mexican, 'enough to feed my family and a little extra to sell. Now I will take some lunch with my wife and after a little siesta in the afternoon, I will play with my children. Then, after dinner, I will go to the cantina, drink a little tequila and play some guitar with my friends. It is enough for me, Señor.'

"Listen to me, my friend", said the business professor. "If you stay out at sea until late afternoon, you will easily catch twice as much fish. You can sell the extra, save up the money, and in six months, may be nine, you'll be able to buy a bigger and better boat and hire some crew.

Then you'll be able to catch four times as many fish. Think of the extra money you will make! In another year or two, you will have the capital to buy a second fishing boat and hire another crew. If you follow this business plan, in six or seven years you will be the proud owner of a large fishing fleet. Just imagine that! Then you should move your head office to Mexico City, or even to L.A.

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After only three or four years in L.A. you float your company on the stock market giving yourself, as CEO, a generous salary package with substantial share options. In a few more years – listen to this!- you initiate a company share buy-back scheme, which will make you a multi-millionaire! Guaranteed! I'm a well-known professor at a US business school. I know these things.

The Mexican fisherman listened thoughtfully at what the animated American had to say. When the professor had finished, the Mexican asked him. 'But, Señor Professor, what will I do with so many millions of dollars?'

Surprisingly, the American professor hadn't thought the business plan through that far. So he quickly figured out what a person would do with millions of dollars.

'Amigo! With all that dough, you can retire. Yeah! Retire for life. boat for going fishing in the morning. You can buy a little villa in a picturesque fishing village like this one, and purchase a small. You can have lunch with your wife everyday, and a siesta afterwards with nothing to worry you.

In the afternoon you can spend quality time with your kids and, after dinner in the evening, play guitar with your friends in the cantina, drinking tequila. Yeah, with all that money, my friend, you can retire and take it easy.

'But Senor Professor, I do all that already.'

Why do we believe that we have to work so hard and get rich first, before we can find contentment? If we have to be rich first, there will be no contentment ever."

Contentment is a result from the practice of Buddhist meditation. As the Buddha once said, it is the best wealth (*Santhutthi paramam dhanam*). It is true that practicing and realizing this Dhamma is difficult because it is both profound and subtle. But it is impossible to make the Middle Way the 'easy way'.

This true knowledge and experience is entirely intuitive. One has to practice and realize it individually. It is an individual effort. The Buddha taught one way which is known as the 'direct way'. This is the one-way path to freedom. When one realizes this Dhamma through one's own experience (*bhavana*), it is certainly irreversible. Just as a green leaf turned yellow and falls from its stalk will never again turn green, one enters this one-way path to freedom and completely comes to the end of the *samsaric* journey by realizing real peace, the real happiness of Nibbana.

For that, this is the Buddha's kind admonition: **'There are these roots of trees, these empty huts, go and sit cross-legged, in solitude, meditate, do not delay and regret later.'** This is the reason why we should all understand the Dhamma and practice meditation in our daily life. If we practice accordingly it is more and more advantageous here in this world and the hereafter. Eventually that itself is the way to the complete extirpation of defilements and the attainment of Enlightenment, Nibbana.

May we all attain the Supreme Bliss of Nibbana!

Kathina Ceremony 2008



Ven. Witiyala Seewalie Thera and other monks are on the way to Pindapatha.

This Kathina Ceremony was sponsored by Sonnadara Family. We had three Guest monks including Ven. M. Wimalasara Thera and two Thai monks. It was a wonderful event of that year.

Vesak Day Message from the Abbot of MNBV

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

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Sila

By Bhikkhuni Satima

“Under a full moon of May,
Prince Siddhartha was born.
Under a full moon of May,
Our Lord Buddha attained His goal.
Under a full moon of May,
Our Lord reached final liberation.
To honor Him,
Let us celebrate the full moon of May.”

SILENA SUGATIM YANTI;
SILENA BHOGASAMPADA;
SILENA NIBBUTIM YANTI;
TASMA SILAM VISODHAYE.

BY MORALITY ONE ATTAINS HAPPINESS;
BY MORALITY ONE ACHIEVES WEALTH AND
TREASURES;
BY MORALITY ONE ATTAINS NIBBANA;
THEREFORE ONE SHOULD PURIFY MORALITY.

When the first group of sixty monks was ready to go out and preach the Dhamma, the Blessed One said to them: “Monks, teach the Dhamma that is good in the beginning, good in the middle, and good in the end, for the welfare and the good of the many.” What the Blessed One meant by this is that: The good in the beginning is Sila, The good in the middle is Samadhi and The good in the end is Panna, and all three stages are needed for one’s liberation from samsara. These main core teachings of the Blessed One: sila, Samadhi, and panna, are the most central teachings and the main basis of the discourses. In fact these are the three classifications of the Middle Way or the Noble Eight-fold Path, which gives rise to vision and knowledge and leads to insight.

This short essay will be on the Sila or the first classification of the path. In the teachings sila or morality is very important, as it is the basis or the foundation for Samadhi – the purification of mind. Without sila it is very difficult to purify the mind. Sila is the outward manifestation of our actions as words and deeds. This is how we interact with others and relate to others. This is our behavior, our conduct. If

we have good behavior, good conduct, we can live in harmony with others, otherwise there will be conflict. Sila is living according to the Eightfold Path, which is a reasonable way to live. It tells us our responsibilities and what actions are appropriate for us. In this way life becomes easy, simple, and not so difficult. Appropriate behavior is so very important for all of us living in any society.

The Pali word sila means a state of normality, the normal state of a human being. So when one practices sila, one is back to one’s normal state of goodness. The negative qualities, like greed, anger and hatred, killing, fighting, harming, jealousy etc are factors that change the nature of a human being into something abnormal. So, practicing sila is to train in preserving a person’s true nature and not allowing the negative factors to overpower him.

The Blessed One in His teachers gave two different codes of conduct or disciplinary rules. One set for the monastics, and one set for the lay disciples. Here we will consider only the rules for the laity. To help guide the lay disciples, he gave them five basic guidelines to practice. These disciplinary rules are called the ‘Panca sila’ or the five precepts. These precepts are NOT commandments; they are training rules, willingly undertaken by the individual in order to have a pure conduct, good behavior and to lead a good peaceful and happy life. The five precepts are: to abstain from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying and taking drugs and intoxicants.

These precepts also help to provide a wholesome foundation for personal and social growth. On a personal level, Sila is what helps us to lead a harmless, peaceful and pure life. It is the first step in the Noble Eight fold Path. It is the foundation for the development of Samadhi, which gives rise to Panna or wisdom, which in turn leads one to abandon the unwholesome states of greed, anger and delusion. It is the most important step on our spiritual journey. Without observing sila it is difficult to get into a state of Samadhi. And Samadhi is needed to gain wisdom which leads towards the highest goal – Nibbana.

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On a social level, sila brings a harmonious and peaceful living among the members of the community. In a community where sila is practiced there will be mutual trust and cooperation, which in turn leads to progress and prosperity. The precepts being based on the Dhamma or the 'Truth,' reflect values such as love, compassion, joy, self-respect, self restraint, honesty and wisdom.

By observing the first precept of abstaining from killing and harming life, one cultivates loving-kindness, and compassion on a personal level, and on a social level one works for the welfare of others. One practices non-violence.

The second precept of abstaining from stealing helps in the cultivation of generosity and honesty in a personal level and friendly cooperation in the community on a social level. One practices non-attachment and selflessness.

The third precept of abstaining from sexual misconduct teaches respect for one's spouse as well as for others on a personal level and self-restraint and respect for social property on a social level. One practices affection and friendship without lust and clinging.

The fourth precept of abstaining from lying helps to preserve one's credibility, trustworthiness, and honor on a personal level. On a social level it becomes a very important factor in social life and dealings. One practices honesty and integrity. The last and the fifth precept of abstaining from intoxicants help a person to maintain sobriety and responsibility for one's behavior on a personal level and on a social level it prevents accidents and crime. One practices awareness and mindfulness.

The five precepts indicate five main directions in which a follower of the Path has to exercise self-control.

The first is to control the passion of anger which will help to cultivate love and compassion; the second is to control the desire to possess

material things which will help cultivate generosity; the third is the control of carnal lust which will help cultivate contentment; the fourth is cowardice- the cause of untruthfulness which will help cultivate truthfulness; and the fifth is the control of craving for unwholesome pleasure which will help cultivate mindfulness and clarity. Without sila there can be no human progress and spiritual advancement.

By practicing, developing, and cultivating these five basic guidelines given by the Blessed One to help and guide the community of lay disciples the following spiritual qualities are produced: Right speech; Right action; and Right livelihood; the three path factors of the Noble Eightfold Path, which gives rise to vision, and knowledge, and leads one to insight and final ending of suffering – Nibbana the Supreme Bliss.

Maintain well the five precepts together with the three refuges. Strive on with diligence.

May you all be well and happy and may peace and happiness be with all of you.

Sri Lankan New Year Celebration 2009



Ven. Witiyala Seewalie Thera is receiving palm leaves as a mark of respect and veneration from Kids on the day of Sri Lankan New Year 2009.

It was a nice day. Lots of people participated to this event. It was very successful and thanks to Ven. Maha Sangha and Organizers of this event.

MBV Dhamma School Kid's Creations

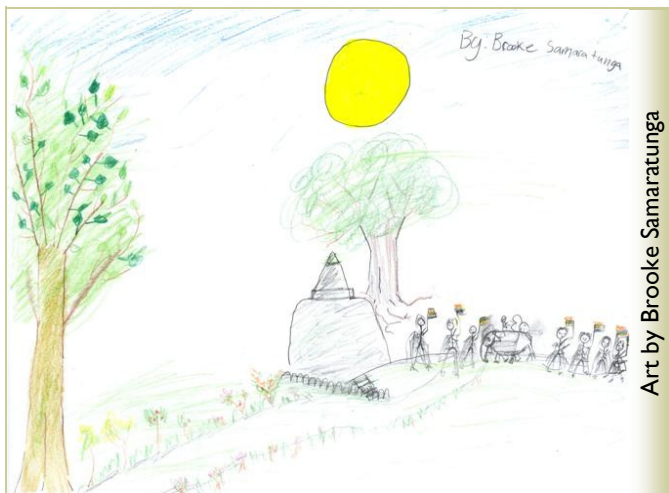


Vesak Month by Melinda Samaratunga

Vesak Day

Vesak Day is the day we celebrate Buddha's birth, enlightenment, and passing away. Buddha was the best teacher ever born in the world. If we follow his teaching it will lead us to a righteous life. In the Vesak Day we go to the temple to worship the Buddha, perform Buddha *puja*, giving *dane*, observe eight precepts and meditate. By doing these activities we earn merits.

Janani Ranatunga, Age 8



Art by Brooke Samaratunga

How to Recognize Friends?

In Dhamma School we learned the ways to recognize friends. According to Buddha's teachings in *Sigalovada sutta*, we have learned how to recognize good friends from bad friends because a friend can have an influence over us: good or bad. So I will introduce two kinds of people one who is good that can lead to a good path, the other is bad to which will lead us to a very bad end. Both of which are the opposite of one another. They are:

- *Apaya Sahaya* (bad friend)
- *Upakaraka* (good friend)

Apaya Sahaya is the fellow waster. He leads us into the wrong directions such as gambling, cheating, and stealing. He wastes our good soul in replacement for a bad one. A good way to stop this is to see if your "friend" likes to play pranks or has a bad reputation towards others. That's how we can tell.

Upakaraka is the helper. He is the only one who will guard us and our property when we are off guard. He can be our refuge center when we are in deep trouble or need to escape to a safe place, our *Upakaraka* will be on our guard. If we need something very badly, he will help us but give us a double supply of what we need. A way to notice him is to see if he will help us when we are afraid or scared.

We have to remember this information to determine not only how to recognize a good friend from a bad friend; it will also help us lead to good and peaceful path.

Kasun Ranatunga, Age 13

Vasala Sutta

Venerable monks, parents, and fellow students, today you will be reading about Vasala Sutta. You may be wondering where this term comes from. Well it comes from a story, back when the Buddha was still alive. One day as the Buddha was walking, hoping to help someone on his or her way towards enlightenment, he came across a house. So he knocked on the door and waited patiently. After a bit a man opened the door. His name was Aggiga Brahmin. As soon as Aggiga saw the Buddha he most rudely told him to go away! But the Buddha, knowing that Aggiga had potential, stayed and told him this:

Vasala Sutta is the “Sermon of Low people” (outcasts). This means no person is born noble and no person is born an outcast. A person’s rank is determined by how he or she acts. Someone who does evil deeds, harms other beings, or disrespects other people and things, that person becomes lower ranked. Likewise, someone who does good deeds, respects other beings, and has good self-control, that person gains a higher rank. So even if you have nothing, or are poor in terms of material possessions as long as you do good deeds you can be a good person. And from that day on Aggiga Brahmin was a more respectful person.

Nath Samaratunga

Sri Lankan New Year Celebration - 2009 -



These young kids are the new year princess of 2009. Malka, Sayumi, Bisandi, Devmini, Janani, Yasangi, Sami, Lily, Anaka, Tara and Aleksis.

**Na perasaṃ vilomāni
Na perasaṃ katā kataṃ
Attano va avekkheyya
Katāni akatāni ca**

Do not find fault with others.

Do not worry about what others do or do not. Rather, look within yourself to find out what you yourself have done or left undone. Stop doing evil; do good.

- Dhammapada



Flower by Nevin Pathagamage

Contributions

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

The Minnesota Buddhist Vihara is a 501 C (3) charity registered with the State of Minnesota since March 30, 2004.

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

All your donations are Federal and State tax deductible. The MN Buddhist Vihara will issue receipts for all your donations at the end of year.

You can join to our:

- ***Dhamma School***
- ***Daily morning meditation***
- ***Sutta Discussion Class***
- ***Weekly meditation group***
- ***Monthly Sil Observance***
- ***Volunteer activities***

MBV Major Events-- Nov. 2008 to May 2009

- | | |
|---------------|--|
| Jan. 1, 2009 | New Year Blessings |
| Jan. 11, 2009 | Sutta Discussion and Meditation Class started |
| Jan. 31, 2009 | New Year Blessings and meditation session for Students of St. Cloud State University |
| Feb. 14, 2009 | New Year Blessings and meditation session for Students of North Dakota State University at Fargo |
| Feb. 28, 2009 | New Year Blessings and meditation Session for Students of University of Minnesota |
| Apr. 18, 2009 | Sri Lankan New Year Celebration |
| Apr. 24, 2009 | Speech and Meditation at St. Cloud State University in St. Cloud |
| Apr. 25, 2009 | Speech and Meditation at Iowa State University in Ames, IA |
| Apr. 26, 2009 | Speech and Meditation at North Dakota State University in Fargo, ND |
| May 1, 2009 | Retreat for monastic |
| May 3, 2009 | Attend to Vesak Program in Vietnamese Buddhist Temple in Blaine |
| May 9, 2009 | Vesak Celebration |
| May 10, 2009 | One Day Meditation Retreat at MRC |