



Taste of the Dhamma

Monthly Newsletter of Bhavana Society

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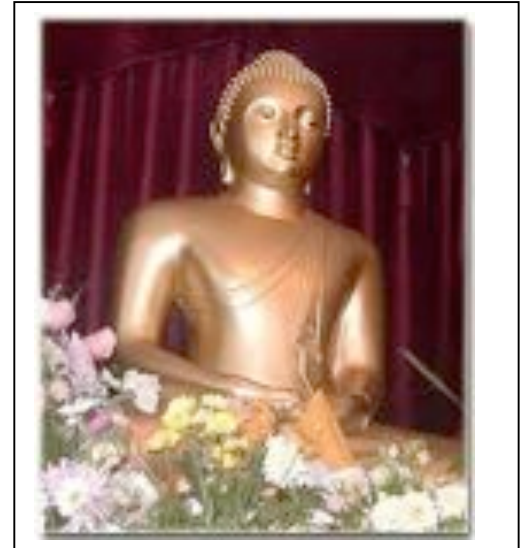
'Thou Art the First Arahant in Our Era'

Arahant-ship is the state of human perfection or the complete purification of mind. This can be achieved only through the practice of cultivating and developing one's mind. Development of mind is called Bhavanā in Pāli (the language of the time of the Buddha). For this achievement there is a systematic way to follow. This is the Middle Way.

The Middle Way has no dogma, cults or beliefs. You will have to shun all your beliefs and come to understand reality as it is. Right understanding is the first thing here. Only right thinking people can come to right understanding. They commit themselves to practice and to developing mind.

There are two aspects or levels of practicing. They are serenity (samatha) and insight (vipassanā), which are to be developed in a reciprocal manner. This is how to follow the Middle Way. Those who follow this way practice three things, namely: morality, concentration and wisdom.

Siddhartha Gotama, a prince born in India in the year 623 BC, sought out a way to develop his mind. At the age of 29, he left his luxurious life and began to practice. He went to meet different teachers and they gave different opinions. He practiced accordingly. However, he did not gain what he had sought. Finally, he thought: "Why not try practicing mindfulness of breathing as I did in my early days of life under a rose-apple tree." Thus he reflected on his early days and decided to practice unremittingly, diligently, vigilantly. Crossing the river Neranjālā, he approached a shady tree and sat with a firm determination. "I will never arise



without attaining Enlightenment." He practiced mindfulness of breathing. Later in the night, his mind became purified and malleable. He then directed his mind to his previous lives. He gained the knowledge and understanding of many thousands, millions, trillions and eons of his past lives.

During the second watch of the night, he gained knowledge in seeing how beings pass away here and are born in other world systems according to the results of their own volitional actions (kamma). Then, at dawn, he realized his own defilements with all their latent tendencies (āsava) and completely exterminated them.

On that full moon day of Vesak, he became the Buddha of our age, the first Arahant in our era. We respectfully venerate the Buddha, keeping joined hands at his lotus-like feet.

May we all see reality
and
attain Perfect Peace!

Thou Art the First
Arahant in our Era

The Very word of
the Buddha

Clear
Comprehension
(Part 1)

The Difference
Between
Samatha and
Vipassana

News
@
Bhavanā

These quotations are from the discourses of the Buddha

"Weeds
are
the bane
of
fields,
lust
is
the bane
of
man-
kind"

Dhammapada.
Verse.356

Loving Friendliness

"Friends, whatever grounds there are for making merit productive of a future birth, all these do not equal a sixteenth part of the mind-release of loving friendliness. The mind-release of loving friendliness surpasses them and shines forth, bright and brilliant. Just as the radiance of all the stars does not-

equal a sixteenth part of the moon's radiance, but the moon's radiance surpasses them and shines forth, bright and brilliant, even so, whatever grounds there are for making merit productive of a future birth, all these do not equal a sixteenth part of the mind-release of loving friendliness."

(Itivuttaka, No. 27)

Looking for ease

"Whoever takes a stick to beings desiring ease, when he himself is looking for ease, will meet with no ease after death.

Whoever doesn't take a stick to beings desiring ease, when he himself is looking for ease, will meet with ease after death.

(Udana, 11. 2-3)

Living in Tune

"If both husband & wife want to see one another not only in the present life but also in the life to come, they should be in tune [with each other] in conviction, in tune in virtue, in tune in generosity, and in tune in discernment.

Then they will see one another not only in the present life but also in the life to come."

(A.N. 4.55)

Downfall

"Though being well-to-do, not to support father and mother who are old and past their youth, is a cause of one's down fall."

(Sutta Nipata Parabhava Sutta)

CLEAR COMPREHENSION [part I]

“And how, bhikkhus, does a bhikkhu exercise clear comprehension? Here, bhikkhus, a bhikkhu is one who acts with clear comprehension when going forward and returning; when looking ahead and looking aside; when drawing in and extending the limbs; when wearing his robes and carrying his outer robe and bowl; when eating, drinking, chewing his food, and tasting; when defecating and urinating; when walking, standing, sitting, falling asleep, waking up, speaking, and keeping silent. It is in such a way that a bhikkhu exercises clear comprehension.

“Bhikkhus, a bhikkhu should dwell mindful and clearly comprehending. This is our instruction to you.”

- Buddha-

“And how, bhikkhus, does a bhikkhu exercise clear comprehension? Here, bhikkhus, for a bhikkhu feelings are understood as they arise, understood, as they remain present, understood as they pass away. Thoughts are understood as they arise, understood, as they remain present, understood as they pass away. Perceptions are understood as they arise, understood, as they remain present, understood as they pass away. It is in this way, bhikkhus, that a bhikkhu exercises clear comprehension. Bhikkhu, a bhikkhu should dwell mindful and clearly comprehending.”

This Samyutta Nikāya passage clearly states that the meditator should become fully aware of feelings, thoughts and perceptions to understand them clearly. Only when one pays undivided attention to them as they arise, as they remain present, and as they pass away can one understand them fully. In doing so, one can comprehend the entire series of tiny moments of arising, their continuous change and passing away. Full comprehension of this uninterrupted flux of experience is laid bare, exposing the truth of impermanence of feelings, perceptions and thoughts. When one clearly compre-

hends the continuous flux of events, there is no room for grasping anything with greed as “This is Mine” (*Etam mama*); with conceit as “This I am” (*eso aham asmi*) and with misconstrued view as “This is my self” (*Eso me attā*).

Clear Comprehension is divided into four parts:

Mindfulness (*Sati*) and Clear Comprehension (*Sampajañña*) go together so closely as an interdependent and indispensable pair that the Buddha strongly recommended them as a prerequisite of meditation, whether we practice mindfulness or concentration meditation. There is no time when we practice only mindfulness without clear comprehension. Whether we are sitting, standing, lying down, talking, walking, eating, drinking, putting on clothes, defecating, urinating or observing silence these two factors should be kept in any serious meditator’s mind.

These two also go along with the three cardinal factors of the Noble Eightfold Path—right effort, right mindfulness and right understanding. We must make mindful effort with clear comprehension to understand that any thought, word or deed that is beneficial to us, to others and

*Mindfulness
and
Clear
Comprehen-
sion
always
go
together*



to both is wholesome. We must make mindful effort with clear comprehension to prevent unwholesome and harmful habits from arising and overcome them if they arise in us. We must make mindful effort with clear comprehension to arouse wholesome habits and to maintain and cultivate newly arisen wholesome habits. This is the function of clear comprehension.

What we read in the aforementioned quotation from the Saṃyutta Nikāya is an example of how we should develop clear comprehension. Expanding this succinct statement of the Buddha, commentators have divided clear comprehension into four parts: (i) Clear comprehension of purpose; (ii) Clear comprehension of suitability; (iii) Clear comprehension of domain; and (iv) Clear comprehension of non-delusion. Each of them merits our special attention.

(i) Clear comprehension of Purpose or Reason:

The mindful meditator's purpose is very special, very specific and lofty, not a simple and ordinary purpose. Clearly comprehending it is even loftier.

The entire success of mindfulness practice depends on how clearly we understand the purpose of meditation—why we meditate. This fivefold purpose of clear comprehension is so indispensable and paramount for mindfulness meditation that the Buddha has highlighted it in the introduction to the Long Discourse of Mindfulness Meditation. It is so compact and succinct that it looks like a vision statement given to honest and serious meditators to remember throughout the entire practice until they attain full enlightenment.

The fivefold purpose: (1) for the purification of beings; (2) to overcome sorrow and lamentation; (3) to overcome suffering and disappointment; (4) to tread the path leading to liberation; and (5) to attain the end of suffering. From the beginning until the attainment of enlightenment, the meditator should keep this fivefold purpose in mind.

For the purification of beings:

Even though the purpose of mindfulness is clearly stated at the very outset of the discourse, most of us do not clearly comprehend it.

"Come, friends, dwell contemplating the body in the body, ardent, clearly comprehending, unified, with limpid mind, concentrated, with one-pointed mind, in order to know the body as it really is"

-Samyutta Nikaya-

If a meditator does not very clearly understand it then making progress is very slow or they may not make any progress at all. Their minds are full of old, unhealthy habits. Surely, they cannot clean them up very quickly before developing new healthy habits. We don't, however, wait until our mind is perfectly pure to meditate. One who waits until the mind is totally pure to meditate is like a man who goes to seashore and waits until the sea becomes calm for him to swim. He will never swim, for the sea never becomes calm. Similarly, we don't wait until our minds become totally pure to begin. With all the impurities in the mind, we should start the practice.

The very purpose of mindfulness and clear comprehension is to cleanse or purify the mind through the practice. Mindfulness meditation is the means to cleanse the mind, not the end. As we meditate, our minds slowly but surely become clearer and cleaner. As the mind grows clear, purification becomes easier. It is this process that eventually liberates us from all mental impurities. In the fourfold right effort, number one is to prevent unarisen unwholesome

thoughts from arising. This is possible only when we clearly comprehend what is harmful to our mental development. From our experience, we clearly comprehend that certain thoughts are harmful. We become mindful of these harmful thoughts.

One of the meanings of the Pali word "*sati*" is memory. This is not a kind of memory that retains what we have seen, heard, smelled, tasted, touched and thought. The function of this particular memory is to remind us that certain thoughts have caused us harm in the past. When we clearly and mindfully understand that certain thoughts, words and deeds in the past have made mindfulness practice difficult, we learn to guard our senses against them and prevent them from arising again. We learn the cost of being unmindful and how craving, anger, or delusion arise in our minds from certain sights, sounds, smells, tastes, touch and thoughts. The memory of those experiences is our mindfulness. We clearly understand how harmful they were in the past. Why do we call them harmful?

To be continued in the May 2011 newsletter

The Difference between Samatha and Vipassana

By Bhikkhu T. Seelananda

"If the people are practicing diligently, persistently with mindfulness and clear comprehension, the world is not devoid of Arahants"

-Buddha-

"Samatha is to focus on one object, whereas vipassana is to focus on many objects."

Samatha means calmness (serenity) and vipassanā means insight. These are the two levels of mental development (bhavanā) and through their practice the human mind is capable of further development and perfection. Those who have developed the mind all the way to perfection are called "Arahants" (Perfected Ones). "If the people are practicing diligently, persistently, with mindfulness and clear comprehension, the world is not devoid of Arahants," said the first Arahant in our era, the Buddha.

We practice calmness meditation when we start to sit. First, we pick a suitable object for meditation. For the practice of Samatha there are about 40 recommended objects in the Buddhist literature, the breath being a popular one. After choosing a suitable object, you seek out a congenial place to practice with few disturbances. It is difficult today to find a place completely free from the sound of cars, TVs and the noisy chatter of life, but

we should seek out the quietness we may find in our homes. We sit on a cushion, hands on the lap, legs crossed as well as you are able to cross them (it's important to just get started even if you can't do a full lotus!). If you want or need to sit on a chair, that's fine, too, but try and keep the upper part of the body straight.

Now, close your eyes gently, giving your full attention to the object of your meditation. Relax each and every muscle in your body, letting go of any tension or tightness. Allow the breath to find its own natural rhythm. Still your body in this way until you feel the calmness take hold and you experience serenity of mind. Try to practice this every day at least for a few minutes.

This is how to develop serenity, learning to fix the attention upon one object or focal point. You must strive to keep your mind focusing on that object, in this case, on the in-breath and out-breath. Let it flow naturally, peacefully, smoothly.

The practice of vipassanā is quite different. Vipassanā basically means divide or separate. It is what results from practicing and developing mindfulness and wisdom. Where there is mindfulness there is wisdom. This is why insight meditation is also called wisdom meditation. Through vipassana practice one can see clearly the three characteristics of existence: impermanence, dissatisfaction and soullessness.

Unlike serenity or calmness (samatha) meditation, in vipassana one must be able to give the attention to as many objects as may appear. We normally perceive many objects through our senses. Through the eye we keep contact with form, through the ear we keep contact with sounds, through the nose we keep contact with odors, through the tongue we keep contact with flavors, through the body we keep contact with tangibles and through mind we keep contact with mental objects. All these happen with causes. If one directs attention to the time of contact (the meeting of the subject, ob-

ject and consciousness), one can understand the nature of feelings, perception, volitional formations and craving, as well.

With this understanding into the nature of things one comes to the conclusion that there is nothing to be grasped as one's own and "everything is not mine, everything I am not, everything is not my Self, everything is impermanent, everything is dissatisfaction and everything is soulless." Through such insight, the meditator no longer feels the urge to cling to anything nor is repulsed by anything, but lives happily and peacefully in society, like a lotus in bloom on a lake. Its roots may be found in the mud, but its bloom is unsmearred and unsullied.

In like fashion, we are born into a world full of miseries, but if we are mindful enough and develop wisdom, our enlightened natures will bloom forth.

So, these are the distinctions in the practice of samatha, in which we take only one object, whereas in vipassanā we consider as many objects as possible. That is the difference.

"The six internal bases should be understood. The six external bases should be understood. The six classes of consciousness should be understood. The six classes of contact should be understood. The six classes of feeling should be understood. The six classes of craving should be understood."
-Buddha-

*"Make an island for yourself!
Strive hard and become wise!
Rid of impurities and cleansed of stain, you shall not come again to birth and decay."*

Dhammapada

NEWS @ BHAVANA

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We're on the
Web at

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See our
schedule
and
consider
one
of the
meditation
retreats
offered
throughout
the year.



SUCCESSFUL CONCLUSION OF OUR MINDFULNESS RETREAT

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A Mindfulness retreat was held from March 25- April 1, 2011 and was very successful. We sincerely thank our supporters who helped with the retreat and with the ongoing well-being of the Bhavana Forest Monastery and Meditation Center. We wish you all good health, longevity and success of your activities. May you all be well and happy!



For this retreat there were 28 retreatants



Next month (May) will be the busiest month for all the monks and nuns in the world. Mainly because it was in this month that the Buddha was born, attained Full Awakening and mindfully passed away. In order to offer respect to the Buddha, people are doing many good deeds (kamma) like practicing generosity, morality and meditation. This year, we celebrate the 2600 years of the Buddha's Enlightenment.

We welcome
to Bhavana

"Introduction to Meditation"
retreatants

April 15-17,2011

Bhante Seelananda will be in Chicago April 14-18 giving some Dhamma talks and offering several Meditation Sessions as a gift for the Sri Lankan New Year.

Bhante G will be leading a retreat in Minnesota from April 23-28 and give Dhamma talks in Minneapolis.

Vesak Day @ Bhavana: May 15: You are welcome to come to enjoy this gathering!