VESAKHA ISSUE

NEWSLETTER OF THE BUDDHIST SOCIETY OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA
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VESAKHA DAY
SATURDAY 24 MAY, 1986

To Buddhists all over the world the full moon day of Vesakha is an event of the utmost importance as it commemorates the Birth, Enlightenment and Parinibbana (final passing away) of the Lord Buddha. The Lord Buddha, as a human being, was able to reach the pinnacle of perfection and wisdom through his own efforts without the aid of any supernatural agency. This achievement of the Buddha gives us all much encouragement and inspiration in that if we make the necessary effort in the training of morality, meditation and wisdom, we can attain that same enlightenment. This is the very best possible way for us to show our respect and gratitude to the Blessed One.

On Vesakha Day our hearts and minds are naturally directed with reverence to the Blessed One who strove earnestly and strenuously to gain Supreme Enlightenment and proclaim the Dhamma for the benefit of all beings.

The programme for Vesakha Day will be as follows:

9.30 am  Gathering at the North Perth Town Hall, View Street, North Perth (opposite the North Perth Post Office).

10.00 am  Group chanting including taking the 3 Refuges and the 5 Buddhist Precepts. Auspicious chanting by the Bhikkhus. A short Dhamma talk on the importance of Vesakha Day.

10.30 am  Pindapata and offering food to the Bhikkhus. The lay people will then share a meal.

5.30 pm  Films/videos/talk on Buddhism and social gathering.

7.00 pm  Meeting at the North Perth Town Hall for the evenings celebrations. Taking the 3 Refuges and the 5 Buddhist Precepts. Chanting the Recollection of the Three Treasures (The Buddha, Dhamma and the Sangha). A Dhamma talk by Ven. Ajahn Jagaro followed by circumambulation of the shrine.

Close.
"NAMO TASSA BHAGAVATO ARAHATO SAMMASAMBODHASSA"

Dear Dhamma Friends,

It is quite obvious that we are all greatly limited by our physical and mental qualities. In one sense it is true that we are all unique individuals, each with our own physical and mental make up. The Buddha explained that Kamma is the reason for the differences in human beings, adding:

"All beings are responsible for their Kamma, heirs to their Kamma, born of their Kamma, and live according to their Kamma."

As no two individuals have the same Kamma, accumulated from time immemorial, it follows that each of us are quite unique.

So in this world we find a great variety of people differing in their facial features, hair, colour, height, width, weight...... Even greater divergence is seen when one considers their mental make up, that is their set of values, views or beliefs, or their intelligence and learning, their emotions and stability, or their habits, customs and culture. Then again there are the numerous languages through which we think and communicate.

All of this highlights the differences in people and the uniqueness of each one of us. When these differences are taken too seriously, though, a sense of separation is created, a feeling of "me" and "them" or more accurately "me" against "them". The thought of little "me" against all of "them" is somewhat unsettling, overwhelming even. So what happens is that people form themselves into groups with others of the same mould, similar in either physical attributes or in their views and beliefs. There remains variety and separation but now it is "us" against "them" and that feels much more secure.

Thus dwelling on the differences in people produces separation and a feeling of conflict which may be seen at its worst extreme in fanaticism. Today we have the political fanatics, race fanatics, health fanatics and, of course, the religious fanatics. These are people whose minds have become flooded and completely obsessed
with their particular viewpoint. I think that all of us are well aware of the barbaric atrocities that have been committed as a consequence of fanaticism.

Now most of us are unlikely to become fanatical monsters! However, it is very common for us to be trapped by these differences in people and believe them to be more real and more important than they actually are. In other words, delusion and attachment surface with regard to these differences for we mistakenly accept them to be the whole truth, the only valid opinion on the way things are and on what we are.

Though we might not be fanatical in our opinions on race or politics or religion, many of us are deluded by some of our differences. For example, most of us identify with our bodies, thinking that it constitutes us and belongs to us. So we really think that we are male or female, caucasian or asian, tall or short, handsome or ugly, young or old...and we suffer accordingly. Then many of us identify with our views and beliefs about ourselves or about the world or about that beyond this world (God, heaven, reincarnation etc) so that we tenaciously defend these opinions to justify ourselves - we suffer again.

The Buddha has taught that attachment to preferences, attachment to views and beliefs, attachment to rituals and customs and attachment to concepts of self all arise out of delusion and result in conflict and suffering. This is because these attachments or beliefs in differences cause separation into the camps of "me" and "them" or "us" and "them". Where there is separation there cannot be true love and where there is conflict there cannot be peace. The Buddha realized the true peace and manifested true love towards all beings, without exception, by transcending all the barriers and limits caused by the apparent differences. This is what he encouraged us to do.

The Buddha encouraged us to enquire or look into these various conditions of body and mind from which stems all separation. Even a superficial enquiry will help to dispel the grosser delusions regarding the "us" and "them" feeling. For instance, is there really a variety in the human race? Over 2,500 years ago the Buddha taught that although one may see a variety of
species amongst the birds or the fish no such variety exists amongst human beings for any differences are purely superficial. Even if just this basic truth was understood we would not have seen the coming into power of Hitler with his ideas of the Jews - "...they do not belong to humanity. They are creatures outside nature"!!

However, for those who are seekers of the Truth it is important to enquire more deeply. The conditioning we receive from the sensory world, plus our own instincts, based on desire, reinforce the feeling of being separate, of being special, of being this or that.

We can become quite obsessed with our physical condition of being a woman or a man, taking it for absolute reality. We can become possessed by our thoughts, views and feelings, completely preoccupied with our problems. But the Buddha stressed that all these physical and mental qualities are just conditions in nature and as such they are all impermanent and not really a self, not really you, not really me. The male body and emotions or the female body and emotions or the countless views and beliefs are not the real source of the problem which is separation and mental dis-ease. The Buddha stressed that the source of the problem, the reason for lack of peace and selfless love, was ignorance.

Thus the Buddha taught the practice of meditation as the means of penetrating the veil of ignorance. By learning how to simplify, calm and clear the mind we find the ability to look closely at, and sustain an enquiry into, these conditions of mind and body. We discover their true nature and this nature is common to all bodies and to all mental contents. Regardless of their variety and differences, all these conditions have this same nature - they are impermanent, they can never really satisfy us and they are not really "me" or "mine". The clearer one sees this truth, the closer one comes to this realization, the smaller the sense of separation becomes, the gap between people narrows, the fires of conflict are put out and there arises this great sense of freedom.

With metta

Jagaro Bhikkhu

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"THE EMPTY MIND"
Translated and adapted from a Dhamma talk given by Venerable Ajahn Buddhadasa.

In his first sermon the Lord Buddha began teaching the Noble Eightfold Path, the middle path between the extremes of self mortification and indulgence in sensual pleasures. The result of abiding in accordance with the eight perfect factors of this Path taught by the Buddha is the arising of the quality of Emptiness, a state of being where there is no attachment to anything as being "me" or "mine". When this condition occurs, it is called "living in freedom". It is purity of being, where one is not limited, or shackled by things, nor is one any longer lost as to the way things are. If the Buddha had not imparted this knowledge to us we would still not be able to make our minds "empty". We would just remain caught in the hectic confusion of "me" and "mine" which is the cause of the arising of all greed, hatred and delusion. This is the state of suffering.

The Pali word Sunnata means "Emptiness", however the meaning of Emptiness in Buddhism is not that there is nothing at all. In fact there can be everything in the mind, but what is meant is that the mind is completely empty of the attachment to "me" and "mine". When one is able to see that the whole world is intrinsically empty then there is no arising of greed, hatred or delusion. This is what the Buddha called the "Empty Mind" because it is empty of these impurities. It is crucial for all of you to reflect on this nature of the "Empty Mind", or as it is sometimes called the Radiant Mind, or Original Mind as its value is beyond estimation. To obtain this state is truly the ultimate achievement for humanity beyond which nothing can surpass, because this state enables one to go beyond all the defilements and all suffering. To simply realise the Empty Mind is a greater achievement than the ability to reach the moon or go to Mars. Actually such worldly achievements have no real value in transcending suffering at all and only create more confusion and problems. With regard to this Radiant Mind the Buddha said, "Monks, this mind is Radiant, however it becomes defiled through impurities coming into it, like visitors."

The Buddha used the word Radiant to emphasise the intrinsic purity of the mind. Impurities come into
the mind like unwanted guests causing it to lose its radiant nature. Let us compare it to a gem which shines brilliantly in the sunlight. If the gem is splashed with muddy water then its brilliance would be impaired. However, don't think that the gem's brilliance is no longer there, it is in fact only concealed by the mud. It is the same with the mind - whenever greed, hatred or delusion arise, the mind's original radiance is obscur-
ed.

All mental activity or mental conditions arise from the contact of form, sound, odour, taste, touch and thought with their respective sense organs of eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind. This contact produces mental activity, but mental activity is not the "True Mind". Just like when we splash the gem with muddy water, the mud is not the gem but it can obscure its brilliance, and it is only when we wash off the mud that we see the true brilliant nature of the gem. The mind is the same as this. All the various mental conditions which arise in the mind tend to obscure its innate radiance. These mental conditions, regardless of whether they may be wholesome or unwholesome, all embellish the mind and cause it to lose its original nature. Regardless of whether the mind is in a wholesome or unwholesome state it is still trapped in the cycle of good and bad, it is unable to stop, unable to obtain peace or purity, or escape from suffering. Hence we should avoid letting the mind become embellished by anything, but rather allow it to maintain its original nature, which is Radiant and Knowing. This property of knowing is the original quality of the mind. If either ignorance nor defilements possess the mind then it will know everything directly and according to truth.

Now what is to be done so that the radiant nature of the mind manifests in a lasting way? The answer is to simply avoid the arising of defilements by cultivating the Noble Eightfold Path taught by the Lord Buddha. The Path of Right View, Right Intention, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration. The bringing together of these eight factors of the Path is Right Living and when there is "Right Living" in this way, then the various defilements cannot manifest. This is the way to the realisation of the lasting radiant nature of the mind taught by the Blessed One.

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One morning in March, walking meditation in the hour before dawn and planning this article instead of "just walking", I saw Halley's Comet low in the eastern sky. According to the old legends, I began to think, the appearance of Halley's Comet portends great events and, indeed, there have been such great events at Bodhinyana Monastery (I admit to the occasional exaggeration, but such 'poetic licence' gets you to read on!), and there I had the theme for this article.

When the Comet first appeared early this summer it marked the most auspicious occasion of our first full ordination of a bhikkhu (Buddhist monk) in this part of the world. On a delightful evening in January a crowd of maybe a hundred lay Buddhists and friends watched on as novice Ariyasilo took full ordination as a bhikkhu. Presiding over the ceremony was Tan Jow Koon Pannyananda from Thailand and seeing such a large gathering of lay people the Venerable Pannyananda kindly gave the time to explain to those present the significance and meaning of this twenty five hundred year old ceremony. When one of the onlookers asked why it was that someone ordains as a Buddhist monk in this day and age, Venerable Pannyananda replied succinctly and profoundly "To be happy". That same evening Ian Sloane relinquished his entire worldly possessions to ordain as Samanera (novice monk) Visardo, which is pronounced Wee-sah-ra-doh.
Then, to make the occasion even more auspicious Venerable Pannyananda planted our two young Bodhi tree seedlings in prepared sites at the monastery. These seedlings were from the 2,300 year old Sri Maha Bodhi tree in Anuradhapura, Sri Lanka, which was grown from a cutting from the original Bodhi tree, once in Bodh Gaya, India, under which the Buddha gained enlightenment. These two seedlings were gifts to us from the monks of Sri Lanka showing their support to the Australian Sangha. Just as these young Bodhi trees, symbols of Buddhism, are planted, take root and grow in Australian soil, so may Ven. Ariyasilo and novice Visarado grow and flourish in the Teachings of the Buddha here in this land! At the time of writing both Bodhi trees are healthy and doing well, so are our new monk and novice (the Bodhi trees are, in fact, sprouting prolifically).

PLANTING OF THE BODHI TREE BY VEN. AJAHN PANNYANANDA

As Halley's Comet sped closer to the earth, I remember reading stories which proposed that it was this very 'star' that the Three Wise Men followed in the old tale from 'that other religion'. And, indeed, three wise monks, two from the East anyway, recently visited our
Buddhist Centre and our monastery. First came Venerable Pannyananda from Thailand who presided over the ordinations and also gave many fine Dhamma talks both in the City Centre and here in the Monastery. I remember him for his serenity, a peacefulness which tended to flow over to those around him and for his gentle kindness, ever willing to give his time to others. Then came Tan Jow Koon Rajavaramuni, also from Thailand, who being a very brilliant, but self effacing scholar brought us the gift of his deep knowledge of the Buddhist texts and the humility of his character - he seemed to know too much to be arrogant. Then came the third wise monk, Ven. Ajahn Sumedho, Ven. Ajahn Chah's senior Western disciple and head of the flourishing Sangha in England. His gift that of deep wisdom, born of his own meditation experiences, which he shared with us in his many public talks, during the five day retreat at Mt. Helena and during the "residents" retreat at the Monastery. We are extremely fortunate that such fine monks, living examples of the results that are to be expected in treading the Buddha's Path, can come and share their time with us here in Western Australia for monks such as these are in great demand.

VEN. AJAHN SUMEDHO AND VEN. AJAHN JAGARO
The approach of Halley's Comet was also the time that our first nun came to reside at Bodhinyana Monastery. Ayya Candima is her name which means Sister Moonflower, and she is from Sydney. But like the rest of us who have less ethereal names, Sister Candima has to clean out the toilets, wash up, cook and work in the office! However there is plenty of time to meditate alone in the Nun's hut. Seriously, we welcome the pioneer nun into Bodhinyana Monastery and wish her the perserverance to forge a path for other women to come, live, ordain and be at peace here in our Monastery.

Another recent visitor to Bodhinyana Monastery is "Miss", a cat who was found hungry and scared living in the drain by the dining hall. Now he is showing signs of taking over the place and is helping us develop our metta meditation (loving kindness), which is very easy to practice with a warm, furry, responsive kitten purring in your lap!

As you see much has been going on at the Monastery in the last three months — visiting monks, ordinations, teaching in prisons (Canning Vale and Karnet), in various schools, at the Whole Life Festival, at the Multi-faith Commonwealth Day Service in St. George's Cathedral, receiving Dana in people's homes and giving the traditional blessings and in February Ajahn Jagaro kindly accepted the invitations from the Buddhists out east and visited Sydney and Melbourne, writing articles for newspapers and newsletters, not to mention the building work. However there is not much building work to mention! A great deal of time has been taken up with other duties and we have only just managed to complete our new bell-house, an eight sided copper and shingle gazebo type structure which only awaits the arrival of the bell from Thailand. We have also begun two small brick walled, iron roofed kutis (monks huts) and are now drawing up the plans for a comfortable Abbot's hut which will also make us less embarrassed when we host visiting senior monk dignitaries from abroad.

So it has been a busy three months and I will be glad when Halley's comet is gone and life here is quieter and less "auspicious". But although the comet isn't expected back for another 77 years, I hope that our visitors return sooner, and I surely hope someone else will ordain before then! For without all these "auspicious" events, I'll have nothing to write about in the next newsletter!

Ven. Brahmavamso
NEWS FROM THE COMMITTEE

The Society's AGM was held in February and the following members were elected as office bearers:

(1 to r) Kathy Shiels, David Miller, Doi Mills, Jill Stump (Secretary), Bob Dawkins, Dr. Chan Beng-Keat (Vice Pres) Phyllis Vos, Ron Storey (Treasurer), Christine Banks (Pres.)

Thank you to all outgoing committee members, and welcome to the incoming committee. Please feel free to contact committee members with any queries you may have.

SPECIAL GENERAL MEETING

There will be a special GENERAL MEETING of the Society on Saturday 31 May, 1986 at the Vihara to discuss changes to the Constitution. All ordinary members are asked to attend as there are several changes to the constitution proposed and is important that they are discussed by all.

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ALL WELCOME

We are aware that many people attend the regular activities at the Vihara, but due to our limited facilities there
are few opportunities to meet each other socially and develop new friendships.
An afternoon tea will be held on Sunday 27 April at 3pm for all of us to get to know each other a little better. There will be music playing, books to browse through and refreshments representing the many ethnic groups within the Buddhist community.

The members of the committee invite you, your family and friends.
Contributions of $2 or delicious treats will be gratefully accepted.

VENUE: NORTH PERTH MIGRANT RESOURCE CENTRE,
66 ANGOVE STREET, NORTH PERTH.

CAN YOU HELP?
One of the objectives of the Committee is to help raise funds with which to provide support for the resident Sangha and the teaching of Dhamma. We would appreciate your help with either or both of the following activities:

A CAKE STALL: Saturday morning, 19 April at Subiaco
We need many cakes and people to help serve on the stall. Cakes will be collected from the Vihara on Friday 18 April.

A HANDICRAFTS STALL: Sunday 4 May at Fremantle Markets.
We hope to have a good selection of handicrafts. It would be especially pleasing if our stall had produce representing many cultures. All art and craft forms as well as practical handmade items would be appropriate. All contributions may be left at the Vihara before 3 May.

PLEASE PHONE 381 4929 (Seetyee, Lynne or Kathy)

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YOGA CLASS
Hatha Yoga classes will commence at the Vihara on Thursday 1 May, 1986 at 6.30pm. Helene will provide this opportunity for us each Thursday evening after 1 May for two months. Helene recommends that you attend for a minimum of 4 weeks to gain maximum benefit. A contribution of $3 per session will be requested.

Please phone 444 7013 (Henry) or 448 2180 (Chris)

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The Dhamma School for children will recommence on Sunday April 6 at 4pm at the Buddhist Centre, 4 Magnolia Street, North Perth, and will continue on every other Sunday from then at the same time. The class is aimed at children aged from 8-14 years. We are also thinking of starting another class for younger children (5-8), at the same time and place, but this will only be possible when there is enough interest. Should you wish to enquire about either of these classes please contact Ajahn Jagaro at the monastery or the Vihara.

FROM THE TREASURER

The financial situation of the Society for 1985 in round figures for all accounts was as follows:

Cash balance carried forward from 1984: $30,758

Receipts from subscriptions $2,830
Receipts from donations $52,594
Receipts from fundraising $5,217
Receipts from loans $5,200
Receipts from miscellaneous income $1,384

Total of income and cash balance $97,993

Expenditure from the general a/c $16,756
Expenditure from the Vihara A/c $5,710
Expenditure from the Forest Monastery Building A/c $55,189
Leaving a cash balance for all accounts at 1 January 1986 of $20,339

Since then, due to the receipt of a generous and large donation from Thailand, brought to Perth by the Venerable Ajahn Pannyananda, we have been able to pay off the mortgage on the Vihara in Magnolia Street. With the establishment of the New Vihara Foundation all our resources can now be devoted to finding a larger Vihara in Perth. Those wishing to join the Foundation may do so by contacting any of the committee members or by writing to the Treasurer, care of the Vihara.
In order to continue spreading the Dhamma in Western Australia the Society needs your support. Subscriptions for membership of the Society for 1986 are now overdue. If you have not already done so, would you please pay your subs as soon as possible by either placing them in the box at the Vihara (in envelope provided) or by sending them to our Treasurer, 4 Magnolia Street, North Perth. Thank you.

MEMBERSHIP OF THE BUDDHIST SOCIETY

As you may know there are basically two types of membership of the Society, Associate and Ordinary membership. Associate membership is available to those people who do not necessarily consider themselves Buddhist but are interested in and sympathetic to Buddhism and wish to be associated with the Society. Associate members do not have any voting rights. On the other hand Ordinary membership is available on request to all who consider themselves practising Buddhists, in other words to those who take refuge in the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha and try to live by the five precepts of a Buddhist lay person. Ordinary members have full voting rights and may take a position on the committee of the Society.

A review and updating of membership records has recently been undertaken and as a result a new application form for Ordinary membership has been prepared. I hope to be able to contact all current Ordinary members so that they may sign the new forms.

It would also be a great help if anyone else who qualifies and wishes to apply for Ordinary membership were to contact any of the committee or the Treasurer for an application form.

May you and all beings live in peace and harmony.

Ronald Storey
Hon. Treasurer.

MEDITATION RETREAT

There will be a meditation retreat on the weekend of 10 and 11 May at the Centre of Theosophy in Mount Helena. For more information and bookings please phone Phyllis Vos on 399 1616.
REGULAR ACTIVITIES

AT THE BUDDHIST CENTRE (VIHARA)

THURSDAYS:  6.30pm  HATHA YOGA

FRIDAYS:  7.30pm-8.00pm  Guided sitting meditation
8.00pm-9.00pm  A talk on Buddhism by Ven. Ajahn Jagaro

SATURDAYS:  9.00am  Food offering (dana) to monks.
3.00pm-3.45pm  Meditation for beginners. Instruction by Ven. Ajahn Jagaro
7.30pm-8.30pm  Sitting meditation

SUNDAYS:  4.00pm  Dhamma school for 8-14 year olds
(alternate weeks)

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