

Nov/December 2007

Issue No: 27

Insight

Voice Of Wisdom

Monthly Newsletter of The Triple Gem Of The North



New beginning

This is the biggest holiday season for most of us. Some of us are celebrating Christmas. All of us can be excited with the coming New Year.

Think about why we get excited with new beginnings. Some might say, "I am excited with my new year's plans," some of us say, "Well, it will be another year." Some of us are planning parties and exciting events. Yet, some of us might say, "It is just another day."

It is time to ask ourselves why we get excited with new beginnings. Remember last year we had the same feeling about going into 2007 and again we have same feeling about 2008. What is behind the excitement? If we are really open to this we would see hope behind it. All the time we have exciting feelings about future with hope for a better

2008. Most of the time we need to overcome some challenges and bypass mistakes and avoid past unpleasant experiences. We are having these in the present moment but it is about the future and the past.

So now we have a question on our hands. What should we do with new beginnings? How do we use this opportunity ?

This time of year is a good time to learn from the past and carry the best into the New Year with new thinking and opportunities for change, for real beginnings. We need wisdom to inform this process. According to Buddha's teaching there are a few steps we can follow. Think about our mistakes and weaknesses from the past, recognize them honestly and strongly think about overcoming those in the next year. Identify what we didn't do and consider how we may have sabotaged ourselves. Recognize and understand worthy and successful actions that we maintained in the past and make sure we continue those in the future. Finally, understand the mistakes and the things we didn't do. Know that there are things we could do and make sure not to continued weaknesses and mistakes in the future. Buddha mentions these steps will lead to useful future. These may sound too easy, but really, if we take the time, we can accomplish a great deal with little struggle.

Most of the time we will never correct ourselves but the New Year is the time to recognize our weaknesses and correct ourselves. That will change our entire future. These ways we will avoid complaining to others. We always think unhappiness is coming from the outside. That is a mistake. Anger and frustrations arise due to unpleasant experience. It is time to think strongly about this. In this new year we will understand what we are doing, do our best and never poison our body by anger or frustration. We are creating a new happy year, we are leading this new beginning to a new life.

A Moment On the Road

— *Bhante Sathi* —



Winter is a beautiful time for some of us but a time of distress for others. It depends on how we perceive it. Last weekend it was snowing when I entered the meditation room at the Chanhassen Library. Someone asked me, "How was the drive?" At the end of the session everybody asked me to drive safely on the way back.

The drive back to Mankato was treacherous with many ice spots. I thought I should drive slowly and maintain a constant speed without braking and take curves gently. At one point the road was just one lane because the plow had only cleared the left lane on the two lane road, making the drive even more challenging.

I observed some cars driving fast and some people were not happy with my slow driving. Then I felt guilty but I thought if I am not safe why do I get stressed because others are frustrated? I observed a few vehicles in the ditch. Then suddenly a bright flash of light in my mirror. A truck flashing its lights to say that I am driving slow. I was not comfortable to go to into an unplowed lane so I let that person pass me. I thought, "I will not involve myself with that person's frustration." So I stopped worrying about that and I focused on the road. Eventually the truck drove to the other lane while the driver gave me a dirty look. He slid back into my lane, raced little a bit then slid into a ditch. There was nothing I could do because there was no way to stop. As I passed, I saw him turn his head around and gave me a sad look.

I can only drive one car at a time. I cannot drive somebody else's vehicle and no one else can drive for me when I am behind the wheel. That is the reality of the moment.

Self-control

One day there was an earthquake that shook the entire Zen temple. Parts of it even collapsed. Many of the monks were terrified. When the earthquake stopped the teacher said, "Now you have had the opportunity to see how a Zen man behaves in a crisis situation. You may have noticed that I did not panic. I was quite aware of what was happening and what to do. I led you all to the kitchen, the strongest part of the temple. It was a good decision, because you see we have all survived without any injuries. However, despite my self-control and composure, I did feel a little bit tense - which you may have deduced from the fact that I drank a large glass of water, something I never do under ordinary circumstances."

One of the monks smiled, but didn't say anything.

"What are you laughing at?" asked the teacher.

"That wasn't water," the monk replied, "it was a large glass of soy sauce."

Flower Shower

Subhuti was Buddha's disciple. He was able to understand the potency of emptiness, the viewpoint that nothing exists except in its relationship of subjectivity and objectivity. One day Subhuti, in a mood of sublime emptiness, was sitting under a tree. Flowers began to fall about him.

"We are praising you for your discourse on emptiness," the gods whispered to him.

"But I have not spoken of emptiness," said Subhuti.

"You have not spoken of emptiness, we have not heard emptiness," responded the gods. "This is true emptiness." And blossoms showered upon Subhuti as rain

Weekly Meditation**Mankato — Monday Night****7:00 PM to 8:30 PM****Unitarian Universality Fellowship****937 Charles Ave.****Mankato, MN 56001****Call Tricia 507-524-3245****St Peter — Tuesday Night****7:00 PM to 8:00 PM****Gustavus Adolphus College****In Linner Lounge****Call Asitha 641-420-7708****Chanhassen -Saturday Morning****10:10 AM to 11:30 PM****Chanhassen Library****11 Kerber Drive****Chanhassen, MN****Call Ralph 952-934-9727**Biweekly Meditation**Northfield — Thursday Night****Northfield Buddhist Meditation Ctr.****6:30 PM to 7:45 PM****313 1/2 Division Street, Suite 201****Northfield, MN 55057****At Carlton****8:00 PM to 9:00 PM****Carlton College- Chapel Lounge****One North College Street****Northfield, MN****All Are Welcome**Maha Kachchayana

One should not do much work
 One should avoid people,
 One should not bustle (to obtain gifts).
 One who is eager and greedy for flavors
 Misses the goal that entails happiness.

They knew as a bog this homage and veneration
 Obtained among devoted families.
 A subtle dart, difficult to extract,
 Honor is hard for a vile man to discard.

It is not on account of another
 That a mortal's kamma is evil.
 On one's own accord one should not resort to evil,
 For mortals have kamma as their kinsmen.

One is not a thief by another's word,
 One is not a sage by another's word;
 It is as one knows oneself
 That the devas also know one.

Others do not understand
 That we all come to an end here.
 But those wise ones who understand this
 Thereby settle their quarrels.

The wise man lives indeed
 Even despite the loss of his wealth.
 But if one does not obtain wisdom,
 Then even though rich one is not alive.

One hears all with the ear,
 One sees all with the eye,
 The wise man should not reject
 Everything that is seen and heard.

One with eyes should be as if blind,
 One with ears as if deaf,
 One with wisdom as if mute,
 One with strength as if feeble.
 Then, when the goal has been attained,
 One may lie upon one's death bed.

-- Translated by Bhikku Bodhi --


**Wishing You a
 Happy New Year**

The Miracle of Dana



On the full moon of October two noble friends and the two resident monks at the Mankato Meditation Center joined me to do a merit transfer ceremony for my mother. It was the twelfth full moon since her death. Anniversaries are just a date on the calendar, but as the changes in the season touched my senses I felt almost transported back to that painful time one year ago. In the days leading up to the event I began to feel depressed and listless. I desperately wanted to do something for my mother, but I was not sure what the best thing would be. The monks told me that the most powerful merit comes out of feeding the Maha Sangha. While I understood the concept, I had my doubts. I thought, "There seems to be plenty of food for the monks to eat. It doesn't make any difference if I bring them food." I didn't feel that feeding them would have any profound impact on the world.

The night before the dana I searched for the groceries I would need to prepare a meal that would be as close to the monks Sri Lankan taste buds as possible. I started to feel nervous as I thought about the logistics of cooking food that was totally foreign to me. I had no idea if this was going to work at all. Luckily, I was able to prepare the meal at the Center with some guidance from Bhante Sathi and Bhante Punna. Before long Rashmi came over to help and Dean also showed up. As we stirred soup and rolled out dough a lively conversation began. I began to feel comfortable and relaxed in the family-like atmosphere. At this point the idea crept into my mind that maybe there is more to this ceremony than what I had suspected.

When the preparation was finished, we made a miniature meal on a tray to offer to Buddha. We can joke about whether Buddha enjoys this food or that food, but we know the Buddha is not even around to taste it. By giving the offering we are opening our hearts to receive the joy of selfless giving. In this context we were also wishing that my mother would have the spiritual sustenance to continue her journey. By lighting a candle, we were wishing for her to share the joy of spiritual awareness. Thinking about this made me happy.

Sitting in the little shrine room with my teachers and support group of friends, chanting and meditating, I was showing my mom that I am ok. Even more so, I showed myself that I have the support and guidance I need to be ok. The happiness from this was a force that I could easily transfer to my mother. The concentration and sincerity of the other people in the room strengthened and directed that force. I was touched that my noble friends showed not only that they cared about me, but that they also cared about my mom.

A few weeks ago, I was angry when Bhante suggested I ask someone to help me prepare the meal for this dana. I thought he was implying that I was not capable to do this on my own. I found out that dana is not an individualistic act. The benefit from the meal did not come from the food itself. The benefit was what we shared together.

—Melissa Lorentz—

A re-dedication

—- Bonnie Dean —-

After 40 years, it occurred to Brian and me that the spiritual component of our life together had been merely garnish and not the main course. Who better than Bhante Sathi to help us change direction?

After Brian and I said refuge and offering in Tibetan, Bhante Sathi sat before us. He told the story of a couple who had been married for many years, and had gone to the Buddha for a blessing. Buddha told them they had incarnated 500 times together! Bhante Sathi told the group that we had invited them because we love them, and that we wanted them to share in this blessing, both of which were true.

After the prayer thread was passed, Bhante chanted a blessing in Pali. The thread was almost electric; many felt the blessing moving through it. Then Bhante Sathi led focused breath awareness, followed by a loving-kindness meditation.

Our friends are serious students from many traditions - Hinduism and raja yoga, Christianity, various meditative forms of movement, a nature-based form of spirituality. There was a pipe-holder in the Lakota tradition, and practitioners of both Theravada and Mahyana Buddhism. All appreciated and felt the universal heart energy that Bhante Sathi brought from the Buddha to this occasion. Afterwards, everyone gratefully accepted a blessing cord.

This occasion was a wonderful way to affirm in the presence of spiritual friends our intention to change the remaining years of our relationship from a destination to a path.



We'll See...

There is a Taoist story of an old farmer who had worked his crops for many years. One day his horse ran away. Upon hearing the news, his neighbors came to visit.

"Such bad luck," they said sympathetically.

"We'll see," the farmer replied.

The next morning the horse returned, bringing with it three other wild horses.

"How wonderful," the neighbors exclaimed.

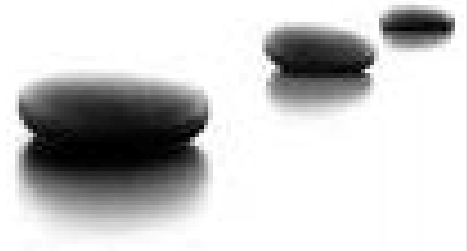
"We'll see," replied the old man.

The following day, his son tried to ride one of the untamed horses, was thrown, and broke his leg. The neighbors again came to offer their sympathy on his misfortune.

"We'll see," answered the farmer.

The day after, military officials came to the village to draft young men into the army. Seeing that the son's leg was broken, they passed him by. The neighbors congratulated the farmer on how well things had turned out.

"We'll see" said the farmer.



Jataka 144

Nanguttha Jataka

The Birth Fire



by Ken and Visakha Kawasaki (from Jataka Tales of the Buddha, soon to be published by Buddhist Publication Society)

It was while staying at Jetavana that the Buddha told this story about the Ajivikas, or naked ascetics, who practiced austerities behind the mango grove. A number of bhikkhus saw them punishing their bodies in various ways—painfully squatting on their heels, swinging in the air like bats, reclining on thorns, and scorching themselves with five fires ¹. The bhikkhus asked the Buddha whether there was any value in such practices.

"None whatsoever," the Buddha answered. "Wise men used to go into the forest, expecting to benefit from austerities like these. One of them found himself no better off for all his sacrifices, so he doused his fire and gave it up. By practicing meditation, he won rebirth in the Brahma heavens." Then he told this story of the past.

Long, long ago, when Brahamadatta was reigning in Baranasi, the Bodhisatta was born into a brahmin family in the North. On the day of his birth, his parents, in keeping with tradition, lit a fire.

On his sixteenth birthday, his parents said, "Son, on the day of your birth we lit a birth-fire for you. Now it is time for you to choose. If you wish to lead the family life, you should learn the three vedas. If, however, you wish to attain heaven, take your fire with you into the forest, and care for it there. In that way you can win the great Brahma's favor and reach his realm."

Telling his parents that a family life didn't appeal to him, he went into the forest and lived in a hermitage tending his fire. After a while, some villagers gave him an ox. As he was leading the beast back to his hermitage, he resolved to offer it as a sacrifice to the god of fire. He discovered, however, that he had no salt. Thinking that the god would not like his offering of meat without salt, he decided to return to the village to get some. Before going, he carefully tethered the animal.

While he was away, a band of hunters passed his hermitage. Seeing the ox, they killed it and roasted the best cuts for themselves for dinner. What meat they couldn't eat they carried away, leaving only the tail, the hide, and the hooves.

When the young ascetic returned with the salt, he found only these miserable remains.

"If this Lord of Fire cannot manage to look after his own sacrifice," he cried, "how can he possibly look after me? It is a complete waste of time to serve him!

"Wretched Jataveda," he mocked, addressing the god by name, "through your own incompetence, your meat is gone. Now you will have to be satisfied with this offal. Enjoy your tail, skin, and hooves, and consider yourself lucky!" In disgust he threw the miserable scraps onto the fire.

After this bogus ceremony, the young ascetic put out the fire and left the hermitage. He went into the Himalayas and devoted himself to meditation on the Four Brahma Viharas. Through his efforts, he ensured his rebirth in the Brahma heavens.

Having concluded his story, the Buddha identified the birth: "At that time, I was the ascetic who quenched the fire."

Pupphavagga - Flowers

(Verses 44-59)

Who will be able to understand himself, this world, heaven and hell? Who will fully realize the well-preached Doctrine, which is like a garland fixed by a clever garland maker?



The disciple in training (sekha) will be able to understand himself, this world, heaven and hell. He will realize the well-preached Doctrine, which is like a garland fixed by a clever garland maker.

Knowing that this body is like foam, and comprehending its mirage-nature, one should destroy the flower shafts of sensual passions (Mara), and pass beyond the sight of the King of Death.

The man who gathers flowers (of sensual pleasure), whose mind is distracted, death carries off as a great flood sweeps away a sleeping village.

The man who gathers flowers (of sensual pleasure), whose mind is distracted, and who is insatiate in desires, the Destroyer brings under his sway.

As a bee without harming the flower, its colors or scent, flies away, collecting only the honey, even so should the sage wander in the village.

Not the faults of others, nor what others have done or left undone, but one's own deeds, done and left undone, should one consider.

As a flower beautiful and brilliant of hue, but without fragrance, even so fruitless is the well-spoken word of one who does not practice it.

As a flower beautiful, brilliant of hue and full of fragrance too, even so fruitful is the well-spoken word of one who does practice it.

As from a heap of flowers many a garland is made even so many one born as a human being should do a good deed.

The perfume of flowers blows not against the wind not does the fragrance of sandalwood, tagara and jasmine, but the fragrance of the virtuous blows against the wind; the virtuous man pervades every direction.

Sandalwood, tagara, lotus, and jasmine: above all these kinds of fragrance, the perfume of virtue is by far the best.

Of little account is the fragrance of tagara or sandal; the fragrance of the virtuous, which blows even amongst the gods, is supreme.

Those, who are virtuous and who live a life of heedfulness, are set free through attaining perfect wisdom and Mara cannot find a way to them.

The lotus will grow even in rubbish thrown away. It will delight the heart with its sweet smell and beauty.

Just like a lotus, the disciple, by his wisdom, will shine among them that are ignorant, blind and unconverted.



Buddhist Teachings for Daily Life

Course 1 -(second Group)

Time: Wednesday 6:00 pm to 7:30 pm

Dates March 5, 12, 19, 26

April 2, 9, 16,

Location: 311 Elm Street

Mankato, MN 56001

Description: We will study Buddhist Sutras on how to cultivate joy and health in daily life. Students will be given reading material to take home. The class will include lectures by Bhante Sathi as well as group discussion and quizzes. Group work in class will reinforce understanding of the Buddha's intricate teachings on human relationships and politics. Topics will include:

- * What is a Buddha
- * History of the different schools of Buddhism
- * The meaning of life according to Buddha
- * How to cultivate harmonious relationships.
- * Methods to maintain better interpersonal connections
- * How to govern a country

Requirements: Read *What the Buddha Taught* by Walpola Rahula, available at the Center for a \$5 suggested donation. Beginners and advanced practitioners are welcome.

Course Fee: \$100 Course materials and textbook will be provided.

Registration: Required by February 15. Limited to 15 students. Send e-mail to info@triplegem.org or call at (507) 933-4421

Teacher: Venerable Sathi is a Theravada Buddhist monk from Sri Lanka.

Voice Of Wisdom

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To add you to our mailing list send your information via E-mail or feel free call us.

In the Spirit of Noble Friends, Triple Gem of the North invites you to submit your writings and comments to us at info@triplegem.org

New Year Blessing Chanting

Saturday, December 29 —Chanhassen

Time 10:15 am

Contact Ralph at 952-934-9727

January 1, 2008 — Mankato

Time: 6:00 pm

At Monks Residence in Mankato

We will be chant a sutta which was introduced by Buddha for wishing wealth and prosperity.

All are welcome

One Day Retreat

January 26

8:00 am to 5:00 pm

Chu Phat An Temple

Roseville, MN

Registration is required by January 15 via e-mail or call 612-216-4854

Triple Gem of the North Is a 501 (C) 3 approved tax-deductible Non- profit organization based in state of Minnesota. We operate in Minneapolis, St Paul, Chanhassen , St Peter and Mankato. Your tax-deductible contribution will assist in our endeavor to serve the community through weekly meditation classes, day long retreats and the assistance in building a permanent retreat center. Triple Gem is also heavily involved in various disaster relief efforts such as Tsunami relief in Sri Lanka, and Hurricane Katrina. This is done in the spirit of the teachings of the Buddha.