



ProVisions

One who is on the Quest needs provisions for the journey; such are these. We hope some are also visions-forward.

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On the Buddha & Buddhism

Buddha Jayanti (or **Buddha Purnima**) is celebrated in remembrance of **Gautama Buddha**. It falls on the full moon of the fourth lunar month (month of Vaisakh), this year on May 9, 2009. **Buddha Jayanti** – the “**Thrice Blessed Day**” – commemorates three important events of Buddha’s life: His birth in 623 B.C.E., His enlightenment under the Bodhi tree in Bodh Gaya, India in 588 B.C.E., and His attainment at the age of 80 of **Paranirvana**, which occurs upon the death of the body of one who has attained complete awakening (**bodhi**). To commemorate, we devote this issue of **ProVisions** to Lord Buddha and Buddhism. All entries were contributed by friends and devotees, unless otherwise noted.

Buddha knew

What does this word “Buddha” mean? Does it describe a particular person who lived twenty-five centuries ago? Yes, it does, but that is not the stopping point of this word. The meaning of the word is “One Who Is Awakened.” So, when we awaken in the morning, do we attain Buddha-hood again, just like yesterday morning? It is not that easy. A different type of awakening is spoken of here. It is an awakening in which all unwholesome states have dissolved and thus one awakens to his True Nature, or “Buddha nature.”

In the story of Siddhartha Gautama, who lived in northern India about five hundred B.C., it became clear to him that his life in the royal palace, filled with comfort and luxury, would not be conducive to the attainment of enlightenment. This is because when one relies on and is completely immersed in physical pleasure alone, there is not much reason to seek anything but an increase of those types of experiences.

But when one starts to understand that underlying those happy states, inescapable misery awaits, he becomes interested in learning how to overcome misery. Is it possible to overcome misery and unhappiness? Physically, no. Mentally, no. But mind is the tool that can be used to practice



Sunset, Ayutthaya Historical Park, Thailand
Source: Wikimedia Commons

transcendence of mind. Or as stated many times before, the thorn is used to pick out the thorn. So, Siddhartha Gautama decided to investigate the possibility of overcoming misery. He did this through meditation or awareness of life as it is in the present moment, as experienced in his body, but without reaction on his part. His point of focus was the breath. So leaving the royal life of luxury he set out to observe himself in seclusion so as to work out this problem of misery that plagues all of humanity. He had to do it alone without interference from outer influences. After six years of extreme effort he succeeded.

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Buddha Knew

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I think we all know the story well enough that a re-telling of it is not necessary here. One fact may be helpful though. The Buddha never claimed to be a god or divine in any way. He was a man. This is very good news for humankind because what has been attained by one can be attained by any one who is willing to work at it as he did.

No doubt the Buddha was an advanced one, probably with many previous lives dedicated to spiritual practice. That should not dampen the spirits of a true seeker of enlightenment. No matter where we are on the path, the important thing is that we are on the path. The Buddha-mind lies at the core of every single being. It may be covered by ignorance and other negative states, but it is ever there. It needs to be nurtured, watered and worked before it will flourish. If we ignore it, it will remain dormant while we bask in sensual pleasures alone.

Once a disciple of Buddha was asked, what does your master teach? He thought for a few seconds and replied “He simply teaches,

1. Do not that which is evil
2. Do that which is good, and
3. Purify your mind

Or, do not practice immorality, practice morality, and meditate. Why the morality issue? Because immoral actions bring results which hold one in bondage. Moral actions tend toward freedom. Why meditate? So we can begin to become aware of the source of misery, the mind. Misery or pleasure is experienced in the present moment but our past actions, due to the judgment facility of mind, is the real culprit. We judge a sensation as either pleasurable or painful and act on that assumption. This is the set-up for craving or aversion. We then become lost in an ocean of seeking pleasure and shunning pain. We may never realize that it is all impermanent and it is not wise to react to that which is by nature passing away. This is the birthplace of new *samskaras*. This is what the Buddha found and what he taught.

One need not be a Buddhist to practice this three-fold teaching. After all, which religion can not agree that

being good, not evil, and purifying the mind is not proper conduct for any human?

Gautama Buddha was not founding a new religion: He was teaching a way from darkness to light. He was not the first, only, or last Enlightened One to appear to the human race for the benefit of those who seek a way out of misery. But even a Buddha is incapable of causing our liberation – he can guide us there, but it is up to each individual to do the actual work. If one is unwilling to work for his own welfare, who will do it for him? Who can do it for him? Not the Buddha. Not anyone else.

– Jim Watkins

Poetry. . .

The Ground of Awakening

*When I was a lowlander, life was like a breeze way:
there was a door always open at each end –
a private revelation of kaleidoscopic, rotating
scenes; blazing red sunrises, golden dusks,
and evenings of deepening emerald greens.*

*Then one day, my restless, young, springtime self,
venturing up, climbing high, wandered into the
coolness of a mountain wintertime cave;
my springtime self subsiding into its own ground,
as in darkness and stillness, night followed day.*

*It was summer's early death, an end of the all
familiar, of all that is certain, of all that is known.*

*But they say that somewhere it is summer always,
and so as my naked feet now plunge into this
shimmering meadow grass, a living lake without
end, and as the vaporous sun is drying the moist
earth-laden air, almost before it rises as a smell*

*of dank, accumulated soil, I know this ground
to be the Ground of Awakening, whose summer
comes back to warm the aching limbs of a cave
dweller's memory; and today, in St. Vrain canyon
there echoes the sound which only Buddha could*

*hear with His one enormous ear: as each wordless
tree bows to each wordless tree –*

so do I bow to thee.

– Judith, Hermit of Sarada

In the Hindu-Buddhist Dialogue held in 1988 at Vivekananda Monastery, Ganges, Michigan, Geshe Lundhrub Sopa, Gelugs monk and Professor of Tibetan Language and Doctrine at the University of Wisconsin, was the representative of Tibetan Buddhism. This is a brief summary of his opening speech.

He stated that the first three principles of the Mahayana doctrine are renunciation of self, leading other beings to enlightenment, and the attainment of *sunyata*. We all want everlasting peace and happiness, he said, but is it possible to get rid of all undesirable elements in life? Yes. We all have the same nature: it can be free from all obstacles and impurities because Buddha showed that this was so. The distinction was drawn between the pure and the essentially pure, citing the example of water, which is pure in its nature but can be subjected to various degrees of superficial impurity. Our mind, then, is essentially pure. What are the poisons, the contaminants? Hatred, desire and ignorance. But the goal is achievable, for the obstacles are temporary and removable. Geshe Sopa referred to the 84,000 *kleshas* as our father and *karma* as our mother, with respect to the basic ignorance. Ignorance of what? Our True Nature.

The mention of *sunyata*, raised several questions in the conference. Some of the Hindus present protested at the idea of the goal being void or emptiness. Others asked for clarification. The Lama appended the following replies: Emptiness does not mean nihilism, not empty of Itself. But the preparation or qualification for this experience demands an emptying of all we now know ourselves to have or to be. It is identical with Wisdom. There is the absence of self – i.e., of grasping, possessing – the I, me, mine.

– Swami Yogeshananda

Bagging an Empty Bowl

With an empty bowl in his hand, the Buddhist monk was marching through the main street of a large city. People generously threw pearls, diamonds, and golden ornaments to fill his bowl but the bowl declared a steadfast emptiness. He went past the city with an empty heart and an empty bowl. As he entered the forest in the outskirts of the city, a torn and lackluster cloth made its way to the bowl. The monk turned instantly radiant. “Who are you, please let me look at you,” he implored. “I can’t appear before you,” said a female voice, “that was the only cloth I have and I was wearing it. “The city left me starving, the forest fulfilled me,” muttered the monk and disappeared in the forest.



A Test of a Monk’s Mellowness

After an extensive and rigorous training, Poorna was ready to deliver his message to the outer world as a Buddhist monk. Lord Buddha asked to see him early next morning for his final test. Poorna punctually appeared before the Lord at the scheduled time:

- B: What would you do if people plug their ears with cotton balls when you speak to them?
- P: I will be happy they don’t throw eggs at me.
- B: What would you do if they throw eggs at you?
- P: I would be happy they do not throw rocks at me.
- B:...and if they throw rocks.....?
- B: I would be happy they do not shoot arrows at me.
- B:...and if they shoot arrows.....?
- P: I will be happy that the arrows hurt me but do not kill me.
- Buddha finally asked, “and if one arrow pierces through your heart and kills you.....?”
- “I would be thankful to them for giving me such a quick Nirvana,” said Poorna.
- With a blissful smile, Lord Buddha declared him fit to be a monk.

– Two Stories from Bhagirath Majmudar

This poem tells the well-known Buddhist story of Kisa Gotami from her perspective. She did not know what death was, lost her infant son to it, and ultimately found peace at the feet of the Buddha by becoming his disciple.

Grief and Peace

His eyes closed, his body cold
What has happened to my baby dear?
My only son, my jewel gold
Struck down still by a disease queer.

With constant stillness as its effect,
This is "Death," my kin say.
An evil disease, none can protect
With young and old as its prey.

I take him away and go for a run,
Leaving my kin behind – weeping and sad,
To sever this disease off my son,
And assuage the grief that turns me mad.

Hither and thither, I run to find
A cure to return my baby's smile,
When I hear of a man, a doctor kind,
Who cures diseases, stubborn and vile.

There he is! The doctor famed, ochre-clad,
Seated on a pavement high,
Speaking to people, rich and ill-clad,
Who sit bewitched, without a sigh.

I rush to him, trampling on people many,
And show him my son stabile,
My mouth opens without words any,
To stop my tears, I try futile.

He sees my son with eyes aglow,
And his lips move with a smile sweet,
He asks me to get grams few,
From a house without Death's visit.

I knock the doors of homes many
To find the one without Death's haunt.
Only to find that there isn't any
That can give me the grams I want.

The truth struck through my heart deep,
That my son is lost forever,
I lay him down and put him to sleep
And kiss him over and over.

I found myself return to the doctor wise,
To cure me off my sorrow,
His peaceful face, his compassionate eyes,
Fill my heart's deep furrow.

To a life that is a ocean of grief
Take I, a final retreat
My only refuge, to find a relief
Are the doctor's holy feet.

Life is like a river in flow,
Where no one belongs to me,
Oh doctor kind! This I realize as I grow -
In peace bestowed by Thee.

– Boka Marimba



The Buddha. Odilon Redon. 1905. Musée D'Orsay, Paris. Redon painted five portraits of the Buddha.

*Under the image of Buddha,
All these spring flowers,
Seem a little tiresome.*

– Kobayashi Issa (submitted by Fontaine Epler)

Kobayashi Issa was one of Japan's most prolific poets. He left in his journals over twenty thousand one-breath poems—then called haikai but today known as haiku.



*Featuring News and
Information About Your Vedanta Center*

Music selected for the occasion were two vocal pieces with guitar accompaniment: “Now the Green Blade Rises” and “Lift Your Voice Rejoicing, Mary.” After Swami Brahmailyandana’s homily on Vedantic views of Easter, the congregation made flower offerings at the beautifully decorated shrine, with many blossoms from their own spring gardens. The lovely service ended with Swami Brahmailyandana leading the group in a guided meditation.

Thanks to our Contributors!

Special thanks to all of you who submitted such wonderful material on the theme of “**Buddha and Buddhism**” to this issue of *Pro Visions*. Each upcoming issue will also focus on a different theme, and your contributions will again be welcome. The topic for the June issue of *Pro Visions* will be “**Favorite Spiritual Images**,” both literary and visual. If you have an article, anecdote, poem, essay, prayer, short story, song, chant, rumination, joke, quote, thought, poem or your own artwork which can be reproduced in two-dimensional form – drawing, photograph, cartoon, painting, even a photo of a sculpture and statue – about the topic, please submit it to us by **May 15** for possible inclusion in the newsletter. The July issue will focus on “**Science and Vedanta**.” Deadline for those submissions is **June 15**. If you have an idea of a topic which you would like to see featured in a future issue of *Pro Visions*, please let us know.

Easter Celebration

Vedanta Center devotees and friends celebrated Easter with a special observance that Sunday. Selected readings for the occasion included portions from Christ’s “Sermon on the Mount,” the poem “Spring” by British poet Gerard Manley Hopkins, Meister Eckhart’s sermon “This is Spirituality: Waking Up,” the Gospel of John Easter account, and George Herbert’s “Come My Way” read responsively.



Shrine with “Laughing Jesus” at Easter Celebration

Koffee Klatch

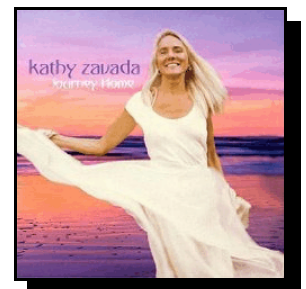
Our weekly Koffee Klatch has become a tremendous success! All are welcome following our Sunday service. We have coffee, herbal and regular teas, and snacks. Please join with us for the fellowship, lively discussions, and refreshments.

Volunteer Opportunities

We continue to need folks to help weed our gardens, tend to the Koffee Klatch, and clean the Chapel. Please contact us if you are interested in volunteering in any capacity.

Soham Meditation Music

Many of you have inquired about obtaining a copy of the music Swami Brahmailyandana uses during guided meditation. The artist is Kathy Zavada, and the CD is entitled “The Journey Home,” which we will shortly have available for sale in the Book Store.



Sunday School!

We are in the process of setting up a Sunday School for children! Details will be provided shortly.

REGULARLY SCHEDULED EVENTS

Sunday	10:30 AM 11:00 AM	Chant Service. Discourse , followed by Discussion and Guided Meditation .
Thursday	8 PM	We are reading <i>Way of the Mystic Part II – The Lectures of Swami Vivekananda On a Universal Approach to Mysticism</i> . The book is available for sale from the Vedanta Center of Atlanta. A half-hour's meditation in the Chapel follows the one hour class.
3rd Fri.	7:30 PM	RAM NAM will be held on May 15 th , 993 Walker Ave., Atlanta, GA 30316.
Daily**	6 PM	Vespers/Arati – A short period of prayer is followed by silent meditation. ** <i>Except Sundays</i> .

MAY 2009 DISCOURSE TOPICS & SPECIAL EVENTS

3	11 AM	The Four Yogas as a Universal Religion IV. Talk followed by discussion.
10	11 AM	Special Guest Speaker: Gareth Young, Instructor, Atlanta Soto Zen Center – Talk followed by discussion.✽
17	11 AM	The Interrelationship of the Four Yogas. Talk followed by discussion.
24	11 AM	BUDDHA JAYANTI CELEBRATION. †
31	11 AM	Introduction to the <i>Bhagavad Gita</i> – Uma Majmudar. Talk followed by discussion.♀

ANNOUNCEMENTS

† The “**Thrice-Blessed Day**” of Lord Buddha will be observed on **Sunday May 24th** followed by pot luck lunch. **Brother Utsumi** and **Sister Denise** of the **Nipponzan Myohoji (Japanese Peace Temple)** will be our special guests for the service.

✽ **Gareth Young**, Instructor at the **Atlanta Soto Zen Center**, will be our special guest speaker on Sunday, **May 10**.

Swami Brahmagvidyananda continues his discourse series on May 3 entitled “**The Four Yogas as a Universal Religion.**” The Four Yogas of Vedanta are Raja, Bhakti, Jnana, and Karma. On May 17th, Swami’s discourse will focus on the interrelationship of the Four Yogas.

♀ We are pleased to announce that our own Uma Majmudar will begin a monthly lecture series on the *Bhagavad Gita*, beginning Sunday, May 31. You will not want to miss Uma’s scholarly and refreshing analysis of the *Gita*!

Brad Byron contributed the following with these comments: “It has been said that if all the New Testament was lost and only the Sermon on the Mount survived, we would still have the essential teachings of Jesus Christ. Though the body of Buddhist scriptures is much more voluminous than the **Bible**, some have made a similar claim that the essential teachings of the Buddha are contained in the **Dhammapada**. The following is a passage from Chapter 1 of the **Dhammapada** which I find very much in line with the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna:”

Our life is shaped by our mind; we become what we think.

Suffering follows a evil thought as the wheels of a cart follow the oxen that draw it.

Our life is shaped by our mind; we become what we think.

Joy follows a pure thought like a shadow that never leaves.

“He was angry with me, he attacked me, he defeated me, he robbed me” – those who dwell on such thoughts will never be free from hatred.

“He was angry with me, he attacked me, he defeated me, he robbed me” – those who do not dwell on such thoughts will surely be free from hatred.

For hatred can never put an end to hatred. Love alone can. This is an eternal law. People forget that their lives will end soon. For those who remember, quarrels come to an end.

* * *

Swamiji’s Lectures

With this issue, we continue our series devoted to the lectures of Swami Vivekananda. The following excerpts are taken from a lecture he delivered in London, 1896. Captions are provided by Sw. Brahmavidyananda.

The Absolute and Manifestation

In Buddha we had the great, universal heart and universal patience, making religion practical and bringing it to everyone’s door. In Shankaracharya



Chauk Htat Gyi Buddha, Myanmar
Photograph by Gillian Renault

we saw tremendous intellectual power, throwing the scorching light of reason upon everything. We want today that bright sun of intellectuality joined with the heart of Buddha, the wonderful infinite heart of love and mercy. This union will give us the highest philosophy. Science and religion will meet and shake hands. Poetry and philosophy will become friends. This will be the religion of the future, and if we can work it out, we may be sure that it will be for all times and peoples.

It was the great Buddha, who never cared for the dualist gods, and who has been called an atheist and materialist, who yet was ready to give up his body for a poor goat. That Man set in motion the highest moral ideas any nation can have. Whenever there is a moral code, it is a ray of light from that Man. We cannot force the great hearts of the world into narrow limits, and keep them there, especially at this time in the history of humanity when there is a degree of intellectual development such as was never dreamed of even a hundred years ago, when a wave of scientific knowledge has arisen which nobody, even fifty years ago, would have dreamed of. By trying to force people into narrow limits you degrade them into animals and unthinking masses. You kill their moral life. What is now wanted is a combination of the greatest heart with the highest intellectuality, of infinite love with infinite knowledge. The Vedantist gives no other attributes to God except these three – that He is Infinite Existence, Infinite cannot be; knowledge without love and love without

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Swamiji's Lectures

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Knowledge, and Infinite Bliss, and he regards these three as One. Existence without knowledge and love knowledge cannot be. What we want is the harmony of Existence, Knowledge, and Bliss Infinite. For that is our goal. We want harmony, not one-sided development. And it is possible to have the intellect of a Shankara with the heart of a Buddha. I hope we shall all struggle to attain to that blessed combination.

Freedom

Let me tell you in conclusion a few words about one man who actually carried this teaching of Karma-Yoga into practice. That man is Buddha.

He is the one man who ever carried this into perfect practice. All the prophets of the world, except Buddha, had external motives to move them to unselfish action. The prophets of the world, with this single exception, may be divided into two sets, one set holding that they are incarnations of God come down on earth, and the other holding that they are only messengers from God; and both draw their impetus for work from outside, expect reward from outside, however highly spiritual may be the language they use. But Buddha is the only prophet who said, "I do

not care to know your various theories about God. What is the use of discussing all the subtle doctrines about the soul? Do good and be good. And this will take you to freedom and to whatever truth there is."

He was, in the conduct of his life, absolutely without personal motives; and what man worked more than he? Show me in history one character who has soared so high above all. The whole human race has produced but one such character, such high philosophy, such wide sympathy. This great philosopher, preaching the highest philosophy, yet had the deepest sympathy for the lowest of animals, and never put forth any claims for himself. He is the ideal Karma-Yogi, acting entirely without motive, and the history of humanity shows him to have been the greatest man ever born; beyond compare the greatest combination of heart and brain that ever existed, the greatest soul-power that has ever been manifested. He is the first great reformer the world has seen. He was the first who dared to say, "Believe not because some old manuscripts are produced, believe not because it is your national belief, because you have been made to believe it from your childhood; but reason it all out, and after you have analyzed it, then, if you find that it will do good to one and all, believe it, live up to it, and help others to live up to it." He works best who works without any motive, neither for money, nor for fame, nor for anything else; and when a man can do that, he will be a Buddha, and out of him will come the power to work in such a manner as will transform the world. This man represents the very highest ideal of Karma-Yoga.



Vedanta Center of Atlanta

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