

## **FIRST CENTENARY OF THE BUDDHIST FLAG**

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The World Buddhist Flag was one hundred years old on the Wesak full moon day of this year (1985) because it was first hoisted in Sri Lanka on the Wesak full moon day of the year 1885. This first centenary of the Buddhist Flag was celebrated in Sri Lanka by issuing a special commemorative postal stamp and declaring a special public holiday for that purpose, because Wesak full moon day was also declared a public holiday for the first time by the government in 1885, as a result of the agitations made by the Buddhists led by the well-known American Buddhist Colonel Steele Olcott.

As a British Colony, Sri Lanka, witnessed a period of Buddhist revival during the latter part of the 19th century and it was during this period that Colonel Olcott arrived in Sri Lanka and launched the Buddhist education movement. It was also during this period that Buddhist leader Anagarika Dharmapala started his Buddhist missionary campaign and organized the Mahabodhi Society.

At this time Buddhists did not have a flag that could be accepted by world Buddhists irrespective of their cultural and geographical differences. Therefore the Buddhist leaders of Sri Lanka under the able guidance of the Maha Nayaka Theros like Ven. Hikkadawe Sri Sumangala and Ven. Migettuwatte Gunananda designed the present Buddhist flag symbolizing the six colours of the halo that emanated from the body of the Buddha when he attained Enlightenment under the Bodhi tree at Buddhagaya on the night of the Wesak Day 2574 years ago. The six colours as believed by the Buddhists to have emanated from the body of the Buddha and symbolized in the Buddhist flag are as follows: (a) blue (b) yellow (c) red (d) white (e) orange and (f) mixture of all this five. However, it was finally brought to the present rectangular shape by a committee led by Colonel Steele Olcott, shortly after the Wesak Celebrations, and approved by the Maha Nayaka Theros of all sects. Thereafter it was gradually accepted in other Buddhist countries like Thailand, Burma and Japan. When the World Fellowship of Buddhists (WFB) held its inaugural General Conference in Sri Lanka in 1950 under the leadership of late Dr. Gunapala Malalasekara, this flag was unanimously accepted as the World Buddhist Flag.

Today it is the flag used by Buddhists as individuals and groups all over the world to mark any Buddhist event or celebration, because it symbolizes the most significant event in the history of Buddhism, namely the Buddha's attainment of Enlightenment. It was when He realized the Four Noble Truths and the Law of Dependent Origination that this halo of six colours emanated from his body.

## **2,600 years**

As we all know it was only three months later at Benares, that he preached his first discourse called the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta, (the discourse that set the wheel of Truth rolling) to his former colleagues and before long he had six disciples who had realized the truth. Therefore Buddha, Dhamma and the Sangha which we call the Triple Gem or the Three Refuges, were born to this world 2574 years ago. This means, the world can celebrate the twenty sixth centenary (2600) of the birth of the Triple Gem in twenty five years' time. The whole world is now planning for the next twenty five or thirty years and there are even societies, research centres, university courses and conferences exclusively devoted to the study of, and planning for, the future. Why not the World Buddhists? Every Buddhist group, or Society can surely plan for the next five years and five such plans will take us to the Twenty Sixth Centenary of the Birth of the Triple Gem.

What shall we plan for? Study the Buddha, Dhamma and the Sangha, apply the Dhamma and follow the Buddha and the Sangha, communicate the Dhamma and your direct experiences to the world for the benefit of others. You will ensure world peace to celebrate that centenary by the whole world together. Otherwise the future appears to be quite uncertain at the rate the world is moving. Science and Technology are making the world smaller and smaller and bringing people closer and closer. Meanwhile Science and technology are also making man materially happier and happier but spiritually poorer and poorer. Education is alienating the growing generation from religion and culture. The message of the Triple Gem which is a Middle Path, can humanize Science and rationalize religion to save the human race from the impending disasters that man himself is creating due to his ignorance of his own true nature. Let us take the message of the Buddhist Flag to the whole world to bring the light of wisdom to reduce this darkness of ignorance.

