

## **THE SIGNIFICANCE OF VESAK**

By Ven. Pandit P. Pematana Nayaka Thero,

Once again to-day we are indeed fortunate in being able to participate in the celebration of the 2523rd, anniversary of Vesak. Vesak usually falls on the full moon day in the month of May and it is being celebrated annually by more than six hundred million Buddhists throughout the world in commemoration of the Birth, the Enlightenment and the Passing Away of the Buddha. Therefore Vesak is known as a thrice sacred day and there will be neither a greater nor holier day than the day of Vesak to the Buddhist community and as such it is always welcomed and greeted with great anticipation by all devout Buddhists to express their feelings in every way in remembrance of our Teacher.

From dawn on this thrice blessed day of Vesak, all Buddhist temples and sacred shrines are packed with devotees of both sexes of young and old. They are clad in white and go to temples with joss-sticks and flowers in their hands to pay homage to the Buddha. Every Buddhist house is decked with six coloured flags, multi-coloured lights and lanterns. This happy and joyous feelings of Vesak is manifest in all the activities of the devotees. But this sort of devotion alone would not be adequate to honour the Buddha who showed us the way to deliverance.

We must realise the fact that Buddhism does not highly esteem much in paying obeisance to the Buddha but that Buddhism is a Way of Life to be practised by every sincere Buddhist, in his day to day life with confidence. That is why the Buddha himself declared, "HE HONOURS ME BEST WHO PRACTISES MY TEACHINGS BEST."

One of the most important teachings propounded by the Buddha is the Four Brahma Viharas - four modes of sublime conduct or divine abodes. These four virtues make a man divine in this life itself. The first sublime virtue is METTA:- goodwill, friendliness, loving-kindness or benevolence. It is this Metta that leads to the development of brotherhood of men and the kinship of all life without distinction of cast, creed, colour or race. The whole spirit of the Buddha's Teachings depends on non-violence, patience and tolerance which have been regarded as one of the most cherished ideals of Buddhist culture and civilization. The great Buddhist Emperor Asoka of India, following this teaching of tolerance, honoured and supported all other religions. In one of his edicts carved on rock, the emperor declared, "One should not honour only one's own religion and condemn

the religions of others, but one should honour others' religions for this or that reason. In so doing, one helps one's own religion to grow and renders service to the religions of others too." As such Buddhists always tolerate other religionists and honour them as their own brothers and sisters without the slightest distinction. That is why there is not a single example of the shedding of a drop of blood in converting people to Buddhism during its long history of 25 centuries.

The second sublime virtue is **KARUNA**:- compassion which makes one's heart to be melted when one sees the sufferings of others. The chief characteristic of karuna is the wish to remove the sufferings of others. The hearts of compassionate persons are even softer than flowers. They do not feel at ease until they relieve the sufferings of others. They always wait for opportunities to render services to others, expecting nothing in return, not even a word of thanks. The poor and the needy, the sick and the aged always deserve our compassion irrespective of whatever religion or race to which they belong.

The third sublime virtue is **MUDITA**:- sympathetic joy which tends to destroy jealousy in the gain, respect and honour of others. Some people cannot bear and cannot see the successful achievements of their fellow-beings. They rejoice over the failures of others but do not appreciate their success. Instead of congratulating the successful, they try to condemn them and create every possible obstacle to ruin their enemies. It is always easy for one to rejoice over the gain and honour of one's own near and dear ones but rather difficult to rejoice over the success of one's adversaries. The direct enemy of Mudita is jealousy.

The fourth sublime virtue is **UPEKKHA**:- Equanimity, looking justly and impartially, without attachment or detachment, favour or disfavour. Gain and loss, fame and ill-fame, praise and blame, happiness and sorrow are the eight vicissitudes of life that affect all humanity. Most people in this world are perturbed when they are affected by such favourable or unfavourable conditions. One is elated when one is praised but depressed and down-hearted when one is blamed. If anyone can stand unmoved, keeping a balance-mind, amidst those eight worldly conditions, like a firm rock unshaken by the wind, he is perfectly exercising equanimity.

Therefore on this Vesak day as sincere Buddhists, let us recall the teachings of the Buddha and endeavour our best to put them into reality as far as possible. Let us hope that Vesak would be observed in the spirit of proper veneration to which this thrice sacred day is entitled. By the blessings of the Lord Buddha we do hope and

wish that all people in Singapore may enjoy peace, happiness and prosperity throughout their lives and may they attain their final goal!

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