

The Triple Anniversary of Vesak

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Today is Vesak Day, the Buddha day, the thrice blessed day, the most sacred day, there can be no greater or holier day than the day of Vesak for the Buddhists. Usually it falls on the full moon day in the month of May. It is being celebrated annually on a grand scale by five hundred and fifty million Buddhists all over the world in commemoration of the Birth, the Enlightenment and the Passing Away of the Buddha .

It was on Vesak full moon day of May, 2594 years ago, in the sixth century B. C., that a Prince - an extraordinary baby named Siddhattha was born in Lumbini Park at Kapilavatthu on the borders of Nepal. His Birthday on which many wonders took place was the most happiest day in the world not only for human beings but also for heavenly bodies.

The Baby Prince who had the thirty-two special characteristics of the body, was examined by the soothsayers and sages, and declared that one day he would become either a Buddha or an Universal Monarch. The Prince was nurtured amidst an abundance of royal comfort and prosperity until he attained manhood. In accordance with the customs of the time, he married the most beautiful Princess Yasodhara, at an early age and enjoyed the worldly pleasures.

Although his father, King Suddhodana, tried his best to please the Prince by providing him with the greatest amount of pleasure and closing the unpleasant side of the world to him, his efforts were of no avail. As time went on the real truth gradually dawned upon him. He realised that fleeting material pleasures were profitless and that renunciation was valuable. One day when Yasodhara gave birth to a son, the Prince Siddhattha, at the age of twenty-nine, renounced the household life and became a mendicant in search of truth and peace.

For six long years, following the instructions of the distinguished teachers of the day, the Monk Gotama practised the most severe austerities and struggled for the attainment of Enlightenment. But He could not achieve His object from outside sources. Finally He was fully convinced through His personal experience that such painful penances did not lead Him to Supreme Enlightenment. Abandoning all those profitless self-mortification and following the Middle Path instead, He gradually gained back His lost physical strength and vigour. It was on a Happy Vesak eve when He was sitting beneath

the Bodhi-Tree at Buddha Gaya in deep meditation that He became Samma Sam Buddha - the Fully Enlightened One, the Perfect One and the Holy One.

Being the Enlightened One, He endeavoured to enlighten others. Being the Teacher of Gods and men He began to teach His Doctrine to others. For the first time in the history of the world, the Order of monks was established and the Buddha despatched the first sixty disciples to various directions in order to propagate His Sublime Teachings. The Blessed One also wandered from place to place for eight months a year, residing in one place only for the rainy season, giving the necessary spiritual assistance to all in every walk of life. He worked incessantly for the good, happiness and welfare of mankind. It was also on Vesak full moon day in the month of May, the Buddha passed away into the Eternal Bliss of Nibbana in His 80th year between two Sala trees at Kusinara.

Vesak is therefore called the Triple Anniversary Day on which the most important three events in the Life of the Buddha took place. On this sacred day to honour our Master we should particularly remember some of His teachings and put them into reality. It is the excellent way of honouring Him, because the Buddha did not expect much obeisance the homage from His disciples. That is why He Himself once declared:-

"He who constantly fulfills the greater and lesser duties, who is correct in life, walking according to the precepts, it is he who rightly honours the Tathagata (the Buddha) with the worthiest homage."

According to Buddhism there are three stages such as SILA (Morality), SAMADHI (Concentration) and PANNA (Wisdom) -- on the way to Enlightenment. The Buddha emphasised the importance of Sila , moral conduct or good behaviour, as a preliminary step to a kindergarten stage for further training. The Buddhist moral precepts are not commandments. But they are based upon common sense and reason. One should observe them through one's own free-will for the sake of one's own advantage and well-being as well as for the mutual benefit of one's fellow-beings. Through Sila one is able to control one's tongue and body, refraining from oral and bodily evils. In other words Sila indicates right speech, right action and right livelihood out of the Eightfold Noble Path which is one of the main Teachings of the Buddha.

Everybody accepts that wrong speech is the source of all quarrels and disputes. As such one should refrain from wrong speech, such as lying, slandering, harsh words and frivolous talk. Secondly as follower of the Buddhist moral precepts, one should practise right actions. The precepts should prevent him from destroying living beings, stealing other people's wealth and property and sexual

misconduct. He should also practise right livelihood, earning his living in righteous ways without causing a curse, injury or suffering to his fellow-beings.

In this way every follower of the Buddha, standing steadily on the ground of Sila, is expected to embark upon SAMADHI -- the one pointedness of the mind -- which is the second stage on the path to Deliverance. Through concentration on a suitable meditative subject, he can keep his mind under his control. It is not only the key to the culture of the mind but also the doorway to right understanding. Through his right understanding one is able to develop one's PANNA -- insight or wisdom -- and realise the things as they really are. This is the last stage on the way to Nibbana.

Among the vast subjects of Buddhist meditations, METTA -- loving-kindness -- is the most appropriate and common one that should be practised by every worthy follower of the Blessed One, everywhere and on all occasions. It is this Metta that teaches us to spread loving-kindness to all without distinction of caste, creed or colour. It is this Metta that creates the racial harmony, religious tolerance, international unity brotherhood of man and the kinship of all beings.

The Buddha Himself, being an absolute tolerant person, advised His disciples not to be angry even when others speak ill of the Triple Gem. The Buddha once said:

“Monks, if others were to speak against me or against the Dhamma (Doctrine) or against the Sangha (The Holy Order) you need not on that account entertain the thoughts of ill-will and spite and be dissatisfied with them. If you do harbour hatred that will not only impede your mental development, but you will also fail to judge how far the speech is right or wrong. ”

Therefore hatred, hostility, violence and revenge are forever foreign to Buddhism. Even for the sake of the propagation of His teachings, one should not violate those Buddhist ideologies. As such, today, to establish an atmosphere of friendliness and genuine peace in this trouble world, the Doctrine of the Compassionate Buddha is regarded as the sole successful method by all the right-thinking people throughout the world.

Even today, twenty-five centuries after the appearance of Buddha, His sublime teaching is still new and fresh. It will never be out of date. There will be nothing to renew or reform. No Councils were ever held anywhere in the world in order to change His teachings. It is the only teaching which is agreeable with the rapid development of modern science. His teachings will spread itself day by day, more and more, particularly amongst the intellectuals in the East as well

as in the West without much propagations. Conversion by compulsion is unknown to Buddhism at any time. That is why today more than five hundred and fifty million Buddhists the world over acknowledge the Buddha as their guidance and pay their homage to Him as their Teacher through their own free will.

As such pondering on the significance of the Triple Anniversary of Vesak, as sincere Buddhists, we should recollect the teachings of the Buddha and should always endeavour to put them into practice as far as possible. At present more than ever, greater and greater number of people are being drawn towards the Teachings of the Perfect One who has provided a panacea for the ills of mankind for all times. Let us hope that Vesak would be observed in the spirit of proper veneration to which this most sacred day is entitled. May the Blessings of the Triple Gem be with you and bring peace, happiness and prosperity upon you all.

SABBE SATTA SUKHI HONTU