

# The day of vesak



By  
Ven. S.M. Sujano  
Varapunya Meditation Centre  
Aberdeen, Scotland  
2024

## Contents:

<b><u>INTRODUCTION</u></b>	<b><u>2</u></b>
<b><u>BIRTH</u></b>	<b><u>3</u></b>
<b><u>ENLIGHTENMENT</u></b>	<b><u>6</u></b>
<b><u>MAHAPARINIRVANA</u></b>	<b><u>12</u></b>
<b><u>INTERNATIONAL RECOGNITION</u></b>	<b><u>17</u></b>

## INTRODUCTION

---

The day of Vesak<sup>1</sup> or Vesak puja is the day of worshipping or merit making for the Buddhist all over the world. On this sacred day, Buddhist from all around the world commemorates three great events that are related to the life of the Buddha, the Birth Buddha, his Enlightenment and his Maha Parinibbana or passing away, which coincidentally fall on a same day of full moon day of Vesak Lunar month.

The Vesak day is also known as Buddha Purnima or Baisakha Purnima in Nepal, where the Buddha was born, which simply means paying homage to the Buddha or celebration of these three great events concerning with the Buddha and related to his life.

---

<sup>1</sup> Original article was first published in 'Sangha News a special newsletter, Punjab Buddhist Society UK, 2005', edited 2024.

## BIRTH

---

On the Full Moon Day of Vesak, the sixth lunar month, in 623 B.C. (80 years before the start of the Buddhist Era) the Buddha-to-be (Prince Siddhartha) was born in the royal family of Kapilavastu at a beautiful park named Lumbini, on the border of Kapilavastu and Devadaha. Both places are in modern Nepal. The scripture records saying that the Buddha to be also known as 'bodhisatta' was residing in the Heaven of the contented for entire life-span and descended into his mother's womb. Mother became intrinsically pure, refraining by necessity from killing living beings, from taking what is not given, from unchastity, from false speech and from indulgence in wine, liqueur and fermented brews. 'When he came forth from his mother's womb, he did not touch the earth. The four deities received him and set him before his mother, saying 'rejoice', O queen, a son of great power has been born to you'. Further illustrates his birth that immediately after being born, it is recorded that he walked up to seven steps to the north, and there was a lotus holding him up at every step. On his last step, He uttered the words

of the words that it was his last birth and was the most exalted one in the world (MN123: Acchariyaabbhuta sutta).

‘I am the highest in the world, eldest am I in the world, foremost am I in the world. This is the last birth of mine. There is now no more coming to be.’

The City of Kapilavastu was full of happiness due to have a cute prince after a long time and named Siddhartha or Siddhattha, which means wish fulfillment. He was living a luxurious life at the palace. After having seen, most suitable verb would be contemplated on these four signs of an old man, a man afflicted with a loathsome, a corpse, and an ascetic, prince renounced the world. The Bodhisatta recalls his reflections saying that

‘while I was still only an unenlightened bodhisatta, being myself subject to birth, ageing, ailment, death, sorrow and defilement, I sought after what was also subject to these things... suppose, being myself subject to these things, seeing danger in them, I sought after the unborn, unageing, unailing, deathless, sorrowless, undefiled supreme surcease of bondage, Nibbana (MN 26 Pasarasutta).

He decided to give off the luxurious life and

left the palace at the age of 29. He was accompanied by his confidant Channa, rode up to the bank of Anoma River.

The discourse on the Noble search (MN26) further explains his renunciation saying that ‘while still young, a black-haired boy blessed with youth, in the first phase of life, I shaved off my hair and beard- though my parents wished otherwise and grieved with tearful faces - and I put on the yellow robe and went forth from the house life into homelessness’.

Prince Siddhattha became an ascetic and practiced contemporary austerities known as self-mortification (Attakilamatha-nuyoga). First went to great teachers of the time reverent Alarakalam and to reverent Uddakaramputta. He practiced in different ways of mortification of that time for nearly six years but still was not near enlightened despite his efforts and dedication deeply into austerities. The Buddha retold his experience saying that

‘still I search of what is good, seeking the supreme state of sublime peace... [these two teachings].. do not lead to dispassion, to fading of lust, to cessation, to peace, to direct knowledge, to enlightenment, to Nibbana, but only to the base consisting of neither perception-

nor-nonperception.’ I was not satisfied with that reaching. I left it to pursue my search (MN26).

## ENLIGHTENMENT

---

At dawn on the Full Moon Day of Vesak month, 588 B.C., 45 years before Buddhist era at the age of 35 years of his age, the Bodhisatta seated under the Bodhi tree and meditate with his mind concentrated and purified. Finally, after 6 years of dedication and determination, experience of living in the remote forests, complete seclusion, isolation and overcoming fear and dread (MN 4) and persistent hard working, he realized the dhamma, the truth of cause and effect that generates the world at under the Bodhi tree on the bank of Neranjara River, Baudhgaya presently in Bihar state of India. He attained the Buddhahood and since that day he became the Buddha, one who is exalted one, self-enlightened one.

His enlightenment is described in various ways in different discourses. The Buddha retold his achievement in the longer discourse with Saccaka (MN 36)

‘Now when I had eaten solid food and had

regained strength, then quite secluded from sensual desires and unwholesome states I entered upon and abode in the first, second, third and fourth meditative absorption'... mind was purified, bright and became malleable and imperturbability, I directed my mind to the knowledge of recollection of manifold past lives.' It was the first knowledge that he achieved. Then he directed his mind to the knowledge of the passing away and reappearance of being. With the divine eyes, he saw beings passing away and reappearing in different births and different manifestations of the being according to their actions. This was the second knowledge that he discerned. Lastly, he directed this mind to the knowledge of exhaustion of taints as it actually is. He discovered and fully realized the Four Noble Truths (Catu ariyasacca), i.e., there is a problem (Dukkha), it has got cause (Samudaya), it can be eliminate (Niroda), and the Way leading to the Cessation of those causes (Magga). This is the cessation of suffering. This was his third knowledge that he attained. At this point the Buddha recalls his experience that

‘Knowing thus and seeing thus, my heart was liberated from the taints for sensual desires, from the taints of being, and from the taints of



ignorance. When liberated, there came the knowledge; 'it is liberated'. (MN 36: Mahasaccakasutta)

After the enlightenment, the Buddha sat at the root of the Bodhi tree for seven days feeling the bliss of attainment that followed by contemplating various aspects of principle i.e. the dependent origination for few weeks, including meeting with two merchants, serpent and Brahma Sahampati etc. while the Buddha ways rejoicing and contemplating the attainment the thought arose in him.

'This dhamma that I have attained to is profound and hard to see, hard to discover; it is the most peaceful and superior goal of all, not attainable by mere ratiocination, subtle, for the wise to experience, but this generation relies on attachment, relishes attachment, delights in attachment. It is hard for such a generation to see this truth specific conditionality, dependent arising. And it is hard to see this trough stilling of all formations, relinquishing of the essentials of existence, exhaustion of craving, fading of such, cessation, Nibbana. If I taught the dhamma others would not understand me, and that would be wearying and troublesome for me'.

Enough of teaching of the dhamma  
That even I found hard to reach  
For it will never be perceived  
By those that live in lust and hate.  
Men dyed in lust, and whom a cloud  
Of darkness laps, will never see  
What goes against the stream, is subtle,  
Deep and hard to see, abstruse.

Then it occurred to the Brahma Sahapati, who became aware in his mind thought that it will be great lost for the world. Thus, hastily appeared in front of the Buddha. He arranged his robe on one shoulder, and putting his right knee on the ground and raising his hands palms together towards the Buddha said:

‘Lord, let the blessed one teach the dhamma. There are beings with little dust on their eyes who are wasting through not hearing the dhamma. Some of them will gain final knowledge of the dhamma’. The Buddha, out of compassion for beings he surveyed the world as the Brahma

pleaded and realized that just as the lotus flower born and grow until full blossom there are beings in different levels. Having realized such the Buddha replied;

Wide open are the doors to freedom from death.

Let those with ears to hear commit to faith.

Thinking it would be troublesome,

I did not teach the sophisticated,

sublime dhamma among humans. (MN 26 & 85)

Brahma Sahampati knowing that now the Buddha will teach, bowed and respectfully circled the Buddha and vanished. The Buddha then began his journey to share his knowledge for the benefit, welfare and happiness of all beings. First, he thought of previous two teachers, who could understand the dhamma but unfortunately, they already passed away not long ago. Then he thought of five mendicants who were helpful during his austere practice and thus travelled to Varanasi to see the group of five mendicants in the deer park at the Isipatana. Initially, they did

not wish to communicate nor listen the good news. They rejected to hear his teachings for three times. Finally, the Buddha spoke saying, 'have you ever known me to speak like this before?' The Buddha was able to persuade the group to listen the dhamma. That was how the Buddha began his teaching journey (SN 56.11, Kd.1:6.16.9).

The First discourse that he explained to the group of five called Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta (The wheel of Dhamma) which consists of main doctrines of Buddhism to the five ascetics (his old associates). This discourse begins with the formal two extremes of practice and according to him that should not be practiced. These are not the way for the cessation of suffering and way lead to spiritual perfection He also showed the Middle way or the Noble Eightfold Path, which avoids the two extremes. The middle path means; it is not compromised, not synthesis, not the mixture, not going between, not the cessation of these two extremes but it means *Upho ante anupagamma*, without entering either the two extremes but it transcends these two. The middle Path is consisting of eight factors, so called Noble

Eightfold path, namely, Right understanding, Right Thought, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration.

## MAHAPARINIRVANA

---

Since enlightenment, forty-five long years of hard work and sacrifice passed by and approaching the last moment of his life the Buddha tirelessly devoted his time and energy for the benefit of mankind, without thinking personal comfort. He travelled in different villages, states, countries until at the age of 80 years of last chapter. Then, finally, on the full-moon day of Vesak, he went to the Sala Grove and lay down between two tall Sala trees for the last moment.

‘Ananda, please make a couch ready for me with its head to the north between the twin sala trees. I am tired and I will lie down’, said the Buddha to his long-term attendance. Then the Buddha lied himself in the lion’s sleeping pose on his right side with one foot overlapping the other, mindful and fully aware. At that moment

venerable Ananda asked the Buddha that how should one treat the Buddha's remains after he had gone. The responded that 'Treat in the same way that the remains of a Universal monarch, who turns the wheel of righteousness are treated... wrapped his remains in different layers and pyre with all kinds of scents and burn the remains. Then build a monument... and whoever shall put flowers or scents on it, worship or feel confidence in his heart there, that will be long for his welfare and happiness.

On this occasion the Buddha granted his last admonition to the Subhaddha, an ascetic of other faith, who was the last disciple of the Buddha. The Buddha further addressed that 'Now some of you might think: 'The teacher's dispensation has passed. Now we have no Teacher.' But you should not see it like this. The teaching and training that I have taught and pointed out for you shall be your teacher after my passing (DN 16).

The Buddha then gave last opportunity to his disciples to clear any doubt up on teaching in their minds but out of respect or fully realized no one did.

'Bhikkhus, it may be that some bhikkhu has a doubt or a problem concerning the Buddha, or the Dhamma or the Sangha or the path or the way

of progress. Ask, Bhikkhus, so that you may not regret it afterwards; thus, ‘The teacher was face to face with us, and we could not bring ourselves to ask in the Blessed one’s presence. The Buddha repeatedly requested monks to ask questions for fourth times, yet everyone remained silent.

When the last moment arrived, he preached his last sermon that; “Perishable are all conditioned dharma, work out your way with diligence (Appamadena Sampadetha).” (DN 16: Mahaparinibbana Sutta, AN 4:76; Kusinarasutta) After that, he never spoke and entered Nirvana at Kusinara, 543 B.C. present day Saranath and only leave his dhamma for the path to the world. Nevertheless, the Buddha’s main teaching is not to do evils, do good and purify the mind. Moreover, Eightfold Noble Path (Ariya Atthangika magga), Three Characteristics (Tilakkhana), Dependent Origination (Paticcasamuppada) etc. and other basic teachings are Pancasila, Atthasila, Sila, Samadhi and panna. These basic principles must be followed in daily life by every human being. According to Buddha by leading Dhamma life everyone can attain the ultimate goal of life; that is Nibbana or Nirvana.

The Mahaparinibbana sutta records that ‘when the Buddha became fully extinguished, Brahmā

Sahampati recited this verse:

“All creatures in this world must lay down this bag of bones. For even a **teacher** such as this, unrivaled in the world, the Realized One, attained to power, the Buddha became fully extinguished.”

When the Buddha became fully extinguished, Sakka, lord of gods, recited this verse:

“Oh! Conditions are impermanent, their nature is to rise and fall; having arisen, they cease; their stilling is true bliss.”

When the Buddha became fully extinguished, Venerable Anuruddha recited this verse:

“There was no more breathing for the poised one of steady heart. Imperturbable, committed to peace, the sage has done his time.

He put up with painful feelings without flinching. The liberation of his heart was like the extinguishing of a lamp.”

When the Buddha became fully extinguished, Venerable Ānanda recited this verse:

“Then there was terror! Then they had goosebumps! When the Buddha, endowed with all fine qualities, became fully extinguished.”

When the Buddha became fully extinguished, some of the mendicants there who were not free of desire, with arms raised, falling down like their feet were chopped off, rolling back and forth, lamented: “Too



soon the Blessed One has become fully extinguished!  
Too soon the Holy One has become fully extinguished!  
Too soon the Eye of the World has vanished!” But the mendicants who were free of desire endured, mindful and aware, thinking, “Conditions are impermanent. How could it possibly be otherwise?”

## INTERNATIONAL RECOGNITION

---

In November 1998 all the Buddhist countries such as Sri Lanka, Thailand, Burma, Nepal, India etc. proposed agenda for 'International recognition of the day of Vesak' to the United Nation Organization (UNO). On 15 Dec. 1999 the UN's General assembly adopted the resolution for the international recognition of the day of Vesak (Buddha Jayanti). Whence the reason UN celebrates every year at its head office in New York and other regional centers all over the world. Presently, not only the Buddhist but other faiths also celebrate this day with great joy by practicing moral ways and purify the mind, which is the way to achieve real happiness and peace within.

On this auspicious day of Vesak every human being should take an oath to cultivate good, purifies the mind for real happiness and peace and thus pay homage to the Buddha by practicing it.