

VISAKHA PUJA DAY: THE INTERNATIONAL DAY OF VESAK AT UNITED NATIONS

Visakha Puja Day is one of the greatest Buddhist holidays which falls on the 15th day of the new moon in the 6th lunar month that is the month of May, in the year with extra eighth lunar month; the Visakha Puja Day will fall on 15th day of the new moon in the 7th lunar month.

Visakha Puja Day is regarded as an important Buddhist holiday, because it is connected with three important events in the life of the Buddha i.e. birth, enlightenment and death ; these three days fall on the same day miraculously. It is the most sacred day in the Buddhist calendar, when the day has come; both monks and lay people specially perform ceremonies recollecting the wisdom, purity and the great compassion of the Buddha.

BIRTH OF THE BUDDHA

The Buddha was the king by birth, Gotama by lineage and Sakya by race, born in 80 years before the Buddhist Era in the middle country at Lumbini park (Lumpini, nowadays, is Lumminde in Nepal) between Kapilavasthu of Sakya and Devadaha of the Koliya region, which is on the full Moon in the month of May in 625 B.C.. Buddha's father was Suddhodana, his mother was Mahâmâyâ who wanted to go to Devadaha, her native place, when she was far- gone in pregnancy, in the morning of Visâkha Punnami Day, came over the beautiful Lummbi Grove on the way to Devadaha, had a break of her traveling under the shade of a flowering Sal tree; but that was not to be, then she gave birth to her child. When the news was heard, the King of Sakya and the King of Koliya were very pleased. Mahâmâyâ and her son were brought to Kapilavasthu.

HIS ENLIGHTENMENT

The prince Siddhattha had been taken care and instructed well since he was a child until he was a young, married with Yasodharâ, the princess of Devadaha, had a son called “Rahula”. With the advance of age and maturity, the prince began to glimpse the woes of the world. He renounced his wife and a child as well as a crown that held the promise of power and glory, became a monk on the bank of the Anomâ River, and then he sought guidance from the famous sages who would teach him all they knew, being led he practiced concentration reached the highest meditative attainments possible thereby, but it was not satisfied with anything for attaining Supreme Enlightenment, left them in search of the still unknown. In his wanderings he finally reached Uruvelâ of Magadha (in Bodhgaya, Bihar state, India), practiced alone until attained the Enlightenment on the Full-Moon Day of the 6th lunar month in 45 years before the Buddhist Era.

What is enlightened are the four Noble truths:-

1. Dukkha is unsatisfactionariness, physical and mental suffering.
2. Samudaya is cause of suffering.
3. Nirodha is cessation of suffering.
4. Magga is the path leading to cessation of suffering.

These four are the truth which is called “Ariyasacca” that is discovered by the Buddha, and more sublime than common reality.

HIS PARINIBBANA (DEATH)

The Buddha, after his Enlightenment, had done daily routine, taught the persons who could be instructed until they have attained the Eye of Truth, sent his disciples to villages, districts and capital cities to introduce his teachings until Buddhism has been established and wide-

spread. He attained Nibbana on Tuesday 15th day of the new moon in the 6th lunar month in the year of the small snake at Sal Grove in Kusinagar of Malla, Uttra Pradesh, India when he was 80 year old.

On the occasion of the Visakha Day, a grand religious ceremony has been continuously held in Jambudipa or India where it is the land of Buddhism; since Buddhism has spreaded into Thailand and Sri Lanka, the religious ceremony of Visakha Day has been performed still now.

In Thailand, the religious ceremony of Visakha Day has been commenced in Sukhothai period, because in those days, Thailand had closely religious relationship with Sri Lanka. Sri Lankan monks came to Thailand for introducing Buddhism. Some of them had been honored as the chief monk; even Thai monks went to Sri Lanka had done the same. The ceremony of Visakha Day is believed that it was brought to Thailand by Sri Lankan monks.

In Phraraj-pidhi-sibsong-duen written by the King Chulalongkorn, Rama 5 it is said that the religious ceremony of Visakha Day was restored in Bangkok period in 1817 B.E. that was the reign of Rama 2 who was advised by the supreme patriarch (Mee) to cerebrate the Visakha Day.

There was publication of programme of the ceremony of Visakha Day that the Rama 2 observed the observance of eight precepts by abstaining from making harm to living beings and from drinking intoxicants for three days. There was decoration of the oil lamps, arranging flowers, incenses and candles as the offering worship to the Tribble Gem as well as lighting fireworks for three days.

ACTIVITIES ON VISAKHA PUJA DAY

1. Offer alms to monks and pour the water for dedicating the merit to all beings and departed ones.
2. Practice meditation and listen to the Dhamma preaching.

3. Observe five precepts or eight precepts and abstain from the causes of bad bodily and verbal deeds.
 4. Perform the candle procession around the respected place of worship, and participate in the activities of the Visakha Puja Day.
 5. Arrange an exhibition of Visakha Day.
 6. Hoist the flags at the houses, monasteries and government offices.
- However, accomplishment of charity, morality and practicing meditation are more important than others.

THE INTERNATIONAL DAY OF VISAKHA AT UNITED NATIONS

In the year of 1999, as the United Nations is the world organization that people around the world have recognized its activities, consented to announce the Visakha Day as the international important day of the world on December 15, 1999 that has been encouraged by Buddhist organizations from Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, China, Lao, South Korea, Vietnam, Bhutan, Indonesia, Nepal, Cambodia, India, Pakistan; and Thailand agreed to present to the United Nations in Bangkok in order to do official announcement on 25th April 2000. It has brought about delight to Thai Buddhist people as well as Thai government. The activities of the promotion of Buddhism are held by Thai Sangha and people in the Visakha Festival all over Thailand.

.....