VESĀKHA ISSUE

Newsletter

May and June

1983
VESĀKHA GREETINGS

AND

BLESSINGS TO ALL
Vesākha Greetings,

To Buddhists all over the world the full moon day of Vesakha which falls in the month of May is an event of the utmost importance and significance as it commemorates the Birth, Enlightenment and Parinibbana (Final passing away) of the Buddha. On this day our hearts and minds are naturally directed with reverence to the Blessed One who strove earnestly and strenuously to gain Supreme Enlightenment and proclaim the Dhamma for the benefit of all beings.

The Buddha's Enlightenment is significant to us all because the Buddha as a human being was able to reach the pinnacle of perfection and wisdom through his own effort without the aid of any supernatural agency. This achievement of the Buddha gives all of us ordinary human beings, enmeshed as we are in the storms and tempests of life, much encouragement and inspiration in that, if we make the necessary effort, we ourselves can attain that same enlightenment.

The Buddha was inviting us to move out of the entanglements of mental and spiritual slavery into a state of peace by following the path of training in morality, meditation and wisdom. This is the best possible way for us to show our respect and gratitude to the Blessed One as is illustrated in the following delightful short story by the Venerable Maha Thera Anandamaitreya.

Vesākha Blessings to all,

Jagaro Bhikkhu.
"THE HIGHEST FORM OF REVERING"

by Ven. Maha Thera Anandamaitreya.

There was once a great forest, abounding in huge trees with thick foliage overshadowing and darkening everything beneath. The inhabitants, being accustomed to its darkness, did not notice the exact nature of the place. Moreover, the fruits of the trees that served them for their staple food brought upon them a long slumber, in which they dreamt curious dreams, while wormlike reptiles living in the soil used to come out and suck their blood. When those unfortunate beings awoke, they used to feel thoroughly exhausted, extremely thirsty and hungry, and immediately fell into fainting fits and states of dreaminess. Only a very few saw even faintly the frightful nature of the forest and even they were often forgetful of its dangers. One might rightly call it an enchanted land.

One day a man emerged from a distant thicket. He wended his way hurriedly towards a glen near the edge of the forest and there joined a group of persons like himself. They were but half awake. He held a long discussion with them in which he described the evils of forest-dwelling and said that he was searching for a way out. The others said to him "Well, brother, we too are searching for a way out. We are waiting for a guide and hope to find one before long."

"I am not in need of a personal guide," the stranger replied. "After long search I have come to understand that the further away from the forest I go, the less I find its dangers. I have also discovered a medicinal herb called vigilia, which keeps me wakeful. Thus prepared, alert and wakeful, I shall go on until I find that Elysium for which I am in search."

So did he say and paying no heed to the discouraging words of his companions, proceeded on his way. On and on he went, facing divers difficulties, until he entered upon a path that led to a hillock lying on the outskirts of the forest. The further he went up, the more refreshed and the less tired did he feel. Thus, passing three hills, he went up higher and eventually found himself on the summit of a vast plateau. It was the final climb and the highest level that our pilgrim had to reach. The plateau was illumined by a dazzling radiance, infinite and everlasting, which deeply penetrated his entire physique. Now at last he realised that he had put an end to all the suffering, fatigue and weariness of the forest. Perfectly cured, thoroughly awakened and full of life, he breathed a solemn and joyous utterance:
"At last am I now perfectly free
And no more to bloodsuckers prey will be!"

He spent a short while there experiencing the bliss of the emancipation he had attained; then, from this exalted position, he directed his sight towards the forest and the dwellers therein. He saw their pitiable situation and, out of compassion for them, returned to the forest and began to lead its dwellers along the path to the Plateau of Perfect Bliss. Innumerable were they that were led and reached that abode.

Now he placed a sign-post in the glen, just opposite the entrance to the path, and placed on it a stone slab bearing an inscription describing the nature of the forest, the reason why its dwellers could not get out of it, the nature of the Plateau of Perfect Bliss and the way thereto. Not far from this sign-post he built an inn, a restaurant where pilgrims might equip and prepare themselves for the upward journey. Thus, having fulfilled all his duties and entrusting the service of guiding pilgrims to his well-trained disciples, that Benign Guide, the foremost Discoverer of the Way, returned to the Plateau of Perfect Bliss, and thence to Eternal Rest.

Many came to that inn, prepared themselves under the instruction of the trained guides, entered upon the Path and went up till they reached the Plateau.

Later on, however, some of the admirers of the Pathfinder, while preparing themselves for the upward journey, built a few memorials here and there in the glen in His honour. More time rolled by and others who came to the glen and reached the inn even went to the extent of making images of their foremost Guide with the idea that posterity might be reminded of Him as the One who should be followed. They who really honoured the Guide always followed His example and hastened out of the forest, for they read His words on the inscription at the foot of the sign-post:

THE PROPER WAY OF PAYING ME HONOUR AND GRATITUDE IS BY TREADING THE PATH DISCOVERED AND POINTED OUT BY ME.

The more numerous the pilgrims at the inn, however, the less the number who actually proceeded to the Plateau. Instead of proceeding along the way, some gave themselves up to decorating the letters of the inscription on the slab or added garlands and decorations to the sign-post. As time rolled by, the sign-post became buried in garlands and the letters on the slab could hardly be read for all the embellishments that had been
added to them. There was in fact not a square inch of slab left undecorated! Meanwhile, others felt it necessary to enlarge the slab, adding more slabs around it and covering these with hieroglyphics detailing the geographical, geological, botanical and zoological aspects of forest-dwelling.

The crowd at the inn was excessively numerous by now, and varied and diverse were the discussions that were held with regard to the interpretation of the inscriptions on the slabs. Some professed to know the original and exact meanings of these inscriptions, while others disagreed with them and consequently discord broke out among parties antagonistic to one another. These had entirely forgotten the purpose for which the inn was established. Those who possessed the special brain-skill and talent in the interpretation of the symbols on the slabs were now greatly honoured by the others.

As they were members of the governing body, many of the inn-dwellers and their colleagues were now regarded as the leaders of the various parties, while the simple act of bowing down at the foot of the statues and monuments as a mark of respect and gratitude to be performed at the start of the journey had by now become the main duty of the pilgrim. The leaders of the parties laid great stress on this!

Before long another tremendous change took place! Hundreds and thousands of people gathered around the sign-post or round the various statues and monuments, heaping up flowers, burning sweet-smelling incense and offering whatever fruits they could find. Offerings of songs and music - actually these were ululations compounded of the emotionalism of the semi-lunatic and half-sleepy denizens of the forest - soon began to accompany this fuss and bustle. Offerings had now come to be made to the accompaniment of the chanting of a specific mantram. The inn-dwellers and their guests, however, still claimed to be pilgrims of the right sort, though not one of them progressed a single step beyond the inn.

To the scene of all this fanatical activity there now and then came persons who asked the so-called "Teachers of the Pilgrims" to guide them. The "Teachers", although they were in fact more sleepy and less wakeful than the strangers, tried to teach them how to perform the various offerings and the specific mantrams to chant along with them. Some of the newcomers, however, who could after much effort understand the statements inscribed on the slabs, began to say that such performances could not bring them a single step forward, and were about to leave. At this the half-sleepy inn-keepers said with much emphasis:
"Neither you nor we can get onto the Path. Therefore join us, share and share alike, and make this aspiration: May we be pushed out of the forest and led to the Plateau of Perfect Bliss by the glory of these performances."

Misled by these discouraging words, many joined the inn-dwellers and pseudo-pilgrims, and remained there with them, while a very few, paying no heed to them, wended their way along the Path as directed by the sign post.

The self deceived inn-dwellers, the pseudo-pilgrims, meanwhile, like the stagnant water that collects in a dirty pool accumulating more and more impurities with the passage of time, remained at the inn, belittling the real pilgrims. They whiled away their time, being fed daily on the poisonous fruits brought from the forest, falling into a swoon repeatedly and discussing the scripts and decorations on the slabs and sign-post. When they were dreamy and half-awake they were still the prey of the bloodsuckers Vigilia, the medicinal herb planted by the foremost Pathfinder, was used only by the few who set out on the upward path.

Application:

The forest is the world: Samsāra.
The fruits thereof are the objects of the senses.
The bloodsuckers are the passions.
The Foremost Pathfinder is the Bodhisattva.
The Plateau of Perfect Bliss is Arahatship or Enlightenment.
Eternal Rest is Nibbāṇa.
The sign-post is the Teaching concerning the Eightfold Path.
The inscription on the slab is the detailed instruction for the Path-goers with regard to their discipline, etc.
Vigilia is awareness or Satipathāna.

The three previous hills are the three preceding stages of the Path: that of the Stream-winner, that of the Once-Returner and that of the Non-Returner.
The inn is the order of the Buddha's disciples: The Sangha.
Their performances are the rituals and ceremonies later added to the Sāsana.
The pseudo-pilgrims are the followers of the self-deceived later members of the Sangha.
The later heads of the inns and inn-keepers are the later Members of the Order, self-deceived and given over to worldly affairs.

This article was published originally under the title "Pseudo-Pilgrims" and appeared in the "Middle Way", the journal of the Buddhist Society of London, Vol. 56 No. 4, February 1982.
One day Ven. Ajahn Chah was visited by a delegation of westerners led by an Australian monk living in Bangkok. They had a set of three questions which they had asked two other meditation teachers in Thailand, on behalf of the Swedish government, and which they would now like to put to Ven. Ajahn Chah. After the preliminary greetings the Australian monk, through an interpreter, told Ven. Ajahn Chah the nature of their business and then began to ask the three questions:

1. Why do you practise (Dhamma)?
2. How do you practise?
3. What is the result of the practise?

Before the monk had a chance to finish asking the questions, Ven. Ajahn Chah put his hand up in a silencing gesture. Asking for a pen and paper, he asked the monk to repeat the questions, carefully writing them down in an almost theatrical manner. He looked at the questions for some time, cocking his head from side to side, and then said:

"In answer to these three questions I can only answer one way. I do not know if you will be satisfied, but I have to answer like this. And my answer is three more questions. My answer is:

1. Why do you eat?
2. How do you eat?
3. What is the result of having eaten?

That is my answer".

The monk who led the delegation was not very pleased. He asked for another answer but Ven. Ajahn Chah was adament. He had to answer like that.

"Look here", the Australian monk protested, "this Zen stuff is all very well but this information has to be used in schools. This man represents the Swedish government! You can't answer him like that!"
"No, that's my answer," Venerable Ajahn Chah said.

Just when the monk seemed to be losing his patience completely Ven. Ajahn Chah explained:

"In answer to your questions I've given three more questions, but there was a reason for that. I felt it was the best way to answer. Why does one practise? Well, why does one eat? We eat because we're hungry, isn't that right? Practise of the Dhamma is similar, we practise because we're hungry. But this sort of hunger is not physical hunger, it's hunger of the mind. The mind is hungry for peace. So in order to satisfy this sort of hunger we have to "eat", just as with hunger of the body. However, what we must "eat" for spiritual nourishment is not material food but the practice of Dhamma. Training the mind to be rid of craving. Training in Sila, Samadhi and Panna (morality, meditation and wisdom). If we train like this the mind becomes freed of the buffeting of the defilements which keep the heart constantly agitated. And just as when we have eaten material food, what is the result of that? We feel satisfied, at ease, our hunger disappears. In the same way, when we practise the Dhamma and arrive at peace, the result is peace. We are no longer disturbed by hunger. So this is the meaning of my answer to you. I hope that is good enough".

The monk and the Swedish man, on hearing a rough translation of Ven. Ajahn Chah's explanation, were very satisfied and expressed their appreciation. Just before they departed, another member of the party, a Korean monk, asked permission to ask Ven. Ajahn Chah a final question of his own. He had been impressed by Ven. Ajahn Chah's answers, and so he wanted to "try him out" on a question which perhaps had bothered him. His question was:

"Who is it who knows Anatta (non-selfhood)?"

Venerable Ajahn Chah immediately replied:

"Who is it who knows Atta (self)?"

The monk made no answer. ... translated from the original Thai by Venerable Puriso.

VESAK AND GREETINGS CARDS

This year the Buddhist Society has produced two beautiful cards in time for you to send to your family and friends for Vesak. All proceeds from the sale of these cards will go towards the Forest Meditation Building Fund.
EVERY EVENING DURING MAY AND JUNE (EXCEPT FRIDAYS)

7.30-8.30 p.m. Sitting meditation with time for any questions and answers after 8.30 p.m.

EVERY FRIDAY NIGHT DURING MAY AND JUNE

7.30-8.30 p.m. Sitting meditation
Followed at 8.30 p.m. with a special talk on Buddhism by Ven. Ajahn Jagaro.

M A Y

The Eight Precept Observance days for May are as follows: 4th, 11th, 19th and 26th (Visakha to be celebrated on Sunday 29th May.)

SATURDAY 7TH AND SUNDAY 8TH MAY

9.30 a.m. A working weekend at the Vihara when we plan to re-paint the front of the house, repair the guttering, wash windows, polish the Buddha Rupas and clean and polish the shrine tables etc etc. If you could come on one of part of these two days it would be greatly appreciated as we would like the Vihara to be in perfect condition for the coming Visakha celebrations at the end of May. Please bring ladders, paint brushes, gardening tools etc. Free lunches and smokoes.

SUNDAY 15TH MAY

Venerable Ajahn Jagaro will be visiting the Darwin Buddhist Society from 15th to 22nd May to conduct Visakha celebrations there.

2.30 p.m. Executive Committee Meeting.

SUNDAY 22ND MAY

Venerable Ajahn Jagaro returns to Perth from Darwin.

SUNDAY 29TH MAY VISAKHA DAY

Please see our special programme on page 10.
The Eight Precept Observance Days for June are as follows: 3rd, 9th, 17th and 24th (Poson Day to be celebrated on 26th June).

**SUNDAY 5TH JUNE**

3.00 p.m. Dhamma school for children.

**SATURDAY 11TH AND SUNDAY 12TH JUNE**

Weekend meditation retreat to be held at the Mt Helena Theosophical Centre, Mt Helena.

**SUNDAY 19TH JUNE**

2.30 p.m. Executive Committee Meeting.

**FRIDAY 24TH JUNE**

8.00 p.m. A special talk on Buddhism to a group of Scouts and Girl Guides at the Vihara.

**SATURDAY 25TH JUNE**

12.30 noon A Chinese luncheon - a fund-raising event with all proceeds going towards our Vihara. Only $3.50 for a delicious, home cooked meal. Come along & meet other members and friends.

**SUNDAY 26TH JUNE**

Poson Day - please see the programme for this day on page 12.

To everyone, both members and friends we extend a very warm invitation to join in all our above activities.

**Pindapata:** At 8.00 a.m. every morning the Bhikkhus go on Alms Round and if you would like to offer food to the monks in this traditional manner please wait outside the Vihara before 8.00 a.m.

The Bhikkhus have their one meal of the day at 9.00 a.m. every morning and those who would like to offer dana on a certain day should write their names on the dana roster that is hanging in the hallway of the Vihara.

A special thank you to all those who have worked so hard in many different ways to help support our Vihara and resident Bhikkhus. May you ever grow in health, happiness and the Good Dhamma.
Programme for Vesākha

Sunday 29th May, 1983

Vesākha, the celebration of the Birth, Enlightenment and Parinibbana of the Lord Buddha, this year falls on 26th May, but for the sake of convenience we will celebrate this great occasion on Sunday 29th May at the Vihara, 4 Magnolia Street, North Perth.

The programme for Visakha Day is as follows:

9.30 a.m. Gathering at the Vihara,
Taking the Three Refuges and Eight Precepts for those wishing to keep the Visakha Observance Day.
A short discourse on the significance of observing Visakha.
Offering of dana to the Bhikkhus.
Laypeople will then share a meal.

12.00 noon Members and friends are invited to come to the Vihara to prepare flowers, decorations, lights, floor coverings etc in preparation for the Visakha celebrations in the evening.

2.00 p.m.- 4.00 p.m. Group meditation at the Vihara.

5.30 p.m. A social gathering when members and friends can meet each other and share a cup of tea and snacks.

7.00 p.m. Beginning of evening's ceremony.
Taking the Three Refuges and Five Precepts.
Chanting and Puja with offerings of flowers, candles, incense and medicinal drinks.
A Dhamma talk by Venerable Ajahn Jagaro.
Circumambulation of Vihara Close.
Weekend Meditation Retreat
June 11th and 12th

The Buddhist Society of W.A. will be conducting another weekend meditation retreat from Friday 10th to Sunday 12th June.

The retreat is held at the Mt Helena Theosophical Centre, Bunning Road, Mt Helena and begins on Friday 10th at around 7.00 p.m. and finishes around 4.30 p.m. Sunday afternoon.

Please bring blankets or sleeping bag, meditation cushion, torch and toilet requisites. The cost of the retreat is only $20.00 per person and covers accommodation and food. The teaching is of course free.

Anyone who would like to join the retreat is most welcome and should write their names in the appropriate space on the poster located near the back entrance of the Vihara.

If you need transport to the retreat please come to the Vihara between 5.00 and 5.30 p.m. Friday 10th.

"As soon as we see that Buddhism has everything that any other religion has and also several things that none of them have, we realise that Buddhism is for everyone.

Buddhism is the universal religion. It can be put into practice by anyone in every age and era.

People everywhere have the same problem – to free themselves from suffering, suffering which is inherent in birth, ageing, pain and death. Suffering which stems from desire and grasping.

Everyone without exception – celestial beings, human beings or animals – have this same problem, and everyone has the same job to do, namely to eliminate completely the desire and unskillful grasping at the root of suffering.

Buddhism offers a way out of this universal dilemma."

... an extract from the book "Toward The Truth - a collection of Dhamma Talks by Venerable Buddhadasa Bhikkhu."
POSON DAY
Sunday 26th June, 1983

POSON DAY, the full moon day in June, celebrates the coming of the Buddha-Dhamma to Sri Lanka and is an important day for Sinhalese Buddhists. This year it falls on Friday 24th, but again for convenience sake we will celebrate this occasion at the Vihara on Sunday 26th June. Following is the programme for that day:

9.30 a.m. Gathering at the Vihara.
Taking the Three Refuges and Eight Precepts for those wishing to keep the Poson Observance Day.
Offering of dana to the Bhikkhus.
Sharing a meal with those present.

5.00 p.m. Screening a film(s) of Buddhism in Sri Lanka from the High Commission of Sri Lanka in Canberra.
Tea and snacks will be served.

6.30 p.m. A talk by one of our Sinhalese members on the significance of Poson Day in Sri Lanka.
Taking the Three Refuges and Five Precepts.
Chanting and Buddha Puja.
A Dhamma talk by Venerable Ajahn Jagaro.
Close.

Our readers will have noticed that, when referring to the coming ceremony on the full moon of May, we have spelled the same word in a few different ways. This was not due to carelessness but rather to the fact that people of different countries do seem to spell it differently. The correct Pali spelling seems to be Vesakha, which is the name given to the sixth lunar month (approx. May). However in present day Sri Lanka it is most commonly referred to as Vesak while in Thailand the spelling used is Visakha. You may well ask the reason for the differences but it just seems to be the nature of all conditioned things to be impermanent!
Refuge in The Three Treasures

FOR ME THERE IS NO OTHER REFUGE,
THE BUDDHA TRULY IS MY REFUGE —
BY THE SPEAKING OF THIS TRUTH
MAY I GROW IN THE MASTER'S WAY.

FOR ME THERE IS NO OTHER REFUGE,
THE DHAMMA TRULY IS MY REFUGE —
BY THE SPEAKING OF THIS TRUTH
MAY I GROW IN THE MASTER'S WAY.

FOR ME THERE IS NO OTHER REFUGE,
THE SANGHA TRULY IS MY REFUGE —
BY THE SPEAKING OF THIS TRUTH
MAY I GROW IN THE MASTER'S WAY.
The bi-monthly newsletter of:

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