

Buddhist Hour  
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**This Script is entitled:  
 “Why We Celebrate Vesak”**

**Why We Celebrate Vesak**

Celebrating the United Nations Day of Vesak together offers a valuable opportunity to build and strengthen links of friendship, co-operation and unity between our various Buddhist traditions, international cultures and the wider community.

A broad view assists us to identify the extraordinary opportunities that are available in this event. We can develop such opportunities for the benefit of our Buddhist communities.

Whilst we are working to achieve the ideals of harmony, cooperation and friendship, within the Buddhist principles of morality, generosity and wisdom, we also need to be mindful that:

- Each Buddhist tradition is reflected in our event.
- All members of the teams are encouraged to contribute their inputs into its planning.
- We should adopt a mentoring role as we involve younger or less experienced persons in our team activities, to help them build new skills and know-how that they can use in their own lives and contribute to their own Buddhist communities.
- We seek the views and counsel of the Venerable Sangha Members.
- Even though it is important to create a well managed event, of more importance is that we contribute to building the good Heart of our Team Members and voluntary helpers.
- In this same way, even though it is important to create a wonderful commemoration of the United Nations Day of Vesak, our unique Buddhist perspective is that the audience has the real experience of the Buddha Good Heart and Mind.

Whilst there are many great events, it is rare for the audience to taste the radiance of the Buddha heart. This is our vision.

We will now elucidate on the specific chain of events that we are recognising when we celebrate the Birth, Enlightenment and Passing of the unparalleled teacher known as Lord Buddha.

## **The Birth of the Prince**

About ten months after her dream of a white elephant and the sign that she would give birth to a great leader, Queen Maya was expecting her child. One day she went to the king and said, "My dear, I have to go back to my parents. My baby is almost due." Since it was the custom in India for a wife to have her baby in her father's house, the king agreed, saying, "Very well, I will make the necessary arrangements for you to go."

The king then sent soldiers ahead to clear the road and prepared others to guard the queen as she was carried in a decorated palanquin. The queen left Kapilavatthu in a long procession of soldiers and retainers, headed for the capital of her father's kingdom.

On the way to the Koliya country, the great procession passed a garden called Lumbini Park. This garden was near the kingdom called Nepal, at the foot of the Himalayan Mountains. The beautiful park with its sala trees and scented flowers and busy birds and bees attracted the queen. Since the park was a good resting place, the queen ordered the bearers to stop for a while.

As she rested underneath one of the sala trees, her birth began and a baby boy was born. It was an auspicious day. The birth took place on a full moon (which is now celebrated as Vesak, the festival of the triple event of Buddha's birth, enlightenment and death), in the year 623 B.C.

According to the legends about this birth, the baby began to walk seven steps forward and at each step a lotus flower appeared on the ground. Then, at the seventh stride, he stopped and with a noble voice shouted:

"I am chief of the world,  
Eldest am I in the world,  
Foremost am I in the world.  
This is the last birth.  
There is now no more coming to be."

After the birth of her baby son, Queen Maha Maya immediately returned to Kapilavatthu. When the king learnt of this he was very happy, and as news of the birth of the long-awaited heir spread around the kingdom there was rejoicing all over the country.

## **The Life Story of the Buddha**

The person who was to become Buddha was born about 2,600 years ago in Lumbini in ancient India, as Prince to the Sakya clan. He was known as Siddhartha.

Shortly after the birth of Siddhartha there were many visitors to the royal palace to pay respect to the king and the child, including learned Brahmins and religious ascetics. Some of these learned and holy men gave predictions concerning the future of the young prince and many concluded that his life could take one of two possible courses. He could become a world ruling monarch or a fully enlightened teacher and saviour of humanity.

Siddhartha's Father, King Suddhodana, wished only that his son would continue to rule the kingdom and maintain the family's royal lineage and sought to avert the possibility that one day his son would leave the kingdom to follow the holy life. The king took steps to prevent the young prince from coming into contact with anything that may cause him to become disillusioned and forsake life in the royal courts.

He built the palace walls so high they could not be scaled by Siddhartha and restricted his experience of living to luxury and comfort, sensual pleasures and enjoyment. The Buddha later said of this time of his life "A white sunshade was held over me day and night so that no cold or heat or dust or grit or dew might inconvenience me". (Nanamoli 1995) 1.

Siddhartha had no knowledge about the life of his subjects and the difficulties and sorrows they experienced as a normal part of living. He never came into contact with elderly or sick people, the dead, or those who had decided to renounce the worldly life in favour of a spiritual path.

Siddhartha grew up as a healthy, gifted and handsome young man. At the age of sixteen he married his beautiful cousin Yasodhara who was princess of a neighbouring kingdom, and later they had one son together.

Even though Siddhartha lived with all the luxuries of the palace and an entourage of attendants he gradually became unsettled and wished to travel throughout his kingdom to know the life of his people.

Eventually his father consented to such a journey, but fearful that his son would encounter sights or experiences that would lead him toward the holy life, the king made arrangements to prepare the city for the royal tour to ensure that Siddhartha would only meet young and healthy people.

Yet as Siddhartha was passing through the capital Kapilavatthu, an old man happened to stumble out of his hut beside the road.

When the prince saw the old man, he didn't know what he was looking at. It was the first time in his life that he had seen an old man of this type.

“What is that, Channa?”, he asked his driver. “That really cannot be a man! Why is he all bent? What is he trembling for? Why is his hair silver-grey, not black like mine? What is wrong with his eyes? Where are his teeth? Is this how some people are born? Tell me, oh good Channa, what does this mean?”

Channa told the prince that it was an old man and he was not born like that. “When young, he was like us and now, due to his old age he has become this way.” Channa told the prince to forget this man. But the prince was not satisfied. “Everyone in the world, if he lives long enough, becomes like this man. It cannot be stopped,” said Channa.

The prince ordered Channa to drive back home at once, as he was very sad and wanted to think carefully about that terrible thing called old age.

On three subsequent journeys outside the palace Siddhartha would see a sick person lying on the ground in agony, a dead body being cremated on a funeral pyre and finally he also saw a holy person, living the religious life of an ascetic.

Siddhartha's whole world had been turned upside down by the thunderbolt of these four visions of truth of which he had been unaware. He was consumed by the realisation that one day he too would be afflicted with sickness, old age and death and so would his loved ones.

That he would be separated through death from his wife and child, who he loved dearly, and that he knew of no way to avoid this tragedy for himself or others.

He wished to find out why there is suffering in life, why there is old age, sickness and death? He longed to find a way to help his loved ones and all beings by understanding suffering and finding an answer to it. Finding out the truth of these things became his vow and life quest. His renunciation of the worldly life became complete when he left the palace secretly one night to become an ascetic in search of the truth.

He travelled throughout India and visited many teachers and holy men. He studied and practised what they taught him until he had mastered each of their teachings, even better than his teachers had mastered them.

Then, one after the other he left saying, in these teachings I have not found the truth I am seeking about why beings suffer and how they can escape from these sufferings of sickness, old age and death.

After 6 years of practicing as an ascetic Siddhartha had not discovered what he was looking for. His practice at that time involved renunciation of all

worldly pleasures, refraining from taking food, water, bathing, cutting hair, speaking.

He practised these austerities in the belief that he could become free of attachment to his body by extreme self-denial. He became so emaciated from such practices that he was near death.

One day a music teacher was teaching his student how to play a string instrument. Siddhartha heard the teacher say “if you wind the string too tight it will break and if you have the string too loose, there will be no music”.

On hearing these words, Siddhartha came to the realisation of the middle way of living - the path between extremes; it must be neither strict, nor undisciplined.

Siddhartha then decided to give up the extreme austerities he had been practicing and take proper food once again to recover his health and strength. He remembered once as a child he had sat under a tree and had the experience of observing his own breath. He remembered how his mind had become very calm, peaceful and clear in that concentrated state.

He decided that he would sit with his back against a large tree and not leave that meditation, even if his body wasted away, until he had found the answer to his quest, the attainment of the highest wisdom and perfect enlightenment.

### **Friends: At this Full Moon Day do all Buddhas Awaken**

In many Buddhist Traditions, Vesak Day celebrates birth, Enlightenment, and passing away of the Buddha Gotama. Rejoice! Keep clean, calm, cool, clever, and caring...

About this Buddhist Vesak Festival.

This May full moon also celebrates the Buddha's third visit to Sri Lanka in the eighth year after his Enlightenment, where he journeyed to Kelaniya on the invitation of the Nāga King Maniakkhika (Mahavamsa i,72ff.).

The day also celebrates the crowning of king Devānampiyatissa (Mhv.Xi.42), and the laying of the foundation stone of the Mahā Stūpa (Mhv.Xxix.1)

Please Remember:

At this very May full moon in year 528 BC the Blessed Buddha awakened by completely perfect and utterly unsurpassable self-Enlightenment!

At that time a girl named Sujata Senani lived in Uruvela. When adult she prayed before a certain Banyan tree, that she might get a good husband equal to herself in caste and that her firstborn may be a son. Her

prayer was successful. Since indeed it did happen. At the full moon day of the Wesak month, she rose at early dawn and milked the cows. As soon as new buckets were placed under the cows, the milk poured spontaneously in streams all by itself! Seeing this miracle, she knew something special was happening!

That same night the Future Buddha dreamt 5 dreams making him conclude: "Surely, truly, without any doubt, today I will reach perfect Enlightenment!" His 5 coloured radiance illuminated the whole tree. Then Sujata came and offered the cooked milk rice into the hands of this Great Being.

Later a local grass-cutter came going with a bundle of grass just harvested from nearby. He offered the Great Being 8 handfuls of Kusa grass, when he saw that this Sage was a Holy Man. The Future Buddha accepted the grass and proceeded to the foot of the Bodhi-tree. Reaching the imperturbable Eastern side, where all the Buddhas take their seat, he sat down saying to himself: This is the immovable spot, where all the prior supreme Buddhas have planted themselves! This is the place for destroying this net of desire!

Then the Future Buddha turned his back to the trunk and thus faced east. Right there, he then resolutely settled on this mighty decision:

Let just blood and flesh of this body dry up and let skin and sinews fall from the bones. I will not leave this seat before having attained the absolute and Supreme Self-Enlightenment!

So determined did he seat himself in this unconquerable seat, from which not a 100 lightning strikes could make him waver. At this very moment the rebel deity Mara -The Evil One- raised exclaiming: Prince Siddhattha will pass beyond my power, but I will never allow it! And sounding the Mara's war shout, he summoned his mighty army for battle. Then Mara warned his evil militia:

This Sakyamuni, son of Suddhodana, is far greater than any other man, so we will never succeed to fight him up front. We must thus attack him from the rear. Frustrated, being unable even to touch this big wielder of power also with 9 mighty hurricanes of wind, rain, rocks, weapons, red coals, hot ashes, sand, mud, and darkness Mara somewhat in panic shouted at his army: "Why do you all stand still? Seize, kill and drive away this prince!" Mara then yelled: "Siddhattha, leave this seat. It is not yours, but mine!" Hearing this, the Well-gone One replied: Mara, neither have you fulfilled the 10 perfections to the third degree, nor have you given the 5 great donations.

Neither have you striven for insight, nor for the welfare of all the world, nor for supreme self-enlightenment! Therefore does this very seat surely not belong to you, but truly indeed only to me. Suddenly, overpowered by fear,

Mara's followers fled helter-skelter in all directions. No two went in the same direction, but leaving their weapons in a chaos, they all fled terrified by metaphysical panic. Seeing them flee thus, the great assembly of deities triumphantly shouted: Mara is defeated. Prince Siddhattha has won! Let us celebrate this truly sublime, wonderful and unique victory! It was before the sun had set that the Tathagata conquered Mara and defeated his army.

That same night, after having bathed, while the Bo tree rained red sprigs onto his robe, The Consummate One gained knowledge of his prior lives during the 1st watch of the night: "With the mind thus concentrated, purified, bright, unified, focused, tractable, compliant, steady and imperturbable, I directed mind to remembrance of my past lives. I recollected many past lives, i.e., one re-birth, two...five, ten... 50, a hundred, a thousand, 100 thousand, many eons of cosmic contraction, and many eons of cosmic expansion: There I had such a name, belonged to such a clan and species, had such a body. Such was my food, such my life of pleasures and pains. Such was the end of my life. Passing away from that state, I re-arose there. There I had such name, belonged to such a sort and family, had such a form. Such was my food, such my experience of pleasures and pains. Such was the end of my life. Passing away from that state, I re-arose here. Thus I remembered my various past lives in all their various modes and manifold details.

This was the first knowledge I attained in the first watch of the night. Ignorance was destroyed; the knowledge arose; darkness was destroyed; light arose as happens in one who is alert, aware, and determined. But the very pleasant feeling that arose by this did neither invade my mind, nor remain.

With the mind thus concentrated, purified, bright, intact, pliant, malleable, steady, and totally imperturbable, I directed it to the knowledge of the passing away and reappearance of beings. I saw by means of the divine eye, purified and surpassing the human eye! I saw beings passing away and re-appearing, and I realised how and why they are high or low, beautiful or ugly, fortunate and unfortunate all in exact accordance with the intentions of their prior actions: These beings who were endowed with bad behaviour of body, speech, and mind, who reviled the Noble Ones, held wrong views and acted under the influence of wrong views, with the break-up of the body, after death, have re-appeared in the plane of misery, the bad painful destination, the lower realms, even in hell.

But the beings who were gifted with good behaviour of body, speech and mind, who did not revile the Noble Ones, who held right views and acted under the influence of right views after the break-up of the body, after the death, have re-appeared in happy destinations, even in a divine world! Thus by means of the divine eye, purified and surpassing the human I saw beings passing away and re-appearing, all in accordance with their particular mixture of good and bad kamma...

But the satisfaction that arose here did neither invade my mind, nor remain. With the mind thus concentrated and completely absorbed, I then directed it towards understanding the ending of mental fermentation. I realised how it actually comes to be, that:

This is Suffering...  
 Such is the Cause of Suffering...  
 Such is the End of Suffering...  
 Such is the Way to End Suffering...  
 Such was the mental fermentations...  
 Such is the Cause of mental fermentation...  
 Such is the End of mental fermentation...  
 Such is the Way leading to the end of mental fermentation.

When my mind saw that, it was instantly freed of the fermentation of all sense-desire, it was released from the fermentation of becoming, and it became fully uncovered from the fermentation of ignorance.

Thus fully and perfectly Enlightened - The Buddha - perceiving this immense glory, spoke these 2 solemn verses, which never has been omitted by any of countless billions of prior Buddhas:

Through this round of countless existences have I searched, but yet failed to find "the Creator", who framed this construction: What Suffering indeed is such endless birth, ageing, decay, sickness and ever repeated death! Now I see that "the Constructor" of this structure is Craving...!!! Never shall this construction be built again, since all the rafters are shattered and the main beam is busted and completely broken... At this calming of all Craving, the mind was finally, irreversibly and ultimately stilled... Then, friends, this revelation of certainty arose in me: This release is indeed immutable, this is the very last rebirth, this endless reappearance has finally come to a happy end... *Nibbāna* is verily the Highest Bliss!

We congratulate all the Venerable Sangha, Organising Committee Members, volunteers, VIPs, and audience members who participated in the Victorian Observance of the United Nations Day of Vesak. Well done, well done, well done.

We express our heartfelt gratitude for your exemplary effort in making the event smooth and enjoyable for all. We would love to see you next year.

May we all work together many times in the future.  
 May the merit of the Triple Gem rain down upon you.  
 Happy Vesak.  
 May all beings be well and happy.

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