

Happy Dharma Day!

by Piya Tan

17th July 2008 (according to the SE Asian Buddhist calendar) is the full moon day marking Asalha Puja or Dharma Day, that is, the day when the Buddha taught the First Discourse to the Five Monks.

You can click here to see the phases of the moon over a month here:

<http://stardate.org/nightsky/moon/>

Actually two suttas were taught here by the Buddha to the monks.

The first sutta is the Dhammacakkapavattana Sutta (the turning of the Dharma Wheel), in which the Buddha presented his teachings in terms of the middle way, the four noble truths and the eightfold path. At the end of it, Kondanna became a streamwinner, one who has stepped into the stream leading to Nirvana: the first saint after the Buddha.

Later, in the second sutta, the Anattalakkhana Sutta (on not-self or the non-existence of an abiding self), all the five monks became arhats, liberated saints like the Buddha. The Sangha is born, and the Buddha has started the Teaching for our benefit.

Here is a beautiful ancient Indian stupa carving showing Greek influence to mark the remarkable event:



If you can't see the stupa carving click here:

http://www.lgfl.net/lgfl/leas/ealing/web/EGFL1/teaching_learning/subjects/REandSACRE/Festival_calendar/July/July_images/Sarnath.jpg

The carving here shows the Five Monks. The sixth figure that looks different is Vajrapani, a Dharma protector (the Buddhist adaptation of Hercules!)

Asalha Puja also marks the beginning of the rains retreat by which monastics count their

<http://dharmafarerer.googlepages.com>

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seniority, that is, the years of their spiritual "residence" or practice.

What does it mean to become a monastic (monk or nun)? From my understanding of the Suttas and Buddhist practice, I would say that a monastic is one who has left the biological for a spiritual family. He/She has not "abandoned" the erstwhile family, but rather broken the barriers of what the world narrowly regards as "family."

The concept of family is globalized or cosmic to include ALL beings.

This means that the monastic is now spiritually "related" to you--as a father or mother, a brother or sister, a son or daughter--and you can approach him/her without fear or favour any time, especially when you are in need of guidance or solace.

This is what the early Sangha of the Buddha is like, and continues to be so with the true monastic practitioners of today. The idea of learning the Suttas and having spiritual friends amongst our peers is so that we can meet the truly spiritual monastics for our own lasting happiness and the benefit of those who are still seeking.

Join me in my boundless joy on this most holy occasion when we celebrate true joy, wisdom, and spiritual liberation.

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