

The true meaning of Vesak

Vesak Day is when I try to bring my family to visit some obscure Buddhist temple we have not been to before, especially and uncrowded, where we could enjoy the peace as we remind ourselves of this most sacred day.

In 1950, the World Fellowship of Buddhists (WFB) declared Vesak Day to fall on the first full moon day of May. In other words, it is an uposatha or precept day. It is a day when we put more effort to keep at least the five precepts, by spending quiet time with the family, or alone meditating.

On the Buddha's parinirvana (final passing away), he reminds us to be "an island unto yourself; make the Dharma as an island" (D 16). This means that we have the potential to be truly happy, and to be liberated from suffering.

The Buddha's message is very simple: if we do not help ourselves, who can? Religion is all based on stories and our idea of imaginary things in which we must have faith. But the stillness of mind is something we can all experience, if we spend some quiet moments alone meditating, say watching the breath.

When your mind is calm, it becomes clear. In that clarity, you will notice there are destructive patterns of behaviour and wholesome patterns of behaviour. Often getting angry is a destructive pattern of behaviour; so is being sad or depressive. Spend some quiet time and question this pattern (or any other negative pattern). Ask why, then some answer will appear in your mind; ask why again, and so on, until you come to understand what is really going on. This final part, you have to find out for yourself.

Then there is the wholesome pattern that you should notice in yourself. It makes you feel really peaceful and happy. And it is not dependent on anything outside of yourself; for, then if that peace and happiness would be dependent on something else. Seek for the non-dependent peaceful happiness within yourself. Where does it come from? Seek and you will find it—in your heart.

You can be emotionally independent: be truly happy.

Be at peace with your breathing. It has always been there, trying to keep up with you. Why not just *let your breathing be* this time, just watch it like you watch a beautiful resting baby or kitten or puppy (choose which you like).

May this Vesak be very meaningful for you and those close to you.

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