

A Special Veneration At The Buddha Gaya

Posted on



Situated in the state of Bihar in India, the Buddha Gaya is a place of utmost religious significance for Buddhists around the world.

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Described as a peaceful and idyllic setting in the hallowed texts, the Buddha Gaya sits beyond the Neranjana River and from its banks unfolds the final journey of Prince Siddhartha towards enlightenment. Identified as the very place where he attained enlightenment, the Vajrasanaya at the Buddha Gaya or the seat of enlightenment from which he vowed to never rise till he attained enlightenment and the Bodhi tree that offered its shelter, remain preserved for worship at the Buddha Gaya to this day.

Adjacently stands the characteristic structure of the Buddha Gaya Viharaya at 170 feet high and which has become a symbolic representation of the Buddha Gaya and shelters an image house, within which is a golden Samadhi (seated) Buddha statue. The sacred precincts around the temple mark locations of significance for pilgrims where the Buddha spent seven

weeks following enlightenment. While pilgrims flock to these sites for religious observances, with the Sambuddhatva Jayanthiya commemorated this year to mark 2600 years since this religious incident, the Buddha Gaya holds special significance.

Led by the Ven Uduwe Dhammaloka Thero and Sajin De Vass Gunawardena, MP, preparations are underway to organise a religious programme held over a period of three days at the Buddha Gaya in the month of November. The programme, titled Sambuddhatva Cheevara Suvanda Mangalya would be conducted to evoke blessings for the whole world and will commence with a religious observance known as the Katina Pinkama. This is the offering of a cheevara or robes to the Maha Sanga (Buddhist monks) who have completed a three month period of sojourn during the rainy season. This practice laid down by the Buddha, known as Vas Viseema (rain dwelling), commences with the Esala Poya in the month of July. At its cessation many religious observances are held with the most significant being the Katina Pinkama.

The programme titled Sambuddhatva Cheevara Suvanda Mangalya would be conducted at the Buddha Gaya to evoke blessings for all and will commence with a religious observance known as the Katina Pinkama - the offering of a cheevara or robes to the Maha Sanga (Buddhist monks) who have completed a three month period of sojourn during the rainy season.

Thus a pilgrimage from Sri Lanka will take place and the cheevara will be carried, mounted on an elephant along with an elaborate procession as an offering to the Buddha. This would be followed by an aloka poojawa or illumination ceremony and a suvanda mangalya - the collective lighting of incense to engulf the Buddha Gaya in pleasant aroma.

On the following day the planting of a Bo sapling of the Sri Maha Bodhi in Anuradhapura will be conducted. The sapling offered by the President Mahinda Rajapaksa, is in recognition and appreciation of the gift of Buddhism reaching the shores of Sri Lanka from India. While the Bodhi tree in Buddha Gaya preserved today, marks the place where Buddha reached enlightenment, although not said to be the original tree. However the Sri Maha Bodhi in Anuradhapura today has been grown from the original tree brought as a sapling to Sri Lanka. during the time of King Asoka. It is a sapling from this tree that will be ceremonially planted at the Buddha Gaya as a part of the religious observances conducted. This would be followed by the chanting of pirith into the night.

The sequence of events held from November 6 - 8, 2011 will conclude with the almsgiving conducted with offerings for 1000 monks on the final day of religious observances. The Sambuddhatva Cheevara Suvanda Mangalya programme thus invites all who wish to take

part and engage in the meritorious religious observances and evoke blessings at the Buddha Gaya.

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