Poson Full Moon dawned a New Culture in Sri Lanka

Posted on

The Poson Full Moon Pōya Day is drawing near, subsequent to the celebration of Vesak Full Moon Day. This significant occasion is uniquely commemorated in Sri Lanka. This occasion marks the arrival of Mahā Mahinda Arahat, the son of King Dharmāshoka of India. On this same occasion, King Ashōka sent eight other envoys to eight different countries simultaneously.

According to Indian history, King Dharmāshōka was a prominent leader, ruling over an empire that encompassed five major rivers (Pañca Mahā Gangā), namely the Yamuna, the Ganges, the Sarabhu, the Achirawathi, and the Mahī, along with 16

states, including Anga, Magadha, Kāsi, Kōsala, Vajji, Malla, and Chethi. If you examine his character more closely, you will find it to be very different from that of Dharmāshōka. Before conquering the 16 states, he was known simply as Ashōka. However, following the cruelty of the Kalinga War, he became referred to in history as Chandhāshōka, or 'cruel Ashōka.' Despite having conquered the entire Indian subcontinent, he experienced deep disappointment when he witnessed the immense loss of life, with thousands of soldiers and civilians killed and many others suffering as a result of the conflict.

After some time, he was fortunate enough to hear the teachings of the Dhamma from a novice monk, which helped to ease his troubled mind. Although he listened to the teachings of the Buddha Dhamma, he also practiced a more universal approach to morality, which was fair to all religions. Consequently, the name Chandhāshōka eventually transformed into Dharmāshōka.

This account is corroborated in the Bauddhalōkaya. "All religious people should strive to live in peace and harmony, as there is no greater effort than promoting the welfare of all. I hope that my sons, grandsons, and great-grandsons will adhere to this for the benefit of the world. Along the roads, I have planted banyan and mango trees to provide shade for both people and animals. I have arranged for wells to be dug and rest houses to be built in various locations. Additionally, I have established watering places for the use of both animals and humans."

Furthermore, he has expressed his views on human life: "As human beings live, enjoying peace of mind and collective protection, self-control, and purity of heart, I wish for the animals in my kingdom's jungle to enjoy equal opportunities for survival." Additionally, globally recognized philosopher Patrick Goodness has elaborated on King Ashoka and his contributions to society, which serve as an excellent example for today's leaders around the world.

"King Ashōka was deeply troubled by the devastation caused by war. As a leader who once sent out his armies to kill and conquer, he became increasingly aware of the destructive consequences of conflict. He witnessed the suffering of people during and after conquests, which led him to convert to Buddhism. Embracing a code of non-violence, he renounced all warfare and incorporated Buddhist principles into his rule. As a result of his efforts, Buddhism spread globally and gained widespread acceptance."

Why are Kings of the caliber of Dharmāshōka rare today? In my view, this illustrates

the nature of human beings in the world, as outlined in Abraham Maslow's Humanistic Psychology. Anyway, his understanding of Dharma indicated that the people in the country were fortunate to practice a very relaxing, soothing, psychological, and practical form of Dharma. As a result, the lives of Sri Lankans transformed with a new culture, influenced by his universal teachings that emphasized positive thinking. His teachings, particularly observed on Poson Poya Day, should deepen our understanding of Dharma's significance in our lives. Without Dharma, achieving a higher state of knowledge and self-understanding becomes difficult. It's important to revisit the Chullahatthi Padopama Sutta, delivered by Arahat Mahinda Thero to the King and his followers on Poson Poya Day in Mihintalā, Anurādhapura, Sri Lanka. "Seyyathāpi āvuso, yāni kānti jangalānang pānang padajānāni, sabbāni thāni hatthi padē samōdhānang gacchti."

"Dear friends, just as the footprints of all four-legged animals are included within the footprint of an elephant, which is regarded as the largest among them, similarly, all skills and qualities (Kusala) are encompassed by the Four Noble Truths. So, what is the noble truth of suffering?"

"Birth is suffering; aging is suffering; death is suffering. Sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, and despair are also suffering. Not getting what one desires is suffering" – (Dhammachakkha Pavattana Sūtra – San. yutta Nikhāya.)

Our current circumstances clearly illustrate that nothing in this world aligns with our wishes. Some individuals seek to invade other countries or territories, while others accuse them of doing the same to ours. The fundamental nature of humans is marked by craving and aversion. Regardless of how much they acquire, they remain unsatisfied. This often leads to a sense of hopelessness, which is referred to as'Icchābhanga,'signifying psychological frustration. This frustration, regardless of desire, can be seen as a form of grief. It is the first concept, known as 'Dukkha,' that the Buddha emphasized in his teachings. In the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna states, "This world is Dukkhālayam ashashvatham," meaning that this world is filled with sorrow, compelling us to search for happiness. Consequently, we often seek the right thing in the wrong places. Therefore, it is undeniable that misery and sorrow exist in this world. In psychological terms, this is described as stress, anxiety, and depression.

So, what should we do to alleviate this suffering? To begin, we must gain a clear understanding of suffering. It is important to acknowledge that the events occurring around us are part of human existence and cannot be avoided. Adversity and

suffering are common to all living beings. In Buddhism, there is a path to be followed called ‘Arya Atthangika Magga,’ or the Eightfold Path, which is a central teaching of the Buddha Dharma. According to psychology, understanding our suffering is also vital. We should observe our thoughts non-judgmentally and meditate until our minds become calm and serene. In the context of Dhamma, this is referred to as ‘Sammā Samādhi,’ which represents the ultimate goal of meditation. This is Buddhism or Buddha Dharma, focusing on understanding rather than rituals.

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