The Glory of Vesak and the Teaching of Buddha

Posted on

Vesak is a festival important for Buddhists in the world as it signifies the momentous events in the life of The Buddha, the Birth, Enlightenment, and the Passing away (Pari nibbāna). The most important thing about these three events is that they happened in three different places.



The Birth at Lumbini, the Attainment of Nibba¯na (Enlightenment) at Buddhagaya, and The Passing Away at Kushinagar in India. The Birth, as well as his Enlightenment, is significant to us. As we are very fortunate to learn and practice his peaceful and insightful Dhamma, it is essential to understand the Buddhahood.

It is mentioned in the Ariyapariyesana sutta in the Majjuma Nikaya that he enlightened as a Buddha. “Then, monks, being subject to birth, seeing the drawbacks of birth, seeking the unborn, unexcelled rest from the yoke, unbinding; I reached the unborn, unexcelled rest from the yoke: unbinding. Being subject myself to aging… illness… death… sorrow… defilement, … I reached the aging-less, illness-less, deathless, sorrow-less, unexcelled rest from the yoke: Unbinding. Knowledge and vision arose in me: Unprovoked is my release. This is the last birth. There is now no further becoming.’’ I think anyone can understand this excellent view of the Buddha, which is very common. It is a universal truth. Not one person, not one

country, but the world is suffering today. But not even today, in the whole life equally. That is because no one can escape suffering in this world. So, “dukkha” is defined in the Dhammachakka pavattana sutta – a bunch of doctrines, the first sermon, preached by The Buddha after he attained the Enlightenment, as sorrow. What is the cause of the sorrow? It is also very clearly, mentioned as: “Yam pichchang n.a labhathi than.pi dukkhan..’’ This means that ‘If an individual does not receive what he longs for, he gets frustrated, and that disappointment leads to Dukkha or sorrow.

On the other hand, this Noble Truth could not be understood so easily by worldly individuals as it is very subtle. That reason is also described in the su¯tra by the Buddha’s words. Then the thought occurred to me, ‘This Dhamma that I have attained is deep, hard to see, hard to realize, peaceful, refined, beyond the scope of conjecture, subtle, to-be-experienced by the wise.’’ So, by these explanations, some individuals may be discouraged from following the doctrine, as it is challenging to understand. The Buddha has seen a method to follow easily. Therefore, it is said, in the su¯tra, as: “I surveyed the world with the eye of an Awakened One. As I did so, I saw beings with little dust in their eyes and those with much, …keen faculties and dull, …good attributes and… bad, those easy to teach and those hard, some of them seeing disgrace and danger in the other world.’’ After surveying the world, The Buddha compared the world to a pond of lotuses. “Just as in a pond of blue, red, or white lotuses, some lotuses, are born and grown in the water, might flourish while immersed in the water, without rising up from the water; some might rise up from the water and stand without being smeared by the water.’’ According to this Buddha’s survey, one can start the path from the beginning and go higher than the Dharma. In the beginning, an individual can follow the “Thri Shiksha¯’’ Three disciplines:

1. Training in moral conduct –Seela

2. Training in concentration –Sama¯dhi,

3. Training in wisdom – Paññ a¯,

firstly, So, where can you study this noble Truth? In Sri Lanka, Buddhism is being taught: in Sunday Dharma schools, Pirivenas, and schools. For this purpose, let us review the education of a leading Pirivena in Sri Lanka. It is none other than the ‘Paramadhamma Chetiya Pirivana’ in Ratmala¯na, Colombo. At this juncture, if we look into the history of this Pirivena, it goes to the very beginning of the Pirivena

education. This ancient educational center was commenced in 1841 by the famous venerable Walane Sri Siddharatha Maha Thero, for the purpose of training monks in Dhamma and Vinaya (doctrine and discipline rules), and named it Ratmalane ̄ Sha ̄stra Sha ̄la ̄wa. Later this center was named 'Parama Dhamma Che ̄thiya Pirivena' with accommodation for about 17 Bhikkhu ̄s as the first batch.

Although Buddhist education was rare at that time, in Sri Lanka, this Pirivena had produced many prominent scholarly student monks. One of them, according to Pirivena legend, was the Venerable Hikkaduwe Sri Sumangala Na ̄yake Thero (1827-1911), who established the Vidyo ̄daya Pirivena at Ma ̄liga ̄kanda, Marada ̄na. And the other one was Venerable Ratmala ̄ne Dhammalo ̄ka Na ̄yaka Thero (1828-1887), also a bright student, the founder of the Vidya ̄lanka ̄ra Pirivena at Kelaniya in 1875. Not only that, the first Sinhala Buddhist newspaper, named 'Lakmini Pahana' was published under the guidance of the Walane Sri Siddharatha Thero. On the other hand, from that era, local students and foreign students have been studying at this Pirivena, as it was a higher standard of Buddhist education center.

And after a few decades, one more step was taken by kala ̄su ̄ ri, Venerable Dr. Mapalagama Wipulasara Maha Thero (1960), starting the modern era, making the institute famous internationally. Though the pirivena began with 17 students, today it is a center for about 100 students with foreign monks, under the guidance of the current Chief incumbent Ven. Dr. Maitipe Wimalasara Maha Thero. Except for Pirivena education, we cannot forget the other services rendered by this temple today. From a long list of social services done by the pirivena I would like to pick up a few names of the national and international Organizations attached to the pirivena. They are namely: Sri Siddha ̄ratha Sunday School, Nursery School, Women's Society, Charitable Ayurveda Dispensary, Advisory Council, Police Station, Sri Lanka Bhikkhuni Forum, Sri Lanka Buddhist Pilgrims Organization, World Buddhist Sangha Councils, and other Organizations in Taiwan, Japan, Mongolia, and Kushinagar. Meanwhile, today, the whole world has become a miserable place, with so many troubles caused by man. They live in sorrow. To my mind, that is why so many people in western countries are also seeking meditation and yoga today, while Sri Lankans fulfill so many vivid rituals. Pirivena education can provide a vital service to the world by teaching Dhamma, which is helpful for mental well-being and peace.

For this purpose, systematic Pirivena education (practically) is essential today, for a Buddhist monk for training in Dharma and Vinaya (the doctrine and discipline rules),

so they need not go to universities to get mixed up with lay students and politics, which has caused big trouble. All pious people can help them achieve this goal by contributing to the advancement of Pirivena education. Finally, I wish the whole world a peaceful, happy, and prosperous future.

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Paramadhamma chetiya Pirivena.