

The Great Visit of the Lord Buddha to Sri Lanka



Mahiyangana is one of the many significant religious landmarks visited by Lord Buddha.

Fortunately, the Lord Buddha first visited Sri Lanka nine months after he attained Buddhahood, or nine months after his Enlightenment. He visited Sri Lanka on Duruthu Pōya Day to visit Mahiyangana, near the Mahaweli River in northeast Sri Lanka. Before the Buddha arrived in the country, he forecasted a war between two groups of Yakkhas, or devils (though they were called Yakkha, they belonged to a kind of tribe).

However, after solving the problem they were going to fight on, the Buddha preached Dharma to gatherings, including God Mahā Sumana. Later, this place became very famous because of the Mahiyangana Pagoda. This pagoda was built at the same site where the Buddha was sitting when he preached the Dharma. As this is the Buddha's first visit to Sri Lanka, this pagoda is a significant landmark to Buddhists in the country as a great sacred worship place. Also, this is the first place among the sixteen holy worshipping places the Buddha visited during his journeys to Sri Lanka.

The other religious places are Mahiyangana, Nāgadeepa, Kelaniya, Sripāda, Diwāguhā, Deeghawāpi, Muthiyangana Pagoda, Thissamahārāma, Jaya Sri Mahā Bodhi, Mirisawetiya, Swarnamāli Pagoda, Thupārama, Abhayagiriya, Jethawana Pagoda, Seila Pagoda, and

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Kiriwehera in Kataragama, where most devotees like to visit. In Buddhist history, those places are mentioned as 'Solos Mahā Sthana' (sixteen great places). Some extraordinary incidents are connected with these sacred places, such as the Mahiyangana Pagoda.

This visit happened after the Buddha preached the Dhamma to three ascetic brothers, namely, Uruvela Kassapa, Nadee Kassapa, and Gayā Kassapa, in India at the Gaya River bank. The eldest brother was Uruvela Kassapa, with five hundred ascetic disciples; the middle brother was Nadee Kassapa, with three hundred ascetic disciples; and the junior brother was Gayā Kassapa. They were called Jatila (j[^]tilə) because they used to wear some kind of turban-like some Hindu people in India do. They were ordained as Buddhist monks after a discussion with the Buddha. A few days after that, the Buddha preached the 'Āditta Pariyāya Sūthra' for these thousand Bhikkhus at the Gayā river bank in India. The Buddha preached in his sermon about the 'nature of the life' of human beings, describing how they are tormented by three burners: Rāga, Dēsha, and Mōha. According to Buddhism, Rāga means lust, Dēsha means anger, and Mōha implies ignorance.

The Buddha, preaching this Sūthra, called monks, "Bhikkhus, all is burning, and what is there that is burning?"

"The eye is burning, forms are burning, eye-consciousness is burning, eye contact is burning, and whatever is felt as pleasant or painful or neither painful nor unpleasant that arises with eye contact for its indispensable condition that too is burning. Burning with what? Burning with the fire of lust, with the fire of hate, with the fire of delusion. I say it is burning with birth, aging, and death, with sorrows, lamentations, pains, griefs, and despairs."

According to Buddhism, it doesn't mean the eye is burning; all our eye contact perceives is burning. Not only that, but our evil thoughts are burning us, too. Thoughts of aversion generated by our eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind contact burn us too. Delusions like wrong religious beliefs might torment us. Real Dharma is not a belief system.

It must be a practical system. We can see it in this world without going very far. Today's world is a Universal Village; therefore, we can see the other side of the world through technology. We can see that some countries have so many troubles: flooding, economic and political problems, religious conflicts, and wars, like in Gaza. They are not only burning mentally, like anxiety, sorrow, and lamentation but also stomach-burning without water or food. Is this the nature of a human being? The answer is in the Āditta Pariyāya sutra. Therefore, this sutra depicts how to estrange from these burning delusions. It is said in the sutra as;

“When a noble follower who has heard (the truth) sees this, he finds estrangement in the eye, in forms, in eye-consciousness, in eye contact, and whatever is felt as pleasant or painful or neither painful nor pleasant that arises with eye contact for its indispensable condition, in that too, he finds estrangement.”

It teaches us to avoid unnecessary contact with the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind. Then what would happen? Your conflict with the reason would be estranged, and your mind would become calm. But when criticizing others, if you do not follow it, you will not be able to reach the point. Because your freedom is in your hands, not in others' activities or invisible beliefs. It has been explained as; “He finds estrangement in mind, finds estrangement in ideas, finds estrangement in mind-consciousness, finds estrangement in mind-contact, and whatever is felt as pleasant or painful or neither painful nor pleasant that arises with mind contact for its indispensable condition, in that too he finds estrangement.” So, it is obvious that if you are aware of the thoughts that come to your mind by contacting various objects, you can get relief from them without getting victimized. This is a very temporary state of the mind. Your unconsciousness always confuses the mind and can't be controlled. Then, you become the victim of uncontrolled thoughts. Fortunately, there's a second step for that as well. Furthermore, it is explained by the second step.

“When one finds estrangement, passion fades out. With the fading of passion, he is liberated. When liberated, there is knowledge, and he is liberated. He understands: ‘Birth is exhausting; the holy life has been lived out; what can be done is done; of this, there is no more beyond.’” One should expect this final goal to come from the liberation of ‘the Sansāric journey’ or the cycle of Reincarnation. That's complete liberation from anxiety, worry, lamentation, and sorrow. According to practical Buddhism, Dharma is not a belief system but a way of life development. Scholars in the Western world use this Dharma as a way of mind development and psychotherapy for needy people. Some people study karma and reincarnation as well. By using this, Dharma, especially mindfulness meditation, relieves one from many mental problems like anxiety and depression, according to their view. They use it as CBT therapy (Cognitive Behavior Therapy) or MBSR (Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction) for mental relief. They also introduce these methods to schools and medical colleges to increase education and to some hospitals in connection with the well-being of patients. Isn't it a better ‘practical way, as Buddhism advocates, than a faith or a belief system?

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