

HOW NOT TO FORGET BUDDHISM

Vesak reminds us of these vital and liberating truths:

(1) THE HISTORICAL BUDDHA

The Buddha arose in India as a human being. He struggled to seek awakening as a human being, and died an arhat. This means that he is fully free from suffering. He is the FIRST ARHAT (*arahata*): that is why we recall him thus:

namo tassa bhagavato ARAHATO sammā,sambuddhassa,
“Homage to him the Blessed One, the arhat, the fully self-awakened one.”

This means that we can each become awakened, be wise, and free from suffering.

(2) ONLY 1 BUDDHA IN THE UNIVERSE

Just as a family needs only 1 mother, our universe needs only 1 Buddha to bring us the awakening teaching. Once the Buddha Dhamma has been discovered and taught, we only need to study, practise and realize it.

As we study Dhamma, we teach it;
as we teach, we will learn;
as we learn, we will change to be a better person.

(3) THE SUPREME WORSHIP IS DHAMMA PRACTICE

In the Mahā,parinibbāna Sutta (D 16)¹, section 5.3, when the devas showered the Buddha’s body with fragrant sandalwood powder and heavenly flowers, filled the air with heavenly music, the Buddha tells us (through Ānanda) that this is NOT the way to respect the Buddha.

The true worship, THE SUPREME WORSHIP is our practice of the Dhamma to gain the path. That is, by reflecting on impermanence and attaining the path as streamwinners in this life itself.²

(4) THE TRUE RELICS ARE THE SUTTAS

After the Buddha’s passing, some people wrongly thought that we are with the Buddha when we worship his relics.³ But these are just the earth element like the ground we are

¹ Mahā,parinibbāna Sutta (D 16, SD 9): <https://www.themindingcentre.org/dharmafarer/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/SD-9-Mahaparinibbana-S-d16-part-2-piya.pdf>

² (Anicca) Cakkhu Sutta (S 25.1, SD 16.7) <http://www.themindingcentre.org/dharmafarer/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/16.7-Anicca-Cakkhu-S-s25.1-piya.pdf>

³ Buddhist Relic Controversy: <https://www.themindingcentre.org/dharmafarer/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/SD9a-Buddha-Relic-Controversy-2007.pdf>

standing on. Even the Buddha, in the Gārava Sutta (S 6.2)⁴, respects the Dhamma. We can only see the Buddha when we see the Dhamma. It is the Dhamma that awakens the Buddha. It is the Dhamma that awakens us, too.

The only true relics we have of the Buddha today are THE SUTTAS. They teach us about the elements (earth, water, fire, wind, space and consciousness). The Buddha's early teachings are still with us. As we study the suttas, we mature in life with the Dhamma. Otherwise, even when we have grown old, we remain ignorant and superstitious, and we are easily misled by RELIGIOUS MATERIALISM and FALSE TEACHINGS.

This is Māra's cunning tricks to mislead us with worshipping people and things. We will be no better than the people we worship; no things in the world can free us from suffering.

Today, Māra is not some frightening demon: Māra is anyone who teaches Buddhism in worldly and superstitious ways. In the end, we know nothing of Dhamma.

Vesak reminds us that the Buddha's relics are his suttas; the Dhamma is still with us.

Vesak is a reminder that the Buddha knows Māra and overcame him. We should know who Māra really is – the false teacher and false teachings – it is still not too late to return to the Buddha.

Vesak is a reminder for us to return to the Buddha and the Dhamma.

Blessed Vesak.

With metta,

Piya Tan, 2024.

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⁴ Gārava Sutta (S 6.2), SD 12.3: <http://www.themindingcentre.org/dharmafarer/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/12.3-Garava-S-s6.2-piya.pdf>