

## SIGNIFICANCE OF VESAK<sup>1</sup>

---

By Most Ven.Dr. Thich Bao Nghiem<sup>2</sup>

---

The 2643<sup>rd</sup> birthday of the Buddha (Buddhist calendar 2563) is an international spiritual and cultural event, very sacred to the Vietnamese and global Buddhist communities, when the United Nations and the world Buddhist community endorse and support the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha to host the Great Festival of the 16<sup>th</sup> United Nations Day of Vesak (UNDV) for the 3<sup>rd</sup> time at the Tam Chuc International Buddhist Center, Ha Nam Province, Vietnam on 12-14 May 2019.

The Great Festival of the UNDV 2019 attracts 1600 international delegates, including 600 delegations from 115 countries and territories and tens of thousands of Vietnamese Buddhist monks, nuns, and lay Buddhists. This special event affirms the United Nations' belief that the Buddhadharma can contribute to peace, progress, prosperity and happiness for mankind on this planet.

The annual Vesak celebration reminds us of the rare and interesting event: “Queen Māyā gave birth to Prince Siddhartha (*Siddhārtha*) in Lumbini garden, now in Nepal. In the standing posture facing the north, Siddhartha walked seven steps, pointed to the sky, pointed to the ground, and declared boldly: I am the supreme in this world, this is my last life.” The presence of the Buddha Shakyamuni on this globe is affirmed by the Buddhist scriptures: “There is a unique, supreme level that stands between bipedal species.”

---

1. Translated by Ven. Thich Chan Phap Can.

2. Vice President of National Vietnam Buddhist Sangha (VBS) and National Head of the Dharma Preaching Department (VBS).

Talking about the supremacy of the Buddha in this world, the Majjhima Nikaya (Middle Length Discourses) uses a metaphor: “Just as a blue, red, or white lotus flower, though born in the water and growing in the water, rises above and stands unsoiled by the water, even so, though born in the world and grown up in the world, I have overcome the world and dwell unsoiled by the world.” In terms of purpose and value, the presence of the Buddha in this world is recognized as follows: “Born for great happiness for sentient beings, for compassion and for great bliss for men.”

The core values contributed by the Buddha to mankind are the miraculous truths and high morality, a therapeutic ability, helping people to overcome suffering and pain, as the Buddha declared: “In the past, like this, disciples, I only speak of the reality of suffering and the way to end suffering.”

In order to fulfill the mission and career of ending suffering for humanity, by bodily example, the Buddha called on his disciples to show their noble responsibility and commitment: “... Bhikkhus, for the good, welfare, and happiness of devas and humans. Let not two go the same way. Teach, O bhikkhus, the Dharma that is good in the beginning, good in the middle, good in the end, with the right meaning and phrasing.”

To brighten the truth, for 45 years from his enlightenment to parinirvana, the Buddha, out of compassion for the pursuit of happiness for human life, enlightened and established a new, valuable philosophy which ceased suffering and opened up happiness. As the greatest sage in human history, “The Buddha instructed the path of enlightenment, the method of training, the ability to cease suffering and to lead to attain Nirvana right in the here and now.”

The Buddha is the teacher who directs: “What one needs to be taught, what one needs to be done, the Buddha did with great compassion.” During the time of the Buddha, castes in the society received the truth and morality of the Buddha, including 8/16 kings, hundreds of civil and military mandarins, thousands of sages and millions of other religious followers in India. They, by themselves, became disciples of the Buddha. Taking refuge in the truth of the Buddha, during the past 26 centuries, through the path of wisdom,

building peace and harmony to develop together, Buddhism is now practiced in 5 continents, including 175 countries and regions, with about 800 million followers.

This year, in memory of the three significant events in the life of the Buddha, including his birth, enlightenment and final nirvana without return, more than 56,000 monks and nuns, as well as tens of millions of lay Buddhists in Vietnam pay homage to the great contributions of the Buddha in bringing happiness to humankind. From his outlook on life which focuses on humanity, outlook on society which promotes equality, fairness and democracy; outlook on morality which emphasizes renouncing evil, doing good with noble motives; and outlook on liberation, which focuses on the purpose of untying the mind from suffering and attachment, Buddhism builds the Pure Land in this world.

The main theme of the UNDV celebration 2019 is the “Buddhist approach to global leadership and shared responsibilities for sustainable societies.” On the one hand, this theme demonstrates the concern of the world Buddhist community about global problems. On the other hand, it introduces Buddhist solutions to solve human suffering, rooted in greed, anger, delusion and bigotry. On this occasion, Bhikkhus, Bhikkhunis, and Vietnamese Buddhist communities in particular and the world in general share the collective wisdom and unified voice on the following key issues:

- (i) Mindful Leadership for Sustainable Peace,
- (ii) Buddhist Approach to Harmonious Families, Healthcare and Sustainable Societies,
- (iii) Buddhist Approach to Global Education in Ethics,
- (iv) Buddhism and the Fourth Industrial Revolution,
- (v) Buddhist Approach to Responsible Consumption and Sustainable Development.

Based on the holy Pali canons, the holy Agama scriptures and the holy Mahayana scriptures, we have the opportunity to discover, contemplate, and share the skills of completely resolving human problems through the spiritual method which consists of four steps (the Four Noble Truths). Step one, acknowledging suffering is

reality. Avoiding the ignoring attitude because it is a risk. Avoiding the attitude of defection, as this is irresponsible. Avoiding the exaggerated attitude, because it is self-torturing. Step two, tracing the cause of suffering from motives, including craving, anger, delusion and bigotry. Addressing the causes is to resolve the suffering half. Step three, by experiencing the happiness of Nirvana here and now when suffering, pain and the cause of their creation ceases. Step four, practice the right path which consists of three pillars. The insightful pillar includes right view and right intention. The moral pillar includes right speech, right action, right livelihood, and right energy. The meditative pillar includes right mindfulness and right concentration. The spiritual method discovered and propagated by the Buddha is an effective and capable solution to cease human's problems at the international, continental, national, territorial, and communal level, as well as the level of family and individual.

In order to celebrate the 2019 UNDV properly, monks, nuns, and lay Buddhists, please promote the spirit of social engagement: "Serving human life for good secular life and beneficial Buddhism; shedding light on the dharma, and supporting the nation and protecting the people." That is, we follow the ideal of the Buddha, for the compassion of life, the effort to do the best one can, to contribute to building peace and ending wars, eliminating hatred, harmonizing the present, building the future with qualities of wisdom, compassion, forgiveness, and no self. In this spirit, the Vietnamese Buddhist community actively participates to protect the sacred independence of sovereignty of the Fatherland, to develop a sustainable Vietnamese country, a better living environment, in order to deserve to be called children of the Buddha, inheriting the tradition of "supporting the nation and protecting the people" of Vietnamese Buddhism for 2000 years.