

Vesak here and now

The Buddha was born and passed away about 2600 years ago. He is still with us today when we practise the Buddha-Dhamma. Unlike other Person-centred religions, the Buddha teaches us not to worship but to go to him “for refuge” (*saraṇam*). In other words, the Buddha teaches how to live safely as he has himself done—with awakening, he is free from ignorance and suffering, so that he is a wise and compassionate teacher.

The Buddha, in his last days—as recorded in the Mahā,parinibbāna Sutta (D 16)—the devas showered him with heavenly flowers and played divine music. The Buddha declares that this is not the way to worship him. The “supreme worship” (*parama pūjā*) is that of practising the Dharma.¹

The supreme worship

We truly worship the Buddha by practising the Buddha-Dharma. This means that we recall the Buddha with our body and our mind—our whole being, what we really are. We supremely worship the Buddha by keeping our body (that is, our 5 physical senses) and our mind safe from negative actions that will harm us or harm others.

We respect LIFE because we are alive, and all living beings want to live. We keep to the Buddha’s teaching by not destroying any life or harming any being. Even more so, we should cherish our life by taking good care of our body, our mind and their health. We take just enough proper food at proper times. We exercise regularly, and rest at proper times.

We celebrate the lives of others, especially those near and dear to us. We accept people as they are, and also wish them well and happy. We speak at the right time with truth, kindness, fellowship and benefit. We share things with them, and with our skills, abilities, time, above all, our love for them by gently reminding them with happy stories and events, how to live with everyone the Dharma way.

Love and respect

We practise the Dharma by recalling what the Buddha himself would do or not do. We respect people just as they are. We also respect what people have: the things that they work for, that they use for their own happiness and health, and with which they support others with love and care.

Respecting people just as they are has a very deep meaning in that people love freedom and respect. Hence, we learn to enjoy doing things together with others; we show our appreciation and admiration for their goodness and abilities. Above all, we should not take any liberties with their bodies or their minds. This means neither to harm them bodily in any way, nor to hurt them emotionally by our words, acts, even thoughts.

As we love others more deeply and truly, we will also be able to read their minds. Since we are not awakened, we often misread their minds. Hence, relating to one another with useful and timely truth is a better way of communication than mind-reading. Even as we live and love, we age, we fall sick, we lose some abilities, we die.

¹ [Mahā,parinibbāna Sutta intro](#); [Mahā,parinibbāna Sutta \(D 19, SD 9\)](#).

Loving the living

This means that we should treasure our loved ones while they live, even now. This means often doing happy and healthy things together, especially leisure activities which are enjoyable. Moments like this also present us with surprises as we learn new things about others. It is a great mistake for us to think that people “do not change.” Just as we grow and change, so do others. We just need to be curious about them.

Vesak as a Buddhist sacred day is about living such happy lives together. Vesak also reminds us to nurture our minds so that we can live together in happiness doing what we love to do, what is good for ourselves and for others. Making one another happy is a very important medicine for keeping the mind (or heart, if you like) happy. It prevents dementia and other mental disabilities.

Vesak is not just about going to temples for some Buddhist festival; it is not merely about burning incense and bowing, or putting money into donation boxes. It's more about what happens after we leave all these events and live our real lives. We must live Vesak, live a living Vesak, a daily Vesak.

Vesak is here and now always

Notice how we forget about Vesak once the day is over! We take it to be merely a once-a-year day. If we follow the Buddha's advice on the “supreme worship,” Vesak must be everyday of our lives.

When we are truly mindful and aware, we will notice how rapidly time flies. It was like only yesterday when we were young and enjoying ourselves. Now more and more of our relatives and friends are gone. The living we know are much older and are less capable than they were.

When we understand that Vesak is always here and now, we are inspired to live truly accepting ourselves and others, and being kind to others especially when we think they don't deserve it. Then we see joy in our own good and the good in others. Even when things don't seem to work out well, we know we've done our best.

We know that it will be Vesak again tomorrow.

Blessed Vesak 2025,

With metta,

From Piya Tan and Ratna Lim.
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SUPREME WORSHIP

5.3 Then, the Blessed One addressed the venerable Ānanda:

“Ānanda, the twin sal trees are bursting forth with full blossom and fruit, albeit untimely, the blossoms are falling on the Tathāgata's body, showering down upon it, covering it up, in homage to the Tathāgata.

Heavenly mandārava [coral tree] flowers are falling from the sky, heavenly sandalwood powder is falling from the sky, showering down upon the Tathāgata's body, covering it up, in homage to the Tathāgata. Heavenly music is resounding through the sky in homage to the Tathāgata. Heavenly songs are wafting through the sky in homage to the Tathāgata.

5.3.2 But, Ānanda, this is not the way to honour, respect, revere, worship, or esteem the Tathāgata.

Ānanda, whatever monk, nun, layman or laywoman practises the Dharma in accordance with the Dharma, properly practising, living in accordance with the Dharma, he honours the Tathāgata, respects him, reveres him, worships him with the supreme worship. Therefore, Ānanda, consider thus:

'We will practise the Dharma in accordance with the Dharma, properly practising, dwelling in accordance with the Dharma!'—this is how you should train yourself."

(Mahā,parinibbāna Sutta, D 16,5.3), SD 9.