

Something and nothing about everything

Vesak reflection 2026

Vesak is about awakening

Vesak celebrates the most important event in terms of life. This refers to the peak of the development of life, human, subhuman and divine. Vesak marks the birth, renunciation, awakening and passing away of the Buddha, the awakened one.

“Awakened” (*buddha*) describes one who has fully and truly understood what life is, and what it means to be human, subhuman and divine. Although we can describe these states in physical terms, what defines each of them is **the mind**.

The “mind” refers to the living interaction between our consciousness and everything around us and beyond. In a way, “everything around us” refers to what we make of the world through our 6 senses: the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind.

The mind's role

The term “beyond” broadly refers to what we can know and infer (through reasoning) what we see, hear, smell, taste, touch, and think, that is, what they mean to us. The keyword here is “mean,” which means that we (the mind) “make sense” of these experiences.

To begin with, we can say that to “make sense” of things is to “know” things. Significantly, we can only know what the 5 senses present us. However, the senses do not work by themselves; they need the mind to make sense of things.

The mind makes senses of things for us by relating what we experience now with something similar we have experienced in the past. Thus, when a present experience reminds us of a past pleasant event that we liked and we desire more of it. When a present experience relates to a past bad experience, we dislike it and reject it.

The all we can know

The Buddha teaches us to notice 2 things from this experience. Firstly, all we can know is what we can sense and think about is through the 6 senses (the 5 physical senses and the mind). This is the “all” (*sabba*) of experience and knowledge.

The reality is that we often try to go “beyond” what the senses and mind present us. We imagine “something” (*kiñcana*) when we like something; when we want it, we initiate a habit: we will want it again. This, in simple terms, is craving.

Craving works in 2 ways: when we like something, we also dislike what hinders or prevents us from getting or having that something, or what threatens to remove or lessen that something. This is hatred, which is one side of the same coin with craving on the other side.

Making something of nothing

The Buddha teaches us to be **mindful**, that is, to carefully observe what is happening now as we sense things. Notice how the eye, for example, runs after an object that it likes. Now everything is impermanent, unsatisfactory and nonself.

Not understanding any of these truths, we (the mind) seek that “something” we have imagined. We can never find that “thing” which will fully satisfies us. Even when we think we have found it, we then realize we want something more or something else. This is suffering.

We can never feel satisfied with anything because no “thing” exists. (Now I did not say “nothing” exists because change exists; everything changes, become other.) The “thing” here is that “something,” some kind of abiding entity that we seek and run after when we sense or think things. In other words, we have made “something” of nothing!

Enjoying the moment

The Buddha teaches us that we should do “nothing” about these sensings and thinking, except to “enjoy” and learn from this moment as it arises and passes away before us. For example, we only need to enjoy reading this for now. Before we know it, we have finished reading and we go about our daily life.

If and when we are mindful, we will relate what we have learned to our daily life. We may notice how things simply and quickly pass away. We may also notice how one thing seems to lead to another; very often one thing may lead to many other things, and so on. It all seems to be repetitive and endless. This is samsara (*samsāra*).

When we understand things this way, we are noticing how causes and effects work. This works the same way for the mind: what the mind thinks defines how we speak or act. When we think negatively, the act is also negative. When we think positively, our act is regarded as positive.

Doing nothing

Simply put, the Buddha teaches us to do “nothing” regarding the world. When this “nothing” idea is applied to our body and speech, it means we should not kill, *not* steal, *not* commit sexual misconduct, *not* communicate falsehood, and *not* cloud up the mind.

When we understand that there is “nothing” to be gained from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, falsehood and intoxication, we then understand that people enjoy “something” that they value, that is, life, property, freedom, truth and happiness.

On a mental level, to do “nothing” means to focus the mind on something good and true. In this way, we progressively free from the mind from the grasp of the senses so that the mind is able to look into itself to see true reality. In this way, the mind frees itself from making something of nothing and to see things as they are.

When this seeing becomes very clear and complete, the mind frees itself from the world. It awakens to the true and complete freedom that is called nirvana. This is the most important meaning of Vesak—that we can free the mind and live happily, free from the craving for something and in the wisdom of nothing.

This reflection shows that the Buddha’s teaching is really very simple when we are truly interested to know our mind: do nothing and watch it!

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