

Radio Thailand Special Report
Promotion of Buddhism Week on Magha Puja Day
9 February 2017

This week Thai Buddhists are celebrating one of the important Buddhist calendrical festivals in Thailand, Magha Puja Day. This year's official Magha Puja week celebration began on the 7th of February at Lumbini Park and Phuttamonthon. The celebration is jointly organized by Buddhist Association of Thailand Assembly, National Office of Buddhism, Department of Religious Affairs, government bodies as well as private sectors.

Magha Puja day marks the four auspicious occasions occurring at the Veluvana bamboo grove, near Rajagaha in northern India ten months after the awakening of the Buddha. On that occasion, as recorded in the commentary to the Mahasamayassutta, four marvelous events occurred:

1. 1,250 disciples came to see the Buddha that evening without being summoned.
2. All of them were Arahants, Awakened Ones, and
3. All were ordained by the Buddha himself by the method of Ehi-bhikkhu upasampada and
4. It was the full-moon day.

On this occasion, the Buddha gave those Arahants the principles instruction of Buddhism, called "Ovadapatimokha" which is popularly known as the heart of all the Buddhist teachings. In this teaching, the Buddha smartly presented his summary of Buddhism into three parts: They are Vision, Mission, and Action which was presented in three stanzas.

Today, let me explain about the first stanza which makes up of four visions of Buddhism. They are:

*"Forbearance is the best austerity,
"Nibbana is Supreme", said the Buddhas.
He is not one gone forth who harms another.
He is not a recluse who molests others."*

In the time of the Buddha, people generally believed that an ascetic practice is the best religious practice. The ascetic practice includes self-mortification, penance, fire sacrifice etc. On the Magha Puja discourse, the Buddha denied those popular traditional practices instead redefined the best austerity as forbearance or patience. In another word, it is not something we act outward but act inwardly within our mind.

From a Buddhist perspective, it is best practice to be able to increase our spiritual immune system by achieving higher degree of patience and forbearance. Patience is the greatest virtue and foundation of human dignity and peace.

Patience can stop us from falling under the power of greed, aversion and delusion. It can also eliminate anger and passion which take place in one's mind. Development of patience prevents ill-will towards others even to oneself because of wrong understanding. People in a society have to face with many influences, if we do not have patience and let the greed, dislike and prejudice rule us, there will be only quarrelling, scandalizing and unhappiness without peacefulness and happiness both in oneself and society. On the contrary, where there is patience there is peace and happiness.

Moreover, in the time of the Buddha, in the name of religions people tend to believe that all are God's creation. The supreme is the creator God himself. Denying the popular belief, the Buddha's vision for humankind is to be able to attain Nibbana. The Buddha then praised Nibbana, the status of Awakened as the supreme. This shows that the vision of Buddhist practice is to be free from the binding power of desire, anger and delusion. In another word, Nibbana itself means extinguishing the fire which burns our mind.

In the time of the Buddha, one popular practice among Brahmin and ascetics were fire sacrifice. Literally, in the name of god they burn live animals as a part of ritual offerings to gods. Believing that such animal sacrifice will please gods and goddess. Refuting the practice, the Buddha explained that he is not one gone forth who harms another. The Buddha's vision for a religious person is to completely stop harming others by all means.

In the name of religions, one who call themselves as holy men or religious persons utilized their higher status in society to oppress others. For example, Brahmins who are considered by the society as religious men always oppress lower caste people in the name of religion. The Buddha, therefore, denounced the practice and redefined *samana* or a recluse as someone who do not oppress others by any means.

Therefore, let us today revisit Buddha's visions emphasizing on patience, set goal for nirvana, not harming others, and live in equality.