

## Asalha Puja Eve

### Special Report for Radio Thailand By Phra Shakyavongvisuddhi

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Asalha Puja Day which also known as Dhamma Day, is the day that marks the beginning of Buddhism.

Following his enlightenment, the Buddha spent several weeks marveling at how profound his realizations were, wondering if others would even be able to understand if he were to teach them. After scanning the world with his enlightened eyes, he found that some people could indeed understand the Dhamma and eventually reach the same level as him. So the newly enlightened Buddha set off to find the people most capable, the five ascetics he practiced with earlier while searching for enlightenment.

There is another event that occurs as the Buddha is traveling in this first post-enlightenment journey. It is recorded that the Buddha came across with the Ajivika Upaka on his way to Benares. Seeing the Buddha coming along the road, he asks him who his teacher is – a normal inquiry for one renunciant to make to another. The Buddha answers that he has no master, that he attained enlightenment on his own, and that he is, moreover, a Jina, a Victorious One. This is said to disturb Upaka who says “if you say so...” or something to that effect and departs by another way.

The Buddha found his old companions at a deer park near Benares on the full moon day of the eighth lunar month, or Asalha Puja Day, and gave them his so called first discourse, the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*.

While the Buddha’s first sermon is certainly an important event in Buddhism, there are deeper reasons as to why Asalha Puja is significant.

The occasion marked the beginning of Buddhism, not just because it was the day of the first teaching of Buddhism, but also because it was the day the first Buddhist monk came into existence. On top of that, one of the five ascetics, Kondañña, became a stream-enterer (a stage of enlightenment) after listening to the sermon, becoming the second person in the world to have enlightened.

After Kondañña became enlightened, he requested ordination and became the first Buddhist monk, thus creating in the world the Triple Gem, or Three Jewels, of Buddhism; the Buddha, the Dhamma (truth/teachings), and the Sangha (monastic community).

Lastly, by teaching, the historic Buddha completed his Buddhahood as a *Sammā Sambuddha*, one who discovers the path to enlightenment by himself, and then teaches others.

The Buddha’s first sermon, the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta* or The Discourse on Setting in Motion the Wheel of the Dhamma, is considered the most famous sutta in Theravada Buddhism. Not only is it regarded as the first sermon, it is probably considered to be the most foundational.

Content wise, the sutta covers several of the core principles that many would consider to be defining aspects of Buddhism. The discourse starts with the newly enlightened Buddha telling his companions that to find enlightenment, one should not indulge in the joys of

the senses, nor should they deprive themselves of basic necessities. The key is moderation, a *majjhima patipada*, or a Middle Way, so to speak.

This is followed by a fundamental teaching on the recurring Buddhist theme of dukkha, or suffering. According to the discourse, suffering, which is what Buddhism aims to end, is all around us. Suffering is sickness, aging, death, not getting what you want, getting what you don't want, etc. Basically, life is suffering.

The Buddha then teaches of non-attachment, a teaching very stereotypically associated with Buddhism. The sutta explains that the cause of suffering is *tanhā*, or desire. Not just the desire for possessions, people or power, but the desire for and attachment to views, beliefs and opinions, the desire to become something, and the desire to not experience unpleasant things among others. The key to ending suffering, is the elimination of such desire through the practice of the Noble Eightfold Path.

After these fundamental principles were outlined, the sutta affirms the Buddha's complete enlightenment and the beginning of Buddhism at the Deer Park in Benares, and ends with an acknowledgment that Kondañña understood the sermon.

The very message for today's Asalha Puja Eve based on the biography of the Buddha would be about how to be a victorious one. People's life is a struggle and everyone aims for a victory. Generally, our victory always depends on outer facts and conquering others. The Buddha advised us to conquer self not others. Conquering self is a true realization of how minds work and able to change its course in a positive way. Positive both with one's life and other's together with the ecological system. This is what Buddhism stands for. This is why Buddhism is a DIY religion for sustainability of human mind, people and the planet.