

**‘Āsālha Pūjā Day’**  
*Special Report on Radio Thailand*  
*Broadcast on FM 88 MHz at 07.30 am*  
*8 July 2560*  
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The Asalha Puja Day is one of the important Buddhist holidays in Thailand which was recently introduced in 1958. Therefore, this celebration is very unique to Thailand as it is not widely celebrated in other Buddhist countries. The term Asalha, in fact, is the name of the lunar month and when we refer to Asalha Puja Day it indicates the commemoration of the Asalha full-moon day. We commemorate this day because it was at this time 2,605 years ago that the Buddha began to set in motion the Wheel of Dharma.

Essentially, the Asalha Puja Day is celebrated in veneration of the first five disciples of the Buddha. However, it is the occasion for us to recall the first discourse which comprise the heart of Buddhist teachings. This is the teachings of the Middle Path.

“The Discourse on the Turning the Wheel of Dhamma” is the Buddha’s first sermon, delivered on the Asalha Puja Day after the Buddha had walked from the seat of his awakening and encountered a group of his old associates in the deer park at Sarnath. The sermon starts out simply by commenting on the Middle Path.

Like today, at the time of the Buddha, in the name of religion and spirituality some devote themselves to the indulgence of the senses for their ultimate happiness. And, some believe that the ‘Wheel of spiritual progress’ was stuck in the mold of ignorance. The awareness of the people does not rise above the boundaries of everyday pleasures, sorrows and petty understandings. While pursuing sense pleasures, the life of people is full of confusion, superstition, unhappiness and fear. The path to liberation and insight into Reality is thought to be in the shunning of society and to lie in extreme behavior such as self-mortification. Having tried the self-mortification himself, the Lord Buddha came to conclusion that it is not the right way because human life is already suffering enough to live with why on earth we make it more suffering.

Therefore, the Buddha’s first teaching was the Middle Path, the path to the right action in freedom which does not lie in either of these extremes; neither in following sense pleasures nor in the killing of sense pleasures. In other words, neither to do as one pleases nor to go against one’s mind.

Then the Buddha further outlines his central teaching of the Four Noble Truths which are suffering, the arising of suffering, the cessation of suffering and the path that leads to the cessation of suffering.

To present it in a modern interpretation, the teaching of the Middle Path is in fact what we call these days, sustainable development or sufficiency economy, the Thai version of the sustainable development.

The legacy of the Late His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej was the Sufficiency Economy which he referred it as the Middle Path for life. It comprised of the three interconnected circles of sanity, spirituality and sustainability. In other words, living one's life in sanity or moderation, immunize one's mind with spirituality or mindfulness and cultivate one's thought with sustainability or wisdom.

Literally, *Dhammacakkhapavattana* sutta translates as the discourse on putting sustainable development in practice. Literally, sustain in English means upholding from below which is the same root of the *Dharma* which means upholding. *Cakka* in Pali language literally means development with firm grounding. Whereas *pavattana* in Pali indicates the practice or to put in action. Therefore, it is so fitting to say that the first discourse of the Buddha which he delivered on the Asalha full-moon day like today is about how to develop one's life to be a sustainable one.

As a summary, let me briefly illuminate the significance of Asalha Puja Day in the light of those event and teachings.

Today is momentous to us because it was the day the Buddha first expressed his unconditional and unsurpassed compassion to the world by delivering an eye-opening truth with his discourse on sustainable development for the ultimate human sustainability.

Secondly, it was today that the first monk was ordained in Buddhism and awakened the Truth just like the Buddha. This signifies and proves the Awakening of the Buddha as pragmatism and achievable not merely a philosophy or ideology.

Thirdly, it was today that Buddhism appeared in this world as a global religion with the completion of the Buddhist fundamental faith, the "Triple Gem" i.e. the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha.

Therefore, I would suggest us to celebrate this day with the practice of right thing by following the Eightfold Noble Path. Whatever action we take in our life should abide by the principle of neither self-indulgence nor self-denial but self-consciousness.

Mind you! our minds are clouded by ignorance so we see thing as permanent, pleasing and self and we pursue for it with attachment. Therefore, we should learn and practice the value of detachment in order for us to able to see things as they really are, through which we can attain peace and able to let go all unpleasantness in our life.

May Asalha Puja Day bring us happiness, harmony and peace in our lives!