

# Reflections at Wesak – the Buddha’s Triple Event

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If you are in the business of making money, you have a nodding smile from the Buddha! Yours is a ‘happiness of wealth’ - one of four in relating to the economy.

This is one of the words of wisdom Buddhists may be reflecting upon as they celebrate Wesak in the month of May, an event recognized by the UN. It celebrates the triple landmarks of the Buddha’s life – Birth, Enlightenment and the Final Demise (Parinibbāna).

It was over three decades ago, in 1981, that the first ever Wesak was held in Canada, reported to be a North American first. A thousand or more attended, reported the Toronto Sun. It was at the Nathan Philips Square, Toronto City Hall. This year, it is celebrated in many cities, including Toronto, Vancouver, Edmonton, Winnipeg, Ottawa and Montreal.

For Buddhists, Wesak (also spelled Vesak) stands for a religious event. But how about for the rest of us? Does it stand for anything?

The Buddha’s primary teaching, of course, relates to ending ‘suffering’ (dukkha, in Pali, the language in which the Buddha’s words were first written, in Sri Lanka in the 1st c. BCE). And it is the suffering of all sentient beings, meaning ‘those with senses’, meaning both human and animal. But it is not simply by sitting on a cushion watching the inbreath – outbreath mindfully that most can manage to minimize suffering.

## **Economy**

If ‘Happiness of wealth’ minimizes dukkha (suffering) in a market economy, it is so only if it is ‘justly earned’. This is ‘happiness of being unblameworthy’. So, not only making your customers happy, but employees, too – fair wages, due holidays, work fitting skill and ability, and sharing your food.

With enough money to spare now, you are ready to take that cruise. How wonderful! You are now wrapping yourself in the ‘happiness of enjoying’ the justly earned wealth. The last happiness is one Canadians, said to be deep in debt, might usefully listen to: ‘happiness of being insolvent’.

The fourfold happiness's, then, are (1) making money, (2) through blameless economic practice, (3) enjoyment of what is justly earned, and (b) being debt-free. The Buddha also encourages a 50% re-investment and saving 25% for a rainy day. That is to say, sorry, you only have 25% to live on! Tough challenge alright, but the idea behind is a life of 'little wanting'.

Quad-happy economically, you have just begun to pave the path away from dukkha, as you live your daily life. But, that is if you don't think that only the bottom line matters. Greed and addiction to wealth will take you right back to suffering.

Does that not mean less economic growth? For sure. But it also means

- a. less of the rich – individuals, companies, getting richer and the poor getting poorer, minimizing the rich-poor gap;
- b. fairer distribution of wealth as business cuts back on unfair labour practices – temporary work, unpredictable working schedules, and better working conditions – fair wages, maternity / paternity leave, childcare, holidays, pensions, etc.
- c. less of scams, money-laundering, corruption, gravy trains, budget overspending (at both personal and institutional level), national indebtedness (again both at state and individual level);
- d. a life of little-wanting allowing enjoying more with less,

All this in general can be said to result in a happier people, better health with less stress and more smiles requiring fewer muscles, frowns ageing the face faster.

## **Polity**

It is not only economics, however, that earned the attention of the Buddha. His political model will assuredly resonate with us Canadians. He identifies the conditions that will make a people, a country and a system "not decline but flourish...". The first is grassroots democracy: holding regular public consultations, where discussion will be harmonious. The meetings will conclude with consensus. They are to be followed up with implementation of the decisions agreed upon.

## **Judiciary**

Did the Buddha have any ideas regarding the judiciary? In his judicial model, the accused is to be present, a judge, by himself or with the input from a jury type peer group, evaluates the evidence, expert opinion is called where needed, and decision arrived at unanimously, or by majority. And decisions are subject to appeal. Making the experience least stressful, courts are set in pleasant surroundings, with facilities for eating, rest and recreation, and even a mini-hospital for women in labour who may have walked miles to be there. Basically, the judicial system is conciliatory rather than adversarial.

## **Social Relations**

In terms of social relationships, the principle is one of reciprocity. Mother and father, listed in that order, is respected by the children who, in turn, are looked after by parents, ensuring their education. A husband makes the wife happy with, in addition to everything else, jewelry and ornaments, while the wife handles the family purse. Domestic go to bed after everybody else, but shared with them are the family's sweetmeats.

Guiding in all these spheres as well as in any other is 'self-control' (sīla), through self-directed 'Five Abstentions' – from taking life, from taking what is not given, from sexual misconduct, from disharmonious language and from binge drinking and addictions.

## **Happiness as Greatest Wealth**

These then are some ways of minimizing dukkha, happiness declared the 'greatest wealth'. As Buddhists make their way to celebrate Wesak, we can join them from our own homes and workplaces by seeking out our own happiness, in our own way, and wearing our own religious, or non-religious hat, even as more and more Canadians take to Mindfulness Meditation.

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