

Wesak: The Blessing of Shamballa

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Tonight we celebrate the great Eastern Festival, Wesak: the Festival of the Buddha. Throughout the world, Buddhists celebrate this festival on the full moon of May. According to the Ageless Wisdom, the significant factor is the full moon of Taurus, which usually occurs in May, but not invariably: sometimes it falls in April. In any case, this year we're all in agreement that this is the full moon of the Buddha: Wesak.

From films that have been made of Wesak, and also from writings, we know that Buddhists are meeting in celebration at this time. In Tibet hundreds if not thousands of pilgrims are gathering at the sacred Mount Kailash in a remote part of Tibet which is believed by some to mark the site of the Buddha's annual return to bless the Earth.

The Ritual and Ceremony of Wesak

For students of the Ageless Wisdom, however, there is a slightly different approach to this annual return of the Buddha, which is well documented in the booklet Alice Bailey wrote on the Wesak Festival. It is "a dream, a legend, a fact", she says. Perhaps we can visualise the valley, high in the foothills of the Himalayan range, which is surrounded by still higher mountains on all sides except towards the northeast, where there is a narrow opening. At this aperture, there is said to be a huge flat rock. As the time of the full moon of Taurus nears, the pilgrims and holy men gather, arranging themselves in a clear pattern so that, as Alice Bailey puts it, most of those gathered seem to know where they should place themselves, their position depending on the evolutionary status of the participant. Together with the Tibetan pilgrims are the disciples, initiates and Masters of the spiritual Hierarchy who also gather at this ceremony, some in physical bodies, others in their "Spiritual Bodies".

As the hour of the full moon approaches, a stillness settles down upon the crowd and all look towards the northeast. Certain ritual movements take place and on the floor of the valley the Masters form a five-pointed star, with the Christ standing at the highest point. All the while sacred mantras are chanted and the crowd's expectancy rises. A stimulation like a bolt of electricity can be felt, fusing the group into a united whole and lifting all in an act of demand and appeal.

Then, just a few minutes before the exact moment of the full moon, the Buddha appears in his spiritual body or presence, seated in a cross-legged position and bathed in light and colour, his hand raised in blessing. When he arrives directly over the great rock, a great mantram is intoned by the Christ and two other Masters, and the entire assembled group fall on their faces. This marks a release of extremely potent spiritual energy which has the effect of quickening all who respond to it, marking the supreme moment of spiritual effort and of the spiritual vitalization of humanity for the entire year. The blessing is poured forth, and the Christ, as representative of humanity, receives it in trust, for distribution at the following full moon of Gemini. That is the dream, the legend, and the fact of Wesak as described by Alice Bailey.

Demand, readiness and expectancy are said to best describe the atmosphere in this remote valley—an appeal that is echoed in the keynote we'll work with in our meditation: *Let the group life emit the Word of invocation*. This keynote is a demand that has a number of levels of meaning, but for Wesak let us express this keynote as an appeal—an invocation to the Buddha and the Forces of Light that accompany his return each year. The writings of Alice Bailey say that "those who can carry out this great act of invocation are the spiritually minded people everywhere, the enlightened statesman, the religious leaders, and the men and women of goodwill, if they stand with massed intent". They act, in effect, as representatives of all who suffer and aspire to liberation, but who may not be able to articulate that appeal.

Behind the ritual and ceremony of Wesak lies a massive generation of energies that can't be seen with the physical eye, but with the spiritual eye. Let us use our imaginations to see our group alignment as a channel that reaches from the human participants straight to the highest Beings who overshadow our planet, known as the Forces of Light. The Buddha acts as a focal point for the power that pours through that channel and—passing it through his aura—pours it out over humanity by means of the channel created by the varied grades of workers who participate. At this moment now, the high point of the spiritual year, the Forces of Enlightenment pour into the world through this channel, bringing the light of wisdom and pure reason to all responsive souls on Earth.

The Task of the Avatars

The Buddha and the Christ are Avatars of rare attainment. They are human-divine, meaning they are "flesh of our flesh and spirit of our spirit", having passed through the human experience and transcended it. The task of such Avatars is to establish on Earth a nucleus of energy, spiritually positive, as an invocative potential that in time kindles the spark of aspiration and striving within humanity. The whole story of evolution is the spiritual quickening generated by the presence of Avatars on Earth who anchor some divine aspect or attribute that, in time, evokes response within human beings. This is a

process of invocation and evocation and we must understand it to take part in Wesak. The lesser aspect is ever the invoking factor—the lesser invokes the response of the greater, which responds according to the dynamic tension displayed by the invoking element. That is the significance of the keynote of our meditation: *Let the group life emit the Word of invocation*. We, humanity, can have Light, embodied and anchored on earth by the Buddha, and Love, embodied and anchored by the Christ, but we must ask for—aspire to—these divine qualities. Light and love must become the focus of human aspiration, and year after year over many centuries, the Buddha has made his annual return at Wesak, working in partnership with the Christ to quicken human aspiration for Love and Light. For we can't have what we don't ask for.

The Buddha's Annual Return

This annual return of the Buddha to Earth bringing his blessing should not be mistaken for a sweetly benign expression of comfort to us poor suffering human beings. He brings the blessing of Shamballa, which is a force of such terrific potency that only in the past century has humanity evolved to the point that it's able to withstand this force directly and without the "buffer" of the Hierarchy. Even so, this impact of Shamballa has only rarely been released directly into humanity—during the World War, again in 1975, and most recently in 2000.

Those are rare occasions. The annual blessing that the Buddha brings each year is not given directly to humanity but to the Hierarchy, and at the centre of that Kingdom of Souls, the Christ. The Ageless Wisdom affirms that at Wesak the Christ, who is the Buddha's "brother" in the deepest sense of that term, receives the fullest impact of the Buddha's blessing which he then holds in custody, on behalf of the Hierarchy, until the full moon of June, when the Christ releases it into humanity. Even if our minds can't grasp the full significance of this transmission which I've just described, it's important to hold in mind the vast group alignment of Beings of varying degrees of spiritual attainment—an alignment through which a spiritual force of tremendous potency is stepped down, much as a charge of electricity must be—grounded in every sense of the word through the cooperation of the new group of world servers. This means, by implication, those of us who choose to set aside personal preoccupations, at least for the present, in order to take our place within a release of energy that spans the whole gradation of consciousness upon our planet. We have a place, if we choose to take it, and we are needed.

The grounding of a nucleus of spiritual energy is the task of an Avatar. Avatars of the level of the Christ and the Buddha are not only human-divine, but they were able to act as Transmitters of certain cosmic principles which could stimulate something of the same principle in humanity—deeply hidden and latent but present. By their attainment

the Christ and the Buddha brought something, transmitted something, from outside the planetary life. The Buddha, whose very name means "one who is awake", stimulated the light in the world. The Christ transmitted to humanity for the first time a potency that can only be called the Love of God; we have no other, more adequate words for it. Legend says that at the Buddha's enlightenment a grounding of spiritual force took place that was so powerful "the heavens roared and a thunderbolt struck that reverberated throughout the planet". This is depicted in images of the Buddha seated, touching the fingers of his right hand to the ground, unmoved and unwavering as "the sound of a hundred thousand roars thundered up from the sympathetic earth, and the Evil One—Mara, the Temptor—fled".

So we shouldn't think of Buddha's blessing as a sweetly benign expression of comfort. Although the Buddha was compassion incarnate, he was also a warrior. He was, in fact, born into the Kshatriya (warrior) caste of ancient India, not into the Brahmin or priestly caste. The Buddha was also a rebel, for at an early stage of his spiritual search, he rebelled against the oppressive, crystallised domination of the Brahmins. Yet the Buddha, and Buddhists, are supreme examples of the love of peace, of moderation and compassion. The Buddha waged war not with weapons but on the psychological level. And it started with his battle against the grip of society and the religion of his time.

The Life of the Buddha

The Buddha was born in northern India in about 563 B.C., in a time called the Axial Age—as its name implies, a pivotal age of great change which in many ways resembles the present time. This Axial Age, according to the religious scholar Karen Armstrong, lasted from about 800 to 200 B.C. Its effect was pivotal to humanity, especially to the civilisations of India, China, Iran and Greece. It was a time of upheaval and malaise and unrest in India when people were beginning to question the old magic rites of the Vedas and the set rituals which had lost their meaning for many. A search was beginning for an inner discovery of truth and morality, and the traditionally accepted outer authority was being challenged. The new society, Armstrong says, was one that fostered individualism and greed. And this, in turn, was fostering selfish desire over communal values. Doesn't this sound like today?

Into this age and society the Buddha was born. He saw the focus on individual attainment as an evolutionary stage that would lead only to greater sorrow if it was left unchecked, un-redirected. For he understood, above all others, the capacity for suffering that is caused by the grip of the self. Self-affirmation is the cause of all sorrow, he said. And the only end to this sorrow is the release from the grip of the separated self.

The Three Marks of Existence

It is this recognition that caused the Buddha's enlightenment. He cracked the mystery of human suffering when he realised what he called "the three marks of existence"—three characteristics that apply to all human beings: One, impermanence: nothing on earth endures in its present state forever; everything is temporary and changes. Therefore, second, as long as we are attached to things and conditions that must inevitably change and cannot last, we will suffer. And three, if the cause of our suffering is our craving—desire—for the impermanent, then the only way to gain release from suffering is to stop craving that which is impermanent, including our desire to maintain our separated existence. These three marks of existence, plus a map for finding our way out of this existence through the Eight-fold Path, constitute the Four Noble Truths. These are the essence of the Buddha's teaching that he preached in his first sermon after he attained enlightenment, and they constitute the framework of his teaching over the remaining decades of his long life: that everything in manifestation is impermanent and therefore subject, some say, to decay—the Ageless Wisdom says to transformation; that to cling to, crave or desire the impermanent is to suffer, and that the only release from suffering is to stop craving, clinging and desiring—anything and everything. The Buddha gave clear and precise instructions for how to accomplish this, and that's why the religion that developed out of his life teaching is called by its followers, not Buddhism, but "the dhanna": the law.

Mistaken Desire

The dharma taught by the Buddha, unlike the yoga practices of his time, didn't try to subjugate the lower nature by bludgeoning it into submission. Instead, he believed there were natural inclinations within the human being that could be awakened and brought into dominance. He taught this as a process that he called "dependent arising", tracing suffering back to its cause in a kind of chain reaction. Much as the evening review traces events back to their origins, helping one to recognize cause and effect on a daily level, the Buddha revealed the condition of life and the world as an expression of a chain of reactions that lead to suffering and which arise out of the mistaken desire for that which must, by natural law, be impermanent, including ourselves and all human beings.

Here we enter into an area of disagreement about the Buddhist belief or non-belief in the soul. If the soul is regarded as fixed and unchanged and therefore eternal in this particular, set state, then, no, he didn't believe in such a soul, because nothing is permanent and unchanging. But if the soul is viewed as, on its own level, progressing and developing, then perhaps he did. I say "perhaps" because the Buddha refused to speculate on the soul and God, on the mysteries that even he, in his enlightenment,

could not confirm. He spoke only about suffering and how to end it, for this, he said, "is useful". He was, true to his earthy Taurus nature, eminently practical in his worldview.

He was practical and he was clear and focused in his prescription for the ills of the world. Buddhist legend says that, in spite of his father's efforts to shield him, he discovered at a very early age the three facts of existence: That we are born, that there is illness and decay, and that we die. And realising that this is the inevitable outcome of every individual life, he asked the one paramount question of life on earth: What is the point? His questioning led him to discover another dimension to life that is untouched by suffering and death because it is free of attachment to any form. This dimension he called nirvana, and he gave the world a map that leads to that state of being.

The Indwelling Life

Sometimes Buddhism is accused of being negative in its view of the meaning of life, but I don't think so if one really tries to understand the Buddha's message. He was in fact extremely positive in his view of human potential. Joyous and liberating in his own enlightened presence, he taught that every human being has the same potentiality within him—but we must be "willing to learn"—willing to take the necessary steps to pry our fingers off their death-grip on life in the world of forms, and trust in the nirvana of freedom from form—the freedom of "the ocean of being". Nirvana is in fact ecstasy, a word that derives from "exstasis": "to stand outside the self". This ecstasy of nirvana, the Buddha said, lies in the discovery that "there is something that has not come to birth in the usual way, which has neither been created, and which remains undamaged. If it did not exist, it would be impossible to find a way out." (This is quoted from Karen Armstrong.)

If it did not exist, it would be impossible to find a way out. The Buddha recognised that there is at the core of the human experience an energy, a potential, a spark or flame that needs evoking and that is not our true self because there is no self, no separated individuality in it, for it is life itself. And that life, the writings of Alice Bailey say, "is one and naught can take or touch that life." It is, and always has been, and forever more shall be. And the point of the human experience is to wake up consciously to this indwelling life and give oneself to it, without reservation or hesitation or conditions. The only requirement asked of us is to give up our craving for a separated existence, an affirmation of the "I".

Nirvana doesn't mean personal extinction but personal release. The word nirvana means literally "snuffed out", "extinguished". What is snuffed out is the flame of self-affirmation, the fires of greed, desire, and hatred. What is gained is the "coolness" of the light of pure reason and the realisation of the omnipresence of God or divinity

throughout the whole. The only annihilation of nirvana is the extinction of the desire to maintain a separated existence. It is enough to merge with the whole.

A Noble Middle Way

The writings of Alice Bailey say that at Wesak, the invocative cry of humanity and the Hierarchy will be effective if the "cold light" of the aspirants and disciples of the world is united with the "clear light" of the initiates and the Hierarchy focused at "the deep centre" of life. These beings, if invoked, can be enormously potent at the full moons of May and June, and they are invoked by our efforts to "dwell at the centre" of life and consciousness during the four or five weeks of this period.

The idea of a cold, clear light and of the coolness of liberation may come as a surprise after the heat and passion of earthly desire and striving. Even our efforts at liberation seem to generate more heat than coolness, perhaps because we're at the end of a 2000-year cycle governed by the sixth Ray of Devotion, an energy that is one-pointed and sometimes almost fanatical when not moderated by love and wisdom. The Buddha's presence at Wesak seems more needed now than ever for its reasonableness and moderation. The Buddha taught a Noble Middle Way that cleaved to neither of the pairs of opposites. This middle, mediating ground is where the group of world servers must take its stand and from which it must work and serve.

To tread this Noble Middle Way is not to refuse to take a stand or to live courageously. Rather, it's an act of transcendence of all the divisions of the world of form—the seemingly real but in fact utterly false divisions that separate human beings one from another and deny humanity's oneness. In the partnership of the "two brothers", the Buddha and the Christ, we see a completeness, a wholeness that provides a model for religion in the coming age. Alice Bailey wrote that in the teaching of the Buddha, the great teacher of the East, we have the concept of God Transcendent—freed of the dualities and multiplicity of manifestation. There is naught but life, formless, freed from individuality, unknown. In the teaching of the West, given to us by the Christ, we have the concept of God Immanent—God in us and in all forms. That each of us and every living thing is infinitely precious. "In the synthesis of the Eastern and Western teachings, and in the merging of these two great schools of thought, something of the superlative Whole can be sensed—sensed merely—not known", she said.

The Buddha freed himself from all the dualities of life, the opposing forces of desire that would pull us off course and cause us to lose our way. He was the first to wake up to the impermanence of life in form and, realising its impermanence, he asked what is the point? Why crave and cling to that which will come to an end? And his gaze never

wavered from that distant goal that is nirvana—unity with the whole, the snuffing out of all remnants of the supreme illusion that it is possible and desirable to live separated from, distinct from, that whole.

Manifesting Spiritual Potencies

The Great Invocation answers the Buddha's question—what is the point of life on Earth?—by its affirmation, "From the centre which we call the race of men, let the Plan of love and Light work out": on Earth. Just as the Buddha, when he gained his enlightenment, touched his fingers to the Earth, sending a thunderbolt of spiritual power thundering throughout the world that reverberates to this day, so is it humanity's responsibility to touch the Earth and all the lives that share it with us by grounding and manifesting the spiritual potencies of Light, Love and Power in creative activity. That is our destiny. Now, as we prepare for our meditation, let us work with all our fellow seekers in appealing for the blessing, the charge, brought by the Buddha as we work with the keynote, *Let the group life emit the Word of invocation.*