

The Continuous Presence of Lord Buddha Within Us

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This year's Vesak marks an important event for global Buddhist followers. Indeed, this is the first time the United Nations together with the government of Thailand and several other nations solemnly and splendidly commemorate Lord Buddha's Birth in the capital city of Bangkok. This event illuminates the important role of Buddhism in today's world as well as the Way of harmonious coexistence, growth, and peace that Lord Buddha has taught us. The teachings continue to hold values and practicality for the global community.

The purpose of this Buddhist gathering is to offer a valuable opportunity for Buddhist leaders from 14 countries whose organizations are participating in the worldwide dissemination of Buddhism. The leaders will meet together, exchange ideas, and reflect on the exalted life of our great and compassionate founder, Sakyamuni Buddha. And most significantly, this important gathering of the world of Buddhism offers a precious opportunity for Buddhist practitioners from different traditions and lifestyles to present, share, and learn from each other their understanding of the Dharma, which was transmitted from and entrusted to us by our beloved Master. We also share with each other the spiritual transformation in our Dharma practice as well as valuable experience that each of us cultivate on our path of self-improvement and altruism.

In my particular situation, having been studying and practicing the Dharma according to the spirit of the Lotus Sutra for the past 50 years, I have internalized the essences of the Lotus Sutra in my mind. These essences have guided my actions and given me positive outcomes. Being deeply inspired and touched by the spirit of the Lotus Sutra, I wholeheartedly commemorate Lord Buddha's Birth by reflecting on Chapter 11 of the Lotus Sutra, titled "Beholding the Precious Stupa". This chapter contains some significant meanings revealed to us by Lord Buddha. It teaches that Lord Buddha is still continuously present within us, still lightens our way, transforms our conduct, and transcends our wisdom in this very world.

The Stupa of the Buddha Abundant Treasures abiding in the sky suggests that those practitioners who are encountering with Buddha Dharma need to purify and

uplift their minds to utmost cleanliness and emptiness in order to see Buddha. In other words, Lord Buddha only appears when our minds are completely still, free from all worldly preoccupations and disturbance as well as when our mind is pure and tranquil. We hope that all the minds of all participants present here in this Vesak celebration are also pure and tranquil in order for us to receive the presence of Lord Buddha in our hearts.

In the past, we often assumed that Sakyamuni Buddha was the only Buddha existing in India more than 25 centuries ago. With the phenomenon of the Precious Stupa's appearance, Lord Buddha revealed that He has many mutation-bodies in the ten directions. This implies that in order to achieve Buddhahood and tame sentient beings according to their types in different realms, Sakyamuni Buddha has been present with different manifestations, which Sutras often depicts as a hundred thousands Buddha bodies preaching in the ten directions. Only Pratyeka or Paccekabuddha has one body of manifestation.

Lord Buddha understands sentient beings' diversified karma, personalities, life situations, capabilities...and teaches both good and evil people, who have karmic connection with Him, in a skillful and beautiful manner. This symbolizes clearly the mutation - body of the Buddha. The mutation-body of the Buddha has utilized numerous Dharma practice fitting for each type of sentient beings, even to each individual and situation.

And to this day, the span of Lord Buddha's teaching realm clearly still deeply and strongly influenced humankind in the five continents. An example is today's gathering of ten of thousands Sangha members and lay practitioners from many nations to celebrate Lord Buddha's Birth in this capital city as well as many, many more from all over the world, who turn their mind to Lord Buddha and commemorate His Birth. All of us, in spite of differences in races, are Sakyamuni Buddha's disciples, willingly aspire to live accordingly to the spirit of His teachings. The hearts and minds of countless Buddha's disciples in general and all of us present here in particular all submit to the All Enlightened One, Sakyamuni Buddha. This proves that the mutation-bodies of Lord Buddha are still present here and everywhere, creating an eternal Dharma- body in this world throughout more than two thousand five hundred years.

All of us, each with a different Dharma practice, with different realizations, represent the part of the essence of the Buddha's Dharma or presence of the

manifestation of Buddha body. One individual cannot completely grasp Buddha Dharma and cannot perfectly fulfill the task of saving all sentient being, but with the gathering and meeting together in this week of Vesak, symbolizing the integration of all Buddha bodies to synthesize all the understandings and realizations of what Lord Buddha has taught us, gathering all the fruits of spirituality and practical applications of practice on our path of disseminating the teachings to benefit sentient beings. Synthesizing the goodness of those who personally realize Buddha Dharma definitely will have the common ground about the lofty and valuable image and conduct of Lord Buddha. This idea in the spirit of the Lotus Sutra means we are able to open the Precious Stupa, able to see the treasures of wonderful and delicate Dharma that Lord Buddha has entrusted to us. Recognizing the lofty Buddha Dharma, our mind automatically become calm, happy, and liberating. That is the meaning of transforming Svaha into Pure-land for our fellow Buddhists.

In this atmosphere of utmost solemn and magnificence of the 2549B.E.– 2006 C.E. Vesak, all of us, with purified, harmonious, solitary minds, join together and set the direction for Buddhism to implement many beneficial activities for humankind in this modern age. That is the most accurate depiction of the continuously and eternally present Buddha in this world, in all of us, in our thoughts and actions.

In the case of our country Vietnam, Buddhism has penetrated deeply in the soul of our people, deeply influenced many different fields of the nation throughout the spans of our history of thousands of years. The wonderful essence of Buddhism guided Kings and aristocrats in their successful effort to establish, sustaining, and developing the nation. Buddhism helped bring peace, prosperity, happiness to all. The way of Bodhisatva with the spirit of altruism and forgiveness had brighten the way for Vietnamese Sangha members and lay Buddhists from the beginning to now in the path of alleviating suffering and granting happiness, understanding to all, glorifying Buddhism.

Reminiscing 25 centuries ago, Lord Buddha came to this earth in the garden of Lumbini. This is the manifestation of Sakya Buddha on this earth, which we often called the “body subject to birth and death” (mortal body). Since life on earth is influenced by the cycle of life and death, Lord Buddha without doubt bore the limited body of the mortals as a necessary means to teach and save sentient beings in this mortal world. The main goal of Lord Buddha when manifesting in this world, however, to point to us the immortal world. According to Lord Buddha, this immortal world is not from faraway, but it is the existence of Buddha Dharma in our very lives.

Yes, indeed according to the spirit of Lord Buddha's teachings, His Dharma exists endlessly in the flow of human life. Although the physical body (Nirmanakaya) of Lord Buddha has been absent in this world, i.e. His mortal manifestation had been extinct, His Dharma-body (Dharmakaya) then started to develop. The immortal world begin to open wider to help us develop the vision toward the immortal body of Lord Buddha. And wonderfully, the immortal body of Lord Buddha grow larger as time goes; the longer the time, the greater the Dharma-body.

This essence is depicted in the Lotus Sutra as "constantly abiding characteristics of the world", which means Lord Buddha is constantly dwelling in the world, existing in our thought habit, way of life as the major factor. Lord Buddha confirms that He attains Buddhahood in the world with the name of Sakyamuni, but when He teaches at other realms, he will have different names. This help us recognize of the quality of "no birth, just manifestation" of Lord Buddha. This means that there is only one immortal body of Lord Buddha, but he appeared as many manifestation, in different worlds, with different names to awaken all to recognize the immortality quality of Lord Buddha as well as to recognize the inherence of this immortality quality in each of us.

According to Lord Buddha's teachings, we inherently have the quality of immortality like Buddha. We, however, did not develop that quality of immortality completely as Buddha did. Therefore, we has not been able to utilize that immortality. Lord Buddha had fully developed His quality of immortality, His Dharma Body and was able to designate and utilize His Dharma Body effortlessly on His mission to teach and save sentient beings.

It is possible to assert that even though the human body of Lord Sakya Muni Buddha had entered Nirvana, nowadays, we still see that in five continents and four seas, nowhere is without the influence of Buddha's Dharma-body. Specifically there are numerous sutras left from Lord Buddha expounding His golden teachings. There are countless people interpreted His transcending thoughts. There are countless people take refuge in Lord Buddha. There are many people who aspire to live accordingly to the teachings of Lord Buddha in order to develop insightful intellect and moral conduct. There are numerous Buddhist organizations engaging in charitable work to benefit society in the spirit of Buddha's teachings.

The mind of each Buddhist disciple who follow His footstep is always shined by the torch of wisdom and compassion manifesting in words, conducts This torch

brings peace and happiness for the many. All the achievement of many generations of Buddha's disciples in the five continents has painted an image of the Buddha's Dharma- body with vastness and wonder transcending time and space in this mortal world.

Recognizing the eternal importance of Buddhism, seeing the strong presence of Lord Buddha among humankind, together with the fruit of valuable practice by Buddhist disciples everywhere, we and the United Nations conduct the ceremony to commemorate the Vesak to share and build the vision of Buddhism fitting and benefiting the human community in the new century.

We pray that all of us present in this grand ceremony of Vesak receive all the best that Lord Buddha has granted to us so that we could advance on the holy path and build the common house for humankind filled with compassion, tranquility, harmony, peace, and prosperity.

May our gathering succeed and thank you for your attentive listening.