

Buddhist Festivals:

Vesak

Learning Objective:

To understand why Buddhists give offerings during Vesak.

Vesak is the most important festival in the Buddhist calendar. Millions of Buddhists around the world celebrate during Vesak every year. Let's find out more about it...



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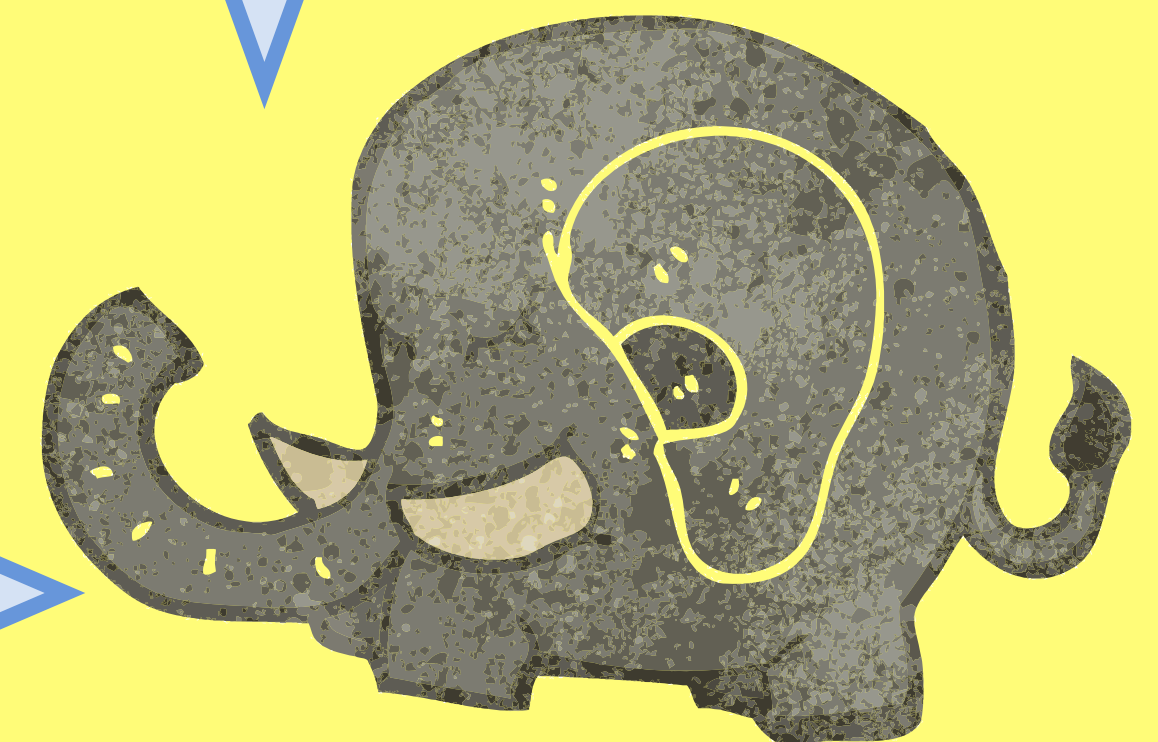
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Vesak is sometimes called 'Buddha's Birthday'. This is because it is a day for celebrating the Buddha's birth, enlightenment and death.

Vesak day is celebrated on different days in different countries. Traditionally, it takes place during a full moon in April or May.



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Beautiful lanterns are hung around temples, at shrines and in the streets.



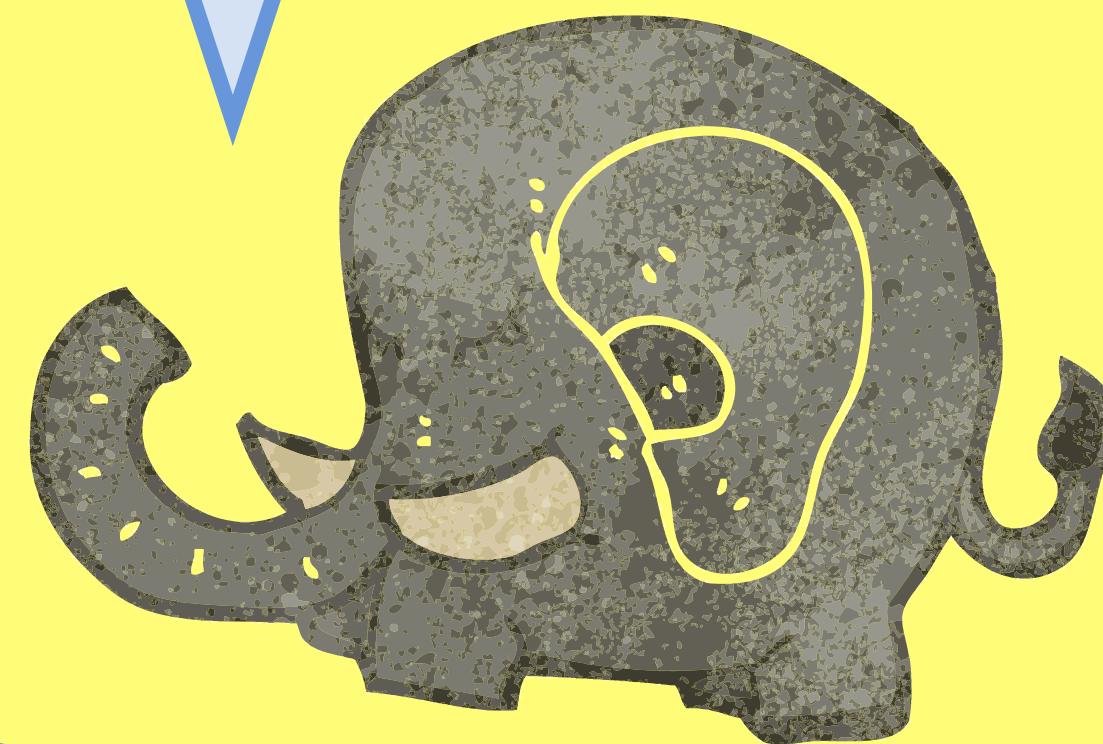
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Buddhists visit temples to pray, meditate and pay respect to the Buddha. They may light incense or leave offerings of food and flowers at the feet of statues of the Buddha.

Buddhists also listen to monks reading the teachings of the Buddha and stories about his life.



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Buddhists may take part in processions on Vesak day, carrying candles through the streets.



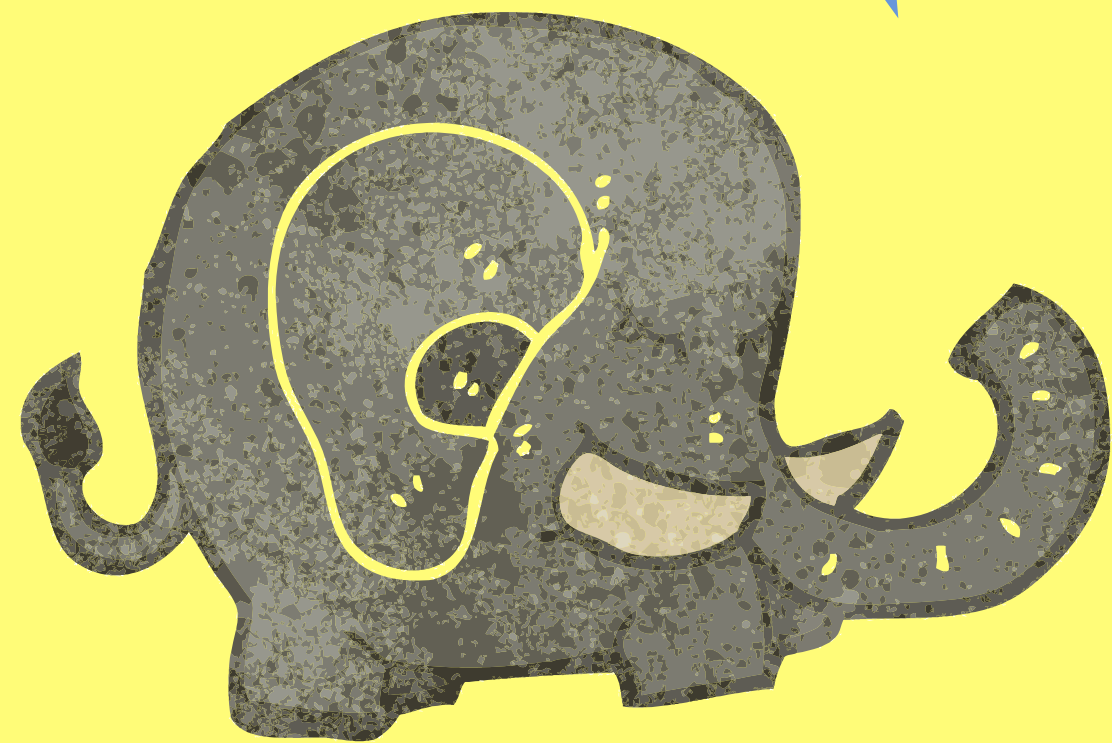
In some countries, floats covered in lights and flowers drive through the streets, carrying statues of the Buddha and other important Buddhist symbols such as the Dharma wheel.

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People give food to monks, and to the needy.

Why do you think Buddhists give offerings of food during Vesak?



Discuss your ideas.

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There is a story about
Siddhartha Gautama before he
became the Buddha. It explains one of the
reasons why Buddhists give monks
food during Vesak...



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The Prince Siddhartha had left his palace in search of enlightenment. He had seen people and animals suffering outside the palace walls, and he wanted to find a way to end the suffering.



He travelled to see many different teachers, hoping that one of them would help him achieve enlightenment. Once he had learned all he could from each teacher, he left, searching for more answers.

Eventually, Siddhartha met a group of six wise men called Ascetics. Ascetics believed they could achieve enlightenment by suffering themselves. One of them survived on a single grain of rice a day. Another slept on a bed of nails. A third would hold his breath until he collapsed. They all dressed in rags.

Siddhartha became an ascetic, and lived a life of suffering for six long years.



By the end of the six years, Siddhartha still had not achieved enlightenment. He decided that starving himself in this way did not help himself or others bring an end to suffering. Instead, he decided that there must be a 'middle way' to live life, neither suffering or living an extravagant lifestyle which might be wasteful and cause harm to others.



Siddhartha went into the village with his begging bowl. The kind villagers looked at his starved and skinny body and took pity on him. They gave him rice and milk and, gradually, his strength returned.



The Ascetics saw this, and were disappointed with Siddhartha. They turned their backs on him and left. The Prince continued on his quest for enlightenment.

Later in life, when the Prince became the Buddha, he would tell this story to his followers. What was he teaching them by retelling this story?



Discuss your ideas.

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Did you think
of these?

- That Buddhists should live their life according to 'the middle way'
- That it is not necessary to live a life of suffering to be a good Buddhist
- That the villagers were kind when they helped him
- That the Ascetics were wrong in the belief that suffering themselves would lead to enlightenment

Buddhists give offerings to remember this story and to create good karma for themselves by doing something kind.



The monks give something in return for the offerings: they tell stories about the Buddha, teach followers about Buddhism and lead meditation sessions.



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Today we
will be learning more about
why offerings are given
during Vesak.



Plenary

Can you use two or more of these words in a sentence to show what you have learned today?

Siddhartha Gautama

Ascetic

incense

middle way

meditation

Vesak

temple

Buddha

food

processions

candles

shrine

offering

flowers

monk

lantern

enlightenment

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