Presentation Essay

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Vesak is a Buddhist holiday celebrating Buddha’s life: specifically his birth, enlightenment and death. Buddhist scriptures state that each of these significant events occurred on the full moon of the Indian lunar month of Vesakha, which is the month of May for our modern calendar.

Each Buddhist culture has it’s own unique traditions of celebrating Vesak. In Sri Lanka, colorful lanterns are lit along with a light display that shows the life of Buddha. The lighting of the lanterns signifies an offering to the memory of the Buddha and all his teachings.

In Taiwan, followers gather to pray during a ceremony to commemorate the birth of Buddha. At this ceremony, they will bring lotus flowers to hold in their hand that signifies the power of Buddha.

In Singapore, the rituals begin at dawn. Devotees will gather at a ceremony and this is where the Buddhist flag is raised and hymns that praise Buddha are sung. Next, offering such as flowers or candles are brought to the temple as an offering to Buddha.

Although there are many unique traditions for Vesak across the world, there are two traditions that are common throughout all the cultures.

All cultures agree that celebrating Vesak means making an effort to bring happiness to everyone. This includes the aged, the handicapped and the sick. Many devotees will perform charitable acts such as donating money or gifts to the poor. Devotees believe that performing good deeds on Vesak will multiply the merit and help them obtain Nirvana.

The second tradition that is common among all followers is the tradition of bathing the Buddha. Buddhist will use fragrant water to bathe the image of the infant Buddha. The fragrant water is poured over the stature three times. These symbolize the cleansing of the body, speech and thought. The goal is to cleanse oneself from anger, greed and ignorance. Whenever someone is pouring the fragrant water over the Buddha statue, they must repeat three phrases.

The first is May I eliminate all evil thoughts.

The next is May I cultivate good deeds.

And the last phrase is May I help save all living beings.

Devotees have said that this ritual improves harmony and inner balance leading to a more fulfilling, wholesome, and enlightened life.

With all the different types of traditions and rituals performed throughout the world, the main goal of Vesak is simple. All these different devotees are gathering to celebrate the birth, enlightenment and death of the Buddha.

Works Cited

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