

### The Inner Life of Wesak

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The dates of the three major festivals are determined by intersections between the solar and lunar cycles against the background of the zodiac, which represents the fixed stars. The Wesak Festival, the second of the three, occurs at the first full moon during the 30 days when the sun is in Taurus. The moon itself is, of course, in opposition to the sun, in Scorpio. Taurus and Scorpio are both fixed signs, signifying among much else stability and sustained effort. While Taurus is an earth sign, Scorpio is a water sign—the only intrusion of the water element in the Higher Interlude of the spring festivals (the sun is never in a water sign during these festivals). Indeed—a point we might usefully ponder—the Wesak Festival is the only one of the three festivals that is not defined by the polarity of fire and air signs.

This year the moon will be full once in the 30-day period: at 8° Taurus/Scorpio, at 12:18 pm GMT (8:18 am EDT, 5:18 am PDT) on April 28.<sup>1</sup> We observe the Wesak Festival over five days: two days of expectation and preparation, the day of the full moon when we hold ourselves in the light, and two days of thanksgiving and “distribution.” Accordingly, for people in the western hemisphere the festival begins on the morning of Monday, April 26, 2010, and ends on the morning of Friday, April 30.

The five-day festival is a time of important group work in response to a major Hierarchical approach that emphasizes Light, Love and Purpose. The Wesak Festival celebrates the Eastern tradition of modern esotericism and links it with the Western tradition celebrated at the Easter Festival. It is a time when two great streams of energy, one focused through the Buddha and the other through the Christ, come together to inspire and inform their disciples and humanity at large.

Buddhists have long observed the Wesak Festival (*Vesākha-pūjā*), and several accounts have been given of its origins and significance. In 1950 the World Fellowship of Buddhists declared that the festival commemorates the birth of Prince Siddhārtha Gautama, the Buddha. More commonly the festival is considered to commemorate his enlightenment (*nirvāna*), and physical death (*parinirvāna*). Devout Buddhists assemble in temples before dawn on the day of the full moon, bringing offerings of flowers, candles and incense—all delightful to the senses but conspicuous in their transience. Candles are also significant in Buddhist teachings, which depict the reincarnational process as analogous to the lighting of one candle from another. Buddhists observe the festival by rededicating their lives to harmony, humility and compassion.

The most notable feature of Wesak tradition, and the most important to Western esotericists, is the annual gathering of disciples in a valley in the Himalayan Mountains. Reportedly attendees fill one end of the valley, leaving the other end clear. Prominent in the clear area is a large, flat rock resembling an altar. According to legend, exalted beings come to perform an elaborate ritual in the area surrounding the altar rock, and the Buddha himself hovers over it to bless the assembled crowd. During the 20th century, clairvoyant investigations as well as channeled teachings have confirmed important parts of the legends. Interest in the Wesak Festival has also spread far beyond Buddhism.

Central Asian tradition places the valley in the shadow of Mount Kailash, close to the Tibet-Nepal border. Mount Kailash, source of the Indus and the Brahmaputra rivers, is sacred not only to Buddhism but also to Hinduism, Jainism, and the ancient Bön faith of Tibet. In Hinduism, it is considered to be the abode of Lord Shiva and a place of eternal bliss. Local people regard it as the center of the world. Religious deference has dissuaded anyone from attempting to climb the mountain, but Lake Manasarowar, just to the south, has long been a favorite pilgrimage destination. Devotees bathe in the lake in a cleansing ritual. In few places is the juxtaposition of the earth and water elements more striking.

Based on his clairvoyant research, Charles Leadbeater located the valley about 400 miles west of Lhasa, which would place it in the vicinity of Mount Kailash. He provided a sketch of the site in *The Masters and the Path*. The valley, he said, is

roughly oblong in shape, its length being perhaps a mile and a half and its breadth rather less. The ground slopes slightly downwards from south to north, and is mostly bare and stony... A stream runs down part of the west side of the plateau, crosses its north-west corner, and escapes about the middle of the north side through a pine-clothed ravine, eventually reaching a lake which is visible at a distance of some miles. The surrounding country seems wild and uninhabited, and there are no buildings in sight except a single ruined stupa with two or three huts beside it, on the slope of one of the hills on the eastern sides of the plain. About the centre of the southern half of the plain lies a huge block of greyish-white stone, veined with some glittering substance—an altar-like block, perhaps twelve feet in length by six feet wide, and standing about three feet out of the ground.<sup>2</sup>

Leadbeater commented that no attempts are made to restrict attendance at the Wesak ceremony, though there are stories of pilgrims who have wandered for years without being able to find the spot.” His work sparked great interest among members of the Theosophical Society who were eager to attend the ceremony, either in physical form or in an altered state of consciousness. Regarding the latter possibility he explained:

There is no reason why any of our earnest Theosophical members should not be present at it in their astral bodies. Those to whom the secret has been confided usually try so to arrange matters as to put their physical bodies to sleep an hour or so before the exact moment of full moon, and to be undisturbed until about an hour after it.

How many Theosophists made the attempt and what they saw if they succeeded is unclear. Glamor and illusion could be expected to present major pitfalls. Leadbeater himself questioned whether uninitiated visitors saw the Buddha or other exalted beings, but suggested that they took their cues from initiates in their midst and prostrated themselves at the appointed times. No doubt they also experienced the energy that pervaded the valley during the ceremony.

The second edition of *The Masters and the Path* contains a detailed description of the Wesak ceremony. In addition to the Buddha, two other senior members of the planetary Hierarchy play significant roles in the ceremony: the Mahachohan, head of the Department of Civilization, and the Lord Maitreya, the Christ, head of the Department of Education and Religion:

About half an hour before the moment of the full moon, at a signal given by the Mahachohan, the members of the Brotherhood draw together in the open space in the centre of the plain to the north of the great altar of stone, and arrange Themselves three deep in a large circle.

Chanting plays an important role in the ceremony. Leadbeater’s account mentions that initiates in the two inner circles move in formation to create geometric figures, and examples of those figures are illustrated in his book. We are reminded of the choreographed displays at large pageants, like the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games. Leadbeater went on to describe the arrival of the Lord Maitreya, and then the Buddha:

The Lord Maitreya materializes in the centre of the circle, holding in His hands the Rod of Power... Then as He again lays down the fiery rod, at the exact moment of the full moon, the Lord Buddha appears as a gigantic figure floating in the air just above the southern hills... He appears seated cross-legged, with the hands together, dressed in the yellow robe of the Buddhist monk... One of the most striking features of this wondrous apparition is the splendid aura which surrounds the figure... The figure is englobed in light which is somehow at the same time dazzling and yet transparent—so bright that the eye can hardly rest upon it, and yet through it the face and the colour of the robe stand out with perfect clearness... As [the ceremony] ends, a smile of ineffable love beams forth from the face of the Lord as He raises His right hand in the attitude of benediction.

Alice Bailey, recording the teachings of the Master Djwhal Kuhl, confirmed much of Leadbeater’s account but provided additional information about the Buddha’s blessing:

The Lord Buddha, sanctioned by the Lord of the World, carries to the assembled humanity a dual stream of force, that emanating from the Silent Watcher, supplemented by the more focalised energy of the Lord of the World. This dual energy He pours out in blessing over the people gathered at the ceremony in the Himalayas, and from them in turn it flows out to all peoples and tongues and races.<sup>3</sup>

The Lord of the World, Sanat Kumara, is the head of the planetary Hierarchy and the representative of the Planetary Logos on the present globe. Bailey also provided additional information about the flow of energy and the manner in which it is accomplished. The Buddha, she declared,

acts as a focal point for that power, and—passing it through His Aura—pours it out over mankind by means of the channel provided by the assembled Lords, Masters, graded initiates and disciples. This channel is formed by the use of sound and rhythm simultaneously employed. By the chanting of a certain mantram by means of the slow, measured movements that accompany that chanting, the funnel is formed that reaches upwards to the desired locality. The geometrical figures formed in the matter of the plane higher than the physical (which are the result of the geometrical movement of the concourse gathered in that Himalayan centre) form themselves into wonderful avenues of approach to the centre of blessing for the inhabitants, deva or otherwise, from any particular plane. For those who can clairvoyantly view the scene, the beauty of the geometrical forms is unbelievable, and that beauty is enhanced by the radiant auras of the Great Ones Who are gathered there.

Bailey's comments regarding the geometric figures are particularly interesting. She confirmed that the assembled initiates make physical movements but placed greater emphasis on the effects produced at a higher level, presumably the etheric or sentient (astral). Moreover, she related them to the chanting of "a certain mantram." The sound evidently sweeps devic entities into action to create the channel through which the blessing flows to the participants—and perhaps through which the Buddha and others can materialize. The channel will be discussed in more detail later.

The purpose of the Wesak Festival, Bailey explained, is:

1. To substantiate the fact of Christ's physical existence among us ever since His so-called departure.
2. To prove (on the physical plane) the factual solidarity of the Eastern and Western approaches to God. Both the Christ and the Buddha are present.
3. To form a rallying point and a meeting place for those who annually—in synthesis and symbolically—link up and represent the Father's House, the Kingdom of God and Humanity.

The Buddha, she explains, is the spiritual Intermediary between the highest spiritual center, Shamballa, and the Hierarchy. He is the expression of the wisdom of God, the Embodiment of Light and the Indicator of the divine purpose. The Wesak blessing conveys the message of wisdom, light and love to humanity and is the outer evidence and guarantee of inner divine guidance and revelation in this present world cycle of 2500 years. The Heart of Deity, of course, is the source of Love-Wisdom and the center that informs the Buddha, the Christ, and the whole Hierarchy of masters. The special benediction of Second Ray energy is made possible by a Triangle of Energy: Sanat Kumara, the Buddha, and the Christ, through "Whose nature [of] radiant love and light... humanity can grasp in some measure the nature of divinity." The energy is focused by the massed intent of the Hierarchy and the massed demand of the world aspirants and disciples, drawn forth by the massed need of the people of all lands.

At the conclusion of the ceremony,

The Buddha's annual sacrifice for humanity (for He comes back only at great cost) is over, and He returns again to that high place where He works and waits. Year after year He comes back in blessing; year after year, He and His great brother, The Christ, work in the closest cooperation for the spiritual benefit of humanity. In these two great Sons of God have been focused two aspects of divine life, and They act together as Custodians of the highest type of spiritual force to which our humanity can respond. Through the Buddha, the wisdom of God is poured forth. Through the Christ, the love of God is manifested in humanity, and it is this wisdom and love that pour forth upon humanity each Wesak full moon.<sup>4</sup>

The Wesak experience is not limited to those who, in physical embodiment or otherwise, attend the ceremony in the Himalayas. The Buddha's benediction is offered to the whole world, and all who receive and respond to his energy can transmit it to the environments in which they live and work.

The five-day festival provides opportunities to reflect on the Buddha's earthly life as Siddhārtha Gautama, on his present exalted role at the highest levels of the planetary Hierarchy, and on the significance of the Wesak benediction on the New Group of World Servers, humanity at large, and the planet.

During his final incarnation, the Buddha anchored *wisdom* in human consciousness—laying the groundwork for the Christ to anchor *love* four centuries later—and gave us a roadmap for right living, serenity, and spiritual growth. Pāli scriptures tell the familiar story of Gautama's enlightenment in the fifth century BCE. The prince had long practiced ascetic exercises in a quest to understand the meaning of suffering. At the age of 35, in desperation, he sat down under a bodhi tree, resolving to stay there until he discovered the truth. After 49 days in meditation he attained nirvāna, and from then on he was known as the Buddha, the "Enlightened One," "Awakened One," or sometimes "One who has arrived." From his experience came the centerpieces of Buddhist teachings: the Four Noble Paths and Eightfold Path. Suffering, the Buddha asserted, is the product of desire. Inner peace and peace with the world can only be achieved through the release of obsessions and fixations and the development of compassion for all living things. A person who overcomes desire attains nirvāna and is no longer subject to human suffering. Buddhist teachings assert that from then on karma is extinguished, and incarnation is purely voluntary.

Alice Bailey commented that in Taurus desire is transmuted into aspiration, and darkness gives place to light and illumination. In Scorpio, the personality is "occultly killed and then resurrected into air and light." Sometime after the Buddha's enlightenment, legends recount, a stranger asked him who he was; his reply was "I am awake." The notions of awakening and enlightenment imply that we may currently be asleep and in the dark. If, as Charles Tart asserts in *Waking Up*, we live much of our lives in a dream state, or "consensus trance," we need to wake up, start looking around, and become responsive to what we see. Even then, we will not see much unless there is *light*. Appropriately, the keyword for the disciple in Taurus is "I see, and when the Eye is opened, all is Light."

The Wesak ceremony is an enactment of sacred ritual on a grand scale, strongly affirming the Seventh Ray now coming into manifestation. Its objective, like that of all rituals, is to open up levels of reality ordinarily beyond our reach. The channel described by Alice Bailey is a topological anomaly in the fabric of "space"—space, that is, comprised of the planes of nature. Connecting the highest systemic planes to the "three worlds" of human experience, it extends to the lower mental, and possibly the etheric, subplanes. We can visualize the channel as a vortex, a "tornado of light," touching the ground. The channel/vortex is constructed from elemental substance of the several planes by an order of devas working under the direction of the Raja Lords, "those great angels or entities who ensoul the seven planes."<sup>5</sup> Those lesser devas, part of the vast evolution emanating from the Third Aspect of Deity, are the builders of forms and the agents through which energy and impressions are transmitted from plane to plane.

The interplane channel created during the Wesak ceremony is a manifestation of—or perhaps makes use of—the permanent Antahkarana, or "rainbow bridge," that for the last 700 years has linked the planetary centers of humanity, Hierarchy and Shamballa.<sup>6</sup> Much of our esoteric work is aimed at building our own Antahkaranas to connect the mental unit, on the fourth mental subplane, with the causal body on the third and eventually the manasic permanent atom on the first subplane. Our Antahkaranas are interplane channels on a much smaller scale but similar in structure to their grand prototype. They are strengthened by activities that raise our consciousness: prayer, meditation, study, healing, sacred ritual, acts of service, and so forth. Esoteric work also awakens the chakras, which comprise another class of interplane channels—and it is not insignificant that "awakens" is used in that context. Numerous clairvoyant studies have depicted the chakras as vortices.

The initiative for creating the Wesak channel comes from above, but it comes in response to "the massed demand of the world aspirants and disciples." The smaller-scale channels contribute to that massed demand. They are created under human impulse but require the collaboration of our Solar Angels and the involvement

of the devic builders. As always, group work is more effective than individual effort, and sacramental ritual and similar group activities that combine sound and movement are particularly effective. Like the Wesak ceremony they attract angelic attention and sweep the builders into action. "Angelic cooperation," Geoffrey Hodson comments, "makes everything we try to do, in both the spiritual and material worlds, far more vital and potent than it would otherwise be."<sup>7</sup> Such activities can be important works of service, yielding benefits far beyond their immediate settings.

Becoming aware of interplane channels, and developing proficiency in creating them, open up rich opportunities for Seventh Ray esoteric work. Work of that nature encourages the kind of collaboration between the human and deva evolutions promised for the Aquarian Age. It also provides a way to extend the Wesak experience beyond the five days of the festival and to apply its power to a broad spectrum of endeavors.

The Wesak Festival is a great spiritual event and the centerpiece of the Higher Interlude, but it should also be seen in the context of the Full Moon approaches that occur throughout the year. As the Seventh Ray manifests more strongly, we can expect to become increasingly sensitive to this cyclical work and our opportunities to respond to it:

[F]rom the highest spiritual Being upon our planet, through the graded spiritual groups of enlightened and perfected men who work upon the inner side of life, on into the outer world of daily living, where thinking, loving men and women serve, the tide of the new life sweeps. The Plan is ready for immediate application and intelligent implementing; the workers are there, and the power to work is adequate to the need. The three Full Moons which we have been considering are simply the three points in time through which the needed power is to be released.<sup>8</sup>

Let Purpose guide the little wills of men, and let Light and Love and Power restore the Plan on Earth.

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<sup>1</sup> The precise date of the Wesak festival varies according to the calendars and ephemeris used. April 28, 2010 is the date accepted in the West. Most Buddhists in Asia will celebrate the festival on May 27.

<sup>2</sup> Charles W. Leadbeater, *The Masters and the Path*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Adyar: Theosophical Publishing House, 1945, p. 303. The orientation of valley given in Leadbeater's description is inconsistent with other accounts, which place the flat rock altar at the northern end.

<sup>3</sup> Alice A. Bailey, *Initiation Human and Solar* (New York: Lucis Publishing, 1922), 105.

<sup>4</sup> *The Wesak Festival*, New York: Lucis Publishing Co., undated.

<sup>5</sup> Bailey, *Initiation Human and Solar*, p. 223.

<sup>6</sup> See for example Bailey, *The Externalisation of the Hierarchy*, pp. 525, 535.

<sup>7</sup> Geoffrey Hodson, *The Inner Side of Church Worship*, 1930, ch. III, §3. Available online at [http://www.global.org/Pub/GH\\_Inner\\_Side\\_of\\_Church\\_Worship.asp](http://www.global.org/Pub/GH_Inner_Side_of_Church_Worship.asp).

<sup>8</sup> Bailey, *The Externalisation of the Hierarchy*, pp. 485-486.