

# POSON: THE START OF A SOCIO-RELIGIOUS RENAISSANCE IN SRI LANKA

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It is with great devotion that we, Sri Lankan Buddhists, celebrate Poson Poya that marks the arrival of a great compassionate teacher who had enormous loving kindness, Arahant Mahinda Thera, with the wonderful message of the Buddha. It is somewhat unfortunate that this year too we have to celebrate Poson from the confines of our homes due to the COVID pandemic. But this should not be an obstacle to reflecting on the greatness of this singular event.

Arahant Mahinda Thera and his companions - four Arahats - Itiya, Uththiya, Sambhala, Bhaddhasala and the novice monk Sumana and layperson Bhanduka, arrived here in the 23rd year after the Parinibbana of the Buddha to establish Buddhasana in Sri Lanka.

Using his special powers, Arahant Mahinda appeared in the presence of King Devanampiyatissa on top of the Mihintale Rock when the king was hunting deer with his retinue of 40,000 people. Asking two sets of questions from the king which are commonly known as the 'mango question' and the 'relations question' to test the intelligence of the king, Arahant Mahinda Thera delivered the discourse on *Chulla Haththi Padopama Sutta* (Simile on the Foot of an Elephant). At the end of the discourse, the king and his retinue of 40,000 people embraced the new teaching and took refuge in Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha.

What is this *Chulla Haththi Padopama Sutta*? It is a Sutta in the Majjhima Nikaya (Middle-length Discourses of the Buddha of the Sutta Pitaka) that clearly explains the path to Nibbana, the ultimate goal of a Buddhist.

This Sutta comprises almost all the teachings of the Buddha, such as, the Eightfold Path and the Four Noble Truths.

It gives a clear understanding of the Triple Gem. It also gives us a clear understanding of how a follower recognises the Samma Sambud-

dha-hood of the Buddha by active involvement in the path trodden by Him.

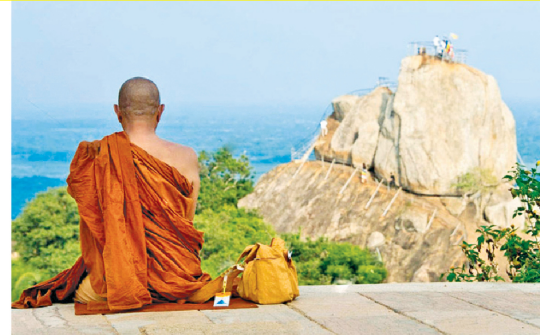
A Samma Sambuddha realises the Truth by his own knowledge and makes others also realise the Truth. It is a Samma Sambuddha who could show us the way to the end of suffering but not ask anyone to follow him blindly. But it is when someone in whom Saddha (sorene commitment to the practice of the Buddha's teaching and trust in enlightened) has arisen pay homage, hear the teachings, remember the teachings, reflect on their meaning, and accept them after consideration. Then enthusiasm springs up and they make an effort, examine thoroughly, and persevere. They would be able to realise the Ultimate Truth, and see it with penetrating wisdom.

In *Chulla Haththi Padopama Sutta* of the Majjhima Nikaya, the Buddha gave the simile of the elephant's footprint to understand the Dhamma step by step. Using an analogy of a skilled elephant-forester finding a big bull elephant, the Buddha explained the way a disciple should follow to find the Truth to a Brahmin named Jansussa who met the Buddha with a real desire to understand Buddha's teachings.

A big bull elephant could be identified only by going to the place where it is lying, walking or standing. Likewise, in order to identify the Samma Sambuddha, one should necessarily go to Him in person.

The Buddha explained that if a person realises the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path, the way to Nibbana as shown by the Buddha, he or she could realise that the Buddha is enlightened and His Dhamma well-discussed and well observed by the Sangha.

Most Venerable Thapovanayake Rathana Thera of Minipura Amashanthi Thapovana Aranya Senasanaya in Peliyaddiwa, Ratnapura said that Buddhism offers the goal of Nibbana to those who need it, and is not forced on any. Those who prefer to achieve this goal are per-



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fectly free to do so. "All four congregations - Bhikkus (Buddhist monks), Bhikkunis (Buddhist nuns), Upasaka (laymen) and Upasika (laywomen) can follow the teachings of the Buddha without any obstacle and they are expected to lead a useful life till the ultimate

goal is achieved," said the Ven. Thera. Ven. Rathana Thera further explained that *Chulla Haththi Padopama Sutta* gives a full description of a monk's way of life and the utmost goal. So a Buddhist monk who puts on the saffron robes by abandoning his wealth and

relatives should definitely practice the holy life, in all its purity. As it was mentioned by the Buddha in this Sutta, Buddhist monks cannot engage in politics or gardening.

"Having abandoned the destruction of life, he abstains from destroying life. He dwells with rod and sword lay down, conscientious, merciful, and compassionate for the welfare of all living beings. Having abandoned the taking of the not-given, he abstains from taking the not-given. He takes only what is given, accepts only what is given, lives not by stealth but by means of a pure mind. Having abandoned in celibacy, he lives a celibate life: living apart, refraining from coupling....." (*Chulla Haththi Padopama Sutta*). Accordingly, Bhikkus and Dasa Sil Matha can be active in their own fields without invading their limits and lay followers can serve their religion, country and the world in their own way, guided by their Buddhist principles which mean that the Buddha has shown one way of life to Bhikkus and another to lay followers.

If a Buddhist observes five precepts, he or she would be able to gain many benefits during their lifetime. If they do not kill animals they can live a long life, and if they do not steal, they will never lose their wealth. Buddhists who apply noble qualities taught by the Buddha in their lives can live a happy life.

The Buddha has shown us the correct path to Nibbana and it is left for us to follow that path.

So while enjoying a happy family life, Buddhists can also develop wisdom which leads to the complete destruction of suffering and the realisation of Nibbana.

**References:** (Dhamma sermon by the late Most Venerable Nanyane Ariyadhamma Thera, *The Fruits of True Monkhood: Benefits of monk's life by Dhammakaya series, Chulla Haththi Padopama Sutta Translated by Piya Tan, The Buddha and His Teachings by Most Ven Narada Maha Thera*)