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# Wesak — The Buddha's Day

A Buddhist festival lesson

## About this lesson

Wesak (also spelled Vesak or Visakha Puja) is the most important Buddhist festival. It falls on the full moon in May. It marks three events in the Buddha's life — his birth, his enlightenment, and his death — which Buddhists believe all happened on the same day, in different years. This lesson teaches the Buddha's life story and how Buddhists celebrate Wesak.

## The story of Siddhartha Gautama

About 2,500 years ago, in what is now Nepal, a prince called Siddhartha Gautama was born. His parents protected him from anything sad — he grew up in palaces, never seeing illness, old age or death. When he became a young man, Siddhartha left the palace for the first time. He saw a sick person, an old person, and a dead person. He was shocked — he had never known these things existed. He also saw a holy man who seemed peaceful despite the world's suffering. Siddhartha decided to leave his life of luxury to find out why people suffer and how it could end. For six years he searched, trying many spiritual paths. Eventually, he sat under a tree (the Bodhi tree) and meditated. After 49 days, he understood the truth about suffering and how to end it. From that moment, he was known as the Buddha — 'the awakened one'. He spent the next 45 years teaching what he had discovered, until his death at age 80.

## Buddhists celebrate Wesak

The Buddha's day

- Visiting the temple at dawn for prayers
- Decorating temples with flowers, candles and Buddhist flags
- Bathing baby-Buddha statues with scented water



- Lighting lanterns and candles — symbolising the light of the Buddha's teaching
- Listening to monks chant and give talks about the Buddha's life
- Vegetarian meals — to avoid causing harm to living beings
- Giving to charity and acts of kindness
- Releasing caged birds or animals — symbolising freedom from suffering
- Reflecting on the Buddha's teachings about kindness and mindfulness
- Children sometimes given small gifts of fruit

### Why Wesak matters

Wesak is the day Buddhists remember their founder — but it is also a day to reflect on his teachings. Did the Buddha solve suffering? Buddhists believe yes — by teaching the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path. But understanding his teachings is one thing; living them is another. So Wesak is not just a celebration but a time to think about how to be more kind, more mindful, more honest in daily life. For Buddhist children, Wesak might involve learning a story about the Buddha, helping with decorations, or doing acts of kindness. The festival is celebrated worldwide — particularly large celebrations happen in Sri Lanka, Thailand, Burma and other Buddhist-majority countries.

### Reflection

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