



New Zealand
Buddhist Council

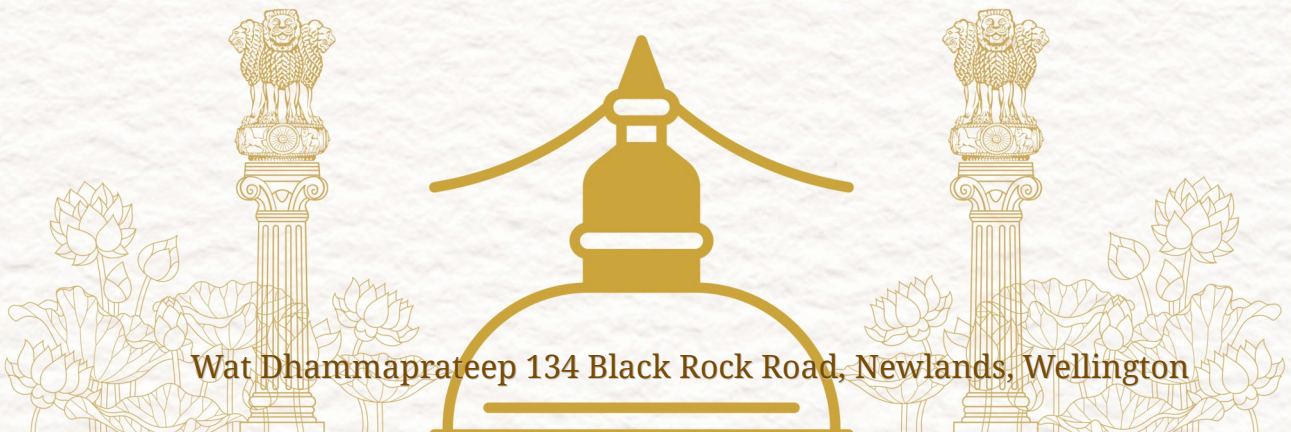


Together in Aotearoa

Combined Vesak Celebration

Saturday 24 May 2025

Speeches



Wat Dhammaprateep 134 Black Rock Road, Newlands, Wellington

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Significance of Vesak

from Bhante Panyawansa, Venerable from Dhamma Gavesi Meditation Centre

Venerable Sangha, distinguished guests, leaders of other faiths, dear friends, I am very happy to celebrate Vesak with you all today.

I am Bhante Panyawansa from Dhamma Gavesi Meditation Centre in Wainuiomata. I'm speaking on behalf of Venerable Bhante Jinalankara Swamin Wahanse.

Vesak is a sacred time for Buddhists around the world because it marks the Buddha's birth, his enlightenment, and his passing into Nibbāna.

The Buddha taught us a path of practising generosity, ethical conduct, and mindfulness -- foundations for us to grow in concentration and wisdom.

When the Buddhist community gathers at Vesak we express our deep gratitude to the Buddha for the path he discovered...

And as we honour the Buddha's life and legacy, we renew our own commitment to live wisely and compassionately.

But beyond our religious tradition, Vesak also offers a time for all people to reflect on wisdom, peace and compassion. These qualities go beyond religious boundaries.

There is a beautiful verse in "the Dhammapada" which reads:

Sukho Buddhanam Uppado

Sukha Saddhamma Desanā

Sukhā Sanghassa Sāmaggi

Samaggānam Tapo Sukho

In English this means --

The birth of the Buddhas brings joy.

Hearing the Dhamma brings happiness.

The harmony of the community brings delight.

United spiritual practice brings peace.

The Buddha often praised the unity and peaceful living of his disciples. His teachings are a guide to peace - not only personal, but also shared peace in society.

Peace here and now. Peace together with you.

Traditional Buddhist devotees also grow in good qualities by offering the "requisites of living" to the Venerable monks. Many of you will be formally doing that today. For those witnessing this practice, please understand that this "dana" reflects a spirit of cooperation between the monastic and the lay communities, one of mutual respect and shared aspiration.

Monks share the Buddha's teachings and practices, and the lay community offers support in return. This mutual care keeps this way of peaceful practice alive and relevant for future generations.

Thank you, Venerables, esteemed guests from all faiths, and heartfelt thanks to all the organisers and all of you who have come together in this spirit of harmony.

I'm heartened to see so many gathered here to offer and receive blessings. You have been listening to chanting, prayers and speeches that uplift and clarify the mind.

By the goodness of heart cultivated through this Vesak celebration:

May your lives be filled with peace and joy.

May you enjoy good health and long life.

May your path lead to true freedom.

May the blessings of the Triple Gem be with you all.

Vesak Reflections: Fostering Peace and Inclusion in Aotearoa

from Mr Mervin Singham, Chief Executive, Ministry for Ethnic Communities

His Excellency Ambassador Waravuth Pouapinya of Thailand, His Excellency High Commissioner Prasanna Gamage of Sri Lanka , Venerable Sangha of all traditions, Leaders of many faiths, Robert Hunt, Chair and executives of the New Zealand Buddhist Council, members of the Buddhist community, ladies and gentlemen.

It is a great privilege to be with you today as we gather to commemorate Vesak — a sacred day that marks the birth, enlightenment, and passing of Gautama Buddha..

Vesak is more than a commemoration. It is a reflection of profound values: compassion, peace, mindfulness, and the pursuit of wisdom. These are not only central to Buddhism but are values that resonate deeply across our diverse communities.

The presence of Ambassador Pouapinya and High Commissioner Gamage adds special meaning to this occasion, reminding us of the long-standing bonds of friendship between nations and the shared commitment to peace and understanding.

As Chief Executive of the Ministry for Ethnic Communities, I see firsthand how faith communities like yours enrich the fabric of New Zealand. You foster harmony, service, and understanding in a world that too often feels divided. Your commitment to inner peace and nonviolence reminds us of the power of spiritual leadership in building inclusive societies.

We live in a multicultural nation, and Buddhism, with its rich traditions and teachings, plays a vital role in shaping a more thoughtful, connected, and caring Aotearoa. Whether it is through meditation groups, charitable acts, or temple gatherings, the Buddhist community contributes immensely to our collective wellbeing.

Let us take inspiration from the life of the Buddha — who walked a path of selflessness, empathy, and clarity — to reflect on how we can serve each other better, listen more deeply, and live more harmoniously.

May this Vesak day bring peace to your hearts, strength to your communities, inspire deeper compassion in our hearts, clarity in our minds, and unity in our actions as we strive for a brighter, more compassionate world together.

Namo Buddhaya

Thank you

Buddhist Principles Offer Universal Ways to Live Wisely

from His Excellency Mr Waravuth Pouapinya, Ambassador of Thailand

Your respected Venerables,

Distinguished guests,

And dear Dharma friends. Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour and privilege for me as the Ambassador of the Kingdom of Thailand to Aotearoa New Zealand to join and speak in front of one of the most important gatherings here that brings together respected leaders from other faiths, representatives from the New Zealand Government and our Buddhist communities.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Here in Aotearoa New Zealand, a land widely known not only for its natural beauty, safe, and generous people, but also for its spirit of harmony, diversity, and openness. Today's meeting, therefore, reflects the spirit of unity and mutual respect that strengthen our shared life in Aotearoa.

Distinguished guests,

I believe that every single religion or belief teaches their followers to be good deed and how to live happily with their daily life and the changing environments. However, today with your kind permission of those from other religions and faiths, I will share with you all what Buddhism offers to us.

Many of us gather here today are followers of the three vehicles of the Buddha's teachings – Theravada, Mahayana and Vajrayana. Through our traditions have distinct expressions, our foundation is shared : the aspiration to awaken wisdom and compassion for the benefit of all beings.

When I recently addressed a combined Vesak event in Auckland I emphasized that Buddhism's principles are universal values regardless of different races, nationalities, beliefs or religions, especially in today's dynamic and uncertain world, where many face stress, disconnection, and global challenges – from environmental

crises to mental health struggles – the teachings of the Lord Buddha are more relevant than ever. Buddhism offers not escape from the world, but a way to live wisely in the world.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In New Zealand, we are fortunate to live in a country that values peace, multiculturalism and respect for spiritual traditions, Yet even here, we face the same distractions, anxieties and suffering that touch people everywhere. Buddhism reminds us that true peace begins within. The practice of mindfulness, ethical living, and compassion enables us to meet life's changes not with fear, but with clarity and resilience. Whether it is the quiet discipline of Theravada meditation, the boundless compassion of the Mahayana bodhisattava ideal, or the transformative rituals and insight of Vajrayana – each tradition offers a path to liberation rooted in the same fundamental truths: the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path. These teachings, over 2500 years old, 2568 years to be exact, remain timeless because they speak directly to the human condition.

What makes our gathering today so special is that it reminds us ; diversity in the Dharma is not a division – it is richness. Just as the Southern Alps, the Vast coastlines and the native forests together make Aotearoa New Zealand unique, so too do the various expressions of Buddhism enrich our understanding and deepen our practice.

Let this gathering be a reminder that beyond labels and lineages, our practice is united by a shared commitment to wisdom (pranjna ปญญา) ethical conduct (sila ศีล) and mental discipline (samadhi สมาธิ). Let us draw strength from one another, honouring our roots while embracing a collective future.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In a changing world, Buddhism gives us tools to remain grounded , to care for our minds, our communities, and this precious planet. In our daily lives- in the home, the workplace, the temple, or on the land – we can embody kindness, mindfulness,

and right intention. In doing so, we make the Dhamma visible and meaningful, not just for ourselves, but for generations to come.

May we continue to support each other in our diverse paths, May we walk together with respect, in harmony and with joyful determination.

I thank you all for your kind attention and may all be well, full of happiness, caring one another and free from suffering.

Weaving the Fabric of Togetherness, Buddhist Wisdom and Social Cohesion

from Mr Robert Hunt, Chair of New Zealand Buddhist Council

Venerable Bhikkhus, Sunims, Geshe, Roshis, Ācāryas, Respected guests from the Diplomatic Corps and the New Zealand Government, Fellow faith leaders, friends and members of the New Zealand Buddhist Council --
Tēnā koutou katoa

Building on the reflections of the three previous speakers, I'd like to explore with you how Buddhist practice helps grow the inner foundations of "social cohesion". Although we may not have used that exact term, what we now call "social cohesion" has long been part of Buddhist life; we know about true friendship, deep understanding, and helping to weave a broad, resilient fabric of peace in the community. We know this as a kind of "unity".

As my friend Amala Roshi pointed out to me, "We are all one — but we are not all the same."

Buddhist practice calls us to each work skilfully with our unique needs, as we develop stronger internal awareness.

With our practice we may individually attain states of peace but there is something deeper: the recognition that our lives are profoundly interconnected. That your wellbeing and mine are not separate. This is the deep understanding that really opens the mind to change, and the heart to compassion.

Requiring this understanding, "social cohesion" is not something that can be engineered, but rather it can be grown when people "realise" this truth of their existence - that while we are different, we are the same.

There's a well-known text I like very much - Kalama Sutta. It shows the Buddha's characteristic way of teaching - one which respects and encourages people's process of realisation. In it he says to the Kalama people

When you know for yourselves that certain qualities are wholesome, blameless, and praised by the wise — and when practised, lead to well-being and happiness — then you should live by them.”

As Mr. Singham reminded us, these qualities are not only Buddhist, they are human values. What makes them transformative is how we live them.

Of course, living these values is not always easy. Even with the best of intentions, we may find ourselves struggling - pulled by old habits, or shaken by the suffering around us.

That's why the Buddha didn't only teach what is good -- he also taught about what gets in the way. He taught that disconnection and conflict often arise not because the world is a certain way -- but because at root our minds are prone to three patterns which lead to suffering and stress: *greed, hatred, and delusion*.

These three are not distant concepts. We see them around us, deluded hatred and greed underlie many tragedies around the world. And, if we're honest, we see within ourselves how these three can arise and where they lead:

Greed fuels rivalry.

Hatred poisons relationships.

Delusion erodes meaning and clouds moral direction.

The Buddha then showed how these can be transformed -- through a care-full mindfulness, cultivating wholesome qualities:

Practice *generosity* to overcome greed.

Practice *loving-kindness* to overcome hatred.

Cultivate *wisdom* to dispel delusion.

In a very fine teaching he once gave the image of two acrobats balancing together — a teaching on mindfulness and interdependence.

In it he said:

“By looking after oneself, one looks after others.

By looking after others, one looks after oneself.”

This is not just practical advice. It is a pointer into the very nature of our existence -- Our lives are not lived in isolation. We rise - or fall – *together*.

And when we truly see this, kindness isn't something we impose on ourselves. It becomes the only thing that makes sense.

So how can gatherings like today's serve us? What can we recognise through shared time, shared silence, and shared aspiration?

Let us pause mindfully, as breathing humans that we are. Let us appreciate. Today we have already experienced expressions from outside traditions we grew up with -- and we've done this not to change what we will customarily do but to grow in understanding together.

So may we now prepare in that way for the kind sharing of prayers by our honourable neighbours, those from other great faith streams, who in generous spirit have come to be with us today.

May friendships formed here endure.

May our efforts - both individual and shared - continue to bring peace, clarity, and compassion to Aotearoa.

And heartfelt thanks to all of you who together have made this event possible. Thank you all for your warmth, great energy and support.

Ngā mihi aroha.

Namo Buddhaya.

