

Significance of VAP POYA

Vap Full Moon Poya Day marks the conclusion of the three-month *Vas* (rains-retreat) for higher ordained bhikkhus and bhikkhunis. It also commemorates the Buddha's descent to earth from Tāvatiṃsa heaven. There are also other events of religious and historical significance attributed to the Vap full moon day.

- Most significant is the ending of the three-month rains retreat during which time bhikkhus and bhikkhunis who observed *vas* spent much of their time in seclusion and meditation to achieve the goal of realizing Nibbana. Formal ending of *Vas* is called *pavāraṇa*. The month from the *Vap* full-moon day up to the *il* full-moon day is termed the *cīvara* (*robes*) month, when devotees who invited the bhikkhus to observe *vas* are privileged to offer a robe known as the *kaṭhina cīvara* to them.
- Another significant event that is attributed in Buddhist records to the full moon day of *Vap* is the descent of the Buddha from the *Tāvatiṃsa* heavens, after preaching the *Abhidhamma*, which could be described as the quintessence of the Buddha's teaching, to divine beings, including his mother, Queen Mahamāya. The Buddha's descent was at Sankassapura, situated in Uttar Pradesh in India, where an Asokan pillar has been erected. On the same occasion, the Buddha proclaimed Arahanat Sariputta as one of his chief disciples (*Aggasāvaka*).

- The aeon (*kalpa*, *kappa*) that we are living now is called the *Mahā baddha kappa* – *Great Fortunate Aeon* because in this aeon five Buddhas are to be born. Gautama Buddha was the fourth and the fifth Buddha is yet to come. Bodhisatta Metteyya, who was among the Sangha assembled at Sankassapura received his assured confirmation (*Niyata Vivaraṇa*) from Gautama the Buddha that he will be a future Buddha. This, too, was on a Vap Poya Day.
- A major agricultural season in Ancient India commences in the month of *Vap*. The Sakyan king Suddhodana was celebrating the *Vap Magula* (sowing/ploughing festival) and was in the field engaged in the ceremonial ploughing. Prince Siddhartha was brought to the scene by his caretakers and for a moment left alone. When looking at the cradle the five-month-old Prince Siddhartha was missing and was found in a deep, meditative lotus pose in a levitated state under the rose-apple tree. All were very agitated and King Suddhodana rushed to the spot and worshipped. This was the second occasion the father worshipped Prince Siddhartha. It was a notable event that took place during the royal ploughing festival in the month of Vap.
- The Mahavaṃsa (Mv.) recounts that King Devanampiya Tissa dispatched a mission headed by Prince Ariṭṭha with a message from Arahant Mahinda to Emperor Asoka, his father. The message was to send his sister Arahant Sanghamitta to establish the bhikkhuni Sasana in Lanka and ‘with her the south branch of the great Bodhit tree, (Mv. XVIII v.15’. This mission was sent during the month of Vap.