

BUDDHA'S BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION CEREMONY



The Buddha's Birthday Celebration Ceremony is an annual celebration held on the eighth of April in the Chinese lunar calendar to commemorate the birth of the Buddha.

About 3000 years ago, Queen Maya had a dream in which she saw a six-tusked elephant entering her from her right side and she became pregnant. Ten months later, as dictated by Indian custom, she returned to her mother's house to wait for the birth of the baby. On her way, she saw some beautiful and fragrant Sala trees at Lumbini Garden where she stopped to rest. As she raised her right arm to take hold of a tree branch, the baby Buddha was born from her right side. When the baby Buddha landed on earth, he took seven steps in each of the four cardinal directions; with each step he took, huge lotus flowers arose from under his feet. Pointing one hand toward the sky, and one hand toward earth, he declared: "In all of heaven and earth, I am the most venerated one." ("I" refers to the inherent Buddha nature in all beings.) At this point, the whole earth shook, celestial maidens sprinkled the earth with heavenly flowers, the four Heavenly Kings showered the golden body of the baby prince with 12 kinds of fragrant water made from the most precious flowers, and the nine celestial dragons spurted two streams of water from their mouths, one warm and one cold, to bathe the baby Buddha. Every being in the heavens and on earth danced in exultation at the arrival of the Buddha, who taught that anguished beings would find the real causes and solutions to their suffering, and lost beings would find the right path to liberation.

Buddhist disciples celebrate the Buddha's birthday by holding the

ceremony in which a statue of the baby Buddha is placed at the center of a water fountain decorated with fragrant flowers. Following a chanting and offering service, participants take turns ladling the fragrant water in the fountain and pouring it over the baby Buddha statue while chanting the "Bathing the Buddha Gatha". This ritual symbolizes the washing away of the greed, anger, ignorance and all the accumulated defilements in our minds. A pure mind brings wisdom and blessings. The beauty of the flowers, the sweet fragrance emanating from the water fountain, and the mindfulness and respect called forth by the bathing ritual serve to remind the participants to always avoid unwholesome thoughts and actions, and maintain purity of body and mind at every moment.

The Buddha came into this world for one express purpose: to challenge us to look directly at the meaning of life and death and show us the way to transcend the endless cycles of suffering caused by our ignorance of or refusal to face the truth. In the Buddha's Birthday Celebration Ceremony, we are inspired and encouraged to reflect on the meaning of our own birth and death, and to truly get to know the buddha waiting to be born in each of us.