

Panthea, Initiations and Festivals of the Goddess
by Olivia Robertson

7. Festival of Wesak
1st to 2nd May

Oracle of the Goddess Mahadevi

Priestess: O Great Goddess, Mother of the Trimurti, the Holy Trinity, Soul of every being, how can we extol Thee? By Thee even Maha-Deva, the Almighty God is put into trance that He may make worlds. Thou art Maha-Sarasvati, Maha-Lakshmi, Maha-Parvati. Triple Goddess, guide us on our path to Enlightenment that we may awaken into eternal bliss.

Oracle: Look within your Self and you will find the Light of Truth, Buddhi, the Jewel within the Heart of the Lotus. Invisible it is and yet shineth in every creature. It is the dewdrop hanging from a blade of grass: it sparkles in the eyes of eagles and fast-flying swallows: it flows in rushing rivers and rests in rocky snow-capped mountains. The bliss of Nirvana is not in the past nor the future: so no vain regrets nor ambitious struggles in religious practices will bring it to you. No strivings for the reputation of saintliness can ensure your awareness. Rather it is in the moment that Eternity rests, awaiting you in a smile, sudden laughter, tears of compassion. If you could experience one second of enlightenment, it would be yours for ever! Time slips by like a passing landscape to the traveller, who appears to journey with it. But in reality the true Self is at rest at the hub of the turning wheel of life, Place yourself at the centre of this hub in total awareness, and you will be in a position of strength to control each of your lives as they revolve in cyclic reincarnations.

True knowledge brings good feeling, thought and activity. Control is essential. Yet how can you control yourself in alignment with your true Self, if you are swayed by passing passions? Free Will is to be earned not by extreme asceticism nor by selfish indulgence. It is attained by continual exercise of conscious choice between good and wrong behaviour. As you develop, you will observe that the choices both become more difficult and more subtle. Rejoice then, for you draw nearer to Self-realisation! If you could live for one minute in a truthful, compassionate manner, you would transform your day and your year and your life! Do not strive for too much: otherwise you will reach for the stars and fall upon your face! Rather combine spiritual practices with an enjoyment of Mother Earth. It is pious to memorise the myriad Names and Attributes of the Gods and Goddesses: it is also good to remember the names of your neighbours and their children, and to respect the attributes of animals, birds and plants! As I am the Universal Mother, these are your brothers and sisters and children. The mind conveys knowledge: intuition and conscience combined with experience produces wisdom.

I am without: I am within: I am the Lover and the Beloved: I am the Knower and the Known: I am the Harmony that reconcileth all things. Know Me.

At the gates, Priestess and Priest in mitres. Women with flower headdresses, men garlanded. All in orange and yellow robes and carry flowers.

Priest: Friends, we are assembled to celebrate Wesak, the attainment of Nirvana by the Buddha Gautama and his wife the Princess Yasodhara. The Buddha found enlightenment in the land of India and taught his disciples that his wife also had attained the great Awakening. He travelled the land preaching adherence to truth, peace, toleration, a caste-free society and compassion for all living things. He

practiced vegetarianism and pacifism. He once gave a simple reply to one who asked what he taught: "do good, abstain from evil, speak the truth." May we rejoice in the attainment of bliss by Gautama and Yasodhara and be inspired by their example! Let us make procession to the High Altar for our celebration.

Flute and drum music. Procession. Altar is draped in red and gold and on it are 8 lighted candles, burning incense and an earthenware bowl of milk. By it is a gong. Table with vegetarian feast.

Prs: (*offers incense*) I offer incense to Maha-Devi, the Trimurti, Who manifests in triple form as Sarasvati, Goddess of Wisdom, Lakshmi, Goddess of Love and beauty, and Devi Who shows herself as Parvati, Durga and Kali; Gentleness, Energy and Creativity. Maha-Devi's divine Daughters are Prajna, Goddess of Wisdom; Kwan-Yin, Goddess of Mercy and the many-coloured Tara of gentleness and power.

Faces celebrants.

Hear the words of Maha-Devi: "I am the Void. I am the Bliss. I am the Knowledge. I am the Unborn. Through Me the Universe came into being. I am below, above, all around." Friends, let us worship the Goddess Maha-Devi who shines like a thousand suns. Without Her, the mighty God Maha-Deva cannot stir in any of his triple forms. As Sarasvati She inspires Brahma to make the cycles of Time. As Lakshmi She causes Vishnu to dream worlds into Being, and to incarnate within them. As Devi She fires Siva with energy so that He may enact the Dance of Creation.

Priest: (*offers incense*) I offer incense to Maha-Deva, the Trimurti, Who manifests as Brahma, Vishnu and Siva. Mighty are the works of the God Who upholdeth the wide firmaments and lifteth on high the bright and glorious heaven! The Three-Headed One sees as if He were near. If a sinful man thinks he is walking by stealth, the God knows it all. Should he flee far beyond the sky, he would not be rid of the God Who with a thousand eyes overlooketh this earth. O hear this our calling, Maha Deva, be gracious now; longing for bliss, we call upon Thee! Where there is Eternal Light, in that immortal imperishable world place us. Where life is free in the thirty-three heavens, where all worlds are radiant, there make us immortal. Where there are happiness and delight, free us from sin; there make us immortal!

Priestess: In token of our joy in the coming of spring, let us present our flowers!

Maiden: (*presents flowers*) O Maha-Devi, when called to mind in difficulties, you remove fear from us. When we are happy you bestow lovely thoughts. O dispeller of poverty, pain and fear, open your ever-sympathetic heart which bestows love on all! Grant us love and happiness and abundance for this spring.

Youth: (*presents flowers*) O Lotus-eyed Goddess, with face as charming as the moon and ever gracious, You are as beautiful as burnt gold and the sun and the moon! Goddess with fire in your eyes, adorned on your brow with the crescent moon, inspire us with the gift of creating beautiful works of art.

Priest: That our souls may be inspired with spiritual understanding, let us witness the Mystery of the jewel within the Lotus!

Gong is struck twice.

Mystery of the Jewel within the Lotus

Actors. Gautama in saffron robe, 1 right bare shoulder, holds staff and begging bowl. Yasodhara in black and yellow striped sari and saffron veil. Maya in jewelled tiara, purple and gold sari and jewellery. Gandharvas in brightly coloured attire, youths garlanded, girls flower crowned. Yasodhara is seated, veiled.

Enter Gautama leaning on staff.

Yasodhara: Venerable monk, I see well that you have travelled far and long! Be you seated and accept refreshment at my hands!

Gautama: Compassion so freely offered without the need of my begging is welcome indeed, both for the substance and the spirit. I have indeed journeyed for forty-five years and have seldom been seated during day-light. (*sits cross-legged*) What place is this, so well shaded by trees from the merciless glare of the sun?

Yas: You are in Kusinagara, country of the Mallus. Behold the countryfolk hereabout wonder, because this grove of sal trees have flowers out of season! They say among themselves that a great miracle is pending.

Gautama: (*looks at her closely*) If you were not a woman at least forty years younger than myself, I should say that your voice reminds me of my wife, the Princess Yasodhara, long since departed from this illusory world!

Yas: Your failing hearing does not deceive you. (*removes her veil*) Behold my face! I am Yasodhara. I am she who appeareth to the righteous at the gateway of death. Gautama, you shall depart this life today, when the sun sets behind these trees.

Gautama: In this degenerate age of the Kaliyuga I accept death with tranquillity. But as at the first, give me of your milk.

Yas. presents bowl of milk to Gautama, who drinks.

Yas: It is customary for the departing spirit to ask questions of me. What would you know?

Gautama: Why have you been so long silent?

Yas: When intellectual dissertation distracts the mind, I withdraw.

Gautama: Why have you veiled yourself so no man may see you?

Yas: The impurities of the mind causes the veil and not myself.

Gautama: Why do you restrain yourself from helping the sinful, the sick and the soul-weary?

Yas: I answer all who call upon Me from the heart. But few are willing to pay the price for my aid, the surrender of selfishness.

Gautama: I understand. Would you question me?

Yas: Assuredly. Why do you permit devotees to worship you as a God through hundreds of statues they make of you?

Gautama: There are no statues of the Buddha. I forbade it. What you see are toys for the young.

Yas: Why do you teach men to abandon their homes and wives and children to become monks? The water cisterns are dry, the canals are silted up, the fields unploughed. The people are hungry.

Yas: I taught the Middle Way between asceticism and excess. These who neglect the earth are no

followers of the Buddha.

Yas: Why have you deserted the Deities, and denied both soul and heaven?

Gautama: I only dispelled delusions, the shadows of Deities, not their Divine Being: the false soul of desires, not the true Soul: fantasies of heaven, not the true Heaven of eternal reality.

Yas: I see your spirit is prepared.

Gautama: Before I leave this earth I would seek a remedy for the misuse of my teachings.

Yas: I myself would find a cure for my rejection of the earth, leaving my children to sin and suffer. We have attained Buddhahood, but this does not make us omniscient. The wider the horizon, the greater the extent of the unknown. What Teacher knows as much as the Mother who bore him? Let us call upon your wise mother, Queen Maya!

Gautama: I call upon the Eternal, the Formless, the form of the Mother of this Universe who took the shape of my mother Maya. Come to us Who art the triumph of spirit over matter, dispeller of miseries and misfortunes, Bringer of all knowledge, tranquillity and beauty, Mother Supreme, as beautiful as the lotus. Thou Who art the form of the Queen of the Universe, the Protectress, the Benevolent, inspire us to bring good to all.

Yas: Come to us, the One whom Brahma of the lotus-seat praiseth, Who bringeth about Vishnu's super-conscious trance. Thou Who art the soul of everything, come to us who would save mankind from ignorance and evil.

Indian music. Maya reveals herself. Gaut. and Yas. stand.

Maya: I am Thy mother, Gautama, and thine, Yasodhara, and I take the form of Maya who weaves the fabric of dreams. I am Maha-Devi Who manifesteth with immeasurable Light, of form and activity beyond the ken of thought; the substratum of three Worlds. I am the embodiment of Truth, Consciousness and Bliss and the three powers, Will, Action and Knowledge which are beyond birth and death. Whenever evil predominates over good, the Deities descend into incarnation, that free choice may be granted to all souls. After the age of the reign of violence and cruelty brought about by turbulent passions, an age of the Fishes brings with it the virtues of compassion, stillness and a longing for heaven.

But in reply to your question, even the virtues may be misused and so weakness may displace compassion; inertia supersede stillness; and a longing for heaven become distorted into religious fanaticism. But the jewel light of Truth which is the Spiritual Self will glow within the hearts of those who truly follow your teaching, Gautama, and they shall attain Nirvana, eternal bliss. It is not for you to ask the number, for would you refrain from helping others because only few may benefit?

Your teachings shall prevail for two and a half thousand years. Your influence, Yasodhara, will dawn at the end of the age and the coming of the sign of the Water-carrier. You shall bring harmony with Nature. Your veil will be set aside, and you shall shine like the stars!

(joyful music) Do you deny the Deities? This is not possible.

(Maya holds up her arms.) Yasodhara and Gautama, know that you are the Ninth Avatars of the Goddess Lakshmi and the God Vishnu! The Ghandarvas rejoice at your apotheosis.

Indian music and dance of Ghandarvas. They garland Gautama and Yasodhara.

Maya: My son, it is time for you to rest.

Gaut. lies recumbent, head on hand. Yas. spreads her veil over him. Ghandarvas surround them.

Maya: Gautama and Yasodhara have left this earth and returned to the thirty-third heaven among the stars. They shall return to reap the harvest at the end of the age of Pisces. They will descend with the Twelfth Avatars of Lakshmi and Vishnu of the Aquarian age.

Ghandarvas withdraw. Gautama rises. He and Yas. stand on either side of Maya, all three with hands outstretched in blessing. Gong is struck once. End of mystery.

Priestess: Aum Mani Padme Hum. Friends, let us meditate upon the Inner Light of Truth, the jewel within the heart of the lotus.

Meditation. Rays of peace, strength and compassion are sent forth. Reports are shared. Priestess and Priest give thanks to Maha-Devi and Maha-Deva. Feast is enjoyed. Flowers are kept for those in hospital and food is shared with animals and birds.

End of Rite.

SOURCES: "Images of Devi in Pahari Paintings," Chhote Bharany, foreword by C. Sivaramamurti, Clarion Books, C-36 Connaught Place. New Delhi, 110 001 India. "Indian Mythology," Veronica Ions, Paul Hamlyn, London. "The Vedas," Max Muller, Indological Book House, POB 98, Ck 31/10 Nepali Khapra, Varanasi, India. "The Goddesses of India, Tibet, China & Japan," Durdin-Robertson, Cesara. "Tripitaka," Arthur Waley. "Monkey," Wu Ch'eng-en, trans. Waley, Allen & Unwin, Penguin Classics.

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