

## Bak poya – Citta uposatha (March)

At *Bak Uposatha* we commemorate the Buddha's second visit to Sri Lanka. The Sri Lankan New Year is also celebrated on this day. *Bak* is therefore a month that has national significance.

*Mahiyāṅgaṇaṃ – Nāgadīpaṃ,  
Kalyāṇaṃ – Padalāncanaṃ,  
Divāguhaṃ – Dīghavāpi – Cetiyancha Mutiyangaṇaṃ,  
Tissa Mahā Vihāraṇcha – Bodhim – Marichavattiyaṃ,  
Suwarnamāli Mahā Cetiyaṃ – Thupārāma,  
Bhayagirim – Jetavanaṃ – Sela Cetiyaṃ – Tathā Kacharagāmakaṃ.  
Ete solassatāni ahaṃ vandāmi sabbadā.*

Listed above are the sixteen most important Buddhist sacred sites in Sri Lanka. Second on the list is *Nāgadīpa*, an island in the *Jaffna*. The historical chronicle *Mahāvamsa* describes the second coming of the Buddha to Sri Lanka. The reason for this was to establish peace between two kings whose struggle was about to take place on the island of *Nāgadīpa*. The dispute arose over a jeweled throne between *Nāga Mahodara*, king of the ocean, and *Nāga Culodara*, king of Mount *Kannavaddhamana*. Both were endowed with miraculous powers and were duly armed. Their war was a threat to the whole country.

The Buddha was then in his fifth year of enlightenment, staying in *Jetavana* Park. When he saw the dispute between the two *Nāgas*, he took his alms bowl and robe early in the morning of the uposatha day and decided to visit *Nāgadīpa*.



He came to Sri Lanka accompanied by the deity (deva) *Samiddhisumana*, who was born in a tree in the beautiful *Jetavana* garden after his last life as a man in *Nāgadīpa*. Deva *Samiddhisumana* took the *Rajayatana* tree, his own abode, and, holding it as a parasol, followed the Buddha to the place where he himself had formerly resided as a man. He went to the place where, as a human being, he had seen the paccekabuddha eating food. At the sight of him, his heart was gladdened, and he offered him at that time the branches of a tree to purify the alms bowl. Therefore, he was reborn in that tree in the beautiful *Jetavana* garden where the Buddha often stayed. The god of all gods, for the sake of goodness, brought the *deva* along with his tree to Sri Lanka.

The *Mahāvamsa* tells how the Buddha settled the dispute. Hovering in the air above the battlefield, the master dispelling spiritual darkness, he caused an intimidating and

complete darkness over the *Nāgas*. He then calmed those who were intimidated and again spread light over the area.

When the *Nāgas* saw the Noble One, they joyfully bowed down at His feet. The Noble One spoke to them the *Kakoluka*, *Phandana*, *Latukika* and *Wattaka jātakas* describing the evils of discord and the benefits of unity of peaceful coexistence. Thereupon the two *Nāgas* gladly relinquished the throne.



When the Blessed One, descending to the earth, sat on the seat of the throne and was presented with heavenly food and drink by the *Nāga* kings. Eighty *kotis* of serpent spirits, inhabitants of the ocean and the land, took refuge at the Triple Jewel and the 8 Ethical precepts.

*Maniakkhika*, the king of the *Nāgas*, who participated in the battle and who, after hearing the Buddha's discourse, took refuge with the Buddha and made ethical decisions, paid his respects with words:

*"Great is the compassion you have shown us, O Sublime One. If you had not appeared here, we would all have been burnt to ashes. May the light of Your compassion (karuṇā) shine through me, You who are filled with all-embracing love (mettā), may You visit my country again, Blessed One!"*

When the Buddha tacitly agreed to come to Sri Lanka once more, they planted a Rajayatana tree on the spot where it stood as a sacred monument. Over this *Rajayatana* tree and precious throne, the Lord of the Worlds said to the King of the *Nāgas*:

*"In remembrance that I have used it, pay my respects, O King of the Nāgas!"*

The Buddha's visits to Sri Lanka are considered false and legendary by some sects. One reason is that they are not included in the *Tipiṭaka*. However, it is believed that the Buddha visited Sri Lanka three times: the first time at *Mahiyangana*, the second time at Jaffna, which is referred to as *Nāgadīpa*, and the third time at *Kelaniya*.

The lesson we should learn on the occasion of *Uposatha Bak* Day is that victory brings hatred and the losers live in misery. One whose mind is calm and undisturbed lives a happy life.



bhikkhunī Visuddhi