

Festivals

6

**Unity leads to peace; peace leads to happiness.”
-The Buddha**



Activity 1

Act Out

Venerable Sumedha meets James Smith, a student from New Zealand.

Venerable Sumedha: I hope you are enjoying your visit to our country, Mr. Smith?

Mr. Smith: Of course. You have a lovely country. I especially enjoyed your Sinhala and Tamil New Year celebrations. The sweetmeats were really tasty.

Venerable Sumedha: Thank you. How long will you be staying here?

Mr. Smith: Well, I'm studying the endemic animals of Sri Lanka. I'll be here for about a month.

Venerable Sumedha: Then you'll be able to see how we celebrate the Vesak festival as well. It's only two weeks away.

- Mr. Smith: Vesak? It's a Buddhist festival, isn't it?
- Venerable Sumedha: Yes. It is celebrated on the Vesak Full Moon Poya day, which falls in May.
- Mr. Smith: What is its significance?
- Venerable Sumedha: It was on this day that the three most important events in the life of the Buddha took place, that is, His Birth, Enlightenment and *Parinibbana*, which means Passing Away.
- Mr. Smith: How do you celebrate it?
- Venerable Sumedha : People engage in many religious activities. They also make colourful lanterns and put up beautiful pandals. These pandals mainly depict events and experiences connected with the Buddha's past lives.
- Mr. Smith: I'm looking forward to seeing the festivities. I'd also like to come to your temple to see the religious rituals. You wouldn't mind, would you?
- Venerable Sumedha : Of course not. We'd be happy to have you.

Activity 2 - Reading

1. Read the conversation and complete the sentences.

- Mr. Smith is from
- Mr. Smith is planning to stay in Sri Lanka for
- The three important events in the life of the Buddha:
.....,, and
..... took place on the Vesak Full Moon Poya day.
- Buddhists engage in on Vesak day.
- Pandals depict

2. Read the conversation again. Write the tag questions used after these utterances.

- I. It's a Buddhist festival, ?
- II. You wouldn't mind,?

Activity 3 - Grammar

Write the tag questions to match the utterances.

e.g. You are enjoying your holiday, aren't you?

- a) You have made some Vesak lanterns,?
- b) You didn't forget the camera,?
- c) Sigiriya is a world heritage site,?
- d) Sri Lankans don't drink a lot of coffee,?
- e) Deepavali is a Hindu festival,?
- f) You won't be late,?

Activity 4 - Listening

Listen to the news extracts. Do they express a fact or an opinion? Tick the correct column.

I.

	Fact	Opinion
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		

Activity 5 Speaking

Step I

After returning to his country, Mr. Smith gave a speech at his school about the Sinhala and Hindu New Year in Sri Lanka. Practise this speech.

Good morning. Today, I would like to share something from my recent holiday in the island paradise, Sri Lanka. I would like to tell you about the Sinhala and Hindu New Year, a national and cultural festival celebrated there.

It is celebrated by both the Sri Lankan Buddhists and the Hindus. This festival, its rituals and customs are closely linked with astrology. For example, it is believed that the dawn of the new year is marked by the movement of the sun from *Meena Rashiya*, that is the House of Pisces to *Mesha Rashiya*, the House of Aries. This is also a harvest festival for both the Buddhists and the Hindus.

There are many rituals that are observed at this festival such as lighting the hearth, cooking milk rice, eating the first morsels and engaging in the exchange of gifts and money. These rituals are all done according to an auspicious time. In addition, people spend a lot of time engaging in religious activities. I really enjoyed seeing so many people wearing new clothes and sharing sweetmeats with their relatives and neighbours. What was most memorable was the lighting of crackers that I heard right throughout the festival. The dawn of each of the auspicious times for the rituals is announced with the lighting of the crackers. They also play many traditional games at this festival.

In conclusion, I'd like to say that this festival is a wonderful blend of Sinhala and Hindu traditions and it's a unique festival which brings people together. I hope you enjoyed listening to me and that I would have generated enough interest in you to visit Sri Lanka, someday.



Step II

Use the given facts and speak about one of the festivals given below.

Christmas	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• a Christian festival• marks the birth of Jesus Christ• celebrated on 25th of December• attend Mass in church• make sweetmeats (Christmas cake, puddings etc.)• sing carols and hymns, decorate Christmas trees• exchange presents
Deepavali	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• a Hindu festival• called the Festival of Lights• falls between October and November• celebrated in honour of goddess Lakshmi-the Goddess of Wealth• signifies the victory of light over darkness, good over evil• light oil lamps, draw designs called <i>rangoli</i> on the floor• prepare sweetmeats• wear new clothes and visit friends and relatives

<p>Ramazan (Id- al- Fitr)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • an Islamic festival • marks the end of the Ramadan fasting season • the date varies. Celebrated when the crescent moon is sighted. • engage in prayers and giving alms • prepare special dishes (watalappan, biriyani) • wear new clothes • share food with relatives, neighbours and friends
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Activity 6 - Writing

Write a news article to a local newspaper about the national Vesak festival organized by the Ministry of Buddha Sasana.

Activity 7 - Pronunciation

The following words contain silent letters. Put them in the correct column.

fasten	whistle	mortgage	Christmas	apostle
ballet	debut	depot	castle	isle
column	solemn	condemn	island	hymn
listen	debris	aisle		

Silent <i>s</i>	Silent <i>t</i>	Silent <i>n</i>
Island	listen	hymn

Activity 8 - Writing

Read the notice given below. It looks more like a paragraph than a notice. Rewrite it improving its layout for easy reading. You may add or delete words, edit sentences and add bullets if necessary. You may also include certain details and separate points.(date, time, venue, events etc.)

Sinhala and Hindu New Year Celebration “*Bakmaha Senakeliya*” will be held on Sunday, 20th April from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m at the Municipal Grounds. Raban playing, Climbing the greasy pole, tug-of-war, pillow fighting, marking the eye on the elephant, bicycle race and many more events and games will be held. We welcome all of you to this event.

Secretary, Sandagama Young Buddhists’ Association



Vesak Festival

Vesak is the most important Buddhist festival celebrated in Sri Lanka. This festival falls on the full moon Poya day in the month of May. This marks three important events in the life of the Buddha. They are the birth, the Enlightenment and the Passing Away or the *Parinibbana*.

Vesak day is dedicated to the spiritual development of an individual. Specially during this festival, Buddhists practise the art of giving by offering alms to the *monks* and the needy. This is because the Buddhists believe that by offering alms they practise the elimination of desire. Many people observe Sil on this day where they observe the eight or ten precepts that help them in disciplining themselves. All Buddhists go to temples to worship and engage in religious activities including listening to *Dhamma* sermons and practise meditation.

In addition, there are cultural activities connected with the Vesak festival. Buddhists light oil lamps in temples and their homes. They also illuminate their houses and gardens with colourful Vesak lanterns. Vesak, in this regard, is a festival of lights. **Furthermore**, Vesak is a festival of Buddhist music, art, poetry and drama. Singing devotional songs (*Bhakti Gee*) is a common custom during the Vesak season. In pandals and Vesak cards, artists exhibit their talents in Buddhist paintings and drawings. Vesak **also** gives an opportunity to poets and dramatists to display their talents. Poets write devotional verses to various Vesak publications. Plays depicting *Jataka* stories are enacted in public places. Therefore, in the Sri Lankan society, the Vesak festival is a strong reflection of Buddhist culture.

In 1999, The United Nations General Assembly declared an international day of observance for Vesak. This was initiated by the former Foreign Minister of Sri Lanka, the late Mr. Lakshman Kadirgamar.

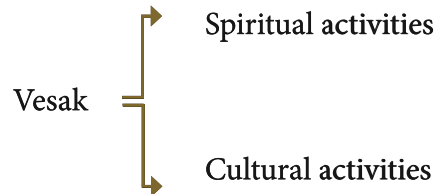
sources: Vesak Full Moon Festival – J.B. Dissanayake, <http://lk.one.un.org/7060/en/vesak-day-globally-marked-as-united-nations-observance-day>

Activity 9 - Reading

Read the text and answer the questions.

1. When is Vesak celebrated?
2. Why is Vesak important to Buddhists?
3. What are the two kinds of activities that the Buddhists engage in on the Vesak day?
4. In which year did the UN General Assembly declare Vesak as an international day of observance? Who initiated this?

5. Read the text and complete the diagram.



Activity 10

Match the words with their meanings.

dedicate	relating to the human spirit or soul as opposed to material or physical things
enlightenment	controlling one's behaviour using self-control
spiritual	the complete removal of something
elimination	devote time or effort to a particular purpose
desire	rules for behaviour
precepts	a strong feeling of wanting something
disciplining	to make (something) pure
purify	the attaining of insight in Buddhism that frees a person from the cycle of rebirth

Learning Point

Cohesive Devices, contd...



Cohesive devices are used to show how ideas are related to each other in a text. They are used to link ideas (different relationships) in a logical order. Cohesive devices can be used within a sentence or to link ideas in separate sentences or paragraphs.

Some cohesive devices used for addition (to add something more) are:

also

as well

in addition

moreover

furthermore

- Sumedha is excellent in his studies. He is also a very good cricketer.
- I like painting. I like reading as well.
- Cumaratunge Munidasa was a writer, journalist and poet. Moreover, he was a prominent scholar.
- The house is very spacious. In addition, it has a large garden.
- Reading is a good way to learn new words. Furthermore, it helps us to learn spelling and grammar.

***Please note that sometimes cohesive devices can be used interchangeably.**

The house is very spacious. In addition, it has a large garden.

The house is very spacious. It has a large garden as well.

Activity 11 - Grammar

Rewrite these sentences adding also, as well, in addition, furthermore or moreover where necessary to show the link between them. The same word or phrase can be used more than once.

- Flowers add beauty to the environment. They help pollination.
- I will attend the seminar. I will go sightseeing.
- Recycling helps to conserve resources. It reduces problems related to garbage disposal.
- Sigiriya is a major tourist attraction. It is a world heritage site.

Activity 12 - Writing

Summarize the following text to about 1/3rd of its length. (number of words 198)

Kandy Esala Perahera

The hill capital, Kandy in Sri Lanka is a historical city as well as a popular tourist attraction. One of the reasons Kandy attracts a lot of tourists from Sri Lanka and abroad is that there is a famous cultural pageant held in Kandy every year. It is the Dalada Perahera: the procession of the sacred Tooth Relic. This procession is held in the month of Esala according to the Sinhala calendar. The month of Esala falls during July or August.

The Dalada Perahera, also called the Esala Perahera, has a long history. It commenced during the rule of King Keerthi Sri Meghawarna, who reigned between 301 B.C and 238 B.C. In the 18th century, during the reign of King Keerthi Sri Rajasinghe, the processions belonging to the four *devalas*¹ dedicated to the gods *Natha*, *Pathhini*, *Katharagma* and *Visnu* were combined with the Dalada Perahera.

Esala Perahera is a combination of Buddhist and Hindu customs. It is a spectacular procession consisting of whip crackers, various dancers, beautifully adorned and caparisoned elephants, drummers and flag bearers. The highlight of the event is the majestic tusker carrying the sacred Tooth Relic of the Buddha. The pageant ends with the traditional *diya kapeema* or the water cutting ceremony. This ritual takes place at the Mahaweli River at Getambe.

Activity 13 - Writing

Imagine you watched Kandy Esala Perahera recently. Write an account describing the experience.

- Include -
1. A list of things you saw with a suitable description of each item
 2. What you felt about what you saw
 3. Any particular or unforgettable event that you saw or experienced there
 4. The reactions of the others who watched the perahara

¹Devale - A shrine devoted to a deity/ gods