

THE BUDDHIST FLAG



Many people, including Buddhists, believe that the Buddhist flag has existed since the time of early Buddhist kingdoms 2000 years ago. In fact, the Buddhist flag is a modern creation and it was originally designed in 1885 by the Colombo Committee, in Colombo, Ceylon (Sri Lanka).

On a suggestion by Henry Steele Olcott, an American Buddhist deeply involved with the revival of Buddhism in Ceylon at that time, the flag was modified to be of the normal size of National Flags. Olcott felt that local Buddhists in Sri Lanka needed a symbol to rally around. His flag achieved that. The Buddhist Flag, so modified, was first raised on Vesak Full Moon Day in 1886.

In 1889 the flag was introduced to Japan by Anagarika Dharmapala and Olcott—who presented it to Emperor Meiji—and subsequently to Burma. The flag later came to symbolize the unity of Buddhists. It remains virtually unchanged to this day and is used by all the traditions and schools of Buddhism throughout the world.

It has been used worldwide, in nearly 60 countries, during Buddhist festive seasons, particularly during the Vesak celebrations. It was accepted as the International Buddhist Flag by the 1952 World Buddhist Congress.

Colonel Henry Steele Olcott was a fascinating character - an American journalist, a former soldier and lawyer, and then a Buddhist and more. In 1875, together with H. P. Blavatsky and William Q. Judge, Olcott co-founded The Theosophical Society in New York, and remained President-Founder for life. As its president, he accompanied H. P. Blavatsky to India, where they played key roles in reviving interest in the philosophical and religious scriptures of the Orient.



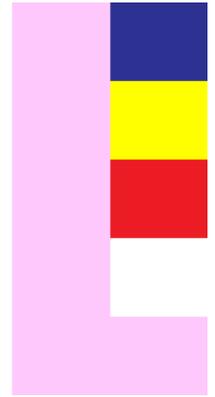
Olcott is especially noted for his work among the Buddhists of Sri Lanka, Burma, and Japan, helping them realize the essential value of their own heritage. He also founded the Buddhist Theosophical Society, devised a Buddhist catechism, encouraged Buddhist versions of Christmas carols and cards, and inspired the founding of Buddhist schools and the Young Men's Buddhist Association (YMBA).

Colonel Olcott was one of the greatest American Buddhists, and he dedicated his later life entirely to the people of Asia. He is known as the father of the Buddhist education movement since he initiated the establishment of close to 400 Buddhist schools and colleges in Sri Lanka. When he died in 1907, Olcott's body was shrouded in both the Buddhist and American flags before his cremation. He is still honored in Sri Lanka for being a key figure in reviving the Buddhism of Sri Lanka.

THE MEANING OF THE STRIPES

There are 5 vertical stripes of red, yellow, blue, white and orange (or pink). The sixth row is made up of short horizontal bars using the same 5 colors that if combined make a sixth color that we humans could not see. This Combination Color symbolizes the Universality of the Truth of the Buddha's Teaching.

The horizontal bars signify peace and harmony between all races throughout the world while the vertical bars represent eternal peace within the world.



In simple terms, the Buddhist Flag implies that there is no discrimination of races, nationality, areas, or skin color; that every living being possess the Buddha Nature and all have the potential to become a Buddha.

THE MEANING OF THE COLORS

Blue signifies the concept of Loving Kindness and Peace in Buddhism and Universal Compassion for all beings.

It also represents the noble quality of 'Confidence' of the Buddha.

Yellow signifies the Middle Path, which avoids all extremes and brings balance and liberation.

It also represents the noble quality of 'Holiness' of the Buddha.

Red signifies Achievement, Wisdom, Virtue, Fortune, Dignity, and the Blessing that the practice of the Buddha's Teaching brings.

It also represents the noble quality of 'Wisdom' of the Buddha.

White signifies the Purity of the Buddha's Teaching and the Liberation it brings, and that the Dharma will always exist regardless of time or space.

It also represents the noble quality of 'Purity' of the Buddha.

Orange (Burmese Buddhists replaced with **Pink**) signifies the essence of Buddhism and the unshakable Wisdom, Strength, and Dignity of the Buddha's Teaching.

It also represents the noble quality of 'Absence of Desire' of the Buddha.

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