
Asahna Bucha day: Buddhist Nation Celebrates in Thailand

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Introduction

Thailand, also known as the Kingdom of Thailand, is a fun-loving and cultured country in South-East Asia. Known for its relaxing, quiet and windy beaches, the country lights up during its festivals. There is more to Thailand than just the beaches - the Thai massage is the best way to relieve your stress and sore body after a heavy day of shopping and then there is the delicious Thai food that is adored around the world for its fresh and varied flavour. To add to this fun, this Buddhist nation celebrates its festivals like grand ceremonies. The festival period attracts tourists from all over the world, and Asahna Bucha is one of its oldest famous festivals. Asanha Bucha Day is a significant Buddhist event and public holiday on the Thai calendar. The day, which usually falls in July or August and in 2016 takes place on 19 July, marks the anniversary of the Buddha's first sermon over two and a half millennia ago. The sermon, which would later go on to form the basis of the Buddhist doctrine of Dharma, was given at a deer park – as a result, images of deer have come to be seen at Buddhist temples across the country. In common with other Buddhist holidays, the timing of Asanha Bucha Day is determined based on the lunar calendar. Also like other such Buddhist celebrations, Thai Buddhists will mark the day by visiting the local temple to make merit. This often takes the form of a donation to the temple, either in cash or – more traditionally, and specific to Asanha Bucha Day – in the form of candles, historically to be used to light the temple during the darker days of the rainy season in the pre-electricity era. Asahna Bucha Day is a public holiday in Thailand. The date of Asahna Bucha varies each year depending on the lunar calendar, but it usually falls in July or August. The holiday commemorates the day when the Lord Buddha delivered his first sermon. This event took place over 2,500 years ago when the Buddha preached his first sermon at a deer park at Benares in India. From this sermon the Dharma (doctrine) of the Buddha was symbolised as a wheel. The Dharmachakra is also known as the Wheel of Life, Wheel of Law or Wheel of Doctrine and can be seen on flags in temples and buildings all across Thailand. Similarly, pictures of deer can often be seen at temples or in depictions of the Buddha to represent the first sermon at the deer park. Asanha Bucha Day is a public holiday in Thailand marking the day when the Lord Buddha delivered his first sermon at Benares in India over 2,500 years ago. The exact date of the holiday is determined by the waxing moon and the lunar months, but is usually held in July or August. This year it falls on July 16. Asahna Bucha, also known as Asalha Puja, is the day that marks when over 2500 years ago Lord Buddha delivered his first sermon at Benares in India. It is a public holiday in Thailand, and the exact date for this festival is decided by the waxing moon and the lunar months which typically comes up in July according to the Thai lunar calendar. It is an auspicious day and brings out all the people to their nearest temples to celebrate the occasion.

Asalha Puja is celebrated in countries with Theravada Buddhist population such as Cambodia, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Laos, Myanmar and Thailand celebrates it on a large scale. Different cities in Thailand make more additions to celebrate this day. For example, in Ubon the candlelit parade is followed by a contest for the best-designed candles and a beauty contest. In Saraburi, the monks walk through the town with their alms bowls. There are many other festivals celebrated by Thai people but this is one of the most important festivals. The day after the Asahna Bucha is followed by 'Wan Khao Phansa', another significant day which marks the start of three month Phansa period.

When is Asalha Puja Held?

Observed by the government sector only, Asahna Bucha Day is a public holiday. An annual festival, it is celebrated in the wet season in July in on the first full moon accordance with the Thai Lunar calendar while it varies in the Gregorian Calendar. This event is one of the most important festivals of Thailand and is celebrated on a full moon night because Buddha himself was born during a full moon.

Wan Khao Phansa

Also known as the Buddhist lent day, it is the day after the Asalha Puja. It takes place during the wet season and is the start of an auspicious three-month annual retreat, observed by Buddhist practitioners. Also known as "Lent Commencement Day" it is the period of spiritual renewal where

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all the monks retreat to the temple and don't leave it for the next three months. They devote this time to study and meditate within the temple grounds. It is also a public holiday, but the banks are not closed. It is also 'no alcohol day' in Thailand. People also make an effort and abstain from eating meat or tobacco at least for the day if not for three months.

It's time to explore Thailand beyond its beaches, spas and shopping areas. In a time where more and more millennials are backpacking across the globe and learning about the various cultures, Thailand is a must-visit. Attracting the majority of the tourists during this festival season, go and experience Asalha Puja celebration first hand.

History of Asalha Puja

Asahna Bucha day is the celebration of the 'Four Noble Truths'- Dukkha, Tanha, Nibbana, and the eightfold path preached by Buddha after his enlightenment. This first sermon called 'Setting the Wheel of Dhamma in motion' which was given at Deer Park in Sarnath city, near the confluence of Ganges and Gomti river in Uttar Pradesh, India is the Thai version of Asalha Puja. It is also known as Dhamma Day. This day marks the beginning of the Vassa, the Buddhist lent period that lasts for three months and generally takes place on the first full moon of the 8th lunar month as Buddha was born during a full moon. The significance of this day is shown when you notice that most temples are covered with carvings of deers and wheel as this sermon was held at deer park and the dharma of Buddha is symbolised as a wheel. Buddha said '*I teach one thing and one thing only: suffering and the end of suffering*'. The presentation of this thought in the first sermon is the core of Buddha teachings. It leads to the various philosophies people have learnt from Buddha.

How is Asalha Puja Celebrated?

Like most of the festivals in Thailand, the people start the Asalha Puja by visiting their local 'Wat' (temple) mainly for merit-making ceremonies. The size and number of people attending this ceremony depend upon the size of the temple. It is a simple celebration known as 'wian tian' starting with the chantings of the monks and preaching the first sermon while the followers kneel and bow as instructed. This is also a good time for many young Thai men to enter monkhood.

As the process of the Asahna Bucha continues, during the chanting, the other monks light up the entire temple grounds with large wax candles. The entire sound of chanting experience transports you to a different era and you embrace the teachings of Buddhism. Continuing the ceremony, the monks chant and lead the followers with lit candles, lotus flowers and incense sticks in hand (which the followers present at offerings later) and walk around the pagoda three times in clockwise direction. The final walk of the chanting monks is around a large seated Buddha while the followers remain seated or give offerings to the temple. The different kind of offerings can be Lenten candles, phansa candles which monks use during their retreat. Asahna Bucha day is the one day the people of Thailand make sure they visit the temple.

Asalha Puja (known as Asanha Bucha in Thailand, is a Theravada Buddhist festival which typically takes place in July, on the full moon of the month of Āsāḍha. It is celebrated in Cambodia, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Laos, Myanmar and in countries with Theravada Buddhist populations. Asalha Puja, also known as Dhamma Day, is one of Theravada Buddhism's most important festivals, celebrating as it does the Buddha's first sermon in which he set out to his five former associates the doctrine that had come to him following his enlightenment. This first pivotal sermon, often referred to as “setting into motion the wheel of dammar,” is the teaching which is encapsulated for Buddhists in the four noble truths: there is suffering (dukkha); suffering is caused by craving (tanha); there is a state (nibbana) beyond suffering and craving; and finally, the way to nirvana is via the eightfold path. All the various schools and traditions of Buddhism revolve around the central doctrine of the four noble truths.

This first sermon is not only the first structured discourse given by the Buddha after his enlightenment, it also contains the essence of all his subsequent teaching. At the end of the talk, one of the five participants recounted his understanding of what had been said and asked to be received as a disciple, a request the Buddha granted, thus establishing the first order of monks.

Asalha Bucha Day wan aa-sāan-hà buu-chaa] okmarks the day when the Lord Buddha delivered his first sermon known as “Dhammachakkappavattanasutta” which he preached to five ascetics at Benares in India over 2,500 years ago, as result all of them attained enlightenment and was ordained by the Buddha as the first ever Buddhist monks. Hence, the origin of Buddhist monks, we see wearing orange color saffron.

Like many other Buddhist festivals and holidays, Asahna Bucha (also written as Asalha Puja and other combinations) is a day when Thai Buddhists will make merit and visit the local temple. Traditionally, candles are amongst the items donated to the wat for Asahna Bucha and processions featuring candles are held at various towns in Thailand. The most famous of these events is the Ubon Ratchathani Candle Festival.

It falls on the full moon day of the eighth month of the lunar calendar year, generally in July. Buddhists participate in the ceremonies by performing a variety of Buddhist activities at the temples, mainly merit-making ceremonies. They offer food and alms to monks, give donations, listen to sermons, and observe the Five Precepts or the Eight Precepts. Some practice meditation, some more devout ones also practice renunciation by wearing white robes and staying in the temple for a number of days. They chant prayers, abstain from all kinds of immoral acts, and try to have their mind purified.

This tradition also has links to the Candle Festival, held in cities including Ubon Ratchathani province in Thailand's northeastern Isaan region, where intricate sculptures are moulded from candle wax to form depictions of Buddhist art and scripture. Processions take place in Ubon on Asanha Bucha Day and the connected Khao Phansa holiday, which takes place the following day (in 2016, on 20 July). Khao Phansa marks the start of the three-month Buddhist Lent period, also known as the Buddhist Rain Retreat. The Buddhist Lent marks the period that Buddhists believe the Buddha transcended to heaven and spent time with his mother. The two holidays combined represent a time of spiritual renewal for Buddhists, and for the three-month period of Phansa monks return to their home temple from any spiritually related travel they might have been doing. They remain there – often not even venturing outside of the temple grounds – for the full three months. It is a time for monks to devote themselves to study and meditation.

Phansa is also a popular time for Thai men to ordain as a monk, whether for a period of weeks or longer. In addition, it is common to see boat races organized around this time, including in Bangkok and nearby provinces. These also occur on the occasion of Org Phansa that celebrates the end of the Buddhist Lent period and marks the Buddha's return to earth. As a visitor to Bangkok, you should note that a blanket nationwide ban on alcohol sales comes into force for both days of the Asanha Bucha and Khao Phansa holidays – including supermarkets, convenience stores, and often hotels, restaurants and bars.

In the evening of the Asalha Bucha Day the believers join the Candle Light Procession, the “**Wian Tian**” (เวียนเทียน), where people will walk three times around a Temple in a clockwise direction, carrying a lighted candle, Joss sticks and flowers which will later be given as an offering to pay homage to the Lord Buddha. “Wian” means to circle and “Tian” is a candle. The day after Asahna Bucha is another significant day which marks the start of the three-month ‘Phansa’ period which is referred to as ‘Buddhist Lent’. Asalha Bucha Day is also a public holiday in Thailand. It is illegal to buy and sell alcohol on this day, except in hotels.

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Asalha Puja Day (Asanha Puja, Asarnha Bucha, Dhamma Day) is a Buddhist festival that occurs on the full moon of the eighth lunar month, which is usually in July. The festival pays homage to the Buddha and commemorates the Buddha's first sermon and the founding of the Buddha's Sangha - four noble truths.

Asalha Puja, also known as Asanha Bucha or Dhamma Day, is a Buddhist festival observed on the full moon of the eighth month in lunar calendar. It is one of the most important festival in Theravada Buddhism to commemorate Buddha's first pivotal teaching which is often referred to as "setting into motion the wheel of dhamma". Origin of Asalha Puja After the enlightenment of Buddha on the full moon of Vesakha in Buddhist calendar, Buddha decided to go the Benaras because of the insistence of His friends. After Reaching Benaras, Buddha gave His first teaching to his five former associates concerning the four noble truth – all life is suffering (dukka), origin of suffering is craving (tanha), there is a cessation (nibbana) beyond suffering and craving, the way to cessation is through the eightfold path.

Asalha Puja Celebration in Thailand, Asalha Puja / Asanha Bucha is observed as a public holiday; thus, most businesses, government offices, and banks are closed. People are granted a day off so that they are able to visit temples, give offerings to the monks, and listen to sermons during Asalha Puja Day. Asanha Bucha Day is an annual Theravada Buddhist festival, (sometimes referred to as "Buddha's Birthday"), which takes place during first full moon of the 8th lunar month (Typically July) according to the Thai lunar calendar. The significance of the full moon and Buddhism dates back to the birth of Buddha himself, who was born during a full moon. The event is one of the Kingdoms most important days of the year, celebrating as it does the Buddha's first sermon in which he set out to his five former associates the doctrine that had come to him following his enlightenment. This first pivotal sermon, often referred to as "setting into motion the wheel of dharma," is the teaching which is encapsulated for Buddhists in the four noble truths: there is suffering (dukkha); suffering is caused by craving (tanha); there is a state (nirvana) beyond suffering and craving; and finally, the way to nirvana is via the eightfold path. All the various schools and traditions of Buddhism revolve around the central doctrine of the four noble truths.

Asanha Bucha Day. This first sermon, which is known as 'Setting the Wheel of Dhamma in Motion' was given some 2,500 years ago, at the Deer Park in Sarnath City, located 13 kilometers north-east of Varanasi near the confluence of the Ganges and the Gomati rivers in Uttar Pradesh, India. Asanha Bucha (อสนาบูชา) is the Thai version of Asalha Puja; it takes place during first full moon of the 8th lunar month according to the Thai lunar calendar. The significance of the full moon and Buddhism dates back to the birth of Buddha himself, who was born during a full moon. If you look hard enough you will see the symbols of deer and wheels through-out the Kingdom and more so in its temples and shrines.

Celebrations for the day

As with almost all Buddhist religious festivals in Thailand the day is a time for the Thai people to participate in a variety of Buddhist activities at their local 'Wat' (temple); mainly merit-making ceremonies. It is here they will offer food and alms to monks, give donations, listen to sermons, and observe the Five Precepts or the Eight Precepts. Some practice meditation and may join others in the practice of renunciation, by wearing white robes and staying inside the temple and abstaining from eating meat and drinking alcohol to try to have their mind purified. In the evening of the Asanha Bucha Day the believers join the Candle Light Procession, the "Wian Tian", where people will walk three times around a Temple in a clockwise direction, carrying a lighted candle, Joss sticks and flowers which will later be given as an offering.

After the Buddha had obtained enlightenment, he wanted to pass on his newfound knowledge. He wondered who he should teach. First, he thought of his teachers, but they had already died. Then he thought about the five companions who had been with him during the time he was trying to solve the mysteries of life, birth, and death. He traveled to Sarnath, a town near Varanasi, India, where he had last seen them. Upon finding them, he gave what would be known as his first sermon, which is called the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta. One of the men, Kondanna, understood his teaching so well that he too became enlightened. The five men, along with the Buddha, established the Sangha, or monkhood so that others could receive his teachings and end their Earthly sufferings. Archaeologists believe that the giant Dhameka Stupa currently marking this spot was built on top of an earlier marker by King Ashoka.

Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta

Obviously, I'm not the Buddha, and it's beyond the scope of this blog to impart enlightenment on you. Still, I'd like to touch on the highlights of his teachings, as I understand them, and suggest that if it rings true for you, perhaps you should find a Buddhist Temple and learn more. Maybe you could even travel to

Thailand and spend part of your vacation time living at a Thai temple. There are many temples throughout the country that cater to Westerners and the study programs run from a few days to a lifetime, depending on your level of interest and needs. Many are free.

The Buddha began the sermon to his five former companions by cautioning them that following extreme paths to knowledge either through sensual pleasures or self-mortification and torture to the body as they had practiced before, would not lead to true spiritual development.

He instead told them to follow a “Middle Way” and taught them these Four Noble Truths:

1. Dukkha — Life on Earth is full of suffering
2. Samudaya — Desire is the root of all suffering
3. Nirodha — Extinguishing desire will end suffering
4. Maggie — Following the “Eightfold Path” will extinguish desire and lead to nirvana, a higher plane of existence where there is no suffering.

“By understanding the four truths, one can stop this clinging and craving, attain a pacified mind, and be freed from the endless cycle of rebirth or Samsara. This can be accomplished by following the eightfold path, restraining oneself, cultivating discipline, and practicing mindfulness and meditation.”

The Eightfold Path

I’m going to quote from the excellent <http://www.buddhanet.net/e-learning> website here since they have done such a beautiful job of explaining it:

The Noble Eightfold Path has eight parts or factors:

1. Right understanding means to know and understand the Four Noble Truths.
2. Right attitude means to have three kinds of thoughts or attitudes:
 - (i) Thoughts of renunciation or an attitude of “letting go”.
 - (ii) Thoughts of goodwill to others, which are opposed to ill will.
 - (iii) Thoughts of harmlessness, as opposed to cruelty.
3. Right speech deals with refraining from falsehood, such as telling lies or not telling the truth; tale-bearing or saying bad things about other people; harsh words and frivolous talk such as gossiping.
4. Right action deals with refraining from killing, stealing and sexual misconduct.
5. Right livelihood deals with the five kinds of trade which should be avoided in order to lead a noble life. They are: trading in arms (weapons), living beings (breeding animals for slaughter), intoxicating drinks and poison.
6. Right effort has four parts using meditation:
 - (i) To try to stop unwholesome thoughts that have arisen
 - (ii) To prevent unwholesome thoughts from arising.
 - (iii) To try to develop good thoughts
 - (iv) To try to maintain good thoughts that have arisen
7. Right mindfulness is also fourfold. It is mindfulness of the body, mindfulness of feelings/sensations, mindfulness of thoughts passing through the mind and mindfulness of Dharma.
8. Right concentration is one-pointedness of mind as developed in meditation.

These eight factors can be grouped into three smaller groups, as follows:

Sila (morality)

right speech, right action, right livelihood.

Samadhi (concentrated mind in meditation)

right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration.

Panna (wisdom)

right attitude, right understanding.

These three — morality, concentration, and wisdom — are the three stages on the path to mental purity whose object is nirvana. These stages are described in a beautiful verse:

To cease from evil,

To do what is good

To cleanse one’s mind:

This is the advice of all the Buddhas.

Celebrating Asahna Bucha Day

Asahna Bucha is observed at Buddhist temples all over the world. In Thailand, worshipers often return to their hometown or join events at their local temple. During the day, Buddhists will donate offerings to the

temple and listen to monks give sermons and chant mantras. In the evening, usually around 8 PM, they will walk in procession around the main shrine of the temple three times, carrying a lighted candle, a stick of incense, and a lotus flower. If you are near a temple in the evening, I encourage you to observe or even participate for a memorable experience.

Conclusion

Asalha Bucha Day marks the day when the Lord Buddha delivered his first sermon known as “Dhammachakkapavattanasutta” which he preached to five ascetics at Benares in India over 2,500 years ago, as result all of them attained enlightenment and was ordained by the Buddha as the first ever Buddhist monks. Hence, the origin of Buddhist monks, we see wearing orange color saffron. This Buddhist festival, which takes place on the full moon day of the eighth lunar month, celebrates the day when the Buddha held his first sermon after his enlightenment to his first five disciples. Asanha Bucha Day is a public holiday in Thailand marking the day when the Lord Buddha delivered his first sermon at Benares in India over 2,500 years ago. The exact date of the holiday is determined by the waxing moon and the lunar months, but is usually held in July or August. This year it falls on July 16. The Buddha preached his first sermon at a deer park and from this sermon the Dharma (doctrine) of the Buddha was symbolised as a wheel. The Dharmachakra is also known as the Wheel of Life, Wheel of Law or Wheel of Doctrine and can be seen on flags in temples and buildings all across Thailand. Similarly, pictures or models of deer can often be seen at temples or in depictions of the Buddha. Asanha Bucha Day is a public holiday in Thailand marking the day when the Lord Buddha delivered his first sermon at Benares in India over 2,500 years ago. The exact date of the holiday is determined by the waxing moon and the lunar months, but is usually held in July or August. This year it falls on July 16.

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Like many other Buddhist festivals and holidays, Asanha Bucha (also written as Asalha Puja and other English equivalents) is a day when Thai Buddhists will make merit and visit the local wat. Traditionally, candles are amongst the items donated to the wat for Asanha Bucha and processions featuring candles are held at various towns in Thailand. The tradition dates back to the times before electricity where extra light was needed at the temple during the darker days of the rainy season. Local people will also ‘wian tian’ which involves walking around the wat with a lit candle, lotus flowers and incense. The day after Asanha Bucha is another significant day with Wan Khao Phansa marking the start of the three-month ‘Phansa’ period which is sometimes referred to as ‘Buddhist Lent’.

After The Lord Buddha enlighten on the full moon day of the sixth lunar month (Visakha), he spent seven weeks near by the Bodhi Tree. Afterward, he decided to teach the Dhamma to the others, even though there were difficulties for ordinary people to understand. His former teachers were dead, the next group of people he thought of were five ascetics called “Pancavaggi”, group of five, who, at that time, lived in a forest named “Isipattanamarukatayawan”, the deer park near Baranasi. On the day before the full moon day of the eighth lunar month, Asalha, there he was. The next day, the full moon day, The Lord Buddha gave them his FIRST SERMON called “Dhamma-cakkapavattana Sutta” or the Discourse on Setting the Wheel of Dhamma in Motion. Not long after that, the head of the Five Ascetics, named “Kondanna” got “The Eye of Dhamma” and asked for ordination from The Lord Buddha. He became the FIRST MONK in Buddhism. The full moon day of the eighth lunar month became the day that honored the Sangha, or the community of the monks. This holiday is one of the three most important holidays in the Buddhist religion, of which Buddha, a man who lived over 2,500 years ago, is the figurehead. Buddha is/was not a God, but a mortal human. Through his search for the meaning of life, he reached Enlightenment and then shared his teachings, which today is known as Buddhism. The three most important days in Buddhism honor 1) the day Buddha was born, 2) the day of Buddha’s enlightenment, and 3) the day of Buddha’s first sermon. Asalha Puja day honors this third day. Buddha’s first sermon is extremely important to recognize and reflect on for Buddhists, as it was this teaching that introduced the Four Noble Truths, which teach how to achieve Enlightenment. They teach that in life, 1) there is suffering (dukkha); and 2) that this suffering is caused by craving (tanha). 3) There is a state (nirvana) beyond suffering and craving; and 4) the way to nirvana is via the “Eightfold Path.” As all of the teachings of Buddhism essentially revolve around the knowledge and belief in the four noble truths, Buddha’s first sermon was vital in

establishing the ideology of Buddhism. On a more practical matter, this was also when Buddha ordained the very first monk, institutionalizing Buddhism as a religion.

What Happens on Asalha Day in Thailand? How is it Celebrated?

Unlike many holidays in Western cultures, this important Buddhist holiday is not “celebrated,” so to speak. It is strictly for religious practice and is not at all commercialized. Those who are not Buddhist may consider this holiday just as any other day of the year, with the exceptions of not having to go to work, and the fact that most businesses will not sell alcohol. Those who are religious will go to the store first thing in the morning and purchase food and everyday useful items to give to the monks. The monks will then receive the gifts during an alms ceremony. The gifts on this day are often of greater quantities or higher quality than other days of the year. Later in the day, practicing Buddhists will go to temple and will walk around the temple carrying long and thin candles, incense and flowers while quietly reciting traditional chants. It is a beautiful ceremony that is interesting to watch, but if you do visit a temple on this day remember to be very quiet, dress very respectfully (shoulders and knees must be covered) and remain in the background so as to not disturb anyone’s religious rituals.

Asalha Puja Day, one of the most sacred days in Buddhism, is observed on the 15th Day of the Waxing Moon in the Eight Lunar Month to commemorate the day on which Lord Buddha delivered his first Sermon, or Dhammachakkapavattanasutr, before the first five disciples in Buddhism. The day also marks the beginning of the worship of the Triple Gem, namely: the Lord Buddha, His Teachings and His Disciples. In his First Sermon, Lord Buddha taught the Middle Way or, Majjimapatipada, and how to reach Nirvana, and as a result one of the five ascetics who was named Kondanya, attained enlightenment. In recognition Thailand was the first Buddhist country to recognise the importance of the day, as a sacred and national holiday.

Historical Background

When Lord Buddha attained enlightenment on the Fullmoon Day of the 6th Lunar Month, he remained near the Bodhi Tree, where he had attained enlightenment, for seven weeks. During that time, he was thinking whether he should teach what he had discovered in his meditation, and who would be the right persons to receive his teaching. He immediately thought of his former teachers, Alaradabos and Uttakadabos, who had reached a high level of absorption, or Chana, and he regretted that both of them had already passed away. He then thought of the five ascetics, or Panjavaggi, with whom he had practised penance for many years: Kondanya, Vappa, Bhattiya, Mahanama, and Assaji. Lord Buddha reckoned that they were ascetics and of good innate character and able to absorb his doctrine. Therefore, Lord Buddha left Gaya, his place of enlightenment at Uruvelasenani Gom, for the Deer Park near Benares. On the Fullmoon Day of the Eighth Month (one day before Buddhist Lent), Lord Buddha expounded his first sermon, commonly known as the Great Discourse on the End of the Ultimate, to his five disciples at the Isipatanamaruegatayavan forest. In this first sermon, Lord Buddha taught the Middle Way which means that an ordained person should not practise extreme self-indulgence on the one hand (Kamasukkahallikanuyoga) or extreme self-mortification (Attakilamathanuyok) on the other. He told his disciples that by following the Middle Way (Majjimapatipada) the person who practised this way could reach Nirvana, the enlightened state. Lord Buddha explained his theory of the Four Noble Truths, or Ariyasajja namely that there was Suffering (Dukkha), there were causes of Suffering (Samudaya), how the Suffering could be extinguished (Nirodha), and the path leading to cessation of Suffering (Nirvana).

The Eightfold Path or Magga could lead to the cessation of suffering, which Lord Buddha described as follows: Right View or Right Understanding (Sammaditthi), Right Thought (Samma Sangkappa), Right Speech (Samma Vajja), Right Action (Samma Kamanta), Right Livelihood (Samma Ajeeva), Right Effort (Samma Vayama), Right Mindfulness (Samma Sati), and Right Concentration (Samma Samadhi). At the end of this sermon (Phradhammadesana), Kondanya gained insight into the real nature of things (or Dharma) and Lord Buddha acknowledged his new state of enlightenment by saying “Kondanya knows!” Kondanya then requested to become Lord Buddha’s disciple and the Lord Buddha ordained him by saying “Ehibhikkhu-Upasampada”, bringing into existence the Third Gem.

Suggestions of Activities on Asalha Puja Day

Activities in the family

1. Cleaning the house, hoisting the flag, and setting up an altar for religious ceremonies.
2. Conversing about the Dharma, and discussing important principles, such as the middle way.

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3. Family members discuss problems in the family by taking the middleway as a guiding principle to abstain from sin, and reduce the path to ruin.
 4. Taking the family to make merit, giving alms to the monks, and praying.
 5. Practising the Dharma in the temple, observing the precepts praying to the triple gem, listening to sermons, joining a candle procession around the temple.
 6. Any other suitable activities.

Activities in educational institutions:

1. Cleaning the area of the school, hoisting national and religious flags, setting up an altar.
2. Teachers and students mount exhibitions, prepare posters or picture notebooks on the religious holiday.
3. Teachers help students in organising essay contests and Dharma Quiz programs, so that they have an opportunity to describe the importance of the day and explain the Dharma.
4. Honouring the students whose conduct is outstanding to serve as good examples on this occasion.
5. The teachers lead the students to participate in community activities, such as going to the temple, offering alms to the monks, observing the precepts, listening to the Dharma, discussion about the Dharma and meditation.
6. Performing other suitable activities.

Activities in offices and companies:

1. Cleaning the area, decorating the office with the national and religious flags, and setting up an altar.
2. Giving information about the importance of the day, including the important principles and practice in the company.
3. Inviting monks to lecture on the Dharma.
4. Participation in activities for the public good.
5. The top executive of the company gives his colleagues and subordinates an opportunity to make merit on that day.
6. Setting up posters to inform everyone of the common goal to abstain from evil deeds on that day.
7. Performing any other suitable activities.

Activities in the society

1. Temples, social councils, foundations, organisations and mass media can spread information about the importance of the day.
2. Spreading information about the day and the Dharma in rural areas or public places, such as airports, railway stations, bus terminals, preaching halls, trade centres.
3. Persuading the people to participate in activities to practise the Dharma and Buddhist rites, giving alms to the monks, listening to the preaching, observing the precepts, and praying.
4. Campaign in the mass media to reduce, abstain from or quit harmful ways and stop taking intoxicants.
5. Announcing names to honour institutions or persons who have acted for to the benefit of the society.
6. Campaigns to preserve the environment, growing trees and cleaning public areas.
7. Dharma recitations, speech contests, mottoes, poetry as well as essay competition on Asalha Puja Day.
8. Any other suitable activities.

Expected Results

1. Buddhists will understand the importance of Asalha Puja Day, and the principles of Dharma and Pavarana and the way to practise them.
2. Buddhists get a good preparation for Buddhist Lent to consider the value of the way of life along with the principles of Dharma and Pavarana.
3. Buddhists can practise their faith and get a good understanding on the importance of Buddhism.
4. Buddhists can be good religious people who understand the duties of the Buddhists in a right way.

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