

The Kathina Ceremony

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Kathina Chīwara Pūjā ceremony.

According to Buddhist history, the Kathina ceremony has been celebrated for centuries and originated in India. The Kathina or Wassāna ceremony is celebrated worldwide as an essential observance per the Vinaya rules. It usually commences in July or Esala (ǣsələ) Full Moon Pōya Day every year after observing the Was or rainy season retreat by adult Buddhist monks in Buddhist countries. After ending the Wassāna retreat in Vap or October Pōya Day, it begins the Kathina ceremony month or Chīwara offering month (robe offering). When this Chīwara month begins, the devotees of temples organize this ceremony with relatives, friends, and other devotees of the area. But there is a special person to lead this ceremony who has invited the monks to observe the Wassāna retreat on behalf of all devotees of the

temple. He would be the designated individual responsible for offering the special robe to monks, which would be brought in a colorful procession from his home to the temple. When they organize this procession, it features dancing, colorful lights, and flower trees with vibrant bulbs. When they arrive at the temple, they need to follow Vinaya rules for their religious activities, unlike other ceremonies. At this Kathina Chīwara Pūjā ceremony, the senior monk asks devotees, “What do you plan to do this early morning?” During this occasion, the chief devotee says, “Permit me, Bhante. We have arranged a special robe for the monks, as you have concluded the Wassāna retreat this year. Please accept this robe from me on behalf of all temple devotees. Thank you.” Typically, this ceremony is called ‘Kathina Pūjā’, which is a significant religious service among other Pūjās. There are many reasons, including time, occasions, and rarity. One can be held only at one temple, and only one robe can be offered as a Kathina Chīwara or robe.

The other thing is that a monk should consistently observe the Wassāna retreat (rainy season retreat) at a temple without interruption. Though it is a religious festival, there are many discipline rules to follow during this ceremony, as well as at the beginning of the rainy retreat. Thus, ‘Kathina Pūjā’ is a significant and virtuous observance. In an ancient Dharma book, ‘The Merit of Kathina Pūjā,’ it states that the merit of this ceremony is as unshakeable as Mahāmeru mountain and as solid as the Earth. It is mentioned that by offering a Kathina Pūjā, the devotees gain great fortune in this world, such as long life (Āyusha), beauty (Warna), comport (Sepa), power (Bala), and wisdom (Pragñā).

According to Dharma texts, if an individual has bad Karma from this life or a previous life, all Karma will be inactivated. Another important aspect of Kathina Pūjā is the avoidance of entering undesirable realms, such as hell or animal existence after this life. Instead, in the next life, they would receive many fortunes and resources. Among them, the most significant is the ‘Sakvithi Kingdom,’ the only Great King who ruled the entire world during a certain period. Besides that, if they could not get the Sakvithi Kingdom, they could receive even divine resources and can live many luxurious lives in heavens like Chāthurmahārājika, Yāmaya, Thusithya, Nimmānarathi, Thāvatisa, and Paranimmita Wasawatti for many years. Some Sūtras explain that certain beings live for millions of years in those heavens. In the heavens, beings can attain a higher rank, such as Brahma or Shakra (the King of all heavens), by practicing Vipassanā Meditation (insight meditation).

The Sathipatthāna Sūtra explains that if any God practices meditation in heaven, he could gain the highest stage of the soul or Nirvana. But some Gods who are doing nothing in heavens come back to the human world to accumulate merits and go back to heaven again, and they continue their lives in this dangerous Sansāra. Furthermore, it is explained that if an individual offers donations for hundreds of years, a single Kathina Pūjā is worth more than those donations, and they are entitled to good health, free from common illnesses, and to longevity in this world as well as the next life. No individual can kill or be harmed by an insect, or they will not be affected by any poison. And a person like that has a calm mind. Last but not least, they lead a happy life and better well-being than other individuals.

Kathina Pūjā is regarded as a noble religious activity within Theravāda Buddhist culture. Some texts suggest that the 'Kathina Offering' is the most significant of all Pūjās and rituals, which is why many people aspire to fulfill at least one 'Kathina' in their lifetime. The origins of the Kathina Pūjā date back to the time of the Buddha. According to the legend, thirty Bhikkhus from Pāvā were traveling to Jēthwanārāmaya in Sāvatti, India, where the Buddha was residing during the Vassa (rainy) season. However, due to the ongoing rainy season, they encountered heavy rain on their journey.

In the heavy rain, the monks arrived at Jēthwanārāmaya wearing soaked robes. When the Buddha inquired about it, they replied that they had gotten caught in the rain on the way to Jēthwanārāmaya. After discussing the incident, the Buddha allowed all monks to have an extra robe to use. Accordingly, the monks can use an extra robe, in addition to the Kathina robe, after the Kathina ceremony. In the Kathina ceremony, this robe is generally offered to all monks from the three periods: past, present, and future time. Later, all participating monks will transfer ownership of this robe to a suitable one monk. Another standout feature of this Kathina Pūjā is that it is offered twice.

Psychology suggests that positive thoughts enhance brain function, promoting mental and physical health and overall well-being. Positive thoughts boost hormones like dopamine and serotonin, reduce mental stress, and help maintain calmness of mind and pleasure. In Buddhism, this concept is referred to as 'KUSALA' or merit, which brings happiness, good health, and well-being, and finally, Nibbāna to the individual. Therefore, most devotees in Buddhist countries prefer to participate in Kathina Pūjā. It is important to accumulate merit because, to develop

a positive mental state, one needs both good health and merit. So, why do human beings hesitate when it comes to acknowledging merit? Why not make it a habit to always practice good things for yourself and society?

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