The Wassāna Ceremony

Posted on



Seeking blessings before offering the saffron robe during the Kathina Cheewara Pūjā’.

The Wassān˙ a ceremony marks the end of Wassān˙ a season, which extends for about three months in India. In ancient India, about twenty-six centuries ago, when the Lord Buddha was alive, Wassān˙ a Ceremony originated. It usually commences in July, or on Esala (æsələ) Full Moon Pōya Day, but from time to time, it changes according to the climatic changes in countries. Unusually, this year, there were two Pōya days in August as Esala Full Moon Pōya Day and Nikini Full Moon Pōya Day, as there was another Esala Full Moon Pōya Day in July as Adhi Esala Full Moon Pōya Day. According to the astrological calculations, they have decided it is an extra Pōya Day or Adhi (Λdi) Esala Pōya Day. However, Wassāna (v^ssān^) retreat usually starts on Esala Full Moon Pōya Day and ends on Vap Full Moon Pōya Day, that is in October. From Vap Pōya day to Ill Full Moon Pōya day would be the 'Cheewara' (/tʃivərə/) or robe offering month.

When this Cheewara month dawns, the devotees of temples organize the Wassāna ceremony with relatives, friends, and other devotees. Because this ceremony is fulfilled with the help of others, it is not like a private religious ritual in a home. But a particular person to lead this ceremony invites the monks to observe the Wassāna retreat on behalf of all temple devotees. He would be responsible for offering this special Robe to monks, which is brought in a colorful procession from his home to the temple. The procession is organized with dancing, lights, and flower trees with vivid bulbs. Upon reaching the temple, is the robe-presenting ritual or the devotees' presentation of robes to the monks. Here, the chief priest, the senior priest at the occasion, asks them, "What will you do on this occasion?" Then the chief dāyakạ or devotee who leads this ceremony will answer, "Awasarai Bhante (permit me, priest), we are going to offer a special robe for all monks as you have ended the Wassān˙a retreat in the Wassān˙a season this year.

Please accept this robe from me on behalf of all the Dāyakās of the temple." Usually this ceremony is called 'Kathina Cheewara Pūjā' as it is a very powerful religious service among other Pūjās. For this, there are a few reasons. One is that it's held at a temple once a year, and only one robe can be offered as a Kathina Cheewara. The other thing is that a monk should observe Wassāna retreat at one temple continuously. Though it is a religious festival, there are many Vinaya Karma, or discipline rules, to be performed.

Therefore, 'Kathina' puja is a powerful and meritorious religious observance. It is mentioned in ancient Dharma books that the merit of Katina puja is as strong as the unshakeable Mahāmēru mountain and as hard as the earth. As a result of observing katina puja, the devotees who do it would gain a big fortune in this world, like

‘āyusha-long life, warṇạ-beauty, sepa-comport, bala-power, and pragñā-wisdom.

> Most devotees in Buddhist countries prefer to participate in Kathina Pūja. It is essential to accumulate merit because if one wants to develop a mental state, one needs good health and merit.

Not only that, it is said that if an individual has bad karma in this world or from previous lives, all those will be inactivated. The significant thing in this Kathina puja is preventing going to bad worlds like hell or animal worlds after this life. Instead, they would receive so many fortunes and resources in the next life. Among them, the huge one is the ‘Sakvithi kingdom’, or to be the only great king of all kings in this world. And usually, they could receive even divine resources and can live many years in different heavens, like Chāthurmahājājikạ, Yāmayā, Thusithayạ, Nirmānaratiyạ Thāwatinsayạ, and Paranirmita Wasawarthi. Some Sūtras explain that they live millions of years in those heavens without expiration.

Meanwhile, living in those heavens, if they want, they can reach a higher rank like Brahma or Shakra (king of all the heavens) by doing Vipassana meditation (insight meditation). The Sathipatthāna Sūtra explains that if any gods practice meditation in heaven, they could reach the highest stage of the soul or Nibbāna. But some gods who are doing nothing in heaven return to the human world, and after accumulating merits, they return to heaven again. It would be funny if they could do it continuously without going to hell or to an animal world.

Furthermore, it is explained that if one gives Dāna (arms giving) for a hundred years, the Katina Pooja is more active than Dana; they can maintain good health without common illnesses and live long in this world and the next. No one or any insect can harm or kill them. They will not be affected by poison. And their minds are tranquil. They lead happier lives and better well-being than others. It is said, therefore, that it is a very rare religious service because of its powerfulness, and most people are keen to fulfil it. What’s more? In a nutshell, it has been mentioned that the ‘Kathina Pūja’ is the king of all pūjas and rituals and the noblest religious activity in the whole Buddhist world.

Anyhow, the origin of the Kathina Pūja legend goes back to Lord Buddha’s period. Once, thirty Bhikkhū from Pāweyya˚ state were journeying to Jēthwanārāmaya in Sāwatthi in India, where The Buddha was sojourning in the Vas period. Since it was

the rainy season, they got caught in heavy rain on their way, as the rainy season was not over. In the heavy rain, those monks came to Jēthavanārāmaya in wet robes. When the Buddha inquired about it, they said they had gotten caught in the rain on the way to Jēthwanārāmaya. After discussing the incident, the Buddha permitted them an extra robe for daily use. And Buddha permitted them to use the robes in the temples. Another extra robe was offered at the Kathina ceremony day, named 'Wassāwāsika Cheewaraya.'

After that, this special robe is offered as a 'Kathina Robe' to monks in common for the first time. As all monks cannot use it, this robe was provided to a suitable monk at the ceremony by all monks for the second time. As it is being offered twice at the same ceremony, it would be another remarkable incident in the Kathina ceremony.

On the other hand, the monk who will receive the Kathina robe is also entitled to get some results in the Kathina Pūja. This monk can receive many robes if anyone offers them to him. Secondly, he can go out of the temple without permission from other senior monks. Thirdly, he can sleep without other secondary robes near him. Fourthly, he is entitled to accept Dāna (food) without any other monks; fifth, he is free to use robes without giving any vows.

According to psychology, all good thoughts stimulate brain function to be mentally and physically in good health and well-being. Because good thoughts produce good hormones like dopamine and serotonin, they reduce mental stresses, and not only that, they keep the mindset calm. It plays a role in how we feel pleasure as well.

In Buddhism, it's described as KUSALA, or merit, by which it makes a person happy, healthy, and well-being, and as a final goal, attain Nibbāna. Accordingly, most devotees in Buddhist countries prefer to participate in Kathina Pūja. It is essential to accumulate merit because if one wants to develop a mental state, one needs good health and merit. If it is so, then why do human beings delay the merit? Just start today with you and do good things for you and society.

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