

Wassāna or Kathina Ceremony

Posted on



The Wassāna season, also known as the Rain Retreat, has a historical origin dating back about six centuries in India. Traditionally, it spans a period of three months, typically beginning in July or the Esala month, with variations based on the climate in different regions. According to the Buddhist calendar, the Wassāna season starts on the Esala Full Moon Pōya Day and concludes on the Vap Full Moon Pōya Day in October.

Wassāna or Kathina Ceremony will be held from Vap Pōya Day to Ill Full Moon Pōya Day. Another significance related to the Vap Pōya Day was Gautama Buddha's preaching of the Abhidhamma to Dēvas or Gods in Thawthisā heaven. Another coincidence to the poya day was the arrival of Arahant Sañghamittā Bhikkhuni with The Jaya Sri Mahabōdhi during the period of Dharmāshōka. During the period from Vap Pōya Day to Ill Full Moon Pōya Day, known as the 'Cheewara month', devotees have the opportunity to offer a Kathina robe. The

devotees of temples come together to organize the Wassāna ceremony, a collective fulfillment involving relatives, friends, and other devotees in the temple and the village. The individual who invited the monks to observe the Wassāna retreat on behalf of all devotees of the temple plays a special role in leading this ceremony. This person is responsible for offering the special robe to the monks, which is brought in a colorful procession from his home to the temple.

Upon arrival at the temple, a lively procession, adorned with colorful lights, dancing, and floral embellishments, was warmly welcomed by the chief priest, who inquired about their purpose for attending in observance of the ancient Kathina ceremony tradition. The chief devotee respectfully made a request, stating, “Awasarai Bhante (permit me, Venerable sir), we are presenting a special robe as the Kathina robe. Please accept it on behalf of all the temple’s devotees.” Subsequently, the Kathina Pūja ceremony commenced as per the devotee’s request.

According to the Kathina Ānisaṇṣa (results of the Pūja), the ‘Kathina robe Pūja’ is a significant religious ritual for several reasons. Firstly, it is held at a temple once a year, and only one robe can be offered in the name of the ‘Kathina robe.’ Additionally, a monk is required to continuously observe the “Rain Retreat” at a temple without breaking the observance. Despite being a religious service, there are numerous ‘Vinaya Karma’ discipline rules that must be performed and adhered to.

The observance of Kathina Pūja is considered a highly meritorious activity and is often referred to as the ‘King’ of all religious activities in ancient Dharma literature. It is believed that the merit acquired from participating in Kathina Pūja is as formidable as the unshakeable Mahāmēru mountain and as enduring as the Earth. Those who partake in this observance are said to gain significant blessings in this world, such as longevity (Āyusha), beauty (Wana.), comfort (Sepa), strength (Bala), and wisdom (Pragñā.).

It is believed that during the Kathina Puja, any negative karma from the present or past lives will be neutralized or eliminated, thus preventing an individual from being reborn in unfavorable realms such as hell or as an animal. Instead, the individual would be destined to receive abundant blessings and opportunities in their future lives. The most esteemed of these opportunities is the ‘Sakvithi Kingdom,’ the highest realm of worldly sovereignty.

They may also receive divine resources and live for many years in various heavenly realms like Chāthurmahārājika, Yāma, Thusitha, Nimmānarathi, Thawthisā, Paranimmita Wasawatti. Some Sūtras explain that they live millions of years in those heavens, without facing expiration. The Sathipathāna Sūtra elaborates on how Gods who practice meditation

in heaven could attain the highest stage of Soul or Nibbāna. However, it is noted that inactive Gods must return to the human realm to accumulate merit before being able to return to the heavenly realms.

Furthermore, it is explained that the observance of a Katina Pūja is considered a more meritorious act than giving Dāna (alms giving) for a hundred years. It is believed that those who observe this ritual can maintain good health, remain free from common illnesses, and enjoy long lives in this world and the next. They are said to be impervious to harm or killing by any being or insect, and immune to the effects of poison, with tranquil minds. It is believed that they experience greater happiness and well-being than others. Due to its rarity and spiritual potency, many individuals are eager to participate in this observance.

During the Kathina ceremony, a unique and significant event occurs when the robe is offered twice. Firstly, devotees present the robe to all monks, and subsequently, the monks offer it to one monk, as it cannot be utilized by all monks, all within the same ceremony.

The monks receiving the Kathina robe are entitled to some results. The monks can receive multiple robes offered to them. Additionally, they are permitted to travel without seeking permission from other senior members of the temple. Furthermore, they have the right to sleep without the presence of other secondary robes nearby. Moreover, they are entitled to accept Dāna (food) without the requirement of other monks, and they are also free to use robes without making any vows. In Buddhism, these blessings, known as KUSALA or merit, are believed to lead to happiness, good health, and overall well-being. This raises the question: why do individuals postpone the accumulation of merit?

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Ven Diypattugama Revatha Thero

(B.A., M.A., M.Phil.)

Expert Psychological Counselor and

Meditation Instructor

Siriwardhanarama Buddha Dhamma College

Manoḍaya Meditation Center

Siriwardhanaramaya, Temple Lane, Kollupitiya

sirirevathad@gmail.com

dhammavedi.com



Before offering the saffron robe during the Kathina Cheewara Pūjā, it is customary to seek

blessings.



Ven Diyapattugama Revatha Thero, Chief Incumbent of the Siriwardhanaramaya Temple, Kollupitiya.