

Māgha Pūjā Day Special Report
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by
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Today, we are celebrating the Magha Puja day nationwide. Of course, for many the Magha Puja Day is just another religious festival of the year. Moreover, for many youth they may know and enjoy the Valentine's Day more than the local Magha Puja day which happens to fall on the same month of February.

Māgha Pūjā Day is the second most important Buddhist festival, celebrated on the full moon day of the third lunar month in Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, Sri Lanka and Myanmar. It celebrates a gathering that was held between the Buddha and 1,250 of his first disciples, which, according to tradition, preceded the custom of periodic recitation of discipline by monks. On the day, Buddhists celebrate the creation of an ideal and exemplary community, which is why it is sometimes called Saṅgha Day, the Saṅgha referring to the Buddhist community, and for some Buddhist schools this is specifically the monastic community. In Thailand, the Pāli term Māgha-pūraṇamī is also used for the celebration, meaning 'to honor on the full moon of the third lunar month'. Finally, some also referred to the day as the Buddhist All Saints Day.

In pre-modern times, Māgha Pūjā has been celebrated by some Southeast Asian communities. But it became widely popular in the modern period, when it was instituted in Thailand by King Rama IV in the mid-19th century. From Thailand, it spread to other South and Southeast Asian countries. Presently, it is a public holiday in some of these countries. It is an occasion when Buddhists go to the temple to perform merit-making activities, such as alms giving, meditation and listening to teachings. It has been proposed in Thailand as a more spiritual alternative to the celebration of Valentine's Day.

The Sangha Day becomes one of the most important Buddhist festivals. It is a celebration in honour of the Sangha, or the Buddhist community. For some Buddhists Sangha refers only to monks and nuns. In fact, sangha in general also means community. It is a chance for people to reaffirm their commitment to Buddhist practices and traditions.

The Māgha Pūjā ceremony is performed to emphasize the summary of the Dhamma. It was the day when the Buddha constituted the Main Code of his instructions which is universally regarded as the heart of Buddhist Teachings.

The Sakyamuni Buddha, the founder of Buddhism is the Disruptive Leader of the time because his teachings are truly disruptive and revolutionary in its brilliance, belief and behaviour.

Mankind has always been professed in the mysterious power of gods and spirits including some kinds of external power as the controller of human life and society. This makes people dependent to God or gods. We are endlessly engaged ourselves in pleasing and sacrificing those invisible beings and powers. Although no one knows whether human's acts of pleasing really please the invisible beings or not we still continue to please those powers regardless of its efficiency and exception. With such brilliance, human are living under the shadow of fear of

invisible and unknowing power and not feel independent at all. Responding to such popular idea, the Buddha totally disrupted the human's brilliance by instructing us to abandon it totally. He described that it is the karma which operates human life and society. Karma is our own action without any influence of mystical or external power. Karma is the process of cause and effect. In other words, it is our consciousness what Buddha actually called karma. Therefore, we should understand our true 'self' and as a result we can be in charge of our own belief and behaviour that will lead to happiness of each individual and the whole world. This is the first disruption on human brilliance introduced by the Buddha on the Māgha Pūjā Day.

Secondly, mankind has always been believed in many things without proper investigation and scrutiny. To this respond, the Buddha pointed out that any belief based upon mere traditions or hearsay, the authority of religious texts, or even based upon the consideration: 'This is our Teacher' might be right or wrong. We should, therefore, fully scrutinize everything with the wisdom before we believe in it. There is no reason for us to jump to conclusion without proper investigation and rationalization. Therefore, the Buddha prompted us to develop wisdom efficiently and be confident in power of wisdom rather than flimsy logic. Mankind has always been believed in something based upon their emotion rather than basing their judgement on wisdom. To a certain extent, the Buddha even told us to be cautious with mere rationality as it also needs to be scrutinized with wisdom. This is the second disruption and revolution on human belief system introduced by the Buddha on the Māgha Pūjā Day. He disrupted belief with awakening.

Finally, the Buddha condemned people's behaviour for treating others unequally based on castes, ethnicity, and gender. He pointed out that one does not become a high or low by birth but by living well with virtue and behaviour. It is like saying in our society a true gentleman is not born into a particular family but someone who behaves properly. The Buddha also condemned the idea and belief that one gets merits and happiness by harming other's life either of human or animal in the name of sacrifice and ritual. He pointed out that such behaviour is not true and irrational. He questioned how things instigated by suffering of others will bring happiness? How things instigated with destruction can bring the result of peace and calming? The Buddha, therefore, advised us to behave properly towards others, not to harm both others and self and to generate loving-kindness by understanding life as it truly is. This is third disruption or revolution on human behaviour introduced by the Buddha on the Māgha Pūjā Day.

Therefore, the Māgha Pūjā Day is the day when the Buddha announced these very principles of Buddhism which disrupted the brilliance, belief, and behaviour of mankind. This drastically disrupted the human life from depending on black shadow of brilliance, belief and behaviour to the independent and bright brilliance, belief and behaviour.

May we all develop in the teachings of the 3 Bs of Buddhism i.e. in brilliance, belief, and behaviour which was imparted by the Buddha himself on the Magha Puja Day just like today.