

## Vassūpanāyikā Day

Special Report on Radio Thailand

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Today, Wan Khao Phansa, marks the beginning of the three months rainy-season time when all Buddhist monks do not travel about but remain confined to one area or Wat. In Buddhist calendar, it is known as Vassupaniyika Day.

The rains-retreat begins, coincidentally, on the day after Asalha Puja. Although not related to the day itself, Asalha Puja lands on a day that marks the beginning of the rainy season in many tropical countries. The rainy season is significant in Buddhism because it is the period of the vassa or phansa, or rains retreat, for monastics.

In the time of the Buddha, the story says: monastics who made journeys during the rainy season would inadvertently cause harm to crops and vegetation or accidentally step on insects revealed by the rain as they travelled. This caused the Buddha to make a rule that monastics limit travel and not stay overnight at a place other than their declared location for the season, with reasonable exceptions of course. This overturned original Buddha's allowance for monks to travel throughout the year for the benefit and happiness of many.

The phansa also serves as a period where monastics are able to focus more on Buddhist practice, since they have more time for solitude and meditation during this time period.

Not monastic alone, even among the lay people, many take this opportunity to join the spirit of the practice and to endeavor to use the time to meditate more or study more, or be more loving and caring to others, or adhere to the moral precepts more strictly. For example, Thai community runs a campaign of 'Ngod Lao Khao Phansa' or 'No alcohol throughout rainy-season time.'

The Khao Phansa marks 3 special months for Buddhists. Therefore, we should think to use the time most effectively for our own purification. This means to endeavor to be diligent in the practice of Sīla, Samādhi and Paññā. Sila means purity of life. This means ordinarily that we don't do anything we know to be wrong. Everyone knows from the teachings of parents, school, society and religion what is personally and socially right and wrong. We should follow what we know. Ultimately, sila means a state of purity or consciousness, mind, body and behaviour free from stress, tension and all negativity and suffering. To put it simply sila is to maintain human sanity.

Samadhi means transcendence, the absolute unity of pure consciousness. Ordinarily, we mean the daily setting aside of a few minutes of time for meditation practice. Letting the mind and heart be free from daily responsibilities and activities. Everyday allows profound physical and mental rest. Deep physical rest gives rise to release of tension and good health. Deep mental rest gives rise to inner peace and mental clarity. Afterwards we approach our daily duties with fresh creativity, energy, cheerfulness and a clearer intelligence. Daily duties, whatever they be, become benefits to ourselves and society when based on an inwardly alert and restful mind. Ultimate pure Samadhi is the transcendence of all thought and action to a state of absolute silence and perfect repose of the absolute unity of the unchanging pure consciousness that is awakening. To put it simply, samadhi

is to boost level of spirituality within self and cultivate a mental immunization from mental disturbances.

Paññā means wisdom. Ordinarily, this means the common sense and intelligence we use to see and appreciate what we use to see and appreciate what is good and beneficial. In a deeper sense, wisdom is the ability to know, not knowledge but the ability to see and think for oneself, to see the truth and benefit or not. In the deepest sense, perfect silence amidst the outer waves of all aspects of living. To put it simply, wisdom is sustainability in practice.

These three: sanity, spirituality, and sustainability, should not be taken separately but together as one and the same. Ordinarily, they describe the path of life. Ultimately, they describe the goal of life, happiness and liberation.

As a part of today's Buddhist rite, we might also call it as the national 'forgiving' day. To begin the rains retreat Buddhist monks ask each other for forgiveness. This opens hearts and minds to compassion and become an important virtue for living together in harmony throughout three months of dedicated study and practice.

On Buddhist holidays like Vassupanayika day or wan Khao Phansa, we celebrate in the traditional ways in the temples and other places. For Bangkokians, you are invited to go and join the unique celebration of Wan Khao Phansa at Wat Bovornivet Viharn at Banglumpoo in the evening, where thousands of people will be waiting to offer alms of flowers or Tark bart dokmai to resident monks.

In seeing the rain which is nature's way of purifying the environment and rejuvenating life, may we be continually reminded of the same requirements to purify our lives. Suffice here to note that today is the time of the Buddha's great renunciation—giving up all of his royal privileges and taking up the holy life. The period of the Rain Retreat, therefore, is generally seen as a time of restraint when vices are given up.

May all beings be rejuvenated, happy and be free from all trouble.