



## The Great Festival to Liberate All Beings of **Water and Land**

### **What is this Festival About?**

It may seem unscientific to talk about gods and ghosts in this modern age, but they do exist. There are other beings that most of us cannot see. In fact, there are ten realms of existences. In six of these realms, the beings are more capable and happier than humans. But, in the lower three realms, the beings endure much suffering.

In this festival, we invite the beings of the higher realms to help the beings in the lower realms get out of their sufferings. By doing so, everyone will benefit. The beings in the lower realms escape from their pain and anguish, and the gods and sages fulfil their compassionate vows of rescuing others. The organisers and participants also receive great blessings and benefits from this virtuous act. Even those who do not contribute may share the merits generated.

This festival is one of the grandest Buddhist rituals. By serving all beings, it is a majestic example of universal compassion. The opportunity to participate in such a meritorious event is most precious, and should be cherished by all.

### **How Do I Participate?**

One simple way is to donate money towards defraying the cost of running this festival. You can also dedicate prayers to your loved ones, or join in the recitation services at the various halls. Best of all, you can practise the five wholesome conducts and the Noble Eightfold Path, and offer the acquired merits to all beings.

If by making offerings to one Buddha and one monk can bring limitless merits to an individual, imagine the magnitude of merit that can be created by offering to the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas of all directions and all sentient beings of the six realms. It benefits the giver and his long line of ancestors, bestowing well-being and happiness upon them.

### **How Did this Festival Begin?**

The festival is attributed to Emperor Liang Wu Di of the Liang Dynasty. The emperor had a dream in which a holy monk advised, "The suffering of the beings in the lower realms is immense, why don't you make offerings to liberate them from their suffering? Among all good deeds, the accumulation of merits through such services is the greatest." So Emperor Liang Wu Di invited Chan Master Venerable Bao Zhi to organise such a ceremony. Venerable Bao Zhi spent three years creating the concept and compiling the texts for this seven day festival.

### **What are the Ten Realms?**

The ten worlds of existence consist of the Four Enlightened Realms (Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, Pacceka-Buddhas and Arahants) and Six Worldly Realms (Gods, Asuras, Humans, Animals, Hungry Ghosts and Hell-Beings).

The great Buddhist sages reside in the Four Enlightened Realms. These sages are no longer trapped in the cycle of birth and death. They are able to enter and leave the other realms at will, so as to guide and teach all beings.

The Six Worldly Realms are categorised into three spheres of existence - namely the Land, Water and Heavens. Celestial beings such as Gods and Asuras live in Heavens and enjoy much happiness and pleasure. Humans are able to control their instinctive desires, act with reason and live in harmony. However, Hell-Beings, Hungry Ghosts and Animals suffer more. They live on land and in water. Hence, this festival is known as the "Great Festival to Liberate All Beings of Water and Land".

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## **What are the five wholesome conducts?**

They are:

1. Respect for Life - do not kill, but to protect. Practise Compassion by protecting and benefiting all life.
2. Respect for Personal Property - do not steal, but be generous. Practise Generosity by sharing or giving material and spiritual wealth.
3. Respect for Personal Relationships - do not commit acts of sexual misconduct, but behave Responsibly. Persevere in personal development.
4. Respect for Truth - do not to lie, but be Truthful. Communicate positively by telling the truth in a pleasant manner.
5. Respect for Mental and Physical Well-being - do not take intoxicants, but be Mindful. Live a physically and mentally healthy life.

## **How is the Festival organised?**

A total of seven different halls are erected for this festival. The first hall is known as the Inner Shrine, while the other six halls constitute the Outer Shrine. Each hall serves a different purpose.

### **A. The Inner Shrine**

This is the hall where sentient beings from the lower realms are liberated. Access to this hall is strictly limited to monks and participants only.

The services conducted in this hall include:

#### **a) Chanting of Mantras**

Mantras are special invocations to the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. Reciting mantras is also a form of meditation. The mantras chanted in this hall help to bring ease to the beings of the lower realms.

#### **b) Recitation of the Ksitigarbha Sutra**

Ksitigarbha is a Bodhisattva who vowed to rescue all hell-beings until all hells are empty, no matter how long it takes.

#### **c) Recitation of the Scripture of Confession & Repentance**

This service explains what unwholesome actions are, and assists all beings in repenting past misdeeds.

#### **d) Recitation of the Precepts for the beings from the lower realms.**

Precepts are the basis for virtuous conduct. And virtuous conduct is the foundation of a better life. Introducing precepts to the beings gives them a chance to break free from their current suffering.

#### **e) Offering of Food and Incense.**

This service provides beings in the lower realms with the necessary sustenance which they are deprived of in their normal conditions, as a healthy body is as important as a healthy mind.

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## B. The Outer Shrines

There are six Outer Shrine halls. They are:

a) **The Grand Shrine - Service of the Repentance Prayer of Emperor Liang Wu Di.**

This is a service that explains and brings the participants through a thorough process of self-reflection, repentance and purification.

b) **The Lotus Shrine - Recitation of the Lotus Sutra.**

The Lotus Sutra is one of the most important sutras in the Buddhist canon, in which the Buddha explains that everyone has the potential to be a Buddha like Him, and teaches the practices to become one.

c) **The Avatamsaka Shrine - Recitation of the Avatamsaka Sutra**

The Avatamsaka Sutra explains the philosophy of Buddhism and the concept of Buddhahood.

d) **The Surangama Shrine - Recitation of the Surangama Sutra**

The Surangama Sutra is the most crucial sutra for spiritual cultivation. It gives specific instructions on how one should train to progress spiritually. It also provides powerful antidotes against forces of evil.

e) **The Pureland Shrine - Recitation of the Amitabha Sutra & Amitabha Buddha's name.**

Amitabha is a Buddha of a world system called the Pureland of Ultimate Happiness. It is a paradise He had created after a very long period of self-perfection. He created it so that all beings could have the most conducive place to learn Buddhism. In His great compassion, He personally brings beings from any world to this paradise.

f) **The Shrine of Other Sutras - Recitation of other Sutras:**

- (i) The Sutra of Golden Light
- (ii) The Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment
- (iii) The Sutra of Infinite Life
- (iv) The Sutra of Contemplation of Infinite Life
- (v) The Diamond Sutra
- (vi) The Sutra of the Master of Healing
- (vii) The Sutra of the Bodhisattva Precepts/Vows

In addition, a tantric ritual of offering food to the beings in the Hungry Ghost Realm is also conducted every night.

### Need More Information?

You can get more information from books at the distribution points around the monastery. You can also check out these websites:

1. Buddhism - <http://www.TheDailyEnlightenment.com>
2. Five Precepts - <http://asp.thedailyenlightenment.com/specials/lamp/precepts.asp>
3. Noble Eightfold Path - <http://asp.thedailyenlightenment.com/specials/lamp/8fp.asp>
4. About Kong Meng San Phor Kark See Monastery - <http://www.kmspks.org>