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Topic: Ghost month

Subject: Re: Ghost month

Posted by: Yuning

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Ullambana (Ancestor Day)/7th Month Festival/Zhong Yuan Jie/Hungry Ghost Festival
(Compiled by Sidney See and Henry Chia)

Is celebrated throughout the Mahayana tradition from the first to the fifteenth days of the seventh lunar month. "Ullambana" means "to be saved from hanging upside down" in Sanskrit.

The observance of Ullambana is based on the story of Ven. Maudgalyayana and his mother. Ven. Maudgalyayana discovered through his meditative powers that his mother had been reborn in one of the realms of misery. Distressed over the tormented state of his mother, he approached the Buddha for help. The Buddha then advised Ven. Maudgalyayana to make offerings to the Sangha. The merit of making this offering would help to relieve the suffering not only of his mother, but that also of other beings in the realms of misery. It is said that as a result of Ven. Maudgalyayana's offering, his mother was soon released from her unhappy state.

To the Buddhists, the seventh lunar month is a month of joy. This is because the fifteen day of the seventh month is the Buddha's joyful day and the day of rejoice for monks. The origins of the Buddha's joyful day can be found in the scriptures. When the Buddha was alive, His disciples meditated in the forests of India during the rainy season of summer. Three months later, on the fifteen day of the seventh month, they would emerge from the forests to celebrate the completion of their meditation and report their progress to the Buddha. Because the number of monks who attained Arhatship during that period was high, the Buddha was very happy.

Making offerings to the Buddha and monks on this day accumulates one's blessings and relieves the suffering of one's parents from seven lifetimes. This is also the significance of the Ullambana Festival thanksgiving ceremony held in monasteries and temples during the seventh lunar month.

The Chinese, however, believed that the gates of Hell are opened on the first day of the seventh lunar month and they will close on the last day of the seventh lunar month. The ghosts may visit the world between these days. Food offerings are made during this time to relieve the sufferings of these ghosts. On the fifteenth day, Ullambana or Ancestor Day, people visit cemeteries to make offerings to the departed ancestors. It is said that people who are not careful at night or down in luck are likely to meet ghosts and get into trouble as a result. Thus, many activities are taboo in the seventh month. These including leaving the house, having an operation, getting married, buying a house, moving house and having a baby. The 7th Month is indeed a scary month for the Chinese society.

Ullambana is also a Japanese Buddhist festival known as Obon, beginning on the thirteenth of July and lasting for three days, which celebrates the reunion of family ancestors with the living.

Many Theravadins from Cambodia, Laos and Thailand also observe this festival.