

The Month of Auspiciousness

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation
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[[Master's Teachings](#)]

Editor's note: In observing the Chinese tradition of the seventh month in the lunar calendar, also known as the Ghost Month, Dharma Master Cheng Yen hopes people would practice these customs associated with this month using wisdom and correct belief rather than superstition. This article is the first of a series on the lunar seventh month, *the month of auspiciousness*, compiled from Dharma Master Cheng Yen's talks on this topic.

In Chinese culture, the seventh month in the lunar calendar is referred to as Ghost Month. Offerings of food and paper money are made to ghosts, deities, and ancestors as a way to seek protection and wellbeing. Many people regard this month as ominous and many taboos are associated with the month, such as one cannot hold engagements or weddings, open a new business, nor move into a new home.

Actually, in Buddhism, the lunar seventh month is regarded as the month of auspiciousness and filial piety. This originates from a story in a sutra. During the summer months in India, the weather is very hot. In the Buddha's time, Buddhist monastics lived in forests and walked barefoot. As there were many insects, snakes, and other small living creatures crawling on the ground, the Buddha worried that the monastics might step on little creatures or be stung or bitten by insects when they went out to ask for alms. To avoid being hurt or harming the tiny creatures, the Buddha designated a three-month summer retreat, from lunar April 15th to lunar July 15th.

During this three-month period, instead of going out for alms, the monastics stayed in the forest; kings, ministers, and lay practitioners came to make offerings so that the monastics could focus on their cultivation by listening to the Buddha's Dharma talks. This made some monastics ponder on the existence of their life, which in turn led them to think of their parents. Ven. Maudgalyayana was one such person. He thought of his mother, who when she was alive had a lot of greed, anger, and ignorance and held no respect for the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. He was worried and wanted to know which realm his mother had gone to after she passed away.

While he was meditating, he saw his mother had a protruding belly, a thin neck, and skinny limbs in the realm of hungry ghosts. Heartbroken, he wanted to help her. Known for his mastery of supernatural powers, Ven. Maudgalyayana conjured up a bowl of rice and gave it to his mother. She took the bowl, but fire came out of her mouth when she tried to eat the rice, turning the rice into black ashes. Ven. Maudgalyayana's heart ached when he saw this.

"Perhaps the Buddha can help," thought Ven. Maudgalyayana. He quickly came out from his meditation, went to the Buddha, and asked how to save his mother.

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The Buddha said, "It is hard to change one's karmic retribution. My effort alone is not enough to save her. Your effort alone is also not enough to save her. You will need the help of many people to save her. Seize the time of the summer retreat period and gather all of the monastics to join as one and pray for your mother."

After hearing the Buddha's instruction, Ven. Maudgalyayana prepared offerings to all his fellow cultivators on the last day of the summer retreat. During the three months of the retreat, these cultivators had purified their hearts, gained wisdom, virtues, and merits from learning the Dharma and observing a vegetarian diet. On that day, all the cultivators sincerely prayed for Ven. Maudgalyayana's mother. As a result, his mother and other hungry ghosts were liberated from their suffering.

The story of Ven. Maudgalyayana saving his mother reminds us to be filial to our parents. Hence, the lunar seventh month is the month of filial piety. In addition, the lunar seventh month is also the month of auspiciousness, because after three months of intense spiritual cultivation, many cultivators had gained insights and realizations of the Dharma, which made the Buddha very happy. Therefore, the lunar seventh month is not an ominous time, but a time to practice filial piety and to carry out good deeds, as we do on any other day.

From Dharma Master Cheng Yen's Talks
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