

Wisdom vs. Superstition

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

In the seventh month of the lunar calendar, many people make offerings of food and burn paper money for their ancestors, hoping that it will help them in their afterlife. This practice, however, does not help the deceased because it is the karma they have created which determines their fate after they have passed away. There is a story in the sutra that illustrates this.

There was an elder who was wealthy and had a happy family. He was a generous person with a kind heart, often helped the poor and the needy in his village, and upheld the Buddhist precepts. Having set an example to his family, they also did good deeds and were filial to him.

One day, this elder suddenly passed away. His death was so unexpected that his family could not accept it, especially his wife, who grieved by crying very hard and continually calling his name. Unable to let go, she wanted her children to hold prayer services every day, hoping that this could help her husband to a better afterlife. At the graveyard where he was buried, they conducted religious rituals, made meat offerings, and burned paper money for him every day for several weeks.

One day, a young cowherd appeared at the graveyard along with his ox. Suddenly, the ox died. The boy kept shaking the ox, saying, "You can't die! You have to come back!"

He then cut grass and placed it next to the ox's head, hoping that the animal would eat the grass. Kneeling by the ox, he kept wailing loudly and pleading to the ox to come back to life.

His wailing caught the attention of everyone, including the elder's family. They gathered around the boy and said, "Don't cry, little boy. This ox is dead. It won't come back. Don't be silly."

The boy looked up and said, "I'm not silly. I'm doing exactly what you're doing. Your father is dead, yet you're here crying every day. You've killed so many animals as offerings to him. Isn't that how it works?"

Hearing this, everyone was stunned. The boy stood up and said, "Actually, I'm your father. Because I practiced the Buddhist precepts, helped many people, and created blessings when I was alive, I've been reborn as a heavenly being in the realm of heaven. I'm reaping the fruits of my good deeds; your offerings to me are of no use. The killings you've done will only create negative karma for yourselves, which you'll have to bear later."

The boy then returned to his heavenly form and disappeared along with his ox. At this point, the family realized how silly they had been all along. Offering food and burning paper money would not help the deceased, but only create negative karma. The family resumed their old ways of helping the poor and the needy, upholding Buddhist precepts, and creating blessings, as their

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father had done.

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Many people regard the lunar seventh month as Ghost Month. They believe that in order to keep their family safe from spirits and ghosts, they need to make lavish offerings to spirits and ghosts in addition to making offerings to their ancestors. This is superstition. The law of karma tells us that the karma people create determines which realm they go after they pass away. We must have correct belief and use wisdom when practicing this Chinese custom.

From Dharma Master Cheng Yen's Talks
Compiled into English by the Jing Si Abode English Editorial Team

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