

Why Do Buddhists Visit A Temple?

More than 2,500 years ago, Lord Gotama Buddha who renounced his princely life to live as an ascetic in search for the ultimate spiritual liberation had persevered in meditation practice until he discovered The Middle Way which allowed him to attain enlightenment. With the power of meditation, he could eradicate all of his defilement or mental impurity and gain the superb insight vision, insight knowing, insight wisdom, super-knowledge, and mental brightness.

The Lord Buddha learned from his insight power that all living beings are governed by the Law of Karma where every single life is destined by the consequences of both wholesome and unwholesome deeds committed either mentally, verbally, or physically actions. The Lord Buddha also found that when one commits good deeds, he receives merit or the pure life energy (*punya*); on the contrary, when one commits bad deeds, he receives sin or the impure life energy (*paapa*) in return. As *punya* can bring about happiness, prosperity, and success to oneself in both the mundane or spiritual path, *paapa* can doom, causes misfortune and suffering miserably.

Therefore, the Lord Buddha taught Buddhists to cultivate *punya* by committing only meritorious deeds through body, speech, and mind while abstaining from all unwholesome deeds. Although merit can be made anywhere even at homes, Buddhists always visit temples to make merits with Buddhist monks as the Lord Buddha said Buddhist monks is

the fertile field of merit [where laypeople can reap abundantly from what they sow.]

Three Major Ways to Make Merit at A Buddhist Temple

At Buddhist temples, there are numerous activities and ceremonies organized to promote morality, peace, and harmony among Buddhist communities. However, mainly, there are three major categories of merit cultivation which are (1) The practice of generosity or *daana* (2) The observance of precepts or *siila* and (3) The practice of meditation or *bhavanaa*.

(1) **The practice of generosity** is the act of kind giving such as making donation, offering meals to the monks, alms giving, funding the temple's construction and maintenance, and giving useful things to the monks or others. It is not necessary that you have to give to the Buddhist monks only in order to earn merit, but giving made to Buddhist monks or Buddhist monastic community is considered to yield much more merit in manifold due to the recipients' purity. In addition, the practice of generosity aims to lessen greed in one's mind. Moreover, according to the Law of Karma, the merit earned from practicing generosity is believed to consequently cause one to be wealthy in the future lifetime.

(2) **The observance of precepts** aims to prevent one from doing bad deeds and promote one's life to be wholesome and pure. Buddhist precept for laypeople is the Five Precepts which is taken as the common codes of conduct for virtuous people. The Five Precepts are as follows:

- (i) Abstention from killing
- (ii) Abstention from stealing
- (iii) Abstention from sexual misconduct
- (iv) Abstention from false speech
- (v) Abstention from consuming alcohol and narcotics

There are also the Eight Precepts for Buddhist nuns and laypeople who spend the retreat, 10 precepts for Buddhist novice monks and 227 precepts for fully ordained Buddhist monks.

Lay Buddhists normally request the monks to lead them making a vow to observe precepts when they make merit at a Buddhist temple. The merit from observing precepts is believed to destine one to be healthy, handsome, and beautiful in the future lifetime, but the immediate result of everyone's observance of precepts is the safe and peaceful society. Precepts observance also helps to lessen one of the defilements called '*dhosa*' or anger as one tries to behave oneself according to the virtuous disciplines. Merit earned from observing precepts is greater than the merit earned from giving as it requires more effort and mental strength.

(3) **Meditation practice** is the most powerful way to earn merit energy. It can help lessen '*moha*' or delusion and eradicate all defilements as well. Merit from meditation will result one to be wise since the mind becomes clearer and more efficient. There are many Buddhist meditation techniques in Thailand. Mostly, they involve methods that

promote mental calm (*samatha*) and insight (*vipassana*). Popular techniques include breathing meditation, mantra meditation, visualization meditation, and mindfulness meditation. Meditation practice can be applied to one's daily life which will eventually create the sense of peace and true happiness as the mind becomes better organized and rests deeply. Many Thai Buddhist monks are well known for instructing meditation and organizing meditation retreats at their temples.

DOs & DON'Ts at A Buddhist Temple

1. Women are not allowed to touch Buddhist monks
2. Do not point your feet toward Buddha statues, monks statues, and Buddhist monks
3. Dress modestly so that you do not become sexually attractive
4. Treat Buddha statues and monks statues with respect as if they were alive
5. Take off your shoes before entering the Buddhist chapel, shrine, pagoda, hall, and most other buildings or even a restroom.
6. Speak politely using moderate voice. Do not yell, shout, or swear.
7. Do not treat Buddhist temples as tourist attractions, they are sacred religious places.

8. Although men are allowed to touch monks, be careful not to touch any part above their shoulders as it is considered to be disrespectful.
9. Do not show your personal physical affection in the temple. Avoid kissing and hugging since these gestures are not commonly publicly shown in Thai society.
10. Do not consume alcohol and narcotics at temples. Also, some temples are smoke-free area.
11. Always be respectful and aware of the cultural gap.