

## RELIGION AND THE MOON

By Rev. Dr. K. Sri Dhammananda

*Since the dawn of history, that heavenly body which we call the moon has been the object of worship or of great religious significance. It was believed in ancient and mythological times that a god or goddess, living in that celestial body, influenced the lives and destinies of mortals on earth. Such being the case, it was no surprise that the moon-god or moon-goddess was worshipped in many lands – **Thoth** in Egypt, **Khons** in Thebes, **Sin** in Assyria, and **Selene** or **Artemis** in Greece.*

*In many countries, during medieval times, man continued to observe certain rituals and superstitious beliefs about the moon for it definitely exercised considerable influence over human activities such as the gathering of herbs, the cultivation of crops, the slaughtering of animals and the taking of particular medicines; there was a propitious season for such activity, ignorance of which invariably led to financial and other losses.*

*Buddhists have all along attached great religious significance to the moon, practising meditation and observing certain religious disciplines such as the precepts on full moon days. The entire Buddhist world celebrates the Full Moon Day of May – Wesak Day, the “Thrice Sacred Day” for “it marks the birth, the enlightenment, as well as the final emancipation of the Lord Gautama Buddha” – and considers that day as the greatest of all Buddhist festive days.*

*It is common knowledge that the moon exerts considerable influence not only over man’s religious beliefs but also on his physical well-being. Scientific and medical investigations carried out by research workers in universities, and independently by the medical world, have confirmed the fact that “the moon plays a big part in your daily life and indeed, in the lives of all living things.”*

*The Rev. Dr. Sri Dhammananda, an acknowledged authority on Buddhism, is very conversant and fluent on matters religion, and has provided here in this article an example of his versatility; he could talk even on ‘Astrology and the Moon’. He needs no introduction. He is the author of a number of thought-provoking books on Buddhism.*

*Ed.*

Many people like to know the religious significance of the full moon and new moon days. To Buddhists, there is a special religious significance especially on full moon day because certain important and outstanding events connected with the life of Lord Buddha, took place on full moon days. The Buddha was born on a full moon day. His renunciation took place on a full moon day. His Enlightenment, His deliverance of His first sermon, His passing away into Nibbana and many other important events associated with His life-span of eighty years, coincidentally took place on full moon days. Buddhists all over the world have a high regard for full moon days. They celebrate this day with religious fervour by observing precepts, practising meditation and by keeping away from sensual worldly life. On this day they direct their attention to the attainment of spiritual development. Apart from Buddhists, it is understood that other co-religionists also believe that there is some religious significance in the various facets of the moon. They also observe certain religious disciplines such as fasting and praying on full moon days. It is to be noted that many Buddhists and Hindus confine themselves to vegetarian food only during the religious observances.

It is believed that the moon, like the other planets, exerts a considerable degree of influence on human beings. It has been observed that people suffering from mental ailments, invariably have their passions and emotional feelings affected during full moon days. The word 'lunatic' derived from the word 'Luna' (moon) is most significant and indicates its connection with the moon very clearly. Some people, suffering from various forms of illness, invariably find their sickness aggravated during such a period. Researchers have found that certain phases of the moon not only affect humans and animals, but also influence plant life and other elements. Low-tides and high-tides are a direct result of the overpowering influence of the moon.

Our human body consists of seventy percent liquid. It is accepted by physicians that our bodily fluids flow more freely at the time of full moon. People suffering from asthma, bronchitis and even certain skin diseases, find their ailments aggravated under the influence of the moon. More than five thousand years ago, people had recognized the influence of the moon on cultivation. People in those days were very particular about their crops. They knew that certain grains and paddy would be affected if blooming took place during a full moon period. Medical science had also ascertained the different reactions of certain medicines under different facets of the moon, hence the influence of the moon on human beings.

In view of possible undue influence of the moon, the ancient sages advised the people to refrain from various commitments on this particular day and to resort to relaxation. They are advised to put aside their minds on this particular day

and to devote their time to religious observances. All those who have developed their minds to a certain extent can achieve enlightenment since the brain is in an awakened state on this day. Those who have not trained their minds through religious discipline are liable to be subjected to the undue influence of the moon. The Buddha attained His Enlightenment on a full moon day for He had been developing and attuning His mind for a long period.

In days gone by, full moon and new moon days were declared public holidays in many Buddhist countries, and people were encouraged to devote their time to spiritual development. It was only during the colonial period that holidays were switched over to Sundays. In view of this, some Buddhist countries are now trying to re-introduce the former lunar system of holidays. However, it is advisable to observe full moon day as a religious day to concentrate on peace and happiness by calming down the five senses. Many Buddhists observe the eight precepts on full moon days, to be free from family commitments and to keep away from worldly pleasures in order to have peace of mind for their spiritual development.

### **Scientific Analysis**

A writer says in his article:

“I have been reading an article in an American science magazine recently where the writer brings together the present research on the subject of the moon to prove how decisively this age-old object of the skies influences our lives, particularly at each of the four phases it passes through in its 28-day cycle.

His research, by the way, was done at the American universities of Yale, Duke and Northwestern and they have “independently come up with the astonishing evidence that the moon plays a big part in your daily life and indeed, in the lives of all living things.”

We are assured that there is nothing very occult in this phenomenon but that the phases of the moon do in fact stimulate various bodily actions like modifying metabolism, electrical charge and blood acidity.

### **Key Experiment**

One of the key experiments performed to establish this fact was on fiddler crabs, mice and some plants. They were all placed in chambers where weather conditions could not affect them, but were subjected to air pressure, humidity, light and temperature under controlled conditions.

The hundreds of observations made showed a remarkable fact, namely that all the animals and plants operated on a 28-day cycle. Metabolism which was found to have dropped at the time of the new moon was twenty percent higher at the time of the phase of the full moon. This difference is described as a striking variation.

Once a nurse in Florida told a doctor that a lot more of bleeding cases occurred when the moon is full. Like all doctors who are skeptical about such beliefs, he laughed at this statement.

But the nurse, undeterred, produced records of surgical operations which clearly showed that during full moon, more patients had to be returned to the operating theatre than at any other time for treatment for excessive bleeding after tonsillectomies.

To satisfy himself, this doctor started keeping records on his own. After observing numerous cases, he found that 82 percent of the patients under observation did bleed excessively between new moon and quarter moon.

Besides these medical experiences there is also evidence that the phases of the moon do have an effect on sex lives. Marine animals like oysters enlarge because of the testes, and the ovaries are full of eggs and spermatozoa, consequently spawning occurs when the moon is full.

Six-year-old records of birth kept in a Chicago hospital showed these conclusions too: "a low ration of males born in the dark of the moon... a definite tendency toward maleness in the period immediately after the full moon".

Fire investigators and arson squads in many parts of America agree in that arson increases by a hundred percent on full moon days.

### **In Meditation**

From this it is clear why there has been an immemorial injunction in the East that man should spend his time during these critical days in meditation and self-discipline.

For by conforming to the ways of heaven man learns to attune himself to the rhythm of the universe, and the lunar cycle is but a perfect guide for both his material prosperity and his spiritual success.

Hindu mythology says: the moon is the controller of the waters, and circulating through the universe, sustaining all living creatures, is the counterpart on earth of the liquor of heaven, “amurta” the drink of the gods. Dew and rain become vegetable sap, sap becomes the milk of the cow, and the milk is then converted into blood – Amurta water, sap, milk and blood represent but different states of the one elixir. The vessel or cup of this immortal fluid is the moon.

(What Buddhists Believe)