



# The Beliefs and Practices of Making Holy Water in Theravāda Buddhism

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## Abstract

In this article comprise the origin and development of making holy water in *Theravāda* Buddhism and study the process of making holy water in *Theravāda* Buddhism both Buddha's time and present time. This examines how the holy water influences the Buddhist and their society. Firstly, the making of holy water in *Theravāda* Buddhism is the Buddha's strategy to make people get closer to religion practices; Water element is so physically vital to all forms of life, the way of chanting *sutta* was introduced its pattern until the chanting *Paritta* can heal people from mentally inside out, and with understanding of the discourses in term of prevention, resolution and therapy through recitation. The evolution of the making holy water was the key maintaining the moral support of the hearer and Holy water must be connected to Dhamma water that is the core of the Buddhism.

**Keywords:** Holy water; Theravāda Buddhism; Paritta; prevention; recitation

## Introduction

Buddhism is a religion that aims to teach the law of nature, The Lord Buddha acted himself as a center of treasury wisdom that everyone could apply his doctrine. Moreover, the doctrine after collecting and categorizing into a group of *Piṭakas* as the Three Baskets (*Tiṭṭaka*): the Buddhist Canon, *Vinaya*, *Sutta* and *Abhidhamma*. Thus, the Buddhists proved the Buddha doctrine for a thousand years. Some Patterns are observed as the original teaching which is the words of the Buddha or any sayings or teaching of the Buddha (*Buddhavacana*) in a form of *Gāthā*; especially the Theravadin monks chanted the *Gāthā* to make holy water in some ceremonial events such as home blessing ceremony, birthday ceremony, and etc. The belief of the sanctity was deep-seated to the Buddhists since the ancient time, appearing in biography of the Lord Buddha. The rituals from the Buddha time have been transmitted to the present time such as the Chronicle of the Holy Water (*Buddhamanta*); it is a part of any auspicious ceremony and it is made for happiness by just a sprinkle of holy water from the Buddhist monk. (PhraRajaratannarangsī, V.P. Veerayutto, 2016: 48)

The explanations of the making holy water story can be proved in the *Pāli* canon that the Lord Buddha taught *Ratana Sutta* to Venerable *Ānanda*. Moreover, the holy water story first appeared in *Vesālī* at the first evidence. So, to compare how differences of making holy water nowadays in modern Thai society are totally contrasted. Thai *Saṅgha* do not make holy water like Venerable *Ānanda* did. (PhraKandhasarabhivamsa, 2005)

Likewise, the pattern has changed through the period of time. Such as, numbers of *Parittas* have been added, the use of adapted material and the number of chanting monks are also elastic. Due to the invitation, the monks are varied in number, usually three monks in minimum. The classic number is nine according to the lucky number or may be more than that depends on the host indefinitely. The religious practice in modern Thai society was totally different in the Buddha time.

Only joyous occasion will be made of holy water or sometimes the use of holy water is for the people who are possessed by evils. When the ceremony starts, monks are invited to their home. On the other side, the host has to set up the location then arranges the Buddhist altar which contains a joss stick, candle, alms bowl, flowers and so on. The person who knows well in religious practice call a “grantor”, he will lead everyone to start ceremony properly; monks may recite seven *Paritta* (*Sattaparitta* or *Jularajaparitta*) to finish making holy water but sometimes the monks recite more longer up to twelve *Paritta* (*Davadasaparitta* or *Māharajaparitta*) to finish ceremony.

The use of protective spells variously known as *Paritta*, *Rakkhā*, *Manta*, *Dhāranī*, *Kavaca*, and etc. against various dangers has been a common practice among the Indians from very early time. The Buddha himself is said to have adopted the practice on several occasions. The public recitation of *Ratana Sutta*, *Vesālī* is the best-known instance. The advantage of *Ratana Paritta* is obtaining a good fortune and escaping from obstacle. (Kariyawasam, A.G.S., 1995: 51)

Literally, the research aims to study the origin and development of holy water and concepts of making holy water in *Theravāda* Buddhism. The researcher focuses on the beliefs and practices how holy water in Thai society is really made in details.

### **The Ratana Sutta: The Origin of Making Holy Water in Early Buddhist Scriptures.**

*Ratana sutta* is one of *Paritta* used for protection, the contents stated about the advantage of the triple gems, which appeared the story and evidence in Commentary level. According to the commentary, is as follows: The city of *Vesālī* was afflicted by the famine, causing death, especially to the poor folk. Due to the presence of decaying corpse the evil spirit began to haunt the city; this was followed by the pestilence. Plagued by these three fear of famine, non-human beings and pestilence. The citizens sought the help of the Buddha who was then living in *Rajagaha* (Piyadassi Thera, 1999: 36), people very suffered from death the distressful to the king which is *Lichavī* could not maintain the goodness.

The *Lichavī*'s dynasty rule a country by council system changing king position ruled the kingdom have been discussing about which king is fall from goodness, as a result, no one do wrong custom but the citizen still wondering along the seven reigns never happen a calamities. The ending conclusion is to invite the Lord Buddha to be here. The two kings of *Lichavī* travelled to see the king *Bimbisal* in *Māgadha* state, *Rajagaha* city for their help inviting the Lord Buddha After that the King *Bimbisal* advice the *Lichavī* king to invite the Lord Buddha by themselves, When both kings have an audience with the Lord Buddha, The Master see that the journey to *Vesālī* this time, he will preach *Ratana Sutta* then 84,000 people will become enlightened. The Lord decide to go with five hundred monks leaving from *Māgadha* to *Vesālī*, along the side ways, people are welcome the Lord by flowers and whine tiered umbrella honorably. With the arrival of the Master, there were torrential rains, which swept away the corpses to the Kankra River. The atmosphere became purified, the city was clean. At the city gate, The Buddha gave him an instruction with *Ānanda* and should study the jewel discourse (*Ratana Sutta*) then walk into the city

along the wall sides three floors, make a holy water and recite the discourse. *Ānanda* learnt *sutta* at the city gate and use of the Lord alms bowl, fill the water and sprinkle around the city. When *Ānanda* start reciting “*Yaṃ kiñci*”, the evil spirit ran away out from 4 direction of the City gates, *Ānanda* walking while chanting only *Ratana sutta* not using other *sutta* unlike in the present time, the way for making holy water use of many *suttas* to complete ceremony. The city come back peacefully, the citizen admired *Ānanda* and worshiped him with flowers, people decorated public hall for welcoming the Lord Buddha also with five hundred monks, when the Lord arrived the hall surrounding by Lichavī kings, even the devas also came here. Apparently, *Ānanda* sprinkled holy water until finish in the Public hall where the lord sit, the Buddha recited the same Jewel discourse (Bhikkhu Ñānamoli, 1991: 5-8) repeatedly; all 84,000 people were attaining the enlightenment.

## The Origin of Holy Water Appear in Thai Culture

Making of Holy water and Chanting is always share the same activity, it hardly separated from each other. When the *Buddhasāsana* propagated from India by missionary monks; *Sonathera* and *Uttarathera* as a *Theravāda* tradition. However, *Theravāda* Buddhism has been introduced to Thailand in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century BCE during the time of Emperor Asoka, who had been a strong supporter of Buddhism and sponsored the 3<sup>rd</sup> council. Buddhism flourished during his time. He had sent many capable missionary monk to the different places inside and outside India. One of them was *Suvannabhumi* (Wolmoruwe Piyaatana, 2017: 119). which is part of Thailand nowadays, the missionary monks not only bring Buddhist scriptures but bring the Buddhist custom, norms and tradition together, mostly available in Pali which Thailand nowadays still use of Pali language for chanting and in Buddhist rituals without changing. Around 1696 B.E., The king Parakkrommapahu succeeded to the throne, he try best to revive *Buddhasāsana* again such as editing *dhamma-viniya* in Pali version, Prosperous Buddhism was restored again in Lanka, their reputation goes to Myanmar, Mon, Siam and Cambodia. Thus, monks from others country also interested to study in Lanka. Monk, which was inherited from Lanka, (SomdejPhrajaobarommavongtherKromphyadamrongrajanupab, 1966: 21) also bring the tradition and chanting style to their own country which have plenty of *sutta* for widely using until now. From this point is the starting point to make of holy water appearing in Thailand.

*Theravāda* tradition shared quite the same pattern of making of holy water especially Thai tradition is very remarkable use of *suttas* by editing and adding new *Gāthā* for beautiful words and very touching to the hearer. Also, popularly use in Royal family

such as in the reign of the King Rama IV who composed eight verses of homage to chant before making holy water.

## The Concept of Making Holy Water

After the great passing away of the Buddha, the oldest tradition was kept in *Theravāda* School. The *Tipiṭaka* was handed down from generation to generation by the oral tradition. Once Buddhism was firmly established in Sri Lanka, the Sinhalese monks paid profound attention to keep the tradition alive. All discourses remained the same, when the era of writing commentary by Venerable *Buddhghosa*, *ratana sutta* was written in *Paramattajotikā* or a commentary of *Khuddakapāṭha*, The discourses typically open with the formula, “Thus I have heard...,” a statement traditional linked with the disciple *Ānanda*’s recitation of each discourse when the collection of the Buddha’s teachings was communally established after his death.(Kevin Trainor, 2004: 191).This concern to trace the *Suttas* back to eyewitness, or more accurately by earwitness, testimony suggests the importance that *Theravāda* tradition has accorded the historical link between its teachings and the life of *Gautama Buddha* was residing when he gave each teaching and who is audience was, each discourse is express in a manner appropriate to the specific concerns .The formality of making holy water does not emphasize on sprinkling the water away, the master allowed to Venerable *Ānanda* to use water as the stratagem for disappearance of catastrophe. The Buddha’s intention to aim for extinguishing people sorrows in the city then is fully awake and establish goodness. The Lord Buddha foresee that the arrival of himself will not be useless because when the master finish preaching *Dhamma*, the prosperity will occur, all dangers is assuage. However, all 84,000 men will attain the enlightenment. (Ajarn Panyachaibangya, 2015: 48) Likewise, the master emphasized on attainable persona more than focusing on making of holy water, the citing of *Ratana sutta* has more details for let us see the truth of life and making the hearer attain an objectives.

## The Purpose of Making Holy water

The objective of making holy water in each era is totally different among Buddhist worldwide, reflect that there are changing in patterns and adjusting new idea for Buddhist over the time since the Buddha period until now. Buddhist firmly believes in *Buddharatana*, *Dhammaratana* and *Saṅgharatana* or a triple gems indeed as the mind’s protection, which is abstract.

Use of Holy water in sacred ceremony for Buddhist lays cause people can be touchable, this process for altering abstract to be material object in a form of holy water. Not only Buddhist people use of holy water but in other religions such as Christian also have a belief like this and make of holy water as well, their purposes are quite same as Buddhist did. Some Christianity have a strong believe that all people are full of sin, once rebirth again, they need to use holy water to clean all sin away from the baby, for just purify a sin and come back purity. This kind of this belief are well known in Christianity, they just make sure that every bad deeds can be exculpated but in term of Buddhist community, we believed that sin or karma is a deed which can be good deed and bad deed, they cannot wash away by any holy water. However, people do use holy water as a symbol of happiness and freshness, the happiness came from mind purity by meditation during monks reciting *Sutta*, freshness came from the water in itself which naturally cold, and once people got sprinkling water from chief monk they may feel delightful.

In the present time, the role of making holy water are expandable use more widely such as in auspicious events, home blessing event, marry, birthday, kind of anniversary of ancestors and so on. The purposes are offer joyful mind, be happy mind eliminate wickedness out of home. Moreover, in some area use holy water mix in showering water or someone swallow as a drink nevertheless holy water which collected from ceremony or left from distribution, holy water will be kept in the bottle near the Buddha image for further use in the future.

On the contrary, someone kept as a souvenir to remind the *Buddhaguna* in term of *Buddhānusati* for their lives, people do worship the Lord Buddha in many forms as well; normal people preserve *sīla*, some worship by practicing meditation and mostly worship as a Buddha amulet. In any kind of worship style, holy water is one of a kind because in some area especially in Thailand, holy water is everywhere and make new holy water every day. The *Buddhamanta* in form of holy water is favorably make in the big festival in this era. For example, Songkran festival, New Year cross over night chanting, Buddhist traditional ceremony and etc.

The moral value was embedded in Thai society for a long time, could not separate from each other. Not just in Thailand, all Buddhist country in south East Asia such as Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam and Myanmar have been sharing the same norm. We sometimes practice little bit different in each local area. Use of holy water is covering in Buddhist society, monk also play very important role to operate all ceremony since chanting through *sutta* and sprinkle holy water. People always invite monks to their home in special occasion for chanting *manta*, the main reason is not just for making sacred water but people need

blessing from monks, talking and greeting monk politely, pay respect monk like in the Buddha's period.

The better life is one purpose, use of holy water is psychological technique to make people get amelioration. Moreover, it help relief uneasiness through incantation.

## The Way to Practice in the Buddha's Time

When Venerable *Ānanda* got permission from the Lord Buddha to learn *Ratana Sutta* and roam in *Vesālī* city's wall, the way to make to holy water in the Buddha's time appearing in commentary said that, Venerable *Ānanda* using only stone alms bowl and water only as a material then reciting *Ratana Sutta*.

The practice of Venerable *Ānanda* recollected all *Buddhakuna* since the master as the *Bodhisattava* wish to become the enlightened one's were 30 perfections including ten perfection (*pāramī*), ten higher perfection (*upapāramī*) and ten ultimate perfection (*paramattha-pāramī*). Besides, 5 *mahā-pariccāga* (self-sacrifice) and he also remind *Buddha-cariyā* (3 Buddha's conducts) which are; *Lokattha-cariyā* (conduct for well-being of the world), *Ñātattha-cariyā* (conduct for the benefit of his relatives), *Buddhattha-cariyā* (beneficial conduct as functions of the Buddha).

Moreover, remind of the *Bodhisattava* move to the mother's womb in the last life, give birth, ordination, perform perseverance, conquer the *Māra*, attain *arahantship* beyond Bodhi's throne, turning of the wheel of Dhamma and Nine *Lokuttara-dhamma* (supermundane stage) which are; four Paths (four *magga*), four fruitions (four *bhala*) and one *nibbāna*.

Therefore, Venerable *Ānanda* went to the city then making the paritta (*karonto*) between three walls all over three nights (*nakarang*). Venerable recited (*Vuttang*) verse “*Yangkinci...*” the holy water was sprinkled to non-humans, when he recited *Yānītha...* so on, the water shape like silver hat shoot to the air and falling like the rain touching sick people then all symptoms get cured immediately, having more energy to walk follow by Venerable *Ānanda*. (Ajarn Panyachaibangya, 2015: 66)

The making of holy water during Buddha's time in Ven. *Ānanda*'s version which convey *Ratana sutta* directly from the Blessed One, The Lord Buddha himself just need people to learn and listen to the *Sutta* and also relieve distress to the crowd, making of holy water in this time is so simple, no format, no complex method.as the result, it totally different in present time but remain *Ratana Sutta*.

## The Way to Practice in the Present time

The making of Holy water in such a way *Theravāda* tradition monk does in the present time is very formal for Buddhist lays. Holy water is one part of blessed chanting which is oldies tradition. Selecting discourses from *Buddhavadana* in *Sutta piṭaka* and merge with *paritta* for chanting or *Bhāvanā* normally use two patterns were compressed version and extended version. For the compress version called *paritta* (seven *sutta*) another one *tavatasaparitta* (twelve *sutta*) , Ratana Sutta has never been cut off from making holy water, which calls down the protection of god and praise the three jewels

No.	Discourse (s)
1	Discourse on blessing ( <i>mangala sutta</i> )
2	The Jewel discourse ( <i>ratana sutta</i> )
3	Discourse on loving-kindness ( <i>mettā sutta</i> )
4	Protection of the aggregates ( <i>khanda paritta</i> )
5	The Peacock's Prayer for protection ( <i>mora paritta</i> )
6	The body quail's Protection ( <i>vattaka paritta</i> )
7	Banner of protection ( <i>dhajagga paritta</i> )

This table shows how to recite the discourses respectively during making of holy water, explaining seven *sutta* for using to shorten the time in ceremony and also being a famous pattern as well.

Twelve *suttas* (*Davadasaparitta* or *mahārajaparitta*) mean big chanting *paritta* which popular use in big blessing ceremony, According to benefit of *mahārajaparitta* is exactly the same as short version, it may add specific discourse which relate to people life. This chanting pattern popular use in royal palace as well when the King want to join in the big vacation day such as birthday and annual ceremony. it starts with the same discourses as *Sattaparitta* but for better details, the ancient monks add more discourses to make the time longer, reciting all twelve discourses take more than 45 minutes to one hour in some area, see the chanting pattern below chart:



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3	Discourse on loving-kindness ( <i>mettā sutta</i> )
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5	The Peacock's Prayer for protection ( <i>mora paritta</i> )
6	The body quail's Protection ( <i>vattaka paritta</i> )
7	Banner of protection ( <i>dhajagga paritta</i> )
8	Homage to the seven past Buddhas ( <i>Atānātiya sutta</i> )
9	Protective discourse ( <i>Angulimāla pariita</i> )
10	Seven factors of enlightenment ( <i>Bojjhaga sutta</i> )
11	Danger-free protection ( <i>Abhaya paritta</i> )
12	Victory paritta ( <i>Chaya paritta</i> )

## Holy Water as Prevention of Devil

Apparently seen in *Ratana sutta* that non-human broke the wall and stepped inside the city to eat corpse making people afraid of evils, The arrival of the Lord Buddha and Holy water from Venerable *Ānanda* was sprinkled all around the city's wall making non-humans no longer stay in this city, they all escaped through the city's gate as scrupulously described in the Commentary. Prevention of devil is not the foolish story, it is suggested by *Ratana Sutta* and this is not a fairy tales but it is supported by the Lord Buddha himself. It is reflected that holy water is useful toward lay people which can bring peace to society, the community come back to be happy. Moreover, in term of devil in the Buddha's time is people who affected viruses or bacteria and acted like a devil and another assumption is non-human species which often appear in *Tipiṭaka* such as Giants, Hungry ghost, bad devas and etc.

## Holy Water as Prevention of Disease

The Buddha insisted on diseases in ancient India that there are three main kinds of serious illness; craving, starving and aging. For instance, craving is a sign of passion to really get something they wanted to. Starving is strongly feeling occurring in body when lack of foods as the Lord said, "Hunger is the worst illness", compounded existence the worst suffering or ailment (*Dukhā*). If you ill, one or more medications may effect a cure

and jeep one healthy for a period of time. So, the discomfort of hunger frequently returns in a few hours, no matter how much and what kind of food and drink is taken. To survive, one must continually find nourishment. The illness of hunger will come back over and over again until the time of death. This may be the main reason that the Buddha remarked that hunger is the worst illness. Human beings also fall in the law of nature, no one cannot stop changing due to *Anijja*. Once being a man who strive for living peacefully but everyday life was shorten because of aging, children cannot be no longer as they are, they always grow old it is because aging is one of the diseases or sicknesses. In *Ratana sutta* told that non-humans eat the decaying corpse and haunt the people, the arrival of the Lord Buddha and Venerable *Ānanda* were healed from bad diseases. However, in this case, the use of holy water as prevention of disease also appear in the *sutta*, after Venerable *Ānanda* chanting *Ratana sutta* and sprinkling the holy water for three days, the black plaque is subsided.

## Monks and Holy Water

Monks and holy water were paired by nature, not just a monk but also priest and fortune teller as well. It is because of lack of trustworthiness and the only way to help them is those services. When people encounter with difficulties, they need monks. If they need money then meet businessman, if they need to sell goods and products then meet marketing expert. So, if they want to be part of political affairs, they would meet politician. Conversely, lay people need to meet monks mean they feel uncomfortable and face with suffering, in the monk's side who practice insight meditation can share the loving-kindness to other people because of the power of kindheartedness provide confidence for overcoming the obstacles, Monks normally do ceremonial services such as chanting, making of holy water, giving *Dhamma* talk and also give back congratulations or any concerned activities because of acting as assumed monk (not yet enlighten one). Besides, lay people or as a host of ceremony who are taken responsible for taking care all processes the ceremony. For instance, when the monk sprinkle the holy water, lay must hold the alms bowl and walk following by chief monk. Eventually if no monk taking responsible of sprinkle holy water, lay people may not be accepted because monk and holy water are come together. Actually by doing this quite serious in attention, *Bhikkhu* is one of triple gems who observed *Sīla* more than lay people, this reason would make monk become more suitable for cherish people than others.

## Introducing NADĪ model

**NADĪ** model (N-A-D-I MODEL) was designed to make normal people have the right understanding toward holy water, which describe the benefit of holy water in the single alphabet from the word “*Nadī*” which means “River”, and the river is the symbol of long running water. However, The Assumption under researcher’s revision combines all words, which occur in the universe of making of holy water but in the model just gather only good meaning words to scope the benefit of holy water. Thus, the hidden meaning in the word “**NADĪ**” is collected from all interviewees as following:

- “**N**” Stand for necessity, norm, narrative.
- “**A**” Stand for attitude, appreciate, awareness.
- “**D**” Stand for develops, defense, deliberate.
- “**I**” Stand for impression, insurance, involve.

The interpretation of “**N**” coveys good meaning of using holy water because of water is very necessary for life. In addition, the making of holy water in our Buddhist’s ceremony is a norm, holy water is a must process to do for devotee’s need. Lastly, the narrative behind the *Paritta* chanting also have an evidence show in *Ratana Sutta* and good teaching in each chanting verses.

The interpretation of “**A**” reflect the attitude of people toward holy water and people appreciate in the drop of *Buddhamanta* in their way but the use of holy water must be aware of misuse of an objects as well.

The interpretation of “**D**” is results of using holy water while receiving the water must develop the Mind Set and must be deliberate to the action. In accordance to *paritta* itself is defense the bad luck.

The interpretation of “**I**” is every time when people invite monks to their home to make holy water must end up with impression and be involved in the ceremony. It is guaranteed the insurance in the mental level.

## Conclusion

Holy water from the beginning of the long narration from *Ratana Sutta* has a hidden clues to prove what the real benefits use of *paritta*, since the origin of development of making holy water found in early Buddhist scriptures occurring in *Vesālī* city, The Lord

Buddha was invited from the Kings *Lichavīs* to please all citizens, at that time once the Noble One arrive at the front city's gate, Venerable *Ānanda* was bestowed *Ratana Paritta* (Discourse of the Jewels) from the Lord Buddha, He began to sprinkle the Holy water expelling devils and stop spreading of the plague. This evidence, researcher found out that this is the first making of holy water in world of Buddhism and the purposes of making holy water are protection, happiness, good fortune and etc. On the contrary, people still believe in the miracle of the holy water such as prevent of devils and diseases, from the analysis found out that holy water is a must pair with monks and use for auspicious ceremony such as home blessing ceremony, high ordination ceremony, birthday ceremony, marry and etc.

The Development from *ratana sutta* became indispensable *paritta* to make holy water in present time. However, The recitation has been added more discourses which are *Satta Paritta* (7 protections) and *Tavatasa Paritta* (12 protections), this long chanting is popularly use in Thai society or especially in *Theravāda* tradition.

Furthermore, the concept of holy water is tactical pattern of the Buddha's teachings in term of water is so vital in life and the touch of sprinkle water will make people delight. During the Buddha time, the making of the holy water is totally different comparing to present time according to Venerable *Ānanda* recalled the past Buddha's virtue such as 30 perfections (*pāramī*), *Buddha cariyā*, 9 *lokuttara dhamma* and so on.

*Ratana Sutta*, Holy water and Chanting are share the same value, these are *dhamma* base to make people feel confident and be the first checkpoint of faith. The process of holy water makes people calm from chaotic mind and step forward to see things clearer which is meditation stage. Holy water must link with holy doctrine, which is the symbol of the Buddha, once people chant the whole *paritta* is the time when they bow the head to accept the triple gems as a refuge of life.

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