

Loi Krathong & The Water Goddess

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Loi Krathong has been called the most important and significant holiday of the year for the Thai people as well as parts of Laos and Myanmar (Shan state). It was recently celebrated here in Thailand, but in much less fanfare due to the current massive floods still affecting greater Bangkok.

What is it all about? How does it play out with the current flooding situation? Is there room for interpretation?

“Loi” means to float and “krathong” is the small boat that is floated. It is usually very creatively made from natural materials such as banana stalk, banana leaves, and beautiful flowers that are just coming into bloom. The festival is celebrated every year in November at the time of the full moon. The city is full of light, both naturally and from the glow of lanterns.

The origins and roots of the festival predate Buddhism but have been incorporated into Thai Buddhism as a way of making merit.

Originally and still today, many ask for the forgiveness of the “water spirit or water goddess” called “Pra Mae Khongka.” There is also a “serpent-ruler” called Phaya Nak that some Thais seek to “appease” in order to halt the monsoon rain, dispel floods and return the rivers to calm.

For me personally, I think this year’s Loi Krathong (2011) should be a wake up call for those who seek to placate these water controlling spirits. Obviously they are not very happy with Thailand. I say this with all due respect to the Thai people. Flooding has affected over one third of the provinces of Thailand for over three months now. Over five hundred people have already lost their lives and a recent report by the Thai government says that over one thousand people have reported to be suicidal because of the floods.

In the land where karma (the law of cause and effect) rules supreme, many true believers of this law of karma must be doing some serious introspection right now. What has brought this misfortune upon us? Why are we suffering? Why are we not fully helped?



Forgive us. But who will answer?

These are the principle questions that are asked in Buddhism and the principle problem that is sought to be eliminated by either merit making ceremonies (tham bun) or asking the forgiveness of various spirits, in this instance, the water spirit or “goddess” (jaow).

But what if we used Loi Krathong for an occasion to seek the Creator God of Heaven and Earth and asked him for forgiveness for our sins and the sins of our nation?

Thai people have sought the help of these “water spirits” even though that is not a very purely “Buddhist” thing to do. It’s time for the good Thai people to break up with these serpent spirits. They can not help. They only seek to hurt. The Bible portrays the ruler of darkness, Satan, as a serpent. He is a ruler of lesser spirits that seek the attention, adoration, and offerings of man. We need a full revolt against his rule and influence.

Some Westerners may be skeptical, but the Thai are very attuned to the supernatural reality of the world. Yet they have been brought into a wrong allegiance with those spirits that were never meant to be worshipped or

placated but rather defeated. Jesus Christ has defeated them completely through his death, resurrection and ascension. All who in complete alliance with him through faith have power and authority over these spirits and do not need to fear them or even pay attention to them. They are defeated foes.

What if we instead used Loy Krathong as a focused time to not only forgive others but also release grudges that we have held against other people for the year? (This would be great for political parties in Thailand to do right now!)

The “Krathong” would be a symbol of our sins being carried away from us and our grudges and unforgiveness being released for the year. The three joss sticks could represent: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The candle could represent that we, in Jesus Christ, are the light of the world. The flowers remind us of the beauty of life but yet like the flower our lives are fading, dying, and one day we will return to our Creator to give an account. Overall we can be reminded that Jesus Christ paid the full price for our sin, to free us from the fear of karma retribution, and give us his full weight of merit (righteousness) so that we have fully received all of the merit we can ever need in this life!

From what I have seen in the explanation of the Loi Krathong background and meaning there is room for this type of adaptation and expression. So far, it has been used as an ancient animistic ceremony to placate the water “goddess”, a Brahmin ceremony to worship one of the “gods”, and a Buddhist ceremony to worship the Buddha’s footprint and make personal merit.

In reality, it is main stay of the Thai culture; the most important cultural event of the year next only to Songkran.

Some of my friends love to take time to make their Krathongs beautiful and creative. Even my own children learn how to make them in school and bring them home. It is a time when communities, friends, and families get together. It is a time when we enjoy the changing of the seasons and the nice weather. We pop fireworks with our kids and float rice paper lanterns to symbolize our sins being taken away from us for the year. We take time to eat together and fellowship.



Friends At The Market Making a "Krathong" Together

There are many stories in Thailand for each main cultural festival. When I ask some of my Buddhist friends what the day means to them, each one has something a little different to say. Many of their meanings are not pure Buddhism but a mixture of what is important to them.

For some, the Krathong is just pretty and they like making them (similar to an American carving a pumpkin, painting an Easter egg, or decorating a Christmas tree). To others, they are asking for forgiveness for polluting the water this past year. And to still others, they are seeking a chance to add some merit to their karmic bank account hoping for their good to outweigh their bad.

Why have we not infused the day with our own meaning? Why do we think that it cannot be done? Who has taught us this? Well, it won't be me! I have to believe that our God, the Creator of Heaven and Earth, deserves the glory of the nations. ([Rev 21:23-24](#))

One of the glories of Thailand is Loi Krathong.

May it one day be presented back to Almighty God in a way that is both pleasing to Him and truly beneficial to the Thai people! And may Almighty God hear the prayers of the Thai people, forgive, free them from fear and spiritual bondage, and heal our land. ([2 Chr 7:14](#))