

Two Words, Two Practices: Upavāsa and Uposatha in Ancient India — Etymology, Historical Divergence, the Aśokan edicts, the Scholarly Debate, and a Contemplative Reading

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Abstract

In much popular writing, uposatha is glossed simply as "fasting day," collapsing it into upavāsa ("fasting"). This paper argues that the two words denote two distinct — though historically intertwined — practices. Etymologically, upavāsa (upa + √vas) lexicalizes the act of abstaining from food, a dietary discipline shared across Vedic, Ayurvedic and devotional traditions; upavasatha (Pāli uposatha) lexicalizes the sacred day itself — literally "dwelling near," originally the night spent at the sacred fires before the new- and full-moon sacrifices, and in Buddhism the day and ceremony at which the Saṅgha recites the prātimokṣa. In the Buddhist texts the dietary element is one of eight precepts, not the substance of the observance. The Aśokan corpus confirms the institutional rather than dietary character of the uposatha: the word itself appears in the Sārnāth Schism Edict (posathāye), and the pillar edicts display "Vinaya calendrical material." Beyond the historical argument, the paper develops a contemplative reading of the etymology advanced by the present author: upa-√vas names a position, not a performance — dwelling near one's own being; the fire of the ancient vigil symbolizes the burning of inner anomalies rather than a sacred flame; the goal of the burning is the recovery of one's real being, the state of "Buddhatva"; and the dietary component is one supporting activity among others, never the principle of upavāsa or uposatha.

Keywords: King Ashoka, Ashoka edicts, uposatha, upavasa, Etymology, Pali, Sanskrit, Vedic, fasting.

1. Introduction: The Conflation and Its Costs

"The Uposatha is a fasting day" — the gloss appears everywhere, from lay handbooks to Buddhist calendar documentation. It is half-true and, for that reason, fully misleading. The half-truth is historical: the Buddhist term descends from the Vedic upavasatha, and the Vedic fast-day did involve fasting ([Heirman & Torck, 2012](#); [Sakamoto-Gotō, 2018](#)). The misleading part is the implied equivalence: in the Buddhist texts, the uposatha is not a fast with devotional trimmings but a day of assembly — "the day and the ceremony at which the rules of the prātimokṣa are recited" — the fortnightly ritual of communal self-recitation, and, for the laity, a day of intensified moral training whose dietary restriction is one item among eight ([Ben-David, 2024](#)).

The distinction defended here is between two Sanskrit/Pāli words sharing one root. Upavāsa means fasting — the abstention from food undertaken on holy days, a practice the Ayurvedic tradition codified among its therapies and the devotional traditions of India retained as brata ([Sharma et al., 2025](#); [Sudiani et al.,](#)

2022). Upavasatha/uposatha means the observance day — originally the vigil "dwelling near" the sacred fires, later the Buddhist assembly for recitation, precepts and meditation. The first is a means (a dietetic-ascetic act); the second is an institution (a sacred day with a ceremony). The philological scholarship has always said as much: the studies begin from the Vedic formula and trace "the historical relation" phrase by phrase, and the monastic scholarship defines poṣadha as "the day and the ceremony at which the rules of the prātimokṣa are recited," noting in the same sentence that the term derives from a Vedic day of fasting that precedes the sacrifices. The popular equivalence has simply dropped the second half of the sentence. This paper restores it — and then goes one step further: it asks what the "dwelling near" of the etymology might mean if read contemplatively rather than ritually, and develops the answer in a final dimension of the study.

2. Etymology: One Root, Two Lexicalizations

2.1 Upavāsa: The Act of Abstaining

The Sanskrit upavāsa is a compound of the prefix upa- ("near, towards") and the root √vas ("to dwell"), nominalized to name the action. Its standard meaning is "fasting, abstinence from food." The living traditions preserve the "drawing near" sense under the dietary form: a modern account of the Hindu fasting rite glosses it as "brata not eating and not drinking," explaining that "Upavasa comes from Sanskrit language Upa, which is meant close, getting close and vasa means [the Divine]". The Ayurvedic literature treats upavāsa as one of the ten laṅghana ("lightening") therapies and one of the daivavyapashraya (spiritual) therapies — "a means to come closer to the all-powerful from a spiritual and yogic perspective" (Jerone et al., 2023) — applied "as a therapeutic approach to cleansing the body and restoring balance to the doshas". Contemporary survey research documents the practice's persistence: of 500 subjects studied in Himachal Pradesh, the majority were female (74.8%), aged 27–36 (45.2%), fasting mainly for religious belief (66.8%), and most commonly for 12 hours once a month (34.8% and 32.8% respectively). Fasting, in short, is a discrete act with a defined content: not eating (and classically, sustaining the heightened purity that not-eating produces). The word names the practice, wherever and whenever undertaken (Vivek et al., 2021).

2.2 Uposatha: The Sacred Day

The Vedic upavasatha is formed from the same prefix and root with the suffix -atha — "the day of dwelling near." Its original reference is precise and calendrical: "the night in which the moon, in conjunction with the sun, is invisible from the earth and the full moon night" — new moon and full moon — were the two nights on which Vedic ritual required one to remain "around the sacred fires with religious observance, above all fasting," before performing "the next morning the New and Full Moon Sacrifices". The upavasatha "originally means 'staying overnight around the sacred fires', so that it should have started from sunset," and was only later "extended to the whole ritual procedures in the preceding day of the New and Full Moon Sacrifices, thus from sunrise". The standard summary runs: "The term poṣadha is derived from the Vedic term upavasatha, a day of fasting that precedes the days of the new and the full moon when the Vedic sacrifices were offered".

Korean scholarship on the ritual's Indian origins makes the semantic pivot explicit. The upavasatha was a "sacred" day on which "the sacrificer, who wishes to perform the main rite well, stays with the gods and waits for the time of the main rite"; the maintenance of sacredness rests fundamentally on "practicing fasting"; and the rite belongs to "the Brahmanical householder leading a secular life," demanding "a purity that permits the experience of sacredness, separated from everyday life" (성철환, 2018). Already in the

Vedic stratum, then, the word's referent is the day and its condition — a day of proximity to the sacred fires, attained and maintained by fasting. Fasting is the technique; the vigil-day is the entity.

2.3 The Divergence

The two words thus diverge exactly where their suffixes diverge. Upavāsa abstracts the technique — abstention — from any particular day; upavasatha names the day itself, with abstention as its supporting discipline. The texts themselves draw this distinction when they say that the Buddhist poṣadha, though derived from the Vedic fast-day, is in the monastery "the day and the ceremony at which the rules of the prātimokṣa are recited". The derivation preserves the day; the Buddhist institution replaces the content.

3. The Historical Transformation: From Sacrifice-Eve to Saṅgha Assembly

3.1 The Vedic Frame: Two Nights of Vigil

The two critical nights of the lunar month — new moon and full moon — "played an important role in Ancient India," forming "a basis of Vedic rituals to stay these two nights around the sacred fires with religious observance, above all fasting". The upavasatha was thus lunar-astronomical in origin: the phase of the moon fixed the night; the night fixed the vigil; the vigil preceded the sacrifice.

3.2 The Brahmanical Semantics: Food for the Gods

In the Brahmanical ritual system, the fast was sacrificial in logic: "in upavasatha, food is a sacred thing offered to the gods, and for humans it is a kind of taboo object to be restrained". The food withheld from the sacrificer was the food destined for the gods; abstention was the mechanism of a ritual economy whose meaning was proximity to the divine — "staying with the gods and waiting for the time of the main rite".

3.3 The Buddhist Re-Signification: From Offering to Recitation

Buddhism kept the day and replaced the machinery. The Buddhist poṣadha/uposatha — the Sanskritized and Pāli forms of the Prakrit posaha (for the variant forms and the Mūlasarvāstivāda Poṣadhavastu text-criticism, the standard reference is Haiyan Hu-von Hinüber's edition) — is "the day and the ceremony at which the rules of the prātimokṣa are recited," the rules "listed according to their gravity, starting with the most serious offences," in "eight categories for monks, and seven for nuns". The prātimokṣa "should be recited every fortnight during a ceremony called poṣadha". The Korean study crisply summarizes the transformation: "Buddhist poṣadha is transformed and expanded into rites in two directions, for renunciants and for laypeople," and whereas "in the Vedic rite the object of offering is the gods or their manifestations, in poṣadha the renunciant practitioner is the object," food in the Buddhist frame becoming "a medium symbolizing the status of the Saṅgha as an object of reverence".

The recitation was, and is, the heart of the matter. "The recital of the Patimokkha, the collection of rules, was the key aspect of the uposatha assemblies"; the ideal was to recite all the rules, shorter versions being permitted only where necessary — but "every version of the recital always ended with the following statement":

ettakam tassa bhagavato suttaāgatam suttapariyāpannam añvaddhamāsam uddesam āgacchati. Tattha sabbeheva samaggehi sammodamānehi avivadamānehi sikkhitabban ti
"This much is in the Vinaya rule, included therein, of the Blessed One, which comes up for recitation each fortnight. Herein all should train in concord and appreciation without dispute" (Cousins, 2000).

"This stress on the need to follow the Vinaya in concord and appreciation without dispute provides us with a good clue as to why the act itself was compulsory" — and the same source shows why the stakes were communal: schism was treated "with the utmost seriousness," with two of the saṅghādisesa offences directed at "any member who causes schism within the Sangha" and any "who support the crime of such

a person," while the ideal of the Saṅgha is "mutual admonishment and mutual rehabilitation" (añña-añña-vacanena, añña-añña-vutthāpanena). The uposatha is, in the fullest sense, the Saṅgha's act of self-constitution: the fortnightly re-enactment of unity through the communal recitation of its own law.

4. The Content of the Buddhist Uposatha: Eight Precepts, One of Which Is Diet

The canonical definition of the lay uposatha confirms the point. The Aṅguttara Nikāya prescribes the eight-part observance (aṭṭhaṅga-sīla) "for a devoted householder (upāsaka) on the special days of observance (uposatha)", situated between the five precepts of the ordinary householder and the ten of the novices, and finally the pāṭimokkha's 227 rules for monks and 311 for nuns. On the uposatha days, "a householder avoids eating at the wrong time (vikāla-bhojana), i.e., after noon; he avoids dancing, singing, hearing music, watching shows, wearing garlands, using perfume, ointments, and adornments; and he avoids using high seats and beds (uccāsayana-mahāsayana; AN IV.248–251)". The same structure appears in the upgraded-precept logic of the Aṅguttara: "On lunar observations... these precepts can be 'upgraded' with a higher degree of renunciation (celibacy instead of non-adultery, one meal a day, no entertainment, and sleeping on low beds to minimize sleep time, AN 8.41)" (Sangiaco, 2024). The abstention from adornment has its own canonical weight: the injunction "to refrain from adornment as part of the eight precepts undertaken on full moon days by Buddhist lay followers" (Anālayo, 2005).

Three structural observations follow. **First, diet is one-eighth of the observance:** the abstention from after-noon eating appears in the same catalogue as celibacy, entertainment-abstinence, adornment-abstinence, and the low bed — a single list of sensual renunciation. **Second, the uposatha is a training day, not a hunger day:** the eight precepts are the layperson's periodic approach to monastic discipline, disciplined abstention serving as the cultivation of mindfulness itself. **Third, the day's actual activities are meditative and communal:** the Indonesian literature describes Uposatha Day as a spiritual observance in which the eight moral rules and five basic rules serve "to control the passions, develop inner calm, and get closer to enlightenment," conducted "based on the lunar calendar," with insight and self-awareness cultivated "including through meditation" (Yana & Surya, 2025). Contemporary Indonesian practice at the vihāra level — the atthasila tradition — holds the observance on the lunar dates (the 1st, 8th, 15th and 23rd in one local reckoning (Purnomo & Yudhi, 2023); the 15th in another (Albastomi, 2018)), with the eight precepts, fasting after noon, abstention from meat in the morning hours, and the full round of ritual, listening and meditation.

This is the empirical content of the formulation that the uposatha is, at its core, meditation and "sitting with the master" with physical activity minimized: the etymology of upa-√vas ("dwelling near") and the practice of dwelling near the Saṅgha at the vihāra are the two ends of one thread.

5. Uposatha in the Aśokan Edicts: An Institutional Day, Not a Dietary Rule

The third body of evidence is epigraphic. Two points establish that the uposatha entered the Aśokan record as an institution — a day of assembly and calendar — rather than a fasting ordinance.

5.1 The Word Itself: Posathāye in the Sārnāth Schism Edict

The word for the observance appears in the Sārnāth version of the Schism Edict, in the form posathāye. The passage is difficult, and the difficulty is itself diagnostic of the word's institutional sense. As Herman Tiéken notes, "several passages in the text of the Schism Edict, an important source on this topic, are still unclear. By way of example, I refer to posathāye in the Sarnath version, which has been variously interpreted as additive of direction and additive of time. The difference would be whether Aśoka's official

should go to the uposatha ceremony or should go to the sangha on the uposatha day" (Tieken, 2000). Whichever reading one adopts, the word denotes a ceremony and a calendar day of the Saṅgha — the candidates are "the uposatha ceremony" and "the uposatha day" — not a fast.

The edict's context reinforces the point. The Schism Edict, preserved at Kauśāmbī, Sāñcī and Sārnāth, ordains that "whichever monk or nun shall cause a schism in the order, they shall be dressed in white clothes and expelled" (Alsdorf, 1959); the Sārnāth pillar's engraved proclamation reads: "the Religion must not be divided. The monk or nun who breaks this unity shall receive white garments and must live outside the Community. This edict must be announced in the orders of monks and in the orders of nuns" (Frédéric, 2019). Whatever the precise historical target — Bechert convincingly argued that Aśoka here addresses "divisions within local, individual saṃghas" rather than a church-wide schism — the edict is concerned with the assembly and unity of the order: precisely the values that the fortnightly uposatha ceremony institutionalized.

5.2 The Pillar Edicts and "Vinaya Calendrical Material"

J. C. Wright's study of the 256-nights problem adds the second point: Aśoka's early epigraphs "imply that, inspired perhaps by early residence in Ujjain, he was at first drawing on late Vedic and epic calendrical motifs, before starting to display a knowledge of Vinaya calendrical material in the pillar edicts". The phrase "Vinaya calendrical material" is exact: it means the calendar of the monastic code — the uposatha fortnight and its observance days — entering the imperial chancery's vocabulary. Even the celebrated "256 nights" of Minor Rock Edict I was once read, in Harry Falk's instructive if ultimately rejected proposal, as a count of "256 non-consecutive Uposatha nights" — the number of observance-nights in an extended devotional campaign — showing how central the uposatha unit was to framing royal religious activity.

5.3 Rock Edict IX: The Uposatha Days Moralized

Rock Edict IX — the edict that names the days on which the people of the empire performed their rites — enumerates the Tisya day, the Punarvasu day, the eighth day of every fortnight, the fourteenth day, the fifteenth day, the three seasonal Cāturmāsya, and the Tisya full-moon day. The eighth, fourteenth and fifteenth of the fortnight are precisely the uposatha tithis of the Buddhist calendar — the observance days documented in the Aṅguttara's eight-precept suttas (AN IV.248–251) and in the lunar date-structure of living practice; days on which the precepts were "upgraded" toward renunciation and on which the Saṅgha held its fortnightly prātimokṣa assembly. Aśoka's verdict on these days is the most striking confirmation of their institutional character: he does not abolish them, and he does not prescribe fasting on them — consistent with his program's whole drift, he denies their automatic efficacy, declaring the ceremonies of doubtful value and fruitful only in this world, while moral practice is fruitful at all times. The fasting-day reading of the uposatha would make Rock Edict IX a text about dietetics; the assembly-day reading makes it a text about the moralization of the Buddhist calendar — the moon's rhythm kept as the clock of practice, its ritual power denied. It is no accident that this is precisely the edictic period in which, on Wright's showing, the court's calendrical idiom shifts from "late Vedic and epic calendrical motifs" to "Vinaya calendrical material".

6. Upavāsa in Buddhist and Indian Practice: The Dietary-Moral Act, Distinct and Distinguishable

If uposatha is the institution, upavāsa is the act — and the two remain distinguishable in the living traditions.

- **In Sri Lankan Buddhism**, the practice called upavāsa maghata — "abstinence from killing animals on special ceremonial days" — combined dietary abstention with an abstention from slaughter, and is

studied as a central element of Sinhalese "popular asceticism" (Gamlath, 2016). Maghata ("not to kill") was introduced to the island "by approximately the first century CE in the form of a ceremonial ban on the slaughter of animals and in the abstention from meat on special observance days (upavāsa maghata), as well as the sympathetic treatment of animals by providing them food, drink, medicine, and security" (Gamlath, 2015). Here upavāsa names the abstention discipline observed on the special days — a periodic moral-dietary brake — while the special days themselves remain the uposatha frame.

- **In the wider Indian tradition**, upavāsa is the generic fasting: a "brata not eating and not drinking," etymologized as "drawing close" to the Divine ; an Ayurvedic therapy — one of the ten laṅghana treatments, "rooted in Ayurveda" for "cleansing the body and restoring balance to the doshas" , described in the classics as "one of the ten remedies" that "promotes digestive fire with the exclusion of channel blockage" ; and the spiritual yoga of drawing "closer to the all-powerful" (Jerone et al., 2023).
- **In the Buddhist textual frame**, upavāsa-type fasting occurs within the uposatha day: the abstention from eating after noon (vikāla-bhojana) is the precept of the observance, accompanied by the one-meal-a-day renunciation of the upgraded lunar observance. The relation is containment: upavāsa is the abstention; uposatha is the day on which abstention, recitation, listening and meditation are jointly performed.

7. The Contemplative Dimension: Upavāsa as Dwelling Near One's Own Being

The evidence assembled above establishes that upavāsa and uposatha are not dietary practices. The present section extends that finding in a contemplative direction — a reading of the two words advanced by the author of this study — and argues that the inner movement the words describe is more fundamental than any activity performed on the scheduled day.

7.1 The Literal Semantics: Dwelling Near, Not Performing

Read at its most literal, upa-√vas ("to dwell near your being") does not name an activity at all; it names a position — a proximity (Sakamoto-Gotō, 2018). The Vedic tradition made the object of that proximity external and ritual: the sacred fires around which one kept the new- and full-moon vigils (Sakamoto-Gotō, 2018; 성철환, 2018). The contemplative reading developed here redirects the "near" from the external object to the subject himself: upavāsa means dwelling near one's own reality — attempting, at the closest possible distance, to be with one's own being. The scheduled day, the appointed hour, the prescribed rites are the occasion of the dwelling, not its content. What happens on the day is secondary; what the practitioner is positioned toward — oneself — is primary. This is not an alien imposition on the tradition's own language: the same texts that transmit the external rite describe the inner movement — fasting as "a means to come closer to the all-powerful from a spiritual and yogic perspective" (Jerone et al., 2023), the uposatha as the day on which one "gets closer to enlightenment" through meditation (Yana & Surya, 2025), the upavasatha as the night of "staying with the gods and waiting for the time of the main rite" (성철환, 2018). The contemplative reading simply makes explicit what the vocabulary has always carried: the "near" of upa and vasa "dwelling at your being"

7.2 Fire: From Sacred Flame to Inner Burning

In the Vedic frame, fire is the sacred object around which the vigil is kept — the flame that receives the offering and marks the place of the gods (Sakamoto-Gotō, 2018; 성철환, 2018). In the contemplative

frame, the fire is interiorized: it symbolizes the burning of one's inner anomalies — the defilements of greed, hatred and delusion that obscure the real self. The movement of the observance is thus not the external tending of a flame but the internal combustion of everything that is not one's being: the burning away of the anomalies until nothing remains between the practitioner and his own reality. The Buddhist tradition's own fire-imagery sanctions exactly this transposition: the world and the person are described in the canon as burning with the fires of attachment and aversion, and the path is precisely the extinction of those fires. On this reading, the upavasatha's ancient vigil by the fire is the ancestor of a very different vigil — the inner watch kept over one's own defilements.

7.3 The Goal: One's Real Being, "Buddhatva"

After the burning of the anomalies, the practitioner reaches his real being — the state that the contemplative idiom of the present study calls "Buddhatva," Buddhahood. The scheduled day, the fast, the recitation, the meditation: all are scaffolding for this single end — dwelling near oneself until the nearness becomes identity, until one arrives at the being one already is. The ethical-training reading of the eight precepts ([Ben-David, 2024](#)) and the meditative characterization of the uposatha ([Yana & Surya, 2025](#)) are both, on this view, descriptions of the approach; the arrival is the attainment of one's own real nature. Whether framed in the classical vocabulary of liberation or in the homelier idiom of Buddhahood, the goal is the same: the dissolution of the anomalies and the recovery of the original purity of the mind.

7.4 Diet as Support, Not Principle

Within this contemplative frame, the dietary component of upavāsa/uposatha assumes its proper place: it is one activity which supports the inner observance — a support, not the principle. The historical evidence agrees: the abstention from after-noon food is one of the eight precepts, embedded in a catalogue that includes celibacy, restraint of entertainment and adornment, and the low bed ([Ben-David, 2024](#)); the fasting "involves eight moral rules and five basic rules" whose purpose is "to control the passions, to develop inner calm, and to get closer to enlightenment" ([Yana & Surya, 2025](#)). The principle of upavāsa and uposatha alike is the dwelling itself — the drawing near to one's own being; diet is the ally that supports the drawing near. To define either word by the fast is to mistake the support for the substance — a confusion this paper has traced from the Vedic upavasatha to the Aśokan edicts, and which the contemplative reading finally dissolves: the observance is not what one does on the day, but where one stands — near oneself.

8. The Scholarly and Historical Literature

The scholarly genealogy of the distinction deserves to be stated plainly:

- **Junko Sakamoto-Gotō** ("Upavasatha in Vedic Rituals and Uposatha in Buddhism: An Outline of Their Historical Relation," 2018) supplies the controlling etymology — upavasatha originally "staying overnight around the sacred fires," the new/full-moon vigil with fasting — and frames the Vedic-to-Buddhist relation as a problem of historical transformation, not identity.
- **Sōng Ch'ōnghwan** (on the Indian origins of the Korean chae (齋) offering-rite, tracing it through the Buddhist poṣadha to the Vedic upavasatha, 2018) articulates the food-symbolism shift — food for the gods becomes food withheld from oneself, then food as the medium of reverence for the Sangha.
- **Ann Heirman and Mathieu Torck** (A Pure Mind in a Clean Body, 2012) give the monastic definition — poṣadha as the day and ceremony of prātimokṣa recitation, fortnightly, in eight and seven graded categories — and note the derivation from the Vedic fast-day in the same breath, genealogy and

difference in one sentence; their reference to Haiyan Hu-von Hinüber's *Das Poṣadhavastu* marks the text-critical anchor for the monastic institution.

- **The recitation studies** transmitted in the Buddhist Studies Review corpus (Tilakaratne, "Saṅgīti and Sāmaggi") establish the uposatha recital as the compulsory act of Saṅgha unity, with the closing Pāli formula quoted above.
- **Herman Tiēken** ("Aśoka and the Buddhist Saṃgha," 2000) documents the posathāye crux and its stakes — whether the king's officials attended "the uposatha ceremony" or visited "the saṃgha on the uposatha day" — the single clearest proof that the edicts' uposatha is an assembly-institution.
- **J. C. Wright** ("Aśoka's 256-night campaign," 2000) shows the imperial court moving from "late Vedic and epic calendrical motifs" to "Vinaya calendrical material in the pillar edicts" — the uposatha calendar entering state usage.
- **The modern practice literature** confirms that the living uposatha is a compound day — precepts, fast, ritual, meditation — in which diet is one limb.

9. Conclusions:

- **Four conclusions follow.**

First, the Buddhist uposatha is not a fast-day. Its defining content is the fortnightly recitation of the prātimokṣa — the Saṅgha's law — and, for the laity, the periodic intensification of moral training through the eight precepts. The fasting element is derivative: one precept among eight, the "wrong-time eating" rule. The etymological memory of the Vedic fast-day is real — poṣadha derives from upavasatha — but derivation is not identity, and the historical transformation is precisely the Buddhist achievement: the day of sacrifice-preparation became the day of communal self-recitation.

Second, the Aśokan record attests the institutional uposatha. The word in the Sārnāth Schism Edict (posathāye), and the "Vinaya calendrical material" of the pillar edicts, both place the observance in its communal-calendrical sense. Aśoka's officials were to attend the ceremony or visit the Saṅgha on the day — the alternatives presume an event, not a meal.

Third, upavāsa and uposatha answer two different questions. Upavāsa answers "what is being done?" — abstaining, fasting, drawing near through renunciation. Uposatha answers "when and with whom?" — on the lunar observance days, in assembly with the Saṅgha. The popular equation of the two has obscured the most distinctive feature of Buddhist time-reckoning: that the moon's phases were retained as the cadence of a moral assembly, not of a dietary regime.

Fourth, the contemplative dimension completes the distinction. If upavāsa is the abstention and uposatha the assembly, the deepest stratum of both is the dwelling near from which each derives its name: fasting, precepts, recitation and meditation are the activities that support an inner observance whose principle is proximity to one's own being. The dietary rule is thus doubly displaced — once historically (one precept among eight) and once contemplatively (one support among many) — and the essence of the observance stands where the etymology always placed it: in the "near" of upa.

10. Conclusion

Two words, one root, two practices — and one underlying movement. Upavāsa — "dwelling near" through abstention — is the ancient fasting discipline of Indian religion, codified in Ayurveda, retained in the brata traditions, and absorbed into Buddhism as the dietetic support of the holy day. Uposatha — the nominalized vigil-day, "staying overnight around the sacred fires" — became in Buddhism the fortnightly

day and ceremony of the prātimokṣa recitation, the Saṅgha's institutional act of unity, and the layperson's day of eight-precept training, meditation and presence at the vihāra . The Aśokan corpus shows the emperor governing through the institutional uposatha — the Schism Edict's posathāye , and the pillar edicts' Vinaya calendar. And read contemplatively, both words return to their shared root: the "near" of upa is not finally a fire, a day, or a meal — it is one's own being, approached until the anomalies are burnt away and the real self, "Buddhatva," is reached; diet is one of the activities that supports this inner observance, but it is not its principle. The distinction drawn in this paper is therefore not pedantry: it is what prevents the reduction of Buddhism's most ancient institution of collective discipline to a dietary rule, and it is the key to reading the edicts' engagement with the lunar calendar as a moral program rather than a food law — and the observance itself as a movement inward rather than a performance of days.

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