

1<sup>st</sup> February 2022

## Purer

**“To cease from evil, to do good, and to purify the mind yourself ...”**

*Gautama Buddha, in the Dhammapada*

The Roman month *Februarius* was named after the Latin term *februum*, which means "purification". The purification ritual, *Februa*, was held on February 15 (full moon) in the old lunar Roman calendar. January and February were the last two months to be added to the Roman calendar, since the Romans originally considered winter a monthless period. February remained the last month of the calendar year until 450BC or so.

Historical names for February include the Old English terms Solmonath (mud month) and Kale-monath (from cabbage). In Finnish, it's called *helmikuu*, "month of the pearl", as, when snow melts on tree branches, it forms droplets, and as these freeze again, they're like pearls of ice. The words for February in Polish and Ukrania mean "the month of ice or hard frost." In Macedonia, it's *sechko*, the month of cutting (wood).

"You pays your money, and you takes your choice", it seems. Ice droplets looking like pearls I can understand. Hard frost makes sense too. Cutting down trees for winter fuel? Yes, I get that. Mud I already know about, having found myself up to the knees in mud on a recent walk. Cabbage? I'm not so sure about that one.

But, going *all* the way back, I am struck by the Romans' purification ritual. We know that the hard frosts of a February act as a purification of the soil, growth never being the same unless the ground has had to cope with the rigours of winter. But what about you and me? Do we not need our times of purification too? As we begin to emerge from the rigours and hardships of this Covid pandemic, and set ourselves to the changes, and hopefulness, of coping with the "endemic" nature of this disease, might we benefit from "purification"? I don't mean being pure for all time, but recognising our need to begin again, take stock, look at life in a different way, readjust our priorities, be freed from the burdens of the past? Purification from time to time might do us good. "To cease from evil, to do good, and to purify the mind yourself", perhaps?

Now we're in February, might *Februa* be all the more important?

### **A prayer for today**

*Lord, help me to be purer, wiser, more self-aware and more loving for you. Amen*

*An original reflection by © Tom Gordon*

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