



SANGHA

VENERABLE MAHINDA

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Also in this series:

Volume 1 Buddha (Aug 2021)

Volume 2 Dhamma (Sep 2021)

Venerable Mahinda

Venerable Mahinda was ordained in 1976 under the tutelage of the late Venerable Dr. K. Sri Dhammananda Nayaka Thera. He has taught Mindfulness and Metta Meditation for 45 years in over 20 countries.

Currently, Venerable Mahinda is Abbot of the Aloka Meditation Centre in Australia; Founder and Spiritual Director of Australian Buddhist Mission Inc; General Advisor to the Buddhist Missionary Society, Malaysia; and Founder and Spiritual Director of Aloka Foundation, Malaysia. He is advisor to a number of other Buddhist organisations in Malaysia, Singapore and Australia.

Preface

The aim of this series on the Buddha Dhamma Sangha is to highlight their great qualities and to draw inspiration for us to walk the Dhamma's path.

When we are living in fear and danger, worry and anxiety, we need to seek refuge in the Buddha Dhamma Sangha. We need their blessings, guidance and protection.

Those who have faith and devotion to the Buddha will naturally find solace in times of need. Those who have developed insights into the Dhamma will have greater awareness and acceptance of the ups and downs of life.

Those who connect with the Sangha will receive the necessary guidance and inspiration along the path.

Many years ago, I heard my teacher saying:

ABHIÑÑEYYAṀ ABHIÑÑĀTAṀ,
BHĀVETABBAÑCA BHĀVITAṀ;

PAHĀTABBAM PAHĪNAM ME,
TASMĀ BUDDHOSMI BRĀHMAṆAⁱ

These words kept resonating in my mind. As I made some effort to understand the meaning of these words, I realised the profoundness of the Buddha and his teachings. I wish to share this Dhamma with all our Dhamma brothers and sisters.

What little I have learned is from my teacher and his teachers' teacher. I am indeed grateful for all their kindness, inspiration and sacrifices. Their teachings are so relevant in these challenging times.

On the completion of my 45th Vassa, spent at Aloka Mitra Singapore, I dedicate Volume 3 in this series to all members of the Sangha and laity who have helped to preserve the dispensation of the Buddha (or the BUDDHA-SASĀNA) to this very day.

May all their noble aspirations be fulfilled.

ⁱ What should be known is known, what should be developed is developed; What should be destroyed is destroyed – therefore I am awakened, O Brahmin.' (Brahmāyu Sutta, MN 91)

THE SANGHA

The term SAṄGHA in Pali and Sanskrit literally means ‘community’. In the broadest sense, the Sangha refers to the entire Buddhist community, all around the world. It includes the fourfold order of monks (BHIKKHU), nuns (BHIKKHUNĪ), laymen (UPĀSAKA) and laywomen (UPĀSIKĀ).¹

However, in many instances the word ‘Sangha’ is used to refer more specifically to the monastic order of the Sangha – the ordained BHIKKHU, BHIKKHUNĪ, SĀMAṆERA (novice monks) and SĀMAṆERĪ (novice nuns).

In its most specific sense, it refers to the ‘holy order’ of the ARIYA-SAṄGHA, comprising of monks and nuns as well as lay followers who have attained the path and fruition (MAGGA PHALA).

¹ Uttara (Vipatti) Sutta, AN. 8.8

The Emergence of the Sangha

The first members of the Sangha were the Buddha's five friends, who had been practising extreme asceticism together with the Buddha before he attained enlightenment. After he gained enlightenment, the Buddha remembered his five friends and sought them out, preaching to them his first sermon at the Deer Park in Sarnath.²

At the conclusion of his sermon, one of them, Kondañña, attained the first stage of sainthood, and asked to become the Buddha's disciple. He was the first BHIKKHU, or monk. With further training, the other four also attained the first stage of sainthood.

Soon after, the Buddha met a young man called Yasa. Yasa was so impressed with the Buddha's teaching that he asked to join him, and this also convinced 54 of his friends to do likewise. The Sangha now totalled 60 monks, whom the Buddha trained until all of them attained Arahantship.

² Dhamma-cakka-ppavattana Sutta, SN 56.11

The Sangha's Mission

At the end of the three months, the Buddha advised them to go out to spread the Dhamma, no two going in the same direction:

CĀRATHA BHIKKHAVE CĀRIKAM
BAHUMANĀ HITĀYA BAHUMANĀ SUKHĀYA
LOKĀNUKAMPĀYA
ATTHĀYA HITĀYA SUKHĀYA
DEVĀMANUSSĀNAM

Wander forth, O monks,
For the welfare and happiness of the many,
Out of compassion for the world,
For the benefit, the welfare and the happiness
Of gods and humans.³

This summarises the Buddha's mission to the world, and the Sangha's role to uphold his mission.

Wherever the Sangha travelled, it has played an important role in promoting and preserving the teachings of the Buddha. The Buddha established the Order of the Sangha in order to provide opportunities

³ Sāsanavaḍḍhana II.17, Mahākhanda, Vinaya Mahāvagga.

for those who wish to dedicate their lives to the study, practice and realisation of the Dhamma, and who will then be able to reach out to the public to promote the Dhamma.

Development of the Sangha

Over time, Sangha members became loosely divided into two groups. One is the VIPASSANĀ-DHURA or ‘forest dwellers’, who lived away from urban areas, usually spending their time in meditation retreats in forests and mountains, developing calmness and insight. The other is the GANTHA-DHURA or ‘village dwellers’, who were usually learned in the Dhamma and attended to the spiritual needs of urban communities.⁴ This loose division still exists today amongst the modern Sangha. However, this was not and is not a formal rule, as there are some who choose to alternate between living in the forest and in the city at different times of the year.

⁴ PTS Dictionary p.627; DhP Atthakatha. I, 8; IV, 37.

Ordination

In the initial period, the Buddha simply said 'EHI BHIKKHU' ('Come, O monk') to admit a person into the Sangha. However, as the Sangha spread the Dhamma across India, it became impractical for all those seeking to enter the Sangha to travel to see the Buddha and be ordained by the Buddha himself. Thus, the Buddha developed proper procedures for admitting people to the order of the Sangha, and these ordination traditions are still followed today in all the different schools of Buddhism.

First, the Buddha allowed a single Sangha member to ordain others by administering the three refuges (SARANA-GAMANA), and later, also the ten precepts. As the Sangha became larger, the Buddha then required that a quorum of at least five monks be present for the ordination ceremony, and the person wishing to be ordained must declare his intent to enter the Sangha and his fitness to enter the Sangha.

Finally, the Buddha split the ordination ceremony into two parts – first the request to become a novice,

who would uphold the ten precepts; and then the request to become a monk or nun, who would uphold the Vinaya precepts.

The order of nuns was established after the Buddha's step-mother, Mahā-Pajāpatī, along with 500 noble Sakyan women, begged to be allowed to enter the Sangha. The Buddha's move to admit women into the order was unusually progressive, given the lowly status of women in India at the time.

Vinaya, or Code of Conduct

The Sangha community has been able to survive for more than 2,500 years, maintaining its unity and harmony, largely due to the wisdom and compassion of the Buddha. Like any other organisation, as the Sangha grew larger it began to attract people from all walks of life, and sometimes differences of opinion would arise. At other times, the lay community was disturbed by what some Sangha members were doing and reported it to the Buddha. Whenever such events occurred, the Buddha would gather the Sangha

together and discuss what they could do to solve the problem.

The results of their discussion became a code of moral conduct known as the Vinaya. It is the guideline by which the Sangha goes about their daily activities, and a source of precedent they can draw on to deal with both internal and external crises. The Buddha made it clear that these were guidelines to protect those who wished to purify their minds. The Buddha never imposed these rules on anyone who was unwilling.

The Sangha was and is a uniquely democratic religious community, supporting its members on the path to liberation. And despite the moral decline of this current era, there are still a number of authentic masters in the various traditions who maintain the lineage of the noble Sangha.

Vassa, or the Rains Retreat

The only period when the monks and nuns would stay in one place was for the Vassa, or the rainy season in India. During this time, while walking over fields

of paddy and grain they would inevitably crush the worms and small insects that had come out to escape the rain. Lay people saw this and became upset, contrasting the Buddhist Sangha with other religious groups, who would arrange to stay in one place during the rainy season. After gathering the Sangha together, the Buddha suggested that they also adopt this practice, and thus it has come down to us today as Vassa, or the Rains Retreat.⁵

Because all monks and nuns would observe the Vassa, it became a useful way of marking the length of time a person had been a member of the Sangha, and by extension their seniority within the Sangha.

As Buddhism grew, it also spread beyond the borders of India to China and Tibet. In accordance with the traditions laid out by the Buddha, the Sangha in these places adapted to the changes in climate and the seasons. For this reason, the monks and nuns in these regions moved the Vassa period to the summer season, from April to July, and called it the Summer Retreat. This practice is still observed in the Mahayana

⁵ Vinaya Mahavagga 3.1

Sangha today, especially in China, where the end of their Vassa coincides with the Ullambana or Hungry Ghost Festival.

Temples and Monasteries

In the beginning, monks and nuns would stay for the Vassa in simple, temporary dwellings made of wood or bamboo, which they built themselves or were offered by lay people. They would all share a communal hall which was used for chanting, teaching and meetings. This type of building can be seen today among the monks of the forest traditions, especially in Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand and other countries where the Sangha observe the Vassa or Rains Retreat.

As time went on, these structures were rebuilt with more lasting materials, and often a stupa would be erected holding the relics of the Buddha or an Arahant.⁶ A Bodhi tree would be planted as a reminder of the Enlightenment of the Buddha. Often an additional hall would be built as a shrine for the

⁶ CETIYA: 'mausoleum, monument'. The word CETIYA formerly meant a stupa, but today it means any Buddhist shrine or temple – a place built for people to pray and worship.

laity, where they could come for prayers and listen to the Dhamma – the beginnings of Buddhist ‘temples’.

By the time of the Emperor Aśoka, such dwellings had become permanent compounds, with usually 15-20 monks or nuns residing there on a regular basis. Here, the Sangha could live, study and practice as a larger community.⁷ This practice developed into the Buddhist monasteries and temples we see today, although the number of monks and nuns have dwindled in most places.

Robes

In the early days of the Sangha, monks and nuns would gather pieces of cloth left unburned at cremation grounds or unwanted scrap cloth, roughly sew them together, and then dye them to make a robe that they could wear.⁸ Some would be offered good quality robes from a single piece of cloth. This meant

⁷ VIHĀRA: ‘a meeting place for the Sangha; Sangha housing’. Sangha dwellings are usually referred to as VIHĀRAS, which is usually translated into English as ‘monastery’.

⁸ Such robes were called PAM̐SUKŪLA-CĪVARA, ‘robes from the trash heap’.

that when they gathered together for the alms-round (PIṄḌAPĀTĀ) or Dhamma gatherings, there was no uniformity in their attire, as some would be wearing badly patched robes, and lay people would comment about their unsightly appearance.

As a result, the Buddha once remarked to Ananda as they were passing by some paddy fields: “Ananda, do you see how the paddy fields are neatly divided into squares by thin rows for walking, and surrounded by an outer boundary? Do you think you could provide robes of a similar kind to the Sangha?”

“Yes, I can, Sir.”

So Ananda went along to make some robes. He cut the cloth into square pieces and stitched them together with thin rows of cloth between them, and then surrounded it all with an outer boundary of thicker cloth. Ananda then returned to the Buddha and showed them to him. The Buddha praised him in front of the other Sangha members, saying: “See how Ananda understands fully what I said only in brief.

All the Sangha's robes should be sewn together in this manner from pieces of cloth.”⁹

Life in the Sangha

For monk and nuns, the Sangha is an association of like-minded practitioners, who have the same goal of striving for enlightenment. It is a community where individuals can learn and be inspired by each other, and to live in a way that is most suited for the attainment of Nibbana.

Whole of the Holy Life

On one occasion Ananda mentioned to the Buddha that ‘spiritual friendship’ is half of the holy life. But the Buddha replied:

“Don't say that, Ananda ... spiritual friendship is actually the whole of the holy life. When a monk has virtuous people as friends, companions, and colleagues, he can be expected to develop and pursue

⁹ Vinaya Mahavagga 8.12

The Noble Eightfold Path.”¹⁰

On another occasion, the Buddha declared:

PŪTIMACCHAM KUSAGGENA

YO NARO UPANAYHATI,

KUSĀ PI PŪTI VĀYANTI,

EVAM BĀLŪPASEVANĀ.

TAGARAÑ-CA PALĀSENA

YO NARO UPANAYHATI,

PATTĀPI SURABHI VĀYANTI,

EVAM DHĪRŪPASEVANĀ.¹¹

Just as a man who wraps rotting fish with fragrant

Kusa grass

Makes the grass smell rotten, so do those who
associate with fools.

But like a man who wraps flowers in palm leaves

Makes even the leaves fragrant, so do those who
associate with the wise.

¹⁰ Upaddha Sutta, SN 45.2. *Half (of the Holy Life)*, trans. Thanissaro Bhikkhu. Access to Insight (BCBS Edition), <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn45/sn45.002.than.html>

¹¹ Itivuttaka, KN 76.5-6

The Ideal Friendship

This is well-illustrated in the following story:

The Venerables Anuruddha, Nandiya and Kimbila were staying together at a park in Gosiṅga. On one occasion the Buddha visited and enquired after their welfare:

“I hope you’re living in harmony, appreciating each other, without quarreling, blending like milk and water, and regarding each other with kindly eyes?”

“Indeed, sir, we live in harmony like this.” Venerable Anuruddha went on to describe how he did this, thinking:

“I’m fortunate, so very fortunate, to live together with spiritual companions such as these.’ I consistently treat these Venerables with kindness by way of body, speech, and mind, both in public and in private. I think, ‘Why don’t I set aside my own ideas and just go along with these Venerables’ ideas?’ And that’s what I do. Though we’re different in body, sir, we’re one in mind, it seems to me.”

And the Venerables Nandiya and Kimbila spoke likewise. The Buddha then enquired whether they lived diligently, keen, and resolute?

“In this case, sir, whoever returns first from alms-round prepares the seats, and puts out the drinking water and the rubbish bin. If there’s anything left over, whoever returns last eats it if they like. Otherwise, they throw it out where there is little that grows, or drop it into water that has no living creatures. Then they put away the seats, drinking water, and rubbish bin, and sweep the refectory. If someone sees that the pot of water for washing, drinking, or the toilet is empty they set it up. If he can’t do it, he summons another with a wave of the hand, and they set it up by lifting it together. But we don’t break into speech for that reason. And every five days we sit together for the whole night and discuss the teachings. That’s how we live diligently, keen, and resolute.”

Finally, the Buddha enquired whether they had attained any superhuman distinction in knowledge and vision worthy of the noble ones. Anuruddha replied on behalf of all three that they had.

Afterwards, the Buddha remarked “See how those three brother monks are practicing for the welfare and happiness of the many, out of compassion for the world, for the benefit, welfare, and happiness of gods and humans!”¹²

Quarrel at Kosambī

The importance of harmony in the Sangha, and the importance of good friends is further illustrated in an incident which took place while the Buddha was residing in the city of Kosambī, and how the Buddha skilfully resolved it.¹³ Shortly after he arrived, a quarrel broke out between two groups of monks in the city.

The Buddha tried many times to end their quarrelling, but neither group of monks heeded the Buddha’s advice. Seeing this, the Buddha silently left Kosambī by himself, and entered the nearby forest. There, he found a cave and decided to spend his Vassa there.

¹² Cūḷagosiṅga Sutta MN 32: Story has been paraphrased from Bhikkhu Sujato’s translation (2018) found at <https://suttacentral.net/mn31/en/sujato> .

¹³ Kosambī Jātaka, (428). Kosambiya Sutta, MN 48.

During his time there, an elephant served as the Buddha's attendant. Taking a large branch with its trunk, he would clear away the grass surrounding the cave, and kept the place clean and tidy. Every day the elephant would bring fruits as an offering to the Buddha.

Meanwhile, in the town of Kosambī, the people found out that the Buddha had left to stay in the forest alone because of the quarrelling monks. As a result, the people stopped offering alms to the monks. The news of this incident spread, eventually reaching Ananda who was staying at Śrāvastī for the Vassa.

At the end of the rainy season, Ananda went to see the Buddha, and told him that there were many people in Śrāvastī who wished to hear the Buddha preach, so the Buddha then went to stay at Śrāvastī. Sometime later, the monks at Kosambī, having realised the mistake they had made, came to seek the Buddha's forgiveness. The Buddha then gave a discourse to the monks, in which he said:

One should associate with the wise, not the foolish.

It would be better to live alone if we cannot find good friends.

There is no companionship with the foolish.

This is the way the Sangha community can support its members to attain their liberation, and in turn, be able to benefit others.

The Sangha Training

The second key part of life in the Sangha is spiritual training. The Buddha once compared the way he trained his disciples to the way a man trains horses.¹⁴

Once a man called Kesi, skilled in training horses, came to visit the Buddha. The Buddha asked how he trained his horses. Kesi replied that sometimes he trained a horse gently, at other times harshly, and sometimes both gently and harshly. But if a horse didn't submit to any of these training methods,

¹⁴ Kesi Sutta, AN 4.111

he would kill it. He explained, “This is because I don’t want to disgrace my lineage of teachers.”

Kesi then asked the Buddha: “But you, Sir, are an incomparable guide for the taming of individuals. How do you train people?”

The Buddha told him that in a similar way, there were times when he trained a person gently, other times harshly, and sometimes both gently and harshly.

He explained: “For gentle training, I teach them the consequences of skilful conduct – happiness in the higher realms. For harsh training, I teach them the consequences of unskilful conduct – suffering in the lower realms. For both gentle and harsh training, I teach the consequences of both skilful and unskilful conduct. And if a person doesn’t submit to any of these methods, I kill him.”

Kesi was shocked and exclaimed: “But it’s not proper for the Buddha to take life!”

The Buddha replied: “If a person does not submit to any method of training, then neither the Buddha nor

his fellow Sangha regards him as being worth speaking to or scolding. When the Buddha and his fellow Sangha doesn't regard him as being worth speaking to or scolding, it means a person is [spiritually] dead.”

When Kesi heard this, he was delighted and took refuge in the Buddha for the rest of his life.

The Nine Qualities of the Sangha

The nine qualities of the Sangha mentioned in the SAṄGHĀNUSSATI, or the contemplation on the Sangha, refers to the qualities of the ARIYA or noble Sangha. Through the practice of Dhamma, an ordinary worldly being can be transformed to a good human being, and from a good human being into a noble being – one who is harmless and who has distanced him- or her-self from the tendencies of greed, hatred and delusion. The ARIYA or noble Sangha may be monastics, or they may be lay followers who have attained one of the stages of Sainthood.

The qualities of the noble Sangha are as follows:

SU-PAṬIPANNO BHAGAVATO
SĀVAKA-SAṄGHO

UJU-PAṬIPANNO BHAGAVATO
SĀVAKA-SAṄGHO

ÑĀYA-PAṬIPANNO BHAGAVATO
SĀVAKA-SAṄGHO

SĀMĪCI-PAṬIPANNO BHAGAVATO
SĀVAKA-SAṄGHO

YADIDAṀ CATTĀRI-PURISA-YUGĀNI
AṬṬHA-PURISA-PUGGALĀ

ESA-BHAGAVATO SĀVAKA-SAṄGHO
ĀHUNEYYO PĀHUNEYYO

DAKKHIṆEYYO AÑJALI-KARAṆĪYO
ANUTTARAṀ PUÑÑAKKHETTAṀ
LOKASSĀ TI

Well-attained is the Order of the Blessed One's disciples;

Upright is the Order of the Blessed One's disciples;

Wise is the Order of the Blessed One's disciples;

Dutiful is the Order of the Blessed One's disciples;

That is to say, the Four Pairs of Persons,

The Eight Types of Individuals –

This Order of the Blessed One's disciples
Is worthy of offerings, is worthy of hospitality,

Is worthy of gifts, is worthy of reverential
salutation,

Is an incomparable field of merit to the world.

1. SU-PATIPANNA

SU-PATIPANNA refers to the Sangha community of the Blessed one who are well-attained. Because the path they have entered is the proper Dhamma, they are well trained in the threefold training of SĪLA

SAMĀDHI PAÑÑĀ, or morality, concentration and wisdom. Therefore, they have either reduced, or overcome the tendencies of greed, hatred, and delusion.

2. UJU-PAṬIPANNA

UJU-PAṬIPANNA refers to the upright conduct of the Order of the Blessed One. They neither indulge in pleasures nor hide their shortcomings. The virtues of sincerity, honesty and truthfulness are associated with upright conduct.

3. ŃĀYA-PAṬIPANNA

ŃĀYA-PAṬIPANNA refers to the wise conduct of the Order of the Blessed One. Their wisdom is not just from books or life experience, but comes from realisation of the Four Noble Truths – namely: suffering, its cause, its cessation, and the path that leads to its cessation.

4. SĀMĪCI-PAṬIPANNA

SĀMĪCI-PAṬIPANNA refers to the dutiful conduct of the Order of the Blessed One. They uphold the Dhamma by practising what the Buddha taught and verifying the Truth, which preserves the dispensation of the Buddha. They also become a source of inspiration to others, leading them to walk the Dhamma's path.

5. ĀHUNEYYA

Worthy of offering. What kind of offerings can we make to the holy Sangha? Traditionally there are four requisites that are considered necessary to sustain the life of a Sangha member: clothing, food, shelter, and medicine.¹⁵

¹⁵ PARIKKHĀRĀ: "CĪVARA-PINḌAPĀTA-SENĀSANA-GILĀNAPACCAYABHESAJJA" (Vin. III, 132). There is an expanded list of eight requisites as well. AṬṬHA-PARIKKHĀRĀ: "TICĪVARAM, PATTO, VĀSI, SŪCI, (KĀYA-) BANDHANAM, PARISSĀVANA"; 'the 3 robes, the bowl (for food), a razor, a needle, the girdle, a water-strainer'

6. PĀHUNEYYA

Worthy of hospitality. This means that Sangha members are worthy of being treated like an honoured guest.

7. DAKKHINEYYA

Worthy of gifts. This refers to classical Indian tradition. In ancient India, teachers and religious masters usually refused to be paid for their teaching. Students would live with their teachers, and teachers would feed, clothe and teach them in their homes. At the conclusion of their training, students would give them gifts, out of gratitude for what they had learnt.

8. AÑJALI-KARAÑĪYA

Worthy of reverential salutation. ‘Reverential salutation’ refers to the way we respectfully greet Sangha members. Traditionally, this refers to AÑJALI – folding our palms together. This method of greeting is used in Buddhist communities throughout the world. There are also more formal expressions of

reverential salutation towards Sangha members ranging from a five-point prostration¹⁶ to a full-body prostration.

Respect is a very important quality for us to cultivate when we wish to walk the spiritual path. There are two kinds of elders who should be respected, those who are older than us in age, and those who are our spiritual elders, our religious or spiritual teachers, even though they may be younger in age. By showing respect and listening to the advice of our spiritual teachers, their knowledge will be transmitted to us, especially the knowledge of the path to enlightenment.

9. ANUTTARA PUÑÑAKKHETTA LOKASSĀ

An incomparable field of merit to the world. Why are the Sangha worthy of offerings, hospitality, gifts and reverential salutation? It is because they are like a fertile field, where any merits we do will multiply.

¹⁶ Note: A five-point prostration involves bowing down with both knees, both elbows and forehead touching the floor.

Here we use the word 'field', but we can think in terms of a farm or our gardens at home. When we sow some seeds in the garden, we find that even the same kind of plant will grow differently in different areas of the garden. Some plants will grow stronger than others, some will bear flowers and fruit, and others will not.

In the same manner, the merits that we perform towards individuals such as a stranger, a thief or a holy person, will naturally have different results. We may have some joy in helping a stranger, but if we later discover we actually helped a thief who has caused harm to others, we will feel bad and even regret our good deed.

On the other hand, when we come to know that our supporting a person who is holy and trustworthy has resulted in benefit to many others, our joy will naturally multiply.

The Buddha established the Sangha for those who wish to study, practise and realise the Dhamma, as well as to preserve and promote its teachings, for the benefit of all beings. So, when one performs a meritorious

act towards the Sangha, the fruit of that action will multiply on the basis of the immense benefit of the Sangha's activities. This is how we should understand the different fields of merits.

The noble Sangha are regarded as an incomparable field of merit to the world, because of their ability to inspire and guide others to walk the Dhamma's path and to gain their final liberation.

Who are the Noble Sangha?

The ARIYA or noble Sangha are those who have attained to the path and fruition (MAGGA PHALA) of any of the four stages of sainthood (or Arahantship). Collectively, they are called 'the four pairs of persons or eight types of individuals' – CATTĀRI-PURISA-YUGĀNI, AṬṬHA-PURISA-PUGGALĀ.

The path and the fruition refer to the various stages of awakening in the process of becoming an Arahant. Cultivation of the Four Foundations of Mindfulness

will eventually lead on to the development of the seven factors of enlightenment. If conditions are right, this process can take place very quickly. Hence the duration between entering the path and realising the fruition may be as little as that of a finger snap.

Such beings have stepped onto the path to liberation, never turning back, by systematically breaking the chains which bind us to saṃsāra: the Ten Fetters.

The Ten Fetters

The path to liberation involves the breaking of the Ten Fetters, or *DASA-SAMYOJANA* which binds us to the saṃsāric cycle of birth and death. They are as follows:¹⁷

1. **SAKKĀYA-DITTHI** – self-illusion
2. **VICIKICCĀ** – doubts
3. **SĪLABBATA-PARĀMĀSA** – adherence to wrongful rites and rituals or ceremonies
4. **KĀMA-CCHANDA (KĀMARĀSA)** – sensual desire

¹⁷ Saṃyojana Sutta AN 10.13

5. **VYĀPĀDA (PAṬIGHA)** – aversion
6. **RŪPA-RĀGA** – attachment to realms of form
7. **ARŪPA-RĀGA** – attachment to realms of formless
8. **MĀNA** – pride
9. **UDDHACCA** – restlessness
10. **AVIJJĀ** – ignorance

The Four Stages of Sainthood

SOTĀPANNA

When the first three fetters are eradicated, one is said to have attained to the first stage of sainthood or SOTĀPANNA, Stream-Enterer. Enlightenment is assured within seven lifetimes at most.

SAKADĀGĀMI

The second stage of sainthood, SAKADĀGĀMI or Once Returner, is attained when the next two fetters,

sensual desire and aversion, are kept under control. 'Once Returner' means that one will be reborn in the human realm only once, but rebirth can take place in the DEVA-LOKA (or the Heavenly realms) if Arahantship is not attained within this lifetime. Since these two fetters are not completely overcome, one can still experience thoughts of lust and anger to a certain extent.

ANĀGĀMI

The third stage of sainthood, ANĀGĀMI or Never-Returner, is attained when both sensual desire and aversion are completely eradicated. Thereafter, one neither returns to this world nor is born in the heavenly realms. Since one has rooted out the desire for sense gratification, after death, he or she will be reborn in the Pure Abodes (SUDDHĀVĀSA), an environment only reachable by ANĀGĀMI, until enlightenment is attained.

ARAHANT

The final stage of Sainthood, the ARAHAT or ARAHANT, the Worthy One, is attained when the five remaining fetters are broken or destroyed. They are:

- attachment to the realm of form (by clinging on to RŪPA JHĀNAS);
- attachment to the realm of formless (by clinging on to ARŪPA JHĀNAS);
- pride (MĀNA), as a result of ‘measuring’ or comparing oneself with others;
- restlessness (UDDHACCA), as a result of the pride that arises through comparing oneself with others in terms of spiritual attainment;
- ignorance (AVIJJĀ). This refers to the very subtle illusion of the self. Even though the gross idea of self is overcome in the first stage of sainthood, there is still a subtle illusion of self that needs to be overcome through the full realisation of the Four Noble Truths.

Those who have attained to the path and fruition of any of the four stages of sainthood are considered to be the ARIYA-SAṄGHA, or belonging to the community of the noble ones, regardless of whether they are monastic (that is, ordained members of the sangha) or lay followers.

Other Kinds of Noble Sangha

Just as there are noble Sangha members who are treading the Arahant path according to the Theravada tradition, there are also noble Sangha members who are walking the Bodhisattva path.

According to the Mahayana and Vajrayana traditions, those who have attained to one of the ten BHŪMIS, which represent different levels of realisation of emptiness and are based on the Four Noble Truths and PAṬICCA SAMUPPĀDA, are also considered to be part of the noble Sangha.

The Importance of SAṄGHĀNUSSATI

The contemplation on the qualities of the Sangha enables us to recognise and connect with authentic teachers, and not be fooled by those who have shaven their head and donned the robes merely for worldly gain. A shaven head and robes alone do not make one a monk or a nun.¹⁸

A true monk or nun is one who has renounced the worldly pleasures of life and taken to the Dhamma's path to reduce and eventually overcome greed, hatred and delusion. The contemplation on the qualities of the Sangha should also inspire and motivate those who have joined the Order of the Sangha to live up to the ideal of a truly noble Sangha community.

In the Mangala Sutta,¹⁹ the sight of holy persons (SAMANĀNAÑ CA DASSANAM) is one of life's

¹⁸ Dhammapada Verses. 264-5

¹⁹ KN Khp 5

highest blessings. Whenever we see the saffron-coloured robes of a monk or nun, we should immediately be reminded of Buddha and the noble path he has shown to enlightenment. Even though that monk or nun may not yet be highly realised, if seeing him or her reminds us of the noble Sangha, we will connect ourselves to the Triple Gem and the path to enlightenment.

The Role of the Sangha

The Sangha as a spiritual community plays a very important role in supporting both ordained and lay followers on the path to enlightenment.

Relations with the Laity

The Sangha was established in such a manner that they depend upon the lay community for basic requisites such as food, shelter, robes and medicine. The regular offerings of Dana and other requisites by lay people maintain the life and strength of the monks and nuns, who in turn have the opportunity to teach

the Dhamma, and to pass on their knowledge and realisations. Because of the rules which prohibit them from dealing with money, the Sangha also relies on the lay community to maintain the temple or monastery buildings and grounds.

In looking after the material needs of the Sangha, the lay community also have the opportunity to perform merits. As we mentioned earlier, the community of the noble ones constitutes an incomparable field of merits.

All these are opportunities for the lay community to connect with the monastic Sangha and to receive proper guidance in Dhamma practice. In the Mangala Sutta, ‘association with the wise’ (PAṄḌITĀNAÑCA SEVANĀ) is one of life’s highest blessings, which will pave the way for one to grow in knowledge and wisdom – and especially for those seeking to walk the spiritual path. That is also why at the end of our chanting, we often include the verse:

IMINĀ PUÑÑĀ KAMMENA

MĀ ME BĀLA-SAMĀGAMO

SATAṂ SAMĀGAMO HOTU

YĀVA NIBBĀNA-PATTIYĀ

By this merit I have acquired, may I never follow the foolish, but only the wise, until the time I attain final liberation (Nibbāna).

For the Sangha, this arrangement enables monks and nuns to focus on the training of their minds, without having to be concerned about too many worldly matters.

Whilst the Sangha depends on the laity for material support, the laity depends on the Sangha for their spiritual growth. The Buddha established the Order of the Sangha not only to facilitate the training of those who have the faith and conviction to renounce their worldly lives to lead a spiritual way of life, but also to reach out to those ‘with little dust in their eyes’. This includes the lay community.

And just as the laity create merit by performing services for the Sangha, Sangha members who pave the way for the laity to grow in wisdom will also acquire

much merit. Supporting one another and rejoicing in each other's practice provides opportunities for both the Sangha and lay communities to acquire the merits and wisdom which form the foundation for one's final liberation and enlightenment.

Apart from their role in providing spiritual guidance, up until the age of colonialism Sangha communities throughout Asia were also the primary means of education, which was extended to all regardless of social or economic background. Monasteries would also assist their local communities in times of famine and unrest, sharing grain and other items they had been offered so that local farmers could grow their own crops and support their families.

In other words, the relationship between the Sangha and the laity is one of interdependence. While the laity provides the Sangha with essential material support, the Sangha provides the laity with spiritual support, paving the way for them to come to the Dhamma and to walk the path to liberation.

Banner of the Arahants

Sangha members who are diligent in their practice and who are able to verify the teachings of the Buddha by attaining to the path and fruition become a great source of inspiration for the laity to walk the Dhamma's path. This will eventually pave the way for them to give up the lesser, worldly happiness for the greater, spiritual happiness.

In this way, the Sangha are indeed the closest link we have to the Buddha and the Dhamma. They are truly the 'banner of the Arahants' (ARAHANTAKETU) – both because of the robes they wear, which remind us of the enlightened beings, and because they strive to develop the enlightened qualities of purity, wisdom and compassion.²⁰

And this banner is passed from one generation to the next. The closest link between the Sangha and the laity is also the one most often overlooked. It is when a youth receives the blessings of their parents,

²⁰ *Banner of the Arahants*, (1979), p.viii. Bhikkhu Khantipalo, Buddhist Publication Society.

and through the strong connection with the Sangha, decides to join the Sangha community. He (or she) undergoes the training, studies the Dhamma and realises the truth. And through his connection with his parents, relatives and friends, he is able to share what he has learnt and realised with others, and bring them onto the Dhamma's path.

After Devanampiya Tissa, king of Sri Lanka, built a Buddhist monastery and invited the Arahant Mahinda to teach the Dhamma in Sri Lanka, the king asked Arahant Mahinda if the BUDDHA-SĀSANA was now established in the country. Arahant Mahinda told the king that Buddhism would only be established, if a SĪMĀ – a consecrated area for acts of the Sangha (such as ordination) – was constructed.²¹

Why was a SĪMĀ important? Because of the importance of continuing the lineage of the Sangha. In another text, Arahant Mahinda says, “[Buddhism] will be established [in Sri Lanka] if a son born in Lanka to Lankan parents, becomes a monk, studies the Vinaya in Lanka, and recites [the Suttas] in

²¹ Mahāvamsa XV.176-181

Lanka”.²² This illustrates the importance of the Sangha to establish and preserve the BUDDHA-SĀSANA²³ and its lineage.²⁴

The Sangha Today

Although there are vast changes in the external world, the task facing the Sangha community today is not much different from the task they faced 2,500 years ago. While modernity, in the form of electronics, social media and so on, can be harmful if abused, all these are also useful tools for promoting and preserving the dispensation of the Buddha and upholding a pure and noble way of life. This is the most important role the Sangha has in our modern, globalised society.

²² Samantapāsādikā

²³ The dispensation of the Buddha.

²⁴ PARAMPARĀ: ‘one after the other; succession’ (PTS PL-EN Dict.). In Buddhism, this refers to the succession or lineage of teaching or transmission of the Dhamma, traced from one’s teacher, to one’s teacher’s teacher, and so on – up to the Buddha himself.

Even Sangha members who have not attained to the path and fruition can contribute greatly to society, catering to the needs of individuals at different levels of development and understanding. They should, however, make a sincere effort to walk the noble path and to realise the truth, in order to be of greater service to humanity. As the Buddha said, “If the monks dwell rightly, this world will not be empty of Arahants.”²⁵

In the same way, the challenges faced by the world today are also no different from the challenges that people faced in the past. The real challenges faced by humankind lie deep within the human psyche – the tendencies of greed, hatred and delusion. That is why it is so important for the Sangha and lay communities to continue to support each other.

It is especially important in this Dhamma-declining age for all of us to make the necessary sacrifices to continue to support the establishment of the Sangha and to provide them with the necessary training to develop their full potentials.

²⁵ Mahā-parinibbāna Sutta, DN 16

Supporting the Sangha – the spiritual community comprising both the monastic as well as the lay community that upholds a pure and noble way of life – will support the preservation of the Buddha-Dhamma in the world.

It is this support, through the generosity of generations of Buddhists, that has enabled the dispensation of the Buddha to be maintained for more than 2,500 years.

The Significance of the Buddha Dhamma Sangha

The Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha are known as the ‘Three Jewels’ or ‘Triple Gem’ because of their preciousness. They are the best and most reliable source of refuge.

When we are ill, we need to visit a doctor and take the medicine prescribed in order to cure our disease.

In the same way, in order to cure our suffering in saṃsāra we can consider the Buddha as the doctor, the Dhamma as the medicine, and the Sangha as one who administers the medicine.²⁶

The blessings, guidance and protection of the Triple Gem lead us to success, not only in our worldly pursuits but also in the pursuit of our final liberation and Enlightenment.

Why We Seek Refuge

When we recite:

BUDDHAṀ SARANAṀ GACCHĀMI

DHAMMAṀ SARANAṀ GACCHĀMI

SAṄGHAṀ SARANAṀ GACCHĀMI

It means that we seek refuge, or we go for refuge to the Buddha Dhamma Sangha.

The Pali term SARANAṀ or SARANA means refuge, guidance and protection²⁷. This has a more profound

²⁶ See Itivuttaka, KN 100; AN 3.22; MN 105.

²⁷ Sarana PTS p. 697.

meaning when we say ‘refuge in the Buddha Dhamma Sangha’, because we are connecting ourselves with all the values or qualities associated with the Buddha Dhamma Sangha.

In other words, we are empowering ourselves: making ourselves stronger and stronger, perfecting ourselves day by day until the conditions are right for enlightenment, for our final liberation, putting an end to old age, sickness and death once and for all. This is also how we develop the strength, courage and wisdom to overcome whatever obstacles or challenges that may arise on our spiritual journey.

Going for Refuge

There are different ways of going for refuge to the Triple Gem, depending on the level of development and understanding of the individual. They involve faith and reverence, humility and devotion. Whilst truly going for refuge must come from deep within our own hearts, in order for us to learn to connect with the true refuge within, we need to first rely on external forms of refuge.

We all have the same basic awareness as the Buddha, whether we believe it or not. The difference lies in its clarity. The Buddha's awareness is vast and crystal clear. Our awareness is clouded and tainted by greed, hatred and delusion, along with all their ramifications or manifestations.

As we continue to grow in faith and devotion to the Buddha Dhamma Sangha, and keep on doing good, avoiding evil, and purifying our minds, we will slowly remove the layers of cloud that have been obstructing and obscuring us and eventually attain the awareness and clarity of the Buddha.

YO DHAMMAṀ PASSATI,

SO MAṀ PASSATI.²⁸

He who sees the Dhamma, sees me.

- *The Buddha*

²⁸ Vakkali Sutta, SN 22.87

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