

**Role of the
Sangha in the
New Millennium**

The Monastic Perspective

A G G A C I T T A B H I K K H U

Role of the Sangha in the New Millennium

The Monastic Perspective

Aggacitta Bhikkhu



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PREFACE

A momentous event took place in Sasanarakkha Buddhist Sanctuary on 13 July 2003—the ordination of its first samanera. In his talk given after the simple ordination ceremony, Ven Aggacitta, the abbot, talked about the mutually beneficial Sangha–laity relationship. He said that the most fundamental way a bhikkhu can repay the gift of dana from the laity is by observing his precepts and practising the Dhamma. The Dhamma can be practised at many levels of spiritual maturity as it appeals to people with different interests. Whether such a monk teaches, studies, performs rituals, or engages in self-practice, he is repaying his lay supporters by giving them the opportunity to reap the fruits of dana to a virtuous monk.

This booklet, published in conjunction with Kathina 2003, is the paper that Ven Aggacitta presented in the forum “Role of the Sangha in the New Millennium” at the Global Conference

on Buddhism held in Shah Alam, Malaysia, in December 2002. It explains in detail the rationale and the need for different types of well-trained monks in modern day society.

In his talk on 13 July, he also said that in Sasanarakkha Buddhist Sanctuary, "...we understand this well and do not train only one type of monk. We provide holistic training as well as opportunities for individual development based on different needs and inclinations. We will give support and guidance to all types of monks, whether they are study monks, practising monks or missionary monks. We welcome people of different inclinations to come and join us so that we can help perpetuate the Buddha's teachings effectively at all levels of society."

Sasanarakkha Buddhist Sanctuary is thus the manifestation of the practice that Ven Aggacitta preaches. It aims to fulfil this role of the Sangha that he advocates.

Editor-in-chief



When I reflect on our theme for this global conference, *Buddhism for a Richer Life*, I cannot help but marvel that life on our planet Earth is blessed with so much richness in Buddhism. We have such a rich variety of Buddhist lineages, traditions, schools, sects, denominations, cultures, etc. which have proliferated since the final passing away of our Lord Gotama Buddha. Naturally, each of them has its respective Sangha with its own rich tradition and code of discipline.

It is not easy to become a member of any Sangha and even harder to master the theory and practice of its lifestyle. I must humbly confess that I am still in the process of mastering the lifestyle of *my* particular Sangha tradition, and have not embarked on a proper study of the lifestyles of *other* Sangha traditions. Therefore, with my deepest apologies to the members of other Sangha traditions, I can only share what I know through my understanding of the Pali scriptures. However,

I was told that the Vinaya and the Nikayas or Agamas that are found in all major traditions have many similarities. If this is true, then what I intend to share may also apply to other traditions as well.

The title of today's forum suggests that the role of the Sangha in this new millennium is and will be quite different from that in the past. How different is it, or should it be? Let us investigate by reviewing the origins of the Sangha and its social role as recorded in the Pali scriptures.

ORIGINS OF THE SANGHA

A long-standing lineage of *samaṇas* (ascetics) and *brāhmaṇas* (priests) who led lives quite different from householders was already prevalent during Prince Siddhattha Gotama's time. The samanās were generally austere and celibate. They did not engage in worldly occupations to earn a livelihood. Many belonged to teacher-centred communities while a minority were probably individualists. They shared a common ideal: to rise above worldly sensual pleasures. However,

their ultimate goal and the means to its attainment could be vastly different. In comparison, brahmanas were not required to be celibate, although they could choose to be so. Many probably had families and engaged in worldly occupations while performing their pastoral duties such as rites, rituals and divinations.



When Prince Siddhattha renounced his royal legacy in search of Truth, he joined the ranks of the samanas. We are all probably familiar with the accounts of his apprenticeship with Alara Kalama and Udaka Ramaputta, the two prominent ascetic teachers at that time, as well as his own efforts of self-mortification. Eventually, he realised the futility of pursuing the two extremes of sensual indulgence and self-mortification and rediscovered the ancient “middle path” leading to the end of all suffering.

His attainment of supreme enlightenment led to the evolution of a new breed of not-so-

austere samanas, which he preferred to call *bhikkhus* and *bhikkhunis* (mendicants who feared the danger of samsaric existence). These were initially his immediate disciples, many of whom were already samanas of one kind or another, who led austere lives in accordance with the generally accepted standards of asceticism. Our Blessed One's powerful charisma and eloquence gradually attracted young men from various strata of society to "go forth from the household life to homelessness". These included a significant number of youths from wealthy families of the aristocracy and merchant class, who were not so physically fit to live up to the generally accepted standards of asceticism. Knowing that many types of ascetic practices were not conducive to enlightenment, our Blessed One made many concessions to the ascetic norms of that time—resulting in his monastic community being sometimes dubbed by other austere ascetics and their lay supporters as "the luxurious Children of the Sakyans".

Despite this apparent laxity in austerity, the Sangha or monastic community still conformed to a distinctly ascetic lifestyle in comparison with that of brahmanas and householders. Indeed, the ultimate goal of the Buddha's teachings was so lofty and the "middle path" that led to it so arduous that the average householder would find them beyond his or her province. Renunciation of worldly occupations seemed to be an important if not essential requirement for total liberation from samsaric suffering. This sentiment finds explicit expression in several suttas.

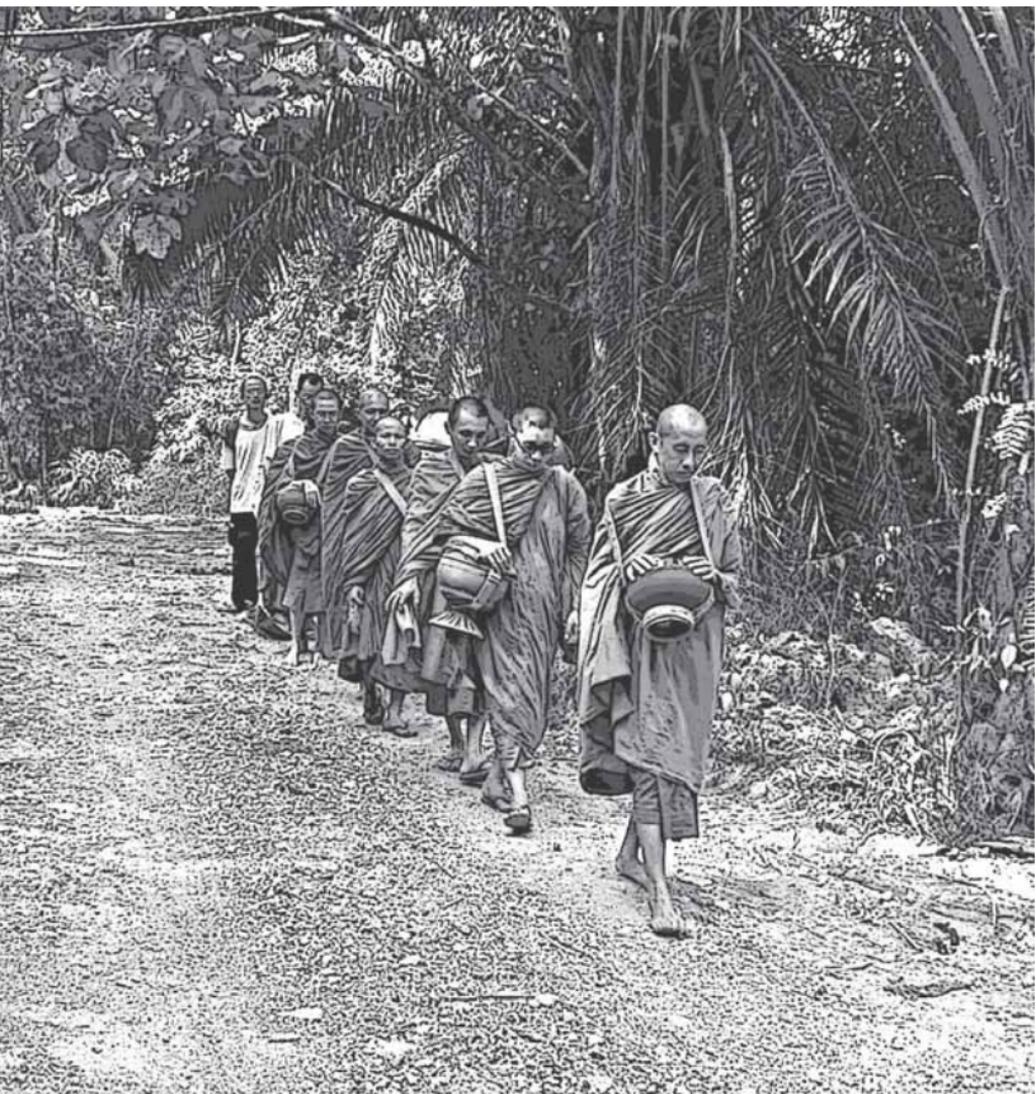
*The household life is crowded, a path of dust.
Going forth is like the open air. It is not easy for
one dwelling at home to lead the perfectly com-
plete, perfectly purified holy life, bright as a
polished conch. Let me then shave off my hair
and beard, put on saffron robes, and go forth from
the household life into homelessness.*

SAMAÑÑAPHALA SUTTA (DN 2.191)

SUBHA SUTTA (DN 10.450)

CULAHATTHIPADOPAMA SUTTA (MN 27.288)

KANDARAKA SUTTA (MN 51.418)





Homelessness has a special meaning in Buddhist scriptures. A newly ordained person is told to depend on four fundamental supports [*nissaya*] for his/her livelihood: discarded cloth, alms-food, the foot of a tree and urine. Nevertheless, a bhikkhu or bhikkhuni is by no means a vagrant. As briefly mentioned above, the earliest disciples of our Blessed One may have followed this injunction closely. Then after our Blessed One made more and more concessions, the Buddhist monastic may, if so offered, accept ready-made robes, invitations to meals, dwelling places and medicine. So homelessness does not literally translate as not having a decent home or dwelling place. Rather, it refers to non-involvement in secular affairs which are inherent in a householder's life—such as earning a livelihood, kinship and socialisation—and to a distinctly different lifestyle marked by the practice of meticulous moral discipline, sense restraint, mindfulness and

contentment with a frugal life. In the words of our Blessed One himself:

After some time he abandons his accumulation of wealth, be it large or small; he abandons his circle of relatives, be it large or small; he shaves off his hair and beard, puts on saffron robes, and goes forth from the household life into homelessness.

When he has thus gone forth, he lives restrained by the restraint of the Patimokkha, possessed of proper behaviour and resort. Having taken up the rules of training, he trains himself in them, seeing danger in the slightest faults. He comes to be endowed with wholesome bodily and verbal actions, his livelihood is purified, and he is possessed of moral discipline. He guards the doors of his sense faculties, is endowed with mindfulness and clear comprehension, and is content....

(IBID)

The whole of the Vinaya Pitaka and its copious exegetical literature are devoted to the

legalities and practicalities of moral discipline for the Sangha. Briefly, they may be classified into three broad areas of focus: training for individual development, regulations for harmonious communal life and Sangha-laity relations. In the Digha Nikaya, our Blessed One describes in elaborate detail the various types of wrong livelihood that the Sangha is not supposed to engage in. A scrutiny of the list can uncover many seemingly innocent activities, such as fortune-telling, prophesying, divination, prescribing or administering medicine and invocations, which would now popularly be regarded as “compassionate acts of social service”. This list serves as a very important piece of scriptural evidence to determine the criteria for setting the parameters of the Sangha’s role in society, whether of the past, present or future.

Much more difficult than external moral discipline and abstention from wrong livelihood is restraint of the senses through the persistent practice of mindfulness and clear comprehension. Sense restraint actually supports moral discipline although such a statement may appear to contra-

dict the normal sequence of our Blessed One's discourses, in which he would normally start with moral discipline. A well-guarded mind will arrest a potential cause of transgression or an intention to transgress any precept, for it is said in the first verse of the Dhammapada: "*The mind is the forerunner of all things*". It is well-established mindfulness that guards the mind well. It is also well-established mindfulness that leads to the ultimate goal. And to properly establish mindfulness, physical seclusion and persistent effort are important contributory factors, as the following passages show:

Endowed with this noble aggregate of moral discipline, this noble restraint over the sense faculties, this noble mindfulness and clear comprehension, and this noble contentment, he resorts to a secluded dwelling—a forest, the foot of a tree, a mountain, a glen, a hillside cave, a cremation ground, a jungle grove, the open air, a heap of straw. After returning from his almsround, following his meal, he sits down, crosses his legs, holds his body erect, and sets up mindfulness before him...

(IBID.)

And soon, not long after his full admission, dwelling alone, withdrawn, diligent, ardent, and resolute, the venerable Magandiya, by realising for himself with direct knowledge, here and now entered upon and abided in that supreme goal of the holy life for the sake of which clansmen rightly go forth from the home life into homelessness. He directly knew: "Birth is destroyed, the holy life has been lived, what had to be done has been done, there is no more coming to any state of being." And the venerable Magandiya became one of the arahants.

MAGANDIYA SUTTA (MN 75.222)

The above sampling of scriptural evidence from the Pali Canon shows that ideally, a monastic's life should be dedicated to the practice of realising the supreme goal. Our Blessed One often urged monastics to practise with urgency "like a man whose headwear is on fire". Gregariousness and talkativeness were discouraged. Nonetheless, as members of a monastic community, they were required to participate in communal chores and to assist one another

whenever necessary—with mindfulness and full comprehension, of course. Otherwise, they were urged to spend their private time in seclusion and “noble silence”—a special term for remaining silent while focussing on one’s meditation object.

SOCIAL ROLE OF THE SANGHA

Such introverted priorities of the Sangha, however, cannot stand by themselves despite the fact that its members belong to a socially accepted class of world renunciants. The freedom derived from non-involvement in secular affairs has to be reciprocated with the gift of the Dhamma to their supporters—those who faithfully provide the monastics with the material requisites of life.

Reciprocation with the gift of the Dhamma is two-fold: by example or by precept. Foremost is the example of an ideal monastic who is morally disciplined, sensually restrained, mindful, contented, solitary and meditative. Such a one reflects the Sangha that practises well and is therefore worthy of reverence and offerings as “the



incomparable field of merit for the world”. That would be the type of reciprocation required for setting a good example so that “those who are not yet pleased will be pleased and those who are pleased will increase in number”.

The other form of reciprocation, which is less introverted and more “socially engaged”, is sharing the Dhamma with lay supporters by radiating loving-kindness, giving moral guidance, teaching, discussion, etc. Gratitude is one of the moral virtues often preached by our Blessed One, and in Sigalovada Sutta he clearly explained the mutually supporting relationship between the Sangha and its lay supporters.

In five ways, young householder, should a householder minister to ascetics and brahmins as the Zenith:

- i by lovable deeds,*
- ii by lovable words,*
- iii by lovable thoughts,*
- iv by keeping his doors open to them,*
- v by supplying their material needs.*

The ascetics and brahmins, thus ministered to as the Zenith by a householder, show their compassion towards him in six ways:

- i they restrain him from evil,*
- ii they persuade him to do good,*
- iii they love him with a kind heart,*
- iv they make him hear what he has not heard,*
- v they clarify what he has already heard,*
- vi they point out the path to a heavenly state.*

In these six ways do ascetics and brahmins show their compassion towards a householder who ministers to them as the Zenith. Thus is the Zenith covered by him and made safe and secure.

SIGALOVADA SUTTA (DN 31.272)

These forms of reciprocation imply that the role of the Sangha should include the study, practice and realisation of the Dhamma and

subsequently teaching it to fellow monastics as well as lay devotees. Study is not merely for the sake of intellectual knowledge but rather so that one can put the knowledge into actual practice and thereby attain realisation. This point is frequently stressed by our Blessed One throughout the Tipitaka. Practising to develop oneself is so important, in fact, that failure to do so would endanger the very life of the *Sàsana* (the Buddha's Dispensation). In this connection, our Blessed One revealed five future dangers which monks should be aware of and strive to overcome. A paraphrase translation follows:

In the future, monks who are not developed in bodily conduct, moral virtue, mind and wisdom will engage in five activities that will undermine the good Dhamma:

- 1 (& 2). *Ordain (give tutelage to) others. Subsequently, they will be unable to train their pupils in superior virtue, superior mind and superior wisdom. Then their pupils, who will not be developed in bodily conduct, moral virtue, mind and wisdom will ordain (give tutelage*

to) others as well. They too will be unable to train their pupils in superior virtue, superior mind and superior wisdom. Then their pupils too will not be developed in bodily conduct, moral virtue, mind and wisdom. Thus, corrupt Dhamma results in corrupt Vinaya and corrupt Vinaya results in corrupt Dhamma.

3. *Be deluded [by fault-finding, censure or preaching for gain and honour] and unawakened when discoursing on abhidhamma [moral virtue and other superior dhammas] and vedalla [subjects related to knowledge or insight]. Thus, corrupt Dhamma results in corrupt Vinaya and corrupt Vinaya results in corrupt Dhamma.*
4. *Not listen to, try to understand or be interested in the profound, supramundane suttas related to Voidness spoken by the Tathagata [“Thus-gone”—an epithet for our Blessed One] when they are being recited. They will rather listen to, try to understand or be interested in flowery discourses, poems and poetry of [non-Buddhist] followers when they are being recited. Thus, corrupt Dhamma results in corrupt Vinaya and corrupt Vinaya results in corrupt Dhamma.*

5. *Become Elders who are living in abundance, lax, and are leaders of back-sliding. They will have given up the duty of living in seclusion and will not strive to attain what has not yet been attained. Those monks who come later will follow their bad example. And they too will be living in abundance, lax, and leaders of back-sliding. They too will have given up the duty of living in seclusion and will not strive to attain what has not yet been attained. Thus, corrupt Dhamma results in corrupt Vinaya and corrupt Vinaya results in corrupt Dhamma.*

TATIYA-ANAGATA-BHAYA SUTTA (AN V.79)

Summarising the moral of the above sutta and other similar suttas, one cannot overstress the importance of self-development before preaching. Although the degree of self-development required before attempting to instruct others is a personal choice, the minimum requirement can perhaps be gauged from the following verses in the Dhammapada:

158. *One should first establish oneself in what is proper,
then only should one instruct others.*

*Thus the wise person will not be
reproached.*

159. *If one would do what one teaches others,
then, being himself well-controlled,
he would control others.
For, difficult indeed, is self-control.*

THE NEW MILLENNIUM SYNDROME

Now that we have a well-founded idea of the origins and social role of the Sangha according to the Pali scriptures, let us turn our attention to the significant characteristics of the new millennium. Then perhaps we can evaluate the role of the Sangha in relation to what is needed and what the Sangha can or should do within the parameters of the Dhamma-vinaya.

Before delving further into this exercise, please be informed that I do not claim to be a trained sociologist, anthropologist, behaviourist, or whatever. I am just making some common-sense analysis and explorations in order to discuss the role of the Sangha at a fundamental level.

Some of the significant characteristics of the new millennium have already been identified and enumerated in the brochure for this Global Conference on Buddhism. To summarise:

1. Advances in science and technology that provide more convenience, comfort and luxury that may require ethical considerations which are not directly found in the scriptures
2. Fast pace of modern lifestyle and changing social values that threaten to break up the traditional, close-knit family unit



3. Internet technology that offers almost unlimited and unmoderated information, thus affecting the healthy development of growing children and adolescents
4. Large scale political and religious violence that threatens the stability of world peace
5. Ever increasing suicide and divorce rates
6. Ever increasing mortality rates due to stress-induced illnesses.

Remedial Explorations

In Figure 1, the second column summarises the possible remedy for each of the above conditions while the third describes the possible role of the Sangha. Please be reminded that this attempt is only exploratory in nature and not at all comprehensive.

Even a cursory glance at the figure would reveal that the possible role of the Sangha in addressing the new millennium syndrome still falls within the traditional formula of study, practise, realise and teach. And to play that role

FIGURE 1: REMEDIAL EXPLORATIONS

Condition	Possible Remedy	Sangha's Possible Role
<p>Advances in science and technology that provide more convenience, comfort and luxury that may require ethical considerations not directly found in the scriptures</p>	<p>Greater theoretical understanding of the principles behind Buddhist ethics</p> <p>Introspection through the practice of mindfulness meditation</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Preserving the purity of the Buddha's teaching by learning, practising and teaching to fellow monastics 2. Sharing with the laity information on Buddhist doctrine, e.g. definition of various shades of good and evil, the law of kamma, <i>pāramis</i> (perfections), various levels of virtuous conduct through body, speech and mind, etc.
<p>Fast pace of modern lifestyle and changing social values that threaten to break up the traditional, close-knit family unit</p>	<p>Education of all age-groups on the importance of cultivating moral values like gratitude, respect, responsibility and loving-kindness, and of balancing material and spiritual goals</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Actively encouraging the practice of Buddhist doctrine by example and instruction
<p>Internet technology that offers almost unlimited, unmoderated information, thus affecting the healthy development of growing children and adolescents</p>	<p>Discipline, video-games that highlight Buddhist values and principles, well-designed Buddhist websites with good content, education on the limitations and disadvantages of sensual indulgence</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Teaching and encouraging the inspirational and tranquillising practice of chanting or reciting scriptural texts 5. Practising and teaching meditation, especially metta and mindfulness meditations
<p>Large scale political and religious violence that threatens the stability of world peace</p>	<p>Propagate the universal teachings of loving-kindness, tolerance, patience, forgiveness</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. Sharing 2-5 with receptive and influential educationists, spiritual leaders, community leaders, counsellors and others
<p>Ever increasing suicide and divorce rates</p>	<p>Counselling, edification of people on spiritual and moral values, meditation</p>	<p>Note:</p>
<p>Ever increasing mortality rates due to stress-induced illnesses</p>	<p>Education on healthy diet, wholesome lifestyle, regular exercise, stress-reductive meditation</p>	<p>To play this role more effectively, the Sangha's traditional training may have to be complemented by education in modern communication methods and skills</p>

effectively, the Sangha should have a good foundation in the theory and practice of the Dhamma-vinaya. How else can it teach and guide the laity correctly?

Sangha Quality Control

By the very nature of its lifestyle and ultimate aims, the Sangha has traditionally been the most effective organ for perpetuating the teachings of the Buddha through example and instruction. For this reason, its members have generally been esteemed by the laity. However, not every person dressed in robes is necessarily an authority on the theory or practice of the Buddha Dhamma. Increasing numbers of educated Buddhists are now embarrassingly aware of bogus monks and nuns who shamelessly beg for money in markets and among hawker stalls. Even more shocking are sex scandals involving monks and cases of monks who get so socially and politically engaged that they get into trouble with their governments. From these examples, we can understand the impor-

tance of having bona fide, properly trained monastics who truly represent the Buddha's teachings when they propagate it to others.

The teachings of the Buddha, especially meditation, are gaining popularity in Malaysia and other traditionally non-Buddhist cultures. We must, therefore, be particularly cautious that the Dhamma presented to those who yearn for it is authentic. In some parts of the world, there is such a great thirst for the Dhamma that a newly ordained monastic with a year or two of experience can very easily obtain lay support to set up a new centre and be an abbot or meditation teacher! Developments of such nature are cause for alarm considering the numerous precautions taken by our Blessed One to prevent the adulteration and decline of his dispensation. Two such injunctions clearly illustrate this.

1. *A newly ordained monk must stay under the tutelage of a competent teacher for at least five years to master fundamental principles of the Dhamma-vinaya before he can be independent.*

2. *A teacher must have a minimum seniority of ten years' standing in addition to mastery of monastic law and regulations, and competence in training his pupils in the theory and practice of morality, concentration and insight development.*

VINAYA MAHAVAGGA, MAHAKHANDHAKA 85

Some of the undesirable consequences of unqualified teachers on the integrity and welfare of the Sangha and the Sasana have already been mentioned above, in the paraphrase translation of Tatiya-anagata-bhaya Sutta from the Anguttara Nikaya. Again, in Sugatavinaya Sutta, our Blessed One declared four things that will lead to the confusion and disappearance of his teaching. A summary follows.

- i Monks learn from a badly transmitted text with wrongly arranged words. Subsequently, the meaning becomes misleading.*
- ii Monks are difficult to admonish. They are intractable and do not receive instructions with respect.*
- iii Monks who are learned and well versed in the Dhamma and Vinaya do not dutifully*

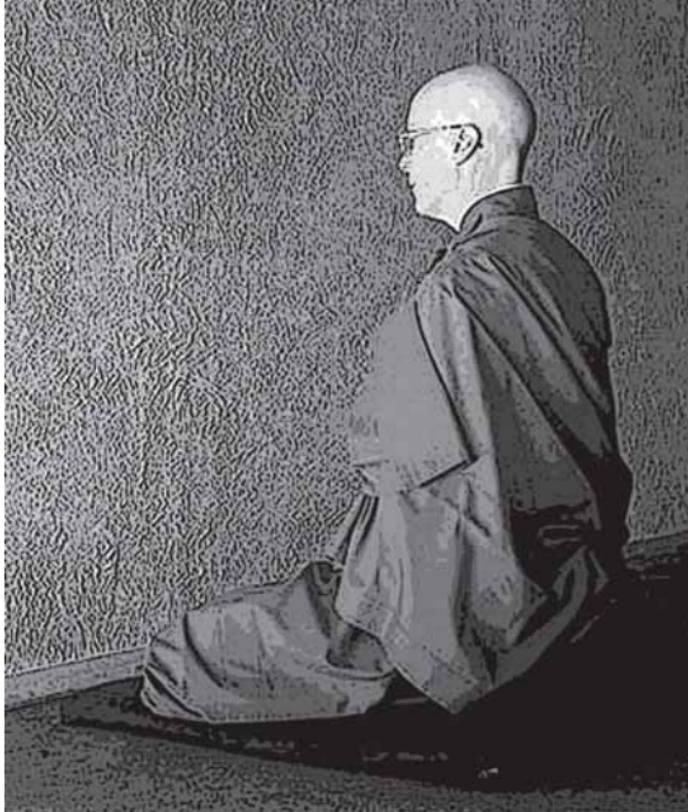
transmit the text to another. When they pass away the text becomes extinct.

- iv *Elder monks live in abundance; they are slack, heading for backsliding, shirking the (meditative) life of seclusion: they make no effort to attain what has not yet been attained or to realise what has not yet been realised. Later generations follow their example. They too live in abundance; they too are slack, heading for backsliding, shirking the (meditative) life of seclusion: they too make no effort to attain what has not yet been attained or to realise what has not yet been realised.*

SUGATAVINAYA SUTTA, AN 4.160

The above sutta reflects a recurrent theme in the teachings of the Buddha concerning the future of the Sasana. Not only is it important to learn and teach the scriptures in their purity, but it is just as important to be humble and willing to be trained by others, and to earnestly persevere in the cultivation of moral virtue, serenity and wisdom.

Many Buddhists may take pride in seeing the phenomenal spread of Buddhist meditation



throughout the world. In traditional Buddhist countries such as Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Japan, Korea and Taiwan, many meditation centres are flourishing with international support. No doubt, many international yogis have benefited under the guidance of their teachers, many of whom are monks or nuns. The profundity of their personal experience of meditation has prompted some to don the robes.

Unfortunately, most of these meditation centres do not provide training in the theory and practice of monastic discipline. This is understandable in the context of a traditional Buddhist country, where there are many well-established study monasteries that a local monastic can go to for further monastic education and training. Foreign monastics are at a disadvantage in such monasteries because these rarely have teachers who can communicate effectively in foreign languages, such as English. Consequently, many foreign monastics who return to their homeland or travel to other countries may not have received enough training to behave in ways that conform to monastic law and regulations. This state of affairs does not bode well for the future of the Sasana.

As I mentioned earlier, the legalities and practicalities of moral discipline for the Sangha may be classified into three broad areas of focus: training for individual development, regulations for harmonious communal life and Sangha-laity relations. Life as a Sangha member in a medita-

tion centre where the emphasis is on intensive meditation does not give a total experience of a monastic's life. While meditation may cover one important facet of training for individual development, many other aspects of the Vinaya cannot be learned in an intensive meditation retreat. These aspects include complementary teachings on behaviour and conduct based on patience, forgiveness, humility, loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, equanimity and responsibility.

It is not difficult for us to see that these virtues are just as essential for individual development as they are for harmonious communal living and for a responsible Sangha-laity relationship. In fact, I would venture to suggest that the comprehensive training advocated by the Vinaya scriptures constitutes a holistic approach to the development of a well-rounded monastic. Complemented with training in contemporary communication methods and skills, including the option of relevant IT education, such a well-rounded monastic would be able to fit competently into the role of the Sangha in this new millennium.

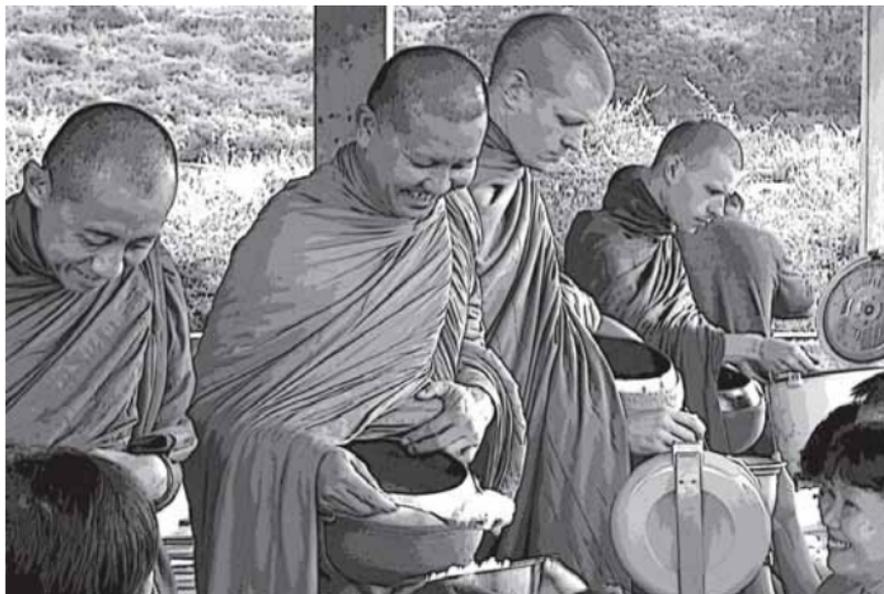
SUMMARY

I have covered different facets of the Sangha's role ranging from those required by its fundamentally lofty goals to social obligations that are more mundane in nature. Let me summarise them under three main areas: a more introverted role, a more social role and Sangha quality control.

More Introverted Role

1. The Sangha or monastic community has a distinctly ascetic lifestyle compared with that of householders. Renunciation from worldly occupations seems to be an important if not essential requirement for total liberation from all suffering.
2. Ideally, a monastic's life should be dedicated to the practice of realising this supreme goal. This practice comprises moral discipline and abstention from wrong livelihood, restraint of the senses through the persistent practice of mindfulness and clear comprehension, and meditation.

3. Such introverted priorities of the Sangha, however, cannot function independently. The lay supporters' gift of freedom from non-involvement in secular affairs—made possible by faithfully providing monastics with the material requisites of life—has to be reciprocated with the gift of the Dhamma, which is two-fold: by example and instruction.
4. Foremost is the example of an ideal monastic who is morally disciplined, sensually restrained, mindful, contented, solitary and meditative. Such a one would be reflective of



the Sangha that practises well and is therefore worthy of reverence and offerings as “the incomparable field of merit for the world”. Such a one would be setting a good example so that “those who are not yet pleased will be pleased and those who are pleased will increase in number”.

More Social Role

1. The other form of reciprocation, which is less introverted and more “socially engaged”, is sharing the Dhamma with the lay supporters by radiating loving-kindness, giving moral guidance, teaching and discussion.
2. Ideally all good monastics should “pay” for their sponsored requisites with such gifts of the Dhamma according to their respective preferences.
3. These forms of reciprocation imply that the role of the Sangha includes the study, practice and realisation of the Dhamma and subsequently teaching it to fellow monastics as well

as lay devotees. Study is not merely for the sake of intellectual knowledge but rather for one to put the knowledge into actual practice and thereby attain realisation.

4. Not only is it important to learn and teach the scriptures in their purity, but it is just as important to be humble and willing to be trained by others, and to earnestly persevere in the cultivation of moral virtue, serenity and wisdom.
5. A certain degree of self-development is required before attempting to instruct others. While this can be rather subjective, the minimum requirement recommended in the Dhammapada is:
 - i Being well established in what is proper
 - ii Possessing composure by practising what one preaches.

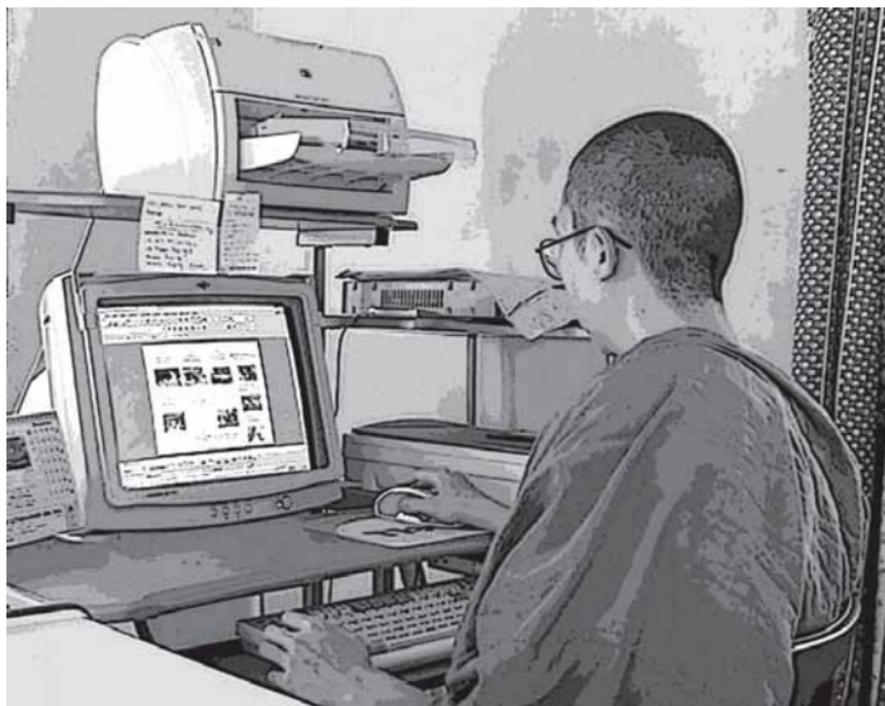
Sangha Quality Control

1. While the Sangha has traditionally been the most effective organ for perpetuating the

teachings of our Lord Buddha, not every person dressed in robes is necessarily an authority on it. There are increasing reports of monks and nuns who misbehave in public, many of whom are bogus. Sangha quality control should therefore be one of the top priorities of the Sangha in this new millennium. Bona fide, properly trained monastics who truly represent the Buddha's teachings are required to propagate it to others.

2. Although meditation may cover one important facet of training, many other aspects of the Vinaya cannot be learned in an intensive meditation retreat. These aspects include complementary teachings that promote communal harmony and responsible Sangha-laity relations.
3. The comprehensive training advocated by the Vinaya scriptures constitutes a holistic approach to the development of a well-rounded monastic. Complemented with

training in contemporary communication methods and skills, such an approach could produce qualified monastics who would be able to fit competently into the role of the Sangha in this new millennium.



Conclusion

The words may be different, the expressions contemporary and the means high-tech; but the fundamental role of the Sangha still falls within our Blessed One's recommendations: study, practice, realisation of the Dhamma and subsequently teaching it to fellow monastics as well as lay devotees.

I feel that, in this new millennium, priority should be given to proper monastic training so that suitably qualified Sangha members can graduate to give inspiration and guidance to those who need them. Efforts should be made to encourage and inspire youths to become responsible and compassionate monastics while steps should be taken to source for qualified teachers who can give monastic training according to the following syllabus:

1. A practical understanding of the Vinaya covering three main areas:
 - training for individual development
 - regulations for harmonious communal life
 - Sangha-laity relations

2. Theory and practice of Buddhist meditation
3. Study of relevant Buddhist doctrines and suttas to address the new millennium syndrome
4. Contemporary propagation skills, with options in relevant courses on mass communication and information technology.

At the same time, a pro-active consciousness of the importance of spiritual or moral education should be instilled into the public, particularly Buddhist organisations, and individuals who are influential in the areas of education, community development, spiritual practice, mass communication and social service. This will prepare the groundwork for qualified Sangha members to share their knowledge and experience with interested people, especially receptive and influential members of the public, such as educationists and community leaders, who can then disseminate the information more effectively to their target audience, i.e. with, without, or with minimal religious connotations accordingly. Admittedly, being in the robes can sometimes be

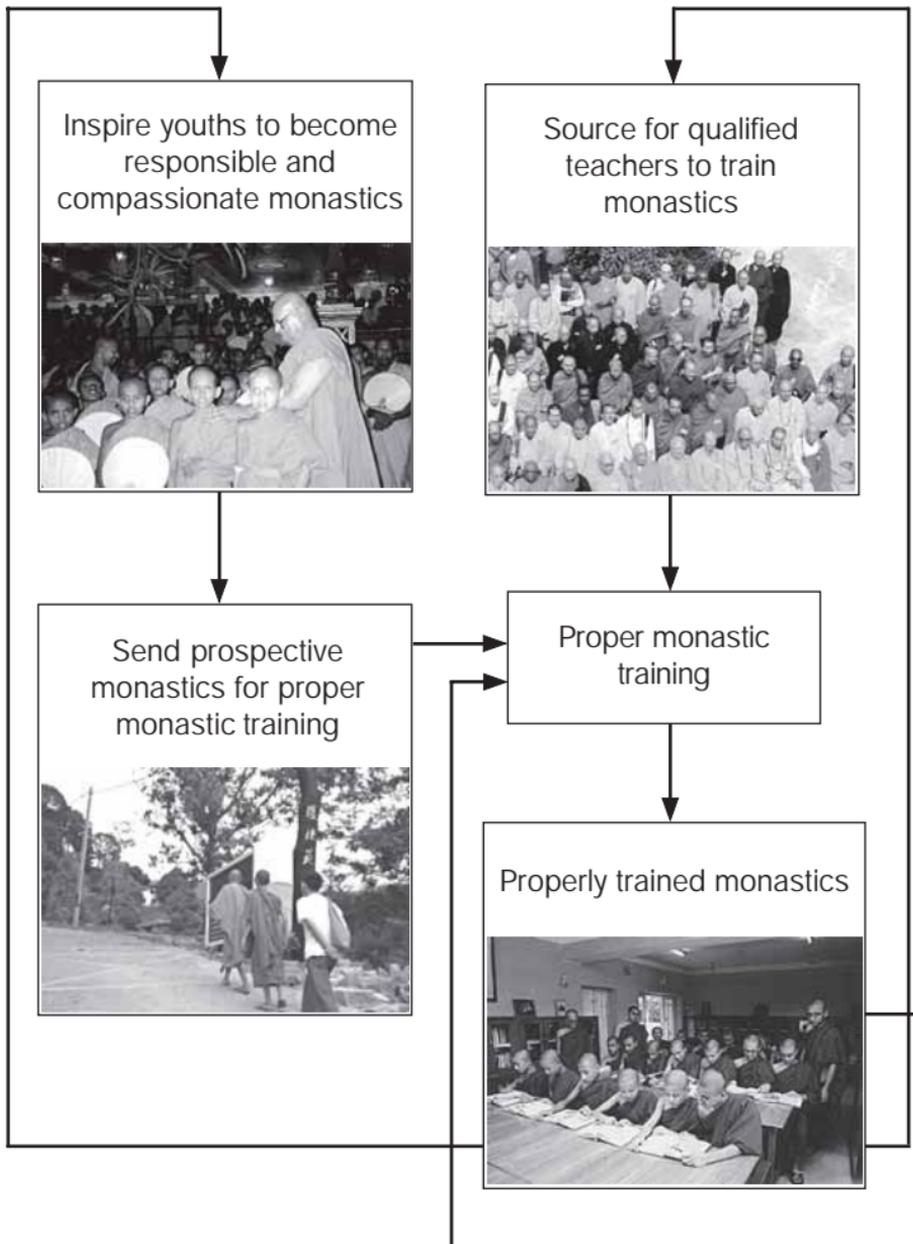
an obstacle to the dissemination of universal truths, especially to people who have strong non-Buddhist affiliations.

Effective dissemination of information is important, but putting it into practice is even more important. Therefore, properly trained lay teachers should follow up by conducting courses, workshops, etc. to implement, monitor and develop the application of these principles as possible remedies for the new millennium syndrome.

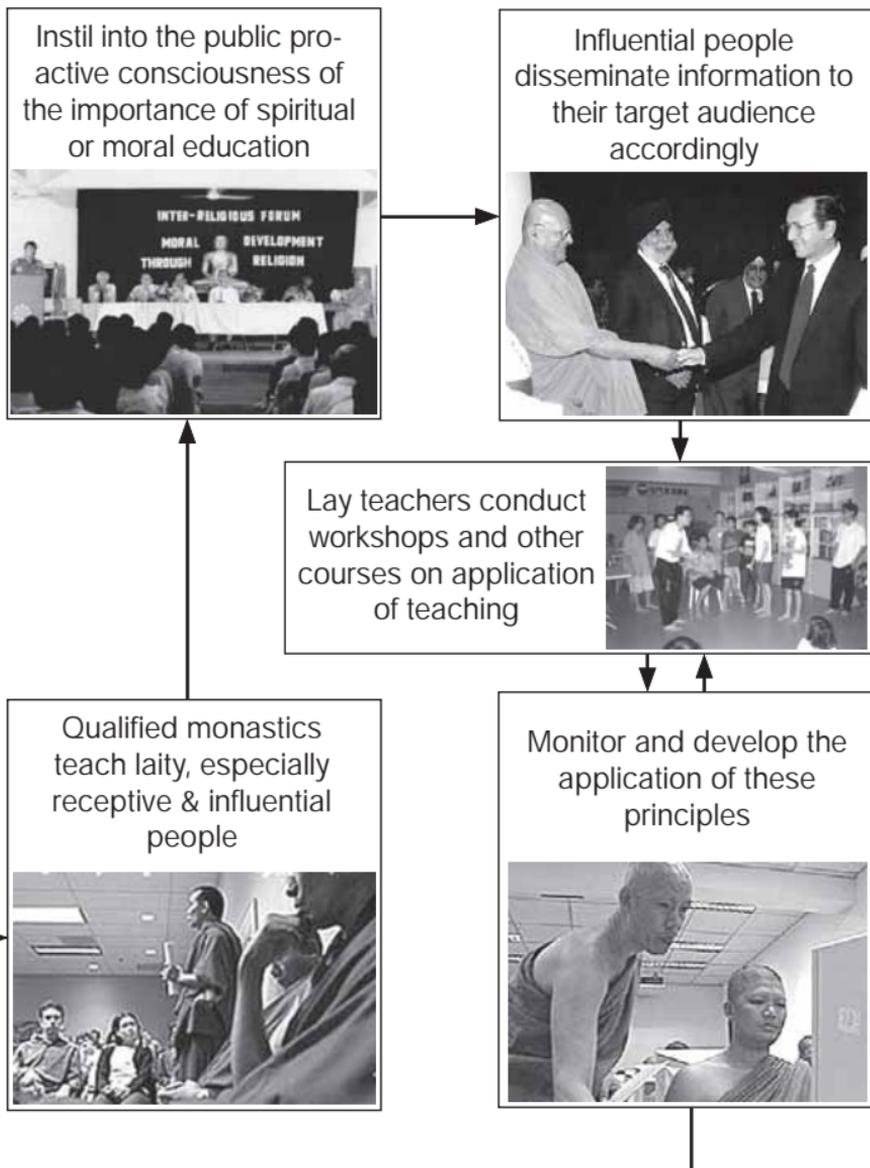
The implementation structure of this proposal is shown in Figure 2.

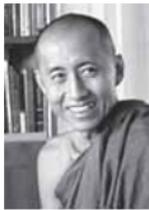
In conclusion, may I suggest that the Sangha will be able to play its evergreen role in this new millennium more effectively with the support and cooperation of receptive and influential laypersons who are closely involved with education, mass communication, community development, spiritual practice and social service. Thank you.

FIGURE 2: IMPLEMENTATION STRUCTURE



OF PROPOSED ROLE OF SANGHA





Venerable Aggacitta Bhikkhu is a Malaysian Theravada Buddhist monk who received *upasamapadā* (higher ordination) at Mahasi Meditation Centre, Rangoon, Burma, in 1979. He has trained under various teachers, notably Sayadaw U Pandita (Panditarama), Sayadaw U Tissara (Yankin Forest Monastery), and Sayadaw U Acinna (Pa Auk Forest Monastery).

Besides practicing meditation, he studied advanced Pali and translation in Thai and Burmese under Sayadaw U Dhammananda at Wat Tamaoh, Lampang, Thailand, from 1983 to 1984. He continued to study the Pali Tipitaka and researched on its interpretation and practice in Myanmar until his return to Malaysia at the end of 1994.

In 2000, he founded Sasanarakkha Buddhist Sanctuary (SBS), a Theravada monk training center nestled among secluded valleys and brooks near Taiping, Perak, Malaysia.

Languages that he is knowledgeable in are English, Bahasa Malaysia, Hokkien, Myanmar, Thai and Pali. Among his major literary contributions are:

- Discourse on Atanatiya Protection (translated, 2003)
- Role of Sangha in the New Millenium: The Monastic Perspective (authored, 2002)
- Kathina Then and Now (authored, 2001)
- Dying to Live: The Role of Kamma in Dying and Rebirth (authored, 1999)
- In This Very Life (translated, 1993)
- Dhamma Therapy (translated, 1984)
- The Importance of Keeping the Five Precepts (authored, 1982)

This booklet, published in conjunction with SASANARAKKHA BUDDHIST SANCTUARY'S KATHINA 2003, is the paper that Ven Aggacitta presented in the Forum "Role of the Sangha in the New Millennium" at the Global Conference on Buddhism held in Shah Alam, Malaysia, in December 2002. It explains in detail the rationale and the need for different types of well-trained monks in modern day society.

SASANARAKKHA BUDDHIST SANCTUARY, a monk training centre nestled among secluded valleys and brooks near Taiping, Perak, Malaysia, aims to fulfil this role of the Sangha that Venerable Aggacitta advocates.