

# KATHINA

## Then and Now

Aggacitta Bhikkhu



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Sasanarakkha Buddhist Sanctuary

**KATHINA** Then and Now

Printed for free distribution to commemorate Sasanarakkha Buddhist Sanctuary's first Kathina ceremony, 18 November 2001.

Published by Sasanarakkha Buddhist Sanctuary  
c/o 96, Lorong 4, Taman Bersatu, Kampung Boyan, 34000 Taiping, Perak, MALAYSIA.  
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Cover and layout design by *Sukhi Hotu*, PJ  
Printed by *Vinlin Press*, KL

First edition—4,000 copies

*...to those who seek and cherish the truth, no matter how bitter it may turn out to be.*

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**Aggacitta Bhikkhu** is a Malaysian Buddhist monk who received his Higher Ordination at the end of 1979 in Mahasi Meditation Centre, Yangon, Myanmar, with the Venerable Mahasi Sayadaw U Sobhana acting as his *upajjhāya* [preceptor].

Since his renunciation, he has studied and practised the Dhamma under various teachers—Phra Khru Dhammabarnchanvud, Sayadaw U Javana, Sayadaw U Pandita, Lampang Sayadaw U Dhammananda, Yan Kin Forest Sayadaw U Tissara, and Pha Auk Forest Sayadaw U Acinna—as well as by himself, including living the life of a solitary forest-dweller in the jungles of South-east Asia for more than ten years.

A Dhamma-practitioner at heart, the venerable bhikkhu has written/translated/edited the following practice-orientated works: *The Importance of Keeping the Five Precepts* (1982); *Cessation Experiences and the Notion of Enlightenment* (1995); “Tales of Cessation” (in *Vipassanā Tribune*, Nov 1998); *Dying to Live: The Role of Kamma in Dying and Rebirth* (1999); *Dhamma Therapy* (trans., 1984); *In this Very Life* (trans., 1993); and *Raindrops in Hot Summer* (ed., 1995).

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### Note on Non-English Words

Except for proper nouns, many non-English words are italicised with full diacritical marks on their first appearance in the text, and elsewhere, whenever they appear within brackets. Subsequently, they appear in normal font. English translations of selected terms are placed within brackets, which usually accompany their first appearance. Explanations of foreign words unaccompanied by a translation can be found in the Glossary of Non-English Words at the end of the booklet.

**A**s with all publications for free distribution, this booklet would not have been printed without the goodwill, contribution and cooperation of many individuals. In acknowledging my thanks to them, the first person that pops up in my mind is Hor Kwei Loon. His critical scrutiny, constructive suggestions and encouragement were like bittersweet medicines that promote good health. They have greatly improved the structure and content of this booklet, making it more organised and reader-friendly. Choy Ping Cheng obligingly transcribed “Kathina Benefits—Illusion, Delusion and Resolution” from the cassette tapes recorded in Subang Jaya Buddhist Association. Looi Sow Fei and Ang Siew Mun helped to proofread and edit the preliminary drafts. Following Kwei Loon’s suggestion, Wong Hoe Kuan helped to compile the entry words for the Glossary of Non-English Words. He also rendered his assistance to Venerable Mahāñāno in translating the booklet into Chinese. Venerable Kumāra has been more than helpful in many ways, especially in sharing his IT knowledge and pointing out inelegant expressions while I was preparing the manuscript with my notebook. To enhance the layout of the booklet, Lim Lay Hoon, Ker Seong Ngo, Lim Bee Chin, Doreen Lim, Dr. Oo Khaik Cheang and others helped to source for relevant photographs. Always last in the line of production

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT



and perhaps the most creative is Hor Tuck Loon of Sukhi Hotu, Petaling Jaya, whose artistic and innovative talents manifest in this beautifully designed booklet. Credit is also due to the printers for this publication.

*Sādhū* to all of you and to others who have rendered assistance and support while we worked to produce this booklet. May our merits be shared with all beings. May our merits conduce to our eventual purification so that we can benefit others better.

*Aggacitta Bhikkhu*

# PREFACE

The kathina ceremony is now an internationally established celebration where the Sangha and the laity meet to participate in mutually rewarding, meritorious activities. Throughout the centuries, the way of carrying out the ceremony has changed with local interpretations, practices and customs. How much has deviated from the original scriptural tradition—how much is in accordance with the scriptures and how much is mere invention? In this booklet, Venerable Aggacitta Bhikkhu combines his scriptural knowledge and practical experience to scrutinise the kathina ceremony through two articles:

- The Scriptural Tradition of Kathina
- Kathina Benefits—Illusion, Delusion & Resolution

The first article is a revised script for a *Dhamma* Talk given in Bodhiyarama Estate, Kuala Kubu Bharu, on 31 October 1999, in conjunction with the centre's first kathina ceremony. Based on the *Pāli* scriptures, it gives a faithful interpretation of how the kathina ceremony was conducted at the time the *Vinaya* Commentary (*Samantapāsādikā*) was written down by Venerable Buddhaghosa in the Pali language after the 5<sup>th</sup> Century CE. This is a rare contribution to an accurate understanding of ancient Buddhist

practices because the Vinaya Commentary has not been translated into English. By reading this article, we can assess how much our modern kathina ceremonies differ from the scriptural tradition. Then perhaps we can confidently venture to adapt the ceremony to suite the particular circumstances of our modern age without deviating from the scriptural tradition. In an epilogue to this Dhamma Talk, Venerable Aggacitta gives a brief description of one such venture at Sasanarakkha Buddhist Sanctuary, Taiping, Perak, Malaysia.

The second article is a revised transcription of another Dhamma Talk given in Subang Jaya Buddhist Association (SJBA) on 28 September 2000, the eve of the association's kathina celebration. Here, Venerable Aggacitta gives a graphic explanation—in layman's terms—of the five kathina privileges accruing to eligible monks who performed the ceremony. In the process, he critically scrutinises the popular belief that kathina sponsors will also get five corresponding benefits. The thought-provoking article concludes with some constructive proposals for conducting the kathina ceremony from a more pragmatic and altruistic perspective.

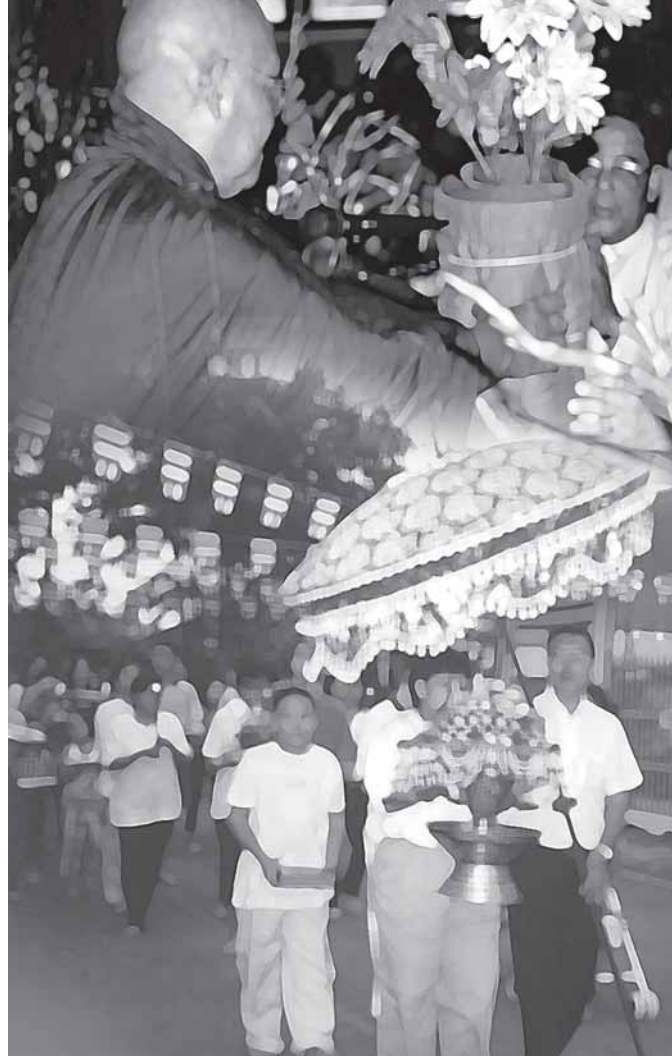
We hope that this booklet will provide Buddhists with authentic information from the Pali scriptures on the significance of the kathina ceremony so that they can participate in it in a more meaningful, wholesome and laudable way. May the privilege of celebrating kathina be an opportunity for us to reap the benefit of stepping closer to *Nibbāna*.

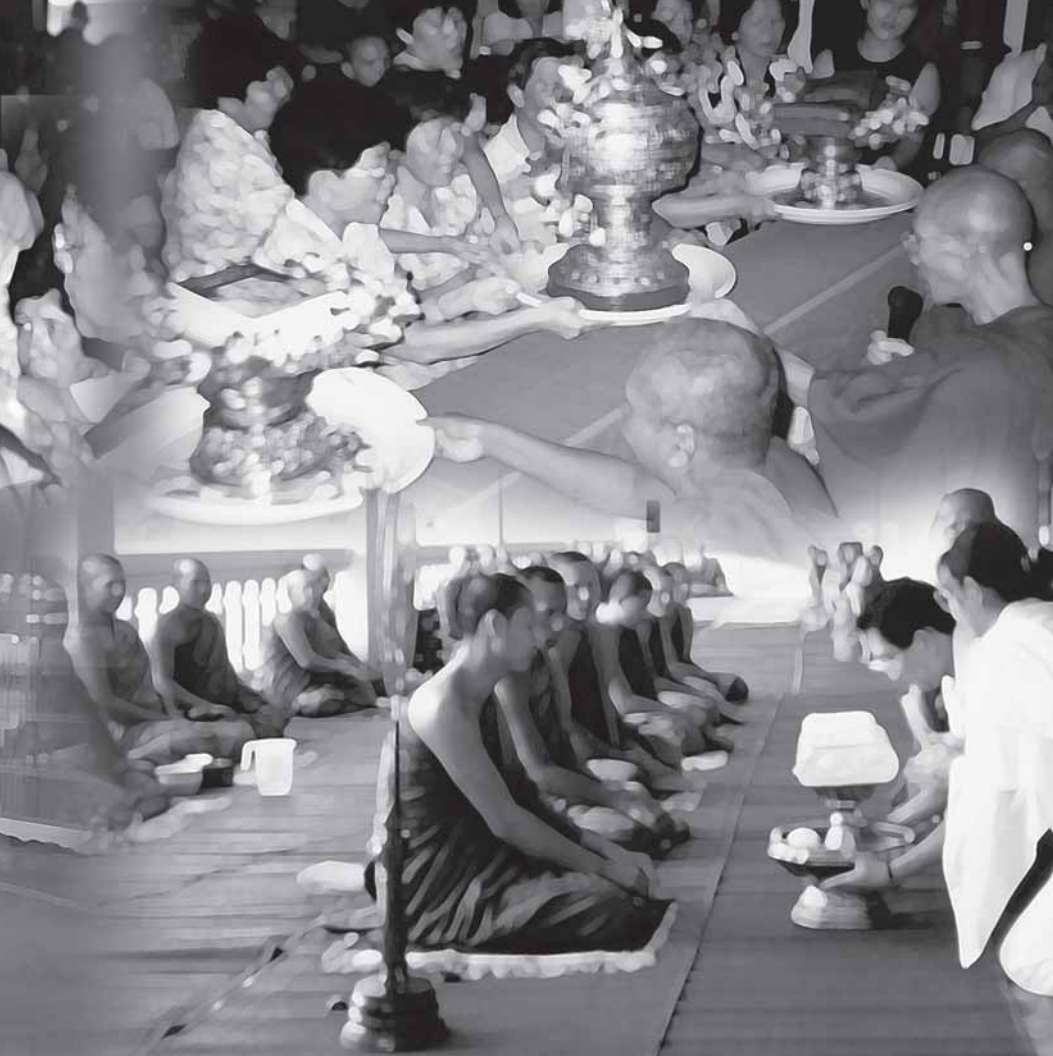
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# THE SCRIPTURAL TRADITION OF KATHINA

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# PREAMBLE





enerable *Sayadaws*, venerable members of the *Sangha*, Dhamma relatives and friends. I am greatly honoured to be given the privilege by the venerable Sayadaws to address this congregation on this historic, auspicious occasion. Today, Sunday, 31 October 1999, will certainly be recorded in the annals of Theravada Buddhism in Malaysia because of 2 significant events. We witnessed earlier this morning the successful demarcation and declaration of a new *sīmā*<sup>1</sup>, the first of its kind in this District of Kuala Kubu Bharu. And now the first kathina ceremony organised by the Selangor Buddhist Vipassana Meditation Society is being conducted in its new Hermitage, Bodhiyarama Estate, Kuala Kubu Bharu, Selangor.

Compared to Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, and even Vietnam, *Theravāda* Buddhism in Malaysia is relatively young. While the peoples of those countries have evolved and developed their own indigenous Theravada Buddhist culture, customs, rites, fine arts and architecture, we Malaysians, as young Theravada Buddhists, are still borrowing ideas and copying customs, rites, art and architecture from them. Step into any Sri Lankan, Burmese or Thai temple and you will be able to see, smell and feel their indigenous cultural influence. While in the process of emulating them, we are bound to encounter conflicting ideas, views, interpretations and practices of the Dhamma and Vinaya. Such differences can be quite paralysing and can very well undermine the stability, health, and propagation

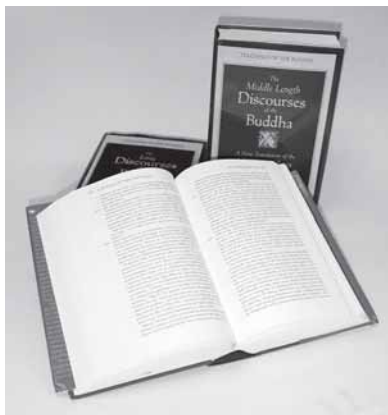
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<sup>1</sup> *Sīmā* means limit or area within a boundary. Here *sīmā* refers to a demarcated area/space within which all formal acts of the Sangha must be performed with unanimous agreement of all monks present in order to be valid and legal.

of the *Buddhasāsana* [the Buddha's dispensation or teaching]. Let me give you a concrete example.

When I was studying in Thailand, I talked to a young Nepalese Buddhist whom I had first met as a fellow yogi at Mahasi Meditation Centre, Yangon, Burma. I asked him: "How's Theravada Buddhism in Nepal?" There was a look of disappointment on his face as he answered, "We have a problem with unity and harmony in our Theravada Sangha." "But why?" I asked. "Because," he said rather sadly, "our monks are trained abroad, in different countries. When they come back they cannot agree on how to conduct Buddhist services. The monk who was trained in Sri Lanka wants to do it Sri Lankan style. Another trained in Burma insists on doing it the Burmese way. Then a monk trained in Thailand disagrees, saying, 'That's not how the Thais do it.' And yet another says, "Buddhism originated in India. So why don't we do it the Indian way?"

This conversation really made a deep impression on my mind. If we surveyed the situation objectively and impartially, I think we would come to the following logical conclusion. If, as young Theravada Buddhists, we have to borrow ideas and copy customs/traditions, then we should do so at the very roots, rather than after several centuries and generations of cultural adaptation and transformation. In other



words, we should try to adopt a fundamentalist approach in the interpretations and practice of Theravada Buddhism. Go back to the roots—to the scriptural traditions enshrined in the Pali Canon, Commentaries and Sub-commentaries—as *the* reference point, guide and support.

During my student days in Thailand and Burma, I became aware of the efforts of some learned and conscientious monks to rectify local interpretations and practices of the Dhamma and Vinaya that were not in accordance with the scriptures. They complained of many obstacles that they had to face. Old habits die hard. Moreover, the status quo has an inherent tendency to resist change because, consciously or unconsciously, the Establishment will want to protect their vested interests.

Fortunately, as young Theravada Buddhists, we Malaysians have an advantage over our established counterparts. We are not yet steeped in age-old Buddhist traditions. We are young, idealistic, critical, receptive and intelligent. We have been brought up to analyse, probe, question and deliberate. Some of us have been brought into Buddhism because of our quest for the Truth – therefore we should have a high regard for that which is true, correct, genuine, authentic. And because we are still searching for the proper way to perform Theravada Buddhist ceremonies

and activities, we should—we must—go back to the roots: to the scriptural traditions enshrined in the Pali Canon, Commentaries and Sub-commentaries.

When we understand the roots, we can then make use of this understanding as a yardstick to assess various local Buddhist traditions, and begin to evolve and develop our own indigenous Malaysian Theravada Buddhist customs and practices that accord with the scriptural traditions in the spirit and the letter.





# INTRODUCTION



hope I am taking a small step in this direction today as I share with you the results of my research into the scriptural tradition of kathina. In preparing this talk, I have based my research almost entirely on the original Pali Canon, Commentaries and Sub-commentaries, in particular, the *Mahāvagga Pāli*, *Parivāra Pāli*, *Vinayasangaha Atthakathā*, and *Vinayāḷankāra Tikā*. For the sake of clarity, I have not given literal translations in a few instances. As an introduction to the scriptural tradition of kathina, I must first explain the circumstances that prompted the Buddha to allow the monks to spread the kathina, and certain terms related to the kathina ceremony.

## ORIGIN OF KATHINA CEREMONY

How the kathina ceremony came about is recorded in the Mahavagga, the third book of the *Vinaya Pitaka* (Vin III. 351ff). The following is a summary of the account.

At one time thirty monks of Pava were on the way to see the Lord who was staying at Savatthi in Jetavana, Anathapindika's monastery. They were all forest-dwellers, all almsmen, all wearers of rag-robles, all wearers of the three robes. As *vassa*<sup>2</sup> was approaching, they were unable to reach Savatthi in time; so they entered vassa on the way, at

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<sup>2</sup> *Vassa* is a Pali abbreviation for *vassāvāsa*, which means "rainy-season residence". Buddhist monks are required to stay at one place for the first three months or the last three months of the rainy-season, which lasts for four months in India. The former is called the first vassa and the latter the second vassa.

Saketa. They spent the vassa in a state of longing, thinking: “The Lord is staying close to us, six *yojanas* [about 60 kilometres] from here, but we are not getting a chance to see the Lord.”

Then after the vassa, the monks continued on their journey to Jetavana, Savatthi, where the Lord was staying. It was raining and the waters were gathering, while swamps were forming. By the time the monks arrived at their destination, their robes were drenched and they were exhausted. Having greeted the Lord, they sat down at a respectful distance.

Now it is the custom for the Buddha to exchange friendly greetings with in-coming monks. So the Lord said to these monks: “How are you keeping, monks? Did you have enough to support life? Did you spend a comfortable vassa in unity, being on friendly terms and harmonious? And you did not have difficulty with almsfood, did you?”

“Things did go well with us, Lord. We had enough to support life, Lord. We spent the vassa in unity, being on friendly terms and harmonious, Lord. And we did not have difficulty with almsfood,” answered the monks. They then related what had happened to them when they were on their way to see the Buddha since the beginning of the vassa.

Then the Lord, on this occasion, having given Dhamma talk, addressed



the monks, saying: "Monks, I allow monks who have completed the vassa to spread the kathina. Five [privileges], monks, will be allowable to you who have spread the kathina:

1. Going (to visit families before noon) without having informed another monk [freedom of movement before noon in spite of having accepted an invitation for a meal]
2. Going (around) without taking (the full set of three robes) [freedom to stay apart from one's set of three robes at the break of dawn]
3. A group meal
4. As many robes as you require (without having to determine or assign them according to Vinaya regulation)
5. Exclusive right to *Sanghika* robes given at one's vassa monastery.

These five [privileges], monks, will be allowable to you who have spread the kathina. And thus, monks, should the kathina be spread...

## MEANING OF KATHINA

In the Commentary to the *Kathinakkhandaka* [Section on Kathina] of the Vinaya Pitaka, kathina is defined as a concept of conglomeration, which means bringing things together. It is a concept that arises because of certain things that come together. For example:

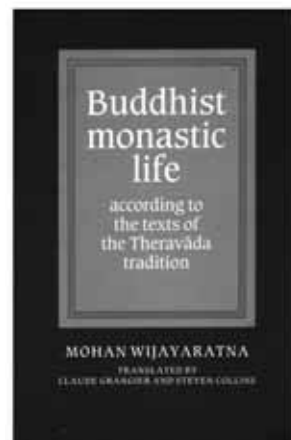
1. A *Bhikkhu/s* [Buddhist monk/s] who has/have spent the first vassa
2. A *Sangha* [Community of bhikkhus] comprising at least five bhikkhus
3. Robe-season (the kathina month)—first month after the end of the first vassa, i.e. last month of the rainy-season
4. A rightfully acquired robe—the robe to be donated must not be requested by a member of the Sangha, nor must any hint be given for the robe to be offered; rather the robe must be offered spontaneously by the donor.

These are some things that come together for the concept of kathina to arise.

Professor Mohan Wijayaratna, in his book *Buddhist Monastic Life* (Cambridge University Press, 1990, p 38), writes:

The literal meaning of the Pali term kathina is 'hard'. According to the Vinaya Commentary, the robe and the ceremony were called kathina because the gift of this robe was an act of merit as hard as a diamond.

With due respect to Dr. Wijayaratna I am rather baffled by where he got this reference



because it cannot be found anywhere in the Vinaya Canon, Commentaries and Sub-commentaries. [A few weeks after having given this talk, I met with some Sri Lankan scholar monks of the forest tradition and we discussed this controversial point. They said that Professor Wijayaratna's source of reference could have come from a Sinhalese classic called *Kathinavamsa* [*The Lineage of Kathina*] written by a *thera* [elder bhikkhu] centuries ago.]

In fact, two meanings of kathina are given in the Vinaya Commentaries:

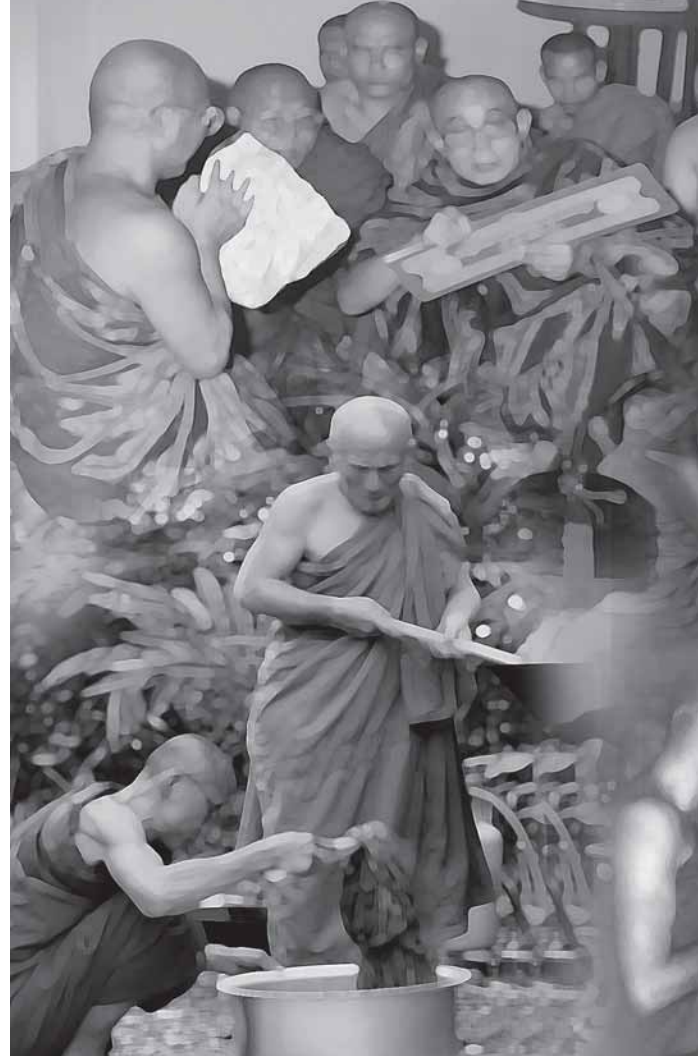
1. A frame used during the Buddha's time for sewing double-layered robes together. The edges of one robe were fixed to the sides of the frame, while another piece of robe was sewn on top of it. It probably looks like a giant silk-screen frame. But that is not the kathina we are talking about. There is another meaning of the word kathina.
2. In our present context, it means *firmness, stability and durability* because it has the power of providing the five privileges mentioned above, i.e. making these five privileges available, firm and stable for a relatively long time for the eligible monks.

## SPREADING THE KATHINA

For the kathina ceremony to be a success, the Sangha must 'spread the kathina'. Though many may be familiar with the kathina ceremony where the offering of robes are made to the Sangha, they may not be familiar with the phrase '*to spread the kathina*'. What does this mean?

It is actually a figurative expression, a figure of speech. For example, in *Bahasa Malaysia*, we say '*cangkul angin*' [lit. dig air], which means doing something futile. We do not actually take a *cangkul* [hoe] and dig the air. Or as in '*makan angin*': we do not literally 'eat the air'. So when we say, 'to spread the kathina', it does not mean that we take the kathina and spread it on the floor. Let me illustrate this with a simile. When you take a mat and spread it on the floor, you are sharing the benefit of the mat with other people so that they can also make use of it. In the same way, when the Sangha 'spreads the kathina', it means that the monk who spreads the kathina is sharing these five privileges with the other eligible bhikkhus participating in the kathina ceremony, making the privileges available, firm and stable for an extended period of time. How a monk spreads the kathina shall be explained later.







# PHASES AND CONSEQUENCES OF THE KATHINA CEREMONY



he kathina ceremony can be classified into six phases, followed by two consequences:

1. Sponsoring the kathina cloth (by giving it to the Sangha)
2. Appointing an individual monk to receive the kathina cloth
3. Converting the kathina cloth to individual property (when the Sangha formally gives it to an individual monk)
4. Making the kathina cloth into the kathina robe
5. Spreading the kathina with the kathina robe
6. Rejoicing in the spreading of the kathina.

The two consequences of the kathina ceremony are:

1. Kathina privileges take effect
2. Subsequently, they are revoked.

However, in the following scriptural explanation of these phases, this order is not followed, due to the flow of the explanation. In addition, the expression “to spread the kathina” is used in an ambiguous manner. It does not only refer to phase 5: “Spreading the kathina with the kathina robe”, but depending on context, it can also refer to the initiation of the kathina ceremony, i.e. the first 3 phases, and

to its consummation, i.e. the completion of all the 6 phases. For the sake of clarity, and to avoid confusion, I have restricted the use of this expression to the first meaning whenever possible.

## INITIATION OF THE KATHINA CEREMONY

The Commentary starts to describe the scriptural tradition by asking a pertinent question: Who is eligible to initiate the kathina ceremony and who is not? First, in terms of number, at least five monks are eligible. Beyond that, even 100,000 monks are eligible. However, less than five monks are not eligible. This is because at least four bhikkhus are required to execute the *Sanghakamma* [Formal Act of the Sangha] of officially giving the kathina cloth to one bhikkhu. Second, in terms of emerging from the vassa, the monk appointed to receive the kathina cloth must have entered the first vassa and participated in the first Invitation (*pavāranā*<sup>3</sup>). Those who have entered the first vassa but have “broken” it, and those monks who have entered the second vassa are not eligible to receive it. A monk’s vassa is considered “broken”:

1. If, without valid reason, he leaves his monastery compound without thought of returning before the break of dawn;
2. If, even with a valid reason, he stays away from his monastery compound for seven

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<sup>3</sup> Immediately after the vassa, monks who have spent an unbroken vassa are required to perform a formal act, called *pavāranā* in Pali, where the monks invite each other for mutual criticism regarding their conduct during the vassa.

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or more consecutive nights. The end of night is defined by the break of dawn. The break of dawn is reckoned somewhere between 24-48 minutes before sunrise.

The *Mahāpaccarī*, an ancient Sinhalese Commentary, also states that a monk would not be eligible to spread kathina in a monastery other than the one where he stayed for the vassa. However, all monks, regardless of whether they had entered the second vassa or broken the first vassa can help to fulfil the quorum of initiating the kathina ceremony. In other words, if there was only one monk staying alone in a monastery for the vassa, he could invite four other monks from other monasteries after the vassa, and thus fulfil the quorum of five monks to initiate the kathina ceremony. But only the resident monk is entitled to the kathina privileges. Here are other examples:

1. Four bhikkhus and one *sāmanera* [novice monk] entered the first vassa in the same monastery. The samanera received higher ordination during second vassa. At end of the first vassa, five bhikkhus are eligible to initiate the kathina ceremony, and all are entitled to kathina privileges.
2. The same principle holds for three bhikkhus and two samaneras; two bhikkhus and three samaneras; and one bhikkhu and four samaneras who entered the first vassa in the same monastery.

## ELIGIBILITY TO SPONSOR THE KATHINA CLOTH

“Who is eligible to sponsor the kathina cloth?” asks the Commentary next. The answer to this question is *deva* [deity] or human being, whether a layperson or a monastic, e.g. monk, nun, or novice. The kathina sponsor has some duties. If not familiar, he/she should enquire: “*Bhante* [Venerable sir], how should kathina be given?” He/she should be told: “It is proper to give, at sunrise, a cloth enough for making one of the three robes, saying, ‘We offer the kathina cloth to the Sangha.’ It is also proper to supply the following items needed for making the cloth into a robe: needles, thread, dye, food for the monks helping to make the robe.”

The bhikkhu who receives the kathina cloth for spreading the kathina should also know his duty. A cloth straight from the weaver’s is not suitable. Neither is a dirty, stained cloth. So, having received the kathina cloth, it should be properly washed. Needles and other robe-making preparations should be arranged. With the help of many bhikkhus, he should cut up the cloth, complete sewing the robe on that very day, dye it, make a mark (*kappabindu*) on it and spread the kathina with it. If, while that cloth is still in the process of being made into a robe, somebody else brings another kathina cloth together with many accessory robes [*kathinānisamsa*—literally meaning “kathina privilege robes”], the cloth of whoever gives



more robes to the Sangha should be used to spread the kathina. The lesser kathina sponsor should be appeased by an appropriate Dhamma talk.

This particular reference shows that the currently popular practice of temple/monastery committees requiring kathina sponsors to pay for the expenses incurred by the resident monks during the vassa is not part of the scriptural tradition.

## ELIGIBILITY TO SPREAD THE KATHINA

Who should spread the kathina? Whomever the Sangha gives the kathina cloth to, says the Commentary. And whom should the Sangha give it to? To the bhikkhu with an old/tattered robe. But according to the Parivara, the fifth book of the Vinaya Pitaka, a monk who intends to spread the kathina should have the following qualifications—he must have knowledge of eight things:

1. Preliminary duty – a) washing, b) calculating, c) cutting, d) tacking, e) sewing, f) dyeing, g) making a mark (*kappabindu*)
2. Revocation (*paccuddhara*) of old determination
3. Determining (*adhitthāna*)

4. Spreading (*atthāra*)
5. Eight headings (*mātikā*) – listing 8 circumstances for the withdrawal of kathina privileges
6. Commitments (*palibodha*)
7. Withdrawal (*uddhāra*)
8. Privileges (*ānisamsa*).

If the resident monks are not qualified, they must invite a learned and experienced monk(s) to come and coach them so that one of them satisfies the requirements.

The Sangha should give the kathina cloth to the bhikkhu who is in need of a new robe to replace an old/tattered one, and who possesses the eight qualities mentioned above. What if there are many such bhikkhus? The senior monk is entitled to it. Among the senior monks, whoever has a large following and can therefore make the robe and spread it on the same day should be given the kathina cloth. If the senior monk is unable to do it but a junior can, then it should be given to the junior. However, it is proper for the Sangha to support the *Mahāthera* [Great Elder]. So the Sangha should say, “Bhante, please receive the kathina cloth. We will make it for you.”

The kathina cloth should be given to replace one of the three robes that is old/tattered. If the

bhikkhu normally uses a double-layered robe, then enough material should be given to replace the old double-layered robe. If the old robe is single-layered but thick, while the kathina cloth is thin, then it is appropriate to give enough material to make a double-layered robe. Even if the bhikkhu is modest enough to say that he'll be satisfied with a single-layered robe, he should still be given two layers. Nevertheless, this principle should not be applied to an obviously greedy monk, although he may say, "After spreading the kathina, I'll undo it and make two robes."

## PROCEDURE OF GIVING KATHINA CLOTH TO A BHIKKHU BY THE SANGHA

The Sangha must first assemble in a proper sima. Then a question-and-answer session follows.

Bhante, this kathina cloth has accrued to the Sangha. To whom should the Sangha give this cloth to spread the kathina?

**To him whose robe is old/tattered.**

There are many with old robes / There is none with old robes.

**Then give to the senior-most monk.**

Who is the senior-most monk?

**Venerable so and so.**

Is the Venerable capable of making the robe and spreading it on this very day?

**Yes / The Sangha will support/assist the Mahathera.**

Does the Mahathera possess eight qualities?

**Yes.**

Sadhu! Sadhu! Sadhu! Then the Sangha should give it to him.

After having decided on the recipient of the kathina cloth, the Sangha should then execute a formal act to give the kathina cloth to the monk. A translation of the *kammavācā* (text for executing this act) follows.

“Bhante, let the Sangha listen to me. This kathina cloth has accrued to the Sangha. If the Sangha is ready, the Sangha should give this kathina cloth to the monk so-and-so for spreading the kathina. This is the motion.

Bhante, let the Sangha listen to me. This kathina cloth has accrued to the Sangha. The Sangha is giving this kathina cloth to the monk so-and-so for

spreading the kathina. Whoever agrees to the giving of this kathina cloth to the monk so-and-so for spreading the kathina should be silent. Whoever does not agree should speak.

This kathina cloth is given by the Sangha to the monk so-and-so for spreading the kathina. The Sangha agrees; therefore it is silent. Thus do I understand this.”



## THE PROPER KATHINA ROBE

Because of this formal act, the kathina cloth, which originally belonged to the Sangha, is converted to individual property. If the kathina cloth is a ready-made robe, cut-up, sewn and dyed according to Vinaya specifications, well and good. But not all ready-made robes satisfy Vinaya specifications. To qualify for spreading the kathina, the kathina robe must be cut up into at least five sections and sewn together again. Many robes available in the market nowadays are cut up into two or three sections only. Generally, Thai outer and upper robes are properly cut up and sewn, but lower robes are not cut up at all.

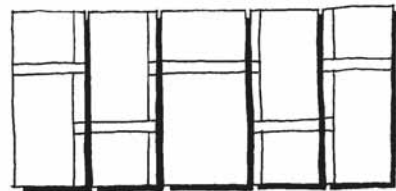
In the old days, the kathina cloth was just plain white material. In such a case, all members

of the Sangha participating in the kathina ceremony must assemble and co-operate to complete making the robe within the same day. In other words, all must help to wash, calculate, cut up, tack, sew, dye and dry the robe. No one is exempt even if he's a Mahathera or a learned monk. It seems that the Buddhas commend this co-operative kathina project. In the past, Padumuttara Buddha himself participated in the kathina project. At one time, his Foremost Disciple Sujatattthera received the kathina cloth. The Buddha sat together with thousands of bhikkhus to make the kathina robe.

## HOW TO SPREAD THE KATHINA

When the kathina robe is completed, the bhikkhu who intends to spread the kathina with a *sanghāti* [outer robe] should first revoke his old sanghati and determine the kathina robe as his new sanghati. Then he should say aloud: "I spread the kathina with this sanghati." If he wishes to spread the kathina with an *uttarasanga* [upper robe], then he should revoke his old upper robe and determine the kathina robe as his new upper robe. Then he should say aloud: "I spread the kathina with this upper-robe." If he wishes to spread the kathina with an *antaravāsaka* [lower robe] he should revoke his old lower robe and determine the kathina robe as his new lower robe. Then he should say aloud: "I spread the kathina with this lower-robe." Thus, we see that the kathina is spread with only one of the three robes.

Then he should approach the Sangha, arrange his upper robe over one shoulder, put his





palms together and raise them, announcing: “Bhante, the Sangha’s kathina has been spread. The spreading of the kathina was according to regulation. Rejoice!”

The participating members of the Sangha should arrange their upper robes over one shoulder, put their palms together and raise them, saying: “*Āvuso*/Bhante<sup>4</sup>, the Sangha’s kathina has been spread. The spreading of the kathina was according to regulation. We rejoice.” Thus, the kathina is spread for all the monks.

Here is the ambiguous usage of the expressions “spreading the kathina” and “the kathina is spread”, which I mentioned in the Introduction. Notice that they can refer to either the actual spreading of the kathina by an individual monk, which is just one phase of the kathina ceremony, or to the consummation of the whole kathina ceremony. This ambiguous usage is particularly obvious in the following Commentarial explanation.

Therefore, it is said in the Parivara (the fifth and last book of the Vinaya Pitaka), “The kathina is spread for two individuals: the spreader and the rejoicer.” Again it is said: “The Sangha does not spread the kathina. A Chapter of monks does not spread the kathina. An individual spreads the kathina. Because the Sangha rejoices, because the Chapter rejoices, because the individual spreads, the kathina is spread for the Sangha, for the Chapter, and for the individual.”

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<sup>4</sup> During the Buddha’s time, monks called one another “*āvuso*” while the honorific “bhante” was reserved for the Buddha. Just before his final passing away, the Buddha ruled that in his absence junior monks should call seniors “bhante” while seniors should call juniors “*āvuso*.”

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This is probably the most authoritative Canonical reference to support the Commentarial judgement that there need not be a minimum of five bhikkhus who have spent an unbroken vassa together in the same residence in order to hold a kathina ceremony there. The passage clearly shows that kathina ceremony can be consummated for a Chapter of monks—technically referring to a group of two to four bhikkhus—by its rejoicing when an individual monk spreads the kathina. Some monks, especially of the Thai tradition, are of the opinion that the kathina ceremony cannot be held if there are less than five bhikkhus spending the vassa together. For that reason, they hold a *pha-pa* robe offering ceremony instead.

*Pha-pa* is a Thai term. *Pha* means cloth and *pa* means forest. So *pha-pa* can be translated as “forest cloth”. If we retranslate that into Pali we would get something like *araññadussa* or *vanadussa*. However, in the Pali recitation for offering pha-pa robe, it is rendered as *pamsukūlacīvara*, which means “discarded (cloth) robe”. This is rather ironical because discarded cloth is not supposed to be offered. The bhikkhu who observes the *dhutanga* [austere practice] of wearing only robes made of discarded cloth is not allowed to accept cloth or robes from lay people. He must obtain discarded material for making his robe from the rubbish dump, cemetery, roadside, etc. The offering of pha-pa robes is a Thai custom not found in the scriptural tradition.



## STATUS OF KATHINA PRIVILEGES TODAY

There is a lot of good press given to the privileges obtainable from spreading the kathina. In reality, the kathina privileges are rather fragile, for they are easily revoked, and the majority of them are quite irrelevant to most monks nowadays.

After the spreading of kathina, the kathina privileges are effective for a maximum of five months, starting from the first day after the end of the first vassa. However, the kathina privileges will be prematurely revoked if the following two commitments (*palibodha*) are curtailed.

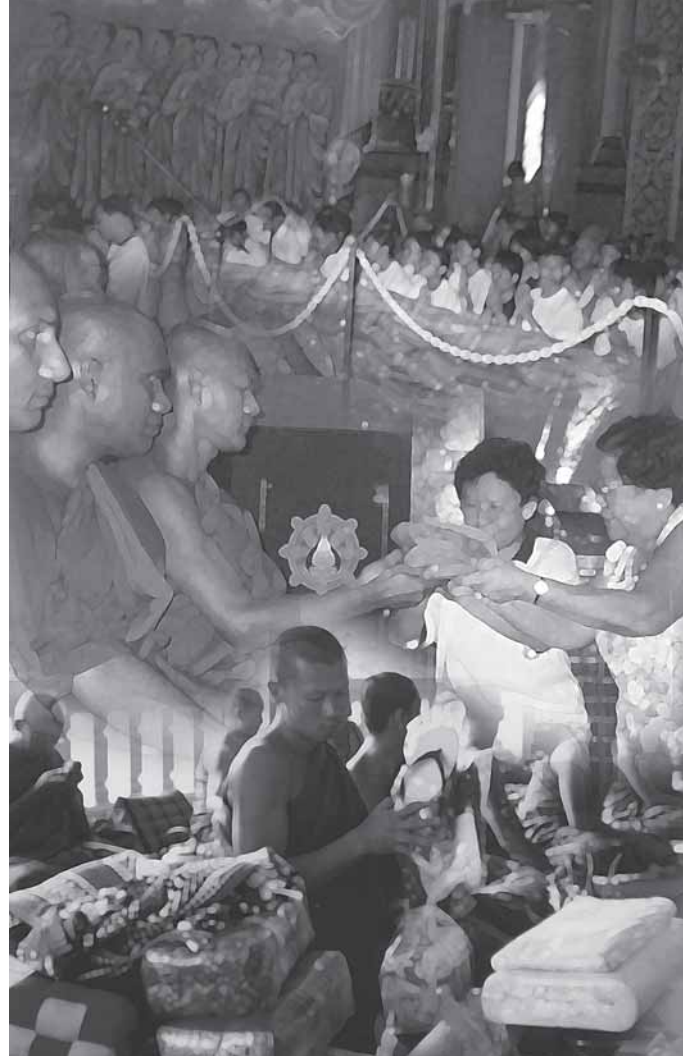
1. Concern for making a new robe out of robe material the monk has received or will receive
2. Intention to continue staying in his vassa monastery, or to leave temporarily and return to it within the five-month period.

So if the monk entitled to kathina privileges were to dismiss any thoughts of making new robes out of robe material he has received or will receive, and were to leave his vassa monastery without thought of returning within the five months, then his kathina privileges would be revoked.

Robes that are offered in kathina ceremonies these days are invariably ready-made ones. So after the kathina ceremony, it is highly unlikely that a monk would have any plans to make a new robe. Therefore, if he leaves the monastery where

he spent his vassa without any hopes of returning before the end of the cold season, i.e. within five months after vassa, his kathina privileges would be revoked prematurely. Moreover, the fifth privilege is only effective while he is staying in the monastery where the kathina was spread and not elsewhere.

LEGALITIES AND  
OTHER ISSUES  
OF THE  
KATHINA  
CEREMONY





t this point, I would like to make two distinctions:

1. Quorum requirements in the formal giving of the kathina cloth by the Sangha to the individual bhikkhu; and in the formal spreading of the kathina by the individual followed by the other members of the Sangha rejoicing.
2. Members of the participating Sangha who are entitled to



kathina privileges and those who are not entitled to kathina privileges.

## QUORUM REQUIREMENTS

As I mentioned at the very beginning of this talk, at least four regular bhikkhus must fulfil the quorum to execute the formal act of giving the Sangha's kathina cloth to an individual bhikkhu. This constitutes a *Sanghakamma* [Formal Act of the Sangha], which must be performed in a valid sima, with full participation and unanimous agreement by all Theravada bhikkhus present within that sima. "Full participation" means all the bhikkhus present within that sima must either come within arm's length of each other, or those unable or unwilling to come must give their consent by proxy to the participating Sangha. The individual bhikkhu who receives the kathina cloth from the Sangha must have entered the first vassa and not broken it. But the other members of the Sangha who participated in the formal act of giving him the kathina cloth are not bound by this condition. In other words, they may or may not have entered the first vassa or they may or may not have broken it. They are there primarily to fulfil the quorum for a legal *Sanghakamma*.

In comparison, the actual spreading of the kathina cloth must be done under two conditions:

1. The bhikkhu who spreads the kathina must have qualified to receive the kathina cloth from the Sangha, i.e. he must have entered the first vassa and not broken it, and also possess the eight qualities.
2. The spreading of the kathina must be done within the monastery compound or *upacārasīmā* where the bhikkhu entered and stayed for the first vassa. *Upacāra* means neighbourhood and *sīmā* means area within a boundary. So *upacārasīmā* literally means “neighbourhood area within a boundary”, but in our context it can be translated as “monastery compound”. The fencing or enclosure surrounding the building or monastery where the bhikkhu stays for the first vassa defines it. If there is no fencing, it is defined as the area enclosed by an imaginary boundary formed by spots two stones’ throw away from the edge of the furthestmost hall or occupied building of the monastery.

We notice that there is no requirement for fulfilling any quorum of bhikkhus in order to spread the kathina. This is because it is not a Sanghakamma and therefore, need not be performed in a valid sima. In fact, if it were done in a valid sima that is not within the vassa compound, then it would not have satisfied the second requirement, and would therefore be null and void, i.e. the monks would not be entitled to kathina privileges.

Now, understanding this distinction, we can see that a monk who enters the first vassa





alone in a monastery without a proper sima can still enjoy kathina privileges. How?

1. Invite four other monks from elsewhere after the first vassa
2. Let the Sangha of five monks accept the kathina cloth from the kathina sponsor in his vassa monastery
3. Go to a proper sima in another monastery
4. Formally receive the kathina cloth from the Sangha there
5. Come back to his original vassa monastery and spread the kathina there.

## ELIGIBILITY TO KATHINA PRIVILEGES

Talking of enjoying kathina privileges brings us to the second distinction. Of those members of the Sangha who participate in the kathina ceremony, who are entitled to kathina privileges and who are not? The following two categories of monks are entitled to kathina privileges:

1. The individual monk who qualified to receive the kathina cloth from the Sangha, and who then spread the kathina within his vassa compound;
2. The other monks who entered (and did not break) the first vassa in the same monastery compound and who rejoiced at the legal spreading of the kathina mentioned above.

Monks who are not entitled to kathina privileges include the following:

1. Resident monks who completed the first vassa but did not rejoice in the spreading of the kathina
2. Resident monks who did enter but broke the first vassa
3. Resident monks who did not enter the first vassa
4. All guest monks.

Although the latter three may have rejoiced in the legal spreading of the kathina, they are still not entitled to kathina privileges.

The five kathina privileges were mentioned briefly in the Introduction. A detailed explanation will be given in the following article. Generally, the first four privileges are a relaxation of *Pātimokkha* rules, which are no longer relevant to most monks these days. I shall therefore skip them and discuss instead the fifth privilege, which has also some relevance to lay Buddhists.

## DISTRIBUTION OF SANGHIKA ROBES

The fifth privilege has to do with the distribution of Sanghika robes. Normally, when robes are donated to the Sangha, they are distributed according to seniority among all members of the

Sangha present within the monastery compound (*upacarasima*) during the time of distribution. But after the kathina has been spread in a particular monastery, and while kathina privileges are still in effect, robes that accrue to the Sangha are to be distributed among the holders of kathina privileges only. In other words, during the time of distribution, other visiting senior monks who are present within the monastery compound are not entitled to any Sanghika robe at all.

But how about the robes that were given to the Sangha before the kathina was spread? How are they to be distributed?

Even these Sanghika robes are to be distributed among the monks who qualify for kathina privileges only. In fact, all robes given to the Sangha during the whole of the robe month (more popularly known as kathina month) belong to the monks who had stayed for the first vassa without breaking it in the monastery where the robes were given. This principle holds even if the monks did not spread the kathina. What does this imply? This means that other monks who had stayed the first vassa elsewhere are not entitled to these Sanghika robes even though they may be present during the *Sanghadāna*, or when the robes are being distributed. However, after the robes have been legally distributed among the resident monks, and therefore converted into individual property, the resident monks can, if they wish to, give part or their entire share to the guest monks. That is their personal choice and decision.



When I was in Mahasi Meditation Centre and Panditarama in Burma, I noticed that during the kathina ceremony, the kathina sponsor offered to the Sangha only one robe (out of the set of three robes), usually a *sanghāti* [outer robe] for spreading the kathina. Other accessory robes were not offered to the Sangha, but were given, verbally and physically, to individual monks – both resident monks as well as invited guest monks. By verbally, I mean there was mass recitation in Burmese, announcing that the accessory robes were given to individual monks rather than to the Sangha as a whole. This means that the accessory robes do not belong to the resident monks only, but are equally given to each and every monk present during the ceremony. This arrangement seems to be a prudent way to avoid the embarrassment of guest monks leaving the ceremony empty handed.

Let us now see what the scriptural tradition has to say further about the distribution of robes. After the kathina has been spread, if the kathina sponsors should say, “We give these accessory robes to the monk who received our kathina cloth,” then the Sangha would have no authority over the distribution of the robes. However, if the kathina sponsors should just give the robes and leave without making any special arrangements, then the Sangha would have full authority. Therefore, in such a case, if the official kathina spreader’s other robes are old or tattered, the Sangha should make an official appeal and give sufficient cloth to him for replacing the old robes. The rest of the accessory cloth/robes, which are still strong and useable, should

be distributed according to the vassa robe (*vassāvāsika*) roster, or in its absence, according to seniority.

## VASSA ROBE ROSTER

Perhaps you might be curious to know what the vassa robe roster is. *Vassāvāsika* is derived from two words: *vassa* + *āvāsa*. *Vassa* means the rainy season; *āvāsa* means dwelling, residence or monastery. Attach a suffix *ika* to *vassāvāsa* and we get *vassāvāsika*, which can be translated as “robe/cloth pertaining to the rainy season residence”, and abbreviated to “vassa robe”.

The Buddha allowed this vassavasika or vassa robe to be given to and received by monks who have completed the first vassa without breaking it. Although it is now a popular Burmese custom to offer vassa robe before or at the beginning of the vassa, this practice was uncommon in the scriptural tradition. Canonical and Commentarial Vinaya literature deal at length on the distribution and ownership of vassa robes. Irrespective of whether kathina is spread or not resident monks who have completed an unbroken first vassa have monopoly over vassa robes offered in their monastery for a period of five months, starting from the robes month, or kathina month, as we popularly call it.

Because of this privilege, a roster is set up listing the eligible resident monks in order of

seniority. Whenever vassa robes are given to the Sangha, they are distributed according to the roster. For example, say there are five resident monks. Someone donates two vassa robes on Monday. These two robes will be given to the first two senior monks. Then on Friday, someone else gives another vassa robe. This robe will go to the third monk. On Sunday, four new vassa robes are offered. Two of the robes will go to the last two monks in the roster. The other two robes will go back to the first two monks, and so forth.

So the accessory robes accompanying the kathina cloth are considered as vassa robes and should be distributed according to the vassa robes roster. If there is no such roster, then they should be distributed according to seniority.

## DISTRIBUTION OF OTHER REQUISITES OFFERED TO THE SANGHA

During a kathina ceremony, not only robes, but also other requisites are offered to the Sangha. How are they to be distributed? The fifth kathina privilege, as I explained, is concerned only with the distribution of robes that are given to the Sangha. It does not cover other requisites. Therefore, “light” property, such as food, medicine, slippers, thread, needle, bowl, umbrella, filter cloth and other small items should be distributed among all monks— residents and



guests—present in the monastery compound. “Heavy” property, such as furniture, metal implements, appliances, machines, building materials and so forth, cannot be distributed, and must be made freely available to the Sangha from the four directions and utilised in accordance with monastic law and regulations.

# CONCLUSION

he kathina ceremony is now an internationally established festive occasion where the Sangha and the laity meet to participate in mutually rewarding, meritorious activities, which may or may not be directly pertinent to its original aims. But then metaphorically speaking, if the rice is properly cooked, the accompanying dishes will certainly make for a delicious meal.

Well, I have shared with you the results of my research into the scriptural tradition of kathina. If we understand the root of the matter, we can utilise this understanding to assess borrowed customs and begin to develop our own indigenous Malaysian Theravada Buddhist customs and practices that accord with the scriptural tradition in the spirit and the letter.

Finally, I hope that the rice will be properly cooked today, for the accompanying dishes certainly look good.









# EPILOGUE— SBS KATHINA CEREMONY





he above talk was delivered to create a greater awareness of the possibilities that lie ahead of Malaysian Theravada Buddhists who are searching for authentic interpretations and practices of Lord Gotama's teaching. Since then I have been trying to formulate a way of conducting the kathina ceremony that

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suites our modern Malaysian environment and accords with the scriptural tradition as well. Sasanarakkha Buddhist Sanctuary's (SBS) first kathina ceremony can be seen as the outcome of such an endeavour, done in collaboration with its management committee.

The following considerations were made in the spirit of the preceding article. During a monk's ordination, he is told to depend on four fundamental supports (*nissaya*) for his livelihood: discarded cloth, alms-food, urine and the foot of a tree. If he is offered, he may accept ready-made robes, invitations to meals, medicines and dwelling places. Nowadays monks are so highly esteemed and showered with such abundant requisites that most have forgotten their humble roots. I personally feel that the kathina ceremony can be used as an annual reminder to monks of their:

1. Ancient practice of making their own robes
2. Gratitude to lay devotees for relieving them of the time-consuming chores related to making and dyeing robes
3. Duty to effectively utilise their time—otherwise spent on looking for the four fundamental supports—to practise the Buddha's teaching
4. Commitment to perpetuate the Vinaya tradition of conducting Sangha affairs.

## MAKING ONE'S OWN ROBE

Although the majority of modern monks now wear ready-made robes, every monk at SBS should still be given the opportunity to learn how to make his own robe at least once. If we follow the scriptural tradition of making the kathina robe out of the kathina cloth on kathina day, all participating monks will have to learn how to do it even before the actual ceremony. In ancient times, monks used to hand-sew their robes. Now we can make use of sewing machines. Natural dyes were prescribed by the Buddha to match the allowable shades of robe colour. The production of such dyes is time-consuming and many of them fade or run after a few washings. It is educational for a monk to learn how to make such natural dyes and use them to dye his robes. However, for practical reasons we can use pre-chemical-dyed cloth to make robes and dye them with self-made dye. Here in SBS, we have found that a concoction of *bakau* bark and *buah jering* shells can produce reddish brown dye. When applied on a pre-chemical-dyed ochre cotton cloth, the result is a sombre brown colour. In case it rains on kathina day, we can also make use of an electric drying machine to dry the newly made, washed and dyed kathina robe in time to spread the kathina.





## GRATITUDE TO LAY DEVOTEES

Being engaged in the tedious process of robe making from the break of dawn until the evening is a rare experience for a modern Malaysian monk who is used to being served by faithful devotees. What more to say of the time spent in producing the natural dye and in other preparations before kathina day itself? After going through this, a monk would certainly be more appreciative of the ready-made robes offered by lay devotees.

## MONKS' DUTY

Monks have renounced worldly occupations so that they can devote their time to carry out the Buddha's instructions. The scriptures classify these instructions in various ways. A popular classification is the famous injunction of the Buddha: "Not to do any evil; to cultivate good; to cleanse one's own mind; this is the teaching of Buddhas". Practically speaking, it can be

twofold: studying and teaching the scriptures (*ganthadhura*) and practising vipassana meditation (*vipassanadhura*). This dyad implies that a monk has to study in order to know what is good and evil; how to avoid evil and cultivate good; and how to practise meditation for mental purification. But study is not an end in itself. Rather it is a means to an end—that of mental purity—which can be achieved only through the practice of meditation.

During the annual kathina ceremony, lay devotees are especially generous in supporting monks with suitable requisites such as ready-made robes, food, medicine and lodging. By doing so, they are relieving monks of the burden of having to look for the four fundamental supports of life. The kathina ceremony is therefore a befitting occasion for monks to gratefully acknowledge the laity's benevolence, and reciprocate by making themselves worthy of hospitality, offering and respect. What greater field of merit can there be in the world than the Sangha that practises well, straightforwardly, methodically and respectfully?



## VINAYA TRADITION OF CONDUCTING SANGHA AFFAIRS

The monks performing the kathina ceremony at SBS will have a first hand experience in the Vinaya tradition of conducting Sangha affairs. To fulfil the quorum for initiating the kathina ceremony the three monks who spent the vassa at SBS will invite at least two other monks from elsewhere. The Sanghakamma of giving the kathina cloth to the appointed monk will be done in Sasanarakkha Sima, which was officially declared by sixteen Malaysian bhikkhus on 1 July

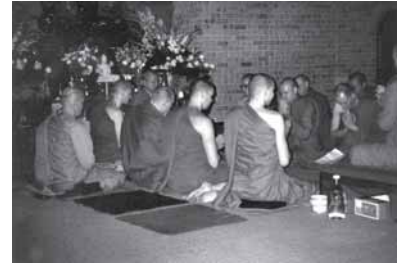


2001. All the monks will then cooperate to make and dye the cloth into a proper kathina robe. Lay devotees will also be given the opportunity to participate in the kathina ceremony by offering kathina accessories and food to the Sangha, as well as by contributing towards the development and maintenance of SBS. In the evening, the appointed bhikkhu will spread the kathina with the completed kathina robe. After that Sanghika robes and other requisites will be distributed accordingly.

There is one deviation from the scriptural tradition, however. The SBS Management Committee was not keen to adopt the auction-like practice of awarding kathina cloth sponsorship to the “highest bidder” on kathina day. Instead, it opted to invite other Buddhist organisations, which have contributed towards the successful establishment of SBS, to be joint-sponsors. They will be given the honour of

1. Sponsoring the expenses incurred by the monks at SBS during the vassa period
2. Presenting the kathina cloth and other accessories to the Sangha on kathina day through a representative.

This concludes a brief description, from the monastic perspective, of Sasanarakkha Buddhist Sanctuary’s first kathina ceremony. We hope that our adaptation of the scriptural tradition to a Malaysian situation will inspire others to be even more creative in the future.





# KATHINA BENEFITS — ILLUSION, DELUSION & RESOLUTION

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# ILLUSION & DELUSION

**P**reachers who give talks on the kathina ceremony assert that by offering the kathina cloth to the Sangha the donors are indirectly bestowing five privileges to monks and, therefore, will reap five corresponding benefits. These five privileges, which were given by the Buddha, and the corresponding benefits claimed by the preachers are shown in the table below.

KATHINA PRIVILEGES FOR BHIKKHUS		CLAIMED BENEFITS FOR KATHINA SPONSORS
1.	Freedom of movement before noon in spite of having accepted an invitation for a meal.	Go anywhere without danger, hindrances or obstructions.
2.	Freedom to stay apart from one's set of three robes at the break of dawn.	Fire, water, wicked kings, thieves and ungrateful children cannot destroy their property.
		They can perform their tasks without difficulty.
3.	Freedom to accept invitations for group meals	They will not meet with any harm.
		They will not meet with any danger on account of their meals.
4.	Freedom to keep as many robes as desired (without having to <u>determine</u> or <u>assign</u> them according to Vinaya regulation)	Their belongings will be kept safe.
		They can get many clothes.
5.	Exclusive right to Sanghika robes given at one's vassa monastery	They can own many other possessions.
		They will be able to keep their properties.

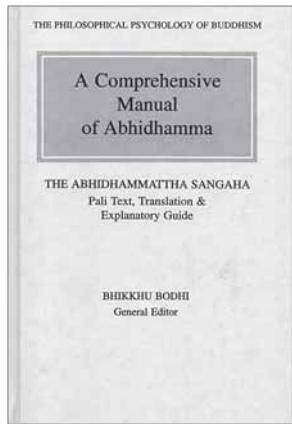
## DELUSIVE PALI REFERENCES

Now, it is very normal for *Theravadins* to substantiate their claims with relevant quotations from the Scriptures—just to give them weight and authority. However, none of those benefits were mentioned at all either by the Buddha or the Commentaries. One can look up all the entries that pertain to kathina privileges and benefits in the very authoritative *Index and Guide to the Tipitaka and its Commentaries* compiled by a famous Burmese scholar monk, Sayadaw U Sīhabala of the Nyaun Lunt Forest Tradition. A high-tech Pali scholar can even use a computer to search through the Vipassana Research Institute's *Chattha Saṅgāyana CD-ROM*, which contains the whole Pali Tipitaka and all its Commentaries and Sub-commentaries. Yet, they will not be able to find a single reference to substantiate these claims. Nevertheless, a booklet called *Offering of Kathina Robe*, reprinted for free distribution by SJBA in October 1991, apparently contains a reference on page 11 which states:

The donors of the kathina robes can also get five results like the Sangha. In the *Abhidhamma* [Higher Teaching] it says, '*Janeti sadisaṃ pākam, paṭisandhippavattiyam*', which means, 'This giving produces similar results at rebirth and during one's lifetime'. The donors who offer kathina robes can go anywhere without danger, etc.







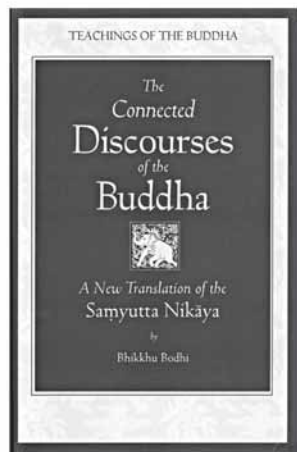
It sounds very convincing especially for people impressed by Pali quotations. This reference is taken from the *Abhidhammatthasangaha*, a compendium of the Abhidhamma. It was composed by *Ācariya* Anuruddha between the 10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> century in Sri Lanka. The identity of this author is not very well known; people do not know who he was and where he came from. Right now, this compendium is very popular in Myanmar. It is a compulsory text in monastic education, and even young children and samaneras at the age of 10 or 11 can learn the whole text by heart. Later it was translated into English by Venerable Narada Thera as *A Manual of Abhidhamma*. Recently, Venerable Bhikkhu Bodhi was the General Editor of a revised translation called *A Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma*.

The verse that was quoted in the above booklet comes from Chapter V, §33 (page 219) of Venerable Bhikkhu Bodhi's new edition (Buddhist Publication Society, 1993, 1999). It comprises the last two lines of a verse that summarises a preceding section dealing with the results of *rūpa* [fine-material sphere] and *arūpa* [immaterial sphere] wholesome kamma. Here is the complete verse, followed by Venerable Bhikkhu Bodhi's translation:

*Ittham mahaggaṭaṃ puññaṃ, yathābhūmivavatthitaṃ  
Janeti sadisaṃ pākam, paṭisandhippavattiyam.*

*Thus sublime merit, determined according to planes, produces similar results (both) at rebirth-linking and in the course of existence.*

Can you understand what that means? This is actually a summary of the section that deals with the development of *jhānic cittas* [meditative absorption consciousness]. When you practice meditation and attain the *jhānas* [meditative absorptions], you are actually developing what we call sublime, meritorious consciousness. If you develop the 1<sup>st</sup> jhana and you are able to maintain it until you die, then immediately after your death, you'll be reborn in the *brahma* [asexual deity] world of the 1<sup>st</sup> jhana plane. If you attain the 2<sup>nd</sup> jhana and you maintain it until you die, you'll be reborn in the 2<sup>nd</sup> jhana plane of the brahma world, and so forth. So the summary says this sublime merit will be determined according to planes of existence, e.g. 1<sup>st</sup> jhana plane, 2<sup>nd</sup> jhana plane, 3<sup>rd</sup> jhana plane, and it will produce similar results both at rebirth-linking and in the course of existence. This means that if you meditate and attain 1<sup>st</sup> jhana, that 1<sup>st</sup> jhana is a kammic consciousness called sublime merit. That kammic consciousness will give a *vipāka* [resultant] as the rebirth-linking [rebirth consciousness], the *bhavanga* [life continuum] or the death citta [death consciousness]. "*In the course of existence*" refers to the life continuum. Life continuum is the consciousness that occurs in between active



cognition. When you are fast asleep, without any dreams, you are said to be in a state of bhavanga.

So that's what those two lines mean. What does that have to do with kathina privileges? It is very impressive but it has nothing to do with kathina privileges. You can see that it is an irrelevant quotation. It is quoted out of context and cannot be used to substantiate or justify the claims by kathina preachers. In fact, to do so would be tantamount to deluding the faithful who sometimes tend to be naive and easily impressed by Pali quotations.

Two weeks ago, when I was at Bodhiyarama Estate, Kuala Kubu Bharu, for Selangor Buddhist Vipassana Meditation Society's kathina ceremony, I met a learned Sayadaw from one of the most famous Pali academic monasteries in Myanmar. I asked him if the Buddha directly mentioned the benefits for kathina sponsors. "No," he said, "but we can deduce from this verse in the *Samyutta Nikāya* [*Connected Discourses of the Buddha*]:

*Yādisam vapate bījā*

*Tādisam harate phalaṃ.* [Meaning: One reaps what one sows.]"

This verse can be found in one of the Buddha's discourses called *Samuddaka Sutta* (SN I.11.10). "*Samudda*" means ocean or sea. So, it is a discourse connected with the sea.

The Buddha once related this to monks. He said, “Monks, once upon a time there were some virtuous hermits staying in *atap* [dried leaf] huts by the sea. At that time, a battle was going on between the *asuras* [demigods] and *devas* [deities]. The hermits thought, ‘The devas are righteous but not the asuras. What if we should approach Sambara, the Lord of Asuras, and ask for the gift of safety?’”

Now, why did they say that? According to the Commentary, they fought above the ocean. Most of the time when the asuras lost and ran away, they would often fly past the hermitage. The asuras thought that the hermits collaborated with Sakka, the Lord of the Devas, and betrayed them, thus causing their defeat. So they became angry and came down to destroy the huts of the hermits who were out looking for food. That was the reason why the hermits decided to approach Sambara, the Lord of Asuras, to ask for protection.

They went by means of their psychic powers. Just as fast as a strong man would bend his arm, they were in front of Sambara in an instant. The hermits said to Sambara, “We request you to give us the gift of safety, for you are capable of giving safety or danger according to your pleasure.”

“There is no safety for you, treacherous hermits, allies of Sakka,” replied Sambara. “To you who ask for safety, I give only danger.”

The hermits said, “To us who ask for safety, you give only danger. We accept that gift of yours.” Then they put a curse on him: “May you have endless dangers. One reaps what one sows. The doer of good shall get good returns; the evildoer shall suffer evil consequences. You have sown your seed and you shall experience the fruit.” After cursing him, they disappeared from his presence and reappeared at their hermitage.

Later that night, Sambara had terrible nightmares that woke him up thrice in great fear.

This is the end of the Buddha’s discourse. Is there any mention of kathina benefits or privileges? The Pali verse quoted by the Sayadaw was actually spoken by the hermits and related by the Buddha to the monks. In terms of context, this is also not a very appropriate source of reference.

## **A WORD OF CAUTION**

At this point I must really caution you to be wary of preachers and writers who give Pali quotations because you do not know Pali and may think that they are very

profound and authoritative. But I have come across misleading quotations so many times that I am now very sceptical. If someone were to give a Pali quotation, I would rarely accept it until I knew its exact meaning and were familiar with the context in which the Pali passage is to be found. However, unless you are a Pali scholar, you will not be able to know. That was one of the primary reasons why I decided to study the Pali language. I was so sick of being deluded by unscrupulous preachers, scholars and people pretending to be scholars who quote impressive Pali passages. Actually, they are quoted out of context just to serve their own ends.

## USING COMMON SENSE AS A YARDSTICK

Now, let us scrutinise the kathina preachers' claims again from another angle. Instead of using impressive references quoted out of context from the scriptures, we can just use common sense to explain the claims. It is commonly understood that according to the universal, impersonal Law of Kamma, we reap what we sow, or in this case, we get what we give.

So, following this principle, the benefits that are supposed to be obtained by the kathina donors have been worked out corresponding to the kathina privileges

of bhikkhus. However, do the bhikkhus really enjoy the privileges nowadays? Do the benefits of kathina sponsors really correspond to kathina privileges for bhikkhus? Let us investigate.

## DO KATHINA PRIVILEGES CORRESPOND TO CLAIMED BENEFITS?

I shall explain to you each of these five privileges and we shall try to see if there is any correspondence between these privileges and the benefits that kathina donors are supposed to get.

**The first privilege** is *Anāmantacāra*, freedom of movement before noon in spite of having accepted an invitation for a meal. Now, when we say freedom of movement, it doesn't mean that without this privilege a monk does not have freedom of movement. There is a Vinaya rule (Pac. 46) that says that if a monk has already been invited for a meal, he is not allowed to go elsewhere visiting other families before or after that meal in the morning, i.e. before noon. However, he can still visit families before or after that invited meal if he informs another bhikkhu. But if he is staying alone, then he does not have to inform another bhikkhu. He is not bound by that rule because it says that he is not allowed to go out only if he did not inform

another bhikkhu who is present. If there is no bhikkhu then this rule doesn't apply. Moreover, most monks now follow the Commentarial interpretation, which says that "*an invitation to a meal*," as stated in the Vinaya rule, means an invitation that has been made through the use of improper terms. For example, if you invite a monk by saying, "Bhante, I want to invite you for *laksa* tomorrow." That is supposed to be an improper invitation because you mentioned the name of the meal. But, if you say, "Bhante, can you please come to my house for *dāna* tomorrow?" then it's a proper invitation. In this case, the Vinaya rule does not apply and there is no restriction on the monk's freedom of movement. Since most invitations nowadays are issued in proper terms, using the word "dana", this rule is virtually obsolete. As such this so-called privilege that a monk can get is actually meaningless. Secondly, we can also consider that if there are other monks within the temple, it is normal practice for a monk, if he wants to go anywhere, to inform the other monks so that people can know where he has gone.

Now let us look for the correspondence with the benefit for kathina sponsors. Because of this kathina privilege for bhikkhus, the kathina donor is supposed to get the benefit of going anywhere without danger, hindrances or obstruction. Do you see any correspondence here? Any cause and effect? To me it seems rather questionable.



**The second privilege** is *Asamādānacāra*, freedom to stay apart from one's set of three robes at the break of dawn. During the Buddha's time, monks were only allowed a set of three robes and they must determine each robe according to its particular usage: whether as an outer robe, an upper robe or a lower robe. If a monk determines his set of robes specifically in that way then at the break of dawn he must not stay apart from any of these robes (NP 2). To stay apart means to be further away than one arm's length. This also depends on where he is. Dawn is also a very controversial issue because not all monks agree on when dawn is. It is supposed to be before sunrise. Some monks take dawn to be two or three hours before sunrise, others take it to be 24 minutes before sunrise, while still others take it to be 48 minutes before sunrise. Monks who take dawn as two or three hours before sunrise will have the liberty to eat breakfast early in the morning, while it is still dark. Dawn also affects people who observe the eight precepts because they can only start to take their food after dawn. People who are strict in their Vinaya or precepts will prefer to take the later dawn, i.e. 24 minutes before sunrise when it is bright enough for one to differentiate between the leaves and branches of trees.

However, there is a Commentarial interpretation of this rule based on the Buddha's allowing monks to determine robes as accessory cloth. This means that a

monk can determine a set of three robes as accessory cloth rather than as outer robe, upper robe and lower robe. When the robes are determined in that way, he is not bound by this rule. In other words, at the break of dawn, it does not matter if he is away from these three robes. Nowadays, the vast majority of monks follow this principle. They do not determine the robes specifically anymore. If they just determine everything as accessory cloth, then this freedom is redundant. Even if they have the kathina privilege, it doesn't make any difference.

So, can you say that the kathina donor, by giving this so-called freedom, will get any benefit from it? That they can perform their tasks without difficulty? That their property cannot be destroyed by fire, water and so forth? That is something very questionable.

**The third privilege** is *Ganabhojana*, freedom to accept invitations to group meals. Now this is an interesting rule. It came about because of Devadatta, a cousin of the Buddha, who was overwhelmed by ambition to overthrow the Buddha. He conspired to kill the Buddha but his scheme fell through. When people discovered that he had evil intentions, they boycotted him. For that reason, he and his followers did not get enough food when they walked around for *pindapāta* [alms]. So, they asked for food.

According to Vinaya rules, monks are forbidden to ask for requisites if they have not been invited to do so. The normal practice for a good monk when he goes for alms round is to just stand silently in front of a house or a donor and wait for food to be given. If nothing is given, then he must move along without uttering a single word. (NP 6, NP 22, Pac 39, Sekh 37, MilP 4.5.9, etc.)

Because of what Devadatta and his followers did, the Buddha laid down the rule that, except for special occasions, monks are not allowed to accept invitations to group meals (Pac. 32). He was afraid that a schism might occur in the Sangha, that factions might form. Normally, if people were to invite the Sangha for a meal, then the Sangha will draw lots to appoint members of the Sangha, or draw up a roster for them, to attend the meal. However, if you personally selected four specific monks from a Sangha (comprising five or more monks) and invited them to a group meal, that may be the cause for their trespassing a Vinaya rule. This so-called group meal regulation is similar to that mentioned under the first kathina privilege, which depends on the phrasing of the invitation. If you mention the particular type of food to be served, and if they accept the invitation and receive their food together, then they are guilty of a Vinaya offence.

But bhikkhus who get this third kathina privilege are not bound by this Vinaya rule—even if they accepted an improper invitation and received their food together,

they would not be penalised. Then again, such invitations are rare because people will often say, “Please come to my house for dana,” rather than, “We invite you to have *nasik lemak*, *satay*, KFC, etc. at my house.” They do not normally state what food will be served. So in the situation of today, where the question of an improper invitation rarely arises, this third privilege is also redundant.

Furthermore, I am baffled by the claim that the kathina donor will get a corresponding benefit of not meeting with any harm or danger because of their meals. How this is connected to the “privilege” to accept invitations to group-meals is something very questionable.

**The fourth privilege** is *Yāvadatthacīvara*, the freedom to keep as many robes as desired without having to determine or assign them according to Vinaya regulation (NP 1). As I said earlier, a monk is supposed to have a set of three robes, which he must determine specifically, or generally as accessory cloth. If somebody were to offer me a robe and I accepted it, left it aside and forgot about it for ten days or more, I’d be guilty of a Vinaya offence. I would have to forfeit the robe to another bhikkhu. It’s only a formality because the bhikkhu who receives the robe will have to return it to me after I have made my confession. Now, if a bhikkhu does not want to determine the robe he can also assign it to another monk. Assigning means taking the robe to another bhikkhu and reciting in Pali, “I assign this robe to you.”

When the monk receives it, he should recite another passage meaning “You can use my robe, give it away or do anything you want with it.” By assigning in this way, the robe no longer belongs to the first bhikkhu. This is a Vinaya formality to show that a monk owns only three robes and any other extra robe belongs to somebody else. A bhikkhu who gets this fourth kathina privilege of *Yāvadatthacīvara* need not have to determine or assign any robes that accrue to him while the kathina privileges are still in effect.

Nowadays most monks do not go through the formality of specifically determining their three robes or of assigning extra robes to other monks. They conveniently determine everything as accessory cloth and put it aside. In this way, they do not commit any offence in spite of owning more than just a set of three robes. Actually, the Buddha did not encourage bhikkhus to have many robes. He put a limit to the number of robes because he did not like the idea of a bhikkhu having too many possessions. It is true that he did not limit the amount of accessory cloth that a bhikkhu could possess; but if we look at the intent of the Buddha, there is good reason to believe that the accessory cloth he allowed did not refer to a ready-made robe. Rather, it refers to the pieces of cloth and rags that are collected to be made into a proper robe. Nevertheless, the ancient Theras had debated that point centuries ago and had agreed to accept the interpretation that monks can determine ready-

made robes as accessory cloth. So, with or without kathina privileges a bhikkhu nowadays is not really restricted to the number of robes he can possess.

In fact, having many robes can be a burden. They need to be properly kept in a secure storeroom that is dry, airy and pest-proof. They have to be periodically inspected and taken out for airing. Otherwise, the robes will get mouldy or be destroyed by rats, termites and other pests. I have heard many stories of mice and squirrels making their nests among the folds of extra robes, not to mention termites eating them up. Frugal and austere monks dread hoarding extra robes while enterprising monks resell them or exchange them for other requisites. I have also been told that some monks (especially foreigners) send them to “poor” Theravada monks in other countries (usually their respective motherland). What actually happens to these robes when they arrive at their destination is something we do not know. When I arrived in Sri Lanka a Western monk enquired if I had any problems with the Customs. He said that they are particularly wary of monks arriving from Malaysia because there have been cases of their bringing in boxes of robes and other requisites to sell!

How then is this fourth “privilege” related to the kathina donor’s supposed benefit of having belongings kept safe and of getting many clothes?

**The fifth privilege** is *Yo ca tattha cīvaruppāda*, exclusive right to Sanghika robes given at one's vassa monastery. Supposing there are two monks staying back after the vassa at their vassa monastery and someone comes to donate Sanghika robes. At that moment when the robes are being donated to the Sangha there are other guest monks as well. For example, there are five guest monks and two resident monks during the Sanghika robe offering ceremony. The Sangha receives the robes but the guest monks are not entitled to them. The robes are to be exclusively shared by the two resident monks. After they have been converted to individual property, the resident monks have a choice of sharing them with the guest monks. At other times outside the kathina month or kathina privilege period, if Sanghika robes are offered, then whether the resident monks like it or not they have to distribute the robes equally among all the monks present.

The monk who has observed the first vassa but does not spread the kathina will still have exclusive right to the robes that are offered to the Sangha at his vassa monastery during the kathina month only. The monk who has spread the kathina will have this privilege extended for a total of five months provided the kathina privileges do not expire prematurely. However, this exclusive right to Sanghika robes is obtainable only at the place where the bhikkhu spent the vassa. If he goes elsewhere then it will no longer be valid.

How is this related by cause and effect to the kathina donors' supposed benefit of being able to safely keep their many possessions?

## **FRAGILITY OF KATHINA PRIVILEGES FOR MONKS**

There is a lot of good press given to the privileges obtainable from spreading the kathina. As we have just shown, the majority of them are quite irrelevant to most monks nowadays. Moreover they are rather fragile, for they are easily revoked. This issue has already been explained in the previous article on page 43. A recapitulation follows.

After spreading the kathina, the kathina privileges are supposed to be effective for a maximum of five months, starting from the first day after the end of the first vassa. Nevertheless, the kathina privileges will be prematurely revoked if the following two commitments are absent:

1. Concern for making a new robe out of robe material that the monk has received or will receive;
2. Intention to continue staying at his vassa monastery, or to leave temporarily and return to it within the five-month period.



In other words, if the monk who has spread the kathina does not have any thoughts of making a new robe and decides to leave his vassa monastery without thought of returning within the five-month period, then his kathina privileges will be withdrawn immediately. Nowadays, most robes are ready-made, so the first commitment is practically non-existent because most monks will not have any plans to sew new robes after the vassa. So, if a monk leaves his vassa monastery and does not plan to return during the five-month period, his kathina privileges will be revoked prematurely. Another important point to remember is that the fifth privilege is *only* effective while he is staying in the place where the kathina was spread and not elsewhere.

## QUESTIONING THE KATHINA BENEFITS FOR DONORS

If the kathina privileges are so fragile then the claimed corresponding benefits for kathina sponsors may also be fragile and subject to restrictions as well. This is only through deduction by the Law of Cause and Effect. As I pointed out, four out of five, or 80% of the privileges can no longer be considered privileges because they are not really needed to make life easier or more relaxed for most monks nowadays.

Do you think that a public holiday makes any difference to an unemployed person? Recently Perak declared an unexpected public holiday for the state because its football team beat Selangor. I was staying in Taiping at the time. The public holiday did not make any difference to me because I was alone up on a hill. I did not consider it a privilege. Suppose you open the door of a cage where birds have been held captive for a long time. You are giving them the privilege of freedom, which they will certainly appreciate, right? But if you open the door of an empty cage and shout out to the birds in your garden, "Look, birdies! I'm keeping this door open. You're free to fly in and out as you please. Enjoy your freedom!" Are you really giving them freedom? Will they appreciate your so-called 'gift of freedom'? Think about it.

The Law of Kamma works according to the principle of cause and effect: you get what you give. If the so-called freedom that you give were only nominal, you would probably get nominal freedom too. This is something that we should all be aware of so that we are not deluded into having unrealistic expectations of our kammic returns.

Another point that we should consider is this: the Buddha talked about the specific benefits of giving food, clothing, a vehicle, a lamp, a dwelling place, etc. in various Suttas, especially in the *Anguttara Nikāya*. In the *Vimānavatthu* and *Apadāna*, which modern Pali scholars consider as later additions to the Tipitaka, there are many

references to the specific benefits of giving particular items such as umbrella, cloth, alms bowl, razor blade, needle, nail cutter, fan, water strainer, etc. to the Buddha and the Sangha. Now isn't it odd that the specific benefits for kathina sponsors, which have been so well glorified by kathina preachers, are nowhere to be found in the whole Pali Tipitaka, its Commentaries and Sub-commentaries?

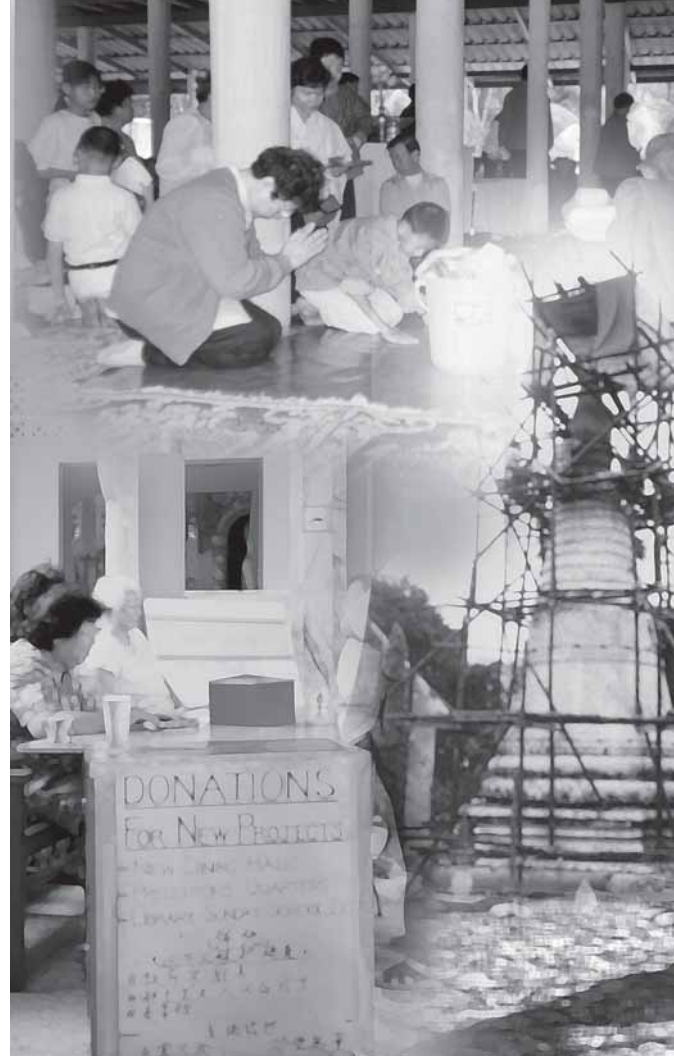
## SWAYING THE FAITHFUL

Recently, when I was in Taiping, I had a conversation with a wealthy and outspoken woman interested in meditation but not in doing dana to monks. It seems that her relatives were very staunch Buddhists and they encouraged her to do a lot of dana. She said, "All this talk about how much merit is made when giving dana to monks is just a way of canvassing for support because the monks are not working and they have to depend on lay contributions. That's why they say you get a lot of merit by giving to monks". I smiled when she said that. Frankly speaking, even being a monk myself, I am inclined to agree with her especially when I see some preachers 'market' their dana products. I remember thinking that way too, when I was studying some of the Pali Commentaries. Not that I did not believe in the Law of Kamma, but

I think some preachers can get very carried away by their vivid imagination, like those who invented the list of corresponding benefits for kathina donors. I suspect there are also greedy and unscrupulous preachers who exaggerate the principles of cause and effect to solicit funds for their own ends.

Just a few days ago a young man came up to me and said that a few of his friends went to Singapore. They shaved their heads, wore *Mahayanist* robes, stood at the MRT and collected hundreds of dollars. They came back and spent the money on drugs. This is very common in our country too because people capitalise on the inherent generosity of Malaysian Chinese.

It is understandable that Buddhist temples, societies and associations are continually in need of funds to perpetuate their activities and services to the community. There is no doubt about that. Does the end justify the means? Must we resort to such a lowly tactic as deluding the faithful and gullible into having unrealistic expectations of what their kammic investments will produce? As practising Buddhists, shouldn't we endeavour to abide by high standards of ethics, particularly that of honesty, rectitude, truthfulness and loftiness of purpose? I therefore propose that we should change our attitude towards the whole issue of kathina and re-educate Buddhists on how to participate in this internationally, widespread Buddhist festival in a more wholesome, non-delusive and meaningful way.





RESOLUTION

## SUMMARY AND PROPOSAL



Let me now summarise what I've just explained and elaborate on my proposal.

1. To wholeheartedly believe in the kathina preachers' claims, which are not found in the Pali Tipitaka, its Commentaries and Sub-commentaries, is an **illusion**.
2. To justify those claims by quoting Pali references out of context, and to exaggerate such worldly benefits in order to capitalise on the Malaysian Chinese's compulsion to offer trays of requisites to monks is a **delusion**.
3. We should therefore seriously consider adopting a **resolution**:
  - a. To understand that most of the kathina privileges are no longer relevant for most monks nowadays, and therefore the corresponding benefits for kathina sponsors are all the more questionable
  - b. To regard the kathina ceremony from a more pragmatic and altruistic perspective. It is an annual opportunity to:
    - i) deepen our faith in the Triple Gem by putting the Dhamma into actual practice;

- ii) renew our commitment to support the Sangha as bearers of the Buddha's profound teachings;
- iii) make a special effort to contribute financially and/or in kind to the maintenance and improvement of communal facilities for the betterment of the many; and
- iv) dedicate our wholesome deeds to the perfection of our *pāramīs* [Perfections] so that we can attain Nibbana soon and be in a better position to help others (develop spiritually).

## A MORE PRAGMATIC AND ALTRUISTIC PERSPECTIVE

If you look at the supposed benefits for kathina sponsors, they are all actually very selfish because we are thinking of what benefits we are going to get and not thinking of other people. It's like when you are sick and you go to see a doctor. After he has prescribed the medicine, you collect it and pay for it. Can you consider this doing dana? You are paying for a service, are you not? Applying logical reasoning, if you give offerings expecting to get things in return, how much different is that from doing business?

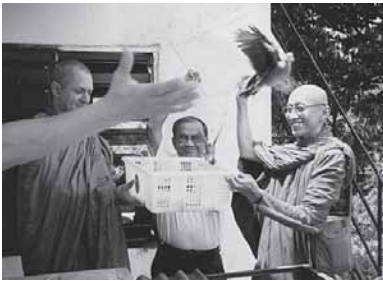




Rather than fostering such business-like, self-centred and materialistic attitudes, may I propose that we should regard the kathina ceremony as an annual opportunity to observe the four wholesome practices mentioned above. These are explained below.

## DEEPENING OUR FAITH IN THE TRIPLE GEM

How do we do that? For example, be determined to stick to truthfulness, not to delude people into having unrealistic expectations of their kammic returns, and to give service. Many things need to be done during the kathina ceremony. Seize the opportunity to offer service in innovative ways as an expression of wisdom.



It has become a very common Malaysian practice to circulate or recycle the kathina offerings. Some of them recycle it immediately and others do it very discreetly. Let me tell you a very interesting story. One day, Venerable Ajahn Brahmagamo came to Taiping to visit SBS. To commemorate his visit, some devotees decided to release birds. When Ajahn Brahm saw the cage he asked, “Where did you get those birds?” The members answered, “We bought them”. He replied, “Oh! Is that so?” Then he began to relate a story: “When I was in

Thailand, there was a temple where many people came to buy pigeons to set free and it never seemed to run out of pigeons. It was very odd indeed. Someone was curious and wanted to find out where the pigeons went after they were released. This particular guy hung around and watched. He discovered that the pigeons were very well trained because after they were released, they flew in a huge circle and returned to their home at the back of the temple.” The Thais are rearing pigeons and recycling them. We Malaysians rear monks’ requisites in our storerooms!

When I speak of innovation as an expression of wisdom, I am sure that many among you are very successful in the business world and are very intelligent and creative. Surely, you can think of more creative ways to raise funds instead of recycling those requisites. To continue this sort of tradition, which is peculiar only to Malaysians, will defeat the very purpose of giving. When you give those requisites to the monks, they actually belong to the Sangha. If they have been given to the Sangha and somebody takes them back and hands them to someone else to give to the Sangha again, then the donor is not giving anything at all. One is just paying a service charge for offering those trays of requisites. Very often, those trays of requisites are kept in the storeroom for so long that they are covered with dust. So, I really urge our creative Malaysian Buddhists to come out with



more innovative ways to raise funds rather than just resort to recycling robes and requisites.

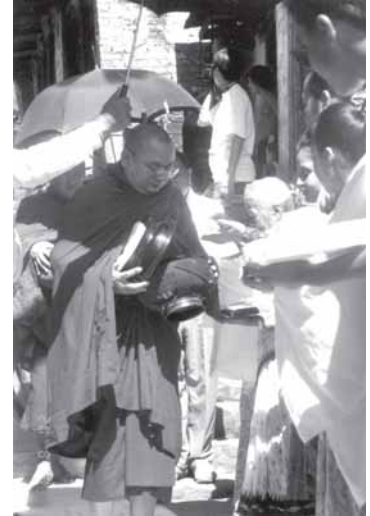
Another way of deepening our faith in the Triple Gem is to practice patience and forgiveness. In a big organisation, especially during a big event like the kathina ceremony, everyone has to work together. When people get together there are bound to be all sorts of clashes, e.g. personality clashes, methodology clashes, priority clashes and so forth. This is a time for you to practise patience, forgiveness, understanding and tolerance. These are all various aspects of the paramis that we need to perfect in order for us to get enlightened. Loving-kindness is very important because it will help to foster patience, understanding and tolerance. Of equal importance is presence of mind and mindfulness. If you have enough mindfulness, especially *cittānupassanā* or mindfulness of mental states, then you will be in a better position to control your emotions and therefore relate better to other members of your team when you are working together.

These are ways that can help us deepen our faith in the Triple Gem by putting the Dhamma into actual practice. Kathina is a wonderful opportunity for you all to really test how deep your practice is because working together can bring about conflicts and disagreements. Now is the chance to test how well you can handle your mind and your emotions.

## RENEWING OUR COMMITMENT TO SUPPORT THE SANGHA

The Buddha passed away more than 2500 years ago. If the Sangha had not preserved the teachings we would not know what Buddhism is. We would not know what is wholesome and unwholesome: what *dāna*, *sīla* and *bhāvanā* mean. It was because of the Sangha that the *Sāsana* has survived and it will be because of the Sangha that the Sasana will be perpetuated. Monks have renounced worldly occupations so that they can devote their lives to the study, practice and propagation of the Buddha's teaching. They are dependent on lay support because they do not earn a living. As lay people, you do not have much time to study, practise or teach the Dhamma. By generously supporting the Sangha with your hard-earned wealth, you are doing your part to help propagate the Sasana now and perpetuate it for future generations. But then again, please try to exercise discretion when you give. Give what is appropriate and necessary at the right time.

Imagine how a critical person would look at our Malaysian Buddhists' compulsion of wanting to offer trays of requisites to monks. Do the monks really need all those requisites? You give so many bowls and robes that they do not need. I have often heard critical remarks like, "How much merit is there in giving all those redundant offerings to the monks? After all, they're so rich and well taken care of. Better to give





to the disabled and needy like orphans, victims of natural disasters, etc.” Remember that the Law of Kamma is such that you get what you give. If you give useless things, next time you’ll get useless things in return.

I understand that in Thailand and Burma, they do not offer trays of requisites like we do here. If there is a kathina sponsor, the monastery will determine a certain monetary value for the sponsor and list out all the things that the monastery really needs. Then the sponsor will contribute in cash or purchase those things that are necessary for the monastery; so in this way there is no wastage.

## **MAKING A SPECIAL EFFORT TO CONTRIBUTE FOR THE BETTERMENT OF THE MANY**

At Subang Jaya Buddhist Association, it is mentioned in the kathina ceremony programme that all the proceeds will go to the Sangha and it’s up to the Sangha to decide what to do with the proceeds. In other places, I understand this is not the case. It is usually mentioned that the proceeds will go to the maintenance of the society, temple, organisation or association. Whatever it is, one could make use of the kathina festival as an occasion for fund raising; but as I have said earlier, please reconsider the practice of recycling requisites.

Perhaps you could state in your programme that this is a fund raising campaign—that is, during the kathina ceremony, you are going to raise funds for a particular project—and the proceeds will be channelled to the said fund. People who wish to participate in the ceremony should also bear in mind that they are actually doing a very good deed. You are thus contributing towards the good of the many, and not only for your own selfish benefits.

## DEDICATING OUR WHOLESOME DEEDS TO THE ATTAINMENT OF NIBBANA

Every true Buddhist aspires to ultimately attain Nibbana. Knowing how difficult it may be to meditate intensively until one is enlightened, we should take every opportunity to accumulate our perfections for the final goal. The kathina ceremony is yet another meritorious event for us to do just that.

Let us briefly talk about the distinction between *kusala*, *puñña* and *pāramī*. In the Pali Scriptures, kusala and puñña are sometimes used quite loosely and they can mean the same thing. There is sometimes a slight distinction. Kusala could just refer to any wholesome mental state, speech or physical act; whereas puñña means merit that will give worldly rewards in the future. Parami, on the





other hand, will give Supramundane benefits. There are differences among them. It is not unusual for people to make puñña or merits to help them realise their aspirations. They'll say, "By the power of this merit, by this dana or whatever merit I've done, may this problem of mine be solved. May I be born more beautiful in my next life, etc." People do make all sorts of aspirations and wishes even during the Buddha's time. Well, merits *can* help you realise such aspirations. But if you dedicate your merits towards worldly aspirations, they may not help you attain Nibbana. You may be very generous, doing a lot of dana, making substantial contributions to charitable organisations, sponsoring a monastery even. And if your motives are worldly, you may become very rich in future and be successful in your career, etc., but you may not be motivated to seek enlightenment or strive for liberation.

Paramis, on the other hand, are wholesome deeds that are dedicated to the attainment of Nibbana, to liberation from *samsāra* [cycle of birth and death]. Paramis are also different in the sense that when a person wishes to perfect his parami of dana, for instance, he gives without discriminating the recipient, for the good and betterment of the many, for other's sake, and not for selfish returns. To give to monks thinking that you'll get better kammic returns is one popular form of recipient-discrimination. Do you think such an act of giving will qualify for dana parami? One

who gives whatever is useful and beneficial to whomever is in need without any selfish motivations will certainly be perfecting his parami. Is aspiring for Nibbana selfish? If we understand that the attainment of Nibbana entails the purification of our hearts, which includes transcending every form of egoism and selfishness, how can such a noble aspiration be selfish?

I think you are all very well aware of that because in your kathina programme, there is a reminder that you must make the proper aspiration for Nibbana, which is very commendable. Please remember to aspire for good progress along the Noble Eightfold Path towards your ultimate goal, Nibbana. You must also understand that Nibbana is not just a void but actually the extinction of hate, greed and all defilements. So you can imagine that if you are enlightened, you won't have any negative emotions—you won't be angry, sad, disappointed or impatient—and because your mind is so pure, you are in a better position to help others progress faster along their own spiritual paths. Therefore, the attainment of Nibbana is not a selfish aim. That is also a sort of *Bodhisattva* vow. You do not wait for others to be saved before you go to Nibbana. You attain Nibbana first so that you can help others better.

I hope that all of you will deeply ponder what I've shared with you tonight. May you aspire to realise Nibbana as soon as possible so that you can help others travel along the same middle way toward final liberation from Samsara.



# GLOSSARY OF NON-ENGLISH WORDS

*Underlined italicised words in the explanations below are individually glossed. Unless otherwise stated, the entry words are Pali terms. A number within brackets denotes the page in the text where a more detailed explanation can be found.*

**Abhidhamma** Higher *Dhamma*, constituting the third Basket of the *Tipitaka*

**Abhidhammatthasangaha** *Compendium of the Abhidhamma* (72)

**Ācariya** teacher

**Adhitthāna** determining; determination (35, 40, 80)

**Ajahn** teacher; master (Thai word derived from the *Pāli* “*ācariya*”)

**Anāmantacāra**, freedom of movement before noon in spite of having accepted an invitation for a meal (78)

**Ānisamsa** privilege

**Antaravāsaka** lower robe

**Apadāna** a biographical work on the *Buddha* and his *arahant* disciples

**Arahant** liberated person who has eradicated all mental defilements

**Arūpa** immaterial [sphere]

**Asamādanacāra** freedom to stay apart from one's set of three robes at the break of dawn (80)

**Asura** demigod

**Atap** Malay word for dried-leaf (roofing)

**Atthāra** spreading

**Āvuso** friend, brother (40)

**Bahasa Malaysia** Malay language, the official language of Malaysia

**Bakau** Malay word for mangrove

**Bhante** venerable sir; lord (40)

**Bhāvanā** meditation, mental cultivation

**Bhavanga** life continuum (73-74)

**Bhikkhu** Theravāda Buddhist monk

**Bodhisatta** one who aspires to become a Buddha

**Bodhisattva ideal** a Mahāyāna assertion that all its adherents must aspire to become Buddhas for their own and others' liberation (*bodhisattva* is the Sanskrit spelling for bodhisatta)

**Brahmā** asexual deity

**Buah jering** Malay name for a leguminous fruit (with a purplish/brownish black shell) of the tree *pithecellobium jiringa*

**Buddha** Perfectly Self-enlightened One; Gotama Buddha, the founder of Buddhism

**Buddhasāsana** the Buddha's dispensation or teaching; Theravāda Buddhism

**Cangkul angin** lit. "dig air", a Malay idiom meaning "do something futile" (27)

**Chattha Sangayana** the Sixth Council, where Theravāda monks revised and recited their scriptures

**Cittānupassanā** contemplation of the mind

**Dāna** act of giving, an offering

**Devadatta** a cousin of the Buddha, who was overwhelmed by ambition to overthrow the Buddha.

**Deva** deity

**Dhamma** teaching of the Buddha

**Dhutanga** austere practice

**Ganabhojana** (freedom to accept invitations to) group meal (81)

**Ganthadhura** studying and teaching the scriptures

**Gotama** Siddhattha Gotama, the founder of Buddhism

**Jhāna** meditative absorption

**Jhānic citta**s meditative absorption consciousness

**Kamma** volition; action

**Kammavācā** text for executing a formal act of the Sangha

**Kappabindu** [making] a mark

**Kathina** wooden frame for sewing a double layered robe; firmness, stability, durability; special ceremony held after the vassa where lay Buddhist devotees offer robes and other requisites to monks, and/or monks cooperate to make a special robe called the kathina robe (25ff)

**Kathinakkhandaka** *Section on Kathina*, found in the Mahāvagga Pāli

**Kathinānisamsa** kathina privilege robes (34)

**Kathinavamsa** *Lineage of Kathina*—a Sinhalese classic composed by a thera centuries ago

**Kusala** any wholesome mental state, speech, or physical act

**Mahāpaccarī** an ancient Sinhalese Commentary

**Mahāthera** great elder; a bhikkhu who has 20 or more years of standing

**Mahāvagga Pāli** *The Great Division*, the fourth book of the Vinaya Pitaka

**Mahāyāna** Great Vehicle—one of the two main traditions of Buddhism, the other being Theravāda. A distinctive characteristic of this tradition is giving priority to the bodhisattva ideal as the means towards enlightenment of both oneself and others.

**Mahāyānist** a follower of Mahāyāna

**Makan Angin** lit. “eat air”, a Malay idiom meaning “take a leisurely stroll or drive”

**Mātikā** heading

**Nibbāna** state of perfect peace, bliss and freedom from all suffering; the ultimate aim of Buddhism

**Nissaya** support (60)

**Noble Eightfold Path** the *Buddha's* way of practice leading to *Nibbāna* comprising eight factors, viz. Right View, Right Thought, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, Right Concentration.

**Paccuddhara** revocation of one's specific determination of a robe (40)

**Padumuttara Buddha** the tenth of the twenty-four *Buddhas*, the fifteenth before *Gotama Buddha*

**Pāli** language in which Theravada scriptures are preserved; *Pāli Canon*

**Pāli Canon** *Tipitaka*, the early scriptures of the *Theravāda* school of Buddhism, as opposed to later Commentaries and Sub-commentaries

**Palibodha** impediment, obstacle, commitment

**Pamsukūlacīvara** robe made of discarded cloth (42)

**Panditārāma** "Pundit's Monastery", a Buddhist meditation and study centre in Yangon, Myanmar, founded by Sayadaw U Pandita, former Spiritual Director of Mahasi Meditation Centre, Yangon, Myanmar

**Pāramī** altruistic meritorious deed that will conduce to the attainment of *Nibbāna* (103)

**Parivāra** the fifth and the last book of the Vinaya Pitaka, with summaries of the rules classified and re-classified in various ways for instructional purposes

**Pātimokkha** text containing 227 significant rules for bhikkhus

**Pavāranā** formal invitation to fellow monks, requesting for mutual criticism of one's misdeeds, held immediately after the vassa

**Pha-pa** Thai term meaning “forest cloth” (42)

**Puñña** merit that will give worldly rewards in the future (101ff)

**Rūpa** fine material [sphere]

**Sādhu** very well; well done

**Sakka** the Lord of the Heaven of the Thirty-three, the second of the six sense-sphere heavenly realms in Theravāda Buddhist cosmology

**Sāmanera** novice Buddhist monk, preparing to become a bhikkhu

**Sambara** the Lord of Asuras

**Samsāra** cycle of birth and death

**Samyutta Nikāya** *Connected Discourses of the Buddha*

**Sangha** Community of bhikkhus

**Sanghadāna** giving food, robes, etc. to the Sangha

**Sanghakamma** formal act of the Sangha (46)

**Sanghāti** outer double-layered robe

**Sanghika** belonging to the Sangha

**Sāsana** Buddhasāsana

**Sāsanārakkha** Guardian of the Buddhasāsana

**Sayadaw** Myanmar word meaning “venerable teacher”

**Sīla** morality, virtue, precept

**Sīmā** limit; area within a boundary where Sanghakamma must be performed (16)

**Sutta** discourse

**Thera** elder, a senior bhikkhu with 10 or more years standing

**Theravāda** Doctrine of the Elders—one of the two main traditions of Buddhism, the other being Mahāyāna. It claims to be the earliest, most authentic extant record of Gotama Buddha’s teaching and stresses on striving for one’s own liberation as the priority in spiritual practice.

**Tipitaka** Three Baskets, the full set of canonical Theravāda scriptures preserved in Pāli

**Triple Gem** the three objects of worship as precious as jewels: Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha

**Uddhāra** withdrawal [of kathina privileges]

**Upacārasīmā** monastery compound (47)

**Uttarasanga** upper robe

**Vassa** abbreviation for vassāvāsa, which means “rainy-season residence” (22)

**Vassāvāsika** robe/cloth pertaining to the rainy season residence, vassa robe (53)

**Vimānavatthu** *Stories of the Mansions*, a book from the Pāli Canon giving accounts of the good deeds done in the past by humans who have become devas

**Vinaya** Buddhist monastic law and regulation

**Vinaya Pitaka** one “Basket” of the Tipitaka comprising the Vinaya

**Vinayāḷankāra Tṭkā** Vinaya *Embellishment Sub-commentary*

**Vinayasangaha Atthakathā** *Compendium of the Vinaya Commentary*

**Vipāka** resultant

**Vipassanā** insight meditation

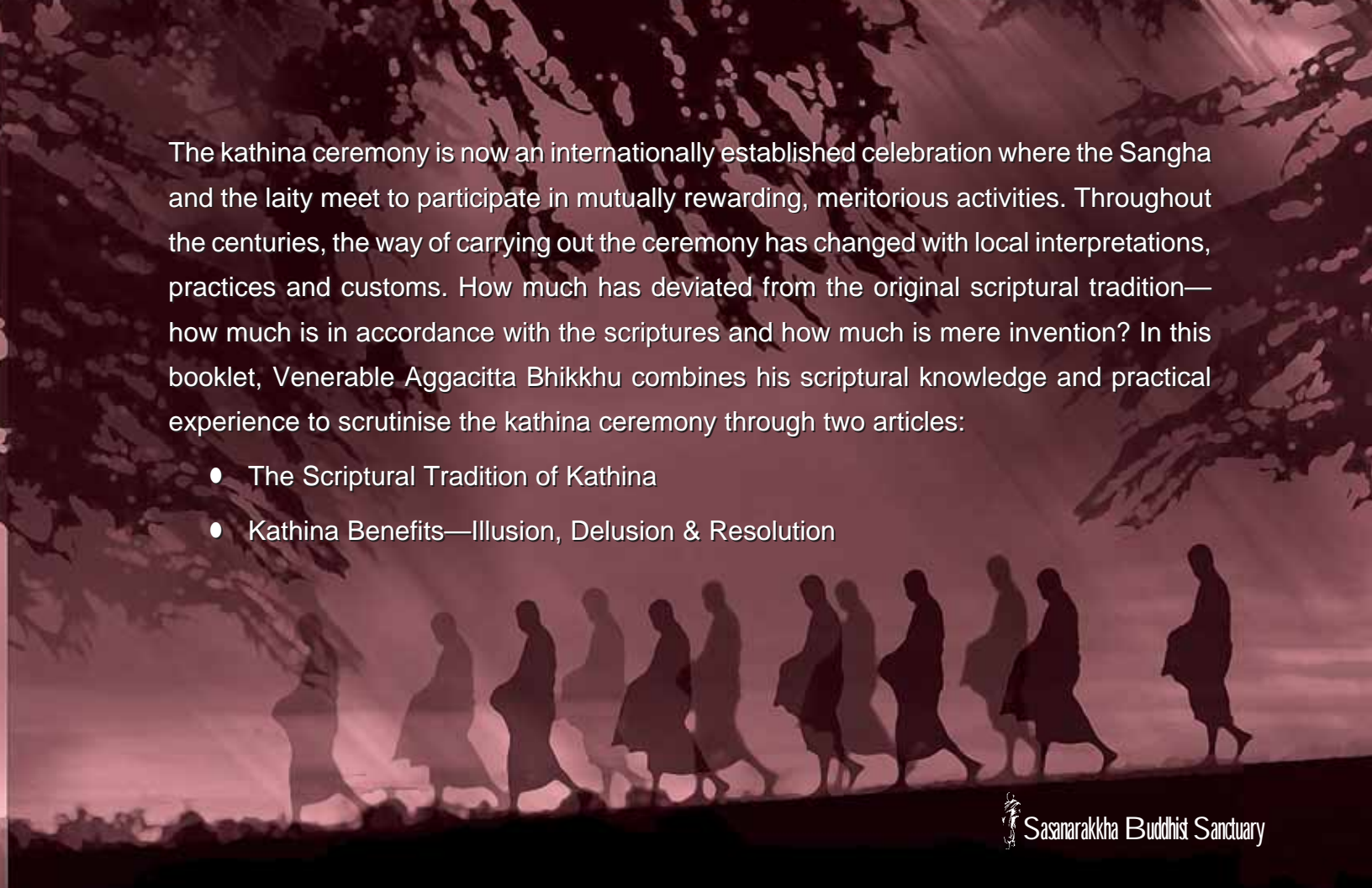
**Vipassanādhura** duty of practising insight meditation

**Yāvadatthacīvara** freedom to keep as many robes as desired without having to determine or assign them according to Vinaya regulation (83)

**Yo ca tattha cīvaruppāda** exclusive right to Sanghika robes given at one’s vassa monastery (86)

**Yojana** ancient Indian measure of distance reckoned to be about 10 kilometres





The kathina ceremony is now an internationally established celebration where the Sangha and the laity meet to participate in mutually rewarding, meritorious activities. Throughout the centuries, the way of carrying out the ceremony has changed with local interpretations, practices and customs. How much has deviated from the original scriptural tradition—how much is in accordance with the scriptures and how much is mere invention? In this booklet, Venerable Aggacitta Bhikkhu combines his scriptural knowledge and practical experience to scrutinise the kathina ceremony through two articles:

- The Scriptural Tradition of Kathina
- Kathina Benefits—Illusion, Delusion & Resolution