

The Buddhist Discipline in Relation to Bhikkhunis

**Questions and Answers
Phra Payutto and Dr. Martin Seeger**

Phra Brahmaganabhorn (P. A. Payutto)

**The Buddhist Discipline in Relation to Bhikkhunis:
*Questions and Answers - Phra Payutto and Dr. Martin Seeger***

by Phra Brahmaganabhorn (P. A. Payutto)

translated by Robin Moore

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I understand that Khun Robin Moore has completed ‘The Buddhist Discipline in Relation to Bhikkhunis: Answers to Dr. Martin Seeger.’ In response, I wish to express my appreciation and delight.

This book was written with the intention of researching the subject matter of bhikkhuni ordinations in the Theravada tradition, along with related material, in order to share it with others. In particular, the aim has been to state specific principles and background stories as they exist, in order to act as a basis and support for people’s reflections on these matters. The author may provide some personal thoughts, especially in regard to the cases in which specific factual evidence or information calls for specific responses. If, however, the reader finds that these suggestions are unreasonable or incorrect according to the facts, then he or she need not give them importance. Moreover, if one discovers additional or divergent factual information, then please share it with others, so that it can lead to comprehensive understanding and act as a genuine basis for further reflections on these matters.

Having completed this translation, Khun Robin Moore is posting it on a website. I wish to express further appreciation for this deed, because it is a way of spreading knowledge in an extensive way, enabling people to access it by methods available in the modern age. It will strengthen understanding and support those contemplations that lead to growth in the Dhamma and cultivation in wisdom.

Phra Brahmaganabhorn (P. A. Payutto)

8 May 2013

Foreword

First of all I wish to express my deepest thanks to Venerable Chao Khun Brahmaganabhorn (P. A. Payutto) for not only inspiring me to study the Dhammavinaya, but also for showing great kindness over the more than ten years that I have known him, ever since my first opportunity to pay respects to him while I was ordained as a Theravada Buddhist monk in Thailand during the period from 1997 to 2000. Every time I have met him, Tahn Chao Khun Ajahn has been so kind-hearted in answering my many questions on Dhamma and Vinaya.

Even after I gave up the training as a monk and was studying for my master's and doctorate degrees, I was still very interested in studying Buddhism as it is described and explained in Tahn Chao Khun Ajahn's book *Buddhadhamma*. I felt that the more I studied *Buddhadhamma* and Tahn Chao Khun's other books the more impressed and inspired I became by his ideas and his way of explaining Buddhism. At the same time my interest gradually grew in regard to studying the Dhammavinaya contained in the Pali Canon, and in regard to religious and cultural studies in the context of the Theravada tradition. For this reason I decided to study Tahn Chao Khun's works and his role in society at a deeper level, doing research for my doctorate in relation to Tahn Chao Khun Ajahn as being a Theravada monk who is trying to 'protect' the Dhammavinaya, in particular when there are controversies or religious dilemmas arising in Thai society.

While I was doing research for my doctorate between the years 2001 and 2004, I was able to interview Tahn Chao Khun Ajahn at length seven times. One chapter of my thesis had to do with the debates around the ordination of Theravada bhikkhunis in Thailand.

Ever since 2004 I have been working as a teaching fellow and lecturer at Leeds University and have both researched and taught

about the role of women in Theravada Buddhism. Since that time I have also been involved in many research programs dealing with the question of Theravada bhikkhuni ordination in Thailand and the role of Thai *mae chi* (eight- or ten-precept nuns who shave their heads and wear white robes). This has given me the chance to pay respects to Tahn Chao Khun Ajahn and continue with the interviews.

Finally, when I saw that Tahn Chao Khun Ajahn had shared a great deal of interesting information, I consulted with him and suggested that some of these interviews be made available to the wider public. The purpose of this suggestion was twofold:

First, when I was doing research on the question of Theravada bhikkhuni ordination in Thailand and the role of Thai *mae chi*, I noticed that occasionally people would quote or refer to Tahn Chao Khun Ajahn in various ways, without thoroughly considering the context of his words. Often people would draw incomplete conclusions about his stance on these matters, or even worse, distort the facts. I therefore thought it would be very useful to compile in a comprehensive way Tahn Chao Khun Ajahn's explanations on Theravada bhikkhuni ordination in Thailand and the role of Thai *mae chi*, as well as his thoughts on the Theravada tradition which are particularly relevant to these subjects. Whenever I felt that further explanations and clarifications may be useful or when people falsely criticized or misrepresented Tahn Chao Khun, I met to interview him in order to shed more light on these issues.

Second, Tahn Chao Khun Ajahn made great effort to provide ample information and knowledge on these subjects, and he sacrificed much of his valuable time to answering my questions. Although I found ways of sharing this information with those who are interested in these subjects, by finishing my dissertation and writing papers for various academic journals in English, I felt that this was a distribution limited to a narrow and rather specific circle of readers. Publishing this book I feel will be more effective in sharing this information with a wider readership.

This compilation contains not only my own interviews with Tahn Chao Khun; I have also included interviews conducted by other people on these subjects.

When I had finished the compilation I sent a text of transcriptions to Tahn Chao Khun of about sixty-five pages, along with comments and further questions, asking him to check the text and asking permission to publish it.

When Tahn Chao Khun Ajahn contacted me and returned the newly revised and completed manuscript, it was six times the size of the original transcription that I had sent to him! This made me feel even more deeply moved by Tahn Chao Khun's kindness and dedication, and it increased my appreciation of the value of the material contained in this book.

I am extremely happy to see this book come to fruition and I am very confident that its contents will be immensely helpful to those people interested in studying the Dhamma and Discipline, the meaning of the Theravada tradition, the subject of gender in Theravada Buddhism, and the spiritual role of Thai *mae chi*.

Dr. Martin Seeger
University of Leeds, UK
20 October 2010

Translator's Preface

Anyone who has been keeping abreast of the developments of Theravada Buddhism in the West will be aware of the ongoing debate pertaining to the ordination of women as bhikkhunis. Although I have not been at the centre of this debate, the subject interests me deeply, in part because twelve of my years as a monk were spent in the monasteries of the Luang Por Chah tradition in England, where there is a strong community of women renunciants. Indeed, the presence of these determined women helped to inspire me to go forth into the homeless life in 1988, and the term 'sister' used to address them was by no means merely a flowery term—the nuns (referred to there as siladhara) truly felt like sisters in the Dhamma. During my entire time as a monk, and later after I disrobed, I was aware of the challenges and struggles of these nuns, as well to some degree of other women who align themselves with the Theravada tradition.

My concern for their situation may have rested there, because I am not in a position now to actively engage in the restructuring of the Theravadan monastic institution, and furthermore I have been chest-deep in a major translation project (Tahn Chao Khun Payutto's 1400-page book *Buddhadhamma*), and have very little extra time. So it was with mixed feelings that I received a notice saying that a group of people wished to have the book *The Buddhist Discipline in Relation to Bhikkhunis: Answers to Dr. Martin Seeger* (ตอบ ดร.มาร์ติน: พุทธวินัย ถึง ภิกษุณี) translated from Thai into English, and that Tahn Chao Khun Brahmaganabhorn (Ven. Phra Payutto) had expressed a wish that I be the translator. Despite my worries about time constraints, I felt highly honoured to be approached for this project, and also pleased to participate in this debate, which has a deep bearing on many people's lives.

Of course there is another worry that I have had, which stems from the awareness that I am entering a domain of intense emotions—one

can almost say a battlefield—which has left many people hurt and confused. Tahn Chao Khun Payutto is accused by some of being overly conservative and orthodox; as his translator, I will probably be labelled as a member of his ‘camp.’ I even joked with friends about using a pseudonym. Although I have tried to remain objective while translating this text, it is unavoidable that some of my personal inclinations and beliefs would shape the outcome. I do feel, however, that this has been a labour of love, and much of my enthusiasm arises from my deep conviction that the author is coming from a place of deep wisdom and compassion, and that the subject material in this book is an extremely valuable contribution to the ongoing discussion of the role of female renunciants in Theravada Buddhism.

My hope is that people who are truly interested in this subject will find that some of their important questions are clarified. As the venerable author states repeatedly, the actual task of action or reform will only be set on a firm basis when people have gained a clear understanding of the factors involved. He goes on to reiterate the importance of communal harmony, and encourages us to discuss these issues openly and in unison, so that we can come to decisions together.

As explained in Dr. Martin’s forward, only a small proportion of the material in this book is derived from the transcriptions of interviews he had with Tahn Chao Khun Payutto; a large part of the remainder was written by the venerable author to round out and enrich the text. (The book also contains material from additional conversations, for instance a discussion between Than Chao Khun Payutto and Venerable Ajahn Sumedho.) Despite this fact, the original Thai edition maintains a feeling of dialogue and mutual exchange. I have tried to preserve this ‘informal’ (one may even say ‘discursive’) flavour of the text. Although I have rearranged the material in a fairly radical way, the text doesn’t necessarily follow a purely linear trajectory. Imagine yourself as a reader being placed into the forum where these discussions took place. Although the conversation may

occasionally meander into tangentially related subjects, it hopefully keeps its integrity and returns to the heart of the subject matter at hand.

In the Thai edition, appendices 1-3 are part of the main text. Appendices 4-6 are part of the Thai edition; they were added by Dr. Martin Seeger.

The page-number references in the footnotes refer to the Pali language edition of the Pali Text Society. If the numbers are in brackets they refer to the page numbers of scriptural texts as cited in the Thai version of this book.

Robin Moore
Winning Tower 2014

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Chapter 1:

Bhikkhunis and the Conventional Sangha¹

Why Not Modify the Formal Discipline To Fit the Present Time?

Dr. Martin: Many years ago, in the discussion with Professor Ravi Bhavilai concerning the Santi Asoke² case, Tahn Chao Khun Ajahn³ said: ‘Although the Buddha recommended moral guidelines for laypeople, in practice, however, there is a flexibility in that laypeople in different places and time periods can establish an ethical code suitable to their present circumstances.’⁴ Some people question why it

¹ An interview with Ven. Phra Payutto at Wat Nyanavesakavan, Sunday 4th January 2004. Part 1 of the interview ‘The Ordination of Bhikkhunis’ by Dr. Martin Seeger.

² [Santi Asoke is a Buddhist reform movement founded by Samana Phothirak after he declared independence from the Thai Ecclesiastical Council in 1975. It is a mixture of both Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism. Samana Phothirak was once a Buddhist monk, but was commanded by the Supreme Sangha Council to disrobe due to his contravening traditional Buddhist doctrines.]

³ [This is the honorific title used by Dr. Martin to address Ven. Phra Payutto.]

⁴ Phra Payutto & Dr. Ravi Bhavilai; ‘The Buddhist Assembly and Dhammavinaya’; first published November 1989, Bangkok, Pannya Publications, p. 22.

is that the ethical code for the laity is flexible, while the monastic community (*saṅgha*)¹ must hold strictly to an archaic form of discipline.² The more that time passes the more problems there are likely to be around this issue of an archaic or obsolete form. Especially in this day and age, there are various religious beliefs and needs. The monastic code will increasingly be an anachronism, do you agree? Can you please address this question?

Phra Payutto: There are many aspects of this issue to take into consideration. First, the monastic sangha is a community which the Buddha established himself. The Buddha wished to deal with this new community in a well-organized way, and because he created it himself it was his prerogative to fashion it according to his wishes. He established the moral code known as the Vinaya in order to create the most supportive environment for undertaking the threefold training,³ or for following a Buddhist way of practice. He established and managed this code of discipline himself.

In a sense, the community of lay disciples lay outside of the Buddha's jurisdiction. The Buddha did not establish this community and he neither wielded nor sought any power to control the laity. He simply advised them to abandon certain things and to cultivate other things. Those people who valued these recommendations and agreed to follow them undertook certain practices. This is a matter of training or of spiritual practice.

¹ [Translator: from here on I will use the lowercase 'sangha' to mean the Buddhist monastic community.]

² [I have translated the term 'vinaya' here in various ways, including: 'discipline,' 'formal discipline,' 'moral guidelines,' and 'ethical code.' In reference to the monastic code of discipline set down by the Buddha, I use the uppercase 'Vinaya.' Note also that the term Dhammavinaya (alternative spelling: Dhamma-Vinaya), sometimes translated as 'Doctrine & Discipline,' encompasses the entirety of the Buddha's teachings.]

³ [*Sikkhāttaya* or *tisso sikkhā*: virtuous conduct (*sīla*), concentration (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*paññā*).]

We can see that during the Buddha's time the Buddhist lay community followed a standard of moral discipline, but its form is rather indistinct. The *Siṅgālaka Sutta* seems to contain a moral code for laypeople, but it is not so clear or decisive that we can categorically say that as a Buddhist layperson one must practise in a particular way and follow a distinct moral code. We can only state there is a minimum moral standard,¹ which all Buddhists should be able to understand and observe.

The lay community was not directly established by the Buddha; the Buddha simply gave advice and counsel to the laypeople. At that time, as the ranks of faithful lay practitioners grew, the community of lay Buddhists arose automatically within a larger society that was not necessarily supportive of Buddhism. This is not a geographically defined community but rather a community based on common principles and ways of life. It is referred to as the assembly of laymen (*upāsaka*) and laywomen (*upāsikā*).

In a positive way, the community of Buddhist laypeople has the opportunity and convenience to make adjustments to their spiritual practice according to time and place. If the Buddhist lay community is steadfast and truly abides by Buddhist principles, it will move towards the ideal of promoting the entire human community to be established in virtue and goodness (in harmony with the original principle of creating a monastic sangha in order to play a leading role in building a community of awakened individuals—see below).

In today's circumstances, however, which are generally so confused and ill-defined, if Buddhists on the whole are to survive or to live a decent life, laypeople who have respect for Buddhism should adopt a moral code of discipline (*vinaya*), which will support and benefit their spiritual practice.

The Buddhist lay community should give attention to establishing a code of moral discipline; at least they should hold to the minimum

¹ [I.e., the five precepts or the ten wholesome courses of action (*kusalakamma-patha*).]

criteria for virtuous conduct. And as time passes, because the Buddha did not prescribe or establish a fixed code of conduct, Buddhist lay people can make adjustments suitable to their own surroundings and time period.

This is connected to today's situation. As I just mentioned, the contemporary Buddhist community lacks a moral compass; it seems like anything goes. The monks still have some form of moral guideline, but if you ask Buddhist laypeople today what criteria regarding beliefs or practices distinguish a person as being a Buddhist, they generally have no idea. They do not know what is trustworthy and how they should practise. Even drinking alcohol and taking mind-altering drugs becomes acceptable. There should be some moral guidelines, which are missing.

The Buddha has offered some guidelines. Lay Buddhists should organize themselves by recognizing that they have inherited a code of ethics. This way there will be some order and discipline to their practice; they will become a bona fide Buddhist community and blessings will spread to the wider society.

Although it is impossible to be certain about this, there are likely to have been Buddhist lay communities in the past which established their own well-formulated moral discipline. In today's society, however, Buddhist laypeople lack structure and principled guidelines. This should be given close attention.

These comments act as a reminder to those people who state that the monastic community is attached to an archaic, out-of-date code of discipline. When one looks at the lay community, however, to whom the Buddha permitted flexibility in these matters, one sees the situation is regrettable. If the Buddha had allowed the monks such flexibility, it is likely that the monastic tradition would not remain to this day. Although the contemporary monastic community is in a rather bad shape, it is still fortunate and helpful that the monks have a clearly defined and stable moral code. What we should be

considering in earnest is how the Buddhist lay community can establish an effective and supportive set of moral principles.

The monastic community possesses a code of conduct, but today's Buddhist lay community lacks such a code. It is possible of course that both parties are deficient: the monks stand around idle and the laypeople are dissolute. It is necessary to attend to both sides, yet it is crucial to attend to the proper points.

Is the Monastic Community Clinging to an Ancient Code of Discipline and Refusing to Adapt?

Let us turn our attention to the monastic community. When the Buddha established the monastic community, he needed to lay down a code of precepts for the stability of the community, suitable to that specific time era and region.

As time passed some of the precepts laid down by the Buddha became unsuitable to new circumstances. Even during his lifetime the Buddha altered the Vinaya, and laid down what are called 'supplementary regulations' (*anupaññatti*). In new situations, or after some monks travelled to regions where conditions were incompatible with the original precepts, the Buddha laid down supplementary regulations, as exceptions, relaxations to the rule, or additional clauses, or he added new rules.

These examples show that even in the Buddha's time he made constant revisions to the Vinaya. Furthermore, he gave his permission that after his passing away, if the community considered it suitable, they may revoke certain minor training rules (*sikkhāpada*). This is relevant to our discussion, is it not?

Dr. Martin: Yes. This is connected to the present situation in Thailand, for example in relation to the ordination of women. There are some scholars who argue that the absolute truth (*paramattha-sacca*) is paramount over conventional truth (*sammati-sacca*), i.e., the Vinaya.

Therefore, we should make modifications to the conventional truth—the Vinaya—according to time and place, because the Buddha himself made such modifications, as Tahn Chao Khun Ajahn just mentioned. People who attended the Buddhist seminar to which I referred earlier said in relation to the bhikkhuni¹ issue that: ‘Hey, Theravada Buddhism repeatedly teaches non-attachment; so why does Buddhism as an institution appear to grasp at form and convention—especially to the Vinaya—to such a great degree?’

Moreover, Tahn Chao Khun Ajahn once said that the essential substance of the teachings must have a suitable container. I understand that the Vinaya is the container for the Dhamma, that is, the aim of the Vinaya is to enable each person to become awakened according to his or her potential as a human being, and the Vinaya is conducive for realizing awakening. My question here is whether the substance—the Dhamma—and the container are still adequately suited to one another.

Phra Payutto: There are many relevant points here, which I believe have been considered carefully by the elders of old. Whether conventional truth is inferior to absolute truth or not, conventional truth exists in this particular way. It is important for us to see for what purpose conventional truth was established. And it is important to look at these issues from a wide perspective, not simply out of a sense of present urgency or out of personal desire.

The absolute truth exists according to its own nature, right? Conventional truth, on the other hand, has been agreed upon amongst certain people. Here we are talking about the relationship between these two truths. In fact, one is not superior or inferior to the other. The importance lies in the objective or the meaning of these truths. Absolute truth exists according to its own nature—nature exists in this way, just so. Conventional truth has been decided upon by a consensus

¹ [Note that the spelling in Pali is *bhikkhuni*. For the sake of simplicity I use ‘bhikkhuni.’]

among people. The Vinaya is a conventional truth: we agree on these forms, designations and conventions.

Whether a person has the wisdom to understand absolute truth or not, or whether he or she accepts such truth or not, absolute truth remains unaffected. Conventional truth, however, is created by human beings; its existence depends on people. If people disagree on conventional truth, or if they don't understand it, or if they choose not to uphold it, then it will disappear.

The Buddha obviously recognized that changes occur according to different time periods and that adaptation is necessary. The problem is not that the Buddha didn't recognize the need for change; rather, it is a matter for us to make a decision based on what we think will be most beneficial.

Our aim is to preserve the original teachings of the Buddha so that present and later generations have access to it and can gain benefit from it, correct? The question is which method to use in order to preserve the teachings. We may ask: 'Who established these conventions?' and the answer is: 'Right, the Buddha established these conventions, but the Buddha has passed away.'

The problem is who should manage these conventions so that they can channel, support and protect the absolute truth in the optimal way. These questions of who should direct any reform and which is the best method for upholding truth lead to endless debates.

The Theravada lineage is a distinct tradition, and it is considered by many people to be the original and primary Buddhist tradition. If one monastic community claims that a particular convention is inappropriate and amends it, and then other monastic communities disagree with this amendment and make their own changes, eventually these different communities will be divided and split apart.

This is an important lesson we can draw from the past: whenever amendments are made, communities split apart, often without compromise. More and more denominations or schools split off, until

some groups appear to have almost no resemblance to the Buddha's original teaching. And these different schools of Buddhism often do not accept each other's authenticity. When the Buddha was alive, there was a central, unified convention. Today's problem is who has the authority to manage these conventions in a decisive way.

This problem has existed ever since the First Recitation.¹ The Buddha allowed the sangha to revoke minor training rules, but even the question of which training rules are counted as 'minor' has created difficulty. Even the monks present at the First Recitation couldn't come to an agreement on this question.

Citing the allowance to revoke minor rules, but without clarity as to which rules are meant, one group of monks revokes these rules while another group of monks revokes those rules. In the end almost nothing remains. If the monks at the First Recitation had not decided to relinquish the privilege to revoke rules, it is quite possible that today the Buddhist monastic community would resemble the present day Thai lay community, which doesn't seem to be able to make up its mind over what are the distinctive features of being a Buddhist. Had the monks at the First Recitation made adaptations, it is likely that monks of later time periods and different geographical regions would disagree with these changes and make their own, leading to an eventual dissolution of the tradition.

I would maintain that the monks at the First Recitation had good reason to decide what they did and were not disobeying the Buddha's teaching. They were unable to determine which of the rules the Buddha meant when he specified 'minor rules.' They thus agreed by

¹ [The word *saṅgāyana* is variously translated as 'council' or 'recitation.' Tahn Chao Khun Payutto has repeatedly warned against the misunderstanding that a *saṅgāyana* is equivalent to a 'council' in the historical Christian sense, of an assembly of bishops, etc., convened for regulating matters of doctrine or discipline. Although it is true that the monks at the first *saṅgāyana* made a collective decision on a matter of discipline (i.e., to not revoke any minor rules), and granted the word 'council' is more common amongst Buddhists, for the sake of consistency I have translated this term here as 'recitation.']

consensus to sacrifice any personal advantage or convenience which would have resulted by making changes and decided to keep the code of discipline as it was laid down by the Buddha.

It is not only a matter of revoking rules. Since circumstances change and new problems arise in different time periods, why didn't the monastic sangha lay down new rules? Some people only think about revoking rules, without considering adding new ones. And which new rules should be added?—this only increases the complexity and confusion. Some people are prepared to cut here and paste there, and propose a large meeting to reorganize or revamp the entire monastic discipline. But as soon as there are disagreements, the confusion is amplified.

As things stand Buddhism has already split into different traditions. There are some people who think that pushing ahead and revoking rules will lead to disagreements and further disintegration, leading in the end to a vanishing of the original teachings. There will be no end to the problems in trying to modify and adapt. If we are willing to preserve the original form, even though aspects of this form are impractical in today's age and the desired improvements are missing, those beneficial aspects of the form will remain.

The Buddha has passed away. As disciples we are faced with a decision. From one perspective the monks at the First Recitation sacrificed their own convenience by considering: 'No matter how difficult, we will practise according to the way established by the Buddha.'

There are occasions, as we see in present day Thailand, when certain rules are not or cannot be observed, or the specific object of the rule is no longer present. An example of rules that are automatically suspended or discontinued is the case of countries in which the bhikkhuni lineage has died out or in which no bhikkhunis live. In Thailand the ten rules in the Chapter on Exhortation (Ovāda Vagga) of the monks' Pāṭimokkha do not need to be observed—

altogether there are fifteen rules concerning bhikkhunis. If one wanted to make fun of Thai monks, one could argue that they only keep at most 212 rules, not the original 227, but in reply one could argue that these rules are gratis and are observed automatically.

Having said this, these rules are actually still preserved. There is no agreement to revoke any rules, or to stop reciting them during formal gatherings. The original rules remain—they have not been removed. And since circumstances change according to different time periods, although one may not be able to observe some rules now, in the future they may become practicable once again.

The Theravada tradition follows this above line of reasoning, which distinguishes it from other traditions. We are willing to relinquish personal advantage in order to preserve an original form. And by doing this we also take into consideration the consensus made during the First Recitation.

In the case of the Mahayana traditions, in which followers did not preserve the original training rules, it has split into innumerable different schools. In Japan many previously existing schools have died out. At present there are five major lineages in Japan, and from these there are two hundred sub-lineages, which purportedly has created a lot of disorder.

Granted, the Theravada tradition has its fair share of problems today, but in general it still maintains a stable structure and in comparison it has maintained its integrity the best. Mahayana Buddhism has splintered into various schools (*nikāya*), to the point that it is hard to recognize whether some of the groups are still Buddhist. Thus, it is up to us to decide which way we wish to go. As far as the Theravada tradition is concerned, there is a mutual recognition that its members have historically agreed on these standards and practices. It is as simple as this.

Disregarding the Buddha's Instructions or Honouring Them as Best as One Can?

Dr. Martin: We discussed this matter last year. The reason I bring it up again is this: there is a Thai scholar who interprets that the Buddha made the allowance for the sangha to revoke minor training rules because he perceived that it may be necessary, according to time and place, for the Vinaya to be changed in the future. The decision by the monks at the First Recitation appears to go against the Buddha's wishes. In other words, the Buddha made it the duty of the sangha to reform or adapt the Vinaya according to time and place. Today it seems that the monks act in contradiction to the Buddha's intention in this respect, and that the opinion of the elders at the First Recitation is given precedence over the Buddha's own teaching. This is what this scholar claims.

Phra Payutto: Regarding this issue from only one perspective, one will come to this conclusion that one needs to be open-minded. I don't believe, however, that this scholar is being open-minded; rather I believe his interpretation stems from a personal bias. We need to consider also the justifications and intentions of these early disciples. We shouldn't just base our judgements on personal opinions. Otherwise, whenever we get frustrated or our ideas are challenged we accuse someone else of being narrow-minded.

The Buddha himself had a very broad perspective and presented an opportunity to his disciples. He recognized that in the future there may be certain rules in the Vinaya which do not fit with the times, as mentioned above. Even during the Buddha's life he made modifications to certain rules as was suitable to circumstances and geographical context.

Regarding the monks who performed the First Recitation there are many aspects to consider, beginning with the fact that they too had a broadminded perspective and paid heed to the Buddha's instructions.

Before offering further comment and analysis, however, let us look clearly at the Buddha's statement on this subject as recorded in the Mahāparinibbāna Sutta:

After my passing away, Ānanda, if the sangha wishes, it may revoke minor training rules.¹

According to these words it is clear that the Buddha did not command or dictate the revoking of rules, but rather he gave the sangha—the monks as a whole—an opportunity to do so if they wished. Nor did he state that he specifically wanted the sangha to take up this opportunity or that the sangha was under any obligation to revoke rules. It is up to the sangha to consider what is right.

Although the Buddha did not order or command the monks to act in any particular way, they brought this matter up for consideration during the First Recitation; they did not overlook its importance.

Even if one were to believe that the Buddha was giving a command, he gave permission to revoke only minor rules. If one were then to revoke rules not considered by the Buddha to be minor then one would be defying the Buddha in a more serious way; such an action would be an even more severe breach of the Buddha's directives.

The monks at the First Recitation considered this matter, but they were unable to resolve this important issue. They were not able to agree on which exactly are the minor rules. They recognized that the Buddha gave permission to revoke some rules, but they also recognized that it is unclear to what extent this opportunity extends. The lack of unanimity on this issue was itself the reason why they did not revoke any rules, you see?

Even the enlightened disciples of the Buddha at the very beginning of the Buddhist era could not come to a conclusion over what are the minor rules. As time passes and different groups of monks develop divergent opinions on this matter, there is bound to be more and more

¹ D. II. 154.

confusion. (For example in some time periods there may be monks who claim that it is now suitable for monks to be married and have families—in fact this has already happened.)

After having looked at this issue from various perspectives, the monks at the First Recitation decided by consensus to relinquish the opportunity granted by the Buddha and to refrain from revoking any rules. Furthermore they realized that the laypeople would likely express the following criticisms: ‘See here, the Buddha has only just passed away, the smoke from the cremation has not yet dissipated, and the disciples are already revoking the training rules.’

In regard to the intention by these elders from the First Recitation, they decided to forego a personal opportunity. Instead, they were willing to sacrifice their own personal advantage and endure hardship in order to honour the Buddha’s prescriptions and follow them in their entirety. For had they revoked certain rules it would have been to their own personal advantage. At least, by reducing the number of rules to keep they would have based their decision on their own preferences, for ease and for convenience.

It is important to understand that in this situation it was a matter of making a choice resulting in the greatest gain and the least amount of loss. Since it was not possible to have things be perfect, these monks decided that by acting in this way there would be less harm and the overall advantages would be greater. They did not rely on their own personal preferences or on personal advantage as the criteria for making a decision, but rather they considered the greater public good in the long run.

The monks at the First Recitation made this decision, for better or for worse. It isn’t necessary to dispute the correctness of this decision. This is the tradition—the tradition is this way. Each one of us has the right to decide whether to be part of this tradition or not.

Thus we can say that the decision by the monks at the First Recitation was based on two things: first, to not seek personal

advantage; and second, to anticipate and to prevent future problems. There can be no definitive agreement as to what exactly comprises the minor rules. These monks thus decided: 'We choose not to revoke any rules; we choose not to split up into different factions; let us maintain the tradition this way.' This was their decision; what happens after that time is up to members of later generations to discuss amongst themselves.

Monks in later time periods have thought: 'We are part of this lineage of monks from the First Recitation; we have respect for these monks. They considered this matter thoroughly and comprehensively. We agree with their decision. Let us not revoke any rules.' These later monks have thus agreed to forsake personal advantage in order to preserve this principle and thus we have this particular tradition.

Of course there have been those who have decided to reform the original tradition and to revoke rules, which has given rise to heterodox schools (*ācariyavāda*). These reformist movements have split into various Buddhist schools. There are many examples of this.

In relation to the Theravada tradition there are many issues to consider. First, if one allows the revocation of rules, there will be no end to this process, and the monastic community will split into different groups. One group will choose to have it this way, another group will choose to have it another way, leading to much confusion. Even the monks of the Theravada tradition, which has tried to preserve the original form, have not been entirely successful and there have been divisions in the monastic community.

From a neutral standpoint, we see that even with this one group of monks who preserve an original form, there have still been divisions. If no-one tried to preserve an original form imagine how many more divisions there would be; perhaps nothing of the original form would remain today. Think this over carefully—don't look at things from a narrow-minded perspective. Even within the Theravada tradition we see the situation to be this way. Do you have any more questions?

The Buddha Gave Prominence to the Sangha Broadminded Monks Give Priority to Communal Harmony

Dr. Martin: Yes, I do. The scholar I mentioned earlier reasons that the apparent prevalence of sangha decisions over the Buddha's words is connected to a quote of the Buddha which Tahn Chao Khun Ajahn has also referred to in the past: namely, the story of the Buddha stating that he honours the sangha when the sangha grows in eminence.¹ According to this scholar, this means that the sangha may come to decisions which may not necessarily accord with the Buddha's instructions or his intentions. Is this correct or not?

Phra Payutto: Yes, this is correct, but this is a separate issue; it is not the issue at hand. The monks at the First Recitation did not go against the Buddha's instructions. As I mentioned earlier the Buddha presented an opportunity to the monks, and these monks considered it. But they were not able to decide which of the minor rules were eligible to be revoked ('rules eligible to be revoked'; not 'rules to be revoked'). They thus came to the conclusion: 'The Buddha gave us this opportunity but we are not clear to what degree this opportunity extends. Therefore we decide not to revoke any rules.' The monks gathered at this meeting decided to forego this opportunity. They were not going against any of the Buddha's instructions.

The Buddha did not give a command to revoke training rules. Had he issued any such command and had the monks not heeded this command, this would have been going against the Buddha's wishes. The Buddha gave the opportunity to revoke rules if the sangha saw fit to do so, but the sangha did not feel that it was appropriate. Their decision was based on the highest respect for the Buddha, to not undermine the Buddha's prescriptions, which they decided to preserve

¹ Phra Payutto: 'Buddhist Jurisprudence'; third edition; Bangkok; Buddhadhamma Foundation, pp. 72-3 (referring to A. II. 21: *I honour the Dhamma ... and when the sangha grows in eminence I also honour the sangha.*)

as completely as possible.

I don't see that the elders' decision was in any way a defiance or an overruling of the Buddha. On the contrary, it was a supreme act of reverence. Consider this carefully—was it an act of opposition or an act of devotion?

Dr. Martin: Hypothetically, if the monastic community today decided: 'Let us gather together and make a decision: let us revoke some rules and include some new rules,' would this be possible? Could there be some form of settlement of 'questions of dispute' (*vivādādhikaraṇa*)? I don't know if in the Vinaya there is any allowance for say a 13th Recitation (*saṅgāyana*) or a gathering of this nature, in which the monks decide: 'Let us make use of this privilege, that when the sangha so wishes it may revoke rules.' Would this possible?

Phra Payutto: Yes, it would be possible. But it would be important to consider the pros and cons of such an action. From the perspective of the Theravada tradition, one can say that such an action would run counter to this tradition, correct? It would be a form of not complying with and a rejection of the tradition.

Another problem is whether such an act would cause division in the Theravada community. Put simply, would all members of the Theravada monastic community agree to such a proposal to make revisions? If everyone was in agreement, then there would be no problem. It is obvious, however, that such a unanimous decision is not possible, which brings us back to the original problem. One group of monks would refuse to go along with the revisions and want to preserve the original system, while another group would rally for change. In the end the Theravada tradition would split apart. One must consider the advantages and disadvantages, especially in regards to preventing the sangha from splitting apart. This was one of the factors which the elders at the First Recitation themselves considered.

In fact, this is the same situation as occurred with the monks at the First Recitation, who decided unanimously not to take up the Buddha's offer to repeal minor rules. Instead, they preserved the original form, a decision which marks the origin of the Theravada tradition.

Later on, there was a group of monks who did not wish to follow this form and thus revoked or altered certain things. When they decided not to keep the same standards, they split off. This becomes clear at around 100 BE, when the original lineage was referred to as Theravada (*theravāda*—'the teaching of the elders') and the splintered group was referred to as a sectarian or heterodox teaching (*ācariyavāda*; Sanskrit: *ācāryavāda*).

This heterodox school then split further. The original Theravada school also split again, giving rise to new sectarian schools. At the time of King Asoka, circa 250 BE, there were as many as eighteen different heterodox schools. Each school was given a specific name, according to the place where it was located, or to its particular views, or to its leading teacher. For example: Vajjīputta, Mahisāsaka, Sammitiya, Dhammaguttika (Sanskrit: Dharmaguptaka), and Sabbatthikavāda (Sanskrit: Sarvāstivāda). As time passed these heterodox schools which had broken off and splintered into different sub-schools all passed away. None of them has survived to this day; only the original Theravada school has survived.

These heterodox schools which disappeared, however, did not all in fact completely cease to exist. Rather, they gradually changed, were altered, and transformed. Put simply, they have remained existent in a form which has gradually developed into what today we collectively call Mahayana (*mahāyāna*—'great vehicle'). Members of the Mahayana school refer to all of the older sectarian schools, including the Theravada tradition, as Hinayana (*hīnayāna*—'lesser vehicle').

The claim that some of the heterodox schools remain is based on traces of these schools found in the Mahayana tradition. For example, Tibetan Buddhism, which is known as Vajrayana (*vajrayāna*—'diamond

vehicle'), uses a Hinayana discipline (Vinaya) stemming from the vanished school called Sarvāstivāda (Sabbatthikavāda), and the bhikkhuni sangha in China uses a discipline from the vanished heterodox school called Dharmaguptaka (Dhammaguttika). As mentioned above, Mahayana is a collective term for many divergent subsidiary schools. The term Mahayana appears for the first time around 600 BE. It is considered to have been developed from or a result of older heterodox schools, which later vanished.

Some of the Mahayana schools have preserved the integrity of their tradition fairly well, by keeping to the form laid down by their founder faithfully and resolutely. But in some places, in Japan in particular, there has been so much change and modification throughout history, giving rise to new schools, that today there are about two hundred subsidiary schools of the Mahayana tradition in Japan.

In Japan during the restoration of imperial rule (Meiji Restoration—1868 CE) there was a state policy to promote Shintoism, along with a suppression of Buddhism. At that time there was a royal decree giving permission to all monks in Japan to get married. This was probably an important reason why Japanese monks, not just Shin and Nichiren Buddhist monks but others as well, increasingly had families, to the point that some books recount that very few monks from that period, except those who were in training, kept the vow of celibacy.

The reason I include this here is that it is an example of how the state or the government can play an important role in leading to the prosperity or demise of Buddhism. There are many other examples of this; for example, during many periods in Chinese history there were direct state orders to banish or cause injury to monks. And as I just mentioned, in the Meiji period the state used legislation to dictate monks' behaviour.

There are principles in Buddhism for laying down laws, regulations, precepts, rules, etc.. Within the Theravada monastic community, which chooses not to revoke any rules laid down by the Buddha or to

establish any new rules which compete with or cancel the original rules, it is still possible to set down new regulations. The principle to be followed in establishing new regulations or rules is to support or supplement the practice of the original rules.

Take for example shaving of the head. The Buddha allowed monks to grow their hair for two months or to the length of two finger widths. In Thailand there has been an unwritten agreement in the sangha to establish a regulation for all monks to shave on the day before the full moon every month. This ensures that the Buddha's provision on this matter is observed, of not growing one's hair either longer than two months or longer than two finger widths, as well as promoting decorum and unity.

The Thai government, which has been a long-standing patron of Buddhism, uses this same principle. For example, after the city of Ayutthaya had fallen the country was in chaos for a long time. Neither the monks nor the laypeople studied the Dhammavinaya and their practice of Buddhism was slack and deviated from the correct way. Many of the monks were more interested in occultism than in following the threefold training. In order to 'honour Buddhism,' the first king of the Chakri Dynasty had to enact certain laws involving the sangha, for example the Fourth Draft of Sangha Law which states:

An age-old tradition in Buddhism marks the utterance by the Buddha enjoining all monks and novices who have gone forth in this religion to uphold two duties: study of the scriptures and practice of insight meditation, which act as restraints.... Following this tradition, may no monk waver and neglect these duties and may all monks vow to observe these responsibilities. May the contrary to this dictate never come to pass.

It is obvious that this state legislation supports the practice of the Buddha's prescriptions. This is the opposite to the imperial decree of the Meiji period, which one could argue subverted the Buddha's prescriptions or at least competes with them or offers an alternative.

This means that at that time Japanese Buddhist monks were able to choose whether to follow the Buddha's regulations or the state regulations. One could jokingly argue that in this case there were monks who followed the Buddha's regulations and those who followed state laws. This was the case not only in Japan; wherever there are such repressive state stipulations the situation is similar in this respect.

This is a warning, that in such circumstances, if the Theravada sangha is not stable and secure in the authentic principles of the Buddha, it will not be able to protect its identity, integrity, and continuity. Nor will it be able to protect the original form of Buddhism.

These examples also provide a lesson that those people who face severe or frequent adversity must be extra vigilant and make great effort: either for the better or for the worse. But those who have an easy and leisurely path tend to become apathetic, indulgent, and heedless. This is an important reminder to Theravada Buddhists, especially to Thai Buddhists, who seem to coast along, aimless and complacent.

Let us go back to a previous subject which I have not yet fully addressed. In general, people say that the Mahayana tradition is the largest Buddhist tradition, with many more followers than Theravada. In fact, many of the Mahayana schools have teachings and practices more similar to Theravada than to other Mahayana schools. And if one counts these Mahayana sub-schools as separate traditions, for example Tendai, Zen, Nichiren, Jōdo, Shin, Lamaism, etc., then Theravada probably becomes the largest Buddhist tradition, with the most followers. This is a matter that can be easily ascertained by looking at the data.

The key to the discussion here is a matter of making choices. But whichever choice one makes, it is not possible to obtain perfection in this matter. One must choose a way that provides the greatest benefit and leads to the least amount of damage.

Isn't it good that the Theravada tradition still exists and that it hasn't completely dissolved into the Mahayana tradition? The Theravada tradition has been able to survive by its abidance to the principle of preserving those things laid down by the Buddha in the best way possible. If it seems best to adapt or change the Buddha's prescriptions, then there is the encouragement to achieve this by unanimous decision. If unanimity is not possible (and it is not difficult to see that nowadays unanimity is impossible), and changes are made, then there will be division. When there is schism then a heterodox school arises. With the first of such divisions, a second, third, and fourth split easily occurs. For this reason the elders of the past emphasized communal harmony.

Whether you call it narrow-mindedness or broadmindedness, the elders at the First Recitation were not thinking in a selfish way. They were thinking of everyone's welfare, of how to protect sangha harmony so that the sangha can protect the Buddha's teachings. If the sangha is not in harmony problems will be protracted and intensify. This is a way of reflecting on this matter with wisdom. One must be careful before claiming that one group is narrow-minded and another group is broadminded. Occasionally those people who want to make adaptations are narrow-minded because they seek some personal advantage, right? And those who resist adaptation may be making self-sacrifices and undergoing hardship in order to preserve an original form. Before using such terms as narrow-mindedness and broadmindedness one must be clear about the definitions of these terms and to what extent these definitions are then applicable.

To define broadmindedness simply as a willingness to adapt is inadequate; moreover, one shouldn't just focus on the content or methods of adaptation. True broadmindedness has two characteristics: first, a knowledge and acceptance of the facts; and second, the intention to act for the true benefit of the greatest number of people. If one seeks only one's own benefit, this is narrow-mindedness. The

first step to broadmindedness, however, is an acceptance of facts.

There are of course cases where there are more than two options to solving a problem. And the possible solutions may be of benefit to all parties involved without the need to create division or a feeling of loss.

Mr. Narit: Tahn Chao Khun Ajahn, in this case, say within the context of the present-day Theravada Buddhist countries of say Thailand, Sri Lanka, and Burma: as a hypothetical case, what should be the determining factor in respect to the issue of bhikkhunis? If, for instance, there is an agreement on this issue among Theravada monks in Sri Lanka or Burma, how should we proceed? What is the determining factor?

Phra Payutto: There needn't be a determining factor; all one needs to do is to acknowledge the situation. For example in Sri Lanka, where a group of monks have begun to promote bhikkhuni ordinations, there has already been conflict. There was no general acceptance of these reforms. It's this simple—one needn't look at the entire Theravada sangha of Thailand, Sri Lanka and Burma. In Sri Lanka alone there has arisen a discordance, because there is an agreed-upon tradition in Theravada and one group of monks have decided to act in a way that is not in accord with this tradition. And even though there hasn't been an outright schism, there are many who disagree, who feel alienated, or who wish to take no part in this reform.

Mr. Narit: Let us imagine that the formal status of the ordained sangha falls under the rule of the state—would this be valid? Say for example the ordination of monks and nuns is the responsibility of the Sangha Supreme Council (*mahā-thera-samāgama*); would we need to accept their decision? Hypothetically, if we were to accept their decision to ordain bhikkhunis this policy would become a part of the Theravada lineage; would we then get a new sub-school within the greater Theravada tradition?

Phra Payutto: No, it wouldn't have such implications. The Thai Sangha Supreme Council is simply a protector of subsidiary state laws and it has administrative responsibilities to see that affairs correspond to Dhammavinaya and to state laws, but it has no prerogative to adjudicate over how to manage the Buddha's prescriptions. Were they to pass judgement over this matter it would lead to problems, because other members of the sangha may disagree with its decisions. So even within a single country the Theravada sangha tries to maintain its integrity. The Theravada community in each of these three countries has tried to preserve the Buddha's prescriptions separately; although the sangha in each country operates independently they are all using the same principles and thus they are similar. If one group of monks or one country decides to perform some kind of new referendum, the Theravada tradition will begin to split.

It is not necessary to compare between countries. Even if the entire Sri Lankan sangha decides to make amendments, the Theravada community in Thailand may not agree to these changes. Then the Sri Lankan Theravada lineage would be different from the Thai Theravada lineage. There may simply be an acknowledgement of this distinction. The situation may not reach a state of schism; there may simply be an awareness that changes and amendments have been made. These differences may lead to an alienation between countries; it depends to what extent each country decides to preserve or to make changes.

Let us look at again at the issue of broadmindedness. As mentioned earlier, there are two facets to broadmindedness: first is recognition and acknowledgement of the facts, by not being led by one's own preferences without a consideration of the facts. Recognition of the truth is accomplished by being open to what others have to say and being open to different ideas. And when one encounters facts that do not accord with one's opinions or preferences, a personal sacrifice of one's preferences is required. This is broadmindedness.

The second factor is a giving up of personal advantage and personal gratification for the benefit, integrity and stability of the wider community. This too is a facet of broadmindedness.

The conviction of the Theravada tradition is that the monks at the First Recitation were truly broadminded. They gave precedence to the welfare of the entire sangha and to Buddhism, which is connected to the wider aim of seeking the welfare and happiness of all human beings. They were not only concerned with their own era, but also considered future generations. They reflected in this way and thus preserved the teachings as they were laid down.

Looked at from this perspective, ask yourself: 'Were they broad-minded or narrow-minded?' The gist of this matter is an absence of selfishness, of aiming for the preservation and stability of the monastic community and for the establishment of a religious tradition that will lead to the benefit and happiness of all beings. The Dhamma teachings and principles will endure when the monastic sangha is secure.

The Buddha's Objective for Creating the Monastic Community

Dr. Martin: Why is it that no bhikkhunis participated in the First Recitation even though at that time there were many arahant bhikkhunis alive? This issue causes a lot of debate. I have mentioned before that there is one scholar who claims that there was a long-standing aversion in the monks towards women, which burst forth during the First Recitation.

Phra Payutto: Let us look at the question of why no bhikkhunis participated in the First Recitation. It was not only in the First Recitation—I have found no mention of bhikkhunis having participated in any of the subsequent formal recitations either.

I mention this because sometimes we must look at things in relation to a social context or even in relation to an entire civilization,

including the political situation and social customs. Here I will speak a little about the social context as a way to lay a foundation before answering this question directly.

Without a doubt, the political and social events, along with social mores and customs, surrounding the monastic community at the time of the Buddha were very influential, and sometimes even determined the sangha's activities. And we must admit that we don't have a very clear understanding of what these social conditions were like. We should try and understand these conditions as best we can.

In any case, it is fairly clear that the origin of the bhikkhuni sangha was an establishment of a new institution within a social environment that was not very supportive. From the onset, the growth and even the survival of this new institution would be difficult.

From the very beginning, Buddhism itself went against the stream of established religion and stood in opposition to the existing social structures. When the Buddha appeared, the people in India were subject to a belief system and social system inextricably tied to the purported power of an omnipotent god. People were sorted into four classes (or 'castes') according to their birth which determined people's identity for life. In order to help shape their destiny, people made sacrifices to divine powers. They had a large body of sacred texts, the Vedas, yet these were jealously guarded by the brahmins, who restricted the sharing of knowledge and monopolized education for themselves and for members of other high castes.

In the midst of these conditions the Buddha offered a new teaching, transferring the emphasis and authority from a supreme god to the supreme truth. This teaching by the Buddha states that the Dhamma is supreme, superior to both human and divine beings. Every person is born equal before the Dhamma. People are the owners of their intentional actions, by body, speech, and mind, which determine their fate. They are able to develop themselves to the highest degree of excellence by the practice of the threefold training. It is incumbent on

leaders in society to provide such a training for everyone in the greatest way possible. Those people who have trained themselves correctly, besides having a free and virtuous life and possessing a happiness that is absent of any form of self-harm, live in a way that promotes the happiness and wellbeing of all.

The Buddha proclaimed this teaching and way of life for the welfare of all living beings. There were people who voluntarily came to the Buddha in order to be trained and also those who realized the truth of this teaching. As a result there arose the community established by the Buddha based on discipline and harmony which is referred to as the monastic sangha.

The establishment of the sangha was an opportunity for people who wished to escape from the wider social system and to live equally together in a way that leads to optimal spiritual growth. It is an opportunity for training and is a place from which those people who have finished their training ('those who have practised well') can spread this teaching to people in the external, larger society, for the welfare and happiness of all human beings.

The essential aim of the Buddha was to develop and transform the entire human society, with the established monastic sangha merely acting as a medium for transformation or as a catalyst. This is evident from the time that the Buddha acquired the first generation of disciples, of sixty bhikkhus. He sent them out in different directions to proclaim this teaching (Dhamma) and this excellent way of life (*brahmacariya*), for the welfare and happiness of the manyfolk, for the compassionate assistance of the world (*bahujana-hitāya bahujana-sukhāya lokānukampāya*).

It is clear that the Buddha established this community of bhikkhus amidst particular temporal and regional conditions, to act as a channel for transformation and as a support for his work. The sangha acts as a bridge to help the wider society develop into a 'righteous society' (*dhammika-saṅgama*).

It is well-known that the bhikkhu sangha is a ‘conventional community’ (*sammati-saṅgha*). The true sangha is the ‘noble sangha’ (*ariya-saṅgha*), the true ‘community of disciples’ (*sāvaka-saṅgha*), which is referred to in the virtues of the Sangha (*saṅgha-guṇa*), comprising one of the three ‘jewels.’ It is clear that being a member of this righteous community does not depend on being ordained or on being a layperson, on being a man or a woman, nor does it depend on a specific time period or location.

The conventional bhikkhu sangha was established amidst specific temporal and regional conditions in order to act as a medium for fulfilling the Buddha’s work of propagating the Dhamma and to act as a role model for others. Apart from the difficult work of spreading the Dhamma, which the Buddha himself acknowledged as going ‘against the stream’ (*paṭisotaḡāmī*), the sangha existed in a wider society that was unsupportive. The sangha had to function, for example, amidst a strict caste order and among people who made sacrifices to various deities. (The repeated efforts to weaken and eradicate the bhikkhu sangha and Buddhism in India, which occurred in subsequent periods and which had various degrees of success, were made in order to revive the caste system and the sacrificial ceremonies.)

The Buddha performed an extremely difficult task. His chief workforce was the newly established bhikkhu sangha, which had the Vinaya as an embankment and protective shield, and had cooperation and harmony as its strength. The sangha had no concrete power to wield, but rather relied on the faith and devotion of the lay community as its driving force. Whatever values from society could be well-assimilated were accommodated; otherwise consideration was given to necessary and essential adaptations and changes.

The Tipiṭaka recounts how from the very beginning, right after his awakening, the Buddha considered whether to teach the truth he had realized or not. The Buddha recognized how profoundly difficult it is to realize this truth. It runs contrary to the preferences and

attachments of human beings, and therefore the Buddha inclined away from teaching it. At this point the Brahma god Sahampati appeared and invited the Buddha to teach.¹ The Buddha considered those people who have ‘little dust in their eyes’ and eventually decided to teach the Dhamma.

Let me make a few comments and observations here for contemplation. Most importantly, this story of the Buddha’s reflections on the profundity of the Dhamma and his disinclination to teach exhorts people from the very start to consider the difficulty of the teaching that they are about to study and undertake. It also brings people’s attention to the essential characteristics of the Buddha’s teachings.

Another aspect to take into consideration is connected to the social environment in which the teaching of the Dhamma occurred. I propose that Sahampati Brahma’s appearance and invitation to the Buddha to teach the Dhamma is another critical starting point: it is a way of changing the status of that which was most highly revered by society at that time—transferring the sovereignty from the highest god to the supreme truth. Here, Brahma—the highest god—acts on behalf of the entire society to serve and revere the Dhamma. Despite this reverence shown by Brahma, Buddhism bestows an elevated position to Brahma and does not denigrate him.

Here, Brahma, instead of existing as the highest god who has created the world, is given the status as the highest, most excellent being within the realm of the round of rebirths—*saṃsāra-vatṭa*. A distinction is also made here between those virtuous Brahma gods like Sahampati Brahma who have right view and those Brahma gods with wrong view (like Baka Brahma), whom the Buddha and his disciples

¹ [Brahma (Brahmā): in Brahmanism, the chief of the gods, creator of the universe. In Buddhist cosmology, there are numerous Brahma worlds, constituting the highest levels of the divine realms. The Buddha did not speak of any single Brahma as the highest being in all creation. There are Mahā Brahmas (‘great Brahmas’), mighty and powerful, but they too, all of them, are subject to the laws of kamma.]

helped to set right.

The virtuous Brahma gods play an important role in encouraging both human and divine beings to listen to and understand the Dhamma, or to practise the Dhamma and develop wisdom in order to gain wellbeing.¹

Ven. Ānanda's Instrumental Role in Asking for Ordination on Behalf of Women

Let us return to matters concerning the monastic sangha. As I mentioned earlier, the bhikkhu sangha established by the Buddha has two levels of responsibility: on a basic level, it gives an opportunity for people to escape from a pressured way of life and a stifling social system, in order to seek inner freedom and to devote themselves fully to spiritual practice. And on a more important level it carries out the highest objective intended by the Buddha, of acting as an intermediary and channel for transforming the human society into a 'noble society' (*ariya-saṅgha*).

These two levels of responsibility are linked. The first objective acts as a preliminary stage or as a ladder for reaching the second objective. The bhikkhu sangha was established to be a starting point and to act as a template for creating a noble society—the aim is to first create a noble community within the conventional community. Members of this noble community are then ready to go out into the wider society and to expand the noble community there, according to the ultimate objective of the Buddha. In order for the bhikkhu sangha to carry out its tasks effectively, the Buddha tried to establish the sangha in an optimal state of stability and proficiency. In this way the Buddha was able to spread the Dhamma successfully and rapidly.

¹ Another Brahma god who is mentioned as making a special effort in this way is Sanaṅkumāra Brahma. [For more on this subject, see Appendix 1.]

Not long afterwards the following situation arose, the response to which required careful forethought. It is not stated in the Tipiṭaka when this event occurred; it is simply stated that while the Buddha was staying at the Nigrodha grove near Kapilavatthu in the Sākya country, Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī¹ came to ask for ordination but the Buddha did not give his permission.²

Later—it is not clear how much time has passed—when the Buddha had departed from Kapilavatthu and was staying at the hall of Kūṭāgāra in the forest of Mahāvana near Vesālī, Mahāpajāpatī along with many Sākya women (the Tipiṭaka simply says ‘many women’; the commentaries say there were five hundred) travelled there to ask for ordination. They had stopped outside an arched gate to shield themselves from the sun.

According to the Tipiṭaka, Ven. Ānanda saw them and made inquiries. He then volunteered to ask the Buddha on the women’s behalf. The words he used are as follows:

In this case, Madam Gotamī, please wait here for one moment, while I go request from the Blessed One for women to go forth and be ordained as homeless ones in the Dhamma and Discipline proclaimed by the Tathāgata.

To sum up, the establishment of the bhikkhuni sangha as an additional conventional sangha occurred due to the assistance by Ven. Ānanda, who asked permission from the Buddha.

According to the commentaries, the establishment of the bhikkhuni sangha occurred when the Buddha’s father King Suddhodana had recently entered final Nibbāna in the fifth year of the Buddha’s period of teaching.³ It is fair to say that the conventional bhikkhu sangha at this time was beginning to become strong and stable, and was expanding.

¹ [For simplicity, in this text I sometimes abbreviate her name to Mahāpajāpatī.]

² Vin. II. 253; A. IV. 274.

³ AA. I. 216; cf.: AA. II. 124; ThīGA. 1, 140.

Ven. Ānanda, who played a crucial role in the establishment of the bhikkhuni sangha, is well-known as the Buddha's attendant. But if this event occurred in the fifth year after the Buddha's awakening, then Ānanda would not yet have been the Buddha's permanent attendant (*nibaddhupaṭṭhāka*)—the person who held the position of being the Buddha's single and constant attendant. Ānanda may have been one of several attendants of the Buddha during the beginning of the Buddha's life (*paṭhama-bodhiyaṃ*; the time immediately following his awakening), or at that time it is also possible that he had never acted as an attendant.

This is not something we can be sure about. It isn't essential to know, however, because in the passages of the Tipiṭaka dealing with this event there is no mention of Ven. Ānanda as an attendant, nor is there any mention of him having any other special position. All that is mentioned in the Tipiṭaka is that he saw Mahāpajāpatī at the gateway in such circumstances and made inquiries. When he learned about why she had come he volunteered to help.

As a speculation or a guess, the situation could have unfolded in many different ways. For instance, we can say that this was a major event, in which a large group of royal women gathered around the monastery gate. Ven. Ānanda (who at that time was still a newly ordained monk—he was ordained in the second year of the Buddha's period of teaching) would have heard about what was happening and would have been curious just like the other monks. And he especially, who was a very close relative (he was Mahāpajāpatī's first cousin once removed), must have felt obliged to go and make inquiries. This would have been normal conduct.

Another scenario is that although Ven. Ānanda was living at this monastery he didn't know what was happening. Other monks, who knew that Mahāpajāpatī had arrived, wondered what to do and thought of Ānanda, knowing that he was a relative and belonged to royalty. They thought he would be a suitable messenger and thus

sought him out. (Ven. Nanda, as Mahāpajāpatī's own son, would have been even more closely related, but according to the texts he was dwelling in the forest at this time.)¹

Alternatively, when the monks went to greet Mahāpajāpatī, she herself chose Ven. Ānanda from amongst the many monks who were the Buddha's attendants in these early years, because he was a relative.² Perhaps, by coincidence, Ānanda was presently acting as attendant at that time. Or else, regardless of whether he was the attendant or not, Mahāpajāpatī asked to speak to him simply because it made her feel most at ease. All of these scenarios are possible.

Let me add here that the appointment of Ven. Ānanda as the Buddha's permanent attendant is described in the commentaries. The commentaries state that at the time immediately following the Buddha's awakening, he did not have a constant or regular attendant. Instead, many monks alternated to perform the duty as attendant, e.g.: Ven. Nāgasamāla, Ven. Nāgita, Ven. Upavāṇa, Ven. Sunakkhatta, Novice Cunda, Ven. Sāgata, Ven. Meghiya, etc. And this list also includes Ven. Ānanda.

This was the case until the twentieth year of the Buddha's period of teaching, at which time the Buddha remarked that he was getting old. Some of the attendant monks had not been doing a good job, and he asked for one monk to be appointed as the constant, regular attendant.³ In the end he called on Ven. Ānanda to take on this role.

From this evidence we can assume that by the time Ven. Ānanda was chosen in the twentieth year for this important position, he must have been very close to the Buddha for a long time already, had often attended on the Buddha, and had done this job well.

¹ S. II. 282; 'forest dweller' (*āraññika*).

² VinT.: Paṭhamo Bhāgo, Verañjakaṇḍavaṇṇanā, Dubbhikkhakathā: *aniyatupaṭṭhākā pana bhagavato paṭhamabodhiyaṃ bahū ahesuṃ*.

³ This is mentioned in many places, e.g.: DA. II. 419.

There is evidence in the scriptures of Ven. Ānanda acting as the Buddha's attendant before the position of permanent attendant was established. Most notable is the story of the famine in Verañja, during which time Ānanda prepared the unhusked rice for the Buddha. The commentaries state that this event occurred in the twelfth year after the Buddha's awakening.¹

There is no mention in the Tipiṭaka of Ven. Ānanda being appointed the permanent attendant in the twentieth year, but in the Mahāpadāna Sutta he receives the praise of the Buddha for being the 'foremost attendant.'² And in the Aṅguttara Nikāya he is praised as 'supreme' amongst all the attendants (*aggupaṭṭhāka*).³ We can thus conclude that he performed this task exceptionally, and was thus eventually appointed as the permanent attendant.

In sum, at the time of the founding of the bhikkhuni sangha, Ven. Ānanda may not have been an attendant or else he may have been one of the alternating attendants, but he was not yet appointed the permanent attendant, which according to the commentaries occurred in the twentieth year after the Buddha's awakening.

In any case, whether Ven. Ānanda was the attendant to the Buddha or not, it is not the essential point of this event. What we know for certain is that he was a close relative to both the Buddha and to Mahāpajāpatī Gotami.

The Origins of Bhikkhuni Ordination

When Ven. Ānanda asked the Buddha to give permission for women to be ordained, the Buddha refused three times. The Tipiṭaka recounts how at this point Ānanda thought that the Buddha would not give permission.⁴ He therefore thought to use another method of asking or

¹ Vin. III. 6-7, 10-11; explained at VinA. I. 177; the year is mentioned at AA. II. 124.

² *Aggupaṭṭhāka*; D. II. 6.

³ A. I. 24-5.

⁴ Vin. II. 254-7.

an indirect means of reasoning. He asked the Buddha whether women who ordain are able to realize the fruit of stream-entry up to the fruit of arahantship. The Buddha answered that yes, they can. (In fact, even if women are not ordained, they are able to attain these stages of awakening. By the same token, irrespective of having been ordained or not it is possible to enter the community of noble disciples—*ariya-saṅgha*.)¹

Ven. Ānanda then linked this question specifically to Mahāpajāpatī, saying that if women who ordain can realize the stages of noble path and fruit, and since Mahāpajāpatī is the Buddha's aunt and step-mother, who had provided him with great service in the past, wouldn't the Buddha please give his permission for women to be ordained.

The Buddha then consented by laying down the stipulation that if Mahāpajāpatī would agree to the eight 'important principles' (*garudhammā*), then this agreement in itself would act as the ordination procedure for her. When Ven. Ānanda went to inform Mahāpajāpatī of this, she consented to these terms, and through this procedure she became the first bhikkhuni. She then went to the Buddha to ask him what she should do with the other Sākyan ladies who had come to be ordained.

The Buddha instructed and delighted Ven. Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī with a Dhamma talk, and after she had departed the Buddha said to the monks: 'I allow the bhikkhus to give bhikkhuni ordination.'

There is an important passage at the section where Ven. Ānanda returns to tell the Buddha that Mahāpajāpatī had accepted the eight principles and had thus in effect been ordained. The Buddha says that if women were not to go forth into the homeless life in this teaching and discipline, the 'holy life' (*brahmacariya*—this term is also used to

¹ The spirit of this is encapsulated in the chant praising the attributes of the Sangha (*saṅgha-guṇa*). [Note that the term *ariya-saṅgha* (noble community) refers to the collection of individuals at all four stages of awakening: stream-entry, once-returning, non-returning, and arahantship.]

denote the Buddhist teachings) would last a long time—the ‘true Dhamma’ would last for one thousand years. But once women have gone forth into the homeless life in this teaching and discipline, the holy life will not last long; the true Dhamma will last only five hundred years.

The Buddha said that this is similar to a family with many women and few men—it will be easier for bandits to pillage and wreak havoc on this family. It is similar to a field of wheat infected by a disease called *setaṭṭhikā* (in the Thai Tipiṭaka this word is translated as ‘caseworm’)—the crops will not last long. It is like a plot of sugarcane infected by a disease called *mañjeṭṭhikā* (the Thai Tipiṭaka translates this word as ‘aphid’)—again, the crops won’t last long. The Buddha therefore prescribed the eight important principles, the *garudhammas*,¹ which the bhikkhunis should not transgress throughout their lifetime. This was like building a dam by a large reservoir, preventing the water from spilling out.

(Some people read the Thai Tipiṭaka and exclaim, ‘The Buddha compared women to worms!’ This is both an amusing and unfortunate interpretation. In fact, the Buddha was not comparing women to anything at all here. It isn’t necessary to know the exact meaning of the Pali term which has been translated as ‘caseworm.’ But by looking at these three analogies combined, they indicate that the ordination of women weakens the holy life. The Buddhist religion will become less stable and will not last as long. The Buddha therefore laid down the *garudhammas* as an embankment to increase stability and sustainability.)

There are many aspects of the establishment of the bhikkhuni sangha which need to be considered in order to reach a clear understanding. If we can draw some conclusions from these considerations at least it may help us to make joint decisions on

¹ *Garudhamma*: ‘principle requiring weighty consideration,’ ‘principle requiring sincere respect.’ [Because this term is used frequently in this text and it is familiar to people close to this debate, I write it without italics.]

matters related to this issue.

Let me say here that when people go and quote me, or continue the discussion on these matters, they shouldn't say that these are my opinions. For instance, as Khun Martin has previously mentioned, when attending academic meetings or reading academic articles, he has come across academics who state that I have particular views, which don't match up with what I have actually said. I mention certain ideas for consideration, but these people select only particular aspects or points of these ideas and believe that they are my opinions. They even claim that these are my final judgements on these matters.

Whenever there are complicated or unsettled issues, it is important to consider different angles or aspects of these issues. With some aspects, we can conclude that they are incorrect or irrelevant, and we can ignore them. Other aspects we can say are possibly true and we thus set them aside for further investigation. Some aspects are obviously linked to specific principles or teachings, and we thus investigate this relationship. If we interpret this matter according to such principles or teachings, can we accept this, or what sort of implications does this have? This recognition should provide us with more clarity on how to proceed. And sometimes we gain clarity through negation: if this particular aspect is incorrect and its opposite is correct then what sort of bearing does this have on the issue at hand? Finally, we must examine all available data and evidence thoroughly and select information that is valid. This way the consideration of the issue will be comprehensive.

Speaking accurately, if one wants to quote me, one should say that these are the points that I put forward for consideration. Or one can state that my opinions are simply points of view presented for contemplation. It is not correct to claim that I have made some form of final judgement over these issues. What sort of judgements can I make? (Also I have to say that I personally prefer not to make judgements anyway.) These sorts of issues must be dealt with

collectively. For instance the way to respond to this issue of bhikkhunis is a matter for the sangha to decide, but before a decision is made it is important to examine every angle and aspect of the issue.

This is what I try to do: to encourage people to study this issue together and search for relevant evidence. The emphasis is on gathering knowledge and on developing wise reflection. At least by doing this one will gain knowledge. With this sort of issue, rather than relying on personal opinions, it is important to emphasize gathering the most complete, exact, clear, and correct information, for example the background and surrounding circumstances. This information will then act as the best basis for analysis and decision-making.

Although we may have opinions on these matters, they are a consequence of our analysis or a conclusion based on facts. For example, in a particular matter the original teachings or principles are such, and if we accord with these principles the matter will unfold in this way. Whether one chooses to accord with these principles or not is then another matter for consideration.

In sum, we first aim at knowledge. As for decision-making, we leave this up to the collective group which is optimally prepared. If at this point we offer our opinions, we do so in order to increase knowledge.

Let me say a few more things about the difference between opinions linked to knowledge and knowledge influenced by opinions. Opinions linked to knowledge refers to offering one's opinions in connection to information which one has gathered: to present the most comprehensive information about a particular issue and then to add one's opinions as an adjunct to this discussion. Knowledge influenced by opinions refers to a person having pre-established opinions about a matter and desiring primarily to give voice to these opinions. A person then selects and speaks about only such information which accords with these opinions, or uses this information to embellish the opinions. In the worst scenario, a person may even distort the information or add false information to back up the opinions.

Take for example a person who has seen a landscape while travelling and for some reason is displeased by it. When he describes this landscape to someone else, he focuses on those aspects that cause him displeasure. This is an example of using information influenced by personal opinions. The data and the perceptions of someone who listens to this description are limited and distorted by the words of the speaker. Another person passes that same landscape and then describes to someone else all aspects that he has observed. He tries to give the most thorough account, as if placing that landscape in front of the listener for inspection. He then expresses his own point of view, his own thoughts and feelings, about it, saying: ‘When I passed this place I had the following thoughts; as for you, you are totally free to have your own opinion—go and have a look!’ This is an example of offering an opinion linked to knowledge. We should endeavour to follow this latter example.

Impediments to the Conventional Sangha

As I mentioned earlier, there are many points to take into consideration in relation to the establishment of the bhikkhuni sangha.

In relation to the Buddha’s permission for women to be ordained as bhikkhunis, I have made the observation before that the Buddha’s words restraining Ven. Ānanda at the first request and his granting permission on the latter occasion show that if one examines the ordination of women from a social perspective—in its relationship to society at that time period—the Buddha disapproved of such ordination. The reason that he gave his permission was based on a perspective on reality, taking into consideration the nature of being a human being. Irrespective of being a man or a woman it is possible to realize noble path and fruit, to realize Nibbāna.

This means that any problems or obstructions having to do with bhikkhuni ordinations are social issues—they are questions having to do with conventional reality. They are not problems having to do with

natural truth. (Conventional reality however is not an insignificant or meaningless matter, but is relevant to everything having to do with interpersonal and social relationships, including: organizations, institutions, titles, formal attire, club membership, systems of communication, etc. These are not matters having to do with the inherent existence of a human being, which is a matter of natural truth. Conventional truth, however, is related to and is based upon natural truth.)

Because this is an issue dealing with conventional truth and social factors it is dependent on time and place, which here means that it is directly connected to the social environment of the Buddha's time period. It is dependent on regional and historical customs, social mores, and even on beliefs, accusations, and rumours of ordinary people.

We must therefore examine the social conditions at the time of the Buddha. For now we should set apart an examination of present social conditions and not confuse these two. That is, we should first understand the circumstances surrounding the original conventional practices.

The ordination of bhikkhunis is a clear example of the importance of social conventions, because it is directly dependent on the role and status of women in India at that time. Casting a short glance back in time, we know from the English who colonized India that there was an Indian tradition of child marriage. And we know from the Tipiṭaka that the custom of girls being married while still young existed before the Buddha's time. This custom was already established in the Indian subcontinent (Jambudīpa) when Prince Siddhattha was born. It is unclear, however, whether this custom was passed down in an unbroken way from the Buddha's time to the 18th century or whether it died away and was resurrected. There is almost no evidence of this practice from the commentarial texts. Here, we can simply conclude that when the Buddha was proclaiming the Dhamma, this custom existed in society at that time.

This custom gave rise to social systems that had an influence on other areas of life, for example family life, family lineage, and social relationships. When interacting with Indian society, Buddhism required practical tools for integration and it tried to accord with these social conditions in order to best achieve its goals.

This custom of child marriage concerns precisely some of those women who came to be ordained as bhikkhunis. When a girl was married, her status in society changed: she became in effect an adult. Her status and responsibilities were elevated, in the family, in the clan, in the role as mother, head of the household, lady of a manor, etc. This change of status had an effect on the bhikkhuni Vinaya, in so far as women who requested ordination as bhikkhunis were classified into two groups:

1. Married women (*gihigatā*): this term is variously translated, including ‘a woman who has encountered a man,’ ‘a woman encountered by a man,’ and ‘someone who enters the circle of men.’ Such a person has entered the world of adults or is someone who is responsible for a family. Such a woman can be ordained as a bhikkhuni if she has reached the age of twelve. (The scriptures say that the sangha can offer the training and determine her as an intermediate level novice—*sikkhamānā*—at age ten; it is not necessary for her to be ordained as an initial stage novice—*sāmaṇerī*.)
2. Unmarried women; maidens (*kumārībhūtā*): these women must be at least twenty years old before they can be ordained as bhikkhunis. Before this age they are ordained as initial stage novices, and at age eighteen the bhikkhuni sangha can establish them in the *sikkhamānā* training.

I mentioned above that there are almost no examples in the commentaries of very young girls being married. The term ‘one determined as sixteen years of age’ (*soḷasa-vassuddesikā*) is found often in the commentaries in reference to women being married. There are

some references to women being married at fifteen, for example in the case of the great female lay disciple Visākhā, who was married ‘towards the end of fifteen and the beginning of sixteen years’ (*paññarasasoḷasa-vassuddesikā*). At this age a woman was considered fit to marry (*vayappattā*). Men, too, generally got married, took on responsibilities, and even succeeded to the throne at this age. Because there are only few examples in the commentaries of young children being married, these few examples warrant a closer look.

One such commentarial story describes an event from the time of the Buddha. This story cites a passage in the Tipiṭaka explaining a verse spoken by the deity who rules the celestial abode of Pesavatī.¹ According to the commentaries, a girl was born in a merchant family in the village of Nālakagāma, which was also the hometown of Ven. Sāriputta.² One day when this girl was twelve years old she walked to the market to buy some oil. At the market place the son of a wealthy merchant picked up his father’s treasure of precious jewels, but mistook them for mere pebbles and stones. The father therefore took a portion of these jewels and placed them in a public place, to see if anyone with merit would be able to recognize them for what they were. The girl reached this spot and greeted the wealthy merchant, asking him why these jewels had been placed here and whether they shouldn’t be put safely away.

The merchant listened to her and thought: ‘This young girl possesses great merit and skill; she should help to manage this wealth.’ He therefore went to the girl’s mother and asked for the girl to be married to his son. Having brought her to live in his home he recognized her virtue and capability and asked her to be the supervisor of his entire estate, placing himself merely in the status of a dependant. From that point on people called her Pesavatī (the ‘commander’; the ‘boss’).

¹ Vv. 642-53.

² VvA. 155.

Later on, Ven. Sāriputta was preparing to die and he travelled to his hometown to assist his mother Sārībrāhmaṇī. His final passing away occurred at his town of birth. To honour him the townspeople organized a ceremony, which Pesavatī also attended. Great crowds of people turned up, including a royal entourage, to pay respects to Ven. Sāriputta's body. One of the royal elephants was in rut and came charging forward. The people panicked and sought to escape, but many were killed. Pesavatī was knocked down and trampled to death by the crowds of people, but because she had made merit and her heart was filled with faith she was born as a devatā in Tāvatiṃsa heaven. This is one example from the commentaries of a young girl getting married.

The Purpose of the Conventional Sangha

Here, we should consider how the conventional reality of society at the time of the Buddha is connected to the Buddha's statement that the ordination of women will weaken and destabilize the 'holy life' (*brahmacariya*).

For comparison, let us go back to the establishment of the first conventional sangha—the bhikkhu sangha—as these two issues are linked and directly interrelated.

As I said earlier, the Buddha established the bhikkhu sangha in order to fulfil two objectives: first, to establish a community favourable to those individuals who have withdrawn from an oppressive society, so that they can give themselves fully to spiritual development and reach the highest stage of 'nobility'—of awakening. Second, and most important, was to establish a model community in regard to nurturing noble beings. This community is the mainstay for creating a noble society. It is the centre or meeting point from which awakened beings build a noble society in the world around them, by encouraging others to advance on the path to awakening.

The new conventional community—the bhikkhuni sangha—should be viewed in relation to these two aforementioned objectives. In regard to the first objective, of being a community that offers women the chance to escape from an unfavourable social environment and that is a place for spiritual training within which women can attain the highest levels of awakening, the bhikkhuni sangha fulfils this objective very well, even if the life of a bhikkhuni is slightly more restricted than that of the bhikkhus.

The life of a bhikkhuni is especially impeded in regard to a renunciant's reliance on peace and solitude, to the freedom of being able to go off on one's own, and to living by the maxim of being like a bird which has two wings and which is able to fly off at any time with ease. Because, even if she is not living on her own, a bhikkhuni living in the forest is under threat of being molested or attacked, there is a rule in the Vinaya prohibiting bhikkhunis from living in the forest.¹

When monks and nuns agreed to travel long distances together, there were laypeople who criticized and publicly condemned them. Therefore there is a rule prohibiting bhikkhus and bhikkhunis from travelling long distances together. When bhikkhunis then travelled on their own they were attacked, and therefore an exception to the rule was issued, permitting monks and nuns to travel long distances together when it is deemed there may be danger.²

When bhikkhunis wandered in dangerous, fearful areas—even within areas governed by a state—without an accompanying caravan, they were assaulted. There is thus a rule prohibiting nuns from travelling in such areas if they are not part of a caravan.³ For these very same reasons there are rules forbidding bhikkhunis from entering a village alone, crossing a river alone, being alone at night, and being separated from a group when travelling.⁴

¹ Vin. II. 278.

² Vin. IV. 63.

³ Vin. IV. 295-6.

⁴ Vin. IV. 229-30.

As I mentioned earlier, the monastic sangha is a community which goes 'against the stream' and offers a special opportunity to its members, but it existed amidst unsupportive social conditions. The bhikkhu sangha, which was created first, was going against and resisting the oppressive and hostile social currents, like the class system and animal sacrifices. These social conditions made it difficult for the bhikkhu sangha to progress or to exist in a stable way.

A close examination reveals how the Buddha himself struggled against certain social conditions. For example, the brahmins, who comprised the highest social class, who had enormous social influence, and who were at the heart of maintaining the class system and animal sacrifices, along with the wealthy nobles (*gahapati*) who were subject to the brahmins, generally showed contempt and aversion for the Buddha and the bhikkhus. They would sometimes use extreme insults, for example 'bald-headed, beggarly mendicants' (*muṇḍaka samaṇaka*).

The reason why the Buddha was able to teach and spread the Dhamma quickly was due to the fact that he was able to change greatly the way of thinking of members of these higher classes.¹ Members of the brahmin intelligentsia who had converted to Buddhism became a crucial force for disseminating the Buddha's teachings.

The Buddha needed to muster all his forces and use his wisdom in order to transform the way of thinking of members of the upper social classes, with the brahmins at the helm, and to lead the people out of the class system and out of the divine prescriptions contained in the Vedas, which determined many aspects of society and permitted the upper classes to monopolize education. From surrendering to sacred powers and seeking absolution from the highest gods, people were encouraged to abandon the practice of animal sacrifice, to recognize the power of human beings to determine their destiny, and to trust in

¹ See for example the following stories: the brahmin Aggikabhāradvāja (Sn. 21); the brahmins and merchants of Khomadussa (S. I. 184); the brahmins and merchants of Thūnagāma (Ud. 78).

the Dhamma as ultimate truth.

In order to perform this essential work smoothly the Buddha needed to place the monastic sangha, which was constantly in the public eye, in a position that was acceptable and respected by people, among many other religious sects and traditions, many of which were hostile to Buddhism and looked to undermine it.

Although this latter task was not the Buddha's principal work and not the essential objective, it cannot be ignored. These matters of social convention, like the opinions of the general public, are surrounding conditions that determine both the stability of Buddhism and the success of fulfilling its main objective, and should thus be managed carefully. The attending to these social conventions is evident in many of the Vinaya rules laid down by the Buddha. Let us look at a few simple examples:

In the Vinaya Pitaka there is an origin story to one of the 227 rules observed by the bhikkhus, that at one time when the Buddha was staying in the Kūṭāgāra Hall in the Mahāvana grove in the district of Vesālī, some cakes were offered to the sangha.¹ After Ven. Ānanda informed the Buddha of this matter, the Buddha instructed Ānanda to give these cakes as a donation to those people who eat leftover food.

Ven. Ānanda gathered these people together, lined them up, and gave them each one cake. By accident he gave two cakes to a female religious wanderer. Other female wanderers nearby asked this woman: 'Is this renunciant your lover?' She answered, 'No, he is not. He gave me two cakes thinking it was one.' As it happened, Ānanda accidentally gave this very same woman two cakes three times in a row. The other female wanderers thus ridiculed her: 'Now is he your lover or not?!'

Another example is of a non-Buddhist ascetic who went to a place for distributing alms. One of the bhikkhus mixed a large amount of rice with fresh butter and gave a big lump of rice to this ascetic. When he had taken this food away, another ascetic asked him where he had

¹ Vin. IV. 91.

acquired this lump of rice. He answered: 'I got it from the alms distribution centre belonging to the bald-headed householders, the monks of Gotama.'

The laypeople heard these two ascetics speaking with one another and thus went to see the Buddha. They told him that members of other non-Buddhist movements are looking to find fault in the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha. They then requested a favour, asking the Buddha to prohibit the venerable monks from giving things directly from their own hands to adherents of other religions.

When the laypeople had left, the Buddha assembled the community of monks. He explained the situation and then laid down a training rule for the monks, forbidding them from giving directly from their own hands hard or soft foods to naked ascetics, male religious wanderers, or female religious wanderers (i.e., to renunciants outside of the Buddhist religion).

I mentioned earlier how the Buddha's regulations in regard to the bhikkhunis are matters directly connected to social conventions and to the social environment of that time period. Take for example the 'important principle' (*garudhamma*), which states that a bhikkhuni, despite having been ordained for one hundred years, must bow and pay respects to a bhikkhu who has been ordained that very day. There is a story of how Ven. Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī after her ordination went to Ven. Ānanda and asked him to request a blessing from the Buddha on her behalf.¹ She requested permission from the Buddha allowing monks and nuns to pay respects according to seniority. When Ānanda went to relay this request, the Buddha replied that there is no way and no chance whereby he would permit the bhikkhus to formally pay respects to women, because followers of other religious movements do not adhere to this practice. How could he grant such permission? (This is because members of other religious orders were constantly looking to attack and insult the bhikkhu sangha.) The Buddha then laid down

¹ Vin. II. 257-8.

a rule prohibiting the bhikkhus from formally paying respects to women.

Note that this rule prohibits bhikkhus from paying respects to women in general; it does not specifically state that they should not pay respects to bhikkhunis. The reason why the term ‘women’ here is used to encompass bhikkhunis is likely because people at that time were unfamiliar with or had not yet accepted the status of renunciant women as distinct from women in general. (The bhikkhu sangha as an institution was already new and unusual. The arising of the bhikkhuni sangha was probably considered very strange by most people, who found the ordination of women unthinkable, who didn’t understand it, or were not yet prepared to accept it.) From the perspective of everyday people or of society at that time and place, when there were issues involving bhikkhus and bhikkhunis, people didn’t see these as issues involving bhikkhus and bhikkhunis, but rather as issues involving bhikkhus and women. We should look into this matter more closely to gain more clarity. I will return to this subject later.

A Pioneering Force Weakened by Internal Concerns

Returning to the subject of fulfilling the Buddha’s objectives, the monks had to make great effort to go against the stream of worldly values, as well as to develop enough strength to go out and transform the surrounding society, to help it become developed in the ‘noble way’ (*ariya-vīthi*), in the best way possible.

In regard to the newly founded bhikkhuni sangha, as is evident from what I mentioned earlier, just fulfilling the first objective and going against the stream of social conventions was more difficult than in the case of the bhikkhu sangha. An effort was made to simply provide the best opportunity for those women who had been ordained. In relation to the external society, however, the nuns had much less flexibility and encountered a relatively large number of obstacles and

even dangers. Instead of progressing and working to fulfil the second objective of transforming the external society, the bhikkhuni sangha was thus preoccupied by trying to sustain itself and survive.

Even more serious, when the bhikkhuni sangha became less stable, less safe, and less free, the Buddha needed to lay down rules requiring the bhikkhunis to live with or near the bhikkhus, who provided protection, assistance and reassurance. Instead of there being two forces working in conjunction, the monastic sangha on the whole became cumbersome and unwieldy. The bhikkhus had an additional burden of watching over and protecting the bhikkhunis, leading to additional worries and to a subsequent reduction of flexibility for themselves.

Generally speaking, people who receive ordination in Buddhism come to receive spiritual training. They are not yet spiritually accomplished, nor have they been selected in order to perform religious duties, as religious officials or as priests who conduct ceremonies, say to act as a medium between gods and humans. To be ordained is to enter the 'holy life' (*brahmacariya*). One definition of *brahmacariya* is a freedom from sexual relationships for the sake of spiritual development and for benefiting one's community and society in the greatest way possible. Thus, both the bhikkhu and the bhikkhuni monastic codes (*Vinaya*) contain key principles safeguarding a celibate life.

As I mentioned earlier, after the establishment of the bhikkhuni sangha, particular social conditions compelled the Buddha to lay down regulations requiring the bhikkhus and bhikkhunis to live closely together. The inherent nature of these new regulations appears to be in conflict with a life of celibacy. As a consequence, many new rules were laid down in order to restrict and regulate the relationships between monks and nuns. This was to ensure that the interactions between these two communities remained wholesome, that a life of celibacy was not violated, that the spiritual training was not hindered,

and that the monastic sangha passed the close inspection by the general public.

When the monks and nuns began to live together in close quarters, there were more reasons for increased interaction and more opportunity for greater contact. The very nature of an increased number of men and women living together, most of whom were beginning their spiritual training, resulted in certain monks and nuns being corrupted, acting improperly, and creating problems. This then became another cause for a weakening of the monastic sangha.

Whereas guiding the wider society to progress in the 'noble path' already involves a struggle against worldly currents, there were now internal issues corroding and sapping the strength of the monastic community. Externally the sangha was restricted and internally it was ailing and weakened.

Let me recount two stories concerning sexual relations between bhikkhus and bhikkhunis. These are origin stories behind monastic training precepts, describing the ill-intents of a monk and a nun, along with the goodwill of a certain robber.

The first story tells of an occasion when the Buddha was staying at Jetavana Grove.¹ At that time a senior court official was ordained as a bhikkhu and his wife was ordained as a bhikkhuni. This monk would regularly take his food and set it out at the monastic dwelling of his former wife.

While this monk was eating his former wife would stand serving him, offer him water to drink, and fan him. She would then talk about worldly things and household matters in order to tempt him. The monk would forcefully remonstrate with her: 'Sister, don't do this; it is not appropriate.' The bhikkhuni then retorted: 'In the past you would relate to me in such and such a way; now you can't even endure this much!' She then covered his head with a water vessel and whacked him with the fan.

¹ Vin. IV. 263.

The other bhikkhunis criticized this behaviour and the story reached the Buddha. The Buddha convened the community and laid down the rule that it is an offence of expiation for a bhikkhuni to serve on a bhikkhu who is eating, by offering him water or fanning him.

The second story occurred while the Buddha was staying at Veḷuvana, the bamboo grove.¹ After going on almsround and eating her meal, Ven. Uppalavaṇṇā Bhikkhunī entered the forest of Andhavana and sat down at the foot of a tree.

At that time a band of robbers had stolen a cow, slaughtered it, and taken the meat into Andhavana forest. The robber leader saw Ven. Uppalavaṇṇā sitting by the tree, and thinking that were his companions to see her too they may violate and harm her, he turned off to another path.

When the meat had been well-cooked, the robber leader took a choice piece of meat, wrapped it in leaves, and hung it on a tree nearby to where Ven. Uppalavaṇṇā was sitting. He then called out: 'I offer this bundle of meat to anyone. Be it a renunciant or brahman, whoever sees it is free to take it away!' He then walked off.

Ven. Uppalavaṇṇā came out of her state of concentration, heard the robber leader utter these words, and thus carried the meat to her residence. When the night had passed, she arranged the meat, wrapped it in an upper-robe (*uttarāsaṅga*), and by her psychic powers flew through the air to appear at Veḷuvana monastery.

At that time the Buddha was out on almsround in the village. Only Ven. Udāyī remained to look after the monastery. Ven. Uppalavaṇṇā made inquiries and then said to Udāyī: 'Venerable sir, please offer this meat to the Blessed One.'

Ven. Udāyī replied: 'Sister, the Blessed One will be satisfied by your meat. Now if you were to give me your under-robe, I too would be satisfied by your under-robe.'

¹ Vin. III. 207-208.

Ven. Uppalavaṇṇā said: ‘Venerable sir, we women obtain few material gains and this under-robe is my last one, completing my full set of five robes. I cannot give it away.’ (Bhikkhunis must wear five robes, whereas bhikkhus wear only three.)

Ven. Udāyī countered: ‘Sister, just as a man who offers an elephant should also relinquish the howdah, so too, by offering meat to the Blessed One, you should relinquish your under-robe to me!’

Coerced by Ven. Udāyī in this way, Ven. Uppalavaṇṇā gave him her under-robe and returned to her residence. The bhikkhunis who were waiting to receive her bowl and robe asked her: ‘Venerable mother, where is your under-robe?’ She told them what had happened. The bhikkhunis criticized Udāyī for his behaviour and told this matter to the bhikkhus.

The monks also criticized Ven. Udāyī until the matter finally reached the Buddha. As a consequence he gathered the community and laid down the training rule that it is an offence of expiation requiring forfeiture (*nissaggiya pācittiya*) for a monk to receive a robe from the hand of a bhikkhuni, unless she is a relative or it involves an exchange of robes.

Let us go back to the Buddha’s repeated statement of great compassion in which he aims for the welfare of the entire world: *bahujanahitāya bahujanasukhāya lokānukampāya* (‘to act for the welfare and happiness of the many, for the compassionate assistance of the world’). This goal is possible by leading the manyfolk to a way of life guided by the Noble Eightfold Path, giving rise to a ‘noble community.’ This community is the gathering point of awakened beings who live according to their own noble qualities, independent of age and gender, of being a monastic or layperson, a man or woman.

The first generation of disciples who were sent out to proclaim this teaching were all awakened beings, part of the newly emerging noble community that was beginning to expand and spread. They began to be organized in preliminary ways, say by forming small communities,

and these groups became the prototype of the later-established, fully-developed conventional sangha.

As I have said earlier, the conventional sangha is not primarily a goal in itself, but rather it acts as a channel. It is an institution creating a favourable internal environment, and its true value is to be a driving force for leading humanity toward the noble path and to becoming a noble society.

For the conventional sangha to be truly effective it must contain an awakened, noble sangha at its core. The essence of this noble sangha is spiritual or immaterial, however, and it is connected to members of the noble sangha out in the world who are not part of the conventional sangha.

In this discussion we are focusing on the conventional sangha and we must examine the relevant issues. The creation of a favourable communal (or 'internal') environment is a supportive stage; it is a ladder that helps the conventional sangha to act as an instrument for building an awakened society.

Both the bhikkhu and bhikkhuni sanghas should work for this cause, of leading the wider society towards this goal. In any case, those people who belong to the external, non-ordained community all have the same practice of becoming a member of the awakened sangha.

If in the conventional sangha there are monks and nuns who were previously married disturbing one another, or if an evil-minded monk can bully a foremost awakened elder bhikkhuni, as we saw in the preceding examples, this conventional sangha still contains a weakness that will impair the highest work of the monastic community.

This is most likely the reason why the Buddha gave a warning at the time that the bhikkhuni sangha was established. He was trying to prevent a weakness in the monastic sangha which would lead to deterioration and disintegration.

The Bhikkhuni Sangha and the Creation of a Noble Society

Although one can say the Buddha was at first not completely willing to establish it, this newly-formed, second monastic sangha of bhikkhunis gave women an excellent opportunity for developing their lives and for reaching the highest goal of Buddhism, and it was highly effective for a long time. This is especially so when one considers the specific contemporary social conditions at that time.

There is much evidence to confirm (and more research should be done on this) that, throughout the ages, monasteries, including the bhikkhuni residences, were centres of learning for the general population. From at least 250 BE (293 BC) there is clear evidence that the bhikkhuni order was widespread. This is recorded in King Asoka's stone inscriptions and in the historical accounts of Ven. Saṅghamittā Therī, King Asoka's own daughter, who took a shoot of the Mahā Bodhi Tree and established the bhikkhuni order in Sri Lanka.

Looking from a wider perspective and taking into consideration the higher objective of establishing a conventional monastic community in order to act as an instrument for developing the greater human community into a noble society, there are aspects and events regarding the creation of the bhikkhuni sangha which indicate that it may also have had significant negative repercussions. This is especially true in that the bhikkhu sangha became burdened and taxed, slowing down and undermining the work involving the external society. Although there is evidence supporting this conclusion, including information in relation to the social conditions of the Buddha's time, more research needs to be done on the origin and historical development of the bhikkhuni sangha.

These matters are connected to the account that at the end of the First Recitation there were elders who criticized Ven. Ānanda for asking permission from the Buddha to give ordination to women.¹ If

¹ [For more on this subject, see Appendix 2.]

we consider the views of those elders and the views of people generally at that time on social issues, it is perhaps the case that most monks and most people were more worried than they were assured about the existence and survival of the bhikkhuni sangha. Those elders may have been reflecting the general attitude and position of people when they criticized Ānanda for helping to initiate this state of affairs.¹

Trying to put ourselves in that situation, if the situation of the bhikkhunis was going well and was generally a matter of delight and ease for people, why would those elders have raised this matter for objection? The Buddhist laypeople were observing the conduct of those elders, and it is likely that these elders were expressing the opinions and concerns of the wider Buddhist community.

Such a reading of these events may be taking sides with those elders, but it is an attempt to understand their actions and to understand the social reality of that time. In any case it is important not to jump to conclusions. As I said earlier, I hope that scholars will continue to investigate the development of the bhikkhuni sangha from the beginning of its inception to the time of the Buddha's death, linking it with social conditions of India at that time.

One more point is that this criticism of Ven. Ānanda was not a serious issue. The elders were simply settling an account with him on the matter of his acting as the Buddha's chief attendant. From another perspective the elders' criticism of Ānanda may reveal their care and concern. They were well aware of the responsibility they had in looking after, supporting, and securing the bhikkhuni sangha, a responsibility which they continued to fulfil.

Although the origins of the bhikkhuni sangha are still somewhat unclear, we see that two and a half centuries after the Buddha, during the time of King Asoka, the bhikkhuni sangha had further grown and developed. This is revealed in the stone inscriptions describing events after the Third Recitation and in the texts recounting how the

¹ For more on the admonishment of Ven. Ānanda at the First Recitation, see Appendix 2.

bhikkhuni sangha, along with the cutting from the great Bodhi Tree, was introduced to Sri Lanka.

(Note that there is no account of the bhikkhunis having played a role in the Third Recitation, but it is clear that in the period afterwards the bhikkhuni sangha was thriving. Occasionally, our way of looking at a historical event does not correspond with the cultural practices of that time period. In any case, this is an interesting subject for study and we should refrain from drawing conclusions based on a vague understanding of events.)

There is nothing wrong or harmful about bhikkhunis or about the bhikkhuni sangha. It was the gender issues connected to social conventions and to the social environment which gave rise to various forms of weakness and difficulties.

Furthermore, the conventional sangha is not the determined goal leading to stability and completion. It is merely a practical instrument, which needs to be used, managed and organized so that one ends up with the best results and the least amount of obstacles in the task of reaching the true goal. The goal is connected to the greater human society, of developing a body of civilized people who are transformed into a noble sangha.

The establishment of the bhikkhuni sangha would necessarily lead to various difficulties and obstacles, and would have a weakening effect which needed to be curbed. Other conditions, on the other hand, were ripe, calling for the allowance to establish this community, at least for the time being. The Buddha therefore prepared some protective measures from the start.

First of all, he did not consent to the establishment of the bhikkhuni sangha right away, and he did not grant permission easily. After the final passing away of King Suddhodana in the Buddha's fifth year of teaching, the Buddha's aunt Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī asked for ordination, but the Buddha refused. Afterwards his aunt along with many Sakyan women (the Tipiṭaka simply says 'many'—*sambahulā*; the

commentaries say five hundred) made the long, extremely arduous journey barefoot (from Kapilavatthu to Vesālī) to where the Buddha was dwelling. We don't know exactly the amount of time that elapsed between these two incidents.

Let us try and understand the Buddha's motives. Might it be possible that the Buddha knew that eventually he would have to give his permission, and that he chose to delay for several reasons? First, he gave those Sakyan women the opportunity to examine and prepare themselves. Second, he waited and used the time to strengthen and prepare the bhikkhu sangha as much as possible in order to make the adjustment and to deal with this new set of highly significant circumstances. Third, he prepared the Indian society of that time to accept or give a chance to this new challenge on top of the first challenge (the 'going against the stream') he had presented in establishing the bhikkhu sangha.

At Vesālī, when Ven. Ānanda heard from his aunt Mahāpajāpati about her request, he went to the Buddha to ask on her behalf, but the Buddha refused once again. It was only when Ānanda used reasoned arguments that the Buddha permitted the ordination, although with stipulations. When these stipulations were accepted and the first bhikkhunis were ordained, the Buddha explained this matter to Ānanda, the details of which I will go into shortly.

In the Tipiṭaka the Buddha emphasizes the importance of the specific subject matter at hand. This was so his disciples would recollect on the admonishments he gave to be careful and vigilant, and to devote themselves earnestly to the subject.

As mentioned earlier, right after his awakening the Buddha reflected on how difficult it is to realize the Dhamma, and he inclined away from teaching the Dhamma. From the beginning, he informed people of how difficult the teaching they were about to study and practise is. Furthermore, he highlighted the prominent features of this teaching and truth. The commentaries continued this emphasis. (The

story of Ven. Ānanda claiming to understand the arcane teaching on Dependent Origination and the Buddha's admonition not to believe this claim is a similar story.)

In this context, by the Buddha's initial refusal, both to Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī and to Ven. Ānanda, and by his making the ordination of women a difficult procedure, both in the amount of preparatory time required and by the necessary tests of stamina, both physical and mental, he was highlighting the vital significance of this issue in relation to Buddhism. Similarly, he was encouraging people to be careful, to show determination when they aspire to take ordination, and to practise earnestly.

An important example of how difficult the Buddha made it for women to ordain is the establishment of the eight garudhammas.

The garudhammas are living principles, which existed alongside the bhikkhuni order from its inception. They thus needed to be applicable to the immediate and changing circumstances throughout the Buddha's lifetime. Most certainly the garudhammas accepted by Mahāpajāpatī acted as the core or original framework, which was altered or adapted according to the changing circumstances in the monastic community. In a related fashion, there existed original training rules, some of which were added to with supplementary regulations, and then finalized at the end of the Buddha's life.

This is evident from the sixth garudhamma, which incorporates many later-developed disciplinary regulations. Take, for example, the passage: 'The bhikkhunis must seek ordination from both monastic communities for a sikkhamānā who has trained in the six rules for two years.' The gist of this garudhamma is for elder bhikkhunis who receive new candidates for training and for ordination to take responsibility for this entire process in a complete way, conforming to the principles and procedures laid down.

This is confirmed by the third training rule in the Chapter on Pregnancy in the bhikkhuni Vinaya.¹ Some bhikkhunis gave ordination to sikkhamānās who had not trained in the six rules for two years. Those sikkhamānās were thus uninformed and unskilled, unable to distinguish between what is appropriate and inappropriate. Other bhikkhunis criticized this state of affairs and the story reached the Buddha, who gave permission to the sangha to provide a two-year training in six rules to the sikkhamānās. And he laid down the rule that any bhikkhuni who gives ordination to a sikkhamānā who has not finished this two-year training falls into an offence of expiation.

From this story we see that the novice stage of sikkhamānā already existed. Although such novices had the responsibility to study for two years, some of them didn't and lacked necessary knowledge, and thus their preceptors were criticized. The tradition of the sikkhamānā training was already in place and accords with one of the garudhammas. And it was general knowledge that sikkhamānās should undergo a system of training. As long as people observed this principle and were aware of their responsibility, there was no problem. Only later was it necessary to lay down a firm regulatory standard to ensure that this principle was upheld.

Later, when the sangha expanded and grew in members, some individuals deviated from these principles. The Buddha therefore gave more specific instructions, including issuing directives to perform formal acts of the sangha (*saṅghakamma* or *sikkhā-sammati*) to help regulate the community, and, whenever there were no training rules dictating the level of offence in the case of transgression, he laid down rules penalizing those individuals who were not fulfilling their responsibilities. The requirement for both monastic communities to participate in the bhikkhuni ordinations was also a later development.

Therefore, the wording in this garudhamma had to be altered in order that the inherent principle accorded with the existing

¹ Vin. IV. 318-19.

circumstances—that the wording matched the newly formulated regulations that were connected to each issue.

Let us look once more at the explanations that the Buddha gave to Ven. Ānanda. He said that the fact that women go forth and are ordained is a cause for the Buddhist teachings (*brahmacariya*) to not last long, similar to how a family with many women and few men is more easily overrun by bandits. He presented other similes, indicating that Buddhism will be weakened, impaired, and unstable. Instead of lasting one thousand years, the true Dhamma will last only five hundred years. The Buddha thus laid down the eight garudhammas, similar to damming up a large reservoir, preventing the water from escaping. The teachings will thus be secure and last a long time.

This means that to prevent the deterioration and shortened lifespan of the true teachings as a consequence of the new circumstances, the Buddha laid down the eight garudhammas as a protective embankment. With such protection the teachings will last for a long time, just like before. The commentaries explain this in the same way, that by establishing the garudhammas as a protection or as a set of boundaries, the holy life will last one thousand years, as before.

If one looks only at the text, the garudhammas are quite tough on the bhikkhunis. But a wider perspective reveals that the Buddha most likely considered the serious matters connected to the social conventions of that time, and was trying to prevent a negative impact on the budding Buddhist religion. In order to do this, in relation to the already established bhikkhu order, he gave a status to the bhikkhunis which, from the view of the external, wider society, was similar to the status that women had generally in society.

Put simply, the Buddha's first priority was to ensure the stability of the bhikkhu sangha. Whatever progress had already been made should be secured. He didn't want this new element which was not yet stable to lead to the deterioration or weakening of that which was just beginning to grow strong. Instead, the Buddha focused on this as

a starting point, an opportunity for the women to generate acceptance and respect in the wider society, and to then gradually be elevated in stature.

As I said before, the society at that time did not accept an elevated status for women in general social positions. Especially in the domain of religion, in which people emphasized the divine and sacred, women were excluded and did not play a leading role. Even worse, women were often viewed as debasing what is holy. Buddhism was already strongly going against the stream of social ideas and conventions in many different areas, including giving women more dignity and honour. It was not yet time to create another issue that would generate a violent reaction.

When women were first ordained, the emphasis was on giving them an opportunity to flourish. The intention was not to change or make an impact on society. Since society in general did not respect women as renunciants, the garudhammas gave the appearance to people that the nuns were like other women, even though they were given an exceptional degree of dignity.

The essential factor which affected the external society was the overt relationship and status between the genders in various monastic and religious communities. The external society took its cue on this matter according to how general members of the clergy dictated it. The Buddha gave important consideration to this conventional form to the extent that he made it the subject of the first garudhamma, which dictates that no matter how long a bhikkhuni has been ordained, it is her obligation to pay respects to any bhikkhu.

This is made clear when Ven. Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī at some point after her ordination asked Ven. Ānanda to pass on the request to the Buddha that bhikkhus and bhikkhunis pay respects according to seniority. The Buddha refused this request, reasoning in this way: ‘Ānanda, there is no way, there is no chance, that the Tathāgata would give permission for bowing to, getting up to receive, folding the hands

in respectful salutation, or paying homage to women. This is because these members of other sects, whose Dhamma is poorly expounded,¹ do not bow, get up to receive, fold the hands in respectful salutation, or pay homage to women. How could the Tathāgata give permission for bowing to, getting up to receive, folding the hands in respectful salutation, or paying homage to women?² Furthermore, the Buddha laid down a rule prohibiting the monks from paying respects to women. And as I noted before, the Buddha here used the term *mātugāma* ('woman') as a general term to encompass all women; he didn't use the term 'bhikkhunī.'

¹ *Durakkhāta-dhamma*: opposite to *svākkhāta-dhamma* ('well-expounded').

² Vin. II. 257-8.

The Ordination of Bhikkhunis¹

Establishing a Firm Basis of Knowledge

Dr. Martin: Some of these questions address the same issues but from a different perspective.

The first question is about a letter which a monk once sent to you, in which he writes that there is no decree by the Buddha rescinding the right of the bhikkhus to ordain bhikkhunis, which means that bhikkhus still have the authority to ordain bhikkhunis. From what I can see, many academics argue along this same line of reasoning. How do you view this question?

Phra Payutto: Before I answer I ask that we all establish ourselves in a correct attitude before debating these issues. This consideration, engagement, and discussion should be seen as a mutual effort—we are helping one another. The purpose here is not to find weak points in someone else's arguments. Instead we view these issues as shared challenges and together we look for proper ways to deal with them.

¹ An interview with Phra Payutto at Wat Nyanavesakavan on 28th August 2008; part 2 of the interview 'The Ordination of Bhikkhunis' by Dr. Martin Seeger.

Establishing the correct attitude is vital. We reflect on how we are faced with a common problem, and after understanding the nature of the problem we ask how we can collectively solve the problem. We can distinguish three stages of such a discussion:

1. Presenting facts: we present the facts about this issue, that is, of bhikkhuni ordinations. We ask: 'What principles did the Buddha lay down?' 'What are the teachings the Buddha gave on this issue?' 'How did he present these teachings?' 'How have these teachings been observed in the past?' 'How did these principles historically develop?' We discuss all of the facts, the information, the evidence that we can find on these teachings and their historical development.

When discussing the facts we try as much as possible not to confuse the issue by adding our own desires or wishes to the discussion. We try and keep this discussion as clear and objective as possible. When some people hear me speaking on doctrinal matters they think that this is my opinion. My personal opinions, however, are a separate issue. In such circumstances I am trying to explain the particulars of this issue according to the facts—to the Buddha's teachings. I try and keep personal opinions out of the discussion, except where there may be some ambiguous matters and I present some theories or explanations which may be influenced by personal opinion. But this is different from adding personal opinions out of desire for a specific conclusion.

2. Expressing our wishes: we express our specific wishes. For example, one has the wish for women to be ordained as bhikkhunis. At the moment there are only Mahayana bhikkhunis, but one wishes for women to be able to ordain as Theravada bhikkhunis. One is thus looking for a way to restore the Theravada bhikkhuni order. (It is valid to have this be the first stage of the discussion, before presenting the facts.)

At this point we connect our wishes to the available facts. For example, one knows that one wishes for women to be ordained as bhikkhunis. This is possible, but at the moment only Mahayana

bhikkhuni ordinations are widely recognized as authentic. One wants, however, for women to be ordained as Theravada bhikkhunis, which at one time was possible, but the bhikkhuni lineage died out. So we ask, according to the facts and according to the teachings, is it possible to reinstate the Theravada bhikkhuni order? We then check the facts closely.

Again, when we discuss the facts we try as much as possible not to have the discussion be adulterated by personal opinions based on desire; we try and keep the facts as pure as possible.

3. Making a decision or coming to an agreement: once we have expressed our wishes and examined the facts, we look to see if our wishes can be met according to these facts. And regardless whether the outcome is favourable to us or not, we need to make a decision. This is the third step.

Having reached this third step, one is faced with various options, for example:

- If our wishes accord with the existing principles, the matter is solved.
- If our wishes are in conflict with the existing principles, we accept this and let the matter go.
- If the existing principles do not support our wishes but we do not want to accept this and still want to go ahead, we may ask: ‘Shall I change the existing principles in order to satisfy my wishes?’
- If we do not want to alter the existing principles but we still want to do something, we ask whether there are alternative solutions.

It is important to distinguish between these different stages. Otherwise things get confused—when someone is speaking about facts, we then think they are expressing an opinion. We should try and be clear about these different stages (here I have reordered them):

1. In this matter my wishes are such.
2. The facts on this matter are such.
3. Whether the facts match my wishes or not, how shall I proceed?

At this point there are five more factors which help as a preparation for such a discussion:

1. To clearly determine and identify the issues to be discussed.

2. To establish one's mind in wholesomeness: that is, one aims for a viable solution to this matter. If one wishes to restore the Theravada bhikkhuni order, which has passed away, one inquires if this is possible. One acknowledges that a solution needs to be found as a collective effort, with the participation of others.

3. To know the teachings on the monastic discipline: this is similar to recognizing how state laws must be clear and concise, because they apply to everyone in a particular society in the long term. If they are not clear and concise, before long the society will fall into chaos.

In order for laws to be clear and concise, specific and precise wording or text is used so that the laws most accurately convey their objective and purpose. This prevents people from misinterpreting them.

Similarly, in both the bhikkhu and bhikkhuni Pāṭimokkhas almost every training rule has a 'section on classification' (*vibhaṅga*), which explains and defines almost every aspect of the rule, so that the practitioner will understand it and observe it correctly. Here, almost every word in the rule is defined. For example, in each rule the terms *bhikkhu* and/or *bhikkhuni* are defined. Some people may complain that they already know these definitions—why must they be constantly repeated? This is the nature of the formal teachings on the monastic discipline.

These classifications do not merely give one definition for specific words. Say in the case of the word 'bhikkhu,' they provide an entire range of definitions, which a general reader may not think of or remember. After providing these various definitions they then state that in this particular rule the term 'bhikkhu' refers to such and such a person. This is because people have different temperaments, and it prevents those legally-minded people from pointing out ambiguities.

Regardless of how strict, detailed, and careful one is in laying down laws or disciplinary rules, however, this process is confined to language and dependent on the intelligence of those who write these laws. Therefore, in almost all cases it is necessary to interpret these laws. When prescribing the laws, meticulous detail is given to the wording. When interpreting the laws it is thus essential to give great import to the specific wording and text. But as a provision, in case the language used or the astuteness of the person who wrote the law is not completely adequate, it is also important to give attention to the specific law's objective.

In brief, one needs to relate to the Vinaya in this way. We don't use our own desires or opinions as the criteria in making decisions in regard to the Vinaya; we don't allow our desires to distort the objective of the Vinaya. At first, we simply state the disciplinary rules as they exist, following the legal structure of the Vinaya, including an analysis on how various rules are complementary. Finally, we acknowledge that the objective of the various Vinaya rules came from the Buddha himself.

4. To preserve communal harmony: both state laws and monastic disciplinary rules aim to protect members of the community, to benefit the community so that it is peaceful, well-ordered, and stable. This is especially true for the Vinaya. The Buddha repeatedly stressed the importance of communal harmony. An inspection of the monastic discipline should not primarily be a search for personal opportunities. Emphasis should be given to cooperation, communal stability, and the prevention of breaking into factions, by using criteria of righteousness and truthful principles. This is why I earlier encouraged people to have the right attitude—to see this discussion as a cooperative effort, rather than some form of argument on who is right and wrong.

5. To establish a heart of wellbeing towards those who are directly involved: one should try to use one's wisdom and intelligence to consider this matter in the best way possible, without failing those

principles mentioned earlier. One should examine the matter from various angles and consider various solutions, so that those people directly involved, in this case the women who wish to go forth as renunciants, are given justice and truly benefit, especially in the long term.

Establishing a correct attitude is connected to what is truthful in light of the Dhamma. One shouldn't discuss this matter by seeking an advantage over someone else. Otherwise, one faction is bent on refusal and simply repeats, 'No way, no way,' raising objections over trivial matters. Another faction spots any ambiguity and then refers to it in order to obtain their desired goal. This is not the correct way.

The solution to this problem needs to be found collectively. If the general conclusion is that, according to the formal teachings, it isn't possible to simply go ahead with bhikkhuni ordinations, then alternative solutions should be examined. But if one spots a technicality as a possible solution and then grabs onto it in order to push forward, this is not correct. One needs to first look closely at this possible solution, to see if it contains any potential complications.

This matter requires consideration because there isn't a definitive teaching by the Buddha which dispels all doubts. When one spots a possible solution one shouldn't immediately push it forward. One should first consider carefully whether by implementing this solution any harm will fall on the wider community or on the women who wish to be ordained. This requires a collective consideration rather than argumentation and factious debate.

How the Bhikkhuni Ordinations Were Originally Conducted

Returning to the letter you mentioned, I can't remember the name of the monk who wrote it. When I received it I didn't give it much attention, because there have been monks in the past who have shared the same opinion. (It's possible that the first one to raise this issue was

a Western monk—I'm not sure.) I haven't had the time to respond to it at any length. I heard that in the recent meeting with the Dalai Lama some people raised this question. So I have been familiar with it for some time now.

This question has many aspects to consider. The procedure referred to here concerns the Buddha's initial allowance. At that time there were no bhikkhunis and so he allowed the bhikkhus to give bhikkhuni ordination to women.

There is one special case which occurred before this allowance was made. Ven. Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī was ordained by the Buddha himself—she was the only bhikkhuni ordained by the Buddha. Because there were several hundred royal Sakyan women who had accompanied Mahāpajāpatī, the Buddha then gave this allowance: 'Bhikkhus, I allow the bhikkhus to give full ordination to bhikkhunis.'¹ The monks thus gave ordination to those other Sakyan women.

If the Buddha hadn't allowed the bhikkhus to ordain bhikkhunis, who would have been available to perform this task, since there was no pre-existing community of bhikkhunis? This was an obvious and natural solution at this beginning stage. What we need to look at is what sort of system the Buddha laid down once there was a community of bhikkhunis.

Here we may ask whether these first bhikkhuni ordinations during the fifth year of the Buddha's teaching were conducted by a meeting of the monastic community by using the method of three motions followed by a resolution (*ñatti-catuttha-kamma-vācā*). According to the sub-commentaries, the procedure of ordination by taking refuge in the three refuges (*tisarāṇa-gamana*), by which a person was ordained by a single disciple, only occurred in the first year of the Buddha's teaching.

An example of this earlier form of ordination is seen in the story of Rāhula, for whom the 'going for refuge in the three refuges' was used as his novice ordination. Rāhula was ordained as a novice at age seven.

¹ Vin. II. 256-7; *anujānāmi bhikkhave bhikkhūhi bhikkhuniyo upasampādetuṃ*.

The Buddha left the palace and practised austerities for six years. This indicates that this event occurred soon after the Buddha's awakening, during the first year of the Buddha's teaching.

The ordination by taking the three refuges (*tisarāna-gamanūpasampadā*), in which individual disciples could bestow ordination, therefore occurred only in the first year. After that the Buddha allowed the monks to give ordinations by an act of three motions followed by a resolution, in a formal meeting of the sangha. When the Buddha made this allowance he forbade the monks from ordaining people by the taking of the three refuges. Ordinations after this point were to be conducted as a formal act of the community.¹

Before Rāhula was ordained as a novice, Ven. Sāriputta asked the Buddha how this ordination should be conducted, since Rāhula was only seven years old. The Buddha told him to use the procedure of 'going for refuge in the three refuges,' which had been annulled as a way to ordain bhikkhus. This is considered to have taken place during the first year of the Buddha's teaching.

This is related to the matter at hand: if in the fifth year the ordination of monks was performed by three motions followed by a resolution, then this procedure would have also been used for ordaining the bhikkhunis. Unless a separate or special clause was laid down in the bhikkhuni training rules, the matters prescribed for the bhikkhus are also applicable to the bhikkhunis. There was no need to repeat these prescriptions for the bhikkhunis. This is similar for the bhikkhus—many technical matters concerning the bhikkhunis also automatically apply to them.

In relation to subsequent bhikkhuni ordinations (after the royal Sakyan women were ordained), we can assume (it is probably too strong to say 'conclude') that some training rules or a code of conduct was prescribed for the bhikkhus regarding this matter.

¹ Vin. I. 56.

We can also assume that from the very beginning the bhikkhus used their own system of ordination when ordaining bhikkhunis. In the fifth year the bhikkhus were ordained using the method of three motions followed by a resolution, and they thus used this method with the bhikkhunis.

The reason I say ‘assume’ is that in the Buddha’s allowance for monks to ordain bhikkhunis there is technically no specific mention that these ordinations be conducted by the sangha—the wording simply says that the bhikkhus may perform these ordinations. Here, people may come up with all sorts of ideas. For example, one may speculate that at first any monk could give ordination to women, without the need for a formal act of the community, which may have developed later. Because there are no teachings by the Buddha on these details to refer to, such speculations can go on forever.

It is thus fair to conclude that if the first bhikkhuni ordinations occurred in the fifth year of the Buddha’s teaching, at which time bhikkhu ordinations were conducted by the community, the bhikkhuni ordinations would have likewise been conducted by the community, since the training rules on this matter are complementary for both the monks and the nuns.

Allowing the bhikkhus to give ordination to bhikkhunis necessarily required an ordination by the bhikkhu sangha alone, because there were no existing bhikkhunis to participate in this procedure. And the term ‘bhikkhus’ here does not imply that one or a few monks could confer this ordination by themselves, as was once the case in the ordination by taking the three refuges. Rather, it was an ordination conducted by the entire bhikkhu sangha, in the same way as bhikkhu ordinations were performed. So we can conclude that the bhikkhu sangha performed these bhikkhuni ordinations by way of three motions followed by a resolution.

The Vinaya Piṭaka then recounts developments from this point on. It says that as part of the ordination procedure the monks asked the

women candidates about their personal attributes, some of which are connected with very personal matters of gender. The women were so embarrassed by these questions that they were unable to answer. The Buddha thus laid down a rule having the bhikkhunis conduct these ordinations on their own. Once this procedure was complete a second ordination would be conducted by the monks, thus giving rise to two stages.

There is some doubt concerning at which point the bhikkhunis participated in these ordinations. We don't know whether they took part in the ordinations before the Buddha laid down the two-stage procedure.

One possibility is that in the early ordinations both the bhikkhu and the bhikkhuni sanghas participated. But because the bhikkhus led the proceedings and were the ones who posed the questions to female candidates concerning the 'things acting as an obstacle' (*antarāyika-dhammā*; questions on personal attributes), the problem mentioned above arose. Originally, bhikkhunis may have sat in on the ordinations but they were not the ones to ask these questions. For this reason the ordination procedure was divided into two stages, beginning with the bhikkhunis posing these personal questions and then followed by a second ordination with the bhikkhu sangha.

Alternatively, the bhikkhunis were not part of the first ordinations. The bhikkhus conducted the proceedings alone, but after the problem of asking personal questions arose the bhikkhunis were given a role in the ordination process, giving rise to the two-stage ordination.

In any case, according to the Buddha's words it appears that the latter scenario is true: that only the bhikkhus conducted these ordinations for women until the aforementioned problem arose. The Buddha thus had women candidates ordain first with the bhikkhuni sangha, and when this stage was complete they were given a second ordination with the bhikkhus. For this reason it is called an ordination 'in both communities' (*ubhato-saṅgha*): in both the bhikkhuni and

bhikkhu sanghas.

The agreed-upon standard was thus that women candidates who were ‘pure’—who possessed the proper personal attributes and who were formally acknowledged as such—were considered ‘ordained’ vis-à-vis the bhikkhuni sangha.

It is clear from the Buddha’s words that both communities were involved, but at this point the bhikkhus did not participate in the first part of the ordination. Women were ordained solely by the bhikkhunis and then, when they were considered ‘complete,’ they went to the bhikkhus for the second stage of the ordination.

The role by bhikkhus in the ordination of women thus gradually became less pronounced. At first, because there were no bhikkhunis, the bhikkhus had to conduct the ordinations. But now that a bhikkhuni sangha was created, the bhikkhunis conducted the first stage, with the bhikkhus conducting a secondary stage.

Later another matter arose. A woman who had just completed the first stage of ordination with the bhikkhuni sangha wished to then be ordained with the Buddha; she wished to be ordained with the bhikkhu sangha with the Buddha present. She therefore had to travel from the city where she had completed the initial ordination to another city where the Buddha was residing.

The path she had to travel, however, was potentially dangerous, with bandits lying in ambush. The woman was not safe and thus there was an obstacle to her plans. The story reached the Buddha, who then allowed women to be ordained by messenger, that is, in regard to the second stage of ordination with the bhikkhus, women may be ordained by proxy.

Later on stipulations were made as to the characteristics of the messenger: she must be a bhikkhuni and someone who is learned. The woman who is being ordained thus does not need to travel to another town or district. A learned bhikkhuni living in this other town or district is able to act as a representative. She makes an announcement

to the bhikkhus in a formal gathering, saying that such and such a woman has successfully been ordained by the bhikkhunis and requests to be ordained by the bhikkhu sangha. After this announcement has been made and the bhikkhus have considered the matter and accepted this woman, the two-stage ordination is complete.

The role of the bhikkhus in this procedure thus gradually decreased, and the first stage of the ordination conducted by the bhikkhunis became more important and decisive. The second stage became merely an announcement, stating that a woman candidate had successfully been ordained. The primary acceptance of women into the sangha was made by the bhikkhunis, who then announced this decision to the bhikkhus and had them give their acceptance as a secondary endorsement.

The Original Allowance of Bhikkhus Giving Sole Ordination to Women

Now that we have discussed some of the circumstances around the first bhikkhuni ordinations let us return to the question at hand. Because the Buddha originally allowed the bhikkhus to ordain bhikkhunis, and this allowance was never formally rescinded, in the case that there are no bhikkhunis is it possible for the bhikkhus to conduct these ordinations alone? There are several aspects to this matter to consider:

1. It is true that the Buddha's allowance for bhikkhus to ordain bhikkhunis was never rescinded. This is because from that time onward, up to the present day, bhikkhus are required for the ordination of bhikkhunis. If this allowance had been rescinded the bhikkhus could play no part in these ordinations. Their participation is still needed in the second stage of the ordination.

The problem lies in that the Buddha added additional regulations, requiring the participation of the bhikkhuni sangha and the ordination

in both the bhikkhuni and bhikkhu sanghas. Would it now be valid for the monks to perform this ordination by themselves?

2. In the formal explanation (*vibhaṅga*) of the bhikkhuni training rules laid down by the Buddha there is this definition: ‘The term *bhikkhuni* refers to a woman who has been ordained in both sanghas.’

This poses a problem in that, if bhikkhunis are ordained without a bhikkhuni sangha present, none of these training rules will formally apply to them or be legally binding.

3. In reference to Vinaya rules it is not just a matter of whether a regulation has been repealed or not. What is more common than the annulment of a rule is that it is amended or revised. This is similar to general principles of law: if a law has been revised, the more recent version is considered effectively to be an annulment of those aspects found in preceding versions which are contradictory.

In the two-fold division (*ubhato-vibhaṅga*) this matter is clear because the progression of this formal procedure is documented. When the Buddha prescribes a specific rule and then later makes revisions to it, the original rule is called the ‘source regulation’ (*mūla-paññatti*) and the newer version is called a ‘supplementary regulation’ (*anupaññatti*). There may be numerous revisions, and the most recent version of the rule is binding. It is not necessary to say that previous versions have been annulled. This is a general standard in the Vinaya.

In the Khandhaka¹ the various Vinaya rules are referred to by the term *anujānāmi*, which means they are an ‘allowance’ by the Buddha, which is the same as saying that they are ‘prescriptions’ (*paññatti*) by the Buddha. In these texts the various rules and regulations are documented according to specific circumstances. For example, because of such and such an incident, such and such a rule was laid down; later, another incident occurred in reference to this subject and a newer regulation was laid down. The monastic sangha would then adapt and practise according to the latest version of the rule. This is the same as

¹ [The second book of the Vinaya Piṭaka containing the Mahāvagga and the Cullavagga.]

that mentioned above: the monks had to practise according to the new prescription; they couldn't validly follow the older version any longer.

In relation to the subject at hand, because originally there were no bhikkhunis the Buddha permitted the bhikkhus to conduct bhikkhuni ordinations. Later, when a bhikkhuni sangha existed and it was inconvenient for the bhikkhus to continue conducting the first stage of the bhikkhuni ordinations (one can say this is the essential part of the ordination procedure), the Buddha prescribed that women candidates be ordained first with the bhikkhuni sangha. After that they then ask for final confirmation from the bhikkhu sangha.

After this point both the bhikkhu and bhikkhuni sanghas were obliged to follow this prescribed procedure—they couldn't return to the older version. And naturally, any later regulations laid down by the Buddha on this subject conformed to this newer system of bhikkhuni ordinations.

The reason why the Buddha didn't rescind the allowance for bhikkhus to ordain bhikkhunis is straightforward: the bhikkhus were still required to complete the bhikkhuni ordinations. The question under consideration here is whether the Buddha's statement—that women should first be ordained by the bhikkhunis and when they were considered 'pure' in this respect they should then be ordained by the bhikkhus—is a revision of the original regulation.

For clarity, let us set the two allowances side-by-side:

The first allowance (before there were any bhikkhunis, i.e., the allowance to create a bhikkhuni sangha):

'Bhikkhus, I allow the bhikkhus to give ordination to bhikkhunis.'

*Anujānāmi bhikkhave bhikkhūhi bhikkhuniyo upasampādetuṃ.*¹

The subsequent allowance (after the bhikkhuni sangha was formed; i.e., setting down the two-stage ordination procedure):

¹ Vin. II. 257.

‘Bhikkhus, I allow a woman who requests ordination, who has been ordained in one community—who is pure in regard to the bhikkhuni sangha—to be ordained in the bhikkhu sangha.’

*Anujānāmi bhikkhave ekato-upasampannāya bhikkhunīsaṅghe visuddhāya bhikkhusaṅghe upasampādetuṃ.*¹

Is this second allowance a formal revision of the first one? Let me leave this question for now and we will come back to it later. Let me repeat that, besides following the key principle in the Vinaya of aiming for cooperation, harmony, and unity, any decisions on formal acts of the monastic sangha should be done in the spirit of openness and goodwill—not out of oneupmanship or by winning an argument.

Reverting to the Original Allowance of Bhikkhus Giving Sole Ordination to Bhikkhunis

To be thorough, let us examine what effects there would be if one were to interpret that the Buddha did not specifically rescind the allowance for bhikkhus to ordain bhikkhunis, and therefore it is possible for bhikkhus to still conduct these ordinations, without the participation of a bhikkhuni sangha.

First, this may cause confusion for the laypeople. Even if the Buddha didn’t formally rescind the original allowance, they will wonder whether these two provisions by the Buddha don’t in themselves contradict one another. The first regulation allowed the bhikkhus to complete the bhikkhuni ordinations by themselves; the second regulation states that the women candidates must first be considered pure by the bhikkhuni sangha, before being ordained by the bhikkhus. Does this mean that both procedures are valid?

If one interprets that the first procedure wasn’t repealed and that it is thus possible to choose between the two procedures, one encounters the following problems:

¹ Vin. II. 271.

If one asks which of these two procedures is easier, it is obvious that being ordained solely by the bhikkhu sangha is easier. For example, it is easier to find bhikkhus than it is to find bhikkhunis. If one has the choice, who is going to be bothered with going through the two-step procedure?

Here, already things get confusing and untidy, because each individual will simply choose which procedure is easier or more convenient.

If both procedures are valid then there will be two kinds of bhikkhunis: those who have been ordained by a single sangha and those who have been ordained by both sanghas. Won't this cause all sorts of confusion? There won't be a single standard.

Moreover, there will be a conflict with the Vinaya itself. As mentioned earlier, when subsequent training rules were laid down for the bhikkhunis, these regulations contain the formal definition of a bhikkhuni as a 'woman who has been ordained by both sanghas.' This definition is found throughout the Vinaya, and it will conflict with ordinations conducted by the bhikkhu sangha alone.

Let us look at what will happen if one concludes that both of these procedures are still valid:

In the Buddha's time it is clear that there were both types of bhikkhunis, but there was a clear system in line with chronological events and circumstances. There was the first group of bhikkhunis ordained by the bhikkhu sangha alone and there were those bhikkhunis ordained later who were ordained by both communities. These two generations of bhikkhunis were clearly distinguished. There are no examples of later bhikkhunis having the choice of one procedure over the other. There was a distinct uniformity.

Let us conjecture how things would proceed if one were to conclude that the Buddha's original allowance was not annulled. One will thus practise according to this original allowance, without needing the participation of bhikkhunis as decreed in the second

procedure, because one wishes to restore the bhikkhuni sangha at a time when no bhikkhunis exist.

If one follows through with this there will be bhikkhunis who have been ordained solely by the bhikkhus. The question to ask is whether in subsequent ordinations this first group of bhikkhunis will then participate in the ordination procedure according to the two-stage regulation prescribed in the Vinaya. Or will ordinations continue to be conducted solely by the bhikkhus?

Here, both alternatives will face difficulties:

If the bhikkhus continue to give sole ordination this would be tantamount to the bhikkhus seizing control over the ordination procedure and the role of the bhikkhunis in ordinations would become obsolete.

There are certainly people who would reply that they don't want it to be this way, because the ordination of bhikkhunis by the bhikkhus here is simply to revive the bhikkhuni order—it would be a one-off event specific to this historical point in time. From that point onward the bhikkhuni ordinations should proceed according to the Buddha's prescriptions of having both sanghas conduct the ordinations.

Remember that at this time the Buddha is no longer alive, yet here we are proposing to take charge of and make decisions about the Buddha's regulations in regard to the Vinaya. In doing so we need to ask whether we can manage this task—will we be able to come to conclusive decisions and agreements, and will we be willing to listen to one another?

The proposal is to temporarily suspend the rule to have bhikkhunis be ordained by both sanghas. Instead, one would apply the Buddha's initial allowance to have the bhikkhus give sole ordination in order to revive the bhikkhuni order, but only with the first group or generation of bhikkhunis. From that point on any woman who wishes to take bhikkhuni ordination must first be ordained by this newly established bhikkhuni sangha, according to the Buddha's prescription to be

ordained by both sanghas.

It is then possible that another group of women, who may be supported by a particular group of bhikkhus, will say: 'You yourselves acknowledge that this initial allowance by the Buddha hasn't been annulled. We are not interested in being ordained by this newly formed bhikkhuni sangha. We propose to suspend the Buddha's regulation for women to be ordained in both sanghas indefinitely.' These women then take ordination with another group of monks, and they claim to be a genuine new order of bhikkhunis, or at least they separate themselves from the other nuns.

As a consequence all sorts of problems will arise. First of all the bhikkhus will splinter off into different factions. And the women who ordain as bhikkhunis may also break up into different groups, without there being any unifying control. (It is also possible that as a result monks and nuns will then seek to temporarily suspend other regulations laid down by the Buddha.)

From the perspective of rights, if the bhikkhus were now to give sole ordination to the bhikkhunis, this is tantamount to claiming a right that belongs to the bhikkhunis. If bhikkhus go ahead and claim this right, some of the them may give reasons for why single-sangha ordinations should be continued. They would then appropriate a right that belongs to the bhikkhunis. In the end, however, going ahead with single-sangha ordinations is an act of taking charge and making decisions about regulations laid down by the Buddha.

If such ordinations were to take place in Thailand, for example, besides the monastic sangha splitting off into different factions, there would be two distinct bhikkhuni sanghas: a group of bhikkhunis who have been ordained by bhikkhus alone, and another group who have been ordained by both sanghas.

If a group of women were to take bhikkhuni ordination in Thailand, surely they would not want later groups of bhikkhunis to be ordained solely by bhikkhus, right? But who would be able to control this? It is

possible that later generations of women would simply continue with the single-sangha ordinations—there would be no way to settle this matter.

Apart from there being two kinds of bhikkhunis—those ordained by a single sangha and those ordained by both sanghas—there would also arise an unmanageable situation of factionalism. If things didn't descend into a form of chaos then at least there would be a lack of stability in the sangha.

We wish for the monastic sangha to be stable, united, and harmonious, both the bhikkhu sangha which remains and also a possible future bhikkhuni sangha. If the bhikkhuni order is to be reestablished, it should be done on a solid and secure foundation, so that we can be confident that it will be well-integrated and last a long time.

We need to consider how to prevent any harm and to solve these issues. We acknowledge that things as they stand still have faults and drawbacks. But we shouldn't be hasty in demanding that things be a certain way. Perhaps we need to first stay composed and be patient. We should examine whether our proposals will give rise to problems. We need to think about the advantages and disadvantages for those women who wish to be ordained and also for the general Buddhist community.

The teachings in reference to ordination are vital, because those women who wish to be ordained want the procedure to be complete. Perhaps this is not true for everyone, but I understand that a considerable number of women candidates wish for the ordination to be pure in light of the Vinaya. They aren't simply seeking ordination by any means possible. Therefore, one must first discuss matters clearly in respect to the formal teachings.

If women feel that their ordination was clearly valid, they will be confident and at ease. But if after being ordained they see flaws and defects in the ordination procedure, they won't feel delighted and at

ease. As this is a religious matter it requires a sense of purity and completeness. It is for this reason that we spend time discussing the formal teachings with clarity, so that we can discern what is possible, what is not possible, and what is the potential harm in acting in a particular way.

From the point of view of desire, it is clear that we want women to be able to be ordained as renunciants or to benefit in the greatest way from the Buddhist teachings. As the formal teachings are this way, what are we going to do? Taking into account the formal teachings, what are the consequences—positive and negative—of the various alternatives? Should we follow the Buddha's prescriptions to the letter or should we make adaptations?

I think it's best that these deliberations be made by the collective monastic community. The decision should not be made by an individual. I don't like to see various factions arguing over what they think is right. It is important that we begin by being clear about the commonly held formal teachings. Then we can make a decision, whether it is to follow the regulations preserved in the Vinaya or not. The decision-making is the next stage. This way things will progress well.

Khun Martin, do you have any more questions about the formal teachings? From what we have talked about so far, is it clear that if people make decisions over these matters unilaterally there are bound to be problems?

Looking for a Way Forward

Dr. Martin: Yes, this is clear. As far as I can see there are many people who believe that bhikkhunis are necessary or would be greatly beneficial to propagate Buddhism and to support the Dhamma practice of women in general. There is occasionally the problem that laywomen are afraid to ask specific questions directly from bhikkhus. As for

Buddhism on the whole, the presence of bhikkhunis may have an enormous benefit. I would like to know how Tahn Chao Khun Ajahn would respond to these points.

Phra Payutto: This is a problem in regard to our desires—it is not a problem in respect to the formal teachings. As far as the formal teachings go, I think we've covered these matters quite clearly.

In regard to our desires, we need to make a decision. If things were perfect we would have bhikkhunis and the fourfold sangha would be complete. Women would then have a greater opportunity. But if we conclude that bhikkhuni ordinations are at odds with the formal teachings, what are we going to do? Will we act in order to obtain what we desire, even if this means being at fault in regard to the teachings, or are we willing to forfeit our desires in order to protect the formal teachings? This is another matter to consider. If we decide to protect the teachings then it is likely that our desires will have to remain unfulfilled.

There are other potential problems related to the formal teachings. For example, if the teachings conflict with our desires, yet we don't want to accept this situation and choose to alter the regulations, will this circumvention or alteration be successful? But let's leave that question for the time being.

Let us look at the benefits. If there were to be a bhikkhuni sangha this would be helpful. This is evident from looking at the time of the Buddha, when a bhikkhuni order was established to assist women. Many people benefited from these nuns. This is looking at the situation from a positive side. But here the matter is complicated—we should address it with understanding.

When talking about this subject at length it is important not to confuse the issues. The question here is not whether it is possible to ordain bhikkhunis. If that were the question then the answer is simply, 'Yes, it's possible'—that is, it's possible to be ordained as a Mahayana

bhikkhuni. The problem we are faced with is whether it is possible to restore the Theravada bhikkhuni order. It is important to grasp and distinguish the specific issues. There are existing opportunities for women to live the holy life—they do have some choices.

Let us go back to your original question.

Dr. Martin: Yes, I was asking about the potential benefits of bhikkhunis spreading the Dhamma and supporting Dhamma practice.

Phra Payutto: It is certain that if there were a bhikkhuni sangha the benefits for women and from women would increase. Here we are examining whether our wishes are in unison with the formal teachings—do these teachings permit us to fulfil our wishes? If they do not will we give precedence to the teachings or to our wishes, and which of these two options has the least disadvantages? At the moment we can't have everything we want, so we consider the available options which have fewer disadvantages and greater benefits.

It is obvious there would be benefits to having a bhikkhuni sangha. But the question here is whether this is possible or whether such a sangha should be established. This is directly linked to the consensus of the wider monastic sangha, which needs to consider this matter. Can you please read out your question again so that I can see if there are other points to address?

Dr. Martin: There are many people who believe that bhikkhunis are necessary or would be greatly beneficial to propagate Buddhism and to support Dhamma practice, especially of women. There is occasionally the problem that laywomen are afraid to ask specific questions directly from bhikkhus.

Phra Payutto: The same was true at the Buddha's time. I don't think I have to say more on this question. The reason for establishing a bhikkhuni order would be to fulfil our aims and wishes. This is clear. Obviously it would be good to have bhikkhunis—we would like to have

bhikkhunis because of the benefits that they could generate. But we need to return to the formal teachings to see if they permit such ordinations. But the more we talk about this, the more we get stuck at the same points. The solution to this problem probably lies with other options. Who knows, some of these alternatives may even prove to be the best way forward.

Dr. Martin: This may be connected to the next question. Tahn Chao Khun Ajahn has said in the past that girls are able to be ordained as young, white-robed nuns (*mae chi*). And similarly, it may be possible to create a new institution for those women who wish to be renunciants. Can you elaborate on this? What methods or forms can you think of for women so that they have an institution or an environment that is most conducive to Dhamma practice? It is important that such an institution be part of the Theravada tradition and that it gives the laypeople the feeling that these new kinds of ‘bhikkhunis’ are a field of merit similar to the present-day bhikkhus and to the bhikkhunis in the Tipiṭaka. Is it possible for you to describe such a system in a concrete way?

Phra Payutto: Here, we can take examples from the past. In the case that the formal teachings do not accommodate our wishes, what can we do that doesn’t involve altering or clashing with the teachings? What are our various options for obtaining what we seek?

I have suggested before that Buddhists in the past may have encountered this same problem and that they established the *mae chi* order as a solution. There are no historical accounts of a bhikkhuni order existing in Thailand. The closest thing that exists is a legend describing the time when Ven. Soṇa and Ven. Uttara first came to Suvarnabhumi. According to this legend there was a terrible child-eating *yakkha*¹ rampant in the land, and these two monks were able to

¹ A class of non-human beings. The term can be translated as ‘spirit,’ ‘demon,’ ‘deity,’ ‘ogre,’ etc.

subdue it. The people thus developed great faith in Buddhism and thousands of them, both men and women, went forth as renunciants. There is, however, no trace of a bhikkhuni order existing in Suvannabhumi or in Thailand.

If we accept that bhikkhuni ordinations conflict with the formal teachings, which we don't want to alter, what are the alternatives, since we want women to gain the greatest benefit from the Buddhist tradition? Thai Buddhists in the past probably faced the same question and thus created the *mae chi* order.

The history of the *mae chi* order is not clear, although there are accounts from more recent times of the reputation of *mae chis* being very tainted. But don't forget that the history of the bhikkhu order is also full of corruption—the history is pretty heavy on both sides, to the point that there have been many stories of monks and *mae chis* misbehaving with one another. From one perspective this can be a useful reminder that if there isn't a strict system in place regulating the relationship between the monks and the nuns things will become disordered and chaotic.

The historical growth and decline of the *mae chi* order is unclear, but its inception must have been well-intentioned, with a wish to establish a way of life for women based on the principles of solitude and renunciation. We are unable to determine what status the *mae chi* were accorded when this institution was first established or to know to what extent they were venerated. But at the very least, this is an example from the past when people sought a viable solution for women who wished to live as renunciants.

Assuming that the *mae chi* order was a solution chosen by people in the past, should we rejuvenate or earnestly support this order? Or are we faced with the impediment that the state of this order as it remains today has degenerated too far? If so we can establish a new institution, something which has been previously attempted in Thailand. In some places women have been ordained and wear the ochre robes. They are

called *silacārini*, which means a ‘woman who practises virtue’ or a ‘woman who upholds moral principles.’ This is an attempt to find a solution. The attempts, however, have been irregular, made by particular individuals or monasteries. The wider, collective sangha has yet to consider this matter. If this matter is considered by the wider sangha, is it possible to establish a new system, institution, or organization for women?

On a related subject, at Amaravati Monastery near London, which is part of the Luang Por Chah lineage, the community has come up with a solution. I don’t know how far this has developed, but it is not a bhikkhuni order.

Dr. Martin: I went to Amaravati Monastery last year. In my view the nuns are similar to bhikkhunis. They wear brown robes, wear an outer robe (*saṅghāṭī*), and chant together with the monks in the Uposatha Hall. When listening to the chanting one hears both male and female voices. At the meals the food is first offered to the bhikkhus, then to the nuns, who are called *sīladharā*,¹ and third in line are the male novices (*sāmaṇera*).² When I was staying at Amaravati, for me the siladhara were like bhikkhunis, just with a different name. One can’t tell from appearances that they aren’t bhikkhunis. And as far as I understand they have written up a new code of training which is called the *Sīladharā Vinaya Training*, based on the ten precepts, the seventy-five training rules (*sekhiya-vatta*), and the bhikkhuni Pāṭimokkha. They don’t use all of these rules, but follow this principle. I understand that this code is not yet complete, but in the *Sīladharā Vinaya Training* they explain which training rules and observances they follow.³

Phra Payutto: This is one good example. The siladhara accept that they have not been ordained as bhikkhunis. Tahn Chao Khun Rājasumedhācariya (Ajahn Sumedho) has thus said that his community

¹ [Usually written without the diacritical marks, as siladhara.]

² [Often spelt without diacritics, as samanera.]

³ See Appendix 4.

doesn't have any bhikkhunis, but in order to provide an opportunity for women he found a solution by establishing the order of siladhara. I think this is suitable and exemplary.

Having established such an order one can then consider the opportunities provided by the Vinaya. This is one example of a consensus made by a particular monastic community, but the agreement was not made on a global level, by all Theravada communities in the world. Having said this, if the entire Thai Theravada tradition agreed to adopt such a system for the ordination of women, Amaravati could act as a prototype.

Although I'm not sure I remember correctly, I once came across an article by Tahn Chao Khun Rājasumedhācariya in which he describes how the nuns at Amaravati feel at ease. They accept that they are unable to be ordained completely as original bhikkhunis, but they are content. It is as if a nuns' order has been reestablished as present circumstances allow, a decision which was supported by the monastic community.

From one angle things are obstructed and not one hundred percent perfect, but from another there is an opportunity, because if women are ordained fully as bhikkhunis (in the complete sense) they must practise completely according to the bhikkhuni Pāṭimokkha. Once one establishes an order like that of the siladhara, however, one needn't adopt those training rules or precepts which are extremely difficult or nearly impossible for contemporary women to uphold. One's opportunities are thus enhanced. One is able to select a discipline and choose training rules which are suitable to modern requirements and useful to this day and age. Although one loses something, one also gains. This is one option.

This is an example, an alternative, which has been given concrete shape. As for other options, we can discuss those at another time. As far as these matters concern the Dalai Lama, how have things progressed?

Dr. Martin: As far as I know there was recently a three-day conference.¹ On the last day the Dalai Lama stated that he is not a Buddha and therefore cannot do anything unilaterally.² He said, however, that the sangha as a whole can make decisions and revisions.

Phra Payutto: In our case I wouldn't consider our actions revisions, but rather that we have the opportunity to establish a new institution of nuns. I wouldn't call these nuns bhikkhunis, because bhikkhunis are tied to the regulations set down by the Buddha. We are not changing or modifying the bhikkhuni order, but instead we can create a new form with the aim of offering an optimum opportunity to women.

Dr. Martin: Considering the state of Thai society today, what do you think the chances are for creating such an institution?

Phra Payutto: I'm not sure because we haven't yet begun this process. People's attitudes are not the same as they used to be. The same is true for people's understanding and willingness.

Most people these days don't have an understanding of matters concerning bhikkhus and bhikkhunis. There is a lot of confusion. This lack of understanding leads to divergent opinions. Often people's ideas are simply based on hearsay. If we were to implement a new institution this would require a great deal of explaining. One needs to improve people's knowledge and perspectives based on proper understanding.

There need to be certain principles which people understand. If the sangha were to come to a consensus, it would be necessary to spend time speaking to the laypeople. The laity are familiar with the present system and have particular customs. When something new is implemented some people have trouble accepting this. But Thai people

¹ This was an international conference on the role of women in the monastic sangha which took place in Hamburg, Germany in 2007. See the appendix: '1st International Congress on Buddhist Women's Role in the Sangha: Bhikshuni Vinaya and Ordination Lineages.'

² See the appendix mentioned in the previous footnote.

are fairly adaptable and adopt new things easily. Sometimes it seems difficult in theory, but when it comes down to it the changes are not too hard. It's uncertain.

Dr. Martin: From my experience some *mae chi* are well-respected. Some people say that it doesn't matter whether one is a monk or a nun—one can practise the Dhamma in both circumstances. The problem is that monks can go anywhere in Thailand and they won't go short of food; people will offer them all the necessary requisites. But in regard to a *mae chi*, if she hasn't yet developed any kind of distinction, she may find that no one is interested in her. Monks, on the other hand, inherit institutional charisma. It isn't necessary for someone to ask where they live or with whom they were ordained. The *mae chi*, however, need to face the questions of 'Who are you?' and 'Where were you ordained?' If the laypeople aren't familiar with their answers they may not receive any support. Another example is getting on a bus—sometimes the nuns are given special seats, sometimes not; sometimes they have to pay, other times not.

Phra Payutto: This is also a matter of changes occurring over time, in that the original status of the *mae chi* was not preserved. The state of the *mae chi* order has declined to the point that some of the nuns go out and beg on the streets. There was also a time when people viewed *mae chi* as women who are broken-hearted. It is necessary to restore and maintain a standard for the nuns. The wider society is responsible for this. With the lack of social constraints, some of the women who come to be ordained as *mae chi* do so simply to make a living, which further damages the institution. As a consequence both Buddhism and Thai society fall into decline.

This is the same for the monks. If the monks misbehave, things get desperate; if monks act badly the whole institution declines and the laypeople become critical and cynical. The monks, too, can degenerate, just as they can prosper.

The status of the *mae chi* is not the primary problem, as it is determined by the behaviour of the nuns in this institution. A good foundation exists. If we come to an agreement and set down a good system of practice, and if sincere people come forward to be ordained, the institution will improve on its own. The restoration of this order should not aim at status but rather at quality: of implementing good training and practice, and of achieving benefits for both the individual and society. The increased status of the nuns will result naturally. The vital points are to know the Dhamma well, to have a code of discipline, to have stability, and to not digress from the Buddha's path.

Dr. Martin: From my recent research I see that there are positive improvements. One example is Mae Chi Kaew Sianglam (from Kham Cha-i District, Mukdahan Province), who is an example for women and who is widely recognized as having been an arahant. And in Ratchaburi Province there is an increasing numbers of nunneries which are independent from the monks and where the nuns go on almsround and accept invitations to chant. In Nakhon Ratchasima there is a college for nuns called the Mahapajapati Buddhist College. This shows that there are positive developments. Mae Chi Sansanee is also a good example for many women.

Phra Payutto: It depends on the conduct and practice of individual people and nunneries. Even if a woman is not ordained as a nun and remains a householder, if she practises well and develops knowledge she will be widely respected. Take Indonesia for example, where the bhikkhu order had died out a long time ago. Even now there are many places where there are no bhikkhus. I haven't studied the facts in detail, but from what I have heard the laypeople in some areas perform religious duties in a way similar to the Buddhist monastic community. The laywomen there are not taken lightly—they practise earnestly and are highly respected.

The Buddha praised specific laywomen as can be seen in the record of foremost disciples. The Buddhist assembly contains noble, awakened beings from all walks of life and from both genders. Occasionally the awakened lay disciples have greater spiritual realizations than the bhikkhus, but the outward form of showing respect accords with the conventional status of the individual, for the welfare of the wider community. In people's hearts, however, respect is shown according to someone else's level of realization and purity of mind.

Take for example the layman Citta, who was a non-returner and spiritually more accomplished than many of the bhikkhus. He would bow down and pay respects to the monks, yet on occasion he would explain the Dhamma to the monks. From the perspective of the mind, of spiritual realization, the decisive factor was thus not his outward appearance or conventional identity.

Laypeople are able to attain the fruit of arahantship, although traditionally it is considered that as arahants they must then go forth as renunciants. It is possible to practise for the realization of arahantship as a layperson. It's simply that the environment is not as convenient or conducive for practice; it's difficult to maintain the practice as a layperson. Therefore, people seek out the monastic life, because the way of life of a monk or nun and the surroundings of a monastery are conducive to practice. Whether one is a monk, nun, or layperson, however, is not of essential importance.

Dr. Martin: Thank you so much—I think that is enough for today.

Bhikkhunis and the Garudhammas

The Eight Garudhammas:

1. A bhikkhuni who has been ordained even for a hundred years must bow down, rise up from her seat, salute with hands together, and perform the duties of respect to a bhikkhu even if he has been ordained for only one day. This rule is to be honoured, respected, revered, venerated, never to be transgressed as long as she lives.
2. A bhikkhuni must not spend the Rains in a residence where there is no bhikkhu. This rule is to be honoured....
3. Every fortnight a bhikkhuni should request two things from the bhikkhu sangha: she should ask for the date of the Uposatha day and come for an exhortation. This rule is to be honoured....
4. At the end of the Rains, a bhikkhuni should invite criticism both from the bhikkhu sangha and the bhikkhuni sangha on any of three grounds: what they have seen, what they have heard, what they have suspected....
5. If a bhikkhuni commits a serious offence she must undergo penance for half a month before both assemblies. This rule is to be honoured....

6. A bhikkhuni should request ordination from both sanghas for a sikkhamānā who has trained in the six precepts for two years. This rule is to be honoured....
7. A bhikkhuni must not insult or revile a bhikkhu in any way. This rule is to be honoured....
8. From this day forward, the admonition of a bhikkhu by a bhikkhuni is forbidden, but the admonition of a bhikkhuni by a bhikkhu is not forbidden. This rule, too, is to be honoured, respected, revered, venerated, never to be transgressed as long as she lives.

The Bhikkhuni Order Was Established to Provide Spiritual Training

Phra Payutto: A basic understanding of the Buddhist monastic institution, the formal discipline, including the training rules and the Pāṭimokkha, and the general state of renunciants in India at the time of the Buddha helps to shed light on the subject of female renunciants in the Theravada tradition.¹ In any case, let us return to the subject of the bhikkhunis.

There are many examples in Pali of a single word used with similar connotations but in different contexts.² A very important term to be examined in this discussion on bhikkhunis is ‘garudhamma.’

¹ [In the original book, this section follows chapters 2 & 3, on renunciants at the time of the Buddha and on technical aspects of the Buddhist discipline (Vinaya), respectively.]

² One such word, which is also used in the Thai language, is *paccaya* (‘condition,’ ‘factor,’ ‘requisite’). This same word is used with similar meanings in different contexts, for example in the compound *hetu-paccaya* (‘causes and conditions’) and in the context of the four requisites of life.

Similarly, in the Thai language the same word may be used for different things which have shared or common features. The word *khem* can refer to needle, a kind of tree, and a kind of fish. Likewise, there are the metaphors *took dtom* (‘swindled’; literally ‘be boiled’) and *dtok loom khao mah* (‘fall into someone’s trap’), referring to being hurt in mind and not in body as a literal understanding may imply.

Bhikkhunis maintain eight garudhamma principles, the transgression of which carries no penalty and thus there is great emphasis to respect these and to uphold them sincerely. Bhikkhus, on the other hand, have garudhamma offences, the transgression of which is very serious and incurs a heavy penalty. This matter tends to bewilder people.

To make matters more complicated, bhikkhunis too have garudhamma offences, the transgression of which incurs a heavy penalty. These ‘heavy offences’ of both bhikkhus and bhikkhunis refer to the *saṅghādisesa* offences (‘rules entailing an initial and subsequent meeting of the sangha’).¹

This latter definition of garudhamma, as a ‘serious offence,’ appears in the fifth of the eight garudhamma principles. Those who lack an understanding of this term will be confused, but those who know will recognize this alternative meaning when they see the associated word *mānatta* (‘penance’).

One may have recognized that some of the garudhammas exist as specific rules in the formal bhikkhuni discipline, that is, they are contained in the bhikkhuni Pāṭimokkha. As a result, some people have doubts whether the garudhammas stem from the Buddha himself, or whether they may have been drawn up and created by later elders.

Let us look at the basis of such doubts. The Buddha’s disciplinary rules, for example the training rules contained in the Pāṭimokkha, were established later in his lifetime. If the garudhammas truly stem from the Buddha himself, then they must have existed from the very beginning. According to the story, the garudhammas were established at the same time as the origin of the bhikkhunis, because they were the stipulations for the first bhikkhuni—Ven. Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī—to be ordained. Yet if the garudhammas existed from the very beginning,

¹ The bhikkhus have thirteen *saṅghādisesa* rules and the bhikkhunis have seventeen (according to the complete list of offences in the two respective codes of discipline, the two Pāṭimokkhas).

why would the Buddha have needed to formulate these additional training rules in the bhikkhuni Pāṭimokkha?

When the Buddha established a new training rule, it indicates that this rule did not previously exist, which means that those garudhammas in the bhikkhuni Pāṭimokkha couldn't already have existed as training rules. This leads some people to speculate whether the garudhammas were perhaps created by monks of later generations.

It is good that people have doubts—they shouldn't dismiss these. These doubts will prompt them to seek knowledge. Doubting is healthy, but don't rush to draw conclusions. It is better to investigate this subject thoroughly and comprehensively.

It is true that some of the garudhammas are repeated as rules in the Pāṭimokkha. Indeed, most of them are. Only two of the garudhammas, or one-and-a-half of them, are not repeated in this way. What is more perplexing is the remaining two garudhammas. Why are these two garudhammas not a part of the Vinaya rules—not a part of the bhikkhuni Pāṭimokkha?

Let me add here that the eight garudhammas manifest as many training rules in the Pāṭimokkha, and they are not restricted to the bhikkhuni Pāṭimokkha—indeed, they appear as many training rules in the bhikkhu Pāṭimokkha as well.

Now there will be some people for whom an opposite doubt will arise from those doubts mentioned above. They will ask: 'Why are the garudhammas so important that they must be propped up by numerous training rules?' Let us wait before getting into a debate. It is better to first inspect the substance of the available information. I will try to organize the information that I have been able to gather. You don't have to believe or agree with it, but at least you will receive some food for thought. And then we will be able to help each other to study this material on a deeper level.

The subject we were just discussing is useful. The establishment of the bhikkhuni order occurred during the early years of the Buddha's teaching. According to the commentaries it occurred in the fifth year after the Buddha's awakening. At that time the monastic sangha was still small in number. The monks who asked to be ordained came out of faith, had sincere determination, lived according to the key principles of the holy life, and conducted themselves well, so that there hadn't yet arisen any harmful incidents. At this time the Buddha had not begun to lay down training rules in earnest. Importantly, he hadn't yet compiled and established the Pāṭimokkha code. He hadn't yet directed the monks to perform the formal Uposatha ceremony in which they chant the 'authorized' Pāṭimokkha (*āṅā-pāṭimokkha*). The Buddha still participated in the ceremony by reciting the Ovāda Pāṭimokkha.

When the new community of bhikkhunis was established, it wasn't necessary to lay down any additional training rules. Whichever rules did exist at the time and were applicable, the bhikkhunis practised in the same way as the monks. Having said this, it was deemed proper to establish some principles for the bhikkhunis to observe.

Questions that were given special emphasis were in reference to the relationship between the two monastic communities—how much contact should these communities have with one another? How would this relationship appear to the people in India at the time who followed specific customs and traditions? How would these two communities remain stable, secure, and respectable?

The Buddha's answer was not to create special training rules. He simply asked that those women who were ordained practise in accord with specific stipulations, referred to as the eight garudhammas. This acceptance to practise accordingly on the part of the bhikkhuni ordination candidates represented their willingness for ordination.

One can see that the garudhammas focus on the relationship between the two monastic communities—on how the bhikkhus and bhikkhunis should conduct themselves in relation to one another.

Their main objective, however, is to enable women to pursue their spiritual training.

Buddhism emphasizes spiritual training, i.e., the threefold training. One can say that spiritual training lies at the heart of a Buddhist way of life, especially the life of a renunciant. Those individuals who are spiritually developed in this system of practice are thus referred to as 'trainees' (*sekha*) and as 'adepts' (*asekha*)—those who have finished training.¹

According to the Dhammavinaya, when someone is newly ordained as a bhikkhu, he must study with his preceptor (*upajjhāya*) or with a teacher (*ācariya*). This is called living under 'dependence' (*nissaya*). He is a 'dependent' (*nissita*—a 'pupil'). He studies his teacher's instructions, and trains by living with his teacher and by offering mutual assistance. They each perform their specific duties—the duties of a preceptor to a fellow bhikkhu (*saddhi-vihārika*), the duties of a teacher to a pupil (*antevāsika*), and the duties of a young monk to either the preceptor or teacher. He must live under dependence for five years before he is released from this obligation.

With the first generation of disciples, by the time they were ordained as bhikkhus, they had passed through various forms of training and cross-examination, some short and others long. The origin of the bhikkhu order thus parallels the gradual development, maturity, proficiency and spiritual accomplishments of these bhikkhus in the Dhammavinaya.

The bhikkhu sangha then grew, applying the system of study based on living under dependence. There were preceptors with their ordainees, and teachers with their pupils, as mentioned earlier. The organization and discipline of this system was developed by the Buddha. Its details are considered as formal regulations (outside of the Pāṭimokkha) laid down by the Buddha.

In the case of the bhikkhuni sangha, however, all of sudden

¹ [These two terms refer to awakened beings (*ariya-puggala*).]

hundreds of women were ordained as bhikkhunis simultaneously. Apart from not having an understanding or experience of the Dhammavinaya, some of these women may have lacked even a basic understanding or training regarding the religious life. It may have been very difficult for them to adjust to a mendicant way of life surrounded by the society at large. When these royal Sakyan women coming directly from the palace were ordained together in such a large group, they didn't have a single elder bhikkhuni—someone who would have already lived as a nun for a longer period of time—to teach them and to impart knowledge.

Let alone extensive Dhamma teachings, the newly ordained bhikkhunis had a lot to study in regard to the training rules and practices already observed by the bhikkhus. This would have taken a lot of time to learn. If the monks and nuns had lived together in close quarters then this transmission would have proceeded gradually and relatively easily. But they hardly had the opportunity to meet with one another—how could this transmission have taken place?

It is clear that the Buddha was thinking of a way to provide the women with some form of training. It was not possible for him to assign individual bhikkhunis to live with one or two bhikkhus, as he did with the young monks. He needed to design a new system or to create a new opportunity befitting the circumstances. This is most likely the fundamental reason why he established the mutual agreements—the stipulations known as the eight garudhammas.

The challenge he faced was how to establish a well-ordered, disciplined system of training, considering that the pupils here—the bhikkhunis—were women, and the teachers—the bhikkhus—were men. This consideration was especially important in the context of the celibate life. The question was how to best set up the relationship between these two communities. Besides providing an opportunity for training, there was thus the added task of establishing the proper relationship between the monks and nuns.

Which of the Garudhammas Lie at the Heart of the Bhikkhuni Training?

The first garudhamma states that a bhikkhuni, even if she has been ordained for one hundred years, should pay respects with palms together to a bhikkhu who has been ordained that very day. This is a matter dealing with the basic relationship between the monks and nuns. Let us set aside any critical examination of this principle for the time being. Note, however, that it is precisely this garudhamma which did not become a formal regulation—it is not a training rule in the bhikkhuni Pāṭimokkha.

The second garudhamma states that (during the Rains) a bhikkhuni should not live in a monastery in which there are no bhikkhus. Although this principle deals with the safety of the nuns, its main objective probably has to do with the benefits of training. It is connected to the third garudhamma, which states that a bhikkhuni should request two things: every fortnight a bhikkhuni should ask for the date of the Observance Day (*uposatha*) and should come for an exhortation (*ovāda*) from the bhikkhu sangha.

Besides offering training to the newly established bhikkhuni order, the fortnightly exhortation also provided an important opportunity for the two separate communities to remain connected. In the long run, the fortnightly exhortation provided an opportunity for the bhikkhus and bhikkhunis to communicate with one another, to stay up-to-date on each other's affairs, and to exchange information. They maintained regular contact with one another, instead of drifting apart and feeling cut off. And when they met at close quarters in this manner, the meetings were conducted wholesomely in the context of study, rather than through other kinds of intimate contact that would create trouble.

A fortnightly gap between formal meetings was still a fairly long period of time to be apart. For example, during the initial period after

the bhikkhuni order was established, how much training could have been provided by meeting only once a fortnight? Could the bhikkhunis receive enough instruction on this single day to provide them with an adequate level of knowledge for daily practice?

In the context of this principle, the commentaries and sub-commentaries state that the bhikkhunis went for an exhortation on the Uposatha day, and then from the first day of the next fortnightly cycle they went daily to listen to the Dhamma (i.e., to study the Dhamma).¹ According to this explanation the Buddha set down this garudhamma for the bhikkhunis to seek out the bhikkhus in a regular, continuous way; he didn't give them an opportunity to allow other things to interfere with this regular exchange. (The sub-commentaries go on to say that the request for an exhortation was made on the Uposatha day, but the exhortation itself was performed on the day after the Uposatha. On each subsequent day the bhikkhunis then went to listen to the Dhamma.)

The fortnightly Observance was thus chosen as the main day, to have a definite date in order to fulfil this obligation, but the training and study occurred continuously. The end of the fortnight was marked by a special occasion, as a way to rouse energy and to offer encouragement, before starting another fortnightly cycle.

Another important consideration is that, because of the gender difference, it was normal that the bhikkhunis didn't live close to the Buddha, especially while he was wandering the countryside, passing through remote places, and visiting cities scattered throughout northern India. The bhikkhunis thus had little opportunity to be in direct contact with the Buddha. The regular meetings with the bhikkhus for the Uposatha exhortations and the subsequent days of listening to the Dhamma may have increased their chances to meet the Buddha. (There is a story of one bhikkhuni who followed the Buddha for seven years in order to study the Vinaya, but she kept forgetting

¹ VinA. IV. 793; VinṬ.: Tatiyo Bhāgo, Ovādavaggo, Ovādasikkhāpadavaṇṇanā.

what she had learned. For this reason, the Buddha allowed the bhikkhus to teach the Vinaya to the bhikkhunis.)¹

The Buddha gave great importance to this matter of exhorting the bhikkhunis, so that they would receive a truly effective training. He therefore established this principle from the very beginning. It is fair to say that the third garudhamma is a very important, possibly even the most important, of the eight. Having said this, this garudhamma only presents a general principle, stating simply that the bhikkhunis should seek out an exhortation every fortnight. It doesn't provide any details of how to fulfil this obligation.

There is no indication in the Vinaya, either in the context of the Pāṭimokkha or outside of the Pāṭimokkha, of the Buddha laying down a training rule from scratch pertaining to bhikkhus giving an exhortation to bhikkhunis, or to bhikkhunis requesting the exhortation from bhikkhus. The giving and receiving of an exhortation is based on the Buddha's prescription here in this garudhamma, that the monks should offer this opportunity to the nuns and that the nuns should request it. This principle was observed by both communities from the very beginning.

After this principle was observed for a period of time it happened that some of the monks and nuns misbehaved. The Buddha therefore set down specific regulations to supervise his disciples and to address some of these problems. In the end, many rules and regulations—in the bhikkhu Pāṭimokkha, in the bhikkhuni Pāṭimokkha, and outside of these—were established having to do with the bhikkhuni exhortation.

This matter takes such prominence in the bhikkhu Pāṭimokkha that an entire chapter is named after it: the Ovādavagga. In the first rule of this chapter, it mentions how those elders who exhorted the bhikkhunis received material gains as a result (this shows that giving an exhortation was already practised).² Members of the group of six

¹ Vin. II. 261.

² Vin. IV. 59-60.

monks (*chabbaggiyā*) wanted to profit and therefore went to the bhikkhunis by their own initiative.¹ They volunteered to give an exhortation, spoke for a short time on Dhamma, but then spoke nonsense or worldly talk (*tiracchāna-kathā*). When the Buddha asked the bhikkhunis whether the exhortation was fruitful, they told him what had happened and he therefore set down the rule stating that a bhikkhu who gives the formal exhortation to the bhikkhunis must be appointed by a formal gathering of the sangha. Later on there were other incidents that led the Buddha to establish further rules.

In the bhikkhuni Pāṭimokkha there is a rule having to do with the exhortation which was established after a specific incident: monks belonging to the group of six went to the bhikkhuni quarters to offer the exhortation to nuns who were also followers of the bhikkhu group of six.² Other bhikkhunis went to the group-of-six bhikkhunis to say that they were on their way to request an exhortation. The latter bhikkhunis asked them: ‘Why should we go? The venerable monks of the group of six have already come here to offer an exhortation!’ The other bhikkhunis thus criticized them.

This matter reached the Buddha and was the impetus for him to set down the following training rule: ‘Should any bhikkhuni not go for the exhortation or for the (meeting that defines) communion (i.e., the Uposatha), it incurs an offence of expiation.’ Further incidents of misbehaviour by bhikkhunis in relation to this matter prompted the Buddha to set down additional rules.

Outside of the Pāṭimokkha there is the story of several bhikkhunis who made various provocative and seductive gestures towards the bhikkhus.³ The Buddha thus set down a rule providing a gradual set of punishments, culminating in excluding the bhikkhunis from the

¹ [The ‘group of six’ (*chabbaggiyā*): a group of monks and nuns, led by six notorious monks, who are frequently mentioned as being guilty of various Vinaya offences.]

² Vin. IV. 314-15.

³ Vin. II. 262-3.

exhortation. Again, this shows that the fortnightly exhortation was already an established tradition.

To sum up, after the basic principle of this *garudhamma* dealing with the exhortation was established, the *sangha* grew in size and there were some *bhikkhus* and *bhikkhunis* who misbehaved and were corrupted in conduct. Some of the *bhikkhus* were greedy and wanted material gain, others simply wanted to get close to the *bhikkhunis*, and they looked for an opportunity to give the fortnightly exhortation. Even some of the virtuous monks acted in inopportune or ill-timed ways, causing the establishment of four training rules in the *bhikkhu Pāṭimokkha* designed to support the practice of this *garudhamma*.

These supporting rules are significant. For example, the *bhikkhu* who gives the exhortation to the *bhikkhunis* must be appointed by the *sangha*, he must finish the exhortation before the sun sets, and he must be endowed with eight attributes. He must: be virtuous; be erudite; know both *Pāṭimokkhas* by heart; possess kindly and convincing speech; be admired and loved by a majority of the *bhikkhunis*; be capable of presenting the exhortation to the *bhikkhunis*; have never fallen into a heavy offence with a *bhikkhuni*, *sikkhamānā*, or a *sāmaṇerī*; and have at least twenty *Vassas*.¹

A matter that one constantly needs to keep in mind is the image of the *sangha* in the eyes of the laypeople, especially those opinions shaped by rumours and accusations which could have a serious impact on the *sangha* itself. For example, in relation to the exhortation, when the *bhikkhunis* travelled together to go and listen to the *Dhamma*, the laypeople denounced them as being the wives and mistresses of the *bhikkhus*, saying: 'Now they are off to amuse themselves with one another.'² The Buddha therefore laid down a rule forbidding them

¹ Vin. IV. 51. [The *Vassa* is the rainy-season retreat (running roughly between July and October). When referring to the number of years a monk or nun has spent in the robes, the tradition is to speak of the number of *Vassas* they have observed.]

² Vin. II. 264.

from travelling in one big group, and instead to travel in groups of fours and fives. The laypeople, however, still accused them and thus the Buddha had them travel in twos and threes. Problems having to do with the bhikkhunis going to meet with the bhikkhus came up repeatedly.

From one perspective, this may simply reflect the traditional feelings and customs of people in that time period and society. But the relationship between the monks and nuns had inherent risks. The bhikkhunis, who were women, would file and disappear into the bhikkhus' monasteries which were located in forests and jungles. At that time it wasn't uncommon for male and female wandering ascetics to be married to one another. So the bhikkhu and bhikkhuni communities had to face these problems continuously. The monastic sangha was not only dwelling side-by-side with the general population, but it was also created to serve the people. So it was normal that the Buddha took the opinions, gossip, and complaints of the laypeople very seriously. The opinions of the laypeople were the reason for establishing many of the training rules.

The circumstances which were the cause for these training rules (especially for those rules apart from the Pāṭimokkha) often did not stem from evil intentions by the perpetrators. But in each case something happened which had a negative effect. So there are some training rules that didn't spring from depravity on the part of bhikkhus or bhikkhunis. These training rules would have gradually grown in number, even during the early years of the Buddha's teaching, before the establishment of the Pāṭimokkha.

In sum, the exhortation, or the regular teaching of Dhamma, was a vital aspect of study and training in the monastic sangha, and was already intrinsic to the bhikkhu sangha. But it became a prominent issue in regard to the bhikkhunis, because it was connected to establishing a system for regulating the interaction between the two genders. One can see the importance of the exhortation by the

distinctions attributed to foremost disciples (*etadagga*), in which Ven. Nandaka was foremost of those monks who exhorted the bhikkhunis, and Ven. Mahā Kappina was foremost of those monks who exhorted the bhikkhus.

The Garudhammas Are Simply Formal Agreements Only When Included in the Pāṭimokkha Were They Canonized

Let us review what we just discussed. I mentioned that all but two of the eight garudhammas became formal training rules in the Pāṭimokkha. And I also mentioned that the Pāṭimokkha lies at the heart of the Vinaya, or put in other words, the Vinaya exists as a result of the Pāṭimokkha. But when the bhikkhuni sangha was first established, the Pāṭimokkha did not yet exist, and the Buddha would not lay down training rules unless a specific incident prompted him to do so. In any case, when all of a sudden a large group of bhikkhunis came into existence, there were no criteria or standards, not even those resulting from previous experience, to act as a support. The Buddha therefore established the eight garudhammas as basic principles to live by.

But don't forget that the garudhammas were simply mutual agreements. They were observed and followed out of respect. They were not Vinaya rules. In short, they were principles to uphold, not formal training rules or laws. If a bhikkhuni infringed on or transgressed them, there was no formal wrongdoing or offence. One can say that they were an agreement based on honour. This differs from the Pāṭimokkha, which by a modern comparison is like a set of laws. Anyone who transgresses the Pāṭimokkha rules incurs an offence and receives some form of penalty or punishment.

At the beginning, when the monastic sangha was still relatively small, mutual agreements were sufficient. The sangha existed well simply by following these agreed-upon standards. But once there were

many monastics, when many different kinds of people came to be ordained and the disciples were geographically scattered far away from each other, some of the monks and nuns became heedless and to act in immoral and deviant ways. This was sometimes the result of a lack of a screening process.

Here we don't need to mention an 'honour system'—some of the monks and nuns began to shamelessly transgress training rules contained in the Pāṭimokkha which had clearly prescribed penalties. Some of these individuals would be penalized and then go ahead and transgress the same rules again. At this point, for the garudhammas to be effective and lasting, they needed to be included into the Pāṭimokkha.

One may have the following doubt: 'The Buddha prescribed even some minor matters as training rules in the Pāṭimokkha. If these garudhammas were so important, why didn't he hasten to include them as formal rules in the Pāṭimokkha?' The reason for this is that he followed the principle of waiting until someone behaved in a harmful way, by violating or transgressing these principles, and only then did he establish them as formal rules according to the circumstances.

Even though the Buddha did not prescribe formal training rules unless a specific event occurred prompting him to do so, eventually there were many incidents which led him to decree formal rules in connection to these principles, until some of the individual garudhammas turned into numerous new rules. One doesn't need to worry whether the garudhammas became formal training rules—almost without exception they did. And for those garudhammas that did not, there were distinct reasons for this. Now which of the garudhammas did not become formal training rules?

Before I answer this, let us look at some of the garudhammas that did become rules within the Pāṭimokkha. A simple example is the third garudhamma that we were just discussing: 'A bhikkhuni should request two things: every fortnight a bhikkhuni should ask for the date

of the Uposatha day and should go for an exhortation from the bhikkhu sangha.’

In this context, there is a related story: ‘At that time many of the bhikkhunis did not ask for the date of the Uposatha and did not request an exhortation. The bhikkhus denounced them, criticized them, reproached them....’¹ This incident reached the Buddha, who made inquiries and found out that it was the truth. The Buddha therefore laid down a training rule, issuing an offence for those who transgress it: ‘Every fortnight a bhikkhuni should request two things from the bhikkhu sangha: she should ask for the date of the Uposatha day and come for an exhortation. Transgressing this rule is an offence entailing expiation.’

The origin story of this training rule shows that the principle outlined in this garudhamma was well-known. Some bhikkhunis chose not to observe this principle and there was thus criticism or an outcry, resulting in a formal training rule. The main body of this rule is identical to the stated garudhamma—the difference in this rule is simply that it ends with the clause: ‘Transgressing this rule is an offence entailing expiation.’ At this point it is no longer simply a basic principle or a mutual agreement. Rather, it has become a Vinaya rule determining the specific offence for one who transgresses it.

For another example, let us return to the second garudhamma, which states: ‘A bhikkhuni should not live in a monastery where there are no bhikkhus.’ There is a related story to this principle: ‘At that time a large group of bhikkhunis spent the Rains in a monastery close to a village; afterwards they travelled to the city of Sāvatti. Other bhikkhunis asked members of that group, “Venerable Sisters, where did you spend the Rains? Was the exhortation fruitful and beneficial?” Those bhikkhunis answered, “Venerable Sisters, there were no bhikkhus in the monastery where we spent the Rains. How could the exhortation have been successful?” The other bhikkhunis denounced

¹ The ninth training rule in the Chapter on Monasteries (*Ārāma Vagga*; Vin. IV. 315).

and criticized them, saying: “How is it that the bhikkhunis spent the Rains in a monastery without any bhikkhus?”¹ The story reached the Buddha, who made inquiries. When he found out that this was true, he laid down the training rule: ‘A bhikkhuni who spends the Rains in a monastery in which there are no bhikkhus commits an offence of expiation.’

This rule is connected to the third garudhamma. When the bhikkhunis met one another, they asked about the exhortation, demonstrating that this was an important principle and an established practice. (It is even possible that this matter was a source of pride, because what would have been a more desirable result of ordaining as a nun than developing wisdom and making progress in one’s spiritual training?)

The gist of this story is that when the upright bhikkhunis heard that this group of bhikkhunis had lived in a monastery with no bhikkhus, they criticized them immediately. This shows that it was standard practice for bhikkhunis to live in a monastery with bhikkhus. This incident was the cause for laying down a training rule and formally establishing the fault for transgressing this principle. So at this point the second garudhamma was included in the Pāṭimokkha, and the specific penalty for not observing this rule was an offence of expiation (*pācittiya*). This garudhamma no longer remained informal.

The story surrounding the fourth garudhamma is similar: ‘At that time a large group of bhikkhunis spent the Rains in a monastery close to a village; afterwards they travelled to the city of Sāvatti. Other bhikkhunis asked that group of bhikkhunis, “Venerable Sisters, where did you spend the Rains? Have you already made the formal invitation (*Pavāraṇā*) to the bhikkhus?”² When those bhikkhunis said that they had not made the formal invitation to the bhikkhu sangha the upright bhikkhunis immediately criticized them. This shows that it was

¹ The sixth training rule in the Chapter on Monasteries (*Ārāma Vagga*; Vin. IV. 313).

² The seventh training rule in the Chapter on Monasteries (*Ārāma Vagga*; Vin. IV. 313-14).

commonly known that after the Rains, besides making a formal invitation to the other bhikkhunis, a bhikkhuni should also make a formal invitation to the bhikkhu sangha. This incident was the cause for the Buddha to lay down a training rule. The fourth garudhamma was thus included in the Pāṭimokkha and the specific penalty for not observing this rule was likewise an offence of expiation (*pācittiya*).

In regard to the fifth garudhamma, it does not involve a transgression of a specific principle, but it is rather a method of clearing up offences. It became an accompanying clause found at the end of the section on ‘rules entailing an initial and subsequent meeting of the sangha’ (*saṅghādisesa*) in the bhikkhuni Pāṭimokkha, stating: ‘If a bhikkhuni commits a serious offence she must undergo penance for half a month before both assemblies.’¹

Note here that the Pali word for ‘serious offence’ is also ‘garudhamma,’ which in this case refers to a *saṅghādisesa* offence. The bhikkhu Pāṭimokkha also contains *saṅghādisesa* offences, that is, bhikkhus can also commit serious offences (*garudhamma*). Here, the word ‘garudhamma’ has a different meaning from that used in the concept of the eight garudhammas. The same term is used in both contexts, but with distinct meanings. As stated earlier, someone who transgresses the principles expressed in the eight garudhammas incurs no formal penalty and does not commit a formal offence.

The Sixth Garudhamma Pertaining to Female Trainees (*sikkhamānā*) Emphasizes Spiritual Training (*sikkhā*)

The sixth garudhamma is connected to the spiritual training of those women preparing to be bhikkhunis—a training that plays a very important function in the long run. This garudhamma later became a training rule, the source story for which is as follows: ‘At that time the bhikkhunis gave full ordination to those trainees (*sikkhamānā*) who

¹ Vin. IV. 242.

had not yet trained in the six precepts for two years. Those trainees were thus ignorant, unskilled, not knowledgeable of those things that are proper and improper....¹ Upright bhikkhunis criticized those bhikkhunis who conducted the ordination. This matter reached the Buddha, who after making inquiries and finding out that this story was true, did two things:

First, he gave permission to the bhikkhuni sangha to establish a 'contract of training' (*sikkhā-sammati*) with those women commencing a life as *sikkhamānā*, for them to undertake six precepts for a period of two years. This was tantamount to establishing a formal position for *sikkhamānās*, by requiring that a female trainee earnestly undertake the agreed-upon standards for a prescribed period of time. This clause is intended for future ordination candidates.

Second, he laid down a training rule, determining an offence of expiation (*pācittiya*) for a bhikkhuni who gives full ordination to a *sikkhamānā* who has not practised according to this contract of training. This clause is intended for those bhikkhunis who bestow ordination.

The story states that, although the female trainees had not fulfilled the stipulations of training, those bhikkhunis still went ahead and gave ordination.

We see here that the *sikkhamānā* training already existed, the looking after and care of which was entrusted to Ven. Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī. At some point, however, some of the *sikkhamānās* did not fulfil their responsibilities. Moreover, some of the bhikkhunis responsible for this training did not show these trainees proper attention, because there was no clear training rule to determine the level of offence for improper behaviour. The Buddha therefore set down a more definite procedure, by having the sangha gather together and set up a formal contract of training. Determining this matter in a communal way gave the training a clearer definition.

¹ See the third training rule in the Chapter on Pregnancy (*Gabbhinī Vagga*; Vin. IV. 318-19).

At that time there were some bhikkhunis who were neglectful in regard to providing training to these trainees. They didn't give consideration to whether the sikkhamānās had fulfilled a course of training and had trained for the prescribed period of time, and simply went ahead with ordinations. The Buddha therefore set down a training rule within the Pāṭimokkha with a specific offence for those bhikkhunis who gave the ordination, in order to help manage this matter and to foster a greater sense of caution. (In this context, there is no offence for the sikkhamānās; they simply accept the contract of training described above.)

This was not all—the Buddha laid down another training rule in regard to this matter. As mentioned above, at the beginning of the sikkhamānā training the sangha establishes a contract of training. Here, this additional training rule states that when a sikkhamānā has finished her two years of training, the bhikkhuni sangha must meet in order to perform an 'agreement for ordination' (*vuṭṭhāna-sammati*)—to formally acknowledge the completion of these two years of training. If a bhikkhuni gives ordination to a sikkhamānā who has finished the two years of training, but the sangha has not given its consent, that bhikkhuni is at fault and incurs an offence of expiation.¹ There are six additional training rules similar to the one above, differing on account of the various kinds of women who are ordained.²

Furthermore, in regard to the period following the ordination, the Buddha prescribed that the female preceptor (*pavattini*) must look after and take care of her disciples³—or entrust this duty to someone with the necessary attributes—for a period of two years. If she does not look after her disciple in this way she incurs an offence of expiation. The newly ordained disciple must remain in company with her preceptor for two years; if she does not she incurs an offence of

¹ Vin. IV. 321.

² Vin. IV. 321-24, 327-29.

³ *Sahajivini*: the female equivalent of a *saddhivihārika*.

expiation.¹ This is a way of ensuring that the going forth and the spiritual training bear fruit.

Therefore, when training rules were added to the Pāṭimokkha in relation to this sixth garudhamma, its meaning and scope of activity broadened. It is as if the sixth garudhamma remained the same, but many training rules were created to support and reinforce it. Each of these related training rules have their own unique content. (This differs from those earlier garudhammas already discussed, in the case of which the garudhamma principle and the subsequent training rule are almost identical—the only difference is that in the latter context a specific offence is stipulated.)

Let us have a closer look at the precise wording of this garudhamma and its matching rule in the Pāṭimokkha:

Sixth garudhamma: A bhikkhuni should request ordination from both sanghas for a sikkhamānā who has trained in the six precepts for two years.²

Training rule in the Pāṭimokkha: If a bhikkhuni gives ordination to a sikkhamānā who has not trained in the six precepts for two years, she incurs an offence of expiation.³

The fact to bear in mind here is that the incidents acting as the impetus for laying down training rules in the Pāṭimokkha, as recounted in these stories, make it clear that at the time of laying down the rules sikkhamānā already existed. And there are no training rules that describe the origin of the sikkhamānā system of training.

Therefore, we can conclude that the origin of the sikkhamānā occurred with the issuing of the sixth garudhamma. As time progressed, some of the nuns neglected or transgressed this principle, but as the garudhammas were simply an informal mutual agreement, there was no clear way of addressing these problems. The details for

¹ Vin. IV. 324-6.

² Vin. IV. 52.

³ Vin. IV. 319.

solving these problems increased, and therefore training rules were prescribed, in order to act as an effective safeguard and to address the specific issues that had come up at that time.

The matter did not end here. The number of corrupt bhikkhunis at the time of the Buddha were no less than the tainted bhikkhus. First, bhikkhunis gave ordination to sikkhamānā who had not seriously trained. But worse than this is that some bhikkhunis gave ordination to women who had never begun the sikkhamānā training. They even gave ordination to pregnant women and to women who had only recently given birth, who would have to raise their children in the monastery. The number of training rules thus continually increased.¹

Here we can review. We can see that two of the garudhammas are directly connected to spiritual training—the third garudhamma on going for an exhortation, and the sixth garudhamma on the sikkhamānā training. The third garudhamma pertains to bhikkhuni training. Once a woman has been ordained as a bhikkhuni, she studies with a qualified bhikkhu who has been appointed by the bhikkhu sangha. The sixth garudhamma, on the other hand, pertains to the training of women who are preparing for bhikkhuni ordination, and the teacher in this case is a bhikkhuni who has passed a prescribed level of training.

A general remark about these two garudhammas is that various training rules, both within and apart from the Pāṭimokkha, were established to make them more effective in a practical way, to support them, and to add details. For each of these garudhammas about ten or more training rules were established. This differs from the other garudhammas included in the Pāṭimokkha, for which the garudhamma principle and the training rule are expressed in almost an identical fashion; the passage outlining the training rule simply has a clause at the end determining the level of offence for its transgression.

¹ Vin. IV. 317-18.

Note also the way in which the other garudhammas support the spiritual training based on these two garudhamma principles, especially by giving emphasis to the relationship between the bhikkhus and the bhikkhunis. Apart from emphasizing the general relationship between these two communities, they focus on the intimacy that arises in the process of formal study, by recognizing that most of the women who were ordained as bhikkhunis at that time had not previously received spiritual training. Social conditions of that time thus influenced the training of women, both before their higher ordination and afterwards. Those who have the interest and time can do more research on this relationship between the different garudhammas.

The Seventh Garudhamma Was Inevitably Included in the Pāṭimokkha

We have discussed the first six garudhammas, which brings us to the seventh, stating: ‘A bhikkhuni must not insult or revile a bhikkhu in any way.’ Similar to some of the other garudhammas, this principle was also included as a training rule in the Pāṭimokkha, stating the offence for one who transgresses it.¹

The story behind this rule is rather violent. It involves a group of bhikkhunis who were disciples of the group of six. The story goes that Ven. Kappitaka, who was Ven. Upāli’s preceptor,² dwelled in a charnel

¹ Vin. IV. 308.

² Ven. Upāli: the bhikkhu who replied to questions concerning the Vinaya at the First Recitation. Here, some people may have doubts and ask: ‘Wasn’t Upāli ordained directly by the Buddha? Why are you saying here that he had a preceptor named Ven. Kappitaka?’ The explanation is that Upāli was ordained along with Ven. Ānanda directly by the Buddha. After their ordination one of the bhikkhus took on the responsibility of looking after them and providing a beginning level of training in the Dhammavinaya; this person was considered their ‘preceptor’ (*upajjhāya*). Ānanda, too, had a preceptor, whose name was Ven. Belaṭṭhasīsa (his name is also spelled Velaṭṭhasīsa or Veḷaṭṭhasīsa).

Even though a person may have been ordained directly by the Buddha, he was still assigned an individual monk to supervise his training. This shows clearly the nature of

ground. At that time a senior bhikkhuni revered by these ‘group-of-six’ bhikkhunis passed away. The ‘group-of-six’ bhikkhunis cremated her corpse close to Kappitaka’s dwelling and built a stupa on the cremation site. They gathered around mourning and crying at this stupa. The sound of crying disturbed Kappitaka, who thus tore the stupa down.

The ‘group-of-six’ bhikkhunis secretly consulted with one another, saying: ‘Venerable Kappitaka destroyed the stupa belonging to our venerable sister. Okay then, in that case let us kill Kappitaka!’ One of the bhikkhunis told this story to Ven. Upāli, who informed Kappitaka. Kappitaka thus left his dwelling and went into hiding. The ‘group-of-six’ bhikkhunis went to Kappitaka’s dwelling, piling on rocks and clods of earth until it collapsed. They then departed thinking that surely he was dead.

When the ‘group-of-six’ bhikkhunis departed, Ven. Kappitaka left his place of hiding and returned to his dwelling. The next morning he went for alms in the city of Vesāli. When the ‘group-of-six’ bhikkhunis saw him, they gathered together and said: ‘Kappitaka is still alive! Who went and shared our secret?’ When they found out that Ven. Upāli had informed on them, they insulted him, saying: ‘This low-born man serves others while they bathe, and scrubs and wipes up filth. Why did he go and reveal our plan?’ (Before he was ordained, Ven. Upāli was a barber for the Sakyan royalty.)

Those conscientious bhikkhunis heard these insults and were critical. The matter reached the Buddha, who made inquiries. When he found out the truth of the matter, he reproached those bhikkhunis and laid down a training rule: ‘If a bhikkhuni insults or reviles a bhikkhu, it is an offence of expiation.’

So this seventh garudhamma is given a binding authority as a training rule. There is a slight difference between the two: the

training in the Dhammavinaya. Think about it—several hundred bhikkhunis were ordained all at once, and they lived separate from the Buddha, without having any elder nun to teach or look after them. How could it be that there weren’t some form of supports provided to them like the garudhamma principles?

garudhamma contains the clause, ‘in any way,’ while this clause is absent in the training rule. And the formal explanation (*vibhaṅga*) to this rule contains the following exception: it is not an offence for a bhikkhuni who criticizes or scolds a monk with the intention to provide benefit, truth, or instruction. (Bhikkhus similarly have a training rule, stating that insulting, threatening, or verbally intimidating another monk is an offence of expiation, unless one aims for the benefit, truth, or instruction of another.)¹

* * *

So here we have covered the six garudhammas that were included as training rules in the Pāṭimokkha. We are left with the two remaining garudhammas, that is, the first and the eighth ones, which were not included in the Pāṭimokkha. It is an interesting question why they were not included.

The first garudhamma states that a bhikkhuni, even if she has been ordained for one hundred years, must pay respects and salute with palms together a bhikkhu, even one who has been ordained that very day. This garudhamma did not become a training rule in the Pāṭimokkha. Let us look at it more closely. But before we launch into this next subject, let us finish for now and have a rest. We can continue our discussion later.

I wish to thank Khun Martin. This book truly stems from his questions, enthusiasm, concern, and wish to share this material. And there have been other friends who have prepared the data, compiling it and sending it to me for inspection and revision. I have heard that there is a wish to publish this material as quickly as possible. By myself I wouldn’t be able to finish this project, because I don’t have the time. I’m so busy with other things. And even though there has been the wish to progress quickly, it hasn’t happened like this. Six months have

¹ Vin. IV. 11.

passed since I was given the original transcript of the tape recording. Six years have passed since Khun Martin came to ask about these questions for the first time, in 2004. Now there is an additional chapter, including material from the time that Tahn Chao Khun Rājasumedhācariya (Ven. Ajahn Sumedho) came to visit with his group of disciples.

Let me repeat that although I have very little access to news reports, I know that there is a great deal of discussion about this bhikkhuni issue, with people claiming that things should follow one particular course or another. Let me also repeat that we are still at the stage of gathering knowledge and information. If people get too caught up in debating this issue, they are likely to simply follow their personal opinions. People will have views, but will not see: that is, they will not discern the facts and they will lack knowledge.

We need to emphasize this sincere gathering of knowledge, rather than indulging in expressing our opinions. If we lack knowledge, our views and opinions can easily become blurred and confused. I urge everyone to seek clear, correct, exact, and accurate knowledge, and then to express their thoughts and opinions based on this foundation.

Let us help each other to do this. Don't neglect the search for knowledge, to the point that one cannot distinguish between facts and opinions. Sometimes one hears people speak as if they are branding another person as being a particular way. When one looks at the situation more closely, one sees that the person who is criticizing or pigeonholing someone else is actually viewing things through the lenses of his own opinions. He is not seeing things with real understanding. Often, he himself cannot distinguish between facts and opinions. For instance, it is not clear to him whether someone else is stating facts or expressing opinions.

One can divide the tasks involving gathering knowledge and then reflecting on it into three stages:

- First, to seek accurate knowledge. As I just said, to seek the clearest, most correct, and most precise understanding; to discover the genuine facts in respect to the matter at hand. To focus on the facts, the evidence, and the principles of the subject matter. And then to speak of these facts in an accurate way.
- Second, once one has seen things according to the facts, evidence, and principles, then one contemplates the solutions to any problems. This is a way of summing up the possibilities which are connected to the facts, evidence, and principles.
- Third, one decides how to deal with or respond to the matter. This stage involves personal views, and it operates at the junction between ideas based on knowledge—on objective goals—and views based on personal sentiment. Here, one may apply one's preferences and dislikes as the criteria for judgement, or decide on personal needs and requirements.

Let me say a few things about myself again. If I do as I please, I like to dwell at the first stage. I enjoy seeking knowledge and understanding things clearly. This keeps me fully occupied. Generally speaking, I stay at this level of seeking knowledge. I don't really enjoy expressing my opinions. If I wish to express an opinion or if someone asks for my opinion, we reach stage two. That is, I say: 'In regard to this matter, I have garnered this information.' I present people with the evidence, explaining the details and nature of the subject at hand. I show how according to the principles, evidence, and facts, the matter is a particular way. These facts are neutral and impartial, and they require no obligations. I don't tell people what to do with these facts. Having listened to them, people can do with them as they wish. But I try to point out that if one follows certain principles and premises, the matter will proceed in a particular fashion.

For example, in this discussion with Khun Martin, we operate at this second level, because once we have arrived at certain facts, there is some degree of summarizing and linking them together. But in

respect to the third stage, of making decisions and coming to fixed conclusions, I don't enter this stage. Take a look—in my books or in my recorded talks—I don't engage on this level. If I am pressed to express an opinion then I simply submit various options for people to choose from or decide on, by themselves.

Once I present the facts according to the available evidence, formal teachings, and information, it is then up to others to agree with these facts or not. I let the facts speak for themselves. As for the third stage, of deciding what to do with these facts, people can think independently. People have their own thoughts and have the opportunity to develop their own thinking. If the specific matter is of concern to the community, we can all help to consider the matter for clarity and wellbeing.

The First Garudhamma Became a Training Rule for the Bhikkhus It Is not Included in the Pāṭimokkha nor Is It an Offence for the Bhikkhunis

We have said enough at this point about the six garudhammas that were included in the Pāṭimokkha. Here, let us look at the two garudhammas—the first and the eighth—that were not included. Let us review the first garudhamma:

‘A bhikkhuni who has been fully ordained for one hundred years must bow down, rise up from her seat, salute with hands together, and perform the duties of respect to a bhikkhu even if he has been fully ordained for only one day.’¹

I have already spoken about this garudhamma at length in the previous sections related to this principle. To avoid redundancy, I will only focus here on a few interesting points for consideration. I am only presenting some factual information and offering some points of view, along with making some reasonable conjectures and hypotheses. Take these ideas and reflect on them at your leisure.

¹ Vin. II. 255.

Some of the stories in the scriptures describe events occurring after Ven. Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī was ordained by accepting the eight garudhammas, and after the five hundred Sakyan women received the higher ordination (*upasampadā*) by the bhikkhu sangha. It is not clear, however, exactly how much later these events occurred. Most likely, after receiving ordination the early bhikkhunis were not much affected by the first garudhamma, because they were all newly ordained. But later, as time passed and these bhikkhunis became elders in the community, the ‘embankment’ or ‘levee’ established by the Buddha began to have an impact, clashing with the feelings of some individuals.

On one occasion Ven. Mahāpajāpatī went to see Ven. Ānanda and asked him to request a formal allowance by the Buddha for bhikkhus and bhikkhunis to pay respects to one another according to seniority.¹ Yet when Ānanda brought this matter to the Buddha, he did not give his permission, stating the following reason: ‘Ānanda, there is no way, there is no chance ... because even these members of other sects ... do not bow, get up to receive, fold the hands in respectful salutation, or pay homage to women. How could the Tathāgata give permission for bowing to, getting up to receive, folding the hands in respectful salutation, or paying homage to women?’

Earlier I remarked how the Buddha used the term ‘woman’ (*mātugāma*) here to refer to all women in a general sense; he didn’t use the term ‘bhikkhuni.’ The reason that the term ‘woman’ here is used to include bhikkhunis is probably because the society at that time was not familiar with or did not recognize the status of women renunciants as separate from women in general. For this reason, in the eyes of the laypeople or in the eyes of society, whenever there were problems involving bhikkhus and bhikkhunis, people viewed these as issues between bhikkhus and women, rather than between bhikkhus and bhikkhunis.

¹ Vin. II. 257-8.

So we can surmise that, at the time when Ven. Mahāpajāpatī made this request, certain incidents had occurred in relation to this first garudhamma, giving rise to some conflict, or at least to some disquietude on an emotional level, for some bhikkhunis, who were expected to follow this principle. (And sooner or later there were most likely bhikkhunis who transgressed this principle, because as the above story of the ‘group-of-six’ bhikkhunis in relation to Ven. Kappitaka recounts, there were bhikkhunis who gravely insulted senior bhikkhus, behaviour which is more serious than refusing to pay respects.) Here, let us look at how the Buddha dealt with these matters. We can summarize some of the noteworthy incidents:

When this incident involving Ven. Mahāpajāpatī arose, the Buddha did not do or say anything that had a direct impact on the bhikkhunis. For example, he didn’t re-emphasize or stress the need for women to follow this first garudhamma in a strict way. He merely gave the reasons to Ven. Ānanda why he wouldn’t give permission for the bhikkhus to be obligated to pay formal respects to the bhikkhunis (using here the general term ‘women’). The reason he gave is that renunciants of other religious traditions do not accept such behaviour.

Although this was a matter directly concerning the bhikkhunis, the Buddha did not initiate any further obligations for the bhikkhunis. Instead, he established a training rule for the bhikkhus, forbidding them from paying formal respects to women.¹ If a monk transgresses this rule, it is an offence of wrongdoing (*dukkata*). This rule is outside of the Pāṭimokkha and carries a minor offence.

We see here that the first garudhamma is not a formal rule (within the Pāṭimokkha), but the gist of this principle was distilled to create a training rule outside of the Pāṭimokkha for the bhikkhus. This decree pertains to issues involving the entire monastic sangha. It seems fairly obvious that the essential objective of the first garudhamma is to prevent giving the impression of bhikkhus paying formal respects to

¹ Vin. II. 258.

women, regardless of women in general or women who are bhikkhunis—a situation that members of other religious traditions who were waiting for the chance to abuse and insult the Buddhist sangha could use in their campaign of denunciation.

Forbidding the bhikkhus from paying formal respects to women addressed the heart of the problem. The matter of whether bhikkhunis pay formal respects to the bhikkhus or not did not have a direct impact on the monastic sangha on the whole. Refusing to pay respects to the monks only had a negative impact on a general level of etiquette. That is, this garudhamma principle ensured a degree of decorum, courtesy, dignity, and harmony. Thus, there was no need to establish a training rule on this matter to control the bhikkhunis.

There are additional details concerning the matter of paying formal respects. As the monastic community grew in size, the number of harmful or indecent incidents increased; there were more and more corrupted bhikkhus and bhikkhunis. At one time some of the ‘group-of-six’ bhikkhus wanted some bhikkhunis to fall in love with them and thus sprinkled muddy water on them, as well as behaving in other unsuitable ways.¹ The Buddha set down a formal punishment of wrongdoing for a bhikkhu who behaves in these ways, and had the bhikkhuni sangha issue a formal penalty (*daṇḍa-kamma*) for such a monk—that is, they should designate this monk as someone to whom formal respect should not be shown. The bhikkhunis are actually forbidden from paying him respects. (Ven. Upāli received the additional instruction by the Buddha that other forms of inappropriate behaviour by bhikkhus towards bhikkhunis, say of endeavouring to keep them from receiving material gains or verbally abusing them, also warrant the formal penalty of *daṇḍa-kamma*.)²

The commentaries state that a bhikkhu who has been formally penalized by the bhikkhuni sangha in this way should be treated by

¹ E.g.: Vin. II. 261-2.

² Vin. V. 195.

the bhikkhunis as if he were a novice (*sāmaṇera*). That monk should go to the bhikkhuni sangha and ask forgiveness. When the bhikkhuni sangha has forgiven him, he is then reinstated as someone worthy of formal gestures of respect.

The group-of-six bhikkhunis similarly wished that particular monks fall in love with them and acted in various unsuitable ways to achieve this end. The Buddha enjoined the bhikkhu sangha to formally penalize these nuns (by way of *daṇḍa-kamma*), by forbidding them from entering the residential area of the bhikkhus. When some of the nuns refused to obey this prohibition, he had the monks impose the highest form of punishment, of refusing to give them the exhortation. (Note that all of these rules and prescriptions mentioned in the last three paragraphs lie outside of the Pāṭimokkha.) We see here that not giving the exhortation was considered a severe form of punishment, that is, the matter of providing teachings and instruction was given great importance.

Regardless of later incidents, the principle contained in this first garudhamma did not become a training rule in the Pāṭimokkha (and even the training rules established in relation to this principle outside of the Pāṭimokkha did not apply to the bhikkhunis). The only rule established was for the bhikkhus, forbidding them from paying formal respects to women.

In sum, if the bhikkhunis do not pay respects to the bhikkhus this is not an offence or fault according to the Vinaya. It is simply a disregard for or an infringement of this particular garudhamma. In any case, although the transgression of this garudhamma principle does not entail a formal offence of the Vinaya, a disregard for something that the Buddha established and decreed may possibly give rise to problems in the Buddhist community. Such disregard does carry with it a certain risk.

The Use of Conventions for Reducing Conceit

As mentioned above, one of the reasons why the Buddha didn't create a formal training rule for the bhikkhunis based on this first garudhamma is that he addressed the heart of the problem by creating a rule for the bhikkhus instead. Another reason may be that this garudhamma is connected to social conventions, that is, this garudhamma is a conventional rule overlapping conventional beliefs held by society. It does not have any deep or direct effects on practice leading to true spiritual growth.

This principle has to do with surface social conventions. A person who is knowledgeable and conscientious does not give primary import to these conventions, but follows them simply to prevent unwholesome states from increasing and wholesome states from decreasing. It is left up to people to use their common sense and wisdom to follow this principle suitably.

This matter is left up to the discretion of the bhikkhunis. They can ask themselves what the reasons are for respecting this principle and for preserving the form of training which they requested, that is, respecting the so-called 'honour system.' The reasons generally include a respect for the Teacher (the Buddha), for the Dhammavinaya, for the common good of the sangha, and for the Buddhist religion.

At the time of the Buddha it is clear that the main reason for the first garudhamma was to preserve the stability of the sangha within Indian society, in which there were many religious traditions, some of which had hostile intentions towards Buddhism. Another reason was for the discipline and order of the monastic community, which held a common resolve to live together in unison.

From another perspective, this method of showing formal respect prevented bhikkhus and bhikkhunis from having too much intimacy with one another. Although as renunciants there was a fair bit of close contact, a clear delineation was drawn distinguishing the two

communities. When contact was made emphasis was given to meeting as two distinct groups, rather than as individuals. Private encounters and frequent socializing were discouraged. When meeting a member of the other community, it wasn't necessary to ask him or her how many years he or she had been ordained.

This system of relating prevented problems from arising by establishing a clear partition or buffer between the two communities. Instead of fearing that problems would increase due to the intimate contact between monks and nuns, the bhikkhuni sangha was able to help the bhikkhus maintain strong mindfulness and restraint. This was one way to apply social conventions skilfully.

The conventions around this matter of showing respect, in the context of general society as opposed to the Dhammavinaya or to the Buddhist monastic community, are based on different conditions and assumptions. Generally, in mainstream society, although there are undoubtedly wholesome objectives in regard to conventions dealing with showing respect, it is inevitable that behaviour will be dictated to some degree by mental defilement, especially forms of conceit, like judging others' worth, a thirst for power, and holding to self-importance.

In the monastic sangha, or in the Dhammavinaya, however, the setting up of conventions in this matter has to do with the discipline, wellbeing, and harmony of the monastic community, and with establishing an environment conducive to the spiritual development of each member. Moreover, there is the wish for the sangha to be the symbol and repository for the Dhamma.

At the same time, instead of supporting conceit, these forms of monastic convention are tools for self-discipline, in order to dispel and transcend conceit. In this sense, conventions dealing with showing reverence and respect help people to train themselves, until they no longer harbour any selfish attachments. They see that the very concept of 'self' is itself a convention, and they thoroughly understand

the conventions of showing mutual respect.

A person replete with the Dhamma fulfils this principle; he or she venerates the Dhamma by considering it as paramount, without any interference by conceit. Indeed, these conventions are a way to reduce conceit and mental defilement. It is expressed in the various systems of paying respects in the Buddhist congregation, beginning with the respect shown by the laypeople towards the ‘conventional sangha’ (*sammati-saṅgha*)—the monastic sangha—irrespective of age, social restrictions, and levels of knowledge or realization. Even if a layperson is an awakened being, having achieved a realization in the Dhamma of the noble ones (*ariya-dhamma*)—from stream-entry upwards—he or she still pays formal respects to unenlightened monks and nuns (*puṭhujjana*).

When one has removed the problem of conceit, the fact that mature adults—whether they be elders in age or elders in wisdom—pay respects to young monks becomes a protective boundary, making those monks more restrained, conscientious, and vigilant. In this way social conventions become beneficial.

In regard to the bhikkhu sangha, prescribed forms of behaviour according to seniority, like paying respects, bowing, and putting the palms together in *añjali*, constitute forms of monastic discipline.¹ They are standards for communal living, making for the harmony, well-orderedness, and unity.

The obstacle that people face in regard to these conventions is their own conceit—their arrogance and judgements based on relative social hierarchical relationships—which is based on many factors. This conceit needs to be dispelled, beginning with one’s assumptions about one’s age. A person who is ordained as a monk at age sixty will be able to bow down to a young man who has been ordained earlier because he respects the Dhammavinaya and appreciates the opportunity to train himself.

¹ See: Vin. II. 162.

Similarly, because of his realizations and outstanding virtue, an arahant who has been more recently ordained is able to bow down to an unenlightened monk who was ordained earlier. This is not difficult for awakened beings, who have attenuated or eradicated the mental defilements which are the cause for conceit.

The most difficult task for people revolves around the issue of birth or social status. Take for example a member of royalty or a brahman who is newly ordained bowing down to a monk from the class of menial workers (*sudda*) or an outcaste. This is the highest form of training, but it is possible to achieve.

An example of true determination and sincerity in this context is the story of the six Sakyan princes, including Ānanda, who were ordained along with the barber Upāli as the seventh candidate. They decided to dispel their conceit by having Upāli, their servant, be ordained first. From then on all six princes had to bow down to Ven. Upāli. This was an achievement in Dhammavinaya.

Granted, this is not the same as the issue around the bhikkhunis, but being aware of this principle is helpful for one's reflections. In reference to the specific issues dealing with bhikkhunis, if one is knowledgeable about related facts and matters, one will see an increasing number of alternative choices, solutions, and possibilities. In short, knowledge sheds light on various options, and reflection based on precise understanding enables one to make the best choices.

This brings us to the final garudhamma—the eighth one. Let me translate it this way: 'From this day forward, "lower the flag" of the bhikkhunis' speech in relation to the bhikkhus; do not "lower the flag" of the bhikkhus' speech in relation to the bhikkhunis.'¹

There is a difficult term in this passage—*ovaṭo*—which is only used in this one passage in the Pali Canon. It is not found anywhere else. By looking into its etymological roots, its stem remains uncertain. One can only guess.

¹ *Ajjatagge ovaṭo bhikkhunīnaṃ bhikkhūsu vacanapatho anovaṭo bhikkhūnaṃ bhikkhūnisu vacanapatho* (Vin. II. 255).

If one divides this term into *o* + *vaṭa*, the word *vaṭa* can be translated in many different ways that do not fit with this passage or subject matter. One definition that appears suitable, however, is that of ‘flag.’ If one chooses this definition, the compound term means ‘to lower the flag’ or ‘remove the flag,’ which corresponds with the context of conceit (*māna*), which is often defined as ‘desiring prominence like a flag’ or ‘raising one’s flag,’ that is, to express one’s importance or to show off one’s power. It seems to fit this context, so I have translated the passage in this way.

If we inspect the commentarial dictionary, we see that it defines *ovaṭo* as ‘to close,’ ‘to forbid,’ ‘to refuse.’¹ One closes off the way of speech, that is, one forbids admonishment. The commentaries explain that bhikkhunis should not set themselves up in a position of authority and then admonish the bhikkhus, for example by saying: ‘Walk forward this way,’ ‘Walk backwards this way,’ ‘Dress yourself this way,’ ‘Cover yourself this way.’ Such admonishment is not forbidden, however, for the bhikkhus when instructing the bhikkhunis.

If one looks at the circumstances surrounding the origin of the bhikkhuni sangha, one sees that the large group of ordination candidates was comprised of Sakyan royalty. These women most likely carried with them a high degree of conceit connected to being members of royalty. After ordination their privileges no longer remained and they needed to be fully receptive to receiving teachings. They needed to ‘lay down the flag of conceit.’ This is one aspect to this garudhamma principle.

The Sakyans were infamous for their extreme conceit in respect to birth status, social class, and caste. Even in response to the request from the powerful nation of Kosala for a princess, they decided to be tricky and send the child of a slave. In the end Prince Viḍūḍabha sent an army and utterly destroyed the Sakyan people, as a consequence of their pride.

¹ VinA. IV. 799.

One of the sub-commentaries claims that the Buddha's laying down rules and *dukkāṭa* offences in response to the bhikkhunis who omitted the Observance day and Pavāraṇā day duties in regard to the bhikkhus, and in response to those who cross-examined the bhikkhus, is equivalent to laying down rules for the transgression of this garudhamma principle.¹ (The author of this sub-commentary expresses a strong opinion, that as the Buddha initially allowed bhikkhunis to be ordained by accepting the garudhammas, it can be doubted whether transgressing these principles is equivalent to no longer being fully ordained—*anupasampanna*.) In any case, this is simply an example of an incident related to this garudhamma principle. It does not directly touch upon the principle itself and it is connected to training rules outside of the Pāṭimokkha.

In sum, the eighth garudhamma is described only in general terms and never became formalized as a training rule, either within the Pāṭimokkha or without.

The Bhikkhuni Pāṭimokkha Provides a Training Going Against the Stream of Predominant Social Values

In the end any discussion on the garudhamma principles is connected to the Pāṭimokkha, or to the process in which agreements come to rely on and be codified as formal rules. For this reason let us turn our attention to the Pāṭimokkha. At the beginning there was no formal discipline (Vinaya) for the bhikkhunis to use as a basis for their behaviour; there were only the garudhammas to observe as key principles. Only later did the Pāṭimokkha come into existence.

The establishment of the Pāṭimokkha provided the bhikkhunis with a formal system of discipline—their training no longer needed to rely only on the garudhammas. The Vinaya shored up, protected, and acted as a guarantee for the garudhammas.

¹ Vajirabuddhiṭikā [428/685]; based on Vin. II. 276.

There is the following story in the Tipiṭaka:¹

At that time the Pāṭimokkha had not yet been recited to the bhikkhunis.... The bhikkhus told this matter to the Blessed One ... [who said]: ‘Monks, I allow the recitation of the Pāṭimokkha to the bhikkhunis.

Consequently, the bhikkhus thought: ‘Who indeed should recite the Pāṭimokkha to the bhikkhunis?’ The bhikkhus told this matter to the Blessed One ... [who said]: ‘Monks, I allow the bhikkhus to recite the Pāṭimokkha to the bhikkhunis.’

Then the bhikkhus went to the bhikkhunis’ residence and recited the Pāṭimokkha to them.

People denounced, criticized and condemned them, saying: ‘These are their wives, these are their lovers; at this moment they are amusing themselves.’

The monks heard those people denouncing, criticizing and condemning them, and thus brought this matter to the Buddha ... [who said]: ‘Monks, the bhikkhus should not recite the Pāṭimokkha to the bhikkhunis. Whoever does so incurs an offence of wrongdoing (dukkata). I allow the bhikkhunis to recite the Pāṭimokkha to other bhikkhunis.’

The bhikkhunis did not know in what manner they should recite the Pāṭimokkha. The bhikkhus told this matter to the Blessed One ... [who said]: ‘Monks, I allow the bhikkhus to declare (i.e., teach) the bhikkhunis the way in which the Pāṭimokkha should be recited.’

There are a few observations to make in regard to the relationship between the garudhammas and the Pāṭimokkha.

First, as is apparent from this story, when the bhikkhus and bhikkhunis would visit one another, this would often immediately be followed by gossip and accusations by the laypeople. This sort of problem happened continuously and had a clear effect on the stability

¹ Vin. II. 259. This passage has been revised according to the Chaṭṭhasaṅgīti: Cūlavaggapāḷi 450.

of the sangha. In this story the Buddha had to forbid the bhikkhus from reciting the Pāṭimokkha to the bhikkhunis, who were then permitted to perform the recitation by themselves.

Second, after the bhikkhunis were permitted to recite the Pāṭimokkha by themselves, why was it necessary for the bhikkhus to provide them with guidance and teachings? This question brings up doubts and points to the society and way of life at the time of the Buddha.

From this perspective one can surmise that most of the bhikkhunis had only a basic level of education. That is, women at that time did not receive a formal education; rather they stayed at home and at age 15 or 16 they would get married. Sometimes they would get married as early as 12 years old. Most women were not involved in business administration and didn't require academic knowledge.

This was different for the boys. If one was born into the brahman caste, boys were soon sent off to learn the Vedas, which was considered the exclusive knowledge of the brahmins. Young princes and sons of wealthy merchants who showed an interest in learning were frequently sent to the city of Takkaṣilā.¹ Their education would begin by facing the dangers of travelling long distances.

King Pasenadi of Kosala, his general Bandhula, and the Licchavi chief Mahāli all studied at Takkaṣilā. The Buddha's physician Jīvaka also studied there, travelling all the way from Rājagaha. As the crow flies this is more than 1,500 kilometres, but the journey would have been much longer than this. He was able to travel with some merchants and went to study with a world famous teacher. Although he learned quickly, his studies still took seven years.

Formal education at that time was thus the privilege of males. The establishment of the bhikkhuni order, however, acted as a reinforcement for the bhikkhu sangha, to widen the scope of formal religious training to the general population, including to laywomen.

¹ [Taxila, in modern-day Pakistan.]

The Garudhammas and the Buddha's Heirs

Questioner: There is a doubt about whether the eight garudhammas were established later and are not the words of the Buddha.

Phra Payutto: Who do those people who express this opinion believe established these principles?

Questioner: I guess they believe that one of the heirs to the Buddha did this.

Phra Payutto: There are many such heirs named in the Tipiṭaka, some 30-40 of them—which one of them was responsible?

Questioner: Venerable Mahā Kassapa.

Phra Payutto: And who appointed Ven. Mahā Kassapa as the Buddha's heir?

Questioner: Venerable Mano¹ says that either the Buddha did, or else Ven. Mahā Kassapa appointed himself. I've read his book, but can't remember exactly what he says.

Phra Payutto: No, the bhikkhunis appointed him.

Questioner: He was formally appointed by the bhikkhuni sangha?

Phra Payutto: No, by Ven. Bhaddā Kāpilānī, who was Ven. Mahā Kassapa's former wife.² I'm joking. In fact, no-one was required to appoint Mahā Kassapa as the Buddha's heir. Ven. Mahā Moggallāna referred both to himself and to Mahā Kassapa as being the Buddha's heirs. Mahā Kassapa, too, referred to himself as the Buddha's heir. Several other monks referred to themselves or to others as the Buddha's heir.

¹ [Ven. Mano Mettānando; a scholar monk who wrote several controversial books on Buddhism. He disrobed in 2007.]

² [The author uses the spelling Bhaddakāpilānī.]

No-one needs to appoint these individuals—the inheritance happens automatically. When one is ordained as a bhikkhu or bhikkhuni, one is a *buddha-putta*: a child of the Buddha, a *buddha-orasa*: a son or daughter of the Buddha, a *jinorasa*: a descendent of the Victorious One. One practises the Dhamma and undertakes the threefold training, and when one realizes the fruit of arahantship, one immediately becomes an heir of the Buddha. It's as simple as this.

Some monks while sitting alone realized the Dhamma and were enlightened. They uttered to themselves: 'I am the Buddha's heir!' Go and read these passages in the Tipiṭaka and you will understand who qualifies as the Buddha's heir and the meaning of this expression. It is clear.

As for Ven. Bhaddā Kapilānī's apparent appointment of Ven. Mahā Kassapa as the Buddha's heir, this occurs when she was remembering her personal story leading up to her ordination and complete awakening. Mahā Kassapa is a part of her life story, and in regard to her attainment of arahantship she considered him to be a 'beautiful friend' (*kalyāṇamitta*).

She thought of Ven. Mahā Kassapa, who had attained arahantship, as an heir to the Buddha, just like she was. Ven. Bhaddā Kapilānī was also an arahant and the Buddha's heir. However, the passage referred to here is a poetic verse, in which she is talking about Mahā Kassapa, extolling and delighting in his virtue.¹

Other 'elders' (*thera & therī*) referred to themselves or others as the Buddha's heir. Of the many names specifically mentioned, there are about 30-40 of these 'heirs' mentioned in the Tipiṭaka. In fact every arahant is an heir to the Buddha—this expression is not referring to anything sensational.

Questioner: I guess people have caused so much excitement about this subject that they are now confused.

¹ [For more on Ven. Mahā Kassapa's formal role in the sangha, see Appendix 3.]

Phra Payutto: Study that neglects precise and clear knowledge inevitably leads to false information—this is very worrisome.

There are some interesting points about this matter of being an heir to the Buddha. The Buddha rejected specific ideas and concepts of the brahmins and established a new way of thinking instead, which can be considered either as opposing or in parallel to the brahmanic view.

Let us look at a passage in which a brahman claims to be the ‘heir of Brahma.’ The Buddha rejects this claim and replaces the brahman’s idea with the concept of being an ‘heir to the Buddha’ and an ‘heir to the Dhamma’:

The brahmins have forgotten their ancient tradition when they say: ‘The brahman caste is the highest caste, other castes are base.... Brahmins are the offspring, the legitimate children of Brahma, born from his mouth, born of Brahma, created by Brahma, heirs of Brahma.’¹

The Buddha went on to say that monks in this Dhammavinaya can truly claim:

I am a true son, a legitimate child of the Blessed One, born of his mouth, born of Dhamma, created by Dhamma, an heir of Dhamma.’²

This is what it means to be a child and heir of the Buddha, an heir of the Dhamma. This matter has to do with a way of thinking that stands in opposition to the brahmanic concept of being an heir of Brahma. It does not deal with a perfunctory or arbitrary transmission of a position of administrator or ruler over the sangha, comparable to a system of government practised by householders.

An example of how an heir of the Buddha is born is found in this passage by Ven. Siṅgālapitā Thera:

¹ D. III. 81. *Brāhmaṇā brahmuno puttā orasā mukhato jātā brahmajā brahmanimmitā brahmadāyādā.*

² *Bhagavatomhi putto oraso mukhato jāto dhammajo dhammanimitto dhammadāyādo.*

A monk in the Bhesakalā forest, perceiving the entire breadth of this body, seeing it entirely as a skeleton, becomes an heir of the Buddha.¹

There are other examples, but this is probably enough for an understanding.

In any case, I can't see how it would have been possible for one of the so-called Buddha's heirs or anyone else by that matter to establish the garudhammas at a later time period. When I first heard this idea, it sounded quite strange and worthy of investigation, but after some reflection I thought one doesn't need to waste time with such doubts, because this matter is rather clear.

The monastic community, both bhikkhus and bhikkhunis, safeguarded and practised according to the Buddha's prescriptions, both those disciplinary rules within the Pāṭimokkha and without, up till the time of the Buddha's final passing away. As for the bhikkhuni sangha, it was not comprised of merely ten or twenty individuals, but numbered into the thousands. Supposing the garudhammas didn't exist during the Buddha's lifetime and were established later, the monks and nuns were observing a complete training code (Vinaya)—why would they afterwards have agreed to new adaptations or changes?

Furthermore, if someone really wielded power over the sangha, why would he have established the garudhammas, which have no binding authority and cannot be used to penalize anyone. Why waste one's time establishing these principles? If one really were to have power, one may as well add or change the training rules. Wouldn't this have been easier, more effective for achieving one's wishes, and more certain?

Enough. We can move on.

¹ Thag. 18.

The Absence of Bhikkhunis at Formal Recitations

Why Were No Bhikkhunis Present at the First Recitation?

Phra Payutto: We have been talking a long time, but I haven't yet really addressed your question dealing with the absence of bhikkhunis at the the First Recitation. Can you repeat the question?

Dr. Martin: Yes. Why did no bhikkhunis participate in the First Recitation despite at that time there existing many bhikkhunis who were arahants?

Phra Payutto: I addressed this matter in some respects earlier, in so far as one should consider it in relation to the social conditions in India during that time. In short, in the general Indian society at that time, women did not openly participate in state affairs or engage in formal commerce and business. In particular, they did not participate in formal meetings—they didn't sit in formal councils or assemblies.

This is not so different from recent times. Women in America, for example, only began to leave the household and work in industrial

factories during the Second World War (1939-45). Circumstances required this—most of the men were soldiers and went to the battlefields, from Europe all the way to Asia. Not only did the population at home need to produce general consumer goods, but they also needed to rush to send weapons and munitions to the front, including bomber planes. While the men were fighting, the women needed to go into the factories to produce weapons and send them both to the American soldiers and to their allies. After the Second World War, at the beginning of the 1960's, women in America worked in offices in a more favourable position as secretaries. But as yet it was very uncommon for women to act as business managers.¹

Moreover, for a long time women didn't have the right to vote, both in America and in Europe (in the West this was the custom ever since the Greek and Roman empires). It was a big deal when women started a movement to fight for their right to vote, resulting in some deaths before they achieved their goal. (One of the activists for women's suffrage, Emily Davison, was imprisoned several times, and died after throwing herself in front of King George V's horse on 4 June 1913.)

In America women only received universal voting rights in 1920 (in European countries on the whole, women received this right between 1906-1928). Thai women received this right in 1932. In 1952, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Political Rights of Women protecting the equal status of women to exercise the right to vote. In Switzerland women didn't obtain this right completely until 1971.

In the Buddhist monastic community, however, women as bhikkhunis exercised this right to participate in formal decision making (equivalent to voting) from the very beginning—a long time ago. When the bhikkhuni sangha was established, women in the

¹ [In 1934, Lettie Pate Whitehead became the first American woman to serve as a director of a major corporation, The Coca-Cola Company.]

capacity of bhikkhunis received a training in the Dhammavinaya and participated in formal meetings, considering and managing sangha affairs, according to the Buddha's prescriptions on formal acts of the sangha (*saṅghakamma*). Moreover, they were involved in adjudicating legal disputes (*adhikaraṇa*). These activities are equivalent to the duties performed by the laity in formal assemblies and courts of justice. In the case of the monastic community, these activities take place in the Uposatha hall. This allowance by the Buddha for the bhikkhunis to participate in these activities should be considered innovative and unusual.

Both the bhikkhus and bhikkhunis live in community, which is divided into the bhikkhu sangha and the bhikkhuni sangha. Both of these monastic communities possess a formal system of relationship and involvement for stability and wellbeing, both in terms of internal harmony and order, and in terms of being a source of faith and reverence for the outside lay community.

As it happened, this new system of providing women with new authority and social standing still met with many difficulties in regard to the monks and nuns meeting with one another. The tradition, culture, and feelings of the laypeople were generally not favourable. Whenever the bhikkhus went to the bhikkhunis' residence, or the bhikkhunis met with the bhikkhus in the monks' quarters, the laypeople would focus keenly on this, resulting in negative rumours and gossip, which impeded the activities of the sangha. This was true even in the case of travelling in order to chant the Pāṭimokkha, as recounted earlier. In any case, the result of all this was that in the end there was no formal sangha procedure (*saṅghakamma*) performed by having the bhikkhus and bhikkhunis meet together. Each individual community performed its own formal acts separately.

The Buddha did decree that some of the formal acts of the bhikkhunis needed to be performed in both sanghas, that is, 'complete in both sanghas' (*ubhato-saṅgha*). But due to various obstacles,

including perhaps the criticism by the laity addressed above, the communities did not perform these activities together, at the same time. They were performed first in the bhikkhuni sangha, and then afterwards as a second stage they were performed in the bhikkhu sangha.

One activity which clearly requires both communities is the ordination of bhikkhunis. This evolved as a consequence of there being no bhikkhunis at the beginning—the first generation of bhikkhunis thus depended on the bhikkhu sangha for ordination. Later on it became inconvenient for women to be ordained in the bhikkhu sangha due to the formal inquiry of personal attributes (the questioning over ‘impediments for ordination’—*antarāyika-dhammā*). The Buddha thus made some changes, allowing for the higher ordination to be completed first in the bhikkhuni sangha, before conducting a second-stage higher ordination in the bhikkhu sangha.¹ At this point the completion of the ordination rested almost entirely with the bhikkhuni sangha. The stage involving the bhikkhu sangha is similar to a simple request for confirmation.

Later on some bhikkhunis who had completed their ordination with the bhikkhuni sangha wished to go through the second-stage ordination with some bhikkhus in another city. As it happened they received the news that travelling to this other city would not be safe. The Buddha then made the allowance that if one fears such a journey is dangerous one may organize for a knowledgeable, skilled bhikkhuni to act as a messenger and representative, in order to announce one’s wishes in the formal assembly of bhikkhus in that other location.²

In regard to the Pavāraṇā ceremony, the Buddha permitted the bhikkhunis to make this formal invitation for admonishment among themselves, and afterwards to make this invitation to the bhikkhu

¹ Vin. II. 271. *Anujānāmi bhikkhave ekato-upasampannāya bhikkhunīsāṅghe visuddhāya bhikkhusāṅghe upasampādetuṃ.*

² Vin. II. 276-7.

sangha. It happened that the two communities once performed this ceremony together, but a chaotic commotion broke out. When the Buddha heard of this he forbade the two communities from performing this ceremony together.

When these adjustments had fallen into place, it became the standard that the bhikkhunis would perform the Pavāraṇā ceremony on one day, and then on the following morning they would go and make a formal invitation to the bhikkhu sangha. And in this second stage of the ceremony, not every bhikkhuni would make such an invitation, which could have potentially been disorderly. Instead, one knowledgeable, skilled bhikkhuni was appointed to make this invitation to the bhikkhu sangha on behalf of the entire bhikkhuni sangha. This appointed bhikkhuni would lead the bhikkhuni sangha to the bhikkhu sangha, and she would then inform the bhikkhus about the formal invitation for admonishment by the bhikkhuni sangha.¹

In regard to the bhikkhunis' two-week penance (*pakkha-mānatta*), which needs to be completed in both sanghas, the process is divided into two stages, beginning with the bhikkhuni sangha, and then followed by an involvement with the bhikkhu sangha.²

In sum, already during the Buddha's time, the bhikkhu and bhikkhuni communities did not meet together to perform formal acts of the sangha. This was the Buddha's wish and directive. There were, however, methods established for the two communities to communicate and to carry out business with one another in regard to specific matters, and these methods became the accepted standard.

Let us now look at the First Recitation. As I have mentioned before, this event entailed a formal act of the sangha (*saṅghakamma*), as is recorded in the appendix to the Vinaya Piṭaka, called the Pañcasatika Khandhaka.³ First of all, it is normal that no-one else participated in

¹ For more details, see: Vin. II. 275-6.

² For more details, see: VinA. VI. 1184-9.

³ Vin. II. 284.

this formal meeting. Not only bhikkhunis were excluded—members of all the other Buddhist assemblies also did not sit within arms-length (*hatthapāsa*) of the bhikkhus.

We may then ask whether the monks initiated any formal processes to communicate with and impart information to members of the other Buddhist assemblies as a form of cooperation. If we base our answer on the recorded material, there are no details on which to elaborate. You can look at this fact for yourselves.

The Pañcasatika Khandhaka in the Pali Siam Raṭṭha Edition in Thai script runs to only sixteen pages.¹ This appendix only seems to give a general summary of events and activities during the First Recitation, rather than providing much detail. It begins with a reference to Ven. Mahā Kassapa, who while travelling heard of the Buddha's final passing away. One of the monks in his group said something that prompted Mahā Kassapa to encourage the bhikkhus to gather for a formal meeting and recitation (*saṅgāyanā*). It then describes the preparations for the meeting, the procedure of selecting monks, choosing a location, and arranging the lodgings.

In regard to the actual meeting, the Pañcasatika Khandhaka describes the formal act of the sangha beginning with the announcement (*ñatti*). The meeting then progresses by Ven. Upāli being asked about matters concerning the Vinaya. In this section only the questions dealing with the four rules of defeat (*pārājika*) are mentioned as examples. There is then a description of the questions posed to Ven. Ānanda concerning the Dhamma, giving as an example the main topics in relation to the first sutta, followed by an introduction to the second sutta. The description then moves on to other subjects and events. The subject matter dealing with the recitation of the Dhammavinaya as found in the Tipiṭaka runs to less than two-and-a-half pages.²

¹ Eleven pages in the Chaṭṭhasaṅgīti edition in Burmese script.

² In the Chaṭṭhasaṅgīti this material runs to less than two pages.

This is the only description we have of the First Recitation. The fact that this event took seven months to complete is stated simply as such. It provides basic examples of the method used in posing questions, which is uniform throughout.

The Pañcasatika Khandhaka goes on to describe the debate over the Buddha's permission for the sangha, if it so wishes, to abolish minor training rules, and the discussion over what constitutes these rules. When this matter was not resolved, there was a consensus by the elders to neither add or remove any rules, and instead to practise according to the prescriptions already laid down. This was then the end of the formal act of the sangha.

After this there is no further mention of Ven. Mahā Kassapa. There is a description of how Ven. Ānanda was accused by certain unnamed monks of having acted improperly in the past. Ānanda didn't try and defend himself; he simply admitted to these minor failings.

The final story about these events describes Ven. Ānanda's consultation with some of the other bhikkhus on how to execute the last disciplinary act of the Buddha in regard to Ven. Channa. Ānanda sorted out this matter and brought it to conclusion.

So from one perspective, the activity which took the longest period of time, and was on the whole similar in nature, is given the shortest account. Only two pages of the text describe the main activity of the seven-month Recitation, simply to give examples of the methodology used in the questions and answers.

In the sixteen pages of this text, Ven. Mahā Kassapa's name appears up to page 9, while Ven. Ānanda's name appears beginning on page 2 up to the end, on page 16.

Apart from the formal meetings, we do not know what other developments and procedures occurred during these seven months in regard to communication, discussion, and appointment of responsibility. We do have the additional information in regard to setting up accommodation, that besides the five hundred monks participating in

the meeting, no other bhikkhus were invited to spend the Rainy Season in Rājagaha. There is no mention, however, of others besides the bhikkhus.

Although it is not stated, it is normal to presume that at least the male and female lay-supporters would have supported the monks with great care. In any case, this entire event would have entailed the cooperation and interaction between the four Buddhist assemblies.

And if one wants to speculate, as I said, it is stated clearly that other bhikkhus were not permitted to spend the Rains in Rājagaha. Bhikkhunis are not included in this injunction. It would have been natural for many bhikkhunis to be living in this key city, a centre of Buddhism at the time. If this was the case, many bhikkhunis would have been witness to the event. By following such conjectures, one can come up with all sorts of possibilities. But here let us stick with the evidence.

Bhikkhunis & Lay Women as Important Sources for the Suttas

We are unable to know clearly the level of participation by the bhikkhunis at the First Recitation. What we can try and understand, however, is the subject matter of the Dhammavinaya, which is the result of the recitation. Let us try and analyze this subject material.

Before we do this, let us look at certain features of how the sangha lived and functioned, which have a bearing on the substance of the Dhammavinaya that has been handed down to us. As I mentioned earlier, because of gender restrictions, especially in regard to living a celibate life, it was normal that the bhikkhunis did not live in close proximity to the bhikkhus. This also means that they didn't live in close proximity to the Buddha.

Let us look at the sangha's everyday life, by using Jetavana as an example. This is the monastery where the Buddha spent the most time, and it is the source for the greatest number of his teachings on Dhammavinaya. Although the bhikkhunis lived in the same monastery

as the bhikkhus, they lived in a clearly defined, separate area.

It was normal that the Buddha's own lodging was in the middle of the community of bhikkhus. (In the suttas his residence is generally referred to simply as the 'monastic residence'—*vihāra*; in the commentaries it is given the special name: the Gandhakuṭi.)

Besides the fact that individual monks with questions, or groups of monks debating unsettled issues, would have easily been able to go and consult with the Buddha, we know from stories in the Tipiṭaka that near the Buddha's lodging there was a round hall (*sālā*), where the monks could go and engage in discussion. Otherwise, they could go the assembly hall (*upaṭṭhāna-sālā*).

Sometimes the Buddha would come out and make inquiries, using the standard Pali phrase: *Kāya nuttha bhikkhave etarahi kathāya sannisinnā*—'On what topic are you sitting here conversing?' He would then explain the matter or give a teaching to those bhikkhus. These occasions were the source for several suttas.

Occasionally, disciples, for instance in the case of Ven. Soṇa-Kuṭikaṇṇa, would arrive after a long journey, and would be invited to stay at the Gandhakuṭi. Both kings and brahmans would sometimes visit the Buddha at his residence. The Buddha would sometimes come out in the late afternoon and sit in the shade of the Gandhakuṭi. Both bhikkhus and people from outside would go and converse with him there. Several suttas are derived from these discussions or from answers to questions.

In these circumstances, it was difficult for the bhikkhunis to remain abreast of proceedings and events. Normally, they would be informed by the bhikkhus. As mentioned earlier, at least the regular formal exhortation (*ovāda*) was an important opportunity for the nuns to communicate with the monks and to stay up-to-date on relevant news.

In regard to the Vinaya, even the Buddha's laying down training rules for the bhikkhunis followed these channels or stages. In the case that a bhikkhuni acted inappropriately, the other bhikkhunis would

witness and criticize the action, or the laypeople would criticize this behaviour and the bhikkhunis would hear about this. The bhikkhunis would then relay these criticisms and concerns to the bhikkhus, who would then go and inform the Buddha. After the Buddha had made inquiries and determined the truth of the matter, he would then prescribe training rules in the formal assembly of the bhikkhus.

The bhikkhu sangha acted therefore in a sense as a delegate for the bhikkhuni sangha, by relaying the Buddha's injunctions (*buddhāṇatti*) and instructions (*buddhānusāsani*), and by following established methods for dealing with issues that had an impact on both communities.

The bhikkhuni sangha was unable to perform the role of acting as a centre or gathering point for all matters pertaining to the monastic community. It was the bhikkhu sangha which acted as the hub of the community. For this reason, there were no matters pertaining to the Dhammavinaya of the bhikkhunis that the bhikkhus were not aware of.

Having outlined these aspects and functions of the monastic sangha, let us now look at the subject material of the Dhammavinaya, which contains examples of the participation by bhikkhunis in community life. The essence and heart of the Dhammavinaya, which has been preserved in the form of the Tipiṭaka, focuses on the words and teachings of the Buddha. Although the Tipiṭaka does contain teachings by disciples and other individuals, along with associated stories, one can generalize by saying that it consists of the words of the Buddha.

This is especially true in regard to the suttas. Although there are many suttas containing teachings by disciples, for the most part they were fully awakened disciples, and their teachings are considered to mirror the words of the Buddha. In some suttas, it is clear that the disciples are sharing teachings entrusted to them by the Buddha. Sometimes, the Buddha offers words of approval or appreciation at the end. In any case, compared to the teachings given directly by the Buddha, these suttas containing teachings by disciples are few.

Of these relatively few suttas containing teachings by disciples, most of these teachings were given by the chief disciples, for instance Ven. Sāriputta, whom the Buddha praised as being able to truly assist him in turning the wheel of the Dhamma. Here, we will look at some of these suttas given by disciples.

The Rathavinīta Sutta is an important sutta given by Ven. Puṇṇa-Mantānīputta, who was distinguished as foremost (*etadagga*) of the preachers of Dhamma (*dhamma-kathika*) among the bhikkhus.¹ This sutta includes a conversation with Ven. Sāriputta, in which Puṇṇa-Mantānīputta answers questions and presents a cultivation of the threefold training, following the stages of the seven kinds of purity (*visuddhi*). This teaching later became the framework for the Visuddhimagga.

In regard to teachings by bhikkhunis, Ven. Dhammadinnā Therī, who was also preeminent among the preachers of Dhamma, is the source of another key sutta, the Cūḷavedalla Sutta.² This sutta contains a conversation with the male lay follower Visākha. After answering Visākha's questions, Dhammadinnā advises him to make further inquiries with the Buddha. When Visākha informed the Buddha of this conversation, he was told that Dhammadinnā is a sage with great wisdom. Even if Visākha had initially come to ask these questions from the Buddha himself, he would have answered them in the same way as Dhammadinnā had.

This gives us an opportunity to mention the male and female lay disciples. There are several short suttas (about ten) containing teachings by the householder Citta, who was foremost among the male lay Dhamma preachers. Most of these teachings are explanations on Dhamma presented to the bhikkhus.

There isn't an equivalent foremost female lay preacher, but there is a woman foremost in erudition (*bahussuta*), for which there is no

¹ M. I. 145.

² M. I. 299.

equivalent among the male lay supporters. The laywoman preeminent in this quality was Khujjuttarā. She is sometimes referred to as the ‘chief female lay-supporter’ (*agga-upāsikā*), as a consequence of the Buddha praising her as being the ‘standard-bearer’ of the assembly of female lay supporters. There are some fascinating stories about her.

Most of us are familiar with the fact that the suttas usually begin with the phrase: *Evaṃ me sutam*—‘Thus have I heard,’ which is a statement by Ven. Ānanda. There is, however, one group of suttas that do not begin with this phrase, and instead begin with the words: *Vuttaṃ hetam bhagavatā*—‘This was said by the Blessed One.’ I am referring here to all of the 112 suttas in the Itivuttaka.¹ The Itivuttaka contains many key and influential teachings (for example the Buddha’s description of the two ‘elements of Nibbāna’—*nibbāna-dhātu*).²

Indeed, this entire collection of suttas was originally memorized and safeguarded by the laywoman Khujjuttarā. She had heard these teachings directly from the Buddha and thus the suttas begin with the words: ‘This was said by the Blessed One.’ Ven. Ānanda presented these suttas at the First Recitation, preserving this first phrase spoken by Khujjuttarā.³

Eminent Bhikkhunis as the Source of Cardinal Suttas

Let us return to the subject of bhikkhunis. In the Saṃyutta Nikāya there is a collection of suttas related to bhikkhus called the Bhikkhu Saṃyutta, which is in the sixteenth volume of the Tipiṭaka, and another collection of suttas related to bhikkhunis called the Bhikkhunī Saṃyutta, which is in the fifteenth volume of the Tipiṭaka.

The reason why the Bhikkhu Saṃyutta is part of the sixteenth volume is because the fifteenth volume (*Sagātha Vagga*) is comprised entirely of poetic verses. The suttas in the Bhikkhu Saṃyutta are all

¹ It. 1-124.

² It. 38.

³ See: ItA. I. 31.

prose suttas, and therefore they were moved to the sixteenth volume (Nidāna Vagga). All of the suttas in the Bhikkhunī Saṃyutta are in verse form.

Let us look first at the Bhikkhu Saṃyutta, which contains twelve very interesting suttas.¹ The bhikkhus here, however, are the listeners, rather than the speakers. Nine of the suttas contain teachings by the Buddha in which he praises various virtuous monks, presenting them as exemplars or sources of encouragement for the other monks. One sutta is a conversation between Ven. Sāriputta and Ven. Mahā Moggallāna, one is a teaching by Sāriputta to the monks, and one is a teaching by Mahā Moggallāna.

Now let us look at the Bhikkhunī Saṃyutta, which contains ten suttas by ten different bhikkhunis.² These suttas are in poetic verse form and are the direct teachings by these individual bhikkhunis. These suttas follow a similar format: each one of these bhikkhunis goes into the forest to seek solitude during the day and she is harassed by Māra. The bhikkhunis see through his deceptions and utter verses containing Dhamma teachings. The suttas end with Māra departing downcast and discouraged.

The Dhamma teachings contained in these suttas are profound. For example, one sutta recounts how Somā Bhikkhuni went into the forest to sit by a tree. Māra wished to frighten her and disturb her concentration, and uttered the following verse:

*That state so hard to achieve,
Which is to be attained by the seers,
Cannot be attained by a woman
With her two-fingered wisdom.*

Somā Bhikkhunī knew what he was up to and replied:

*What does womanhood matter at all
When the mind is concentrated well,*

¹ S. II. 273-85.

² S. I. 128-35.

*When one is endowed with penetrative wisdom,
Seeing correctly into the truth.
One to whom it might occur,
'I am a woman' or 'I am a man'
Or with yearning thinks I am anything at all—
Is fit for Māra to address.¹*

Another sutta which is very famous includes a teaching by Vajirā Bhikkhunī. Here Māra says:

*Who created this being?
Where is the creator of beings?
Where does a being originate?
Where does a being cease?*

Vajirā Bhikkhunī answered:

*Really, Māra, do you believe in a being?—
That is a view clung to by you.
This is purely a mass of formations;
Here, no being can be found.
Just as with the assembly of various parts,
The term 'wagon' ensues,
So too, with the five aggregates
The conventional term 'being' ensues.
Indeed, there is only dukkha that arises,
Abides and passes away.
Nothing but dukkha comes to be,
Nothing but dukkha ceases.²*

The Vajirā Sutta is greatly revered. It is used commonly as a reference for explaining the characteristic of nonself (*anattā*), as it pertains to human beings and to all beings in general.

Other texts in the Tipiṭaka cite this teaching. It is referred to, for example, in the Mahāniddeśa, which is traditionally considered to

¹ S. I. 129; also at Thīg. verses 60-62.

² S. I. 135. *Dukkha*: the condition of dissolution and transience.

contain the teachings by the chief disciple Ven. Sāriputta. Here it states: ‘Vajirā Bhikkhunī said thus....’¹ Ven. Moggaliputta-Tissa Thera,² the head of the Third Recitation (*saṅgāyanā*) cited it in the Kathāvatthu, which was composed to rectify the wrong views of various schools (*nikāya*) during the time of Emperor Asoka.³ In later texts, beginning with the Visuddhimagga by Ven. Buddhaghosa Thera, it is cited repeatedly.⁴

In the fifteenth volume of the Tipiṭaka there are suttas in verse form dealing with bhikkhus, but this collection of suttas is not called the Bhikkhu Saṃyutta, because these teachings are not by bhikkhus. Instead, bhikkhus here are the recipients of these teachings. These monks were living in the forest, but were indulgent, sleeping too much, careless, or otherwise caught up in activities. Celestial beings thus came to warn them by speaking verses of Dhamma. This collection of fourteen suttas is called the Vana Saṃyutta.⁵

¹ Nd. I. 438-9.

² [The author uses the spelling Moggallīputta.]

³ Kvu. 66-7.

⁴ E.g.: Vism. 593-4.

⁵ S. I. 197-205. In the Vana Saṃyutta, there are two exceptions. In one sutta Ven. Anuruddha is living peacefully and is approached by a devatā who tries to seduce him. Anuruddha then admonishes her. In another sutta a devatā utters a verse describing the forest from an unenlightened point of view. A monk then alters this verse to reveal the perspective of an awakened being.

Let us look at one of the suttas in which a devatā offers a reminder to a bhikkhu (S. I. 202): On one occasion a Vajjian bhikkhu was dwelling in a forest near Vesālī. On that occasion an all-night festival was being held in Vesālī. This monk heard the loud, jubilant music and became depressed, uttering this verse of lament:

*We dwell in the forest all alone
Like a log rejected in the woods.
On such a night as this
Who is there worse off than me?*

The devatā that inhabited that forest, having compassion for that monk, desiring his good, and desiring to stir up a sense of urgency in him, approached him and addressed him in verse:

*As you dwell in the forest all alone
Like a log rejected in the woods,
Many are those who envy you,
As hell-beings envy those in heaven.*

Then that monk, stirred up by that devatā, acquired a sense of urgency.

To sum up, the Bhikkhunī Saṃyutta contains stories of bhikkhunis chasing off Māra, and the Vana Saṃyutta contains stories of devatās admonishing monks.

Perhaps this is enough to provide a basis for consideration on this subject. How things actually took place, however, I can't absolutely know, because the factual evidence is not totally clear and I wasn't born in time to witness these events firsthand.

What is important here is that one examines closely the factual evidence that is available, so that one is confident and clear on these issues, rather than make a slapdash inquiry. If one produces incorrect facts and thus increases misunderstanding, this only destroys the benefits of wisdom belonging to the greater public. This is a vital matter.

Can the Theravada Lineage Transplanted to China Many Centuries Ago Still Be Accepted as Theravada?

Dr. Martin: In the Vinaya it does not state whether the bhikkhunis who give higher ordination to women candidates must be purely of the Theravada lineage, because during the Buddha's time the sangha hadn't yet splintered off into different groups (*nikāya*) or split into the division of *sāvaka-yāna* (the 'way of the disciples') and Mahayana, is this correct? There is a scholar who argues that there is evidence showing that bhikkhunis travelled from Sri Lanka to China in the 10th century BE, and that they passed down an unbroken ordination lineage from that time to the present. This scholar goes on to state that the Dharmaguptaka Pāṭimokkha used in these ordinations has a great similarity to the 311 rules contained in the Theravada bhikkhuni Pāṭimokkha. In fact, the Dharmaguptaka bhikkhuni Pāṭimokkha contains even more rules.

The question here pertains to the matter of a difference in communion (*nānā-saṃvāsa*). Let us assume that this ordination

procedure was truly passed down in an unbroken fashion, and that the Dharmaguptaka Pāṭimokkha is more-or-less identical to the 311 rules contained in the Theravada Pāṭimokkha. This would mean that there is a ‘congruity of moral conduct’ (*sīla-sāmaññatā*). But wouldn’t there be a conflict in terms of ‘congruity of views’ (*diṭṭhi-sāmaññatā*), or are we dealing here with something different? I am still unclear on this subject of *nānā-sarivāsa*.

Phra Payutto: That’s okay. In fact, the claim by this scholar already contains a contradiction. How so? She states that at the time of the Buddha the distinction between Theravada and Mahayana didn’t exist, and for this reason one shouldn’t confine oneself to Theravada. If one follows this argument, why bother taking into account the movement of bhikkhunis from Sri Lanka to China? If one doesn’t recognize an essential distinction between Theravada and Mahayana, why focus here on the Theravada lineage at all? With this line of reasoning it is acceptable to invite Mahayana bhikkhunis to conduct ordinations; there is no need to go and trace the movement of Sri Lankan bhikkhunis.

The fact that she mentions the Sri Lankan bhikkhunis travelling to China indicates that she realizes the distinctive identity of Theravada Buddhism, right? So this argument is rife with confusion. Let me reply to this in several steps.

First, at the time of the Buddha, while the Buddha was still alive, if any difficulties arose in the sangha the Buddha would deliberate and settle these matters himself. Even with this being so, the monastic community almost split into two distinct factions, because Ven. Devadatta almost succeeded in creating a new, distinct group. There was almost a separate ‘school’ (*nikāya*), but because the problem was solved it didn’t come to this.

The splintering into different schools is an historical occurrence, because when the main monastic community protected the

Dhammavinaya in this form, other groups of monks disagreed, resulting in a division of views and practices. Some monks went their separate ways and new schools were established. This is the truth of what happened. We can't go back in time and have things be exactly as they were during the Buddha's time.

Second, and more profoundly, what is the essential meaning of the term 'Theravada'? We need not get stuck at the literal term. It is simply a term used to denote a specific tradition. The upholding of this specific tradition is referred to as 'Theravada.' It is simply a term used to convey this meaning. The term 'Theravada' points to a factual truth. It denotes a tradition that strictly protected the original Dhammavinaya—the Dhammavinaya as the Buddha taught and laid down—refusing to make any amendments or changes.

The Theravada tradition has protected the original monastic discipline (Vinaya). This is the essence of the Theravada tradition. It keeps to the original 311 bhikkhuni rules that the Buddha laid down. If one reduces this number to 310 or increases it to 312, it is no longer the original, correct? The essential factor here is the monastic discipline preserved by the Theravada tradition.

This has a bearing on another aspect of the Theravada tradition. According to its essential principles, if the Vinaya undergoes any kind of alteration or divergence, regardless of how many rules this pertains to, the result is a deviation from Theravada. According to the very definition of Theravada, any such alteration or deviation becomes 'not-Theravada.' Or one can simply say that the resultant discipline is not the same as the original.

Third, the historical evidence (that is available to us) revealing how the Theravada monastic community upheld these specific principles and practices is linked to the second factor, of the identity of Theravada Buddhism.

By reading the historical accounts, one can see clearly how the various schools split off from one another. Small differences in opinion

about training regulations or minor differences of view in regard to principles of practice became significant and led to division in the sangha. With such division monks from different schools refused to meet for the Uposatha day and perform formal acts of the sangha in unison.

Take for example the circumstances surrounding the Second Recitation in 100 BE (443 BC).¹ The Vajjiputtakā monks kept ten divergent Vinaya rules, which are called the ten ‘matters’ (*vatthu*), and split off as an independent group, an event which is considered the beginning point of the distinction between Theravada and Mahayana. In the eyes of many people, the particular rules in question here appear to be minor and relatively insignificant. The Theravada tradition, however, maintains its identity by way of uniformity; it follows the Buddha’s regulations as they were laid down, which defines Theravada.

After this date there were further divisions in the sangha. It is said that at the time of King Asoka, when the Third Recitation took place in 250 BE (293 BC),² there were eighteen schools (*nikāya*). Some of these schools differed from one another on account of even fewer rules or principles than existed in the division between the two schools at the Second Recitation.

We shouldn’t get caught up in speculating about these different schools. Rather, let us look at this matter based on historical or scriptural evidence. For example, it is clear that the Dharmaguptaka (Pali: Dhammaguttika) school is a heterodox school (*ācariyavāda*). It is not a sub-school of Theravada, nor did it break off directly from Theravada. In the second century of the Buddhist Era two schools split off from Theravada: the Vajjīputtavāda and the Mahisāsakavāda. The Mahisāsakavāda then split off into two more schools: the Sabbatthikavāda (Sarvāstivāda) and the Dharmaguptaka.

¹ Vin. II. 294-5. [Some scholars claim this event took place in the 4th century BC.]

² [Some scholars claim this event took place in c. 247 BC.]

When a specific school held to certain principles, it was normal that they practised accordingly. Followers of the Dharmaguptaka school rejected Theravada; they refused to live with members of the Theravada school and thus broke off. How can it be expected that the Theravada tradition will accept all of these various heterodox schools, including various Mahayana traditions, as somehow indistinguishable from itself? If someone of the Theravada tradition were to accept these other schools, he would be rightly asked: 'Are you Theravada or what exactly?' Therefore, this assertion by this scholar does not accord with how things really are.

This question is connected to the method of practice that we have been discussing. First, we ask the question: 'What are the principles pertaining to a specific topic of investigation.' Second, by following these principles what bearing does this have on the topic or case in point? This is the stage we are presently at.

As for the third stage, of coming to decisions on how to act, here I am no longer involved. Once one has obtained the necessary information and understanding, then one can act accordingly. Or one can follow my suggestion of coming together in concord and contemplating this matter in unison. This is why when people ask me for my opinion, it is as if I don't have one. I simply say: 'Go and reflect on this subject, or even better go and meet in harmony with others and discuss it together.'

Here I have one observation to make. It seems as if the Theravada tradition has the characteristics and qualities of a legal system, while the Mahayana tradition has the characteristics and qualities of a philosophical system. I don't know how you, Khun Martin, view this. You can think about it.

And the question pertaining to 'congruity of moral conduct' (*sīla-sāmaññatā*) and 'congruity of views' (*diṭṭhi-sāmaññatā*) is clever and suitable. It shows that you have a broad understanding of this subject.

To answer this question—technically speaking, if two groups do not share the identical training rules, and each group adheres to their individual beliefs and viewpoints in regard to these practices, then they are at odds—there is neither a congruity of moral conduct nor a congruity of views.

Moving Beyond a Clash of Opinions

Dr. Martin: According to the principles of Theravada, is this related to the subject of different communion (*nānā-saṁvāsa*)?

Phra Payutto: Yes, it is. But this matter gets even more complex. To describe it as a difference in communion is too simple. There are many overlapping and related issues involved. Going back to the aforementioned scholar, she is still concerned with the integrity of the Theravada tradition, and for this reason she cites the movement of bhikkhunis from Sri Lanka to China.

Her argument, however, contains contradictions. Let us analyze the different factors:

The first question to ask is whether it is even necessary to distinguish the different schools.

If one chooses to recognize the distinct identities of different schools, one then asks oneself, ‘Which school do I wish to focus on or be a part of.’ Let us assume here one focuses on the Theravada tradition.

Third, assuming one focuses on Theravada, one asks the question: ‘Do Theravada bhikkhunis still exist?’ or ‘Is it still possible for women to be ordained as Theravada bhikkhunis?’

It is important to separate these different factors, rather than having them be all mixed up.

In relation to the different traditions, whether this be Theravada or Mahayana, don’t get caught up in the terminology. These terms exist simply to convey distinct meanings and to represent specific systems

or circumstances. For example, in the case of Theravada, this specific tradition keeps these particular principles and practices. If individuals don't believe in or follow these principles then they don't belong to the Theravada tradition. How can integrity be maintained by formally adopting principles and practices from other traditions?

The name Theravada refers to this specific system or to an upholding of specific principles. If one simply labels oneself Theravada but does not keep to these principles, how can one justify using this name? Similarly, if a particular Mahayana school decides to adopt the Theravada practices and principles, how can it maintain its own integrity?

People are aware of the distinction between the Theravada and Mahayana traditions, and many people are able to describe the differences between the two. We need to be aware of these facts. What good is there in saying that at the Buddha's time this distinction didn't exist? It exists now! It is as if someone were to say: 'At the early stages of the Buddha's time there was no need for a clear-cut moral discipline.' How can one reply to such a person? We need to be realistic.

Khun Narit: If one has been ordained in a particular tradition, how strictly must one hold to it? Suppose I was ordained in the Mahayana tradition but had faith in Theravada and wished to share Theravada teachings, would this be okay from the perspective of Theravada followers? Accepting that one couldn't be on equal standing in regard to matters of formal discipline (*sīla*), would it still be okay to adopt and teach the Theravada principles?

Phra Payutto: That is no problem—who would go and prevent you from doing this? Even laypeople are entitled to teach the Dhamma. If a Mahayana monk has faith in this way of teaching he can go ahead and teach. He can honestly tell people that in terms of convention or form he is a Mahayana monk, but he has faith in the Theravada teachings.

Or he wouldn't have to say that he himself has faith in the Theravada tradition; he could simply explain to others what Theravada teaches. And he wouldn't have to compare and criticize the teachings in Mahayana. If there were to be a problem, it would arise in relation to his own community, but this is different from the issue we are looking at here.

The issue we are looking at pertains to ordinations. If the ordination occurs in the Mahayana tradition and the ordination candidate considers himself or herself to belong to that tradition, there is no problem. But why then struggle to associate oneself with the Theravada tradition? If one claims there is no real distinction between these different traditions—ultimately, where is the problem? The problem lies with a lack of clarity, even with a lack of clarity about one's own identity. For this reason one encounters such incongruent arguments.

One needs to go back to the basics, to the facts. That is, if one wishes to align oneself with the Theravada tradition, one needs to recognize that it comprises a specific set of principles and practices.

All told, it is possible to find some weak points in regard to the Theravada tradition. But its strong point is that no matter what has happened, it has been most successful at safeguarding the original teachings by the Buddha. In regard to its weaknesses, for example in the area of adapting to the modern era, adherents of this tradition say: 'Never mind. These shortcomings are cancelled out. The good things that are protected outweigh the things that are forfeited. We are willing to relinquish certain things in order to guard what is precious.' This is a selfless perspective.

We can choose here which results and benefits we want. And we don't have to go around accusing others of favouritism or bias. We are trying to speak candidly and objectively. We simply state: 'The principles of Theravada are thus; do we want to go along with these?' If we don't want to go along with them, we simply say: 'I don't agree

with these principles. Theravada focuses on such-and-such benefits, but I feel that these benefits should be relinquished in order to obtain these other benefits.’ In this case one can align oneself with the Mahayana tradition—this is no problem. This is an honest assessment, and it does not give chief emphasis to personal opinions.

There are many issues here to consider, for example the matter of Sri Lankan bhikkhunis travelling to China and transmitting the Theravada tradition. But simply making this claim is not helpful—one may just be letting off steam. One hasn’t yet made one’s intentions clear. One needs to present factual evidence, by saying: ‘I researched this matter. A Theravada sangha travelled from Sri Lanka to China and transmitted the Theravada tradition.’ One then shows clearly the historical developments, asking such questions as: ‘Did this tradition maintain its integrity?’ ‘Did it deteriorate in any way?’ ‘Is it still a living Theravada tradition or was it subsumed into the Mahayana tradition?’

These are all worthy questions, and members of the Theravada tradition are at liberty to reflect on them. We should give these questions fair treatment. Most Theravada monks are not close-minded. They are happy to listen to others and would say: ‘Please show me the historical evidence. This way we will both be confident about these matters and feel at ease.’ They wouldn’t be forceful, by saying: ‘These are my views; you have to agree with them.’

It is important to allow people to safeguard their individual traditions. In such a case, one first presents the factual evidence clearly, and second, one engages in a mutual consideration of the matter at hand. If this is done gradually, people won’t close themselves off from a healthy discussion. Of course, there are some people who will be closed to new ideas, through some kind of bias, whether this be through desire, anger, delusion, or fear. It also happens that people have encountered some kind of conflict in regard to these matters, resulting in bias and a refusal to engage in discussion. But there are

many open-minded individuals.

Those people who aren't clearly informed about these issues, or who feel neutral about them, need to be gradually introduced to the key points. This is more effective than simply trying to persuade someone else to immediately accept one's desired course of action. In this case, one needs to explain the precise way in which these Theravada bhikkhunis travelled to China and transmitted the Theravada tradition. If there are any stumbling blocks then one can consider these together. This will inspire confidence.

Problems that may arise include the possibility that these Theravada bhikkhunis who travelled to China have somehow been corrupted or comprised, by not upholding the original principles and practices. For example, although the training rules may still remain in their sacred texts, the core of their everyday conduct may have undergone essential changes. And by living amongst Mahayana monastic communities, the training may have developed discrepancies and irregularities.

Another problem may arise in relation to the requirement that bhikkhunis be ordained by both communities. Although the bhikkhuni sangha conducting the ordination was Theravada, the bhikkhu sangha was Mahayana. Is this acceptable? These are all issues that need to be considered according to the available facts. We needn't engage in this discussion purely by way of emotional reactivity or by appealing to our desires. Rather, we can clearly state our objectives and inquire about the possibilities when one takes into account the various facts and historical circumstances.

This is connected to the matter Khun Martin brought up on views. One has the right to ask the question whether adopting views and teachings upheld and practised by others may be harmful for one's own community. If by endorsing certain views and practices one creates trouble or difficulty for one's community, this is a crucial issue. For example, problems may arise by adopting practices of the

Sukhāvati (Pure Land) school, which promotes chanting a determined number of times each day in order to pray to the Buddha Amitābha. It is important to allow people to consider these issues as well.

In the end there are many interrelated aspects to these discussions, from the issue of different communion as it is described in the Vinaya, to issues of congruity of moral conduct and congruity of views.

Honouring Existing Forms Options for Restoring Ancient Forms

Dr. Martin: Let me ask about another aspect of this issue. Let us assume for now that what the previously mentioned scholar said is true, that a Theravada tradition was established in China, but it relied on the Mahayana sangha to conduct and complete the bhikkhuni ordinations. And she also states that the Pāṭimokkha adopted by the new bhikkhunis in China contained almost the identical 311 rules of the original Theravada Pāṭimokkha. But there is still a problem regarding the bhikkhu preceptor (*upajjhāya*), who would have belonged to the Mahayana tradition. This is a problem, isn't it?

Phra Payutto: Yes, it could be a problem and it is one factor which needs to be taken into consideration. Even in the Theravada monastic community there is a division of ordination lineage (*upasampadāvaṁsa*). This problem exists even for the bhikkhus.

Dr. Martin: Are you referring to the Dhammayuttika and Mahānikāya schools?

Phra Payutto: Yes, this is an example, as is the division into three schools (*nikāya*) in Sri Lanka. If one gives this matter of ordination lineage importance, one is faced with particular obstacles and problems. We need to focus on and address the precise aspects to these problems, rather than be vague and ambiguous. We need to speak directly and candidly about the specific facts involved.

Dr. Martin: I met a monk who said that he had spoken to you, and he said that you had proposed the name *bhāvikā* ('cultivator,' 'one who trains') for a new order of women renunciants.

Phra Payutto: That was a long time ago, before people were talking about bhikkhunis. I'm glad that you reminded me of this.

The possibility of restoring the Theravada bhikkhuni order is one issue. But the essence or core of this discussion is our wish to provide an opportunity to those women who wish to live a renunciant life. We need to reflect on and discuss the available options, but we should also remember our intention to help women.

Here, we are considering whether it is possible to have Theravada bhikkhuni ordinations. And if one concludes that it is not possible, then one considers the alternatives. Even if we are inconclusive on this matter, we should attend to those things that can be accomplished now in regard to providing opportunities to women. While waiting to clarify the matter of bhikkhuni ordinations we shouldn't neglect those things that can be done now.

I proposed the term *bhāvikā* when the discussion focused solely on the *mae chi*. At that time there was no discussion about bhikkhunis. In fact there was a discussion about bhikkhunis before I was born, but by the time I became aware of this issue it had grown quiet. There was only a discussion about *mae chi*. I wanted to elevate the status of the *mae chi*, because their status in Thai society has sunk to a low ebb. And there was a time when quite a few *mae chi* could be seen begging on the side of the roads, by placing a bowl or some other vessel in front of them.

In sum, regardless of whether it will be possible to provide bhikkhuni ordinations or not, the existent *mae chi* form should not be neglected. We shouldn't idly wait for some possible future event, but rather we should act constructively now.

If we are not careful, people will accuse us Thai people of temporarily getting excited about something, and then, after we

obtain what we want, of becoming indifferent and ineffectual. They'll say: 'See, the Thai people don't care about the existing *mae chi*; they don't want to do anything to improve their situation. Nothing is improving.'

So we should give close attention to those forms which already exist. Whether bhikkhuni ordinations become possible or not, we should act in whatever way we can to support the *mae chi* form of practice.

Khun Narit: One still sees *mae chi* begging.

Phra Payutto: Is that so? Some laypeople have said that they've seen *mae chi* asking for money outside of shopping malls where foreigners go. Previously, some people have had a poor opinion of *mae chi*, seeing them as lovelorn or unable to cope with life. So I have wondered how to raise the status of the *mae chi* and provide them with a better training. If the *mae chi* receive a good training and education, besides becoming better people, they will also benefit society.

I also see that *mae chi* have a much better opportunity than the bhikkhus to act as a medium in society, because the bhikkhus are very restricted when it comes to accessing the laypeople. The *mae chi* can act to fill in an important gap, especially in the area of helping out in society and by introducing the Buddhist teachings to society on another level. This is something to be promoted. The *mae chi* can act as an important reinforcement to the monks.

At that time I wanted the *mae chi* to have an elevated status, to receive a proper education, and to provide them with opportunities to benefit society. I was also thinking of alternative names for the renunciant women. There were many related issues, one of them being the going forth into a renunciant life as *chi prahm*.¹ Have you heard of this term?

¹ [This term refers to women who go and live in a monastery for a temporary period of time; they wear white and keep the eight precepts, but they do not shave their heads. The term comes from the Sanskrit: *jī* (term of respect) + *brāhmaṇa* (person leading a pure, renunciant life).]

At the time I was thinking of a more suitable name for these women who were going forth as *chi prahm*. The term *chi prahm* didn't seem appropriate to their circumstances. Its meaning did not seem clear; it seemed to only convey the idea that they didn't shave their heads, or something like this. I thought of several alternatives, including *nekkhammikā* ('female renunciant') and *bhāvikā* ('cultivator').

I don't see the specific name used to refer to the *mae chi* as essential. What is more important is that they have a good position in society, a good training, and an opportunity to be of benefit. Furthermore, we need to find a way to provide women renunciants—whether we refer to them as bhikkhunis or use some other term—with a way of life resembling that of the bhikkhus. We need to provide them with an opportunity to seek out the good—to seek out blessings—in solitude.

But don't forget that, from one perspective, ordaining as a bhikkhuni may create even more obstacles for women. This is because once they have taken bhikkhuni ordination they will be obliged to keep the 311 training precepts. Go ahead and try to keep these rules in the present high-tech age. Would this perhaps simply increase problems?

At the beginning of these interviews we talked about the question why the bhikkhus themselves don't reduce or alter their own 227 training rules. Why don't they make adjustments as permitted by the Buddha? Why don't they adapt to the present times? Moreover, people attack and accuse Ven. Mahā Kassapa and the elders at the First Recitation, saying: 'Why did they close the door to removing some of the training rules?' In the end this is an assault on Theravada Buddhism. People want to belong to the Theravada tradition, yet at the same time they disagree with some its principles and wish to reform it. In fact, it has already been reformed, resulting in the Mahayana tradition. Why waste time trying to implement reforms?

The Theravada tradition has its own unique meaning and identity. We have the prerogative to choose whether we want to be part of this tradition. But if we set out to make reforms, we will soon encounter the problem of the 311 bhikkhuni rules. The revision of the 227 bhikkhu rules hasn't made any headway; now one will get caught up in trying to revise the 311 bhikkhuni rules. There's no end to this. Sometimes, because there hasn't been a joint consideration of these issues, confusion arises.

One needs to reflect on things well, to reflect clearly and in a well-ordered fashion, rather than in a confused and muddled way. This begins with an inquiry of how, in today's social environment and general way of life, keeping the 311 training rules may be a stumbling block for women who are ordained. Are we sure that they will be able to keep these rules? We need to discuss these issues in order to be clear about them. We can learn from the experience related to trying to reform the 227 rules of the bhikkhus, a matter which is unresolved. We have the valuable opportunity to create something new and to design it in a way that avoids potential impediments.

In fact, this matter of female ordination provides an excellent opportunity, better than trying to reform the bhikkhu form, which is set in its ways and difficult to budge. If one reestablishes the Theravada bhikkhuni order, the women will have to adopt the original 311 rules. Compare such a bhikkhuni sangha with a new renunciant community for women, which we could conceivably create at the present time. Women belonging to this new community wouldn't need to face the problem of keeping the 311 rules. We wouldn't have to be troubled with a problem like that of trying to reform the bhikkhu training rules.

So we can think about various alternatives in regard to female ordination, and together we can decide on one preferred form. Our main intention, however, remains that of trying to provide the best opportunity for women. As regards the actual form that this

opportunity should manifests as, we can give this matter thorough consideration, in respect to the allowable alternatives in face of the Vinaya and in respect to present social conditions. We consider both the benefits the women receive and the benefits the women are able to share with others.

Our mutual considerations should be wide-ranging and open-minded, rather than rigid and unyielding. If we stick to only one idea and it is unsuccessful, then we are left with nothing. Moreover, those forms that already exist will be neglected and opportunities will be squandered.

Khun Narit: From my impression, the Theravada tradition possesses certain enhanced features ('value added'), say from its historical importance. Its position and status gives it a kind of power.

Phra Payutto: What sort of power?

Khun Narit: In the eyes of the general public, if one were to create a new institution, the accumulated credit of the Theravada 'brand' would have a certain influence. The establishment of a new institution would require a marketing campaign.

Phra Payutto: That is possible, but we don't have to worry about this too much. The important factor is that the Theravada tradition has a distinct identity. If one doesn't agree with its principles then one can abandon the term Theravada.

In regard to women ordinations, we have options. Why should the bhikkhunis have to face the same problems as the bhikkhus, who are urged by many people to adapt and change? The women don't need to be saddled with these problems. We can choose an alternative that provides the greatest benefits, both to the individual and to society.

Khun Narit: Can one thus view the term Theravada more as an abstract notion? That is, when it comes to the actual institutions, there are separate schools (*nikāya*) in Theravada, as one sees say in Sri Lanka and Burma. But the term Theravada seems to contain an inherent law or

principle, that of preserving the doctrine of the early elders in a precise and exact way.

Phra Payutto: Yes, we keep things the same, so that Buddhism, both in spirit and in letter remains as close to the original as possible. And preserving the letter, or the form, implies establishing it as a basis or support for the essence of the teachings.

From one perspective, we try and safeguard the spirit of the teachings by preserving the form. But one needs to be careful. Don't simply keep the form by forgetting its purpose. Otherwise one won't be aware that the bottle one holds to contain water now contains booze. Don't let this happen.

Khun Narit: So in a sense the term Theravada is abstract in that it represents inherent laws and principles. In terms of the actual teachings, they have been passed down in a precise and accurate way.

Phra Payutto: The form must be passed down; it doesn't simply appear spontaneously. The form arises as a convention, that is, by mutual consensus. The Buddha created these conventions, so the bhikkhu sangha can be considered a direct lineage from the monastic order created by the Buddha. How does this transmission or succession take place? There is a system of preceptors, etc. This enables the lineage to stay intact.

The splitting up into different schools (*nikāya*) within the Theravada tradition has occurred because even minor, trifling matters can be a cause for division and the birth of a new school. For example, even minor differences in the ordination procedure have resulted in new schools forming.

From another angle, we can remark that, even with this sincere effort to preserve the original form, factionalism occurs. This is a matter of human nature. If we don't try to preserve the form, just think how much division there will be. We need to understand human nature. We can't expect things to be perfect.

Sometimes we need to weigh the pros and cons of various alternatives, by choosing an option that has the greatest amount of gain and the least amount of harm. This is what it is like to be human. The Buddha is no longer with us, which makes it even more important that we be careful.

Correct Ordination Procedures

Dr. Martin: Sorry, but academics like technical terms. I would like to ask another question pertaining to a difference in communion (*nānā-saṃvāsa*). If the aforementioned bhikkhunis had a bhikkhu preceptor (*upajjhāya*) who was of the Mahayana tradition, how decisive is this from the perspective of Theravada? Would this constitute a difference in communion?

Phra Payutto: Yes, it would.

Dr. Martin: In respect to ‘congruity of moral conduct’ (*sīla-sāmaññatā*)?

Phra Payutto: From the perspective of the Vinaya, there is a incongruity of moral conduct and the procedure is considered faulty. The person ordained is considered to belong to the Mahayana tradition. The ordination lineage and the standards of discipline belonging to the preceptor are different, and therefore the ordainee is of a separate tradition.

Dr. Martin: What are the dictates here pertaining to higher ordination?

Phra Payutto: The ordinations must follow the established system, the disciplinary standards of the Theravada tradition. These include a preceptor, a quorum (*saṅgha*) of participating monks or nuns, a formal boundary (*sīma*), etc. These requirements are called the four factors of completion (*sampatti*):

1. The factor of completion comprising the subject (*vatthu-sampatti*): the person to be ordained possesses the correct attributes, for example he or she is at least twenty years old.

2. The factor of completion comprising the assembly (*parisa-sampatti*): the sangha gathering conducting the ordination is complete, for example there is a complete quorum of monks or nuns, and none of these individuals making up the quorum is counterfeit.

3. The factor of completion comprising the boundary (*śīla-sampatti*): the gathering occurs in a correct, formal boundary.

4. The factor of completion comprising the formal announcement (*kamma-vācā-sampatti*): the official wording used in the ordination is correct and complete, beginning with chanting the formal motion (*ñatti*), up to the announcement of the formal resolution (*mati*).

These four factors are required and must be complete (occasionally the fourth factor is subdivided into *ñatti-sampatti* & *anusāvana-sampatti* —‘completion of the formal motion and completion of the proclamation,’ resulting in five factors). But when the ordination is conducted by a Mahayana preceptor, how can one verify its completeness? We know that the term Mahayana is a collective term, referring to a wide range of heterodox sub-schools. One must specify which branch of Mahayana one is dealing with, and describe its procedure of ordination. When it comes to the formal announcement, one is at a loss. Although the official wording is clearly outlined in the Theravada Vinaya, it may not have been closely followed during such an ordination.

Dr. Martin: Because a different language was used?

Phra Payutto: Yes, the language is one factor, but we also don't know how the meaning of the text was applied. We haven't yet examined this.

Dr. Martin: But if a different language other than Pali was used, then there is no way that the ordination was valid.

Phra Payutto: If another language was used we would have to give this some consideration, but from a strict Theravada viewpoint it would be invalid and unacceptable.

Dr. Martin: If I were to be ordained say in English, this wouldn't be acceptable, right?

Phra Payutto: One could expect that at least one section of the Theravada tradition would not accept this.

Dr. Martin: What is your view on this matter?

Phra Payutto: Here, I serve and answer to the sangha, because in regard to this matter the sangha is the authority. But don't forget that the state of Buddhism in Thailand has degenerated a lot. Even in regard to the Pali chanting many monks simply go through the motions and are clueless. It has simply turned into a gesture of preserving the form. This degeneration cannot serve as an excuse for sloppy behaviour, however. It should be mentioned in the context of improving the situation and restoring a correct and favourable state of affairs.

Having said this, we need to appreciate the value of the form. As long as the form exists, the chances of recovering or reviving the gist inherent in the form are boosted. If the form disappears, the essential principles that it is designed to safeguard will gradually slip away.

Why is the Theravada tradition so strict about preserving the form, even though it doesn't consider the form to be the essential matter and it views the form as simply a conventional truth? The importance here lies in acting correctly in relation to the form, by conforming to its true meaning and purpose. One needs to ask the question: 'For what purpose was this form—were these conventions—established.' The answer is to protect the spirit—the essence—of the form.

When one doesn't safeguard the form and it begins to change, the spirit which it is designed to protect falls away and disappears. And then the form continues to be distorted, without end. In order to protect the form one requires a contract or mutual agreement. The system of conventions relies on set standards, on rules and regulations. Those people who adhere to these rules strictly may be accused of narrow-mindedness. But from another perspective, if they

understand the true objective of these rules, they may be trying to protect the spirit of the rules.

From the perspective of wisdom, if one doesn't strictly protect the form, it will inevitably change, right? The people who safeguard the form give consideration to the wider community and think about these things in the long term. They recognize that the protection of the form by earlier generations has resulted in the form existing to this day. Otherwise, the form would have already disappeared. This is their reasoning—we should give them some heed.

We then ask the question whether we agree with their reasoning and with the protection of the form. If we agree, then we join up with them; if we don't agree, then we stay apart. That's it.

There are several questions which need to be asked in relation to the long term. For example, the Vinaya preserved by the Theravada tradition is restrictive. It limits certain activities, for example it is difficult for bhikkhus to travel to foreign countries in order to propagate and teach the Dhamma. From one perspective this restriction seems to stem from narrow-mindedness, but from another perspective it is a result of broadmindedness, because it involves a self-surrender in order to preserve a valid and meaningful system.

In relation to how we should act in response to these questions, there are many aspects to consider. For example, perhaps there should be a stricter screening process for bhikkhu ordinations, by acknowledging that it is not necessary to maximize the number of Theravada bhikkhus. We could then have another group of people whose task it is to propagate the Dhamma in a wider sphere by integrating themselves more easily in society. We would need to consider what the pros and cons are of such a proposal. So there are many issues to discuss.

When we consider all these issues, we would need to ask whether some of the people involved may give priority to personal agendas and view things narrowly, rather than consider the overall religion. This

could possibly happen. At the very least, they may not reflect adequately on the various associated factors and issues.

This subject is connected to the principle of the Buddhist assemblies, which offer each other mutual reinforcement in performing different roles pertaining to the Buddhist religion. It is also linked to the matter of historical context. Here, I'm talking about the Theravada tradition. Some other Buddhist traditions may encourage the monks and nuns to adapt and to change their lifestyles to accord with different places and time periods.

Even in regard to the Theravada tradition we need to give some consideration to adaptation. Along with an emphasis on preserving the original rules and principles, we can think of ways to provide reinforcement. For example in relation to Thai monasticism, in some ways the *mae chi* may be able to access and assist the wider society more easily and better than the bhikkhus. The status of the *mae chi* has declined for a long time now; we should look for ways to support them.

In regard to this matter, it is admirable that Somdet Nānavarodom (Ven. Prayoon Santaṅkuro)¹ of Wat Thepsirin, ever since he was the secretary-general at Mahamakut Buddhist University, supported the *mae chi* for a long time. He established the Thai Institute for Mae Chi, which promotes the education of the *mae chi*. Various branches of this institute have been established, including the Mahāpajāpatī Therī College, which became an affiliate.

I know that this institute emphasizes education and training. I think that when the *mae chi* are prepared they will be able to offer a lot of assistance to society. Perhaps they have already reached this stage; I'm not sure because for several years I have been living quite remote even from the circle of the bhikkhu sangha.

I believe the research that Khun Martin is doing on the *mae chi* will help to enhance their position in society and increase people's understanding of their situation.

¹ [Born 1916; died 2007.]

A moment ago I spoke about the Buddhist assemblies. A closer examination reveals that the *mae chi* are an integral and complementary part of the assembly of Buddhist *upasikā* (female householders).

Let us look more closely at this principle of the Buddhist assemblies. The Buddha subdivided the assembly of bhikkhus into elders (*thera*), monks of middle standing (*majjhima*), and newly ordained monks (*navaka*). A similar division was made in respect to the bhikkhunis, as *therī*, *majjhimā*, and *navakā*.¹ The assemblies of male and female householders (*upasaka* & *upasikā*) were subdivided into followers of a celibate, renunciant life (*brahmacārī/brahmacārini*) and those who enjoy sensual pleasures (*kāma-bhogī/kāma-bhoginī*).

It is quite well known that the present day community of Buddhist laypeople is weak. It has declined to the point that many people don't know what it means to be a Buddhist, or what standards and practices constitute being a Buddhist. Here, I'm referring to those laypeople who delight in sense pleasures, the *kāma-bhogī* and *kāma-bhoginī*. Many have become very degenerate and decadent. This community is full of people indulging in drugs and alcohol. With some it's hard to find any of the five precepts intact. Is it possible that those laypeople who live a celibate, renunciant life can offer assistance to these other layfolk, acting as an anchor and mainstay for the others?

It is precisely the *mae chi* who are the *brahmacārini*. We should focus on how they can act as a support for the Buddhist lay community as a whole. The course of training for the *mae chi* should prepare them for this task.

We end up lacking the celibate and renunciant laymen, the *brahmacārī*. We can give some thought to how we can create such a group of renunciant laymen, who could assist the *mae chi* in supporting and guiding the rest of the lay community. If we can do this, it will give body and substance to the lay community, which will finally be

¹ D. II. 115-17.

endowed with some power and energy.

Besides supporting the rest of the lay community, these male and female lay renunciants could assist the bhikkhus, who are faced with certain obstacles, to perform specific roles in society that pertain to the present day and age. If the laypeople, especially the renunciant laypeople, realize the importance of their position, role, and responsibility in society, they will be able to be of tremendous benefit to all.

Let us recall the Buddhists in Indonesia, which was once the home of the Srivijaya Empire and where Buddhism flourished for many centuries. When Buddhism almost disappeared from there, a group of Buddhist laypeople protected the religion and transmitted the Buddhist culture and tradition to the present time. A group of laypeople there performed some duties as a substitute for the monastic sangha, until some bhikkhus arrived, for example from Thailand, to help restore Buddhism in Indonesia, beginning around the year 1967 CE.

Final Points on Different Communion

Let us return to the unfinished subject of different communion (*nānā-saṃvāsa*), the meaning of which you have inquired about on several occasions. You have probably wondered why I have not answered your question directly.

This is a subject that may be difficult for some people to understand. Before I give an explanation, let me present part of the definition of *nānā-saṃvāsa* from my book ‘Dictionary of Buddhist Terminology’:¹

Nānā-saṃvāsa: to have variant ‘factors of cohabitation’ (e.g., the Uposatha observance and formal acts of the sangha). The monastic sangha does not live in communion,

¹ พจนานุกรมพุทธศาสตร์ ฉบับประมวลศัพท์.

i.e., the sangha does not jointly perform the Uposatha observances and the formal acts of the community; this is called ‘to live in different communion.’

This gives you a sense of the meaning. Those monks who are in different communion do not perform formal acts of the sangha (*saṅghakamma*) together. This includes the Uposatha day observances and ordinations. Each group performs its own separate formal acts. If one group performs a formal act, but a monk who is of a different communion participates in this act, the act becomes invalid. If it is an ordination and the second factor of completion comprising the assembly (*parisa-sampatti*) is lacking—what the laypeople would call having a ‘bogus’ monk present—for example in Khun Martin’s previous question about having a preceptor who is of a different communion, then the formal act of the sangha is defective.

We can ask what determines the different communion of a monk.¹ Monks who are of a different communion are divided into three kinds: one who is of a different communion as a consequence of action (*kamma-nānā-saṃvāsaka*), one who is of a different communion as a consequence of ideology (*laddhi-nānā-saṃvāsaka*), and one who is of a different communion as a consequence of boundary (*sīma-nānā-saṃvāsaka*).²

The first kind of dis-communion occurs as a result of the sangha laying down the punishment of ‘suspension’ (*ukkhepaniya-kamma*). A bhikkhu who has had this penalty imposed on him is excluded from living together with the sangha and has temporarily had his bhikkhu privileges revoked. He is not allowed to participate in formal acts of the sangha until the sangha permits him to return.

There are three causes for the sangha to lay down the penalty of suspension. First, a monk commits an offence but he does not see that he has made a mistake and does not acknowledge the formal

¹ Original story: Vin. I. 325, 340; summarized at, e.g.: VinA. V. 1146.

² The suffix *-ka* in Pali is used to designate a person.

transgression (*āpatti*). Second, a monk has committed an offence but is unwilling to rectify the situation, say by formally confessing the offence. Third, he has pernicious views; although the sangha passes a formal resolution for him to abandon these views, he refuses to do so.

The second kind of dis-communion results from a difference in ideology and beliefs; the separation into different factions thus occurs naturally. The texts describe the monks who fall into this category as those who agree with and support the previous kind of monks—those who have had a penalty imposed on them by the sangha. They then join forces with these monks who have been excluded from the sangha.

The Buddha used the term ‘status of being one of a different communion’ (*nānā-saṁvāsaka-bhūmi*), of which there are two kinds: first, to bring a state of dis-communion upon oneself (to harbour views consistent with those of a divergent group, i.e., to be a *laddhi-nānā-saṁvāsaka*), and second, to be excluded by a unanimous decision on the part of the sangha (to receive the penalty of suspension, i.e., to be a *kamma-nānā-saṁvāsaka*).¹

Although those monks of divergent views—those who have become part of a different ‘group’ (*nikāya*)—have not been penalized by the sangha (they are not within the sangha’s ‘reach’ to receive a punishment), their status of dis-communion is considered more serious than that of those who have been formally excluded by the sangha, because they are already part of a different group—they are equally not within the reach to be re-admitted into the sangha’s fold.

Put simply, these kinds of monks are classified as ‘outside of the sangha.’ They are considered ‘persons to be excluded’ (*vajjanīya-puggala*); they should not participate in nor sit within arm’s length (*hatthapāsa*) during formal acts of the sangha.

In terms of the Vinaya, these principles clearly indicate how one should relate in such circumstances. There are additional principles

¹ Vin. I. 340.

here relating to the Dhamma, however. When two parties keep different Vinaya standards, or if someone receives a penalty from the sangha as described above, then they lose equality vis-à-vis conduct (*sīla*); they do not share 'congruity of moral conduct' (*sīla-sāmaññatā*). And when these individuals hold different views, for example someone agrees and joins up with a monk who has received a penalty from the sangha, they lose equality vis-à-vis views (*diṭṭhi*); they do not share 'congruity of views' (*diṭṭhi-sāmaññatā*).

The third kind of dis-communion, resulting as a consequence of boundary (*sīma*), is clear. Those monks within the formal boundary and those monks without, although they may belong to the same group, may not at that time participate in a formal act of the sangha together. This is a normal circumstance and it is not related to the problems discussed here.

Although the difference in communion deals directly with important principles, it is quite subtle and complex. Most people do not understand it fully. It is one instrument for preserving sangha harmony and for preventing the deviation from the authentic Dhammavinaya.

Having asked this question on the subject of difference in communion shows that you have studied Buddhism deeply, and have delved into the finer points of the monastic community. By doing so, one gains an awareness of the monastic discipline (the Vinaya) which gives an insight into the way that the Theravada tradition maintains itself, into how it maintains its integrity and how it endures, both in spirit and in form.

When we have examined such principles as difference in communion, we are reminded of the importance of the formal teachings, especially the teachings contained in the Vinaya, in terms of the essence of the Theravada tradition. Having gained such an appreciation it is possible to offer a very brief response to many of the problems we face.

When we speak honestly about the heart of the matter, regardless of whether one addresses the question of bhikkhuni ordinations or some other issue, one can simply say: ‘You wish to belong to the Theravada tradition? That’s not hard. Simply act correctly and sincerely in relation to the formal teachings, both the Dhamma teachings and the Vinaya teachings. That’s all.’

When we act correctly, accurately, and thoroughly in regard to the teachings on Dhamma and Vinaya, as preserved by the Theravada tradition, then we are automatically a part of this tradition. But if one doesn’t do this—if one clouds the issue, if one acts incorrectly and inaccurately in relation to the formal teachings—then one is not part of this tradition. No-one from outside can decree that one is or is not part of the tradition.

If one doesn’t act correctly and accurately according to the teachings, even if one declares oneself to be a Theravada bhikkhuni, or if someone else certifies one as a Theravada bhikkhuni, one automatically becomes a heterodox or Mahayana bhikkhuni. These things are determined by our actions, which are either consistent with the formal principles, or not, just as outlined in the subject of difference in communion. Here, we speak in accord with the formal teachings, whilst not expressing a personal opinion.

To conclude, by getting to the heart of the matter, the answer to this quandary is brief and succinct. It is for this reason that, in regard to this matter of bhikkhuni ordinations, I think we should propose various alternatives and give them consideration in a collective manner. This way we won’t be limited to and stuck with one option.

Supplementary Chapter 1:

Develop Clear Understanding and Maintain Close Harmony¹

Reviewing a Long-Standing Question:

Has the Allowance for Bhikkhus to Ordain Bhikkhunis Been Revoked?

Phra Payutto: The question of bhikkhuni ordination should be studied clearly by applying two principles: first, one should gain as clear an understanding of the formal monastic discipline—the Vinaya—as possible; second, one should establish a mind of loving-kindness and compassion towards the women who wish to be ordained. This consideration, however, should not be done in an errant fashion. It needs to be performed collectively—the entire monastic sangha should participate in this discussion. In this way the sangha will be endowed with knowledge and kindness.

Dr. Martin Seeger has come to ask questions about bhikkhunis. He has recounted how some people look at this issue from only one perspective. They have an unclear understanding of the Dhammavinaya,

¹ Phra Payutto; a talk with Ajahn Sumedho and some other monks and laymen, 3rd December 2009.

and instead use their desires and preferences as criteria, trying to strengthen their arguments by referring to human rights. From one angle this is rather humorous. This matter has nothing to do with human rights. Women already possess the right to be ordained; the problem is who has the right to give ordination to these women? We are unable to find anyone with this authority. This is the problem. We are seeking someone who has this authority.

The bhikkhu sangha considers bhikkhunis to have been ordained by both communities—monks and nuns. Moreover, during the Buddha's lifetime, the role of the monks in such ordinations gradually became less important—the main ordination was conducted by the bhikkhunis followed by a formal announcement to the bhikkhus. If the female candidate lived in another township and it was considered dangerous to travel, she didn't need go herself, but instead a bhikkhuni who lived near the monks could act as her representative.

At the Buddha's time, once Buddhism had gained a strong foothold and the bhikkhuni order had been established, the Buddha gave more and more responsibilities to the bhikkhunis. Essentially, the ordination process was brought to near completion in the first stage, performed exclusively by the bhikkhunis.

These days, regardless of what decision we make and how we choose to respond to this situation, my wish is that it is not done in a hasty fashion. It is important that this is a communal decision, and that it is based on both a clear understanding of the teachings and on kindness towards the women. Let us gradually gain a better understanding of the Vinaya and then collectively consider what our options are. Then we can decide how to act so that there is an optimum benefit for all. If this process is done without a clear understanding, those parties who face misfortune are Buddhists on the whole, the Buddhist religion, and those women who are ordained as bhikkhunis.

Contentious matters of Vinaya need to be clarified. Some people claim that there is an allowance by the Buddha for bhikkhus to ordain bhikkhunis. This was an allowance the Buddha made when the bhikkhuni order was first established—when Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī and the large group of royal Sakyan women came to the Buddha requesting ordination. At first the Buddha refused, but later he consented, permitting the bhikkhus to ordain the bhikkhunis. This was the starting point of the bhikkhuni order.

Many people have argued that this allowance was never revoked, and thus bhikkhus can still ordain bhikkhunis. There are several related issues to consider here, which I have discussed at length before:

Obviously this allowance was not revoked because bhikkhus are still required to participate in the ordination procedure. If it was revoked the bhikkhus couldn't fulfil the second stage of the procedure. This is clear.

It is not a matter of revocation or reduction of rules; instead, it is a matter of addition. That is, the Buddha added the regulation that bhikkhunis need to be ordained by both communities, the bhikkhus and the bhikkhunis.

Once this second regulation was made, it is natural (as it would be in the case of general legal proceedings) that the latter regulation is superimposed on the original one. If there is any conflict or inconsistency, one must follow the most recent regulation.

At first the bhikkhus were needed to ordain the bhikkhunis because the bhikkhuni order was not yet in place. Later, when the bhikkhuni order was established, the bhikkhus still participated in the ordination procedure. Both communities were required. For the ordination to be complete, however, there needs to be bhikkhunis.

If one were to assume that the original allowance for bhikkhus to ordain bhikkhunis by themselves has been valid all along, what would have been the consequences?

First, if this were the case, then later on in the Buddha's lifetime there would have also been ordinations conducted solely by the bhikkhus. Some groups of women would have claimed that they need not be ordained by bhikkhunis, but rather that they can ordain simply with the bhikkhus. There would have thus been two kinds of bhikkhunis: those who were ordained by both communities and those who were ordained by bhikkhus alone. This would have caused all sorts of confusion. But this didn't happen. Why? Because once the Buddha laid down the second regulation the bhikkhus practised accordingly and abandoned the first allowance. They waited until the women candidates had been ordained first with the bhikkhunis before completing the two-stage procedure. No one transgressed this rule so there was no problem.

If in Thailand some people were to claim that the original allowance was not revoked and therefore bhikkhus are able to ordain bhikkhunis, a new bhikkhuni order would be established, but the matter would not rest here. There would be some future women candidates who would say that they have the right to choose whether they are ordained by both communities or by bhikkhus alone. Other people would be troubled why some bhikkhunis are not ordained by other bhikkhunis. Eventually, there would be two or more groups of bhikkhunis, and no single group would yield to the others. Some people say that in this case one should establish a state law making it mandatory. That wouldn't work. State laws can only act to support the Vinaya, but the Vinaya itself must first be clear.

Moreover, there are likely to be conflicts and obstacles to keeping the bhikkhuni Vinaya, since most of the training rules for bhikkhunis, beginning with the rules contained in the bhikkhuni Pāṭimokkha (and some of the rules in the bhikkhu Pāṭimokkha), were established when bhikkhunis were ordained by both communities and apply to women ordained in such a way. The formal explanation (the Vibhaṅga) of these rules defines a bhikkhuni as follows: *bhikkhunī nāma*

ubhatośaṅghe upasampannā—‘the term bhikkhunī refers to a woman who has been ordained by both communities.’ These training rules will not be legally binding to those women newly ordained by bhikkhus alone. In other words, these bhikkhunis will have no formal status in regard to these Vinaya rules.

Therefore we need to be very clear over these matters. Before making any final decisions, we should come to a mutual consensus. If this is not done, there will be problems, not least of which there will be problems for the bhikkhunis.

We should go about this procedure carefully and thoroughly. We shouldn’t create problems, especially through a lack of understanding. First, we should be clear what we want, for example we may clearly state, ‘We want to be able to ordain bhikkhunis.’

The next stage is to examine the formal teachings, to investigate the Vinaya. Here it is very important not to have our wishes get in the way. We then consider: ‘The teachings state such; the Vinaya states such.’ We then ask: ‘Is it possible for our wishes to be consistent with the teachings?’ If the answer is yes, the matter is solved. If the answer is no, we must decide what to do. We then consider the matter further. If we can follow these steps, things will most likely proceed well.

In sum, we should act in unison to contemplate this matter. Don’t be in a rush. Sometimes we don’t see the potential damage of specific actions. It is only when we thoroughly consider a matter that we can discern the potential harm and make an effort to avoid it.

The benefits to working together to contemplate this matter are twofold: first, the monastic community will consider this matter together and be in harmony; second, a solution will arise from the most optimum level of wisdom.

Study the Alternatives and Follow Through with Decisive Action

Question: Tahn Chao Khun, what do you think is the best alternative? Do you think it is possible in Thailand to create a new or newly fashioned order for nuns?

Phra Payutto: It won't be easy, but I think we should try. As far as alternatives go, we need to be honest. For example, if we conclude that according to the original teachings of the Vinaya it is not possible to reinstate a Theravada bhikkhuni order, then one alternative is to look at the Mahayana bhikkhuni lineage. Are we able to accept and endorse this lineage? If yes, then we speak frankly that these are bhikkhunis who are part of the Mahayana tradition. We speak directly and openly. We can state the reasons why we have come to this decision and then invite Mahayana bhikkhunis to help establish an order in Thailand. These bhikkhunis would not be original Theravada bhikkhunis—we would call them what they are in a direct, straightforward manner. Sometimes the expression 'speak directly' seems too blunt—let us say that we describe them as they really are.

If people object to this proposal, then we can establish a new community of female renunciants that is generally accepted by the bhikkhu community. We can determine the way of practice for this new community, by laying down a system of rules and regulations drawing upon the original bhikkhuni rules in the Vinaya. We then acknowledge this new order truthfully for what it is. I think speaking in such a straightforward, honest manner is the best thing to do. But note that these are simply some personal suggestions for alternatives—people don't have to agree with these suggestions.

The lack of clarity over these issues causes a lot of confusion—the boundaries become blurred. The Theravada tradition is this way; because it is this way it is the Theravada tradition. Personal preferences may be otherwise. One may claim to be a pure Theravada, but wish for the Theravada tradition to accord with one's desires. The

two don't always match—they may not be in harmony.

According to the Theravada tradition the bhikkhuni lineage died out. We may not be able to give exact historical details, for example by saying that in Sri Lanka the bhikkhuni order died out in a specific year, but it is generally acknowledged that the order ceased. And in other Theravada countries there was no lineage of bhikkhunis, so it wasn't possible to restore the order in Sri Lanka.

Not just the bhikkhunis—the bhikkhu order too may also die out, and if this happens we need to face the truth and speak honestly, before deciding what to do next. For example, when the bhikkhu order died out in Sri Lanka, a request was made for bhikkhus in Thailand and Burma to conduct ordinations and restore the bhikkhu order in Sri Lanka. This was an honest assessment. We need to speak honestly and acknowledge the facts.

In Sri Lanka the bhikkhuni order died out and later on the bhikkhu order died out. This is the truth of events. When the original institution dies out it is no longer available to us—it has ceased. We wish, however, to have available a similar way of life, in which case we have the prerogative to establish a new system, creating a form that is optimal for practice. But it is not the original institution established by the Buddha. This is stating the facts.

Question: Tahn Chao Khun, do you think that the establishment of the siladhara order in England, in which the nuns have a code of discipline and a practice of renunciation, but are not referred to as bhikkhunis, is a possible solution?

Phra Payutto: I have heard about this order but haven't studied the details. I would have to study the details first to give an accurate answer. But speaking in general terms, it is an option. This is similar to the *mae chi* order in Thailand. I have conjectured that a similar way of thinking occurred in Thailand, where there has been no bhikkhuni order but women have had the wish to be ordained and live as

renunciants. The result was the establishment of the *mae chi* form.

In one of my recent CDs there is a talk entitled, 'Continue the Considerations over Bhikkhuni Ordinations, but Do Not Forget to Elevate the Status of the Mae Chi.' I see the *mae chi* order as important—it has already been established and deserves attention. As for the matter of bhikkhunis, this should be discussed in order to gain clarity and understanding. But what can be done first and done immediately is to elevate the status of the *mae chi*, so that they are given an opportunity to study and practise, and to live a wholesome life, without coming to any harm. From what I can understand, the system at Amaravati accords with these principles, that is, it elevates the status of nuns and provides an optimum renunciant lifestyle for women.

This alternative has some advantages over the bhikkhuni option, because there are potentially all sorts of obstacles to applying the bhikkhuni Vinaya in today's day and age. Here we have the opportunity to establish a new order, suitable to our objectives. We can consider how to create an optimum renunciant way of life for women, conducive for them to cultivate the threefold training and practise in a way that bears fruit. We can do our best to achieve this goal. We can choose whatever name we want for this new order. This is one viable alternative.

Whether we have bhikkhunis in the future or not, paying attention to the already established orders is important. We can further debate the issue of the bhikkhunis, but in the meantime we have these already existing nuns' orders as a basis. This is what I discussed in that talk on the CD. We shouldn't just sit around and debate on the issue of bhikkhunis and neglect those things that we can implement right now.

Questioner: From my experience in England, I feel that we should first of all focus on and aim for genuine renunciation. Many people lack an understanding of what being a bhikkhuni entails.

Phra Payutto: Concerning the matter of the bhikkhunis, we shouldn't be hasty. We should contemplate this matter and discuss the Vinaya points clearly. At the very least people will gain a wider understanding and realize that this issue has nothing to do with the rights of women. The bhikkhuni order used to exist; although the order has died out, the rights of women have not disappeared. Women still have the right to be ordained, but these days where will we find someone who has the right to conduct such an ordination? What can we do? This is where we are found wanting. It has nothing to do with women's rights.

Imagine that the bhikkhu order dies out. Even if men were to claim some kind of human right, they still wouldn't be able to be ordained.

This is not a problem of women's rights, but rather a problem in connection to formal procedure, especially pertaining to the people with the authority to conduct the ordinations. The debate is over who has this authority. In the case that there are no bhikkhunis, is it possible for the bhikkhus to conduct these ordinations on their own? Are bhikkhus able to appropriate the right that belongs partly to the bhikkhuni sangha? This is the problem, isn't it?

We can do what we can first. We can elevate the status of Theravada female renunciants, providing women with a viable path of practice. We can call this order whatever we like.

If the Bhikkhuni Order is to Be Restored Do This with Clarity and Concord

Question: There is a rule laid down by the Buddha stating that a bhikkhuni preceptor (*pavattini*) is only permitted to ordain one bhikkhuni every two years. What happens if she ordains four bhikkhunis at once?

Phra Payutto: This is another problem, which can be debated without end.

Question: Does such a group ordination qualify as a defect in announcing a formal act of the sangha (*kammavācā-vipatti*)?

Phra Payutto: As regards the formal announcement, this is a matter that would need to be looked at more closely—one can't just pass judgement on this matter immediately. But literally speaking, such an action is doubtful, incomplete, and could give rise to problems.

Question: Some people claim that this is simply an offence of expiation (*pācittiya*); once one confesses it it goes away.

Phra Payutto: This matter needs to be reviewed as well. If the formal announcement, for example the actual wording of the announcement, is incorrect, then this is a defect in the announcement. It's not just an offence of expiation—the entire act is null and void.

There are other matters here to consider. Some people may use a loophole to circumvent this problem, that is, they chant a separate announcement for each ordination candidate. They don't announce the candidates together. This is like saying that in this moment in time we are ordaining one person. If this is the case, in terms of the official wording (*kamma-vācā*) the announcement is not invalid. In the situation you are referring to I don't know how the announcement was made. This is a loophole—one ordains a single individual, but repeats the ordination procedure several times.

If this is done the fault rests with the preceptor (*pavattini*); the persons who have requested ordination are not at fault. And as the procedure is completed by the sangha, the ordination is complete. But those individuals who have knowingly participated in such an ordination are accomplices in this misdeed and each one of them is also at fault.

Using this circumventing measure may have been thought-out beforehand, but how can a deliberate transgression of the ordination procedure be a good thing? It is setting a bad example from the beginning. It is not impeccable behaviour and even takes the form of

a stratagem or trick. Conducting an ordination in this way is like admitting that this is a transgression of the formal teachings, but saying that it doesn't matter—let us just finish the formal act of the sangha. Once the ordination is done the candidates have been successfully ordained and we the accomplices in this act can simply confess our offences.

This can be true for bhikkhu ordinations as well. In some cases the ordinations are invalid, while in other cases the bhikkhus who participated in the ordination commit an offence.

The details of this recent event need to be reviewed. You say that the monks who participated in this event considered this matter before acting and claim to not have taken a short cut. We need to examine this case more closely to gain any sense of certainty.

In any case, this conduct at the very least brings up matters of contention and is a cause for problems. One should try and avoid such problems before acting. This event has caused problems and disruption. Regardless of whether the formal ordination procedure was valid or not, there are unresolved issues here. Moreover, there have been problems concerning the breaking up into factions in the sangha. It is as if the problems have been compounded. What is clear is that the bhikkhus who participated in this event knowingly and willingly committed offences.

It is vital that when one is doing something considered wholesome and good, that it commences with wholesomeness and clarity. One doesn't want to begin in a way that is unhealthy or destructive.

The fact is that the Theravada bhikkhuni order has died out; we are faced with the question whether we are able to restore it. If we are to restore it, this should be done in the most carefully considered and complete way possible, which will lead to a sense of clarity and rejoicing for everyone.

Looking at this issue from a broad perspective. The gist of it is that we want to support women and provide them with a viable

opportunity for practice. In regard to the bhikkhuni question, we can give this more consideration, but we shouldn't act rashly. In the meantime, whatever we can do to help women that isn't incompatible with our tradition, we should act upon. Just like what Tahn Chao Khun Sumedho is now doing. And we need to explain to the women that in truth we are not discriminating against them, by telling them: 'You have every right to be ordained as bhikkhunis, but do the bhikkhus have the right to confer this ordination? I am still asking this question. I must be certain that I have this authority. If the women have not passed through the first stage of being ordained by bhikkhunis, how can we bhikkhus conduct an ordination?'

And if the women candidates claim to have been ordained by a bhikkhuni sangha, is that bhikkhuni sangha truly valid according to the Vinaya? We are not outright rejecting its validity, but we need to first give this thorough consideration. This is the correct way to proceed.

The reason why we give such great importance to being correct is because correctness is the highest criterion for determining our actions. Our actions are based on a feeling of well-wishing towards women, a wish for them to be ordained properly, and a wish for their status as nuns to be faultless and complete. If we act in a way that deprives them of correctness and completion, we ourselves are at fault and act improperly.

Later, if these bhikkhunis study the Vinaya and find out that their ordination was done with a lack of clarity, they will begin to doubt themselves. Indeed, it is the bhikkhunis themselves who will feel distressed and ill-at-ease, by doubting the validity of their ordination procedure. The process is thus not pure and secure. The best thing, therefore, is for us to first consider this matter clearly and openly.

If we truly wish the women well we must act correctly and clearly. We shouldn't simply ignore the causes to future problems, resulting in the women feeling self-doubtful and anxious afterwards. The impor-

tant factor is that we act clearly according to the instructions in the Vinaya. Not only will we be clear on these issues, those women who request ordination will also understand all the relevant Vinaya points. Later, when they encounter facts or information on this subject, they will feel bright and confident, free from doubt.

At the present time our responsibility is to explain the facts to people. It will take some time before people understand the complexities of this issue. Facts are facts—our duty is to help people gain an understanding so that the truth of this matter manifests for them.

We need to be honest and direct when speaking on this matter. For example, in this case what is the lineage of the ordination (*upasampadā-varṃsa*) in regard to the bhikkhuni preceptor, and what kind of Dhammavinaya does she observe? Is she a part of the Dharmaguptaka lineage or the Sarvāstivādin lineage?

Questioner: The Dharmaguptaka lineage, because this is the closest resemblance.

Phra Payutto: The bhikkhuni preceptor is part of the Dharmaguptaka lineage?

Questioner: No—she comes from Sri Lanka and is part of the Theravada lineage.

Phra Payutto: You say she is part of the Theravada lineage, but when a Chinese bhikkhuni has given ordination to a Sri Lankan woman, does the formal transmission to this latter bhikkhuni occur by her keeping to the Dharmaguptaka Vinaya code? If a bhikkhuni is keeping to the Dharmaguptaka Vinaya, what lineage is she actually a part of? Since only the Vinaya remains intact of the Dharmaguptaka lineage, one can't really say that the Dharmaguptaka school still exists. And when someone is keeping to the Dharmaguptaka Vinaya, can she simultaneously be part of the Theravada lineage? Indeed, although the Theravada Vinaya and the Dharmaguptaka Vinaya are similar, they are also distinct. How are we to understand this? These issues must be

made clear. Let us first consider them closely.

As far as I know, the Dalai Lama is still stuck in regard to this same matter. He has encountered problems even though he is part of the wider Mahayana school. Tibetans consider themselves part of the Vajrayana school, but generally speaking they are part of the Mahayana lineage. Even though Tibetan Buddhism is part of Mahayana, there are still obstacles. And even though Mahayana Buddhists are able to apply the Vinaya of the Hinayana (Theravada) lineage, these matters have not come to a convenient conclusion. Has the Dalai Lama now come to some kind of agreement?

Questioner: No, not yet.

Phra Payutto: See, even among the various Mahayana schools there is as yet no agreement. Therefore, I say this matter is being acted on too rashly, with a lack of adequate clarity. It is the future bhikkhunis who will encounter a problem. This first group of bhikkhunis may not doubt the validity of their ordination because their determination is so strong, but later generations of bhikkhunis may doubt themselves and not be at peace.

We need to show loving-kindness towards those future ordination candidates. We need to consider the wellbeing of women who come to be ordained in the long term. One shouldn't simply think: 'I have been successfully ordained. I follow my own convictions and ideas on this matter, which I have been able to bring to completion.' But in the end the people who incur the consequences are other people.

If those women who come forward to be ordained do not clearly see the legitimacy of their ordination and harbour unresolved doubts, they will face a danger and have issues to resolve. How will they be able to speak with confidence? Therefore, clarity and precision are of utmost importance. If one truly cares for their wellbeing, one will act openly and clearly. These women will then not have to struggle with confusion and anxiety.

A Wish For Women to Obtain Integrity & Wellbeing

Questioner: There is a prevalent view among Westerners that at the present time Theravada Buddhism must be reformed so that it becomes acceptable in regard to contemporary ideas and provides rights to women.

Phra Payutto: I have said this several times before that this matter has nothing to do with women's rights. Ever since the Buddha's time and up to the present day, women have the right to be ordained as bhikkhunis. They have the right, but the question is whether anyone has the right to give them ordination. This is where we get stuck.

Questioner: We haven't dared to answer this question and therefore we haven't dared to ordain bhikkhunis.

Phra Payutto: We will dare to do this when there is clarity and certainty, and when there are supportive principles. We need to speak honestly, by informing women of their status—at the moment we can't clearly designate bhikkhunis as being obviously Theravada, without there remaining any doubts. Therefore we can't yet perform bhikkhuni ordinations. What does Luang Por Somdet¹ from Wat Saket have to say on this matter?

Questioner: According to the laws of Thailand, there was a decree in 1928 which is legally binding and is used as a standard. It states that it is a transgression of the law to ordain bhikkhunis in Thailand.

Phra Payutto: This decree was made a long time ago, during the time of the Supreme Patriarch Somdet Krom Luang Jinavorn Sirivaddhana.

That is speaking on the level of Thai law, but it is also possible to speak from the perspective of Dhammavinaya, which is independent from Thai law. And indeed, the resolution by the Sangha Supreme Council to enact this regulation was made by considering the Vinaya.

¹ [Somdet Phra Bhuddacharn (Buḍḍhāchariya), former acting Supreme Patriarch of Thailand (b. 1928; d. 2013).]

There are many angles from which we can look at this subject, all of which are connected to the Dhammavinaya. We should speak according to the Vinaya, and this discussion needs to be clear and accurate. And as I mentioned before, the sangha needs to discuss this matter as a collective effort. If what I have been told is true, that the recent bhikkhuni ordinations were done in secret, this is not good. It should be done openly and in a collective way, in order to maintain harmony.

Question: Is there here a fundamental break in sangha harmony?

Phra Payutto: The result is a breaking up into different factions. The ordination of bhikkhunis is already a dilemma. Now there is the additional and overlapping problem of factionalism in the sangha.

The things to do at this stage are as follows:

First, to help generate clear knowledge and understanding of the Dhammavinaya.

Second, to recognize the pros and cons of this recent event; to understand whether there were faults or mistakes in the methods used to accomplish this deed.

If people develop an understanding this issue will gradually become resolved. We apply honesty and sincerity as the chief principles and maintain our focus on the Dhammavinaya. We should study this matter together in order to gain clarity.

Moreover, we should establish a well-wishing towards women, especially those women who wish to be ordained as bhikkhunis. We can tell them that we don't harbour any aversion towards them and we are not preventing them from being ordained as bhikkhunis. But if they are to be ordained as bhikkhunis, we want this ordination to be complete and authentic.

There is another question of whether those bhikkhunis who have recently been ordained feel truly and fully confident that their ordination was complete and valid. Do they feel bright and clear in

their hearts? It is possible that they have conflicts within themselves, have self-doubts, or have to face contentious issues with others.

This is not an issue requiring a claim to women's rights. To do so stems from a misunderstanding. Why make such claims?—the right for women to ordain as bhikkhunis still exists. The question is where women can be ordained—who has the authority to give them ordination?

The question we face is whether those bhikkhus who have ordained bhikkhunis have claimed an authority that the monks do not have. Theravada bhikkhus have the authority to give ordination to bhikkhunis when women have first correctly passed through an ordination ceremony conducted by Theravada bhikkhunis—is this true or not?

The matter of wishing women well has profound dimensions. Think about it—if we wish someone well, then we want that person to obtain the best, most correct, and most complete things, which will truly benefit him or her and provide the person with long-standing happiness and joy. By obtaining these things, the person does not need to face inner doubts and distress at a later time, nor does he or she need to face various obstructions, by replying to objections and an external lack of openness. Isn't this so?

Those individuals who are involved in ordaining bhikkhunis most certainly have the welfare of women in mind and also recognize the benefits for the wider public. But one must be careful. Sometimes, without being aware, one acts simply to accomplish and fulfil something according to personal views or desires. Eventually, one's actions may be more a form of glorifying one's own views rather than a true act of well-wishing towards women.

Therefore, those monks who are involved in this issue of bhikkhuni ordinations must take great care. And those women who seek ordination should recognize that the individuals who truly wish them well are those people who are trying to do everything in the most

correct and thorough fashion. Sometimes we must wait in order to find a solution that is not faulty or harmful, by determining to provide women with goodness and uprightness—with the greatest degree of completeness and benefit.

The Question of Women's Rights

Questioner: I sometimes wonder about the Western women who want to be ordained as bhikkhunis. Often the main issue does not seem to be a matter of renunciation, but rather a focus on equality and egalitarianism. If men can do something, women should be able to do it too. For example, in regard to paying respects according to seniority, some women request that these gestures of respect be made according to the day of one's ordination, that is, newly ordained bhikkhus should formally pay respects to the senior nuns. They claim that women should have equal rights in respect to bowing and formally receiving the food. These issues come up a lot.

Phra Payutto: It is important here to look at and address those issues which are the most sensitive. But before that, it is also important to point out that the basic right of women to be ordained as bhikkhunis still exists—it hasn't disappeared. The reason we can't restore the bhikkhuni order is because of other factors.

Let us return to this issue of the right of women to be ordained as bhikkhunis. This theme seems to constantly return, even in our conversation here. And even though I live far from other people and in a single year I don't meet that many monks or laypeople, this subject keeps coming up. People keep saying things like: 'Why can't women be ordained as bhikkhunis?' 'Why don't women have the right to be ordained?' 'Why don't you authorize bhikkhuni ordinations?' The more I hear these questions, the clearer it becomes that in truth this issue of bhikkhuni ordinations has nothing to do with women's rights. This idea stems from a lack of understanding.

Especially those people involved in newscasting—they don't seek and obtain a clear understanding of this issue, and tend to get stuck with their preconceived ideas and beliefs, without change. Instead of helping to solve this problem, they often induce more confusion and misunderstanding in people.

In fact, people generally don't pose the right questions and define the issue correctly. The question is not: 'Can women be ordained as bhikkhunis?' We need to rephrase the question so that it is accurate and to the point. The question is: 'Are we able to restore the Theravada bhikkhuni order which has disappeared?'

Theravada bhikkhunis used to exist, and there were many of them. The bhikkhuni order, however, disappeared, both in India and in Sri Lanka—it is not clear where it last disappeared. It disappeared because of wars, foreign invasions and persecution, or other factors—again it is not clear exactly what happened. Not a single bhikkhuni survived. Not just in Sri Lanka, but in the entire world—they all disappeared.

On a related subject, I did research on the Maricavaṭṭi monastery at Anurādhapura in Sri Lanka, which is mentioned in the commentaries to the Majjhima Nikāya. I referred to the *Dictionary of Pali Proper Names* by Dr. G.P. Malalasekara and then linked this material with passages in the Mahāvamsa and the Cūlavamsa. I discovered that King Duṭṭhagāmaṇi Abhaya built this monastery. Later on, during the reign of King Kassapa IV (1439-1456 BE; 896-913 CE), the king built the Tissārāma monastery for the bhikkhunis and appointed them as the guardians of the Bodhi Tree. If these historical accounts are true, they show that the bhikkhuni order in Sri Lanka was still thriving in the 9th century CE.

In any case, it was soon after this time that Sri Lanka encountered great problems over a lengthy and consistent period from the Tamil people. This included Tamil invasions, and also wars between neighbouring Sri Lankan kingdoms, each which requested military assistance from the Tamils, until in the end Anurādhapura was

abandoned and fell to ruin. The new capital at Pulatthipura (commonly known as Polonnaruwa) faced similar problems. (For example, the Tamils from the Coḷa country in S. India occupied the capital, captured the king of Sri Lanka, and imprisoned him in India for twelve years until he died there. The Tamils also built many Hindu temples at Pulatthipura.) It is possible that the bhikkhuni order died out during this turbulent time. In the historical accounts of the reign of King Parakkamabāhu I (1696-1729 BE; 1153-1186 CE), during which time Sri Lanka developed greatly and there was a revival of Buddhism, there is no mention of bhikkhunis. Those people who have the time can further research this matter.

Presently there are many people who want to restore the Theravada bhikkhuni order. Can this be done and how should we go about addressing this question?

This predicament has occurred in the past for the bhikkhus as well. In the 16th century (CE.) the Portuguese arrived in Sri Lanka, hunting for new colonies. They killed and oppressed the populace, causing great destruction and upheaval and leading to a reduction in the number of bhikkhus. Later, the Sinhalese king¹ was able to free the country from Portuguese rule. The king later became angry at the bhikkhus, converted to Hinduism, and had all the bhikkhus killed, with only novices remaining.² (It is not clear whether the bhikkhuni order also ceased to exist at this time; it is likely that it had already died out.)

A later Sinhalese monarch³ began to restore Buddhism in Sri Lanka, but there were no bhikkhus, so it wasn't possible to conduct ordinations. Eventually, it occurred to him that there were still Theravada bhikkhus in Thailand. (This was during the reign of King Boromakot of Ayutthaya who ruled 1732-1758 CE.) He sent a royal

¹ [King Rajasinghe I—1544-1593 CE.]

² [He had previously killed his own father and the sangha maintained that this was an 'act with immediate, irredeemable results' (*anantariya-kamma*).]

³ [King Kirti Sri Raja Singha—1734-1782 CE.]

delegation led by the minister Sirivaḍḍhana to request bhikkhus from Thailand. Ven. Upālī from Thailand thus travelled to Sri Lanka and gave ordination to Sinhalese men, restoring the bhikkhu sangha there. This lineage is called the Siam Vamsa or the Upālī Vamsa, and it continues to this day.

The historical records do not say whether the Sri Lankan king considered to request bhikkhunis from Thailand or Burma in order to give bhikkhuni ordination to Sinhalese women. But if he did give this matter consideration, once he realized that there were no bhikkhuni orders existing in these countries, he wouldn't have been able to do anything about it.

As I have said before, the inability to be ordained as bhikkhunis is not a matter exclusive to women—the same case can occur for men. If the bhikkhu order dies out, men still have the right to be ordained, but they won't be able to do so. It is the same for both genders. The Theravada bhikkhuni order died out. Eventually, the bhikkhu order will die out too, although we don't know when this will happen or due to what circumstances. At that time, however, neither women nor men will be able to take ordination.

Presently, there are women who wish to be ordained as Theravada bhikkhunis. Here, we are faced with the same difficulty—the Theravada bhikkhuni order has died out.

When a woman requests the Theravada bhikkhus to confer ordination the monks reply that Theravada bhikkhus have the right to give ordination to a bhikkhuni under the condition that she has first been ordained by a community of Theravada bhikkhunis. But here we get stuck at the same obstacle, that no such community of Theravada bhikkhunis exists.

Although this obstacle exists, there are women and supporters of these women who won't give up trying, and thus come up with possible solutions for this matter, for example:

- Some people propose that Mahayana bhikkhunis from Taiwan, Hong Kong, or Mainland China should conduct the first stage of ordinations instead of Theravada bhikkhunis, followed by a second ordination by Theravada bhikkhus. This proposal, however, has not received popular support, because it conflicts with principles in the Vinaya.
- Some people say that there is already a Theravada bhikkhuni order reestablished in Sri Lanka. These bhikkhunis were ordained by bhikkhunis from China, who trace their lineage back to an older Sri Lankan bhikkhuni order. These people propose that we should invite these recently ordained Sri Lankan bhikkhunis to Thailand in order to give ordination to women, and then have Theravada bhikkhus fulfil the second stage of the ordination. Some people agree with this proposal, others reject it, while others wait for more clarification, because these bhikkhunis have been ordained by Chinese bhikkhunis, whose historical lineage still lacks clarity. Moreover, these Chinese bhikkhunis come from the Mahayana tradition and there are aspects to this tradition which need to be further considered. Finally, in Sri Lanka itself, this newly formed bhikkhuni order has not yet been formally accepted, either by the government or by the wider bhikkhu sangha.
- Some people claim that it is not even necessary to have Theravada bhikkhunis in order to conduct ordinations; Theravada bhikkhus can perform these ordinations on their own, because the Buddha never rescinded his original allowance for the bhikkhus to ordain bhikkhunis. But this proposal meets with various objections as I commented on earlier.

These are some examples of seeking a solution to this question. One can sympathize with both sides: on the one hand there are those faithful women who wish to be ordained and to find a form that matches their faith; on the other hand, there are those people who are

responsible for the overall religion, for the monastic sangha, and for ordinations, who desire correctness and completeness in order to maintain strength and stability. Especially in these matters of religion, which are profound and close to the heart, one wishes for integrity and steadfastness, without any disturbances, by following procedures that are pure and complete.

This gives an overview of the problem at hand. But no matter how one looks at this matter, it has nothing to do with women's rights. It is important that people maintain the discussion and keep the focus on the real issues involved. The crucial issues have to do with monastic Vinaya principles, with rules and regulations, with the code of conduct and the formal activities of the Theravada monastic institution.

To use an analogy, it is as if someone were to say: 'I would like to apply for a position to work in the Siam Air Conditioning Company.' This company, however, went out of business thirty-eight years ago. That person then complains and asks why he is not allowed to work for this company.

One can reply to that person by saying that if he has the proper credentials, he can apply for a position, but at this time no such company exists. To fulfil this desire one must first reestablish a company with this name. If this is accomplished the person can apply for a position. The problem does not lie with the person—no one is blocking this person. The problem lies with the fact that this company doesn't presently exist; it has not yet been reestablished.

Another example is that of a pupil or the parents of a pupil who say that they like the seventh grade of elementary school. 'We want our child to study in 7th grade. Why can't our child study in 7th grade? Why is he not given the right to study in 7th grade?'

One can answer: 'Your child has the right to study in 7th grade if he fulfils the criteria, but the 7th grade of elementary school has been done away with for about thirty years.'

‘So what can we do so that our child can study in 7th grade?’ The answer is: ‘You can encourage the government to reestablish the 7th grade of elementary school. The problem does not rest with your child —no one is keeping your child out. The problem is that the 7th grade has been dissolved; there is thus no 7th grade for your child to enrol in.’

Whether the Siam Air Conditioning Company or the 7th grade of elementary school will be restored is dependent on various conditions, some of them similar, some not. For example: money and capital, government policy, the needs and desires of the public, the suitability according to the present time, etc.

For the restoration of the bhikkhuni sangha, however, a crucial stipulation besides the wishes of women and of society is the Buddha’s regulation in regard to the ordination of bhikkhunis. The specific regulation here is that the bhikkhuni sangha is entrusted with the authority to perform the first stage of bhikkhuni ordinations. In the case that the bhikkhuni sangha no longer exists, who has the power to take this authority away from the bhikkhuni sangha? Or can we disregard this right that belongs to them?

Now we are at the stage of looking for a solution. Some people are looking for possibilities provided by the Buddha’s teachings, others are looking for solutions completely in keeping with the Buddha’s disciplinary regulations. However one conducts this search, let it be done without quarrelling. Let us seek good and proper understanding.

To sum up, the problem lies with the fact that this institution has collapsed. The question is are we able to restore it by ourselves. The problem is not whether certain individuals have the right to be ordained.

It is possible that personal attachments and suspicions have interfered with people’s thinking. An overemphasis on demanding and protecting individual rights can cause trouble, by having people view all problems as connected to people’s so-called rights.

In respect to women's rights and the ordination of bhikkhunis, when people say, 'Why can't women be ordained as bhikkhunis' or, 'Why aren't women given the right to be ordained as bhikkhunis,' who are these people appealing to? In fact, there is no-one who is removing or blocking the alleged rights of women in any way whatsoever.

When people make repeated requests or demands, this demand for change, which is often done in an unclear way and does not address the specific issues, can be countered with the objection: 'Why must you infringe on a right belonging to the Buddha?'

How is this infringement done?—one disregards the prerogative of the Buddha in the capacity as the original teacher, who wished for his disciples, in this case the bhikkhus, to practise according to his regulations. One also infringes on the liberty of the monks, who have the sanction of practising without violating the Buddha's regulations.

By witnessing how this issue of bhikkhuni ordinations becomes connected in people's minds to women's rights, it indicates that at the present time the subject of women's rights is still very sensitive or touchy. From this sensitivity there arises mistrust. Whenever another issue seems to bump against people's sensitivity vis-à-vis this matter, they conclude that it has to do with women's rights, even when it is completely separate. As a result the original problem escalates and becomes more complex, and the solutions to the problem become distorted and misdirected.

From a wider perspective, women's rights are just one part of the notion of appealing to or demanding individual rights, which in this present era has been instilled and nourished in people for a long time. This mindset of claiming and protecting one's rights has become rooted in people's minds, which on the one hand helps to develop and enhance modern civilisation, but on the other hand seems to sometimes lead to extreme and imbalanced forms of behaviour. We should help each other to avoid this extreme behaviour, by emphasizing mutual support and generosity in order to balance things out.

This consideration is connected to other serious problems in today's world and civilization. We claim to have made great strides in human development, to have achieved globalization, the era of high-tech, or whatever, but this so-called developed world is still brimful of problems. And modern people, instead of gaining more skill at solving problems, seem to be further away from achieving real solutions.

It appears that we use our progress as a tool for increasing the number of problems rather than as a tool to solve problems. Take for example our system of advanced media and information services—instead of using this as a means to research and share knowledge in order to arrive clearly at the truth of matters, we use it to reinforce and spread views and beliefs which intensify problems. Otherwise, we create a stream of information which agitates and frightens people, influencing their way of thinking and keeping them from the facts. As a consequence people aren't able to solve problems effectively.

We must aim at knowledge in order to reach the truth of matters. Especially here in Thailand, we must place opinions subservient to knowledge, to develop and be enriched by knowledge, and to consider issues based on a firm foundation of knowledge. If we do not, we will slip onto a path of irreversible ruin.

In regard to this issue, if we adhere to the Buddha's later prescription, the privilege of the bhikkhus was reduced or limited. Bhikkhus are no longer permitted to ordain bhikkhunis by themselves; the only allowance which remains is for them to acknowledge the bhikkhunis who have already been ordained by the bhikkhuni sangha. Therefore, in regard to the bhikkhuni ordinations of women in the present time, it is not the case that women don't have the right to be ordained. Indeed, it is the bhikkhus themselves who don't have the right to ordain bhikkhunis by themselves.

Here, I have separated the issue on women's rights. As for the issue of equality, the women deserve sympathy over these issues. One should consider this matter and find a suitable way of dealing with it.

Questioner: This issue requires clarity. Over this past year there has been a problem in that some of the senior nuns (i.e., siladhara) who are skilled at teaching meditation have felt that there are monks who are trying to subjugate them in some way. Even some of the laypeople have had doubts about this issue. In truth, however, we do elevate the status of the siladhara—we don't subjugate or oppress them. But there are a lot of strong feelings about this issue. There are some siladhara, however, who don't have a problem with this issue.

Phra Payutto: As I said, this issue of equality is a separate issue. The women deserve sympathy over this issue, because by living in the world there are still feelings of attachment to one's identity. We should find a way to empower and honour women as much as we can. This is a separate consideration.

If our empathy is combined with an understanding by the women, they are likely to feel at ease. First, we can explain to them what I mentioned earlier, that at the present time bhikkhuni ordinations are not yet available, because there are obstacles concerning the Vinaya. Nevertheless, we try to elevate the status of women, for example in England the women have the siladhara training. This is an opportunity for women to practise during the time that it is not yet possible to be ordained as a bhikkhuni in the complete sense. If women understand this, they are likely to reach a level of contentment.

There are other issues here to clarify. For example, at the time of the Buddha the bhikkhus did not pay formal respects to the bhikkhunis. This has to do with the social circumstances and conventions at that time. That is, members of other renunciant traditions would not accept this, as they themselves did not pay respects to women.

At that time there were many people who were looking for an opportunity to disparage Buddhism. If the bhikkhus had paid formal respects to the bhikkhunis, these people would not have seen this as one renunciant paying respects to another renunciant, but rather as

monks paying respects to women in general. Members of other religious movements would then have immediately accused the Buddhist monks of being truly inferior, in that they have to pay formal respects to women. The Buddha needed to be cautious on this matter and to prevent these accusations.

Questioner: Some people argue that the times have changed and that women nowadays are much more educated.

Phra Payutto: From one perspective this is true—things have changed dramatically. I don't disagree with this. However, the Buddha's regulations were set down according to circumstances existing in his lifetime, and then they were gathered together as a code. We have agreed to collectively observe these standards. This being the case, if we were to make alterations on this regulation, it would have implications on other regulations and open the door for making further alterations. Here we are faced with the dilemma of whether to make alterations or not to make any at all, and to consider which of these choices has a greater advantage or benefit.

At the time of the First Recitation, the monks deliberated whether to choose the way of making alterations and revoking rules or to observe all the rules and regulations set down by the Buddha. They considered in this way: 'Since it is not exactly clear what comprises the so-called minor rules, if we choose to make adaptations this will entail more disadvantages.' They thus decided unanimously to observe all the rules without alteration. If they had begun to make various changes, this trend would have continued until none of the original structure would have survived. Both choices have advantages and disadvantages, but from a long-term perspective, the fact that the Vinaya survives to this day is due to this decision to observe the original form.

The main objective here is to protect the Dhamma, by having the Vinaya act as a support. The Vinaya in itself is not seen as a goal. The

true purpose of our actions focuses on the Dhamma, that is, what can we do to ensure that the Vinaya helps to preserve the Dhamma. Sometimes we need to make allowances; we need to give up some advantages in order to preserve the Dhamma.

From one perspective, if we don't attach to gender differences, it doesn't matter whom we pay respects to. This gives us an opportunity to train ourselves. For example, there is the story of Somdet Toh,¹ who one day while walking encountered a dog lying on the path and showed some deference while passing around it. People criticized him for paying respects to a dog. His answer was logical: 'I do this because it is as an opportunity to train myself. There is no harm done.'

We need to be able to distinguish between form and content. On one level the form of the Vinaya is an opportunity to train ourselves. Each training rule in the Vinaya has a clear rationale and a reason for why it was enacted. As time passes and circumstances change it is possible that this objective doesn't match or fit with the present day and age. We can still use and benefit from such training rules, however, as a form of self-discipline. This is one level of practice.

An Opportunity for Training and Teaching

Questioner: There is another issue that brings up doubt in some people's minds pertaining to a prejudice towards women. There is also the question whether rules were inserted by later generations of monks and do not stem from the Buddha.

Phra Payutto: You mean the matter of the eight garudhammas? This matter can be investigated—I have nothing against this. It is a matter of academic study, and should be pursued. If it is not yet clear, examine it some more. But one shouldn't jump to the conclusion that this is not a teaching by the Buddha himself and that later generations

¹ [Somdet Phra Buddhacharn (Toh Brahmaramsi): ca. 1787-1872. Probably the most famous and widely loved monk in nineteenth century Thailand.]

of monks established these rules. Before coming to a conclusion one should study this matter carefully and thoroughly. I have previously spoken at length about this issue.

In regard to the matter of paying respects by making *añjali*, on one level it is a way of following the Vinaya in order to uphold a communally-held standard and to benefit the entire community. It is also a way to train oneself. But this matter of paying respects involves other points which need to be looked at and carefully studied in the context of the *garudhammas*. There are aspects to the *garudhammas* that may be different from how some people understand them.

I have heard this argument many times, that the eight *garudhammas* may have been added by later monks and do not originate with the Buddha. When one hears this claim for the first time, it is understandable that it gives rise to doubt, but when one studies this matter more carefully, it becomes clear that if later monks did this, one must question why. They themselves would not have been able to satisfy their wishes by making these changes, and there would have been more effective and easier ways of going about accomplishing their objective. But even if we assume someone really did add these rules, I can't see how anyone else would have gone along with it.

It is fair to say that this matter of bhikkhuni ordinations is becoming a prominent dilemma of the current times. This is no problem—it shows that women are interested in living a Buddhist way of life, which is excellent. It is worthy of support and in the case that it gives rise to dilemmas, we can work together to sort these out. But a vital factor is our intentional actions, our *kamma*, that is, the way we think, speak, and act in order to solve these problems. If we are not careful, we create new, overlapping problems, including the feeling by many people that this issue has to do with women's rights, and the trouble created when people criticize others, both people alive today and those individuals who played a participatory role in the past.

The basic problem, however, which one can even say is the sole problem, is a lack of knowledge, a lack of study—the fact that people don't seek a clear and adequate understanding of these issues. Moreover, people tend to draw conclusions or make judgements based on this lack of knowledge. We should try to solve this core problem, so that people speak and act with comprehensive knowledge.

It is true that there are many things in the past that we are unable to clearly know, because the specific details and facts about these things have not survived. But to refrain from acting in haste, to investigate thoroughly, and to verify the information that is available can help to a great extent. When our studies and knowledge has reached a certain limit, we can then speak according to the facts that we have garnered.

We need to address the problem of a lack of knowledge—both individual and collective—and the fact that people don't make an effort to seek knowledge. Moreover, we need to attend to sub-standard methods of learning and the way in which people produce evidence based on defective or inadequate understanding. At the very least people should be able to speak in accord with facts and to act with understanding.

I have said before that in respect to this issue of bhikkhuni ordinations, we are still at the stage of research and gathering knowledge—generally speaking, our knowledge on this issue is still inadequate. For this reason we shouldn't hastily draw conclusions or make simple judgements, both in regard to Vinaya principles and to contemporary institutions and organizations.

At this point I would like to talk a little about present circumstances. Earlier we spoke about those bhikkhunis in China who some claim can trace their lineage—their line of ordination—to the Theravada tradition. Let us reflect on this matter. What lineage of Vinaya do these bhikkhunis observe?

Questioner: Dharmaguptaka, because that is the closest.

Phra Payutto: So it is claimed that they trace their lineage to the Theravada tradition, and yet they observe the Vinaya of the Dharmaguptaka school. Just now you said that this Vinaya has the closest resemblance. This means, however, that these bhikkhunis who apparently trace their lineage to the Theravada tradition, at some point adopted the Dharmaguptaka Vinaya. But from what I have heard, the newly ordained bhikkhunis in Sri Lanka who have been ordained by those Chinese bhikkhunis now observe the Theravada Vinaya.

There are some people who say that the Dharmaguptaka Vinaya is similar to the Theravada Vinaya, that the former even has more rules than the latter, or they claim that these two codes of Vinaya are the same. But from the perspective of the formal teachings on Vinaya, these sorts of comments are ambiguous and misleading.

To refer to the greater number of training rules is rather silly. If one removes one of the *pārājika* or *saṅghādisesa* rules, but then adds any number of minor rules, this is meaningless. The number of rules is not the essential factor. What is essential is to recognize that if these two codes of Vinaya are not identical then they can't be considered the same. Isn't this right?

One needs to provide these people with the facts, for example to encourage them to compare these two codes carefully. The claim that the Dharmaguptaka tradition is subsumed under the Theravada tradition can be rejected by imagining that one could resuscitate the monks of the Dharmaguptaka school. They would surely rush to announce: 'We are not part of the Theravada school; we have separated ourselves completely. Don't misrepresent us!'

People who are directly involved in these issues should sympathize with those people who are just beginning to get a grasp of them. The technical details of the formal teachings and the sources of information are complex, unclear, and sometimes inconsistent. Moreover, those people in positions of communal responsibility should be given the opportunity to study the facts thoroughly before

making decisions. We shouldn't simply say: 'My opinion on this matter is such—I am clear on this issue. You must agree with my opinions.'

This is even more important in relation to issues involving an institution and a formal disciplinary code, which are conventional entities (*sammuti*). If we agree collectively that upholding a particular convention is worthy and good, then we must be clear about this agreement and protect it well. Conventional agreements are created by and dependent on human beings. If people don't pay them heed and manage them correctly, no good can be expected from them. And the term 'human beings' here refers to a community or society of people, which must act in unison. It is for this reason that the Buddha gave such emphasis to communal harmony and unity.

It is not like with matters of absolute truth (*paramattha*), which even if people are disinterested in or ignore it makes no difference. These things exist according to their own nature and are independent from people.

We should at least address these issues in stages. To begin with, we gain clarity around what the formal teachings state on these matters. Then, if we encounter an obstacle, for example an aspect of the teaching seems to conflict with contemporary ideas or norms, then we reflect further on the possible solutions. This way we will understand the facts clearly and maintain a reasoned, systematic approach.

Let us look at a relevant example from the Vinaya. We don't have to talk about bhikkhunis from other lineages or schools. Even within the same school—in a unified monastic sangha—if the community strips a monk of his status and cancels his privileges (a form of suspension—*ukkhepanīya-kamma*), this monk temporarily becomes 'one of a different communion' (*nānā-saṃvāsa*). As long as the community does not permit him to return to the fold he doesn't have any right to participate in formal acts of the sangha. If he does join the formal meeting, say of an ordination procedure, the formal act becomes null and void. This is simply speaking according to the facts. Before we

make decisions we need to gather knowledge. The clearer our understanding the better.

I am not really directly involved in this issue of bhikkhuni ordinations. This issue is interesting and important, but in this monastery few people discuss it. It is not that I am disinterested, but there isn't enough time to give it proper attention. I already don't have enough time for those projects that I'm directly involved in. When people come and ask about this issue, I engage with it as a way to reflect on it together. It sometimes appears that this is an urgent issue for me, but that is not true. While discussing the issue it is important to seek clarification, but it goes no further than this. I'm not directly involved in the decision making.

Some people misunderstand and even claim that I am in some senior position of administration and a member of the Sangha Supreme Council. In fact, I am subject to the administration of the Sangha Supreme Council. I am simply one bhikkhu, whose most senior position is that of an abbot at a provincial monastery.

Who are the members of the Sangha Supreme Council? The only monks I am certain about are the Somdets, who by law are automatically a part of this council due to their position. As for the other members, I can only remember some. Sometimes I hear about them on the news, but I have even less opportunity than the laity to hear the news, because I don't receive newspapers and don't have a television. I only hear the radio at seven in the morning and seven in the evening, which gives me a rough summary of events in the country.

When people ask me about this issue, I try to share my understanding as a way to participate in this discussion. People come to me and ask these questions because they want some clarification. But when these people depart, I don't take the issue further.

Regarding this issue of bhikkhuni ordinations in the Theravada tradition, the implications affect Theravada Buddhists everywhere, who adhere to a cohesive and unified standard. This differs from how

this issue affects Mahayana Buddhists, who generally speak in terms of their individual schools, groups, or communities. We should recognize this difference.

When we examine this issue, we need to pay attention to two aspects:

First, we should look at those individuals who wish to see Theravada bhikkhuni ordinations become a reality. These are the people who are directly involved in this issue and who either hope to benefit themselves or aim for the wider benefits to society.

Second, we should look at the overall monastic sangha, members of which throughout the world are waiting before drawing a conclusion on this issue.

As I've mentioned before, the Theravada monastic community gives great emphasis to unity, to maintaining the tradition with precision and correctness, to harmony and consensus. The more that those individuals who are in a position of authority and responsibility for the wider monastic sangha see an increasing factionalism among Theravada Buddhists, the more that they will become unyielding and strict.

As for those individuals who are directly involved in reform—one can call them at the cutting-edge of change or whatever—they will expect that pressure from the outside, like the opinions of others and social trends, will come to help their cause. Other people, however, may simply remain passive and indifferent. In any case, the different parties do not work together and things do not progress smoothly. Everyone is weakened as a result.

If we want this process to go well we must begin with a stable foundation. This is achieved by following the general principle of gaining a clear understanding of the facts and then acting accordingly. If we can establish ourselves in this way, who can find fault with this? —things will fall into place easily. Otherwise, the best we can hope for is to keep stuttering along like this.

As I said, the reason I engage in this form of discussion is to exchange and impart knowledge, and to propose various themes for contemplation.

I have several more suggestions concerning this issue of bhikkhuni ordinations, but I will stop here. This is because there are other things that I have determined to finish, which otherwise would come to a complete halt. As regards further research into this matter, that is something I can do, but as far as being vested with some kind of authoritative position I request to simply be a neutral bystander for now.

Ordination by the Vinaya Leads Halfway Ordination in the Dhamma Leads All the Way¹

Questioner: I have two questions:

1. If one concludes that the Theravada bhikkhuni order has died out and that it is not possible to restore this order, in the case that Theravada bhikkhus conduct another form of renunciant ordination for women, can these nuns be equated with female novices—*sāmaṇerī*—from the time of the Buddha?
2. In Theravada bhikkhu ordinations is it acceptable to invite Mahayana monks (those who keep the Dharmaguptaka Vinaya), who are respected as virtuous and disciplined, to join in the formal act of the sangha? I mean here that they sit within arm's length (*hatthapāsa*) but at the end of the line—they do not sit in between the Theravada bhikkhus.

Phra Payutto: Let me answer these questions according to the formal teachings and according to relevant information we can find about similar circumstances in the past.

¹ After the previous discussion was completed a monk who had been directly involved in this issue requested answers for two more questions. As these questions correspond to the subject at hand it seems suitable to add them here.

1. The Vinaya commentaries—the Samantapāsādikā—come to the following conclusion: ‘No-one apart from a bhikkhu has the right to give the going forth to men; likewise, no-one apart from a bhikkhuni has the right to give the going forth to women.’¹

This commentarial verdict was recorded about 1000 BE (about 450 CE). If we look at this from the perspective of the historical records pertaining to King Kassapa IV (1439-1456 BE; 896-913 CE), who built the Tissārāma monastery and offered it to the bhikkhunis, we can conclude that the commentaries were composed at a time when the bhikkhuni order was still thriving in Sri Lanka. Moreover, this verdict would have been honoured and upheld by both the bhikkhu and bhikkhuni sanghas—both communities would have been well aware of the acceptable parameters pertaining to ordinations.

This matter becomes clear when we look at the true principles of ordination. The ordination of monks and novices is not simply a religious ceremony. A monk who gives novice ordination to boys is called a preceptor (*upajjhāya*). After conferring ordination he has the responsibility of providing training to these novices. He needs to look after their entire living situation, behaviour and practice, including their eating habits and general ways of conducting themselves. The novices and their preceptors must live in close contact, and show mutual care and attention, at the same time associating with the wider community of monks and novices. If a monk gives novice ordination to a girl, as a *sāmaṇerī*, how would she be able to live with her preceptor amidst the male community of monks and novices? This would be impossible. When the first female novice ordinations occurred at the time of the Buddha, there needed to be a pre-established bhikkhuni order, and the duty of female novice ordinations rested with the bhikkhunis.

¹ VinA. V. 967. *Purisam hi bhikkhuto añño pabbājetum na labhati tathā mātuḡāmaṃ bhikkhunito añño.*

Following these teachings, it is not possible for bhikkhus to give ordination to *sāmaṇerī*. Contemporary female renunciants are thus technically a part of the assembly of lay-women (*upāsikā-parisā*), but they are laywomen of the first order ('those who live the holy life'—*brahmacārini*).¹ And in these circumstances a unique community is established in which women are ordained and can live a renunciant way of life.

These newly ordained renunciant women are in keeping with the principles mentioned earlier, of there being positive alternatives to bhikkhuni ordination. It is fine that these women are not *sāmaṇerī*, because otherwise that would mean that they are preparing to become bhikkhunis. When one knows that one isn't going to become a bhikkhuni, why would one remain in the uncompleted stage of a *sāmaṇerī*?

In relation to these renunciant women being part of the assembly of laywomen, as laywomen of the first order, but not *sāmaṇerī*, there are a couple more points to consider:

First, on an everyday, mundane level, let us compare this situation to that occurring in Indonesia after the era of the Srivijaya empire, when no bhikkhus (or bhikkhunis) survived. The renunciant women there were the leaders among the laypeople or the leaders among Indonesian Buddhists. They were the leaders in that society, in which the bhikkhus were absent. One can say that they were the link between the laity and the monks. If we apply and adjust this example appropriately to the present day situation, we may be surprised by how suitable it is to this day and age.

The second consideration is more unique. It involves going beyond the concept of the assembly of laymen and laywomen, and capturing the spirit of the renunciant way of life. I still haven't thought of a concise term for these renunciants in this context—let us refer to them as 'those who go forth by devoting themselves to the Buddha.'

¹ The second kind of laywomen are referred to as 'those who enjoy the pleasures of the senses'—*kāma-bhoginī*.

There is an example of such a person in the Tipiṭaka. In the Dhātuviḥāṅga Sutta there is the story of a clansman named Pukkusāti.¹ The commentaries claim that he was the king of Takkasilā, and that he had established a friendship with King Bimbisāra, although they had never met. He developed faith in the Buddha, even though he had never seen him, and therefore renounced the domain of lay life and ‘went forth with devotion in the Buddha,’ by independently shaving his head, taking an almsbowl, and wearing ochre robes.

Pukkusāti travelled with the aim of meeting the Buddha. By coincidence and without knowing who his companion was, he stayed overnight in a potter’s shed in Rājagaha along with the Buddha. He listened to the Buddha’s teaching and consequently realized the fruit of non-returning—*anāgāmi-phala*. He thus knew that he had met the Buddha and promptly asked for ordination as a bhikkhu. But because he didn’t have the complete set of three robes, he went off in search of them. Before he could return he was gored by a cow and died.

Had Pukkusāti not died first, he would have gone through a two-stage ordination procedure: first, was his going forth by devoting himself to the Buddha (by ‘entering’ the Dhamma, but remaining outside of the Vinaya); and second, would have been his ordination with the Buddha (by dwelling complete, in both the Dhamma and the Vinaya).

There are other important disciples of the Buddha who ‘went forth’ with devotion in the Buddha, although their stories are recounted in the commentaries.² Most notably among these are Ven. Mahākappina, the former king of Kukkuṭavatī, and Ven. Tissa, the former king of Roruvanagara.

The former, Ven. Mahākappina is outstanding—he was one of the great disciples and foremost among those who taught the monks. There are many stories in which he plays a role. It was not only he who

¹ M. III. 237-8.

² E.g.: [SA. 2/245/269; AA. 1/231/285]; DhA. II. 117; ApA. 497; ThagA. I. 211.

went forth—when his chief wife Anojādevī later found out what he had done, she followed him and was ordained as a bhikkhuni.

The stories of these individuals are all alike: they developed great faith in the Buddha, but lived far away from him and couldn't meet him. They therefore relinquished the householder's life, shaved their heads, carried an almsbowl, wore ochre robes, took up the life of a renunciant, and devoted themselves to the Buddha. The commentaries say that this is similar to the going forth by a bodhisatta (*bodhisatta-pabbajjā*).

Although this form of going forth is not the same as taking ordination in the full sense according to the stipulations in the Vinaya, the individuals who perform this act are considered 'renunciants' (*pabbajita*) and have removed themselves from the assembly of laymen and laywomen. This is clear from the fact that the Buddha addressed Pukkusāti as 'bhikkhu'—'monk.'

In any case, these individuals who went forth in this way were truly unique and special people, who had already reached a mature level of mind development and wisdom, to the point that they were prepared to relinquish their royal wealth and head straight for the Buddha in order to realize the Dhamma. King Pukkusāti travelled without stopping from Takkasilā to Rājagaha, and King Mahākappina travelled at one stretch from Kukkuṭavatī to the river Candabhāgā. If one were to apply this method of ordination in establishing a distinctive renunciant community, one would have to be very serious about screening the candidates and setting down a precise ordination procedure, for example by having the candidates make an announcement or vow in front of the bhikkhu sangha, to show their clear determination.

One would need to establish a system and set down a code of discipline with definite and certain guidelines, so that none of its renunciant members would behave like those *mae chis* who go out begging, boast of psychic powers, or get caught up seeking material

gains. It would need to be firmly grounded in Dhamma and well-integrated with the community—in harmony with the other Buddhist assemblies.

As I said earlier, this is equivalent to being ordained in the Dhamma; it is not complete in regard to the convention of the Vinaya. If the ordination is complete in both ways it is called ‘going forth in this Dhamma and Vinaya.’

From one angle this lack of completion according to the Vinaya can be seen as an opportunity, especially in this day and age. In regard to a code of discipline, once one has gone forth in the Dhamma and dedicated one’s life to the Buddha, one can then select those training rules that are effective and suitable.

It is not a matter of rejecting the Vinaya. Just the opposite—one is fully determined to apply the Vinaya. Although one isn’t keeping the Vinaya to the letter, one captures its spirit and true objective.

We recognize that the original women’s renunciant order has disappeared, yet we are able to draw upon the essence of the bhikkhuni sangha, by effectively applying the principles of this order to present conditions. Meanwhile, the men still have the bhikkhu sangha, whose form has been preserved intact. Although it has been able to survive in its original form, it sometimes appears like a museum artefact and is limited in its capacity to adapt.

From a positive perspective, being a female renunciant without being a bhikkhuni in the complete literal sense of the Vinaya has advantages and can be beneficial. The bhikkhuni Vinaya is heavily influenced by and dependent on the social conditions at the time of the Buddha, and necessarily so. These days there are those who propose removing some of the bhikkhuni training rules, leading to a deviation from the original form. The result is a divergence from the Theravada teachings and an increased effort to make adaptations, including an attempt to reform the bhikkhu Vinaya. Moreover, by tinkering with the Vinaya and reducing the training rules, the status of the nuns will

automatically change. All of these adjustments and rearrangements won't lead anywhere—in the end the outcome will resemble precisely those communities of renunciant women which are being created as alternatives to the bhikkhuni order.

The siladharas are a good example. When one is clear about one's identity from the beginning, there is no need to get caught up in the complications of reducing or altering an original code of discipline. Instead, one can select a new code of training at one's convenience. To begin with, the siladharas are under no obligation to live by the eight garudhammas, which is connected to the dilemma of bowing to the bhikkhus. As siladharas they are free from these constrictions. Through consultation with the bhikkhus, they are able to establish a set of rules around bowing and the formal paying of respects that is suitable to the conventions of the modern era. For example, they may decide to only bow to those monks with specific qualities, say those monks who have been ordained for a determined number of years or those monks who have been ordained for longer than the nuns in question. They can apply methods which don't make them feel like they lose a sense of equality and which at the same time allow the bhikkhus and samaneras to preserve their principles of training, without these issues remaining unresolved in a drawn-out way and causing disquietude.

In any case it is important to explain that at this time we haven't yet found a prescription or allowance by the Buddha which would lead to the certain conviction that restoring the Theravada bhikkhuni sangha is possible.

There is still a general consensus that the bhikkhu sangha does not have the authority to use a prerogative belonging to the bhikkhuni sangha to give ordinations to women. We should explain this situation clearly, as well as pointing out what the position of women is at this time. In addition we should describe what solutions and alternatives there are currently available which may be of help.

Monks from Other Schools Joining in on Ordination Ceremonies

2. According to the regulations on different communion (*nānā-saṃvāsa*), it is not acceptable to have Mahayana monks or monks from another school sit within arm's reach of bhikkhus in Theravada ordinations, no matter where these monks sit. To do so renders the formal act of the sangha defective or flawed. (During the present time there are no Dharmaguptaka monks. The Dharmaguptaka order has died out. There are only Mahayana monks who observe the Hinayana Vinaya of the Dharmaguptaka lineage.) Ordinations involve an official gathering of the sangha and those who participate in the meeting must give their consensus. When these monks of other ordination lineages join the gathering, it is as if the consensus comes in part from those individuals who are not directly involved. Their consensus is incongruous and inadmissible.

The problem does not depend on where a person sits. No matter where he sits, when someone is within arm's reach he is officially a part of the meeting—of the formal act of the sangha. The crucial issue lies with the fact that monks of other ordination lineages are of a different communion (*nānā-saṃvāsaka*).

If these monks of a different communion complete the quorum of monks, then the official act of the sangha is invalid and the ordination is void. If the monks of a different communion are not required to make up the quorum, although the ordination procedure is complete, that sangha gathering is not considered to be spotless or whole. It is as if it barely escaped invalidation.

Although they are detailed, let us look at the teachings on this matter as presented in the scriptures.

Of the four means of completeness (*sampatti*) in regard to ordinations which I discussed earlier, this matter pertains to the 'completion of the assembly' (*parisa-sampatti* or *parisa-sampadā*), which is divided into four factors. The commentaries and sub-commentaries

are in unison over this understanding. Here, I will present the summary described in the *Vimativinodanī-Ṭīkā*¹ and the *Vinayālaṅkāra-Ṭīkā*,² which is clear and well-ordered.

The four factors making for completion of the assembly are as follows:

1. For the formal gathering there must be no less than ten bhikkhus (in the ‘Middle Country’)³ or no less than five bhikkhus (in the ‘neighbouring country’).⁴ None of the bhikkhus making up the quorum can be guilty of an offence entailing expulsion (*pārājika*) or be living under formal suspension (*ukkhepanīya-kamma*); moreover, they must all be of the same communion (*saṃvāsa*).

2. Those bhikkhus gather in a single *sīma* boundary; they stay within arm’s length of one another during the formal ceremony; and they bring the formal consent (*chanda*) of those who are required to give consent.

3. Those monks in the gathering act unanimously, without any objections.

4. Apart from the ordination candidates, there is no-one within arm’s length who falls into the category of one of the twenty-one kinds of ‘unsuitable people’ (*vajjanīya-puggala*; including those individuals of another communion).

The fulfilment of these four factors is called *pattakallaṃ*—‘rightly complete,’ making for a true completion of the formal act of the sangha.

In the case that for some reason it is not possible to complete all these factors, the texts state that the first three factors are indispensable. The fourth factor, however, is related to the first factor in the following ways:

¹ [2/176]

² [Burmese edition: 1/286]

³ *Majjhimadesa*—central India.

⁴ *Paccantadesa*—places beyond the boundary of central India.

A) If the unsuitable person (including someone of another communion) who joins in this gathering is required to make up the full quorum (of five or ten monks, as the case may be), then the formal act of the sangha is invalid and the ordination is unsuccessful.

This corresponds to the Buddha's regulations:

*Bhikkhus, in the case that a formal act is performed by a quorum of five monks, and this group of five performs the act by having a monk of another communion as the fifth member, the act is ineffective and should not be performed.*¹

*Bhikkhus, in the case that a formal act is performed by a quorum of ten monks, and this group of ten performs the act by having a monk of another communion as the tenth member, the act is ineffective and should not be performed.*²

Furthermore, the Buddha declared that a monk of another communion does not have the status that would allow him to participate in the sangha meeting—he does not have the privileges of the normal participants. Even if such a person is invited unintentionally, he does not officially count as one of the participants in the meeting, as confirmed by this passage:

*Bhikkhus, the objection by a bhikkhu of another communion amongst the sangha is null and void.*³

B) If the unsuitable person (including someone of another communion) makes up a number over and above the necessary quorum, that is, the gathering of monks has enough 'regular' or 'ordinary' monks to make up the quorum, the formal act is not invalid and the ordination is still successful. But the sangha who performs this act, which is faulty and not impeccable, is considered worthy of criticism.

¹ Vin. I. 320. *Pañcavaggakaranañce bhikkhave kammaṃ nānāsaṁvāsakapañcamo kammaṃ kareyya akammaṃ na ca karaṇīyaṃ.*

² Vin. I. 320. *Dasavaggakaranañce bhikkhave kammaṃ nānāsaṁvāsakadasamo kammaṃ kareyya akammaṃ na ca karaṇīyaṃ.*

³ Vin. I. 321. *Nānāsaṁvāsakassa bhikkhave saṅghamajjhe paṭikkosānā na rūhati. Na rūhati = 'does not grow'; is ineffective.*

This factor should be viewed in a similar way to the circumstance in which a monk who has committed an offence entailing expulsion (*pārājika*)—someone who is technically no longer a bhikkhu—participates in a formal act of the sangha. If the gathering of the sangha contains an adequate number of regular monks the ordination is still successful.

Therefore, it is not appropriate for Mahayana monks or monks of other schools to join in on the formal act of ordinations. If for some reason, however, such monks do participate in the formal ceremony, yet there are a sufficient number of bhikkhus of the Theravada lineage to make up the prescribed quorum, one can consider the ordination to be successful.

In any case, when one wishes for completeness, stability, impeccability, and appropriateness, one shouldn't allow unsuitable people, including monks from another communion, to join in on formal sangha meetings. We should remember that even individuals who aren't obviously unsuitable can cause problems for the sangha—we should thus particularly avoid having problems arise due to those people who are clearly designated as unsuitable.

We don't need to search for complicated reasons for why not to allow monks from another communion—from other schools and affiliations—to join in on formal sangha gatherings. We can look at some simple, basic reasons for this:

First, formal acts of the sangha are matters pertaining to a specific community. An ordination in particular is a process of inviting an individual to be a member in such a community. It is suitable to have those people directly involved and responsible—that is, those full members of a community—contemplate and decide on these matters by themselves. What business is this of people belonging to another community or tradition? It's even less appropriate that they cast a vote on these issues.

Second, the problems may deepen if those monks from another communion, for example Mahayana monks, who participate in such a formal act comprise five individuals (or ten individuals in the Middle Country) and if they observe the same Vinaya regulation pertaining to making up a quorum. After the ordination is complete these monks may claim that their own sub-group within this gathering comprised a quorum and therefore that newly-ordained monk is technically a member of their own ordination lineage.

The Theravada monks (or whichever monks) who have organized the ordination ceremony consider the Mahayana monks, or those monks of different schools, to be technically outside of and apart from the official participants, and they are not counted as making up the necessary quorum. The ordination is complete because there were enough of their own monks to fulfil the necessary numbers, and the newly-ordained monk is thus a member of their school. Yet those other monks could just as easily think the same, that all the Theravada monks, or whichever monks organized the event, no matter how many of them there were—ten, twenty or thirty—officially exist outside of their community and can't be counted. The ordination was complete because of their own quorum and the newly ordained monk is part of their tradition.

This being the case, to which school does this newly ordained monk officially belong? This may lead to disputes and even a competition for that monk's official status. (Some laypeople believe that a newly ordained monk is automatically a part of his preceptor's school, but this is a mistake, because it is the sangha rather than the preceptor who has the authority. The ordination is complete because of the sangha, not because of the preceptor.)

When monks of other traditions understand the specific issues involved, they will wish to be supportive and provide the host community with an opportunity to perform its duties without interference, without seeing this as stemming from some kind of

mutual dislike or aversion.

One can see that in Thailand this matter is observed very strictly. In the case that a traditional ordination is performed by having both Mahānikāya and Dhammayuttika monks participate in the ceremony together, once the ordination is finished and the Dhammayuttika monks return to their monastery, another formal act of the sangha is performed. This is called an ‘act of strengthening’ (daḥhī-kamma), that is, it is a repeat of the ordination procedure.

Although I haven’t examined this in detail, it is evident that in these ordinations involving monks from these two schools, the numbers of monks from both schools is about the same, and they both have enough representatives to complete a quorum. For this reason the newly ordained monk can be said to belong to both schools, or equally to either school, and therefore the act of strengthening is performed to provide a greater sense of certainty, comfort, and freedom from doubt. Moreover, it has become a tradition.

If in some places ordinations have been performed by having non-Theravada monks participate in the ceremony, one can consider using such an act of strengthening to dispel any doubts and to foster a sense of wellbeing.

The Buddha’s Ordination of Monks by the Method of Ehi-bhikkhu

Question: I have one more question. As I understand, at first the Buddha allowed individual disciples to bestow ordination on faithful individuals by way of ‘seeking shelter in the three refuges’ (*tisaraṇa-gamanūpasampadā*).¹ Later he had his disciples ordain individuals with suitable attributes by a formal gathering of the sangha (*ñatticatuttha-kamma-upasampadā*—an act of three motions followed by a resolution), as is performed up to this present time. The former method of

¹ The texts usually refer to this ordination simply as *saraṇa-gamanūpasampadā*.

ordination by going to the three refuges was abandoned and used instead for giving ordination to novices. Therefore, a person is ordained as a bhikkhu through a formal act of the sangha.

I know that from the very beginning of the Buddha's period of teaching, he bestowed ordination to suitable individuals by himself, using the phrase, 'Come, bhikkhu' (*ehi-bhikkhu*). My question is whether after he prescribed the method of ordaining by an act of three motions followed by a resolution—as a formal act of the sangha—did he still give ordinations by using the method of *ehi bhikkhu*? Or did he stop this at the same time as he had the monks abandon the method of ordination by going to the three refuges?

Phra Payutto: If one knows the gradual sequence of events concerning this issue, it is clear and easy to understand. Soon after the Buddha's awakening, he travelled around to proclaim the teachings, or one can say he began to establish the religion of Buddhism. There were those people who listened to the Dhamma and gained a clear understanding to the stage of obtaining the 'eye of Dhamma' (*dhamma-cakkhu*), or at least of abandoning basic delusions, and then asked for ordination in order to study with the Buddha. In regard to these people, the Buddha would give them ordination by speaking the short and simple phrase: *ehi bhikkhu*, which literally translates as: 'Come and be a bhikkhu.' In fact, this was followed by a subsequent phrase: 'The Dhamma has been well-expounded by me; you should practise the holy life in order to make a complete end of suffering.'

Of this first generation of bhikkhus ordained by the Buddha himself, they were without exception arahants or awakened beings at other stages of enlightenment. The Buddha sent these disciples out to spread and teach the Dhamma in different regions and localities. Whenever these disciples taught someone, who consequently understood the Dhamma, gained faith, and asked for ordination, they would have to lead this person to the Buddha in order to ask for ordination directly from him.

Some of these disciples taught in far-away places, and travelling at that time in India was extremely difficult. It is this reason the Buddha mentioned when he subsequently allowed this first generation of disciples, who were ordained by the method of *ehi bhikkhu*, to give ordination to others by themselves, using the method of taking shelter in the three refuges, as mentioned earlier. They no longer needed to take new disciples to the Buddha in order to be ordained by him.

From this point we can see that the newer generation of disciples—those individuals ordained by the so-called *ehi bhikkhu* monks—may not necessarily have shared the same level of spiritual excellence as their preceptors. Many of them were not awakened beings and had the potential to behave heedlessly. Allowing these later generations of monks to decide by themselves whom to accept into the bhikkhu sangha could undermine the stability of the religion and lead to serious problems.

Here we can see the reason why the method of individual disciples giving ordination by having candidates go for refuge was abandoned, and instead a system was implemented in which people were ordained by consensus in a formal sangha meeting. The system of individuals making this important decision was replaced by an agreement by the community.

The decision to ordain someone ultimately depended on the Buddha, who allowed his disciples to carry out this procedure. The methods of ordination, whether it was the method of going for refuge which was later abandoned, or the method of three motions followed by a resolution in a sangha gathering which replaced the former method, are matters of an allowance granted by the Buddha to his disciples. Meanwhile, in relation to giving ordinations, the Buddha himself continued to act as before.

Therefore, regardless of whether we look at the very early period before the Buddha had disciples who could help him with ordaining others, or at the subsequent period when he allowed individual monks

to bestow ordinations by the method of ‘going for refuge,’ or even after that when he set down the regulation that his disciples ordain new monks by communal agreement, when the Buddha gave teachings to people who gained insight into the Dhamma and asked to go forth, and if he thought it was suitable, he would ordain these individuals using the method we simply refer to as *ehi bhikkhu upasampadā*. For this reason during the Buddha’s time the *ehi bhikkhu* ordination procedure existed in tandem with the procedure of using three motions followed by a resolution.

Put simply, the *ehi bhikkhu* ordination procedure was used by the Buddha to bestow ordinations on others by himself. The ordination procedure of ‘going for refuge,’ which was later replaced by the formal act of using three motions followed by a resolution, was the method the Buddha allowed his disciples to conduct.

One sees that from the very beginning the individuals whom the Buddha ordained by using the method of *ehi bhikkhu* all had listened to the Dhamma directly from the Buddha himself and had gained insight into it. Some of them obtained the ‘eye of Dhamma’ and attained to the stage of stream-entry, while others attained arahantship and then asked for ordination. At the very least they were firmly established in the correct way of practice. Whether someone who met with the Buddha was ordained by this method or not was up to the the Buddha’s own judgement, which was more certain than a consensus made by the sangha, which may simply have been comprised of unawakened beings (*puthujjana*).

From one perspective the allowance for the disciples to conduct ordinations by consensus within a formal ceremony of the sangha—the establishment of the ordination by using three motions followed by a resolution—is similar to having the community of disciples help in easing the Buddha’s burden. In the case that the Buddha taught someone who consequently realized the Dhamma and was awakened (*ariyapuggala*), this person did not require an elementary level of

training—he was already steadfast in walking the correct path. If he asked for ordination the Buddha would ordain him by using the method of *ehi bhikkhu*. But if he simply gained faith and had not yet reached an adequate realization of Dhamma, the Buddha would charge the community of disciples with the responsibility of giving him ordination.

The story of the bandit and mass murderer Āṅgulimāla is an example. After the Buddha made the allowance for the sangha to conduct ordinations by communal consensus and a formal resolution, he met and gave teachings to Āṅgulimāla, who felt repentance for his evil actions and determined to turn over a new leaf. He was certain about taking up a new path of behaviour and asked for ordination. The Buddha thus gave him ordination by the method of *ehi bhikkhu*.

This was not the case, however, with the group of six Sakyan princes, including the prince Ānanda, who were all close relatives of the Buddha, along with the barber Upālī. They left the palace and went to the Buddha to ask for ordination, but the Buddha only performed the stage of the preliminary going forth (*pabbajjā*); he didn't give them the full ordination (*upasampadā*) by the method of *ehi bhikkhu*. (This occurred in the second year of the Buddha's teaching, that is, it also occurred after the implementation of ordination by way of three motions followed by a resolution.) This shows that by this time the ordinations were primarily a communal responsibility.

According to scriptural sources, Ven. Ānanda's preceptor was Ven. Belaṭṭhasisa, and Ven. Upālī's preceptor was Ven. Kappitaka.

A comparison can be made here to the going forth of Rāhula, who was seven years old and came straight out of the palace. Although he was the son of Prince Siddhattha, he had no knowledge about the Dhamma and Vinaya. The Buddha had Ven. Sāriputta give him novice ordination and guide him in the initial stages of training.

There were some children, however, who attained arahantship soon after going forth as novices. The Buddha gave them full

ordination (*upasampadā*) himself, even though they were only seven years old. There are many famous examples of this, including: Sāmaṇera Sopāka, who was ordained by the method known as *pañhāvyaṅkaraṇūpasampadā* (he was able to explain a question on Dhamma posed by the Buddha); and Sāmaṇera Sumana, who was ordained by the method of praising or announcing a novice's abilities, which were replete in virtue and goodness.¹

Those individuals ordained by the Buddha by way of the *ehi bhikkhu upasampadā* became bhikkhus immediately, without needing to have the sangha examine their personal attributes and make a formal decision according to the *ñatticatutthakamma-upasampadā*. This is because these individuals had already reached a desired set of criteria. To put it simply, the Buddha selected them himself; they didn't need to be screened by the sangha.

There are many of these individuals. By counting the individuals mentioned in the Vinaya Piṭaka, the commentaries say there were 1,341 of them, while some commentaries draw upon sources additional to the Pali Canon and state that there were 27,300.²

Of all these stories, one may ask whether there are accounts of bhikkhunis being ordained by the method of *ehi bhikkhunī*. There is one story, of Ven. Bhaddā-Kuṇḍalakesā, that deserves consideration. She herself stated: '[The Buddha said] "come and be a bhikkhuni;" those words constituted my full ordination.'³ This statement, however, is found in a poetic verse (there are similar verses quoting bhikkhus), and therefore it is not totally clear or decisive. It does not follow the usual statement found in scriptural prose passages: '[The Buddha said] "come and be a bhikkhu; the Dhamma has been well-expounded by

¹ The Dhammapada commentary calls this 'ordination by way of inheritance' (*dāyajja-upasampadā*)—DhA. IV. 136.

² E.g.: VinA. I. 240.

³ *Ehi bhaddeti maṇ avaca, sā me āsūpasampadā.*

me; you should practise the holy life in order to make a complete end of suffering.¹

Note that the term *ehi* or *ehi bhikkhu* is not a formal name for this method of ordination. It is simply a Pali term used for addressing an individual. When the monks from the past wished to refer to this kind of ordination, however, it was difficult to find a concise designation for it, and therefore they used this term of address to describe this form of ordination. The expression *ehi bhikkhu* translates simply as ‘Come, bhikkhu,’ ‘Welcome, venerable,’ or something of this manner. And it is used in other contexts as well, as can be seen in Tipiṭaka passages in which bhikkhus speak with one another. For example, one of Ven. Ānanda’s disciples challenges one of Ven. Anuruddha’s disciples, by saying: ‘Come, monk, who can speak more? Who can speak better? Who can speak longer?’² At other times it is used as an invitation, for example in the passage: ‘Come, monk, here is a seat—please be seated.’³

In regard to the story of Ven. Bhaddā-Kuṇḍalakesā, the commentarial opinion is that this was not a case of an ordination by the method of *ehi bhikkhunī*, but rather a form of address by the Buddha, inviting her to participate in the normal ordination procedure.

In any case, whether Ven. Bhaddā-Kuṇḍalakesā was an *ehi bhikkhunī* or not, this does not alter the points of the discussion here. If she was an *ehi bhikkhunī*, she would have entered the monastic sangha in the same way as an *ehi bhikkhu*, having been ordained directly by the Buddha. This is a unique form of ordination which does not require a formal community decision. It is an exception to the rule.

Even after the Buddha gave an allowance to his disciples to conduct ordinations by way of a formal act involving three motions followed by a resolution he still gave ordinations by the method of *ehi bhikkhu* to

¹ *Ehi bhikkhūti bhagavā avoca svākkhāto dhammo cara brahmacariyaṃ sammā dukkhassa antakiriyaṃ.* If there were several monks, the phrase would begin: *Etha bhikkhavo...*

² S. II. 204. *Ehi bhikkhu ko bahutaraṃ bhāssati.*

³ S. II. 209. *Ehi bhikkhu idaṃ āsanaṃ nisidāhi.*

certain individuals, who were spiritually prepared and had listened to the Dhamma directly from the Buddha himself. Later on, however, when the sangha had grown and become adequately stable, the Buddha transferred complete authority to the sangha for accepting people into the sangha and conducting ordinations. The commentaries state that the method of *ehi bhikkhu upasampadā* only occurred in the beginning period of the Buddha's teaching (the texts conclude that this was the first twenty years after the Buddha's awakening).¹ It did not occur in the final twenty-five years of the Buddha's life.

¹ VinA. I. 240.

Supplementary Chapter 2:

Ongoing Discussion on Bhikkhuni Ordinations¹

Questioner: I have a question in relation to bhikkhunis. How should we consider the fact that the Buddha entrusted the protection and propagation of Buddha-Dhamma to the four Buddhist assemblies, which includes the bhikkhunis? As you mentioned, the problem lies in that the bhikkhus do not have the authority to give ordination to bhikkhunis, and thus it isn't possible to reinstate the bhikkhuni order.

What is more important: the fact that the Buddha entrusted the fourfold assembly, including the bhikkhunis, with the dissemination of Buddhism, or these specific legal matters which Tahn Chao Khun Ajahn has just mentioned? From the perspective of legal regulations, one can consider changing some rules so that what is presently unfeasible becomes possible.

¹ This is a transcription from the tenth talk contained on the CD: 'A Collection of Dhamma Talks 2006: Not Forsaking the World.' The title of this talk is 'The Rights Belonging to the Three Kinds of Gender,' given on 1st August 2006. [In the Thai edition to this book Ven. Phra Payutto includes a discussion about the rights of homosexuals in regard to ordaining as Buddhist monks. As this subject seems to be only tangentially related to the subject of bhikkhuni ordinations I have decided to leave it out.]

Is this an option in regard to the bhikkhunis? I don't mean that the bhikkhus would have to ordain bhikkhunis forever. But what if there were to be another formal Recitation—a *saṅgāyanā*—and the monks were to consent to the ordination of bhikkhunis. After that, those bhikkhunis who were ordained first could take on the duty of conducting subsequent bhikkhuni ordinations. Would this be possible?

Phra Payutto: This question must be answered at many different levels. First of all, we need to ask whether we want to preserve the Buddha's prescriptions. As Theravada Buddhists, we collectively adhere to the Buddha's prescriptions and regulations. If we don't agree with these regulations and wish to alter them, this is not the same as altering ordinary laws. We use the terms 'regulations,' 'laws,' or 'prescriptions' here simply for the sake of convenience, so that people have a familiar concept to make comparisons with. But here we are talking about making alterations to the Buddha's own regulations.

Normally there is no problem to making alterations to specific laws, but in this case in which we are dealing with laws set down by the Buddha, it is not a matter of whether one can or cannot change them. The key issue is who has the authority to change them. For example, if we allow the state to make the alterations and to issue new laws on this matter, later on there will be monks who accord with the Buddha's regulations and other monks who follow state laws. Equally, there will be bhikkhunis who follow the Buddha's regulations and those who follow state laws.

If alterations are made to the Buddha's regulations regarding bhikkhuni ordinations, the monks themselves will face problems in the area of bhikkhu ordinations. When alterations are made in regard to the bhikkhunis, people may argue that similar changes can be made in regard to the bhikkhus. And it won't end here—if alterations are made in one area, there will be people who will use this as a justification or pretext for making further alterations. Therefore, we must prevent such a breach from opening and causing harm.

Let me say a little here about the term *saṅgāyanā* ('council'; 'recitation'). In the Thai language the meaning of this term has changed. It now carries the meaning of 'revision,' 'adjustment,' or 'amendment.' People think that the monks who participate in such a recitation have the authority to decide how they want things to be, for example by choosing how to interpret the Buddha's teachings. This meaning has changed drastically from the original meaning, to the point that one now needs to distinguish whether one is talking about an original *saṅgāyanā*, or one as defined by the Thai language.

The original Buddhist definition for this term is a communal 'gathering together' of the Buddha's teachings, including organizing it into various sections, in order to preserve it according to how it was originally spoken and taught. One preserves the true and complete teachings in a well-ordered fashion, so that it is not scattered and does not disappear.

After many years pass since the last such recitation, if there is the concern that some of the teachings have been scattered, fallen away, or vanished, another recitation is thus organized. One takes the various editions of the Pali Canon and inspects and reviews them, looking for any inconsistencies. Any differences are recorded, for example one may note that the Burmese edition varies at such and such a point from the Thai edition, and that the Sri Lankan edition accords at such and such a point with the Thai edition, etc. This way one preserves the Buddha's words in the most precise and accurate way possible.

The monks who participate in the recitation do not have the authority to make any changes. The most they can do is to record how in regard to a specific passage one edition may differ from another. By considering the details of language, or some other point, they may come to the conclusion that one edition is more likely to be correct than another. If they were to make actual changes, how could they expect other monks to accept this? Therefore, in regard to bhikkhuni

ordinations the most that a new *saṅgāyanā* could accomplish is to look precisely at the Buddha's prescriptions pertaining to this matter, and then to act truly in accord with these teachings.

Let us return to the primary question having to do with the fourfold assembly. Each of these original four assemblies had specific attributes which needed to be protected and preserved. Now that this fourfold assembly is no longer complete, what can we do? The answer is that those assemblies which remain must be especially vigilant, to make sure that they too don't fall away and disappear.

Don't let things happen as they did in Sri Lanka, where both bhikkhus and bhikkhunis existed, but then later both of these orders died out. Fortunately, there were still bhikkhus in Thailand and therefore the Sri Lankan royalty asked these Thai monks to go to Sri Lanka and reestablish the bhikkhu sangha there. In regard to the bhikkhunis, however, they were stymied; they didn't know from whom to ask. No bhikkhunis existed in either Thailand or Burma, and thus this order could not be restored.

The fourfold assembly was a result of the Buddha's efforts and exertions. Each of these assemblies had specific characteristics, and thus one can say that at the Buddha's time the Buddhist religion was complete. After their establishment it was up to these assemblies to preserve their integrity, in order to fulfil the responsibilities invested in them by the Buddha. When the necessary conditions making up such an assembly cannot be maintained, then it is possible that it can die out and disappear. What are we to do in such a case? The Buddha is no longer alive so we cannot go and ask him to reinstate the lost assembly.

The Buddha established these assemblies but he is no longer alive. Whatever has disappeared, has disappeared—this is the inescapable truth of the matter. According to nature we are provided with ten fingers; when we possess all ten we can do many things. But if we aren't careful we can lose a finger or two. If this happens, how can we

go back to having ten fingers?

The Buddha emphasized the specific qualities of the four assemblies—he didn't emphasize the actual number of assemblies. If the fourfold assembly exists yet is void of quality and virtue, it provides no benefit.

Buddhism is not preserved by having a complete fourfold assembly; rather, it is preserved by having the assemblies possess a complete set of virtuous attributes. If it so happens that one of the assemblies falls away and disappears, it behoves us to caution the remaining assemblies to not be heedless and to protect their virtues to the utmost.

To say that the Buddha entrusted the protection and propagation of Buddha-Dhamma to the four Buddhist assemblies is simply an idiomatic expression. The Buddha said that Buddhism is complete when we have the fourfold assembly, which is endowed with specific characteristics and is able to act in specific ways. Are we going to have a fourfold assembly in this day and age? Will the remaining assemblies be endowed with virtue and be able to perform their duties well? These are all important questions. We need to act and to protect the remaining assemblies with great care—this is our duty. If we don't protect them and practise well they will degenerate and come to an end—then whom can we beseech for help?

Let us return to the question of amending laws. In this case, of making changes to the Buddha's regulations, there are several factors to consider:

First, we must ask ourselves whether we want a standard that conforms to the Buddha's regulations or whether we want a standard simply based on communal opinion—a standard shaped by alterations made by communal consensus or by the requests and appeals by certain individuals. The splintering off into many different schools as seen in the Mahayana tradition, to the point that some of the monks can get married and have families, is precisely a result of the sangha's

decision to make amendments to the Buddha's original regulations.

Second, if one makes changes to one aspect of the teachings, then it follows that changes can be made to other aspects. In the future it will no longer be necessary for bhikkhus to be ordained by the bhikkhu sangha as determined by the original prescriptions. Equally, new regulations may be established. (For an example of this look at the history of the Tendai school in Japan.)

Finally, the distinct characteristic of Theravada Buddhism, which distinguishes it as a separate tradition, is the mutual agreement and consensus to uphold the Buddha's regulations completely and precisely.

Theravada Buddhism is determined by this upholding of the teachings and principles laid down by the Buddha, without making any changes or alterations. If we were to make alterations to the Buddha's regulations, then we would by definition become a part of the Mahayana tradition. Of course, whether we would admit to being Mahayana or Theravada disciples in such a case would be up to us.

From the Theravada perspective, the problem facing the Mahayana tradition is that alterations are made to the Buddha's teachings which result in conflicting opinions; these conflicts in turn lead to further divisions and an almost endless separation into various schools and denominations. In reference to a specific rule, one school says that changes should only be made to this extent, but another school claims that additional changes are suitable. The first school refuses to accept these additional changes and they thus split off from one another. Each individual group follows its own opinion on these matters, splintering off from other groups until it's difficult to say how many different schools exist in the Mahayana tradition. In Japan alone there are about two hundred different schools. Eventually, almost none of the original regulations set down by the Buddha remain. As I mentioned earlier, in Japan how many of the monks are now married with families?

Granted, the Theravada tradition has a drawback—that of not making any changes and alterations. But which of these options will we choose? If we choose to preserve the original, complete system there will be minor elements contained within that are faulty to some extent. But by weighing the advantages and disadvantages, we choose to protect the teachings and uphold the original regulations. We choose not to revoke or change any rules.

The Mahayana tradition stems from the decision to make alterations. Some of the schools made few alterations, others made many. This process has continued without end.

Here we are faced with an option. If one chooses to be part of the Theravada tradition then one needs to endorse the regulations as they stand. If, however, one chooses to be part of the Mahayana tradition, making changes is acceptable, and within the Mahayana tradition bhikkhunis still exist.

One of the problems discussed in these debates involves the Mahayana bhikkhuni lineage. The bhikkhunis in Taiwan, who originally came from mainland China, so it is argued, trace their lineage back to Sri Lankan Theravada bhikkhunis. It is up to us to substantiate this claim. Did this actually happen and was the transmission conducted properly? This discussion involves an analysis of historical data and facts.

In sum, we are faced with a threefold process: first, we should be clear in regard to the formal teachings; second, we investigate the historical records pertaining to this subject; and third, we see to what extent the teachings and the facts conform to our wishes in regard to bhikkhuni ordinations. From that point, we can decide how to act.

The choice is up to us. My role in this matter is not to come to any conclusions or to make specific decisions. I am simply pointing out what the formal teachings say on this matter and describing the historical developments. I am asking the question, ‘What are our wishes in regard to this issue?’ and ‘How should we proceed?’ Ideally,

we will contemplate this matter together and come to a common agreement.

Question: So if one wants to be ordained as a bhikkhuni one can be ordained in the Mahayana tradition, is that correct?

Phra Payutto: Yes.

Question: So it is not necessary to be ordained in the Theravada tradition?

Phra Payutto: These days the bhikkhunis who are fully and clearly recognized by their tradition are the Mahayana bhikkhunis. Anyone qualified who wishes to be ordained as a Mahayana bhikkhuni may do so. This is not a problem—it is clear and free from ambiguity. The problem or obstacle centres around the restoration of the Theravada bhikkhuni order, which has died out.

The reports from Sri Lanka of recent Theravada bhikkhuni ordinations conducted by bhikkhunis coming from a Chinese lineage, who trace their lineage back to Sri Lankan bhikkhunis who travelled to China in the distant past, with the help of a group of Sri Lankan bhikkhus, pertain to a specific group—these ordinations have not been sanctioned by the whole sangha. From what I have heard, neither the government nor the leaders of the three Theravada schools (*nikāya*) in Sri Lanka have endorsed these ordinations. This matter involves fairly complicated details connected to history. At the very least, it requires some time to clear up doubts and ambiguities. This matter must be handled very carefully, to avoid it being a cause for division and disharmony.

In brief, one group of Sri Lankan monks gave ordination to these bhikkhunis, but the majority of the sangha was not in agreement. As I've said, if we are not careful, the Theravada community will split off into different factions. These days this issue of bhikkhuni ordinations is increasingly becoming a cause for division. Although this division at

the moment is mostly on the level of views and opinions, still any kind of division is unfortunate.

Emphasis should be given to acquiring knowledge, and our speech and actions should be based on such knowledge. Whenever someone inquires about this subject, one should be able to admit, 'I'm still not clear about this subject' or 'I don't know enough about this subject—let me study it some more.' If we voice our opinions, then let these opinions correspond to our level of knowledge. Or one can simply speak honestly: 'I would like there to be bhikkhunis, but I'm not sure whether this is possible according to the formal teachings.' If we speak in such an honest and accurate way, this in itself is a form of Dhamma practice.

As every Buddhist should know, the Buddha gave tremendous emphasis to protecting communal harmony, and the Theravada tradition likewise gives great import to this principle of harmony.

Liberation Leads to Compassionate Assistance

Questioner: I have a couple of questions. First, why was it required for the bhikkhunis at the time of the Buddha to keep three hundred and eleven rules? Second, why did the bhikkhuni order die out around five hundred years after it was first established?

Phra Payutto: Some people will claim that the end of the bhikkhuni order fulfils one of the Buddha's prophesies. Having read the Buddha's words on this matter, however, I see that he was drawing a comparison or speaking metaphorically. For example, if Buddhism should last for one thousand years, this amount of time will be reduced by half—to five hundred years—if a bhikkhuni order is established.

It is simply a comparison. The essential point is that the establishment of the bhikkhuni order will weaken the religion, because were there only to be a bhikkhu sangha, this monastic community could make headway to the utmost. Once there is a bhikkhuni order,

however, the monks are burdened by concerns in regard to protecting the nuns.

The Buddha, however, followed this statement by saying that he has laid down an embankment to prevent the water from overflowing. Therefore, the potential reduction to five hundred years returned to the full amount of one thousand years, and according to historical evidence the bhikkhuni order survived in Sri Lanka for as long as one thousand five hundred years after the Buddha.

The social environment at the time of the Buddha was not supportive to the bhikkhunis. Moreover, there were some problems inherent to being a bhikkhuni which created an inconvenience, obstruction, and even a danger to them. One example of this relates to living in the forest.

The life of a renunciant and solitude—including living in the forest—are almost inseparable. After the first bhikkhuni ordinations the nuns wished to live in solitude in order to find the most favourable environment for Dhamma practice. But when they did this they were faced with danger and some of them were assaulted by bandits. The Buddha thus laid down a rule forbidding the bhikkhunis from living in the forest. This almost conflicts with the spirit of the renunciant life. And as a consequence, the bhikkhunis needed to live together with the bhikkhus for reasons of safety.

This answers your first question as well, as to why the bhikkhunis have three hundred and eleven rules. The bhikkhunis observed many rules which the bhikkhus didn't need to have. Take for example going on long journeys. Even if bhikkhunis travel together as a group they are still subject to danger. The Buddha laid down a training rule forbidding the bhikkhunis from travelling long distances alone—that is, they must have a bhikkhu to accompany them. Another example is that the bhikkhus have only three robes, whereas the bhikkhunis must possess five. Besides creating a difficulty for the nuns themselves, these conditions also caused concern and constriction for the monks.

Here we come to a key principle and the true purpose of the monastic life. That is, the Buddha didn't establish the monastic community simply to benefit those individuals who come to ask for ordination, but rather he intended that this community fulfils a responsibility to society as a whole.

The Buddha mentioned this clear objective repeatedly. He wished for the monastic sangha to wander forth for the wellbeing of the general population, according to the familiar Pali phrase: 'To act for the welfare and happiness of the many, for the compassionate assistance of the world' (*bahujanahitāya bahujanasukhāya lokānukampāya*). This is the sangha's responsibility and it is a core objective of Buddhism in its entirety.

The monastic sangha is a gathering place and melting pot for people of all social classes and castes to become a united whole and an independent community. Members of this community act in a selfless way to benefit the world in accord with the ideal expressed in the Pali phrase above. Flexibility and freedom are thus of paramount importance—both external freedom in relation to society and internal freedom in regard to a person's mind.

The person who embodies this ideal is an arahant, whom the Buddha described as one who is liberated from all forms of shackles and fetters—*muttā sabbapāsehi*—both divine and human, both material and mental. He or she is free and thus is able to truly 'act for the welfare and happiness of the many, for the compassionate assistance of the world.'

This is a very important point. One can see that in order to fulfil this objective the Buddha set down various criteria in respect to the attributes of those people who ask for ordination. He prepared the readiness of people from the moment that they entered the monastic sangha.

First, ordination candidates must have no impediment that would interfere with their practice. For example, they must be able to help

themselves, to be able to cross over mountain ranges and pass through deep forests by relying on their own strength and fortitude.

Second, they must not be a burden on the community, so that other monks can pursue their individual spiritual practice uninterruptedly and wander forth for the benefit of others to their utmost capacity.

For these reasons the criteria for those people asking for ordination include that they are not crippled, mute, or blind in both eyes, or have a contagious disease.

Some people say that one should allow such individuals to be ordained as a form of social welfare. (When people became widely aware of AIDS, some even suggested that AIDS patients be encouraged to take ordination.) One needs to understand that the monastic sangha is not a place for people to go to receive aid. Rather, it is a community in which a person receives spiritual training in order to go out and help others and to assist the world. It is important that one clearly understands the responsibilities of the monks and nuns in relation to the wider society.

People tend to overlook this fact. Sometime people may think that the main purpose of ordaining as a monk is to derive a personal benefit. Granted, the person who ordains benefits, in that he develops virtues, gains strength of mind, and cultivates comprehensive wisdom. This personal benefit, however, becomes a preparedness to go out and help others, you see? Both parties benefit.

This is not all. This matter relates also to Nibbāna, and not simply as a personal blessing. Indeed, Nibbāna is the supreme form of personal benefit, but what does that mean? It means that a person has reached completion, to the point that one can say that he or she has reached a state of egolessness. An arahant no longer has any necessary task in regard to personal concerns, and thus is able to act for the benefit of the world to the utmost.

A fully awakened one thus acts 'for the welfare and happiness of the many, for the compassionate assistance of the world.' If one

overlooks this fact one will have a very restricted perspective and consider things in a faulty way. For this reason an ordination candidate must not have any problematic or unsettled issues. He must be fully prepared to undergo difficulties and to persevere.

Demanding Rights from Those Lacking the Authority to Grant Them

I want to return to one of your earlier questions. Some people have doubts about the allowance the Buddha gave to the sangha of revoking minor training rules, which appears as if he gave an allowance to amend his own regulations. People often refer to this point. In the Theravada tradition, however, there exists a common agreement to accept things as they stand, that is, we relinquish this right and opportunity, and decide not to revoke any rules.

Some people say that the Buddha possessed a special knowledge and ability to predict the future. They wonder whether the refusal by Theravada monks to follow up on this allowance is tantamount to showing disrespect for the Buddha's comprehensive wisdom. This question can be answered in several ways:

First, this was an allowance by the Buddha—it was not a command to revoke or to amend the training rules. The Buddha said that if the sangha considers it appropriate, it may revoke minor training rules. This allowance is a sign of the Buddha's wisdom and foresight.

The elders at the First Recitation thought: 'We as disciples of the Buddha who gather together to perform a formal recitation are faced with the question whether to take up this opportunity or not. We acknowledge that the Buddha's wisdom surpasses our own, and that he was able to determine the proper course of action. We also admit that our wisdom is insufficient to distinguish which rules should be revoked and which ones should be kept. We accept that our own ability and wisdom is lacking, and therefore we choose to refrain from revoking any rules.'

So you see it is not a matter of insulting the Buddha's wisdom; rather it is an admission that our wisdom is not as great as the Buddha's.

Question: In regard to human rights, does this mean that women lack the right to be ordained? Women themselves may wish to be ordained as nuns, but the bhikkhu sangha has agreed to refrain from amending the Buddha's regulations. Is this equivalent to denying women the opportunity and the right to be ordained as bhikkhunis? Does this have a bearing on the issue of human rights?

Phra Payutto: This is exactly the second point I wish to discuss:

The allowance by the Buddha to amend his regulations or to revoke minor rules was very general or broad. He did not intend to focus specifically on the matter of bhikkhunis. Even if we had been present at the time and listened to this allowance, we would not have thought about bhikkhunis. This was not a matter that anyone would have had in mind.

It is possible that some people would have thought about matters concerning food, robes, or lodgings. For example, the question may have come up for some whether it would be prudent to revoke the rule forbidding monks from storing food overnight. It is reasonable that some of the monks would have thought about these kinds of precepts. But no-one would have thought about the extinction of the bhikkhuni order. (Similarly, no-one would have thought about the rules pertaining to bhikkhu ordinations. Moreover, when the bhikkhu order died out in Sri Lanka and bhikkhus needed to be invited from Thailand, we don't know whether people thought about 'men's rights.')

In any case, even if people didn't think about the rules governing ordination, they are included in the Buddha's allowance, which covered every sort of minor rule and regulation.

By looking at the Buddha's regulations dealing with bhikkhuni ordinations, however, we see how difficult it is to judge which rules

are minor rules and which ones are more serious. If people were to discuss whether the regulations dealing with bhikkhuni ordinations are minor rules, the debates would be drawn-out and complex.

Consider the factor of intention, which is the key measuring stick for human actions. In this context the intention of the monks is not to prevent women from being ordained as bhikkhunis. Rather, their intention is something different altogether: it is to preserve and protect the Buddha's regulations. The monks are concerned about doing the right thing. If the monks recognize that they do not have the authority—neither to confer bhikkhuni ordination on women nor on a more profound level to amend the Buddha's regulations—they will fear wrongdoing. They will fear acting incorrectly and will not dare to violate the rules. This is a very different intention.

As I have said before, the right to give bhikkhuni ordination rests with women—no-one can revoke or nullify this right. Yet at present no-one can be found who is authorized to execute this right and to give ordination. When bhikkhus realize that they do not have the authority, they will fear acting wrongly. How can they go ahead and give ordinations?

Indeed, it is because of this recognition—that women have the right to be ordained—that we are giving such thorough consideration to possible ways for accomplishing such ordinations. If women lacked the right to be ordained, why would we be spending so much time deliberating this matter? This entire discussion takes place because there is sympathy and compassion for those women who wish to be ordained. An important factor, however, is not to give precedence to compassion over correctness.

From their side, women too have an important consideration. They ought to consider: 'I recognize that I have an inherent right, but I face a stumbling block in regard to the Buddha's regulations, which resemble legally binding laws. How can I go and force the bhikkhus to do something that lies outside of their domain of authority?'

Some people may say in jest: ‘Hey, why are these people infringing on a right belonging to the Buddha and at the same time disrespecting the rights of the bhikkhus, who wish to observe the rules prescribed to them by the Buddha?’

In regard to the Buddha’s prescriptions, the bhikkhus do not possess any special rights which do not belong to the other three Buddhist assemblies. Indeed, the bhikkhus must show even greater devotion and care than others in observing the Buddha’s regulations.

In fact, all people have the same overall rights. We should ask ourselves: ‘Do I honour the Buddha, and should I respect the Buddha’s regulations?’ If the answers to these questions are ‘yes,’ we shouldn’t get caught up criticizing and blaming each other. Instead, we should consult with one another, gain a clear understanding of the Buddha’s regulations, and help each other find effective ways to obtain what we want within the boundaries of what is correct.

This is connected to the question: Why aren’t we looking for an immediate solution to this predicament? If it is not possible at the present time to have Theravada bhikkhuni ordinations, and if some women do not wish to be ordained as Mahayana bhikkhunis, why don’t we establish a respectable and dignified community for renunciant women? This should be feasible. We acknowledge that this is not the bhikkhuni order as set down by the Buddha’s regulations, but we can establish a new community for women to live the renunciant life.

This is similar to the time in the past when the *mae chi* way of practice was established. I understand that this way of practice was established as a solution to the same predicament. Unfortunately, the *mae chi* order has degenerated since it was not well safeguarded, although from one perspective this simply follows the natural process of growth and decline.

We are faced with a choice. We can restore the *mae chi* way of practice so that it is healthy and strong, or else we can establish a new community for renunciant women. This is up to us to decide and to manage.

Going Beyond Defending One's Personal Rights to Creating Wellbeing for All

Let me say a little more on the subject of rights. Especially in this day and age, the matter of human rights is extremely good and important. But at the same time we need to look at this subject from different perspectives. If we consider only the matter of human rights this way of thinking becomes factional or partisan, which people generally agree is incorrect.

Our references to human rights, along with other rights, need to be connected to other matters. Why was the concept of human rights established? An obvious and important benefit of human rights is that they act as a basic guarantee for people to have stability in their lives and to have the opportunity to grow and develop in goodness.

But we can't stop here—we need to examine this matter further. Regardless of whether we claim human rights or not, we should examine how these rights result in growth and development.

Take for example the act of ordination as a monk. This is not a matter of exercising a personal right. In fact, in many respects it is a relinquishment of one's rights; one may willingly give up and surrender all sorts of rights.

Spiritual development does not result from people focusing on personal rights. It results in large part from conceding to the wishes of others. If one becomes fixated with personal rights one may lose focus on what is essential. One allows one's thoughts to become preoccupied with securing one's rights and consequently one does not progress.

Problems occurring in the West often stem from this preoccupation with personal rights, resulting in competitiveness, acquisitiveness, anxiety over protecting one's own rights, and a lack of mutual goodwill. Sometimes it becomes so extreme that one deceives oneself into believing that everything is connected to some kind of right.

If we really believe that human rights act as a basic guarantee for people to find stability and to develop in goodness, we must combine the principles of human rights with other principles conducive to human spiritual development.

Spiritual development sometimes involves the relinquishment of specific rights. When a person is ready, he or she may be happy not to exercise or appeal to a personal right and instead to give up such a right when the occasion warrants this.

When a person ordains as a monk and develops the virtue of renunciation, he must relinquish all sorts of rights, including rights connected to social customs and traditions. For example, in Thailand the monks do not have the right to vote, even though this is a basic right belonging to the entire populace. In regard to inheritance, one is not allowed to write a will. If one wishes to bequeath something one must give the object while one is still alive, otherwise, if one has already died, the object belongs to the sangha. And in the case that things are bequeathed, say by parents to their children, and there are disputes among the heirs a monk is not allowed to file a claim. An ordination candidate needs to be aware of those rights he is willing to forgo.

At the present time there is a debate over whether to allow monks to vote. In this debate it is important to look at the basic principles and objectives of the renunciant life. One examines both the principles and one's personal wishes on this matter, and checks whether these two factors conform to one another. Decisions on this matter should thus be made through a measured consideration.

It is fair to say that establishing human rights is the fundamental stage for human development. From a negative point of view, however, one can say that the need for human rights is an accusation, that people are still in a state of turmoil—that there is still a great deal of oppression and persecution, and therefore one must establish these principles as a guarantee for people's safety. From this perspective

human rights are good and vital, but they are good and vital because they help people to escape from negative and harmful behaviour—a sign of people’s lack of inner development.

If people are to develop to higher levels they must have something superior to aspire to, something which isn’t tied up with the matter of rights. Moreover, rights are matters that focus on individuals. Even a declaration of human rights is a matter that specific governments draw up in relation to individuals.

Having said this, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights claims to be a benchmark and guarantee for laying a ‘foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.’ This shows that such a declaration of human rights, which gives emphasis to individuals, is connected to society as a whole.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights here seems to be stating that a recognition of individual rights acts as the foundation for freedom, justice and peace in the world. This declaration acknowledges that the relationship of an individual extends to society as a whole and that world peace rests upon the rights of individuals.

But shouldn’t we go one step further? To begin with, we safeguard the rights of individuals so that we have a guarantee for social peace and tranquillity. But is there another stage? Once we have established a surety for social justice and peace, what should people do next? What are the responsibilities that go hand-in-hand with personal rights? At this stage we are going beyond a sense of duty, to a level of performing wholesome actions.

If people become obsessed with personal rights, eventually they will get stuck with demanding such rights. They will develop a habitual tendency of trying to get or obtain, and their focus will become one-sided.

We should indeed enable human rights to act as a guarantee, while at the same time encouraging people to develop themselves further. This can be done by acknowledging that here we have established

a basic level of stability, a guarantee for an adequate level of peace and happiness in the world.

From this point we then give emphasis to a path of practice for each individual that is wholesome, supportive, and beneficial. That is, we ask what can we do based on this stable foundation so that every living being is well and happy and that the world has true and lasting peace. If we pursue this path then people will develop spiritually in a true and authentic way.

Here I will conclude with the Buddha's verse: 'To act for the happiness of the manyfolk, for the compassionate assistance of the world' (*bahujanasukhāya lokānukampāya*). Let us reach a stage that goes beyond a focus on individual rights.

Supplementary Chapter 3:

The Sphere of Renunciants and the Social System of India

Distinctions between Brahmans and Buddhists

Remember that the Buddhist monastic sangha was established on the Indian sub-continent, home to myriad renunciant traditions, many of which had already existed for a long period of time. The Buddhist monastic community may be regarded as a younger sibling to these other renunciant traditions.

It was common that members of other religious traditions were looking for an opportunity to ridicule, insult, or dishonour the Buddhist sangha. Similarly, some of the laypeople were prepared to jeer the bhikkhunis whenever there was a damaging incident or when the nuns acted in unaccustomed ways.

These matters must be looked at in the context of Indian society at that time, not in the context of modern day Thailand, which is significantly different. (One can look, however, at the state of religious renunciants in India today, an observation which will cast considerable light on these matters.)

Before the dawn of Buddhism, many priests and renunciants, who can be collectively referred to as ‘holy men,’ lived in India. These religious people were the source of many problems which the Buddha later attempted to rectify.

Moreover, there existed a strict social system.¹ Besides the problem of dividing people into different social classes according to their birth—a division that was considered irredeemable—the people who were considered to be of the highest class, who were considered to be inherently holy, and who were ostensibly consecrated by the Supreme Brahma, were the brahmans. They conducted the religious sacrifices and were the cause of many problems which the Buddha tried to set straight.

The brahmans did not need to pass through an ordination ceremony and they considered themselves superior from the fact of their birth, as created by the god Brahma. Sometimes when they first encountered the Buddha and saw that he was a renunciant they would immediately insult him, revealing their scorn by calling him such names as ‘bald-headed renunciant’ and ‘bald-headed beggar.’ There are stories, however, of brahmans who gained wisdom by speaking with the Buddha and who consequently gained faith in him. (For example, the story of Aggika-Bhāradvāja² and of Sundarika-Bhāradvāja.³)

When the Buddha established the Buddhist religion, he referred to this process as ‘proclaiming the Dhamma.’ He not only offered teachings on spiritual development and on liberation through wisdom, but he also instituted tremendous changes at a basic social level and on the level of ethics.

¹ [Trans.: There seems to be an ongoing debate among scholars over the validity of referring to the brahmanic social system of the Buddha’s time as a ‘caste system.’ I have occasionally used the term ‘caste system’ in this text as I feel it captures the flavour of dividing society into different groups based exclusively on a person’s birth.]

² Sn. 21.

³ S. I. 167.

In the Buddhist monastic sangha, members of all castes and social groups were welcome, regardless of one's position in society. Even outcastes (*caṇḍāla*) can be ordained. The consideration here is that anyone who is well-trained is excellent and transcends the limitations of social class. Moreover, the training is not confined to the mind and to wisdom. Although bhikkhus in the Buddhist monastic discipline live without wealth and luxurious means of comfort, they have a general deportment and a well-mannered behaviour that is refined and virtuous, and which is not inferior to that belonging to members of the highest social classes. This conduct earned the respect even of those people who considered themselves to be of the highest social class.

Take for example a story about King Ajātasattu. After he had committed patricide he wasn't able to rest. Every time he was about to fall asleep he would have a violent convulsion. One full moon night during the season of blooming lotuses, when the air was fresh, he had the wish to converse with a monk in order to gain some peace. He asked his chief ministers where he should go.

In the end he agreed with the royal doctor Jīvaka's suggestion to converse with the Buddha at Jīvakambavana monastery. When he had entered the monastery and approached the Buddha's dwelling, there was complete silence. At that moment he felt utterly alone and afraid, with his hair standing on end. He turned to Jīvaka and asked him if he had set a trap to deliver him to his enemies. There were 1,250 monks living with the Buddha—why was there not even the sound of a cough or muttering? How could it possibly be so quiet? Jīvaka explained the situation in order to reassure him.

When the king reached the Buddha he looked around at the large gathering of monks who were sitting peacefully, instilling a sense of confidence. At that moment he was reminded of his son and uttered forth the exclamation: 'May that my son Udāyabhadda have such peace as this community of monks before me.'¹ (Later, Udāyabhadda

¹ D. I. 50.

committed patricide and succeeded to the throne in turn.)

Let us look at the renunciants who were considered excellent and holy in India. The Pali term *pabbajita* (Sanskrit: *pravrajita*) refers to someone who is a renunciant, who has 'gone forth' from the household life into the homeless life, who seeks seclusion in order to escape from life's bonds and attachments and from oppressive social systems. These persons seek freedom, liberation, and the highest good. They strive for self-knowledge and for an understanding of the truth. Sometimes they go off to live independently and at ease, discovering exceptional psychic powers surpassing the powers of ordinary human beings and divinities.

In relation to these renunciants, a comparable example from the contemporary period is that of the hippy movement, which blossomed in the United States. The hippy movement resulted from a disenchantment with materialism within an affluent society. The hippies abandoned social customs and mores, secluded themselves and lived simple lives, wandered around unrestrained and at ease, gave importance to spirituality, and lived close to nature. The hippy movement, however, was a reaction to the status quo at that time, a makeshift attempt to go against the stream of society. It was born quickly, gained great popularity, and then more or less disappeared. It didn't have a firm, lasting objective. In any case, the hippies drew inspiration from the Orient, especially from India.

The origin of the renunciant traditions in India unfolded relatively gradually, in line with other social developments. These traditions were shaped by both conflicts between, and assimilations among, various cultures and ethnic groups in India, amongst other things.

The Buddha presented an account of the evolution of human societies and of social classes in the *Aggañña Sutta*.¹ Here he describes how the first human beings began to take sexual partners, build homes, and gain ownership of the four requisites. Personal property

¹ D. III. 92.

was allocated, followed by possessiveness, violation of rights, theft, blame, condemnation, deceit, quarrels, and fighting. This led to the formation of a social system, by electing a leader or king, which resulted in a class of warriors (Sanskrit: *kshatriya*; Pali: *khattiya*; 'kings,' 'administrators').

Meanwhile, some people became disillusioned with the evils in society and sought to renounce them by parting with society (in India the traditional expression for this is 'to float away from evil'). These people later became the class of brahmans (*brāhmaṇa*). They lived in the forest, reflected on spiritual matters, and developed the concentrative absorptions (*jhāna*). They didn't earn a living and came into the towns and villages only to seek food (this is the original way of life of the renunciants in India).

After frequenting the towns and villages, however, many of these individuals ceased to develop the *jhānas*. Instead, they memorized and recited sacred incantations, composed texts, and taught the Vedas. In the end they returned to being householders and were referred to as the brahman class (*brāhmaṇa*).

Another group of people were preoccupied with establishing and supporting families. They engaged in various businesses and enterprises. They were called the merchant class (*vaishya*; Pali: *vessa*).

Other people lived under difficult conditions, engaging in hard physical labour, living as hunters, or performing menial jobs. They were looked down upon by others and were branded as 'low class' (*shudra*; Pali: *sudda*).

This is the way human society evolved until it was divided into the four social classes of warriors, brahmans, merchants and lower class citizens. Buddhism teaches that this evolution occurred according to specific causes and conditions, especially as a result of intentional actions—by way of thought, speech, and physical deeds—and according to the occupations in which people were engaged. The caste system is in no way a creation by some higher divinity.

According to Buddhism, every human being is essentially able to govern and direct his or her own life. As a human being, one is able to improve and transform oneself by altering one's actions, a process which accords with nature.

This is the distinction between Buddhism and Brahmanism, which controlled Indian society at the time of the Buddha's awakening. Brahmanism espouses the belief that these four castes (*vaṇṇa*) are created by a supreme God and are absolute, fixed, and irredeemable. In whichever caste one is born, one is bound to the way of life prescribed for such a caste until one's death. One's entire life is determined by the state of one's birth.

In the Brahmanic tradition people were confined to these four social classes. If for some reason a person fell outside of these four, for instance if one was the offspring of parents from different castes, then one was an 'outcaste' (*caṇḍāla*). Such persons were so low that they were not even considered human. They were not permitted to live in normal human society, their existence was considered a misfortune, and they were 'untouchable.' Even if their shadow were to pass over someone's plate of rice, the food had to be thrown away and was forbidden from being consumed.

Although Brahmanism had tremendous influence and was able to firmly control Indian society through the division of social classes, nonetheless some people were able, in some respects, to find a way out from this restrictive caste system. They were able to live outside of the confines of society by renouncing the world, giving up the household life, and taking ordination as renunciants. These renunciants and wanderers were able to free themselves from this repressive society and even to establish independent communities. The Buddha used this established institution of renunciants to give those people who wanted it an opportunity to escape from the oppressive clutches of the caste system.

It is noteworthy that in the Aggañña Sutta the Buddha does not use the term ‘caste’ (*vaṇṇa*) to refer to these four groups of people, but rather he uses the term ‘group’ (*maṇḍala*; ‘circle’), as: *khattiya-maṇḍala*, *brāhmaṇa-maṇḍala*, *vessa-maṇḍala*, and *sudda-maṇḍala*. He considered them as groups of professions or occupations, as groups of people with similar ways of earning a living. (The term *maṇḍala* literally means ‘circle’ or ‘sphere.’) Moreover, the Buddha adds the group of renunciants—the *samaṇa-maṇḍala*—making five groups of individuals rather than four social classes.

The renunciants who comprised this group of *samaṇa-maṇḍala* came from the other four groups. As it is said, in some time periods there were those princes, brahmins, merchants, and labourers who were discontented and who disapproved of their own ‘state’ (*dhamma*: tradition, customs, social and occupational systems); they separated themselves from society and went forth as spiritual seekers. Thus, out of the four main groups there arose the group of renunciants.

Although these renunciants left society behind and became independent, some of them remained attached to the doctrine of the caste system and looked down on other renunciants, giving rise to conflicts and disputes, even in the forests of the Himalayas. It was as if different social classes were maintained among the group of renunciants, as recounted for example in the Mātaṅga Jātaka.¹

The Buddha did not accept this division of people under any circumstances, neither within the wider society nor within isolated communities. Instead, as he goes on to say in the Aggañña Sutta, he claimed that these five groups of people, including the group of renunciants, are equal before the Dhamma, are equal in face of the truth.

In this sutta the Buddha goes on at length about the equality of all people. No matter if one is a king, a brahmin, a merchant, a member of the lower classes, or a renunciant, if one performs evil deeds, behaves

¹ JA. IV. 386.

immorally, and harbours wrong views, one is destined to fall into states of perdition, while if one behaves virtuously and has right view, one will reach a happy destination.

In the end, if a person remains steadfast in performing virtuous deeds by way of body, speech, and mind, develops those qualities leading to the wisdom of awakening, and reaches the destruction of the taints and freedom from defilement, he or she is supreme, transcending the four castes (at this point the Buddha uses the term *vaṇṇa*). The Dhamma is the determining factor, and the truth itself reigns supreme in all human societies, both in the present and in the future.

Buddhism Was Established in both the Forest and the City

This group of renunciants—those people who lived apart from the main social system and lived in communities removed from society—had two models for living. The first, which was commonly associated with such people and frequently discussed, was a life of physical seclusion: of leaving inhabited areas and dwelling in the forests and mountains of the Himalayas, of living as rishis or hermits in hermitages, as in the story of Vessantara.¹

There was, however, another model, of those individuals who lived in seclusion in a metaphorical or spiritual way. There were many such individuals, who lived in inhabited areas and established residences in towns and cities. They devoted themselves to teaching others and engaged in discussions on spirituality, which today may be referred to as the philosophy of religion. They lived, however, apart from the social systems which surrounded them.

In an archetypal sense these renunciants lived not only separated from society but they also transcended society. They transcended society not only in the way often considered by the laity, of having

¹ [The Vessantara Jātaka recounts the tale of the Buddha's previous life as Prince Vessantara, who gave away everything he owned and perfected the virtue of generosity.]

mystical or psychic powers, or of being separate from mundane affairs, but also in the area of virtue, of spiritual attributes, of levels of wisdom, and even of having realized transcendent spiritual states.

The bhikkhu sangha which was established by the Buddha is a community belonging to the sphere or institution of renunciants; it belongs to the 'circle of renunciants' (*samaṇa-maṇḍala*). This is evident from the way in which people outside of Buddhism, especially the brahmans and various ascetics, like the Jain followers and the ascetic wanderers, addressed the Buddha, as the 'venerable renunciant Gotama' (*samaṇo gotamo*), or sometimes as the 'great renunciant' (*mahā-samaṇa*; this is the term that the matted-hair ascetic Uruvela-Kassapa used to address the Buddha). Other people too referred to the Buddha and to the bhikkhus as renunciants (*samaṇa*). (Even the female wanderers referred to earlier who received cakes from Ven. Ānanda used the term *samaṇa* when chiming in to make fun of him as the alleged lover of one of their members.)

At the Buddha's time there was already a long established renunciant tradition with numerous renunciants spread out throughout the country, some of them in communities. Some of them lived in the forests and mountains, some lived near villages and inhabited areas, while others lived in the cities. Their residences were established both in forests and on the outskirts of cities.

There were six schools of such renunciants which were particularly famous at the time of the Buddha, named after their guiding teachers: Pūraṇa-Kassapa, Makkhali-Gosāla, Ajita-Kesakambala, Pakudha-Kaccāyana, Sañjaya-Velaṭṭhaputta, and Niḡaṇṭha-Nātaputta.¹

This tradition of renunciants evolved over many years before it manifested in its existent form during the Buddha's time. In any case,

¹ The six teachers: *cha satthāro*. In the Tipiṭaka this term is used to refer to six teachers from the ancient past. The use of this term to refer to the six teachers during the Buddha's time is found in later texts like the Milindapañhā and the commentaries. The source for this may be the declaration by the deity at S. I. 65-6.

the traditional view of the act of ‘going forth’ was to associate this with giving up the householder’s life, the abandoning of material possessions, throwing off one’s connections with society, going off in seclusion, and keeping moral precepts and religious practices in the forest, similar to the first generation of brahmins before the idea of the brahmin class was established.

Buddhism originated in the forest—not in the remote forest, but rather at the edge of the forests, on the outskirts of the towns. Prince Siddhattha renounced the palace and took on the form of a mendicant monk (*bhikkhu*), which means that he ate almsfood collected from the laypeople in or near markets, towns, and villages. He did not live as a forest ascetic like Vessantara, who lived in the remote jungles far from human habitation, eating forest roots, tubers, leaves, and fruit. Someone who wished to visit Vessantara could only do so with great difficulty.

Prince Siddhattha went forth by the banks of the Anomā River. He parted ways from his charioteer Channa, who returned to the palace with the prince’s horse and personal belongings. The Bodhisatta travelled a great distance on foot; in his first week he had walked about 30 yojanas.¹ He reached Rājagaha, the capital city of the Magadha kingdom, and went on almsround, which was the cause for him to be fortuitously seen by King Bimbisāra. The king followed him to Mount Paṇḍava and conversed with him, before the Bodhisatta continued to the hermitages of the ascetics Āḷāra and Uddaka. At these hermitages the Buddha trained in meditation until he had accomplished the concentrative attainments. He realized that these attainments are not the path to the knowledge of awakening (*bodhi-ñāṇa*), and thus went off in search of a suitable place of practice, until he reached Uruvelā and settled by the banks of the river Nerañjarā.

¹ [According to the Pali Text Society’s estimation of a *yojana*, this would be about 336 km. For more on this subject of distance, see ‘A Note on Dhammapada 60 and the Length of the Yojana’ by Peter Skilling.]

Here the Buddha made the following declaration: ‘This is a refreshing place, a delightful, shady grove with a cool, flowing river with smooth banks and nearby villages for acquiring alms. Indeed, it is a truly suitable place for putting forth effort.’¹ From this passage, it is evident that this location possessed both a forested area (*vana-saṅḍa*) and surrounding villages in which it was possible to go for alms (*gocara-gāma*).

Even when the Bodhisatta occasionally entered the deep jungle during his period of extreme asceticism, he did not live very far from human society. In the end, Buddhism began with the Buddha’s awakening at the border of the forest under the Bodhi tree, not far from Sujātā’s home.²

From there the Buddha travelled to the Deer Park of Isipatana in the district of Benares (*Bārāṇasī*). Here, after teaching the group of five ascetics, who were ordained by the Buddha as bhikkhus and were the first group of arahant disciples, he encountered the wealthy merchant’s son Yasa. Yasa had woken up in the middle of the night and had felt disillusioned with his life among sensual pleasures. He left his palace and wandered aimlessly out of the city gates until he arrived at the spot where the Buddha was staying, at the edge of the forest. He listened to the Dhamma and became an awakened being. This shows that the Buddha was not far from the city, close enough to easily reach on foot.

In the woodland of Isipatana and at the home of Ven. Yasa’s father in Benares, the Buddha assisted Yasa’s parents and former wife to realize the Dhamma. These individuals became the first male and female lay followers to take refuge in the three refuges. The Buddha also taught fifty-four of Yasa’s friends, helping them to become fully awakened as arahants. At that time, including the Buddha, there were sixty-one arahant bhikkhus in the world.

¹ M. I. 166-7.

² [Sujātā: the young woman who offered a meal of milk-rice to the Bodhisatta, on the morning before his awakening.]

It was on this occasion in the woodland of Isipatana that the Buddha sent out these sixty arahant disciples to proclaim the Buddhist teachings, sharing with them this vital injunction: ‘Bhikkhus, wander off for the welfare and happiness of the manyfolk, for the compassionate assistance of the world.... Let no two monks take the same path.’¹

It was not only the disciples who wandered by themselves; the Buddha too wandered off to teach without a companion. If we look at the commentarial analysis of the Pabbajjā Sutta, the Buddha’s aim here was to fulfil his promise that he had made to King Bimbisāra, who had requested that the Buddha visit his kingdom first, once he had attained enlightenment.²

Before meeting with the residents of Rājagaha, the Buddha considered that he should first correct the views of the matted-hair ascetics who followed the doctrine of fire worship and who were greatly respected by the people of Rājagaha. Having done this it would be much easier to teach the general people. The Buddha thus returned to Uruvelā and on the way he met the group of thirty young men (the Bhaddavaggiyā). After these young men had listened to the Dhamma, truly understood it, and asked to go forth as monks, the Buddha likewise sent them out in various directions to proclaim the teachings.

The Buddha then travelled by himself to the residence of the matted-hair ascetics. He challenged the views of these ascetics, who worshipped fire and who judged the state of complete enlightenment (arahantship) according to a person’s exceptional level of psychic powers. It took a long time before he could change and correct their views; in total he stayed in this area for three months. In the end, all of the matted-hair ascetics of three different residences were ordained as bhikkhus.

¹ Vin. I. 20-21. (*Caratha bhikkhave cārikaṃ bahujanahitāya bahujanasukhāya lokānukampāya ... mā ekena dve aḡamittha.*)

² Sn. 71; commentarial analysis at: SnA. II. 385; JA. I. 66; ApA. 71; BvA. 6, 285.

On the second full-moon day in the winter season, the Buddha, who had travelled alone from Benares, left Uruvelā along with one thousand former matted-hair ascetics (in Pali they are referred to as the *purāṇa-jaṭṭila*) and travelled to Rājagaha, the first city in India where Buddhism became firmly established.

In Rājagaha the Buddha stayed in a forested park on the outskirts of the city which was suitable for renunciants, especially in such large numbers (at that time the Buddha stayed in the Laṭṭhivana—the ‘Grove of Young Palms’). When the king found out, he travelled there with a large number of Magadhans. When these people found out that the matted-hair ascetics whom they had venerated had become disciples of the Buddha, they were receptive to listening to the Buddha’s teaching.

When King Bimbisāra listened to the Dhamma, he understood it with clarity and there arose in him the ‘eye of Dhamma.’ Having gained tremendous confidence he wished to offer a place of residence to the Buddha. Upon consideration, he decided to offer the royal park of Veḷuvana to the Buddha, who received it as the first Buddhist monastery (*ārāma*). This was also the occasion when the Buddha gave his permission for there to be monasteries for the monks.¹

Refreshed in the Woodlands Venturing into the Forests

It is noteworthy to see which attributes King Bimbisāra considered when choosing a location for this first monastery. The suitable attributes are as follows:²

It is a place that should be neither too close nor too far from the village; it is convenient to come and go; it can be reached by people who wish to visit. During the day it is not crowded; during the night it is quiet. It is without loud noises and the sound of bustling people. It offers privacy; it is suitable for retreat.

¹ Vin. I. 38-9; *anujānāmi bhikkhave ārāmaṃ*.

² Vin. I. 38-9.

These attributes are considered the criteria for establishing or building a Buddhist monastery. For example, when the merchant Anāthapiṇḍika built Jetavana monastery he looked for a place matching these criteria. Veḷuvana and Jetavana are the model monasteries in Buddhism.

Whereas Veḷuvana, which was located in the capital city of the Magadha kingdom, was the location in which Buddhism was established and can be regarded as the centre for the dissemination of Buddhism, Jetavana, located in Sāvattthī, the royal capital of the Kosala kingdom, was the major teaching centre of the Buddha. Once Buddhism had been established, Jetavana became the centre of teaching, and was the birthplace of most of the subsequent teachings.

The other monasteries of the Buddha's time shared the attributes of these two major monasteries. Contained within the names of these monasteries was the word vana, which means 'forest' or 'woodland grove.'

There are two common Pali words which can be translated as 'forest': vana and arañña. Technically speaking, these two words are synonyms and can be used interchangeably. Especially in poetry or scriptural verses they are often substituted for one another. But according to customary use these two words have distinct nuances.

Vana generally refers to woodland located in inhabited areas or forests bordering towns and villages. These are sometimes parks or woodland groves, as in the case of Veḷuvana, which was a royal park (*uyyāna*). In the Pali Canon these two terms are used as a pair: *Idaṃ kho amhākaṃ veḷuvanamaṃ uyyānaṃ*.¹ (The commentaries occasionally use the compound *veḷuvanuyyānaṃ*.) Jetavana was referred to as the royal park of Prince Jeta.² Once this royal park became a monastery it was referred to as an *ārāma* ('park,' 'grove,' 'place of delight,' 'place of refreshment').

¹ Vin. I. 38-9.

² *Jetassa rājakumārassa uyyānaṃ*; Vin. II. 158.

King Bimbisāra's offering of Veḷuvana is recorded as follows:

'Lord, we offer the royal park of Veḷuvana to the bhikkhu sangha, with the Lord Buddha as chief.' The Blessed One accepted this monastery.

Similarly, when Anāthapiṇḍika made his request to Prince Jeta, he said: 'May His Majesty kindly bestow the royal park on me in order to build a monastery.'

The definition of *arañña* on the other hand makes one think of a jungle with fierce animals and beasts. It tends to be wild, remote, and terrifying.

Here are the definitions I give in the Dictionary of Buddhist Terms:

- *Vana*: forest, woodland, park. This term emphasizes a collection or cluster of trees or plants, along with the resident fauna.
- *Arañña*: forest, jungle. This term emphasizes desolate, secluded forested areas, places far from human habitation.

The meaning of *arañña* shares attributes with that of *vana*, in the sense that it is a forest, a woodland, an unspoiled, natural area. But an *arañña* tends to be quieter and more remote, further away from human beings; it is secluded, containing the sounds of wild animals rather than the sounds of humans. It is a suitable environment for meditation and thus many monks choose to live in such forests. One can say that living in the wilds is one aspect to cultivating the threefold training, giving rise to 'forest monks' (*araññika*), 'forest dwellings' (*araññaka-senāsana*), and the (*dhutaṅga*)¹ observance of living solely in the forest (*araññikaṅga*).

There are stipulations for forest dwellings or forest monasteries to be at least one kilometre (five hundred bow lengths) away from a village. There are similar stipulations stating that these dwellings should not be farther away than four kilometres—one *gāvuta*—so that one can return from almsround in time for the meal.

¹ [Many readers may be familiar with the English transliteration of the Thai form of this term—'tudong.']

When women took ordination and the bhikkhuni order was established, it was normal for them to live in forested areas (*vana*). When they lived in wilderness areas (*arañña*), however, they were faced with the problem of being assaulted. The Buddha consequently laid down a rule forbidding the bhikkhunis from living in remote forests (*arañña*). (The rule is stated such: *na bhikkhave bhikkhuniyā araññe vatthabbaṃ*.)

Moreover, the term *arañña* here is not defined in the same way as it is for forest dwellings for bhikkhus, that is, as being at least one kilometre away from a village. Instead, Vinaya scholars interpret the term *arañña* here as corresponding to the definition in the rule on stealing: ‘Except for a village or the vicinity of a village. All else is called a forest (*arañña*).’¹ Or they use the definition from the Abhidhamma, which matches a sutta passage: ‘The term “forest” refers to the area outside of the boundary marks; this entire area is called a “forest”.’² Furthermore, the *dhutaṅga* practice of living in the forest is also forbidden for bhikkhunis.

Although bhikkhus are allowed to live in the forest, there are rules in the Pāṭimokkha dealing with this subject. Whereas the bhikkhunis are forbidden from living in the forest due to the dangers that this poses to the nuns themselves, the monks are permitted to live in the forest but must take care that they do not endanger other people.

Take for example the 145th rule in the Pāṭimokkha: ‘A monk living in a forest residence who knows that it is a frightening and dangerous place commits an offence entailing acknowledgement when he receives by his own hand hard or soft foods and eats it, if he has not informed the donors of these dangers beforehand, unless he is sick.’

In this circumstance there are regulations dictating that before receiving this food a monk must be notified beforehand by someone associated with the donor, and if there are dangers one must inform

¹ Vin. III. 46.

² Vbh. 251; Ps. I. 176.

this person. If after warning them they insist on coming to offer food, the monk must go and try to deter the bandit (or whoever poses the danger).¹ Furthermore, if one lives in the forest with the intention of having people bestow praise, this too is incorrect and entails an offence.²

Even for monks there are dangers to living in the forest, but if thieves wish to steal the monks' belongings, for example, these dangers are not directed at the monks themselves. There is a story in the Vinaya of some monks who lived in a forest residence. After the rainy season retreat some thieves thought that the monks probably had been given valuable possessions and therefore chose to plunder their residence. For this reason the Buddha allowed monks who live in forest residences to store one of their three robes in a village and to be separated from this robe for up to six nights.³

The Bhikkhu Sangha Upholds a Code of Discipline

I have veered off from the main subject at some length because it seems these related topics are relevant to our discussion. However, I have not forgotten the main question.

The Buddha established the order of renunciants known as the bhikkhu sangha (and later also the bhikkhuni sangha) and laid down a very clear system and code for how these monks live their lives. One essential aspect to this system is the relationship to the wider society.

As mentioned earlier, when people encounter the term 'renunciant' they tend to think of separation from society, of escape from society, or even of severing connections to society. Renunciants in Buddhism, however, are not of this ilk. One can refer to them as walking the Middle Way.

¹ Vin. IV. 182-3.

² Vin. III. 101.

³ Vin. III. 263.

It is true that bhikkhus cut entanglements, free themselves from bonds, let go of attachments in relation to society, and go off in search of freedom. But they cannot live alone in remote forests as hermits, digging for roots and collecting fruit, without getting involved with anyone else (as in the case of Vessantara). And they cannot live as they please, without taking responsibility for society or for anyone else, as is true for some religious groups.

(Vessantara, and the Bodhisatta as he appears in other Jātaka tales, was still searching for the knowledge of awakening. He was trying to live in the best way possible, and was seeking the best form of escape, which was the best way of life discernible by people in that day and age. He was still in the process of trial and error.)

Why were the monks not able to live like other renunciants during the Buddha's time? The answer is simple: the Buddha laid down a disciplinary system or code (the Vinaya) containing training rules and dictating the monks' way of life and activities.

In regard to the relationship within the group of bhikkhus (and bhikkhunis) the Vinaya dictates that the individual monks (and nuns) live together as a community (*saṅgha*), which shares a single system of conduct. There are rules stipulating that the monks must gather to consider communal matters and to perform formal acts of the community (*saṅghakamma*) at least once a fortnight—to hold a fortnightly observance (*uposatha*) together.

In regard to the relationship between the monastics and the laity, the acquisition of material requisites depends on the faith of the laypeople. It is necessary to meet with people in the surrounding community at least once a day, when one goes out on almsround to receive food and one shares one's knowledge of Dhamma with the laypeople. (Other requisites are also dependent on the laity; if the laypeople do not offer a place to stay, for example, one must live at the foot of a tree—*rukka-mūla*.) There are many rules governing how the monks live their lives in relation to the external society. Any food to be

consumed, for example, must first be offered by the laypeople; and it is not possible to accumulate food or to store certain requisites past a defined time period.

The Buddha gave teachings revealing the true objective of the Vinaya in relation to society. The laity support the monks with the four requisites, and the monks teach the Dhamma to the laity, sharing with them the principles of living an excellent life (this is the dual teaching on material gifts and on the gift of Dhamma). When these two parties—the householders and the ‘homeless’ ones—live in mutual dependency (*aññoñña-nissitā*), the true Dhamma reaches fulfilment.¹

The spirit of these teachings is encapsulated in the Buddha’s exhortation: ‘Wander off to teach the Dhamma and proclaim the holy life for the welfare and happiness of the manyfolk, for the compassionate assistance of the world.’²

The monks do not go off to live in the forest in order to separate themselves entirely from society as is the case with some recluses and ascetics. Instead, they go in order to find a secluded environment conducive to meditation and development in the threefold training, to free themselves from the heavy yoke of mental defilement. They then have the freedom to act for the welfare and happiness of all people to their fullest capacity.

This established institution of the sangha is shaped by and endures as a result of a body of disciplinary rules or precepts which were set down by the Buddha and are followed collectively. The monastic community has a unified code for living. This community is not confined to a specific region, but rather it can grow and spread to different places. No matter where it exists, or in which time period, it remains the same, as it consists of this system guiding one’s life.

¹ It. 111-12. *Aññoñña-nissitā* may also be spelled *aññoñña-nissita*.

² Vin. I. 20-21.

The disciplinary code of training rules which is at the core of preserving this community is called the Pāṭimokkha.³ It is similar to those standard charters of regulations which people of later generations up to the present time have created in order to supervise their institutions, most notably a state constitution, which helps to direct the state or nation. The Pāṭimokkha, however, regulates the way of life for all individuals in the monastic community; it is a form of constitution for living. It does not regulate an institution itself in the same way as general constitutions. (The regulation of the monastic institution is found in the part of the Vinaya called the Abhisamācāra.)

It would be worthy of study to see if any of the contemporary religious traditions had something which resembled the Buddhist monastic community with the Pāṭimokkha at its core. As far as I know, however, such a social system originated within Buddhism.

The commentaries claim that establishing the Pāṭimokkha is the domain of a Buddha (*buddha-visaya*) and that higher virtue (*adhisīla*) is equivalent to living in accord with the Pāṭimokkha.²

It is also noteworthy that the Buddha selected the common term *saṅgha* for this community. It is a word that ordinary people in India at that time frequently used, for example: *sakuṇa-saṅgha* or *dija-saṅgha* (flock of birds), *kāka-saṅgha* (flock of crows), *miga-saṅgha* (herd of deer), *maccha-saṅgha* (shoal of fish), *hatthi-saṅgha* (herd of elephants), *siha-saṅgha* (pride of lions), *kimi-saṅgha* (clew of worms), or on higher levels: *sahāya-saṅgha* (group of friends), *sattu-saṅgha* (gang of enemies), *deva-saṅgha* (host of deities), and *brahma-saṅgha* (pantheon of Brahma gods). To add to this list are the *bhikkhu saṅgha* and the *bhikkhunī saṅgha* in Buddhism.

I have not found, however, this term used to designate a group of other renunciants (or even to refer to a group of brahmins). Therefore there are no such terms as *titthiya-saṅgha* (group of sectarians),

³ Also spelled Pātimokkha.

² E.g.: VinA. I. 244; VbhA. 413.

paribbājaka-saṅgha (group of religious wanderers), *tāpasa-saṅgha* (group of ascetics), *jaṭīla-saṅgha* (group of matted-hair ascetics), or *brāhmaṇa-saṅgha* (group of brahmins).

An exception to this is the term *isi-saṅgha* (group of hermits), which is found only in verse and usually refers to the bhikkhu saṅgha. It is used here however as a metaphor, referring to the bhikkhus as rishis (hermits; inspired sages). (The most prominent reference is: *jetavanaṃ isi-saṅgha-nisevitaṃ*: ‘Jetavana, where the sages dwell.’ The Buddha is often referred to as the ‘great sage’—*mahesi/mahesī*.) Sometimes the term *isi-saṅgha* is used to refer to a group of Silent Buddhas (*pacceka-buddha*). In one passage the Bodhisatta is referred to as the leader of hermits in the ordinary sense (*isi-saṅgha purakkhataṃ*).

Generally, when referring to a group of hermits (in a literal sense, not in reference to bhikkhus) the term *isi-gaṇa* is used, and this term is found in more than one hundred places in the scriptures (the terms *tāpasa-gaṇa* and *brāhmaṇa-gaṇa* are also used).

The term *samaṇa-saṅgha* is used in one passage, recounting the occasion when the brahman Sela praised the Buddha as resplendent among the group of samaṇas, which here refers to the group of bhikkhus.¹ The term *samaṇa-saṅgha* is not used in reference to other renunciants.

The life of Buddhist monks, which is guided by the Dhammavinaya, beginning with the moral code of the Pāṭimokkha, is a communal life in which every member takes part in ensuring the stability and peace of the community. The community supports the spiritual development of each member and is the source of Dhamma teachings for people in the surrounding society. The communal life of the saṅgha is marked primarily not by socializing (*samsagga*), but rather by communal harmony (*samagga*).

¹ This story is repeated in many places, e.g.: M. II. 147. The brahmins and renunciants of other religious traditions referred to the Buddha and to the bhikkhus as *samaṇa*.

In order to promote spiritual cultivation the monastic sangha provides solitude and privacy so that an individual can be self-reliant and develop his potential. A monk has the opportunity to live alone and to truly be one who ‘dwells in solitude’ (*eka-vihāri*).

In Buddhism living alone does not mean escaping from society, seeking isolation, and having nothing to do with others. Its importance lies in the area of spiritual development, beginning with finding physical solitude in order to practise meditation (to cultivate the mind and to develop wisdom), and to generate self-reliance. One avoids distressing and obstructive things, but one does not live a desolate and lonesome life. Instead, one discovers spiritual satisfaction. This is the way of living alone with freedom which makes a person ready to be a refuge for others.

Let me give you an example from the suttas to illustrate this point. The story goes that at one time a large group of monks went to the Buddha and told him about a bhikkhu named Thera, who normally lived alone (*eka-vihāri*) and who praised the merits of living alone.¹ The Buddha beckoned this monk and asked him in what manner he lived alone and how he praised the merits of living alone.

Ven. Thera replied that when he goes into the village for alms, returns to his dwelling, sits in a secluded place, and performs walking meditation, he engages in these activities alone.

The Buddha answered that indeed this is one way of living alone, but that true living alone is fulfilled by considering it in a broader way. That is, one does not hold on to the past, one is not anxious about the future, and one does not identify with anything in the present out of attachment. In this way living alone is brought to perfection.

In the *Saṃyutta Nikāya*, there is another sutta reference giving a profound spiritual interpretation of what it means to live alone.²

¹ S. II. 282-3.

² See: S. IV. 35-6.

Some Minor Observations in Regard to Scholarship

Let me touch upon an academic matter here. In this discussion I have started to quote the scriptures more frequently. This increased referral to scriptural sources reminds me of the comment by Dr. Martin alluded to earlier, that in academic conferences or academic papers he has encountered scholars who cite my words and teachings. It has made him uneasy when they do not quote me correctly.

Although this subject matter of bhikkhunis is not directly related, I myself recall hearing already twenty years ago of some scholars who had read my books, for example the volume *Buddhadhamma*, in which I extensively quote the scriptures, including the Tipiṭaka, the commentaries, the sub-commentaries, and other texts. They expressed the opinion that I am attached to the scriptures. I couldn't avoid hearing of their opinions, although I didn't voice any criticism.

Hearing of such claims it seems useful to shed some light on this matter. It is not a criticism, but rather an attempt to increase understanding. Those who voice these opinions will hear a different perspective and perhaps gain an understanding that is different from what they initially assumed.

First of all, I wish to distinguish between knowledge and opinions. Knowledge here means foremost information or facts, which are independent from our opinions and must be researched.

This is different from personal opinions. Sometimes opinions are simply views that match our feelings, or even our likes and dislikes.

Let me mention something about myself. According to my original disposition I like to search for knowledge and do not enjoy voicing opinions. If I want to know something, I try to investigate the subject in the most thorough, certain, and clear way. If I am not yet sure, I generally do not stop before the matter is clarified.

Some matters are truly baffling. One may investigate a matter exhaustively, and still it is not yet clear enough to provide a sense of certainty. The only solution is to leave the matter aside. (When this

happens to me, I wait until I can pursue my research. When writing the book *Buddhadhamma*, I sometimes spent an entire week researching a single word or passage, and still didn't reach a conclusion. I would then leave the matter and if it was still not clear I would mention this in the book.)

In reference to knowledge and the search for information, it needs to be as comprehensive, correct, exact, certain, and clear as possible.

In relation to the truth (*sacca-dhamma*), Buddhism teaches that whether a Buddha arises or not, the truth remains the same: the truth exists according to its own nature. But when one attempts to describe the truth, then one must say that the truth is such according to a particular person's teaching. For example, one states that this is the truth as taught by the Buddha Gotama, or this is the truth according to how oneself (or someone else) has seen or understood it.

If one wishes to describe the truth—the Dhamma—according to how the Buddha Gotama described it, one must investigate his teachings. These are his teachings and discourses; they are not our own teachings. Therefore we must refer to his words and teachings as they have been recorded in various places, in order to be confident and clear about what he said.

As I mentioned earlier, it is a matter of researching to the best of one's ability, in order to gain the most comprehensive, correct, and exact information, to know clearly what the Buddha taught. There is no need to cling to any texts. Having done this research one discovers in which locations specific matters are discussed and then takes these sources and shares them with others.

When one does this, one is provided with confirmation and proof of those things one wishes to know. And one can return to investigate things further and acquire more data, at one's convenience. This can also be of help to others; those people who seek the details of a specific matter don't need to waste time looking for them. This is a normal process.

I admit that in the sharing of this knowledge sometimes too much evidence is provided (I am also guilty of this), so that it is excessive or unnecessary. My personal thinking is that having done all this research, I can give this extra information as a bonus, so that it does not get lost. This is a matter of personal satisfaction, but some people see the material as overly dense. For this reason I have tried to leave or cut out certain material, and have not created footnotes to avoid the feeling of complexity or protractedness.¹

In this context of clarifying Dr. Martin's questions, sometimes I wish to provide evidence but see that it is only supplementary material and thus restrain myself and leave it out. Others however may feel it is a shame to leave out such material and ask that it be included. This is a matter of personal preference and varying opinions, and it may require compromise to some extent.

Here, if one wishes to paraphrase what others have said, or if one wants to engage in a form of debate and to disagree with what they say, one must look very closely at what precisely they have argued. Otherwise, one runs the risk of quoting them incorrectly. (Especially in the case that these individuals are no longer alive and don't have the opportunity to engage in debate, it is extra important to do justice to their words.)

When one is clear about what other people have said, then one can respond to their statements adequately. Whatever one's response is to these statements, it is important to make clear that one's own words are merely an expression of personal opinions. This constitutes a frank, open, and fair exchange of ideas.

The search for information and the thorough providing of proof has nothing to do with being attached to the scriptures; in fact these are two very different things. One can say that they are the opposite to one another. This is because a correct consideration of something

¹ [Translator: there are no footnotes in the original text. The sutta references, for example, are added in parentheses throughout the text.]

along with an acceptance of it requires a clear, precise, and adequate understanding. Furthermore one needs to quote or provide this information in line with how its author has stated it or in line with the evidence. It is not enough to simply give a recapitulation, which then becomes secondary information or a form of hearsay. (This matter of bhikkhunis is an example: I feel that we are still at the stage of researching information. Sometimes people are in too much of a rush to voice their opinions and to take sides, leading to hasty decisions.)

One should be well aware of the matter under consideration and speak from a clear understanding of it—to contemplate and to speak with knowledge. This does not mean that we always need to agree with that which we know; knowing about it clearly, we may still decide to reject it. The acceptance or rejection should be done with knowledge, however. We shouldn't accept or reject something without understanding it, or what is the worst, to accept or reject something because we don't understand it.

Grant me to say a little more about myself. As I said, I like to search for knowledge, and don't like to express opinions. It is not really a matter of liking or disliking—using these terms is simply a manner of speech. In fact it is a personal attribute or proclivity—an accumulated tendency (what in Pali is called *vāsanā*).

This attribute is such that when encountering something, my mind searches for knowledge, asking such questions as: 'What is this?' 'How does it work?' 'Where does it come from?' I am not inclined to voice an opinion. I am even less inclined to pass some form of judgement on something, or to try and direct others to accept it, reject it, or respond to it in some particular way.

As I said, this is my disposition. For example, about twenty years ago a doctor came to complain that he had made the effort for many years to enlist as my disciple, but he said that I didn't teach him: I didn't admonish him or tell him what to do. I had not thought of teaching him, since I didn't think of myself as anyone's teacher.

Generally, I speak according to the formal teachings. I take information, for example the Buddha's teachings on a specific topic, and share this with others, allowing each person to obtain this knowledge and to contemplate it himself. I pass on knowledge. If I speak about personal opinions, this is merely to offer a perspective which others can take and contemplate further themselves. One may say that I enable people to train themselves in the art of contemplation. I don't tell them what to think, what to do, or what to accept. This is my tendency to the point of being an innate disposition.

Although it's not necessarily my intention, one beneficial aspect of this tendency is it may help others to think independently, by analyzing the information or developing on the teaching, as opposed to following their own opinions or waiting to be told what to think.

Here, in this context, it is simply my normal disposition to instruct by citing principles or by providing certain information, without any specific intention to admonish anyone, in order to allow people to think for themselves. It is not a planned strategy.

By coincidence this way of teaching resembles the practice described in the commentaries, in reference to the *garudhamma* clause prohibiting *bhikkhunis* from admonishing *bhikkhus*. The commentaries state that a *bhikkhuni* should not put herself in charge, for instance by ordering or commanding *bhikkhus* to wear their robes in a particular fashion. Instead, when a *bhikkhuni* sees a *bhikkhu* behaving in a harmful way, she can speak in the way of providing information, say by saying thus: 'According to how the Elders have practised, they wear the robes in such a way.'

(This is the explanation in the commentaries. As for the detailed explanation from the *Pāṭimokkha* in the training rules of the *Vibhaṅga*, an exception to the rule is included: that if a *bhikkhuni* reprimands a *bhikkhu* by focusing on the essence and practical meaning of the teachings, and wishes to provide beneficial advice, there is no offence.)

The emphasis here on searching for the most comprehensive, clear, and precise information is connected to a subject I brought up earlier, of the relationship between knowledge and personal opinions. There are two ways of sharing information: first, one gives priority to knowledge, with personal opinions being merely supplementary; and second, one gives priority to personal opinions, with knowledge being supplementary or used to support these opinions.

As I said one should give priority to knowledge and search for data in the most comprehensive way. The example I used before is of figuratively placing a natural landscape in front of people so that they can see it for themselves. Both we and others can then see the landscape in its entirety. (Of course, not everyone can see it completely, because someone who has actually travelled to the place in question has had a more direct experience, witnessing it with its entire surroundings. In this case, honesty and a lack of hidden motivations help to a great extent.)

When we have accurately described the landscape we can then voice our opinions about it, saying how we like or dislike certain aspects. Others can listen to us, while both parties maintain an objective view. Others are completely free to establish their own opinions about the landscape, and to consider our opinions, which are simply supplementary to that which they witness in their own minds.

We must beware of giving precedence to our opinions. Some people voice their opinions, backing them up with limited and selective information. This information is simply extra or is sometimes used merely as an advocate for their opinions. The listener then is not in the clear—it is like being blindfolded and only being able to hear. One's knowledge is then determined and limited exclusively by the information given to us by the other person. Often the information is incomplete, inadequate, and unclear. And sometimes it is deliberately incorrect, inaccurate, or false, provided in order to appear genuine. Both parties then go astray.

We must be able to distinguish between knowledge and facts on the one hand, which are independent and must be researched, and opinions on the other, which are dependent on people and which are sometimes simply emotional reactions or personal likes and dislikes.

Here we give precedence to knowledge, emphasizing the search for and sharing of information in the most comprehensive, accurate, exact, and clear way possible. We try to scrutinize and organize our opinions to correspond with this knowledge, aware of how to apply it and to benefit from it.

Even if our conclusions are faulty or deficient, the information which has been examined is still independent of our opinions and is conducive to an increased understanding and to further contemplation.

The Bhikkhu Sangha Maintained Stability

Let us return to the subject of renunciants at the time of the Buddha. As we discussed, the Buddha established the monastic sangha by setting up a code of living for renunciants, who were called 'bhikkhus' (and later, in addition, the 'bhikkhunis'). By doing this the Buddha set up not only an ordered system for the Buddhist sangha, but he also had a potent influence on the wider sphere of renunciants (*samaṇa-maṇḍala*).

In any case, the Buddha's actions had a strong impact on the circle or class system of the brahmins, who were at the core of this system. As a consequence, the religion of Brahmanism had to make adjustments on a large scale, until it transformed into what we call Hinduism, which at a later stage also contained ordained monks. (Along with other forces, Brahmanism later expelled and eradicated Buddhism from India. In India today the caste system is reestablished, and it is home to numerous kinds of religious renunciants. The religious landscape there now resembles the India of pre-Buddhist times.)

Before we take a more thorough look at the sphere of renunciants, let us briefly review the system of Buddhism. As mentioned before, Buddhism changed the focal point and set new boundary markers, shifting from giving supreme importance to a creator God, to giving supreme importance to the Truth (Dhamma).¹

This teaching giving supreme importance to the Dhamma is a standard for measuring people according to truth and according to their actions (*kamma*: physical actions, speech, thoughts, and the way of conducting one's life).² Besides demoting the value of making sacrifices and propitiating divine beings, this teaching erases the significance of the caste system, which was purportedly created by Brahma, the supreme god. Instead, this teaching views people belonging to the social classes as simply human beings belonging to different professions, which can be chosen and switched if desired. In fact these groups are not 'castes' (*vaṇṇa*) but rather 'groups' (*maṇḍala*). No one is ultimately higher or lower than anyone else.

The Buddha venerated the truth to which he was awakened.³ He gave supreme importance to the Dhamma, he elevated the Dhamma, he honoured the sovereignty of the Dhamma (*dhammādhīpateyya*), and he set the wheel of Dhamma in motion.⁴ As a personal attribute, the ruler of a nation state should adhere to this key principle of the sovereignty of truth to help govern.⁵ After the Buddha had established the sangha as a support for all people, and when the sangha had begun to flourish, he also honoured the sangha.⁶ And at the time of his final passing away he said that after he had gone the monks should adopt the Dhamma and the Vinaya as their teacher.⁷

¹ D. III. 97.

² *Kamma*: Sanskrit = *karma*.

³ S. I. 139.

⁴ A. I. 109-10; A. III. 150-51; Ps. II. 159-60, 164.

⁵ D. III. 61.

⁶ A. II. 21.

⁷ D. II. 154.

In order for the Dhammavinaya—which was to replace the Buddha as teacher—to be stable and clear, the Buddha recommended that the monks gather in concord and participate in recitations (*saṅgāyanā*), inspecting and compiling the teachings. In this way the Buddhist teachings will endure for a long time, leading to the happiness and wellbeing of all people.¹

The story is recorded of how after the death of Nigaṇṭha Nātaputta, the Jain disciples broke up into factions and began to quarrel. They could not agree on the essential teachings and training rules of their order, claiming: ‘I know. You don’t know. I am practising correctly, you’re doing it wrong,’ almost to the point of killing each other. The Buddha thus gave a teaching on this subject in the Pāsādika Sutta.² And Ven. Sāriputta taught the Saṅgīti Sutta almost as if performing a recitation as an example.³ Three months after the Buddha’s final passing away the First Recitation took place, marking the replacement of the Dhamma and Vinaya as teacher.⁴

The Dhamma comprises the essential principles for all human beings. The Vinaya with the Pāṭimokkha at its core is the cornerstone and anchor for the monastic sangha, for protecting and governing the monks and nuns, to ensure order, virtue, and harmony. As described in the Gopakamoggallāna Sutta, this system of governing by way of Dhammavinaya does not require appointing someone to an inherited position:⁵

One day in the city of Rājagaha soon after the Buddha’s passing away, King Ajātasattu became suspicious of King Caṇḍapajjota of Ujjenī in the Avanti country and therefore ordered repairs to be done in the city. Ven. Ānanda, on his way for alms in the city, first visited the brahman Gopakamoggallāna at his workplace. The brahman invited

¹ D. III. 128.

² D. III. 117-18.

³ D. III. 210-11.

⁴ Vin. II. 284.

⁵ M. III. 7.

Ānanda to sit down on a seat provided. As they were talking, the brahman Vassakāra, the chief minister for the state of Magadha (the person responsible for destroying the Vajjī state) came by on inspection of the repairs and joined the conversation.

Vassakāra asked Ven. Ānanda whether there is a particular monk appointed by the Buddha as the leader (as a 'refuge'—*paṭisaraṇa*) to represent the Buddha after his death. Ānanda said there is not. Vassakāra went on to ask whether there is a monk appointed by the bhikkhu sangha or by the senior monks to perform this duty. Again, Ānanda replied there is not.

Vassakāra then asked what, in the absence of a leader, acts to bring about communal harmony in line with righteousness (*dhamma-sāmaggi*). Ven. Ānanda replied saying it is not that the sangha lacks a leader, but rather that the Dhamma is the leader. Vassakāra then asked for the meaning of this statement.

Ven. Ānanda explained that the Buddha prescribed a collection of training rules and set down the Pāṭimokkha. On the Uposatha days all of the monks in a given parish district gather together in unison. They then ask one of the monks who has memorized the Pāṭimokkha to recite it. If while chanting the Pāṭimokkha one of the monks recalls a transgression of a training rule, the monks at that meeting have him practise according to the instructions laid down by the Buddha. In this way, it is not the monks who dictate what should be done—it is the Dhamma that dictates.

Vassakāra then went on to ask whether at the present time there is a monk who is venerated by the other monks and treated as a leader. Ānanda said there is.

Vassakāra replied: 'Just a moment ago I asked you if there is a bhikkhu appointed by Venerable Gotama, by the sangha, or by the elders to act as leader after the Blessed One's passing away, and you said no. Now, you say there is. How should I understand this?'

Ven. Ānanda explained that the Buddha gave the teaching on the ten qualities instilling faith (*pasādanīya-dhammā*; qualities making for trustworthiness): virtuous conduct, learning, contentment, access to the jhānas, and access to the six kinds of supreme knowledge (*abhiññā*). The monks honour and rely on any bhikkhu who is endowed with these qualities (they look to this person as a leader or guide). Vassakāra accepted this answer and the conversation was continued with regard to other matters.

This is one way to explain how the Dhamma and Vinaya act as the teacher, and it emphasizes the importance of clearly and accurately preserving the teachings, including the clauses of the Buddha's prescriptions which are akin to laws. Because authority is not invested in an individual, it is essential to protect the teachings—to not allow the 'teacher' or 'guide' to vanish. Because the Buddha's disciples were true to this principle the sangha survived intact amongst all kinds of different renunciant traditions, on which I will speak more soon.

This gives you an idea of how Buddhism with the monastic sangha at its core was able to be transmitted, spread and grow, and survive for such a long time. Although it was beset by dangers which extirpated it from its original homeland, it survived in the wider world in a lasting and stable way.

(Seen from another perspective, however, the fact that Buddhism was such a clearly defined and stable group made it an easy target for hostile forces, which led to the demise of Buddhism in India.)

The Brahmins Instigated the Class System

The Hermits and Ascetics Are the Origin of the Samaṇa System

Let us now finally turn to the subject of renunciants and examine the Buddha's teaching in the Aggañña Sutta, where he discusses the evolution of human society up to the point of the establishment of four distinct groups (*maṇḍala*) of people with different vocations: *khattiya*, *brāhmaṇa*, *vessa*, and *sudda*.

This teaching is in opposition to the claims by the brahmins, who say that the god Brahma established this system (of the four castes), which is fixed according to a person's birth and is irrevocable.

As I stated earlier it is the brahmins themselves who can be regarded as the origin of the renunciants. Soon after the beginning of human society a group of people witnessed various social ills and forms of oppression. They aimed to desist from and transcend these ills and were thus called *brāhmaṇa*.¹ They left society and built hermitages in the remote forests, devoting themselves to meditation (to developing the *jhānas*). In this way they resemble hermits and rishis, but these early meditating renunciants did not cook their own food and rather relied on seeking alms from the towns and villages for their sustenance.

According to the commentaries some of these individuals who were unsuccessful in attaining *jhāna* entered the towns and there began to compose and teach sacred religious texts (*mantras*). The commentaries say that they composed the Vedas.²

Eventually, from being renunciants the brahmins (*brāhmaṇa*) became householders, had families, and passed down their rights via their children. They composed the Vedas which state that brahmins originate from Brahma. They classified people into the four castes, which they claimed is a fixed system. They claimed that the brahmin caste is in control of the sacred. They had exclusive rights over learning the Vedas and claimed to be the medium for the gods, who can change ill fortune to good through proper sacrifices. The entire society consisting of four castes depended on the brahmins.

¹ [In this context, note Dhammapada verse 388: 'Because he has discarded evil, he is called a *brāhmaṇa*.']

² This term 'mantra' (Pali: *manta*; Sanskrit: *mantra*) literally means 'contemplation,' 'analysis,' 'wise consideration,' and includes the speech resulting from such analysis. This last meaning resulted in the definition 'consultation,' 'advice,' and thus the word *mantin* ('counsellor,' 'minister').

In any case, some of those people who fled society and practised meditation from the time that the original brahman (*brāhmaṇa*) class was formed continued to live in the forests and maintained this renunciant way of life. Later, when the caste system was established, some members of all four castes became dissatisfied with and rejected their tradition and lifestyle, relinquished their householder status, and went forth into the homeless life, which swelled the ranks of renunciants. These people were referred to as a separate group—the group of renunciants (*samaṇa-maṇḍala*)—which was relatively independent from the caste system which controlled society.

But as I said, even though these individuals went forth and lived in the forest, they sometimes would get into arguments due to still holding on to their sense of belonging to a specific social class.

It has been said that the original renunciants who lived in the forest and practised meditation were hermits ('rishi'; Pali: *isi*). (One group of these renunciants eventually composed the Vedas and are the forebears of the brahmans—*brāhmaṇānaṃ pubbakā isayo mantānaṃ kattāro*). They are sometimes referred to as 'ascetics' (*tāpasa*)—these two terms are interchangeable.¹ They lived in hermitages² with leaf- or grass-roofed buildings and places for doing formal walking meditation.

These ascetics tied up their hair in a knot, twisting their braids into a shape or bun, which is referred to as a *jaṭā* ('braid,' 'matted topknot'), and they were thus called *jaṭila*.³

For this reason an individual renunciant may sometimes be referred to in the scriptures by any of these terms: *isi*, *tāpasa*, or *jaṭila*.⁴

¹ See, e.g.: JA. IV. 444; and for an easy example see the Vessantara Jātaka, in which the hermit Accuta is referred to alternately as 'Accuta *isi*' or 'Accuta *tāpasa*,' according to the particular passage.

² Pali: *assama*; Sanskrit: *āśrama*; English: ashram.

³ *Jaṭā* also means: 'unkempt,' 'untidy,' 'overgrown.'

⁴ E.g.: the Somanassa Jātaka (J. IV. 446; JA. IV. 444) and the Uddālaka Jātaka (J. IV. 299; JA. IV. 297). Vessantara went forth as a rishi and tied up his hair into a knot.

When the term *isi*, which refers to a forest renunciant, is found in the Jātaka texts it is used to designate rishis of the ancient times. If this term appears in other parts of the Tipiṭaka, especially the Sutta Piṭaka, it is usually accompanied by the term *bhūtapubbaṃ*, meaning that it is a story about the past, or it is preceded by the term *pubbakā* (i.e., *pubbakā isayo*—‘rishis of the past’), and refers to the forebears of the brahmans.

Otherwise, if used in the contemporary context of the Buddha’s time, it refers to the Buddha or to Buddhist monks. (If it refers to the Buddha then sometimes it is preceded by the term *mahā*—‘great’—as *mahā-isi* or *mahesi*.) In this case it is usually found in verses, since it is a short word and conducive to poetry, and it was borrowed from other sources as a metaphor. (Indians spoke about the rishis of old with great reverence and awe.)

The second term *tāpasa* is used only seldom in the Tipiṭaka; even in the Jātaka stories it occurs rarely. (The Jātaka stories in the Tipiṭaka are written in verse and thus the term *isi* was more convenient.) In the Jātaka commentaries, however, *tāpasa* is commonly used as a general term for renunciants.

I surmise that this is because the term *isi* was reserved for a special sense of reverence and holiness. The commentaries begin their stories with an individual going forth as a rishi (*isi*) and thereafter refer to him as an ascetic (*tāpasa*). Moreover, if the story contains an act of corruption, like dishonesty or deceit, the expressions *kuhaka-tāpasa* (‘deceitful ascetic’), *kūṭa-tāpasa* (‘false ascetic’), or *kūṭa-jaṭila* (‘false matted-hair ascetic’) are used.

The expressions ‘deceitful brahman’ (*kuhaka-brāhmaṇa*) and ‘deceitful bhikkhu’ (*kuhaka-bhikkhu*) exist, but I have not encountered the term *kuhaka-isi*, except in one passage (*kuhako ayaṃ isi*), but the individual in question is being falsely accused of doing evil by a jealous rival.¹

¹ ApA. 120.

The term *jaṭila* appears infrequently in the Tipiṭaka. Interestingly, it is used more often in the suttas than in the Jātaka tales. It is used in reference to people contemporary to the Buddha, specifically to the three brothers, with Uruvela-Kassapa at the head, who lived as matted-hair ascetics near Rājagaha, as well as in the story of the ascetic Keṇiya. (In the Apadāna there is a verse describing the ascetic Sumedha in which the term *jaṭila* is added into the text.) This term is more frequently used in the commentaries, for example in the Jātaka commentaries.

On this subject of scriptural terminology allow me to express the following conjecture:

In the ancient times, before the Buddha's era, the renunciants had fairly similar characteristics and thus the terms *isi* and *tāpasa* are used as the standard names.

Originally the term *jaṭila* was simply an epithet describing the way renunciants wound their hair into a topknot. Shortly before the Buddha's time, however, there were numerous kinds of renunciants, all with different ways of wearing their hair, shaving, and wearing clothes or robes. Having a topknot therefore became a special mark to distinguish one group of renunciants from the rest. The term *jaṭila* thus became a name for this specific group of renunciants.

Note also that of the terms used by ancient circles of renunciants, besides the terms *isi* and *samaṇa*, the Buddhists also adopted the term *munī* ('sage'), which was a term of high distinction in the ancient religions. The Buddha, however, would emphasize how he now used these terms with a distinctly Buddhist meaning and gave them unique definitions.

The term *isi* is generally used in verse and endowed with a sense of elevation and reverence. The term *samaṇa* is used relatively often, and it is frequently explained, as in the Dhammapada verses. And in the Buddhist scriptures, the term *munī* is given a special significance.¹

¹ This is evident for example in the Muni Sutta (Sn. 35-6) and the Moneyya Sutta (A. I. 273; It. 56).

The Bhikkhu Sangha Was Surrounded by Diverse Groups of Renunciants

Renunciants outside of the Buddhist faith are referred to collectively as *aññatitthiya*, which is sometimes translated as ‘members of other religious groups.’¹ Sometimes this Pali term is abbreviated to simply *titthiya*.

In the case that a renunciant of another religious tradition changed his mind, abandoned his faith, and asked to be ordained as a bhikkhu, he had to first live under a form of probation (*titthiya-parivāsa*)—a time of adjustment—for four months or until the sangha was satisfied. Then he could be ordained.

The matted-hair ascetics who worshipped fire (for instance Uruvela-Kassapa), however, were exempted from this rule, because they held a doctrine of action (*kamma-vāda*), a teaching of activity (*kiriya-vāda*): they believed in the law of kamma.²

Those individuals who went forth as renunciants were sometimes ordained with famous rishis, who had large groups of disciples. But many renunciants were ordained by themselves, for example: Prince Siddhattha went forth and determined the state of monkhood by himself; Ven. Mahā Kassapa, before meeting the Buddha, followed the life of a self-ordained renunciant; Vessantara entered the life as a rishi by himself; and the Silent Buddhas (*pacceka-buddhā*) are ordained as monks by themselves.

The principle activity for rishis is to develop the jhānas, and they find delight in jhāna as a source of enjoyment (*jhāna-kīlā*). Those who are skilled accomplish the eight concentrative attainments (*samāpatti*) and the first five of the six higher psychic attainments (*abhiññā*). They are resplendent in their powers and highly knowledgeable. Some of

¹ *Añña* (‘other’) + *titthiya* (‘holder of a religious doctrine’). [One also finds the translation ‘members of other sects,’ but this now sounds pejorative.]

² Vin. I. 71. Note that the commentaries interpret the term *jaṭilaka* as equivalent to *tāpasa*: VinA. V. 994.

them practise religious austerities, attempting to burn away their sins by various means of self-mortification. Sometimes their austerities are so potent that the devas—including Indra—are troubled. Others worship fire according to the brahmanistic doctrine and tradition. The brahmans believe that worshipping fire and bathing in sacred water helps to purge one's sins. (Fire worship was considered the leader or chief of all forms of sacrifice: *aggihuttañmukhā yaññā*.)

Vessantara, who was ordained as a rishi, lived by worshipping fire in the way of the brahmans. Many Jātaka stories describe how the Bodhisatta went forth as a rishi, developed the jhānas until he accomplished the concentrative attainments and the five higher psychic attainments, and was then reborn in the Brahma realms. (As the Bodhisatta, he was still searching, practising by trial and error; he hadn't yet realized the knowledge of awakening.)

From the ascetic tradition, Buddhism adopted the way of developing jhāna, particularly in the sense of using concentration to enhance the quality of the mind and to act as a basis for wisdom. If a person gets caught up with the concentrative and psychic attainments, however, he is considered to have gone astray and this conduct may end up being harmful.

As for ascetic practices of self-mortification, fire worship, and the making of sacrifices, the Buddha encouraged people to abandon these practices.

The Buddha sometimes preserved the original terms for these practices, especially when teaching on related social issues, but he gave them a new meaning. For instance, he gave a new meaning to the word *tapā*, as the mental effort to 'burn up,' i.e., to eradicate, the defilements, and as the fortitude in maintaining righteousness—to not allow oneself to nourish or indulge the defilements. This practice begins with keeping the Uposatha day precepts.

The significance of honouring and tending the sacrificial fire was changed to extinguishing the fires of mental impurity: greed, hatred

and delusion. Alternatively, a Buddhist can worship fire, but the term 'fire' here refers to those people whom one must look after and care for, similar to tending a real fire. Neglecting these people will lead to harm. They include parents, spouse and children, employees, and priests and brahmins. The Buddha adopted and changed the meanings of terms used by the brahmins in their fire worship, for instance: *āyuneyyaggi*, *gahapataggi*, and *dakkhineyyaggi*.¹ As for the making of sacrifices, the Buddha changed the meaning from propitiating the gods to assisting fellow human beings in society.

Note also that the renunciants referred to earlier didn't always forsake their families. In some cases both the husband and wife took ordination together, and occasionally the entire family went forth including the children.² All of the family members may have taken vows of chastity, as was the case with Vessantara, his wife Maddī, and their children Jāli and Kaṇhājinā. This was also true in the case of the bodhisatta Suvanṇasāma, who lived with his parents Dukūla and Pārikā.

A female renunciant is referred to as a *tāpasī*.³ There is, however, only one case in which this term is used in connection to a female renunciant, and that is to Suvanṇasāma's mother Pārikā. In other cases, including that of Maddī, the text simply mentions that the women are ordained as rishis (*isi*), but it does not use the term *tāpasī* as a title.

In the case that a husband and wife were ordained together (or even in some cases when an individual was ordained alone), they didn't always live a celibate life. An important example is that of the matted-hair ascetic Keṇiya of the city of Āpaṇa.

¹ [The original meanings for *āyuneyyaggi*, *gahapataggi*, and *dakkhineyyaggi* are 'consecrated fire prepared for receiving oblations,' 'fire of a householder who has precedence at a grand sacrifice,' and 'southern fire of the altar,' respectively.]

² Such an ordination is referred to as *saputta-bhariya-pabbajjā*—'going forth with wife and child.'

³ Older copies of the Thai Pali dictionary use the term *tāpasinī*.

This ascetic was a powerful and wealthy brahman. He went forth out of a desire to protect his wealth. He offered a tribute to the king and built a hermitage on a vast tract of land that he received as a royal gift. He had a large caravan of wagons for trade, a large retinue of attendants, and a collection of adolescent girl renunciants (female wanderers—*paribbājikā*—whom I will discuss below) who served his sexual needs during the nighttime.

I mentioned earlier how the ascetics who lived deep in the jungles, for example in the Himalayas, survived by gathering forest roots and fruits (*vana-mūla-phalāhāra*) or by eating fruits that had fallen naturally from the trees (*pavatta-phala-bhojana*). Only seldom did they venture out to the villages and towns to eat salty or fermented foods.

When they came into inhabited areas these ascetics would sleep at the base of trees or if they came alone they would sometimes stay in potters' sheds, which were spacious. If they came as a large group, sometimes numbering into the hundreds, they generally stayed in parks.

Some of these ascetics resided in forests not far from inhabited areas or in woodlands near villages in the countryside.¹ Whether they came occasionally or came repeatedly, they would receive alms from people who lived in the forests or who lived in villages by the frontier.

Things may have unfolded as described earlier in reference to the ancient rishis. Some of these early brahmans, who were not yet designated as a distinct social class, came to live in the towns and villages, abandoned the practice of *jhānas*, and created the mantras and wrote texts, which later developed into the Vedas. Eventually, these brahmans became householders, had families, and constituted the brahman caste.

At the same time, it is possible that some of the renunciants who came to live near the towns and villages maintained their renunciant, 'homeless' lifestyle and did not become part of the brahman caste.

¹ See, e.g., the Gandhāra Jātaka: J. III. 367; JA. III. 363.

These renunciants who stemmed from the original forest ascetics then began to live near the towns and villages in greater numbers. Both their lifestyle and their teachings would have evolved as time passed, and as they developed unique features new names for these different groups of renunciants would have been created.

One of the more common groups of renunciants is the group of *paribbājaka* (plural: *paribbājakā*), which is often translated as ‘wandering ascetic.’ (If they are women, they are called *paribbājikā*.)

Some of these wandering ascetics lived in forest hermitages, as was the case with the female wandering ascetic Kuṇḍalakesī, who asked to be ordained after pushing her bandit husband off a cliff to his death. There is even one unusual case in the Jātaka tales of a wandering ascetic who was ordained in the Himalayas. This ascetic, however, came often to the towns and was involved in helping to adjudicate legal matters.¹ There are probably close to one hundred occurrences in the scriptures of the term *isi-pabbajjā* and a few occurrences of the term *tāpasa-pabbajjā*.

Renunciants as a collective term are sometimes referred to as *tāpasa-paribbājakā* (‘ascetics and wanderers’). This term shows the relationship between those renunciants dwelling in the forest and those living in the towns. And it points to the source of all renunciants: the forest ascetics (or rishis—*isi*) are the origin of the wandering or town ascetics. Eventually, the wandering ascetics were also incorporated into the meaning of the term *tāpasa*.

Those renunciants who one can call ‘borderline’ or ‘halfway,’ for example those who lived on the borders of forests or on the outskirts of villages, and who followed both styles of practice (of forest and town ascetics), are sometimes referred to by both terms: *tāpasa* and *paribbājaka*. Sometimes they are referred to as *tāpasa*, but their disciples are referred to as *paribbājaka*. These terms are used interchangeably.

¹ Mahābodhi Jātaka: JA. V. 227.

Forest Renunciants and City Renunciants —Similarities and Differences

Let us look at some examples which may cast some light on the distinction between forest renunciants and the wandering or city renunciants.

The story in the Kumbhakāra Jātaka recounts how a husband told his wife that he was planning on going forth as a renunciant, but that his wife preempted him and was ordained in a monastery near the town as a wandering ascetic (*paribbājikā*). The husband was required to stay at home to look after their children. When the children were old enough to fend for themselves he was ordained as a rishi, also near the town.¹

Despite having contradictory versions, another story which helps elucidate this matter is that of Kuṇḍalakesī Therī:

According to the account in the Dhammapada commentary, after pushing her husband off the cliff, Kuṇḍalakesī wished to be ordained as a renunciant.² She went farther and farther into the forest until she came upon the hermitage of some wandering ascetics, where she asked to be ordained. (Normally, *paribbājakā* lived in an *ārāma*—a monastery. The individuals in this story may have been ‘borderline’ ascetics, as described above, or else the term *assama* (‘hermitage’) may have been added by accident. This is the only passage in the scriptures where ‘hermitage’ is used in connection with wandering ascetics. The term *ārāma* is frequently used.)

After she was ordained, Kuṇḍalakesī asked her companions what is the highest blessing or goal of taking ordination in their hermitage. They told her that she can choose: either she can practise the *kaṣiṇa* meditations in order to attain *jhāna*, or else she can study thousands of rhetorical passages until she is highly knowledgeable and then wander

¹ JA. II. 351.

² DhA. II. 215.

around in order to challenge other skilled debaters all over the Indian sub-continent. If anyone were to be able to answer her riddles and questions, however, then that person would be the victor: if he was a layman then she had to consent to be his wife; if he was a renunciant then she had to take ordination and live in his monastery or hermitage. (If she chose the former path of developing jhāna, she would be a *tāpasī*; if she choose the latter path she would be a *paribbājikā*.)

Kuṇḍalakesī said that she would not be able to endure the path of developing jhāna and so she chose the latter path as a wandering ascetic. She studied the art of dialectics until she became an expert and then travelled through various regions in India. She challenged all and sundry to debate, asking that they answer her questions. No-one was able to match her until she met Ven. Sāriputta, who was able to answer all of her questions. She, on the other hand, was unable to answer his. She accepted defeat and followed Sāriputta in order to visit the Buddha, from whom she asked to be ordained as a bhikkhuni. Later Ven. Bhaddā-Kuṇḍalakesā Therī was praised as being foremost of all the nuns in a swift awakening.

The account of Kuṇḍalakesī ordaining among the wandering ascetics is from the Dhammapada commentary. The commentaries to the Aṅguttara Nikāya and to the Therīgāthā, however, present a contradictory account and claim that she was initially ordained in a residence of the Nigaṇṭhā (the Jains).¹ She studied and understood their teaching but felt it was inadequate, so she studied on her own until she became highly skilled. She then wandered about challenging others to debate until she met Ven. Sāriputta and was ordained as a bhikkhuni, as described above.

One possible reason for this discrepancy is that the biographical account of this therī in the Tipiṭaka is very brief and is in the form of

¹ AA. I. 372; ThīGA. 101.

poetic verse; the terms used are concise and rather ambiguous.¹ Although the account here is not clear-cut, the Buddhist community at that time was probably well aware of her history. She herself says: ‘I entered the residence of those who wear white. Once I was ordained they took tweezers and pulled out all of my hair.’² Looking at this evidence, it is likely that she was ordained with the Nigaṇṭhā as described in the Aṅguttara and Therīgāthā commentaries.

In the Therīgāthā, Ven. Kuṇḍalakesī also speaks about herself, but here too it is in verse and without offering any specific details: ‘Earlier, I pulled out my hair, sucked on tartar, wore one piece of cloth to cover my body, and wandered around.’³ The Therīgāthā commentaries explain that these were customs of the Nigaṇṭhā.

From a broad perspective, I mentioned earlier how the term *paribbājaka* is sometimes used to cover all renunciants who live in the towns and villages. (The Nigaṇṭhā were an important group of renunciants who are usually referred to by their own distinct name.) One can thus say that Kuṇḍalakesī was ordained as a *paribbājikā*, but of the Nigaṇṭhā order. Using this interpretation the three commentaries do not in essence contradict one another.

Let me add here that the terms *nigaṇṭha* and *paribbājaka* get mixed up in the scriptures. Take for example the story of Saccaka-Nigaṇṭha, which describes a male Nigaṇṭha (*nigaṇṭho*) and a female Nigaṇṭha (*nigaṇṭhī*) who travelled in different parts of India.⁴ Both of them were highly skilled in debate. (This was the way of practice for wandering ascetics.) They finally met one another in the city of Vesālī. The Licchavī lords were delighted by these two and organized a debate between them. The debate ended in a draw.

¹ Ap. 562-3.

² The Thai translation of the Tipiṭaka add the word *paribbājikā*, but this term is absent in the original Pali.

³ Thīg. 107-108. *Lūnakesī paṅkadharī ekasāṭī pure carim*.

⁴ MA. II. 271.

The Licchavī lords were greatly impressed by the skill of these two. They thought that if they were to have children, the children would be doubly intelligent and skilled. They therefore asked that these two remain in Vesālī, organized a wedding ceremony, and promised to be their patrons.

This couple lived together and had four daughters: Saccā, Lolā, Paṭācārā,¹ and Ācāravatī.² They also had one son named Saccaka, who was the youngest.

All four daughters learned the art of dialectics until they were highly skilled. Their parents encouraged them to travel about challenging others in debate, as they had formerly done, with the stipulation that if someone were to be able to answer their questions successfully they must marry him if he is a householder or be ordained with him if he is a renunciant. All four of them travelled as wandering ascetics engaging in debate until they met and were defeated by Ven. Sāriputta and were then ordained as bhikkhunis.

As for the youngest child Saccaka, he had exceptional intelligence. He lived in Vesālī and was a teacher of the arts and sciences for the children of the Licchavī lords. Because of his great proficiency as a debater he developed the conceited view that no renunciant or brahman, including the Buddha—not to mention an ordinary person—would be able to compete with him in debate. Even pillars trembled when he walked by!

One day he said that he would go and converse with the Buddha. At will, he claimed, he would use his reasoned arguments to drag, haul, and beat the Buddha, who would surely be at his wit's end. He took a large group of Licchavī nobles with him to debate with the Buddha. In the end, however, it was he who was at wit's end, and he had to admit

¹ She is distinct from Ven. Paṭācārā Therī, who was one of the foremost bhikkhuni disciples, sitting at the Buddha's left-hand side. The commentaries to the Jātakas state this daughter's name was Paṭicchādā.

² The name of this last daughter is sometimes rendered as Avadhārikā, Sivāvatikā or Silāvatakā.

that he had been merely blustering, speaking impetuously and speaking untruths. He admitted defeat and invited the Buddha along with the bhikkhu sangha to have a meal at his house.¹

Although the scriptural accounts of these stories, like that of Ven. Bhaddā-Kuṇḍalakesā Therī, sometimes vary, they give us an insight into the life of renunciants during the Buddha's time period.

Wandering Ascetics in the Towns and Villages

Let us try and give an overview of the city and town renunciants as described in the scriptures to help refine our understanding:

The term *paribbājaka* has a nonspecific, very broad meaning, encompassing all kinds of renunciants living in inhabited areas. But if many renunciants gathered to form a large group, say because they followed a famous teacher or leader, they developed into an important religious tradition in their own right with a specific name that was known far and wide. They were then usually referred to by this name, as in the case of the Nigaṇṭhā order.

Those renunciants who lived in small groups or lived scattered about on their own are referred to simply by the term *paribbājaka*. These individuals or smaller groups of renunciants possessed the distinctive attribute of wandering around freely, for example by going around debating or exchanging ideas, as we saw in the preceding stories. This was the custom until people associated the term *paribbājaka* with these so-called 'wandering ascetics.'

Because these renunciants moved about freely, were proficient in knowledge, and wandered about engaging in reasoned debates, Western Indologists sometimes have referred to them as 'sophists,' as an analogy to ancient Greece.

When more and more people asked to be disciples of an important teacher, a monastery, or monastic tradition, was established (referred

¹ M. I. 227-8.

to as an *ārāma*, similar to a Buddhist monastery). Some of the smaller monasteries grew in size, but their residents were still called *paribbājaka*, as was the case with the teacher Sañjaya,¹ with whom Venerables Sāriputta and Moggallāna lived before encountering Buddhism.

Even members of the high princely caste wished for their daughters to study various religious doctrines and thus enrolled them in monasteries of the wandering ascetics. This was the case with the female wandering ascetic who was the mother of Ven. Sabhiya Thera. In her case, however, after entering the monastery one of the ascetics had improper sexual relations with her. When the other residents found out that she was pregnant they chased her out of the monastery, and she had to give birth in a public rest-house (*sabhā*) along the road.² Acting as an escape from the strictly defined caste system and offering an opportunity to study may have been a role of the circle of renunciants at that time. But because of the unregulated freedom of these renunciants, the women who came to study took a risk.

And as mentioned above, there existed the custom that if a woman engaged in a religious debate and lost, she had to marry the person she lost to if he was a householder, or enter the monastery and religious tradition of the person if he was a renunciant (even if the woman was already ordained in another tradition).

This custom seems to indicate that most of these religious debaters were men. And it is strange that there is no mention of what happens when the woman renunciant is the victor. It is probably safe to assume that at that time there were comparatively few women renunciants.

As one can see from this discussion, at the time of the Buddha there were many different kinds of renunciants and ascetics, both those who lived in the forests and those who lived near the towns. Some of these individuals lived alone, while others went forth with their entire

¹ In the Burmese editions he is referred to as Sañchaya.

² This is the origin of her son's name.

families, including wife and children. Most of these renunciants were celibate, but there were a considerable number who weren't. Some kept the vow of celibacy loosely, because they didn't have a clear disciplinary code.

Some renunciants lived in small groups while others lived in large monasteries with a famous teacher, whose disciples numbered into the hundreds or thousands. Some renunciants were ordained by themselves, while others asked for ordination from a teacher. And their doctrines and practices varied greatly.

I have discussed the forest ascetics at length; let us look more closely at the renunciants who lived in inhabited areas, who are referred to by the umbrella term *paribbājaka* ('wandering ascetics').

It helps to separate the different kinds of wandering ascetics. Several texts help with this analysis.¹ Here is a general summary:

There were two kinds of wandering ascetics: those who wore clothes and those who did not:

1. Renunciants who wore clothes (*channa-paribbājaka*): for example those living in the monastery of Sañjaya, including Upatissa (Ven. Sāriputta) and Kolita (Ven. Mahā Moggallāna). They normally wore white robes.
2. Renunciants who did not wear cloths (*nagga-paribbājaka*; *acchanna-paribbājaka*): these can be further divided into two groups:
 - 1) *Acela*: naked ascetics, who wore no clothing at all.
 - 2) *Ājīvaka*: half-naked ascetics, who covered the top-half of their bodies with one piece of cloth tucked under their armpits; the lower half of their bodies remained uncovered.

¹ The texts which are particularly helpful are the *Sāratthadīpanī* *Ṭikā* [volume III. 241 of the Burmese edition] and the *Silakkhandhavagga-abhinava* *Ṭikā* [volume II. 368 of the Burmese edition]. See also: VinṬ.: *Mahāvagga-ṭikā*, *Mahākhandhakam*, *Aññatitthiyapub-bavatthukathā-vaṇṇanā*.

Because those ascetics who did not wear clothing are usually referred to directly as *acelaka* or *ājīvaka*, generally speaking the term *paribbājaka* refers to those ascetics who did wear clothes.

The Nigaṇṭhā considered it important to cover the body and they would cover one half of their body with a single white piece of cloth. But differing from the Ājīvakas, who covered the top half of their bodies and were naked below, the Nigaṇṭhā followers covered the front half of their bodies and left their back sides naked. (The Ājīvakas were naked over half their bodies; the Nigaṇṭhā were naked over one side of their bodies.)

There is a story of the bhikkhus discussing how the Nigaṇṭhā are better than the Acelakas—at least the Nigaṇṭhā have a sense of shame and cover the front half of their bodies, unlike the Acelakas who go around completely naked.¹ The Nigaṇṭhā heard them and argued that they didn't cover their bodies out of shame, but rather in order to avoid coming into contact with dust particles, which they considered to be a form of life,² and preventing them from falling into their alms bowls (a practice of non-violence).

These days when there are references to the Jains in India most people will think of them as naked, or if one has more knowledge of this religion one will say there are two groups: those who wear clothes and those who are naked. In the Buddhist scriptures, however, there is no mention of Jains who are naked—there is only mention of those who cover the front half of their bodies, as mentioned above.³

There is no mention in the Pali texts about the two Jain orders—the Digambara sect, who are naked, and the Svetambara (Śvētāmbara) sect, who dress in white—until the term *digambaro* appears in the

¹ DhA. III. 488.

² This is similar to seeing the body as bound to the life-faculty (*jīvitindriya*).

³ The term *nagga-nigaṇṭha* is found at UdA. 338, which may lead some people to think that this refers to naked Nigaṇṭhā, but in fact this term refers to two groups of people: the naked ascetics and the Jains.

Abhidhānappadīpikā, which is a relatively recent text.¹

Historical texts say that an important split occurred in the Jain community while some of the followers travelled towards the south of India during the reign of King Chandragupta (162-186 BE; 381-357 BC; King Asoka's grandfather), eventually resulting in the two distinct Jain orders in either the year 70 CE or the year 73 CE. Those followers who had travelled south felt it was essential to be naked and they believed that any images of their teacher should depict him as naked. (This is probably why the Jain sculptures in the Ellora Caves are of naked figures.)

The Practice of Non-violence

The Jains gave great importance to the teaching on non-violence (*ahimsā*). Take for example the story described above, in which the Jain followers claim that they don't cover the front of their bodies out of a sense of shame, but rather to cover their almsbowls (they would have said that if they still felt shame, this would indicate an attachment—the term *nigaṇṭha* literally means 'free from all attachment'). They wore a robe in front in order to prevent particles of dust from falling into their bowls. (One may wonder why they didn't simply use a small cloth to cover only the bowls.) They believed that these particles are a form of life, which would be harmed or destroyed by falling into the bowls (probably by being crushed or crippled when mixed with food).

This is an extremely refined behaviour. Other examples include the Jain practices of covering their mouths with a cloth for fear of killing any creatures, refraining from bathing, using a specially designed broom to sweep the path ahead while walking, and refraining from lighting a fire.

¹ A Pali dictionary of synonyms, written by Ven. Moggallāna in Sri Lanka around 1700 BE (1157 CE).

From the perspective of the Jains, the practice of Buddhists, including that of the bhikkhus, must appear as being very lax. Buddhists, however, see the Jain practice as extreme, unreasonable, and incorrect. Take for example refraining from lighting a fire—one doesn't need to speak of lighting an actual flame—even turning on an electrical light at home has consequences. Insects are attracted to the light and then geckos come to eat the insects. Turning on the light is thus a cause for insects to die, and thus by keeping this principle strictly, one shouldn't turn on the light. Or if one does, then one should chase away the geckos. But then there would be people who may argue that chasing away the geckos and keeping them from having a meal is a form of oppression!

If one investigates closely one sees that simply by living one helps many creatures to exist, and at the same time one's life is the cause for other creatures to die. If one truly wants to refrain from endangering any other living creature there remains only one solution: of ending one's life. If one wishes to keep the principle of non-violence absolutely, then the logical conclusion is to kill oneself!

Certainly, Buddhism teaches non-violence, but it uses intention as the criteria for judging right action. If an action is beneficial and righteous, and our intentions behind it accord with the true objective of this action, without harbouring any intent to oppress or endanger someone else, it is not wrong.

At the same time, in order to prevent indifference and negligence—by having people claim that they had no intention—which is destructive in another way, the Buddha added the principle of heedfulness, so that people act with care and circumspection. We should act after a thorough consideration of the circumstances, so that we avoid any unintentional harm or injury, either as side effects, collateral damage, or after effects. When one's intentions are pure and one has wisely examined the circumstances from all angles, one proceeds to act with caution. Then, whatever happens, happens.

Once one has acted with care one should review the consequences of the action. Was there anything harmful, faulty, or lacking about it? This way one makes adjustments so that future actions are harmless and fully beneficial. This is another level of heedfulness—of being heedful in one’s investigation. In this way there will be continual improvement and development. One won’t get bogged down and find oneself at a dead end.

The factor of intention has an important bearing on everyday forms of practice in regard to harmlessness. For example, in Buddhism, the bhikkhus must make a special effort to take care and avoid any form of oppression; yet they are permitted to eat meat if there is no intention to kill or to have someone else kill on their behalf.

Similarly, there is the clause in the Vinaya which states that there is no offence and there is nothing wrong for a monk to have a lay disciple take meat leftover from a lion’s kill and prepare a meal. And there is the story described earlier of Ven. Uppalavaṇṇā Therī: some robbers had stolen and slaughtered a cow and took the meat into the forest to eat. The robber chief saw the venerable elder sitting in meditation, led his gang another way, and kindly placed some meat near to where she was sitting. The venerable elder took this meat and even went to offer it to the Buddha.

Whoever claims that the monk eating the lion’s meat is a cause for the lion to kill the deer, or claims that the venerable therī’s eating of the meat is a cause for the robbers to kill the cow, does not see the link between cause and effect.

One should contemplate these stories in order to understand the allowance for monks to eat meat. Some people, however, go even further, claiming that the lion may still feel possessive over the meat it has left behind—it may wish to return and resume feasting. If we eat this meat then it is a form of theft and oppression. The Buddha didn’t want us to get confused by this way of thinking.

Before long, by thinking in this way, the monks would start having all sorts of worries. If they were to receive some food, go off to attend to an errand, and then return to find that ants have begun to nibble away at the food, they may think: 'The food now belongs to the ants! If I chase them away then I am stealing their food!' This way of thinking is excessive.

I have told the story before of the time in the recent past when environmental concerns were beginning to take center stage, and ecological issues began to link up with issues on human rights (extending also to animal rights). A graduate student in America secretly released a dolphin from an animal research lab and was arrested on grounds of stealing. He argued that a dolphin should have rights concerning its own life and he thus set it free—he didn't steal anything. In the end, however, he was convicted on charges of theft. This is an example of how people can have different opinions. Sometimes they are both correct, but in different aspects. It is then up to specific individuals involved to reach a settlement.

If the individuals in such a case are rulers or are in a position of social leadership, and they are virtuous, they should consider to what extent human rights apply and to consider the wellbeing of the animals, to minimize their suffering. They then need to apply existing laws, which address matters of personal property, to come to a conclusion on this matter.

A person may enter a forest and suddenly be attacked by a tiger, who plans to eat him. No matter how much the person asserts his human rights to live, the tiger doesn't listen—it simply eats him. Tigers have not made any agreements with people and they don't accept human conventions. Human beings, however, can settle on mutual agreements and establish a code of behaviour or a set of laws, which state that people have specific kinds of rights, for specific reasons, and with specific boundaries of application.

These social conventions are established because in truth, according to nature, nothing truly belongs to anyone. People feel possessive towards say land and employees, but these things are not truly in anyone's possession. Ultimately, they are just natural phenomena. Even the 'I' or the 'we,' which is considered the owner of these things, doesn't exist in any substantial way. Therefore, people must establish a disciplinary code in order to manage material possessions, with wholesome intentions and with wisdom, which recognizes the significance and objective of these things.

Although moral codes and laws are simply agreed-upon social conventions, devoid of any true or ultimate existence, people engage with them, by either observing or disregarding them, by way of intention. And intention is a natural phenomenon that truly exists. Spiritual training consists of teaching people how to generate and to act on wholesome intentions, which are free from greed and hatred, and endowed with kindness and compassion. In some cases, however, people do not have bad intentions, but they still cause harm through a lack of understanding. Therefore, one must also dispel delusion, by carefully developing wisdom. Wholesome behaviour is determined by a person's level of wisdom.

When people have established laws and conventions, one must then give consideration to people's intentions. It is here that moral discipline is linked with truth.

These are general principles. In the case of eating or not eating meat, when circumstances change and new, subtle factors come into play, for example in relation to different time periods and cultural understandings, one should discuss this subject with kindness and in a reasoned way. One shouldn't take the issue so seriously that even speech no longer contains the quality of non-violence.

The principle of non-violence is seen as a key attribute of both Jainism and Buddhism. If one looks at stories in the texts, however, one sees that although the principle of non-violence was important at

the time of the Buddha, it was not considered the most prominent teaching in the Nigaṇṭhā doctrine. The most important principle for the Nigaṇṭhā was the practice of austerities (*tapa*), for instance by pulling out the hair each strand at a time, as described by Ven. Bhaddā-Kuṇḍalakesā Therī.

The Nigaṇṭhā believed that it is impossible to arrive at happiness by way of happiness; on the contrary, happiness is only achieved through pain. They also taught that any happiness or suffering experienced by a person is a consequence of past karma.¹ Accordingly, they believed that by bringing an end to all previous karma by way of austerities, and by not producing any new karma, they would end all karma. The end of karma would result in the end of pain; the end of pain in the end of feeling (*vedanā*); and the end of feeling would result in the waning and end of all forms of suffering. For this reason, the Nigaṇṭhā would practise austerities with great fervour and undergo intense pain.

Take for example the conversations which the Buddha had with members of the Nigaṇṭhā order:²

The Buddha said how he himself before his awakening had the thought that happiness cannot be reached by way of happiness, and that it can only be reached by way of pain. For this reason he went forth and practised extreme austerities with great zeal, experiencing severe pain, but all in vain. He realized that this is not the correct way and thus abandoned these austerities. And by recalling the happiness that is free from sensuality and is wholesome, he proceeded on that path of happiness leading to awakening.³

The principle of non-violence was probably widely observed among the entire circle of renunciants, and it is highly praised in the Buddhist

¹ [In non-Buddhist contexts, as is the case here, I use the Sanskrit spelling of 'karma.' This may not be ideal, but it helps to highlight the distinction between Buddhist conceptions of kamma and the beliefs by other religious traditions related to this principle.]

² M. I. 92-4; M. II. 214.

³ M. II. 93.

teachings. One of the main reasons why it is given such emphasis in Buddhism is because of the disagreement with Brahmanistic views and practices. Buddhism teaches to abandon animal and human sacrifices. The story in the Candakumāra Jātaka, for example, is all about the evils of religions that promote sacrifices.¹

There is a verse here saying how non-violence, rather than the making of sacrifices, leads to heaven: ‘See here, Koṇḍañña, you should offer gifts; non-violence towards all beings is the path to heaven; the path to heaven is not achieved by sacrificing one’s child.’

In a similar vein, the word *ariya* (‘noble’) is given a new meaning in Buddhism. Rather than referring to nobility and eminence stemming from the family or caste in which one is born, it refers to virtues or spiritual qualities that a person generates within.

It was the brahmins who espoused the doctrines of nobility by birth and the efficacy of sacrifices. The Buddha thus gave the term *ariya* a new meaning, as can be seen in this Dhammapada verse:

*A person is not noble in that he harms living beings; because of non-violence, by not harming living beings, that person is called noble.*²

The Austere Practices of the Ancient Brahmins Were Uncomplicated.

New Brahmanistic Practices Were Highly Elaborate

The austere practices (*tapa*) were first performed by the brahmins, who used these as a way to burn away sins and to purify themselves. And these brahmins monopolized these practices, claiming that only members of the brahmin caste are able to attain purification—they alone are entitled to practise austerities.³ Members of other castes were considered base and had no right to practise austerities. Those brahmins who were strict despised the *samaṇas*, and classified them

¹ J. IV. 132.

² Dh. verse 270.

³ [Saṃyutta Īkā: 1/193/274.]

as lower than the menial class (*sudda*). (They probably considered them as outside of the caste system. I mentioned earlier how strict brahmans showed contempt for the Buddha as being a *samaṇa*.)

You have probably come across the Brahmanistic teaching which recounts how the god Brahma created the four castes from different parts of his body: the brahmans were created from his mouth, the rulers from his arms, the merchants from his thighs, and the menial workers from his feet.

One of the texts, however, describes a more detailed teaching, which claims that the brahmans were created from Brahma's mouth, the rulers from his bosom, the merchants from his navel, the menial workers from his knees, and the *samaṇas* from the tops of his feet.¹

The brahmans considered themselves the elite social class. It was their responsibility to announce the edicts issued by Brahma (it seems fair to say they considered themselves the representatives of Brahma). They interpreted and taught the Vedas, worshipped fire, and conducted the sacrifices. They thus thought themselves the most capable of being purified, transcending mental impurity, and becoming one with Brahma (*brahma-sahavyatā*). Other spiritual practices were not considered very important, but in the case of brahmans who went forth as rishis, they took on some additional austere practices (*tapa*) in order to burn away evil.

The austere practices were probably considered by the brahmans as supplementary to such regular practices as worshipping fire, or they were used as formal procedures bestowing the attributes of a renunciant. The austere practices of the brahmans were thus not very severe and were not designed to create intense pain. The practices most often mentioned include: sleeping on the ground (covered by a layer of grass); fasting (this is connected to the term *uposatha*, the meaning of which in Buddhism was changed to keeping the observance day precepts); submerging oneself in water three times a

¹ SA. II. 397.

day (morning, noon, and evening) in order to wash away sins; and the fivefold practice (the five practices using fire, for example maintaining the southern fire of the altar—*dakshināgnī*—and the householder’s fire—*gārhapatyāgnī*). In addition, there are the practices of sleeping on thorns or nails; standing solely on one’s tiptoes or one’s heels; and sitting exclusively in a foetal position—if one moves one then hops in this position.

The pre-Buddhist concept of *uposatha* referred directly to fasting, and to fasting for the entire day. This differs from the Buddhist adaptation of this term, which came to refer to keeping the eight Uposatha day precepts, which include fasting after noon. This is an austerity in the sense of burning away defilements: a person develops self-control, does not indulge in pleasure, does not succumb to desires and defilements. A person lives in moderation and walks the Middle Way, which with wisdom one recognizes as a true blessing. It is not an austerity in the original sense of torturing one’s body or of burning away sin by self-mortification.

All told, rishis have a mystical appearance, as is evident in the Ceti hunter’s description of the rishi Accuta: ‘Accuta lives in that hermitage, his teeth stained, his hair encrusted with dirt. He looks distinctive, becoming of a brahman. He has a hook for collecting fruit and a ladle for scooping the ingredients for worshipping fire. He twists his hair into a topknot, wears a tiger skin, lies above the ground, and venerates Agni.’¹

The brahmins basically despised the *samaṇas* for being outside of the caste system and outside of the way promoted by the Vedas. Some of the *samaṇas* rejected the Vedas outright and claimed the Vedas have no authority in respect to making sacrifices.

For these kinds of renunciants, austerities were not simply supplementary practices; they were the main or the only practice leading to the highest spiritual goal. These *samaṇas* thus developed or

¹ J. VI. 531-2. He gave this description when showing the way to Jūjaka.

expanded the austere practices, both in number and in intensity. To perform these, tremendous effort and endurance of physical pain was required. The practice of non-violence was included in these austere practices.

As I mentioned earlier, the Nigaṇṭhā followed the doctrine of not producing new karma, along with ending all old karma through austerities. They therefore were highly committed to austere practices. But the Acelakas and the Ājīvakas also performed great austerities.

The goals of these renunciants were not always the same. Generally, they believed in the principle derived from the ancient rishis, that austerities burn off evil deeds and lead to purification, and that they generate inner powers. (The term ‘power’—*teja*—here is connected to *tejo*, which means ‘fire.’ One generates an inner fire or inner power.) Some of the rishis practised austerities to the extent that they caused distress to the devas, all the way to the Brahma realms. There are many such stories in which Indra had to come down to earth and sort things out. Some of the renunciants practised austerities for the sole purpose of being born in heaven.

Let us examine some of these austerities. Some of them have to do with eating, others with clothing, lodgings, and general way of life.

As described above by Ven. Bhaddā-Kuṇḍalakesā Therī, the Nigaṇṭhā would pull out all of the hair of newly ordained members with tweezers.

For the Ājīvakas the ceremony of removing hair at the ordination was an important event. In the story of the Ājīvaka named Jambuka, at his ordination the other members of this order buried him in a hole, with only his head above the surface of the ground. They then placed two planks over his shoulders, sat on these, and took palm splinters to remove all his hair.¹

¹ DhA. II. 55.

Jambuka later met the Buddha, listened to the Dhamma, and realized arahantship. After his ordination Ven. Jambuka Thera told his story: ‘I upheld the practices of smearing myself with oil, fouling myself with dirt and scurf; I ate once a month; I pulled out my hair and beard; I stood on one leg; I abstained from sitting down; I ate dried excrement; I did not welcome food which people invited me to eat. I practised this way for fifty-five years ... and then met the Blessed One as my refuge.’¹

People tend to be interested in strange austerities, which are startling or shocking, for example the practice by the Nigaṇṭhā of standing on one leg and never sitting down. The Buddha himself went to converse with these individuals about their practices.²

Many renunciants practised like bats, gripping branches with their legs and hanging upside down. An example is the brahman Kuhaka.³ The Acelakas would eat standing up. Instead of washing their hands with water, they would lick them clean with their tongues. They defecated standing up as well, and instead of using bits of wood to clean themselves they would wipe their behinds with their hands. (Thai people about sixty years ago still used bits of wood to clean their backsides. When disciples would go to pay respects to their teachers and preceptors at the beginning of the Rains they would offer bits of wood along with other gifts. Later, people used straw paper.)

The commentaries explain that these renunciants believed that wood is a living creature, and therefore didn’t want to injure it (similar to how the Nigaṇṭhā believed that dust possesses life.)⁴

Following is an abbreviated list of standard austere practices: abandoning social manners; licking one’s hands; receiving food at a single household; living on only one mouthful of rice; receiving food at

¹ Thag, verses 283-6.

² M. I. 92-3.

³ DhA. IV. 152.

⁴ MA. II. 43.

two households; living on two mouthfuls of rice; eating food that has been kept for one day, two days, etc.; eating food that has been kept for one week; eating only once a fortnight; eating only pickled vegetables; eating only forest roots and fruits; eating only fruit that has fallen naturally; wearing garments made from bark; wearing tiger skins; wearing garments made of *kunai* grass; wearing garments woven with human hair; pulling out the hair and beard; only standing up and refraining from sitting down; standing on one's tiptoes or heels; sleeping on thorns; sleeping on a mound of earth; smearing oneself with dust, sweat and scurf; living out in the open; eating dung; refraining from using cold water; and submerging oneself in water three times a day.¹

These austerities (*tapa*)² like those above are also referred to as 'deeds that are difficult to do' (*dukkha-kārikā*), which in Buddhism are classified as forms of self-mortification (*atta-kilamathānuyoga*), of creating unnecessary and fruitless hardship for oneself. It is also possible to refer to these austerities as specific religious practices (*vata*), and in some cases as forms of moral conduct (*sīla*).

An explanation for how they are forms of moral conduct (*sīla*) is that they are customary practices for people, ways of refraining from things that are considered inappropriate, practices to be upheld constantly and not transgressed. They are religious practices (*vata*) in that they are strict forms of conduct that run counter to common behaviour; they have distinctive features and procedures which are undertaken to reach a spiritual goal.

The expression 'undertake' is a translation of the Pali word *samādāna*. Sometimes this word is used to replace the term *vata*, for example in the Tipiṭaka there are some places where 'sectarian practices' (*titthiya-vata*) are referred to as *titthiya-samādāna*.

¹ A similar list is found in many places, e.g.: D. III. 40-41.

² They are also called *tapo-kamma* or *tapo-pakkama*.

They are austerities (*tapa*) in the sense that they require tremendous effort for tormenting one's body in order to burn off evil and to reach purification.

It is evident that these three terms—*tapa*, *vata*, and *sīla*—refer to similar practices; the meanings of these terms are related and they can be grouped together. Nonetheless, the term *tapa* conjures up a feeling of severity and hardship, whereas *sīla* generally doesn't have this connotation. (Having said this, there is an interpretation of the term *sīla* as a form of austerity which I will discuss later.)

In the Tipiṭaka there is mention of some strange religious practices, for example the 'elephant practice' (*hatthi-vata*), 'horse practice' (*assa-vata*), 'cow practice' (*go-vata*), 'dog practice' (*kukkura-vata*), and the 'crow practice' (*kāka-vata*).¹ Those persons who followed these practices believed that by doing so they would reach purification or go to heaven.

The cow practice, for example, consisted of living like a cow, by say wearing a pair of horns, attaching a tail to one's rear, walking on all fours, and grazing grass along with real cows.

The dog practice consisted of living like a dog, say by bending one's hands and legs to sit like a dog, using one's feet to scratch the ground, and howling. Once the Buddha was visiting the village of Uttarakā where a naked ascetic lived who followed the dog practice. He walked on his elbows and knees, and used his mouth to bite at food that was on the ground. Some people believed he was an arahant.

On another occasion he was visiting the township of Haliddavasana and met two individuals who were undertaking the cow and dog practices (the latter was a naked ascetic). They came to the Buddha to tell him that they had perfected these practices and asked him what their destination would be after death. The Buddha remained silent two times.

¹ E.g.: Nd. I. 310.

When they asked for a third time the Buddha explained that someone who constantly and thoroughly practises the dog observance, makes his mind like that of a dog, and behaves like a dog, will be reborn as a dog. If, however, he has the firm belief that acting in this way will lead to a heavenly rebirth, this is a wrong view, for which there are two destinations: hell or the animal realms.

This means that if he accomplishes his practices he will be reborn as a dog, whereas if he does not fully accomplish them he will go to perdition. The Buddha then gave a teaching on the four kinds of action (*kamma*).

In the end these two individuals relinquished their cow and dog observances. The former asked to take refuge as a lay disciple and the latter asked for ordination.¹

An Unregulated System: Renunciants in India up to the Buddha's Time

As I've explained, the renunciant tradition in India at the time of the Buddha was diverse: some renunciants lived in the forests, others in the towns and cities; some lived alone, while others went forth as a family, together with their wives and children. There were many small groups of renunciants, as well as large, famous monasteries filled with hundreds or thousands of followers.

Those renunciants who lived in the forests, especially the remote forests, were the rishis (*isi*) and ascetics (*tāpasa*). (They can also be referred to as 'matted-hair ascetics'—*jaṭīla*—although this term was not commonly used in the pre-Buddhist times. It became a more common term closer to the Buddha's time, when the ascetics were beginning to move closer to the towns and villages.)

¹ See: D. III. 6-7; M. I. 387-9. In a similar manner, switching gender from say a woman to a man occurs because an individual accumulates and cultivates conditions that lead to such a birth (see: D. II. 271; A. IV. 57).

The rishis and forest ascetics had similar doctrines, ceremonies, and ways of practice, for example developing the *jhānas*, worshipping fire, and undertaking austerities that were not overly severe. They belonged to the ancient lineage of the brahmins, or they were highly influenced by the brahmins. (Vessantara was born in the warrior caste, but when he went forth as a forest ascetic it is clear that he practised according to the teachings of the brahmins.) And although their wives and children sometimes joined them, they tended to observe celibacy.

In any case, these observations are drawn from the stories in the *Jātaka* tales in which the ascetics who are accompanied by their wives and children happen to be *bodhisattas*, or the parents of a *bodhisatta*, and who as a norm live by virtuous standards.

Stories involving rishis (when they perform an important function in these stories they are usually referred to by the term *tāpasa*), who live in remote forests all the way to the Himalayan mountains, are generally found in the *Jātaka* tales, which recount events before the Buddha's time.

Whenever these forest ascetics play a role in these stories—good or bad—they tend to come from the remote forests. They enter the towns and villages and stay nearby, wherever they can find a suitable place. The favoured places, which are mentioned frequently, are the parks (*uyyāna*; often royal parks).

It is noteworthy that we are endowed in Buddhism with these *Jātaka* tales which describe the religious landscape, society, and culture before and leading up to the Buddhist era, along with other texts which describe the circumstances existing during the Buddha's time. The *Jātaka* tales also show the evolution of religious practices and affairs in India. In the study of Buddhism it is important to understand the pre-Buddhist circumstances and to see how these had an effect on the unfolding of the Buddhist religion.

At the time of the Buddha most of the events concerning renunciants had to do with those renunciants who lived in or near the cities. Buddhism itself developed and spread from urban centres. This probably had to do with the growth and development of the towns and cities at that time—the religious traditions expanded and grew in these places due to the requirements and wishes of the inhabitants. The Buddhist monks interacted with other renunciant traditions who were based in the towns and cities. Those bhikkhus who lived in the forests, however, would have become more isolated from these other religious teachings.

There are only few stories of bhikkhus encountering forest ascetics during the Buddha's time. Besides meeting the occasional villager, forest bhikkhus more often encountered bandits and devas.

Of the renunciants who lived in the towns and cities and who are collectively called 'wandering ascetics' (*paribbājaka*), those who went about completely or semi naked were usually referred to by the name given to their particular order.

This leaves us with those wandering ascetics who wore clothing, of which there were many. They wandered about freely, in large groups, in small groups, or sometimes alone. They lived in pairs, lived in communities resembling monasteries, lived in houses, or were constantly on the move. They differed in their teachings, their beliefs, their way of life, and their religious practices. They had a great deal of freedom, to the point that one can say they had no clear organizational structure.

During the earlier era when most renunciants lived in the forests, even as far as the Himalayas, they lived in search of freedom and independence. Living in the forests and amongst nature bestowed a certain clearcut order to their independent lives. But once the renunciants began to live in the cities, in which people lived according to their desires, their independence became a form of disorganization, lacking any standards and creating confusion and turmoil.

Many people assume that renunciation implies celibacy, but this was often not the case. Some orders even held the opposite view. Take for example the sect that was called the Diṭṭhadhamma Nibbāna Vāda (the doctrine of immediate Nibbāna), members of which believed that the self (*attā*) attains the highest Nibbāna when the five objects of sensual enjoyment indulge the self completely and fully.¹

The Buddha taught the four ways of undertaking things (*dhamma-samādāna*; four ways of practising a doctrine).² The second of these four factors is the practice generating happiness in the present but bearing fruit in the future as suffering—a practice that accords with the doctrine of those renunciants and brahmans who believe that there is no harm in indulging in sensual pleasures.

These kinds of renunciants amused themselves with the adolescent female renunciants, finding pleasure by touching their soft hands and silky hair. They engrossed themselves in sensual pleasures. An example is the rich matted-hair ascetic Keṇiya, whom I mentioned earlier.

There is a story of a wandering ascetic whose young wife was also an ascetic. She was pregnant and close to giving birth.³ One day she told her husband to fetch some oil to use after giving birth. The husband didn't know where to acquire any oil, as he didn't have any money. His wife implored him three times to get oil.

He remembered that in the royal storehouse of King Pasenadi of Kosala there was a special royal allowance for *samaṇas* and brahmans to drink as much butter or oil as they wish, but that it is forbidden to take any away. He thus went to the royal storehouse and drank as much as he needed. His plan was to return home, vomit out the oil, and give it to his wife. But when he got home, no matter how much he gagged he could not spit out the oil and likewise he couldn't digest it. His intestines were heavy, tight, and distended. He writhed on the

¹ E.g.: D. I. 36-7.

² M. I. 305.

³ Ud. 13.

ground in severe pain.

That morning while the Buddha had entered Sāvatti for alms he saw that wandering ascetic rolling on the ground in pain. The Buddha gave an inspired utterance, touching upon the misery of those who are still stuck in attachment and anxiety, distinct from someone who is endowed with clear wisdom, who has nothing unresolved in the heart and is free.

From the many stories in the scriptures it appears that there were many wandering ascetics who lived as married couples. One of these stories is of Ven. Vaṅgīsa Thera, the great disciple of the Buddha foremost in perspicuity. Both of his parents were wandering ascetics.¹

The parents of Ven. Sabhiya, another great disciple of the Buddha, were also wandering ascetics, who had had inappropriate sexual relations. Sabhiya himself was a wandering ascetic for a long time, before meeting the Buddha and asking him questions in verse. The Buddha answered him purely in verse, as recounted in the Sabhiya Sutta.

One of the questions that Sabhiya asked the Buddha was what is the conduct truly worthy of a wandering ascetic. The Buddha answered him and explained the proper life of a wandering ascetic. Sabhiya developed great faith in the Buddha and asked to be ordained. When he found out that an ordained member of another religious order must first live under probation for four months, he said that he would live under probation for four years.²

The wandering ascetic couples just mentioned above clearly lived together in private houses, but many male and female wandering ascetics lived together in larger communities.

Like in Buddhism, the monasteries of wandering ascetics were called *ārāma* (thus the term *paribbājakārāma*), of which there were probably many. Some of these are mentioned in the Tipiṭaka, for

¹ SnA. I. 344.

² Sn. 91-2; SnA. II. 421.

example the Ekaṇḍarīka Paribbājakārāma in Vesālī, and the Udumbarikā Paribbājakārāma and the Moranivāpa Paribbājakārāma in Rājagaha.

It is not clear whether female wandering ascetics lived separately. From the stories I have encountered it appears that they lived together with male wandering ascetics.

There is one unusual passage in the scriptures which contains the term *paribbājikārāmaṃ*.¹ This passage recounts the story of Ven. Mahā Kassapa. When he and his wife, Bhaddā Kāpilānī, went forth into the homeless life together, they reached a crossroads. He took the right path (went forth as a renunciant on his own) and then met the Buddha under the Bahuputta banyan tree.

Bhaddā Kāpilānī took the left path and since there were no bhikkhunis at that time, she ‘went to the monastery of female ascetics.’ After Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī had been ordained, she then took ordination in her monastery.

As I said, there is only this one reference to a *paribbājikārāma* and the details are vague. And since in all other cases the female wandering ascetics live together with male ascetics (as in the story of Ven. Sabhiya Thera),² one can surmise that it was actually a *paribbājakārāma* and that this term was mistakenly transcribed or revised. Having examined this matter, there is no definitive proof one way or another.

Occasionally the state would use the renunciant form and tradition as a political tool. This is described in the story in which the Buddha recognizes the counterfeit ascetics to whom King Pasenadi of Kosala lifts his hands in reverence. In fact, these ascetics were intelligence agents dressed up to act as spies.

The story goes that the Buddha was once staying at the Pubbārāma park in Sāvātthi.³ In the evening King Pasenadi visited him and sat

¹ AA. I. 168.

² SnA. II. 421.

³ S. I. 77-8.

down. At that moment seven matted-hair ascetics, seven Nigaṇṭhā, seven naked ascetics, seven Ekasātakas ('one-robbers'; similar to the Nigaṇṭhā), seven wandering ascetics—with hairy armpits, long fingernails, and long body hairs, carrying the requisites of a renunciant—walked by not far from the Buddha.

The king then got up from his seat, arranged his robe over one shoulder, knelt down by resting his right knee on the ground, put his hands in reverential salutation towards those renunciants, and called out his own name three times. When those renunciants had walked off, the king returned to the Buddha. After paying respects he sat down and told the Buddha that those renunciants must surely be arahants or have entered upon the path of arahantship.

The Buddha replied: 'Your Majesty, you are a householder who enjoys sensual pleasures. It is difficult for you to know whether these individuals are arahants or have entered upon the path of arahantship.' He then gave a teaching on the true way of knowing a person according to his or her true character.

Having listened to this the king expressed his amazement that the Buddha knew the truth. He admitted that these individuals were actually working as spies for the king. They had recently gone to the countryside in order to gather information and had just returned. Soon the king will find out what information they had discovered. They were now washing off the dust and sweat, shaving, and wearing white, supplied by abundant delights of the five senses, and waiting to serve the king.

From all these descriptions above one can get a fairly accurate impression of the circle of renunciants in India at the Buddha's time. One can recognize what things the Buddha abandoned, rejected, or tried to modify, along with his reasons for doing so. Also, one can see how his actions had a bearing on the administration of the sangha, so that it was stable and prospered.

On this matter of renunciants I don't want to draw any hard and fast conclusions, because it is my wish to investigate the facts and evidence about renunciants in India more clearly all the way to the present day. I don't have the time right now, however, to focus on this area of study and must entrust it to other scholars who are interested in this subject.

In any case, those people I have consulted, who have lived in India for a long time or who go to India frequently, say that the state of renunciants there today is very similar to how it was in the ancient times. It is almost identical to what is described in the Tipiṭaka and the other texts. And if one were not to witness this for oneself, it would be hard to believe that such things exist on the planet today.

To begin with, many of the renunciants in India follow religious practices and undergo austerities according to their own beliefs and vows. These practices and austerities act to unify the renunciants; they automatically give rise to a disciplined code of behaviour, which may to some extent be perceived as a form of vinaya. As they are religious figures, their behaviour is dictated by the customs of Indian society which state that a renunciant must follow general principles of virtuous conduct. Simply speaking, people should at least observe the five precepts, similar to the Buddhist axiom stating that whether a Buddha appears in the world or not, the five and the ten precepts will invariably exist in the world.¹

In any case, on one level the code of discipline here arises automatically, in so far as the renunciants are not deliberately following it in order to benefit society, or with some social justification. They follow it for themselves, in order to burn away evil or for some other personal objective.

Besides not thinking about the consequences for society, many of these renunciants do not take an interest in, feel responsible for, or promote the wellbeing of society. For example, many of the austerities

¹ VinA. I. 243.

involve doing away with polite behaviour, for instance by being dirty or dressing in a disheveled way.

Naturally, when these renunciants live together in monasteries or communities they need to have some kind of rules, regulations, agreements, and principles to make communal life possible. At least they receive directives in this regard from their leaders. These rules, etc., are up to each community to manage. They are not general or common principles adhered to by all, and they are not clearly defined, constant, or lasting. And this is even less the case for those renunciants who wander about freely without constraint. In their case they generate even more confusion and disorder.

In sum, they have no Pāṭimokkha to act as a core for their discipline (vinaya) and as a safeguard for their behaviour.

Supplementary Chapter 4: The Buddhist Discipline

The Pāṭimokkha: the Disciplinary Standard for the Sangha

In Sir Monier Monier-Williams's 'A Sanskrit-English Dictionary,' which is an important reference book in the fields of Sanskrit Studies and Indology, the Sanskrit version of the term *pāṭimokkha*, i.e., *prātimoksha*, is said to be a Buddhist term and related to the term *pratimoksha*.

The first observation to make here is that, as far as this scholar could discern, the term *pāṭimokkha* was not used in any other religious or social context. (I don't know of another Sanskrit term to represent the same idea—this is a matter to be investigated.)

The reason I mention this is because Buddhism originated in India, in which clearly defined and solidly established linguistic and cultural traditions had been developed. In most cases, when the Buddha wished to express an idea he used already existing terminology.

At the same time, various traditions used these very same terms to convey new or unusual ideas and concepts. As a consequence, identical terms were used by distinct religious traditions and doctrines, but with different meanings, sometimes markedly so.

Many Buddhist terms were already in common usage during the Buddha's time period, especially in the context of Brahmanism, which was the dominant religion in that society. The meanings of these terms were altered, however, and these variant meanings should be studied and understood. In the case that a new word was fashioned, as appears to be true with the term *pāṭimokkha*, even more attention should be given in order to broaden one's understanding.

Let us return to the definition of *pratimoksha*. Sir Monier-Williams defines this term as: 'liberation, deliverance; (with Buddhism) emancipation, L.' He notes in reference to the definition of 'emancipation' that the term *pratimoksha* is used in a special literary sense,¹ and states further that it is a Buddhist term synonymous with *vimutti*, *vimokkha*, or *mokkha* (Sanskrit: *moksha*), all denoting 'liberation' or 'deliverance.'

He concludes with the definition according to the *Kāraṇḍavyūha*: 'the formulary for releasing monks by penances.' In other words, the *Pāṭimokkha* is a formula for liberating monks by having them atone for bad actions. (Or one can say it is a way for monks to be liberated by confessing their offences.)

One must sympathize with the author of this dictionary, because there are considerable limitations of language connected to differences in culture and basic ways of thinking. It is very hard to find English words that provide an accurate and clear translation for this term. I fear, however, that people will misunderstand the meaning of this term and see Buddhism as simply another doctrine of practising austerities. Even if one concedes to using these particular English terms, the translation more accurately should read: 'A formula providing a disciplinary code, the transgression of which constitutes a wrongdoing for the perpetrator, who must release himself from this offence.'

¹ [Thus the abbreviation 'L.']

In any case, the important point here that I wish to discuss is the definition of Pāṭimokkha as ‘liberation.’

This definition exists because Sir Monier-Williams equates the *mokkha/moksha* in the term *pāṭimokkha/pratimoksha* as the same in the term *vimokkha/vimoksha*, which is translated as ‘liberation.’ This is the second observation.

In the Tipiṭaka, after the Buddha gives his permission to chant the Pāṭimokkha,¹ there is the following explanation: ‘The term Pāṭimokkha means “this is the starting point,” “this is the source,”² “this is the leader of all wholesome qualities.” For this reason it is called the Pāṭimokkha.’³

Here we see that according to the original story in the Tipiṭaka, *mokkha* is interpreted to correspond with *pāmokkha* (‘prominent factor,’ ‘chief,’ ‘leader,’ ‘guide’) rather than with *vimokkha*.

The passages predicting the future of a great man (*mahā-purisa*) say that one who possesses the marks of a great man will be a universal emperor, the chief (*pāmokkha*) of all beings who enjoy pleasures of the senses. If he goes forth as a renunciant, however, he will be a Buddha, eminent (*pāmokkha*) among all beings. Similarly, Uruvela-Kassapa was leader (*pāmokkha*) of the five hundred matted-hair ascetics.

According to this definition the Pāṭimokkha is a preeminent system, a master template, which sets down a code of living for the Buddhist monastic community. It is a foundation, a means, an opening leading to the cultivation of wholesome qualities. It helps to initiate spiritual practice leading to higher realization and culminates in the supreme goal.

The Pāṭimokkha is the core of moral conduct, generating strength and power, including both individual mental power and communal harmony. It facilitates the development of concentration and wisdom,

¹ Vin. I. 102: *anujānāmi bhikkhave pāṭimokkhaṃ uddisitum.*

² *Mokkha* means ‘leader,’ ‘entrance,’ or ‘opening.’

³ Vin. I. 103.

and it leads to liberation. Moreover, it provides a unique identity to the institution known as Buddhism.

This Sanskrit-English dictionary, however, has allies. In their explanations of important terms, the Buddhist commentaries and sub-commentaries tend to analyze in great detail and distinguish many nuances, as if they are offering a Dhamma teaching by way of such explanations. In the case of this term Pāṭimokkha, these texts provide a lengthy interpretation of about three pages.¹ Many subsequent texts follow this example.

These explanations begin with the definition corresponding to the term *pāmokkha* as described in the Tipiṭaka, but very soon the texts veer off and explain this term as consistent with *vimokkha*, as a way to be liberated from a variety of things.

In any case, these explanations are not the same as those in the Sanskrit-English dictionary, because they do not define Pāṭimokkha as some form of redemption from wrongdoing. The definitions tend to be more auspicious, for example: to be free from falling into states of perdition; to be liberated from suffering in the round of rebirth; and to be free from mental taints and defilements. These texts offer subtle and profound explanations, which I won't go into at length here.

To sum up, it is very difficult for people from other cultures and time periods to understand Buddhist terms, and to distinguish the specific Buddhist nuances from the meanings bestowed on these terms by other religious doctrines existing during the time of the Buddha.

The Buddha once mentioned to Ven. Sāriputta the reasons why during the time of some previous Buddhas the holy life—the Buddhist religion—lasted a long time, while during the time of other Buddhas it did not.²

The teachings of the Buddhas Vipassī, Sikhī, and Vessabhū did not last long, because they did not strive to present the Dhamma in

¹ E.g.: *VismṬ.: Silaniddesavaṇṇanā, Pātimokkhasamvarasilavaṇṇanā.*

² *Vin. III. 7-8.*

a comprehensive way to their disciples, they had little in the way of the ninefold teaching (*navāṅga-satthu-sāsana*), they did not prescribe training rules for their disciples, and they did not set down the Pāṭimokkha. When they and their awakened disciples had passed away, later generations of disciples took ordination and quickly brought the religion to an end. This is similar to putting a garland of untied flowers on a flat piece of wood—as soon as the wind blows the flowers are scattered in every direction.

The teachings of the Buddhas Kakusandha, Konāgamana, and Kassapa, however, lasted a long time, because they persevered to present the Dhamma in a comprehensive way to their disciples, they had much in the way of the ninefold teaching, they prescribed training rules for their disciples, and they set down the Pāṭimokkha. When they and their awakened disciples had passed away, later generations of disciples took ordination and helped to preserve the teachings for a long time. This is similar to putting a garland of flowers tied together with a string on a piece of wood—despite gusts of wind the flowers are not scattered.

When Ven. Sāriputta heard this he asked the Buddha to lay down training rules and establish the Pāṭimokkha so that the Buddhist religion would last a long time. The Buddha, however, told him to wait, because the Buddha himself would know the appropriate time to lay down training rules.

The principle here is that the Buddha would not set down training rules and establish the Pāṭimokkha until specific harmful, immoral incidents (*āsaṅghāniya-dhammā*—bases for the mental taints) arose in the sangha. He would only set down training rules and establish the Pāṭimokkha in order to protect against and rectify these harmful factors. Moreover, these harmful factors do not appear in the sangha until it has grown in size, after a long period of time and widespread expansion, and until there is an abundance of material gains.

At the time that the Buddha spoke these words to Ven. Sāriputta, however, the bhikkhu sangha was still pure, faultless, and established in virtue. Of the five hundred monks living with the Buddha at that time, the very least of them were stream-enterers.

When the Buddha spoke these words he was living in the town of Verañjā. According to the commentaries, this incident took place during the twelfth year of the Buddha's teaching. At that time Ven. Ānanda was the Buddha's attendant, although he had not yet become his permanent attendant.

The commentaries say that Ven. Ānanda was selected to be the chief, permanent attendant in the twentieth year of the Buddha's teaching.¹ Similarly, the commentaries state that the Buddha prescribed training rules, stopped reciting the Ovāda Pāṭimokkha, and had the disciples begin to chant the 'authorized Pāṭimokkha' (*āṇā-pāṭimokkha*) around the twentieth year of his teaching.²

Let me add that in the Sāratthadīpanī there is the additional explanation that Ven. Sāriputta's request for the Buddha to set down training rules and establish the Pāṭimokkha does not mean that the Buddha had not prescribed any training rules before this point. Indeed, there were some training rules (on minor matters), but they hadn't yet been fully systematized and set down as the Pāṭimokkha.³

The authors of the sub-commentaries here also refer to the Buddha's teachings in the Bhaddāli Sutta.⁴ In this sutta, Ven. Bhaddāli asks the Buddha the reasons why in the past there were few training rules but many monks were established in the fruit of arahantship, while now there are many training rules but the monks who are established in the fruit of arahantship are relatively few.

¹ E.g.: VinA. I. 177; DA. II. 420.

² VinA. I. 187; linked to the passages in the Tipiṭaka at Vin. I. 101; Vin. II. 240; Ud. 51.

³ VinT.: Paṭhamo Bhāgo, Verañjakaṇḍavaṇṇanā, Vinayapaññattiyācanakathā.

⁴ M. I. 444-5.

The Buddha replied that it is just so: when beings are in decline and the true Dhamma is vanishing, the number of training rules increase and the number of monks who are established in the fruit of arahantship declines. The Teacher—the Buddha—will not lay down training rules to his disciples as long as harmful, negative incidents do not manifest in the sangha. The Buddha then continues in a way similar to the teaching he gave to Ven. Sāriputta, above.

The matter of the Pāṭimokkha is connected to the observance days—the Uposatha days—for it is on these days that the monastic community recites the Pāṭimokkha. As I mentioned earlier, the Uposatha observance is an ancient religious custom, practised by other traditions before the Buddha’s time. For these traditions, however, the Uposatha observance (*vatta*) referred primarily to fasting.

The Buddha encouraged Buddhists to keep the eight precepts on the observance days, as a way to develop in wholesome qualities. The meaning of the term uposatha was thus broadened; in Buddhism the eight precepts are matters concerning the male and female lay disciples.

A story in the Tipiṭaka recounts how at one time the Buddha was living at Rājagaha.¹ King Bimbisāra came to visit and told him that renunciants of other traditions meet on the 8th, 14th, and 15th days of the lunar calendar in order to gather and discuss spiritual matters. The lay disciples who listened to these discussions grew in faith and increased in numbers. The King thus expressed a wish for the bhikkhu sangha to gather and discuss the Dhamma on these days.

The Buddha gave his permission to the sangha to meet on these days, but there was a flaw in that the monks would simply meet and sit in silence. The laypeople criticized the monks, saying that they are as useless as ‘mute pigs.’ This led the Buddha to make an additional allowance, encouraging the monks to meet and discuss the Dhamma so that the laypeople would have a chance to listen.

¹ Vin. I. 101.

After this occasion—it is not clear how long after—an incident occurred while the Buddha was staying at the Pubbārāma park in Sāvatti which was the occasion for him to stop reciting the Pāṭimokkha himself, and rather to enjoin the bhikkhus to chant the Pāṭimokkha themselves from that time onward.¹

The earlier story in the Tipiṭaka of when the Buddha was staying at Rājagaha continues: the Buddha was later sitting in seclusion and had the thought that he should permit the training rules that he had prescribed to the monks to be integrated as the Pāṭimokkha chant. The ceremony of chanting the Pāṭimokkha became the Uposatha observance for the bhikkhus. The Buddha gave his permission to chant the Pāṭimokkha,² and it is in this context that the commentaries say that the Buddha stopped reciting the Ovāda-Pāṭimokkha, and had the monks begin to chant the ‘authorized Pāṭimokkha’ (*āṇā-pāṭimokkha*).

This is consistent with what the Sāratthadīpanī says, that it is not the case that the Buddha had not previously laid down training rules. There existed some training rules, but they had not yet been codified as the Pāṭimokkha chant. And prescribing training rules had not yet become a prominent matter, because the sangha was still small in number and not many damaging incidents had occurred.

Let us look more closely at the words the Buddha used to articulate his thoughts on this matter: ‘Well now, I ought to authorize the training rules that I have prescribed to the bhikkhus to be a Pāṭimokkha recitation for you. The Pāṭimokkha recitation shall be your Uposatha observance.’³ Later on, the laying down of training rules became an important responsibility, as if the Buddha was obliged to consider whether each new incident warranted laying down a new training rule or not.

¹ Vin. II. 240-41; Ud. 50-51.

² Vin. I. 102; *anujānāmi bhikkhave pāṭimokkhaṃ uddisitum*.

³ Ibid.

Accounts in the Tipiṭaka describe how monks would travel from different districts to visit the Buddha. The Buddha would first inquire about their general wellbeing, and then, if there was a problem to address, he would lay down a training rule, as is seen in this example:

It was the custom for monks who had finished keeping the Rains to go and visit the Blessed One ... and it was the custom for Awakened Ones, Blessed Ones, to exchange friendly greetings with visiting monks....

Awakened Ones question the monks for two purposes, saying: ‘Shall I reveal the Dhamma, or shall I lay down training rules for the disciples?’¹

Let us connect these passages to the development of the bhikkhuni sangha. If ordinations of bhikkhunis began in the fifth year of the Buddha’s teaching, as reckoned by the commentaries, the monastic community would not yet have grown large. The laying down of training rules would not yet have begun in earnest, and there was not yet the prescription for the collected training rules to be compiled as the Pāṭimokkha.

Following these estimates, the timespan that the monastic sangha was ‘pure’ remained for fifteen years after the dawn of the bhikkhunis, or another eight years from the aforementioned conversation between the Buddha and Ven. Sāriputta. Later, in the twentieth year, the Pāṭimokkha chant was established, which required a full examination of moral conduct, along with the issuing of penalties for those who transgressed the training rules.

Although this was a rather long account about the Pāṭimokkha, it is connected to other subjects and will help to clarify them.

¹ E.g.: Vin. III. 87-8.

Arriving at the Middle Way of Happiness

According to the scriptures, before the Buddha was awakened and after he had gone forth from the palace, he engaged in spiritual practice for six years, initially studying at the hermitages of Āḷāra Kālāma and Uddaka Rāmaputta, and then undergoing severe austerities. Finally, when he saw that extreme asceticism is not the way to awakening, he developed his concentration further and perfected wisdom, culminating in liberation.

Many suttas give the Buddha's account of this period of time, including the Mahāsaccaka Sutta and the Bodhirājakumāra Sutta.¹ The direct accounts of the Buddha's practice during these six years, however, are not the only accounts of this time period. One can say that they provide the main examples or the crucial points in the sequence of events. The Buddha gave other accounts of this time, for example in the Dvedhāvitakka Sutta.²

The Buddha gave Dhamma teachings in order to benefit the listeners, often to specific individuals and in specific circumstances. When teaching about a certain theme, the Buddha would draw upon related subjects to facilitate understanding and provide clarification. For this reason, the biography of the Buddha is dispersed throughout the Tipiṭaka.

From what we can garner from these accounts, the Bodhisatta attained all eight of the concentrative attainments (*jhāna-samāpatti*) while staying in the two hermitages mentioned above. That is, he accomplished the highest spiritual attainments that had been accomplished by rishis and ascetics from ancient times up to his own era. After this he practised austerities, which ascetics in that time period commonly undertook, to the extreme. He then realized that neither of these systems of spiritual practice lead to awakening. The path to

¹ M. I. 240; M. II. 93.

² M. I. 114-15.

awakening must be otherwise.¹

All of his initial spiritual endeavours began with his belief that happiness cannot be achieved by way of happiness—it can only be achieved by way of pain.²

The Bodhisatta remembered an incident from his youth, when his father was conducting a ploughing ceremony and when he the prince was sitting alone under a Jambolan tree, peaceful and at ease. At that time he had an experience of the first *jhāna*, accompanied by bliss and joy.³ The Bodhisatta had an insight that this indeed is the way to awakening. He then set off on the path of attaining happiness by way of happiness, until he was enlightened.

It is important to clarify that happiness here is defined in full as ‘happiness free from sensuality and all unwholesome qualities.’ It is not merely sensual pleasure, but rather it is a form of happiness that does not rely on sensuality; it is independent from sensuality.

After the Bodhisatta remembered this incident, he asked himself whether he is afraid of this happiness free from sensuality and unwholesome qualities. He did this in the manner of inquiring whether this happiness is harmful or dangerous in any way. He answered his own question with confidence, that he is not afraid. The paramount spiritual quality is wisdom, which emancipates the mind. With wisdom present, this refined form of happiness is unable to overwhelm the mind, say by causing indulgence and infatuation, or by leading to overconfidence and heedlessness.

When mentioning happiness, most people think of sense pleasure. The Buddha did not disparage this way of thinking, but he encouraged people to know sensual happiness thoroughly. Indeed, sense pleasure is a form of happiness, but it has many disadvantages and drawbacks in tow. It is dependent on external things; it is accompanied by anxiety

¹ *Siyā nu kho añño maggo bodhiyā.*

² M. II. 93. This was the doctrine of numerous other ascetic groups at that time, especially the Niganṭhā.

³ In total, the first *jhāna* has five factors.

and worry; it is under threat by distrust, disappointment, and distress; it tempts people into competition and maltreatment; and it leads to future suffering and despair.

Besides enjoining people to have an insight into sense pleasure, so as to avoid carelessness and to prevent the dangers of sensuality from spreading, the Buddha encouraged developing the kind of happiness that is free from sensuality and unwholesome qualities. This more refined happiness acts as a support for one's virtue, enables one to maintain happiness for long periods of time, and is a guarantee against mental affliction. Eventually, one is able to experience happiness at all times.

It is possible for people to have these two forms of happiness exist side-by-side. The happiness free from sensuality exists as the basic state of mind, while people still secure desirable sense pleasures. The scriptures contain examples of such individuals, who are awakened disciples at the stage of stream-entry, who live happily together with their spouses and children. The Buddha gave the comparison, that if the suffering of unawakened persons is likened to the size of the mighty Himalayas, the suffering remaining for a stream-enterer is the size of seven mustard seeds.¹

Nakulapitā and Nakulamātā were a married couple who were stream-enterers and very close to the Buddha.² They were thoroughly faithful to one another from the beginning of their marriage into old age, and they told the Buddha that they wished to meet each other in future lives. The Buddha thus gave a teaching on the four qualities which make a couple well matched (*samajīvi-dhammā*)—qualities which lead couples to meet one another both in this lifetime and in the future, that is, to be matched in faith, virtuous conduct, generosity, and wisdom.³

¹ S. V. 464.

² They were considered foremost of all lay disciples in being close to the Buddha.

³ A. II. 61-2.

You are probably familiar with the Buddha's saying: *Nibbānaṃ paramaṃ sukhaṃ*—Nibbāna is the supreme happiness.¹ The Buddha said that if one considers Nibbāna as *dukkha* ('suffering,' 'pain,' 'stress'), there is no way that one can realize path and fruit, of any stage. But if one sees Nibbāna as happiness (*sukha*), it is possible to realize stream-entry up to the stage of arahantship.²

A newly ordained monk once came to me and asked how he could give an easy explanation of Nibbāna to the laypeople. I suggested that he use a comparison, to give them an inkling of Nibbāna. Imagine that you are a parent with one child, whom you love very much. This child grows up to be a teenager and then becomes addicted to drugs and associates with bad friends. The child is delinquent and does not pay attention to his studies. No matter what one says, the child doesn't listen. As a parent one feels almost indescribable suffering.

One day the child comes and says that he has thought things over, realized how his previous behaviour was harmful, and has completely stopped acting in that way. From now on he will live with his parents and study earnestly. As soon as one hears this as a parent, one is greatly relieved and one's suffering ends. One experiences a tremendous joy. This is like the experience of Nibbāna, to some degree. In this way people can get a picture of Nibbāna.

(So far the discussion has meandered somewhat from one subject to another, according to the questions posed—it hasn't been a formal or technical presentation. And my earlier attempt at not relying much on scriptural references has not been successful—they are for the sake of those people who like to research these matters. And the wish to avoid footnotes will probably also not be fulfilled.)

When the Bodhisatta was studying with Āḷāra and Uddaka, he said that these two renunciants imparted the sphere of nothingness (*ākāṅkamaññāyatana*) and the sphere of neither perception nor non-

¹ Or, 'Nibbāna is ultimate happiness' (M. I. 509; Dh. verse 204).

² M. I. 510.

perception (*nevasaññānāsaññāyatana*), respectively. He saw that the practice in these two places did not lead to awakening (*na sambhodhāya nibbānāya samvattati*), and thus he left these hermitages. Later, when he realized that the extreme ascetic practices also do not lead to the highest goal, he remembered the time as a youth when he had entered the first jhāna under the Jambolan tree, and it became clear to him that this is the correct path.

In sum, those two renunciants had obtained the seventh and eighth attainment of jhāna (*jhāna-samāpatti*), respectively, and these levels of concentrative attainment must pass through and begin with the first jhāna. So why was it that, while claiming that the way of these two renunciants was not the true way, the Buddha, when recollecting the past, remembered entering the first jhāna? He didn't think of and focus on the higher levels of jhāna he had achieved while with these two teachers.

A question we need to ask is what is the difference between the first jhāna which the Buddha entered under the Jambolan tree and those jhānas taught by the two renunciants?

We should remember that during the six years that the Bodhisatta was a seeker of the good (*kiṃ kusalagavesi*), aspiring to supreme peace, he was familiar with the living conditions of the general public, and also with the life, ways of thinking, and practices of the many renunciants he encountered.

From the previous material we can conclude that Buddhism is diametrically opposed to the doctrines of the many renunciants in India during the Buddha's time, especially the Nigaṇṭhā (the Jains), who proclaimed that happiness cannot be achieved by happiness; rather it can only be achieved by pain. They therefore practised extreme austerities. Buddhism, on the contrary, claims that happiness can be achieved by happiness, and thus it encourages abandoning austerities, along with various other religious practices.

And in reference to the wider society, Buddhism rejected the entire, all-embracing institution of Brahmanism, which manifests as the caste system, the offering of sacrifices, the dependency on the Vedas, and ultimately the belief in God as the supreme reality.

And even in relation to the teachings of the forest ascetics—of whom Ālāra and Uddaka were representatives—which have some similarities to the Buddhist teachings and are compatible in some respects, particularly in the area of meditation—of developing concentration and accessing the *jhānas*¹—the Buddha clearly repudiated them, as not leading to awakening.

Apart from those things the Buddha completely abandoned, there were significant differences even in those things he still applied or followed. A problem that arose immediately concerned the use of religious terminology.

Buddhism originated in India, which had its own languages and traditional definitions for specific words. In the case that Buddhism created new teachings and ways of thinking, some words were no longer used by Buddhists, but it was not possible to replace the entire religious vocabulary with a new one. Some new words were created, while other words were given new definitions.

In Buddhism, several different systems were established: of thought, of teaching, of practice, and also of clear terminology.

An earlier example I gave is of how the Indian people observed the custom of making sacrifices, and they offered things during these ceremonies as a form of payment to the brahmans, who conducted them. These gifts, offered with respect, were referred to as *dakshiṇā* (Pali: *dakkhiṇā*). Offering these gifts was such a familiar custom that people didn't even think of them as a payment for the sacrificial ceremonies.

¹ As I mentioned earlier, these ascetics separated themselves for long periods of time from society, delighting in *jhāna* as a source of enjoyment, and only coming into inhabited areas to seek salty or fermented foods.

Later on many of these people developed faith in Buddhism. They had respect for the monks and wanted to support them. They were used to giving offerings to the brahmins, and now that they were making respectful offerings to the monks, they needed a word to refer to these. They simply chose the term *dakkhiṇā*.

Although they used the same word, the reasons for making offerings were not the same as before—they had nothing to do with sacrifices. As a consequence the monks needed to elucidate the new meaning of this term. Eventually, the term *dakkhiṇā* referred specifically to offerings made to the monks. If more explanation was necessary, the definition of this term would be expanded to: ‘offerings to the monastic sangha made with the belief in kamma and the fruits of kamma,’ for example. In most cases, however, the common term *dāna* (‘donation’) would suffice to describe these gifts.

The term *dakkhiṇā* is connected in a deeper way to the Buddhist teachings. This term has important spiritual implications and it is connected to Buddhist beliefs and understanding; it is linked to spiritual development and the cultivation of wisdom. If one makes offerings with wrong beliefs or blind faith, the results can be harmful, both for an individual and for society.

The term *dakkhiṇā* is also important in relation to solving problems, both individual and social. The Buddha wished for people to abandon their attachment to making sacrifices, which cause oppression to animals and an unhealthy desire for divine intervention. He used the term *dakkhiṇā* in his teachings, asking the question, ‘Who is truly worthy of offerings?’ (One worthy of offerings is called *dakkhiṇeyya*.) Is it the brahmins, who conduct the sacrificial rituals?—surely not.

The term *dakkhiṇeyya* became an attribute of the noble Sangha, which we see as one of the nine attributes (*saṅgha-guṇa*) praising the Sangha. A person with noble qualities and noble virtues is one who is truly worthy of offerings.

This is one example of how the Buddha dealt with language, giving

words new meanings to help transmit a distinctive Buddhist understanding on how to solve spiritual problems. This way he introduced new teachings and ideas to people and in society—one can say he did this in a form of open combat.

Indian society at that time, at least in the sphere of renunciants or in religious circles, was very open in regard to developing knowledge and philosophy, providing a complete freedom in the cultivation of wisdom. And it happened to be that the brahmins at that time were undergoing changes, many of whom were becoming seekers of wisdom. Many of the Buddha's important disciples were such brahmin seekers. They listened to the Dhamma and consequently abandoned the doctrine of making sacrifices and maintaining a caste system. They then helped to increase the understanding and wisdom of the general population, for the welfare and happiness of all beings.

The open-mindedness of Indian society in relation to spiritual ideas accompanied the earnest search for wisdom at that time; indeed, it was more open-minded than one finds in the present age. (Much later on, after the reign of King Asoka, the closing down of intellectual freedom, along with religious persecution and suppression, began.)

Although I have some considerations on these matters to put forward, I wish that people do more research on these subjects and compile the available information. I suppose things could have developed as follows:

In the period shortly before the Buddha was alive, Indian society developed and expanded, both economically and politically. Groups of caravans brought trade between the various states. The economy prospered, followed by luxuries, extravagances, and many things to minister to sensual pleasures. Wealthy merchants were appointed by the king to chief positions and each state wanted to have such wealthy patrons.¹

¹ These leaders' wives were referred to as *agga-mahesī*, the same title given to the chief queen of the king.

The larger cities had courtesans (*nagara-sobhiṇī*) who were the pride of the region, to whom even kings and princes from other states would visit to admire their beauty. (An example is Padumavatī, a courtesan of Ujjenī in the land of Avanti. King Bimbisāra heard of her fame and came to visit her. From their union Abhaya (or Abhayarājakumāra) was born, who found and nurtured Jīvaka-Komārabhacca.)¹

Apart from those who enjoyed sensual extravagances, however, many people became disillusioned. They abandoned their homes and possessions and became spiritual seekers (*kiṃ kusalaḡavesī*), and tended to react to the social environment by sometimes going to an opposite extreme.

It was in this era that the interest in ascetic practices flourished and proliferated. The ascetic practices initiated by the brahmins, like those performed by the forest ascetics, paled in comparison. The Acelakas, Ājīvakas and Nigaṇṭhā developed the methods and forms of ascetic practices to new heights. This was the time of increasing fascination with asceticism.

It is perhaps possible to compare this situation with the 'flower generation' in the United States. From the late 1960's onwards, young American men and women from the middle classes abandoned their parents and homes, and 'wandered forth' (*paribbajati*) as Hippies. Part of the Hippy movement was an excitement about meditation.

Similarly, at that earlier time in India many young members of the higher social classes, especially brahmins, went forth into homelessness as renunciants.

The Buddha himself spent a considerable amount of time trying out the extreme ascetic practices, until he realized that they are not beneficial and proceeded to the middle way of practice. Once he had realized the goal, he established a new system of practice that rejects both the Brahmanic sacrifices and the severe austerities of the ascetics, both extreme hedonism (*kāma-sukhallikānuyoga*) and extreme

¹ ThīgA. 38.

asceticism (*atta-kilamathānuyoga*). The monastic sangha, which was free from caste distinctions, spread the Dhammavinaya proclaimed and laid down by the Buddha.

Sīla, Vata, & Tapa **Ancient Words with Radically New Meanings**

Austere practices (*tapa*) were a prominent feature of the Buddha's time. The Buddha experimented with these practices and finally abandoned them. Only nine months after the Buddha's enlightenment, when he had begun propagating the Dhamma, he already had more than a thousand monk disciples. On the full moon day of the third lunar month (Māgha), one thousand two-hundred and fifty bhikkhus gathered at Veḷuvana monastery, including the two monks who would become the Buddha's chief disciples: Ven. Sāriputta and Ven. Moggallāna.

During this gathering, at which time four auspicious events occurred,¹ the Buddha gave the Ovāda Pāṭimokkha: an exhortation outlining the key principles of the Dhammavinaya which his disciples hold to as the heart of the Buddhist teachings. In total this exhortation is only three and a half verses long.

The Ovāda Pāṭimokkha begins by revealing the unique identity of Buddhism, in relation to the socio-religious environment of that era. It shows clearly how Buddhism is distinct from other contemporary religious doctrines, which may appear as very similar, and it outlines the distinctive features of Buddhism.

The first verse of the Ovāda Pāṭimokkha is as follows:

*Khanti paramaṃ tapo tītikkhā
Nibbānaṃ paramaṃ vadanti buddhā
Na hi pabbajito parūpaghātī
Samaṇo hoti paraṃ viheṭṭhayanto*

¹ [1] All of the monks were arahants, ordained by the Buddha himself; 2) they all gathered spontaneously, without any prior arrangement; 3) the Buddha gave the Ovāda Pāṭimokkha; 4) it was the full moon day.]

‘Patient endurance is the highest austerity;
All the Buddhas say that Nibbāna is supreme.
One who injures others is not a monk;
One who oppresses others is not a renunciant.’

The exhortation begins by addressing the subject of austerities. From the start, it is a clear rejection of trying to burn away evil by torturing one’s body. It is an encouragement to abandon such practices of self-mortification so popular at that time, whether it is lying on thorns, fasting, holding one’s breath, standing on one leg, hanging upside down like a bat, etc. These are not the way to find purity, to reach the goal of liberation. On the contrary, fortitude, patience and effort lead to the goal of the holy life—these qualities indeed comprise the supreme form of austerity.

Note that there are two words here denoting patience: *khanti* and *tītikkhā*, which have different nuances of meaning. In this context, *khanti* refers to perseverance, to not getting discouraged, to not being content until one has found success, and to not harming or injuring others. *Tītikkhā*, on the other hand, refers to fortitude, to strength of endurance, to bearing with provocations and temptations, to self-restraint, to preserving righteousness and maintaining virtue, and to not allowing things to end in harm or ruin.

Khanti has a broad range of meaning and is used in many different contexts. It may refer to patience and endurance in ordinary settings, for instance bearing with adverse weather, people, or work (or enduring a situation over which one is unable to prevail). The meaning of *tītikkhā* is more specific. It refers to tolerance, forbearance, and self-restraint in relation to other people, especially those who are weaker than oneself. Although one may have the opportunity to harm them, one refrains from such deeds and maintains righteousness. It is considered the apex of patience.¹ The above phrase is thus translated: ‘Patient endurance is the highest austerity.’ (Alternatively: ‘Patience—

¹ See: S. I. 222.

i.e., forbearance—is the highest austerity.’)

From this stage the first verse explains that the objective of fortitude, patience, and effort is Nibbāna. All of the Buddhas confirm the truth of this.

Finally, the person who is described as the model for such effort and practice is called a renunciant (*pabbajita*; *samaṇa*). He or she possesses the vital attributes of non-harming, of non-oppression, of not being a danger to anyone else (one can use the term ‘harmless’—*ahimsā*), and of virtue. It is not a matter of conducting religious ceremonies, being a mystic or holy man, having psychic powers, acting as a mediator between heaven and earth, or anything like this.

As I mentioned earlier, the renunciants at the time of the Buddha emphasized asceticism and had their own distinctive forms of practising austerities. These practices automatically became their code of conduct, their normal behaviour, the distinctive, personal features of an individual or group of renunciants (i.e., they constituted the person’s moral conduct—*sīla*). For example, the Acelakas practised the austerity of wearing robes in a distinctive fashion, ate only once every three days, slept on thorns, etc. On the surface this code of conduct resembles a monastic form of *vinaya*, yet the Buddha rejected precisely these kinds of practices, the reason for which we will look at more closely soon.

These renunciants undertook these practices as a result of personal beliefs and aspirations—to burn away evil and to attain personal liberation. They didn’t pay attention to or consider their responsibility towards society. For example, they were unrestrained, neglected social manners, licked their hands, did not wash their mouths, and urinated and defecated standing up in public. They didn’t care what others said. Many people even believed these renunciants to be well-disciplined, holy, and reverential. This is one aspect to consider.

Most importantly, however, these renunciants believed that by practising these austerities they would arrive at the spiritual goal—of

washing away evil deeds, of purification, of liberation, of attaining release (*moksha*), detachment (*kaivalya*), etc.

These matters will become clearer when we examine the Buddhist view of practising such observances and austerities.

The Buddha had passed through and abandoned the practice of religious austerities (*vata*) and extreme asceticism (*tapa*), and therefore these two terms are generally not used in the Buddhist teachings. The chief Buddhist word used in this context of virtuous conduct is *sīla*, because it most accurately conveys the desired nuance of meaning. *Sīla* refers to intentional actions, to physical and verbal modes of conduct in relation to society, and to disciplined behaviour. It emphasizes one's relationship to society and to the environment, beginning with the principles of non-harming and mutual assistance.

In some religious doctrines, for example among the Nigaṇṭhā, the strict practice of non-violence is simply one aspect of a system of extreme self-discipline. Adherents of such religious traditions observe austerities in this context in order to refrain from creating new karma. In the Buddhist moral system referred to as *sīla*, however, non-violence and compassionate support lie at the very heart of this system.

Buddhism teaches that moral precepts (*sīla*), religious practices (*vata*), and austerities (*tapa*) are all included in the stage of moral conduct (*sīla*)—they are confined to the level of conduct. Those ascetics who practised extreme forms of austerity, however, believed that they would achieve purity and liberation by way of these practices—i.e., *sīla*, *vata* and *tapa* in themselves will lead to purity and freedom. This is an incorrect understanding, a false belief, and a wrong practice, referred to as 'adherence to rules and practices' (*sīlabbata-parāmāsa*): the belief that purity and liberation is attained by way of moral precepts (*sīla*) and religious practices (*vata*).¹

¹ [Note how the v in *vata* becomes a double-b in this compound word.]

According to Buddhism, moral practices are only one part of a systematic approach to reaching purity and liberation. *Sīla* is a system of conduct and self-discipline used in relation to community life, so that people do not harm each other—instead they assist one another. It is a system of conduct and a proper relationship to one's environment that is established as a foundation or as preparation. It fosters a conducive environment and prepares people in order that they can advance in spiritual training.

Moral conduct is one level of spiritual practice. It is the initial or basic stage of practice, preparing the ground for a person to reach higher stages, within the system of the threefold training: moral conduct (*sīla*), concentration (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*paññā*)—a training in body & speech, mental composure, and wisdom. Moral conduct is a requirement or prerequisite for practice.

The purpose of moral conduct is to lead to concentration, which leads to wisdom, which in turn leads to liberation. Liberation is not achieved directly or solely by way of adhering to moral precepts or religious customs. (It must be emphasized, however, that without a foundation of moral conduct, liberation is impossible. Without the necessary prerequisites, spiritual progress does not occur.)

From one perspective, *sīla* is a responsibility towards one's society and environment. It also includes mutual assistance according to the principle of non-harming—not harming oneself or others—that is, to benefit oneself (*attattha*), to benefit others (*parattha*), and to benefit both oneself and others (*ubhayattha*). This is achieved by setting down a code of conduct, a way of life, and principles of behaviour governing physical and verbal actions.

On a personal level, *sīla* creates good habits and fosters a way of life, including a physically healthy lifestyle, that is conducive to mental fulfilment and the development of wisdom. A way of life that aims to benefit all beings generates wholesome results, which return to benefit the individual and create conditions that help in spiritual development.

When one observes *sīla* correctly, it becomes one's normal way of conducting one's life. In reference to looking out for both the collective good and one's own spiritual progress, the Buddha compared a stream-enterer to a mother cow, who, while grazing on grass herself, looks to make sure that her calf also has something to eat. Paying attention to one's physical and verbal actions has a bearing on the development of concentration and wisdom; *sīla* appeals to other spiritual qualities in order to support true growth, both individual and social.

In reference to the monastic community, moral conduct is perfected through a code of discipline (the Vinaya), which puts great emphasis on communal life. The monastic community is stable when it is in harmony, and for this reason there are many rules in the Vinaya Piṭaka which aim to protect and ensure communal harmony.

At the same time, the Vinaya is intimately connected to the Dhamma, and this connection reveals the gist of moral discipline. This is clearly evident in the teaching known as the six 'virtues conducive to communal life' (*sārāṇīya-dhamma*): physical acts of loving-kindness (*mettā-kāya-kamma*); verbal acts of loving-kindness (*mettā-vacī-kamma*); thoughts of loving-kindness (*mettā-mano-kamma*); sharing gains with others (*sādhāraṇa-bhogitā*); possessing a similar virtuous conduct as one's companions (*sīla-sāmaññatā*); and sharing right, noble views with one's companions (*diṭṭhi-sāmaññatā*).¹

The Vinaya thus has two levels: a basic or internal level, which lays down a code of behaviour regarding an individual, and an external level, which goes beyond the individual and lays down a code of behaviour pertaining to the community.

The term *tapā* or *tapo*, which is translated as 'heat,' 'to heat up,' or 'to burn,' and is used in the context of burning away evil, can also be translated as 'to cause affliction.' In this context, the Buddha classified

¹ Vin. V. 92.

people into four groups:¹

- *Attantapo*: those who burn themselves; those who cause self-affliction. This refers, for example, to the Acelakas, who practised extreme austerities, like lying on thorns, pulling out their hair, eating grass, eating cow dung, eating excrement, standing and never sitting down, or other practices described earlier.
- *Parantapo*: those who burn others; those who cause affliction to others. For example: deer hunters, bird hunters, thieves, and those who perform various savage deeds.
- *Attantapa-parantapo*: those who burn themselves and others; those who cause affliction to themselves and others. This refers to people with great wealth and power, for example kings and chief brahmans who conduct animal sacrifices. They perform the ceremony by shaving off their hair and beard, dressing in animal skins, anointing themselves with butter and oil, scratching their backs with deer horns, lying on ground smeared with fresh cow dung, drinking milk from a cow's udder, and taking the milk to worship fire. Their associates must do likewise. They then command that certain animals are slaughtered for the sacrifice. At the same time, their servants and labourers are distressed and troubled.
- *Anattantapa-apanantapo*: those who burn neither themselves nor others; those who do not cause affliction to themselves or others. These individuals are contented, satisfied, peaceful, untroubled, and happy; through this practice they have instantly become 'sublime' (*brahma*). When a Buddha appears in the world, there are those who listen to his teaching, proceed on the right path, go forth into homelessness, observe supportive moral precepts, do not injure others, live a pure livelihood, and develop the divine abidings, like loving-kindness. They bring the factors of concentration and wisdom to completion, realize the Four Noble Truths, and reach true liberation.

¹ A. II. 205-206.

In this teaching the Buddha reveals the harm in those doctrines of extreme asceticism, practised by many renunciants during that time, and the suffering of the doctrine of sacrificial offerings, practised by the brahmans.

The Buddha states that those renunciants undertaking extreme austerities do not burn away evil—rather they end up burning themselves. He then states that those who perform sacrifices burn both themselves and others—they oppress and injure other beings in a similar way to hunters and bandits.

In Buddhism the essence of moral conduct is the establishment of a code of conduct, which fosters a healthy, supportive relationship between people and their environment—both social and natural. This purpose and goal of moral conduct leads to a clearly defined practice that is distinct from these other religious traditions.

Maintaining an Integrity of Practice

For the sake of review, in reference to the renunciants at the time of the Buddha, the term *tapa* or *tapo-kamma* is a general term for their ascetic practices.

Each distinct practice they undertook is referred to as a religious practice (*vata*).

The term *sīla* is used in a broad sense and as an auxiliary term, referring to normal, accepted behaviour. The particular practices (*vata*) of these renunciants are designated as *sīla* in the sense that they are things to be constantly safeguarded and not transgressed; they become the distinguishing characteristics of their life.

Their entire collection of religious practices are thus referred to as *sīla-vata*, which in Pali is written as *sīlabbata*.

In the Buddhist teachings the term *vata* was almost completely abandoned. The key term used in this context is *sīla*, which has a very important meaning, as discussed earlier.

Moral conduct in Buddhism is comprised of observing specific training rules or precepts (*sikkhāpada*). Simply speaking, *sīla* is defined as keeping particular rules, like not stealing, not killing, and not lying. If one transgresses these rules, one commits an offence (*āpatti*). In the Vinaya there are varying degrees of severity in regard to these offences.

For the bhikkhus there are two hundred and twenty-seven important training rules, which act as the basis of the Vinaya. Together they constitute the main disciplinary code called the Pāṭimokkha, as mentioned earlier. Simply speaking, the monks have two hundred and twenty-seven moral precepts (*sīla*). Strictly speaking, however, *sīla* does not refer to training rules, but rather to the virtues inherent in an individual, which are generated by following and not transgressing these rules.

The training rules for monks, however, are not limited to the two hundred and twenty-seven rules contained in the Pāṭimokkha, which merely acts as a foundation for the monastic discipline.

There are numerous training rules apart from the Pāṭimokkha, outnumbering those contained in it. They are applied to refine one's moral conduct, to make one's conduct more excellent and impeccable. The penalty for transgressing these rules is usually not serious. Examples of these rules include: an obligation in the rainy season to observe the three-month rains retreat (*vassa*); having observed the Vassa, to then perform the Pavāraṇā ceremony on the final full moon Uposatha day; having completed the 'first' Vassa,¹ to then 'spread' the *kaṭhina* cloth; to refrain from wearing rings and necklaces; to refrain from using makeup; and to refrain from using silver, gold, crystal, or copper almsbowls.

I mentioned earlier that in Buddhism the Buddha bestowed a prominent role to moral conduct (*sīla*) and established a system of

¹ [The 'first' Vassa begins on the full moon of July; the 'second' Vassa begins on the full moon of August. Both last for three months.]

ethical conduct. He renounced or rejected the austere practices (*vata*) which lay at the heart of those religious traditions espousing asceticism.

For the most part those individuals who were ordained as Buddhist monks were aware of which ascetic practices belonged to adherents of other religious groups. But it did happen that some bhikkhus proposed to undertake various ascetic practices that they believed were consistent with a life of modesty and fewness of desires. These occasions prompted the Buddha to lay down training rules, for example:

On one occasion a bhikkhu came naked to the Buddha and asked for permission to undertake the practice of nudity (*naggiya-vata*).¹ The Buddha rebuked him and told him it was unsuitable to live as a naked ascetic, which is a practice belonging to members of other sects (*titthiya-samādāna*). If a bhikkhu undertakes this practice, he incurs a 'grave offence' (*thullaccaya*).

On another occasion a large group of monks spent the Rains together at a monastery in the Kosala country.² They made a pact to refrain from speaking with one another for the entire three months, in order to maintain communal harmony and to live at ease (i.e., to spend the entire time meditating). After the Rains they went to visit the Buddha and told him what they had done.

The Buddha rebuked them and said that they had lived together like cattle, like goats, or like heedless people. He then laid down a training rule prohibiting monks from observing a 'vow of silence' (*mūga-vata*; 'to practise as mutes'), which is a practice belonging to members of other sects. If a bhikkhu undertakes this practice he incurs an offence of wrongdoing (*dukkāṭa*).³

¹ Vin. I. 305.

² Vin. I. 157.

³ Let me add that the Thai Siam Raṭṭha edition of the Pali Tipiṭaka uses the term *mūgabbatta* (silence as a religious observance—*vatta*), with a footnote stating that the Burmese edition uses *mūgabbata* (= *mūga-vata*). It is clear that *mūgabbatta* is the correct

Besides forbidding the monks from taking on this vow of silence, the Buddha also used this opportunity to prescribe a new formal act of the sangha, by having the bhikkhus who have completed the Rains perform the Pavāraṇā ceremony. Instead of mimicking the mute, he had the monks train themselves in proper speech. He had them use speech in conjunction with wisdom in order to benefit the community—to make improvements and to foster mutual development.

Besides the bhikkhu who requested the observance of nakedness, there were other bhikkhus who asked permission from the Buddha to wear robes made from kusa grass, woven bark, cloth made from human hair, and tiger skins, imitating those ascetics described earlier. The Buddha rebuked them, and laid down a training rule forbidding monks from wearing such robes, which act as the banner of members of other religious traditions. Anyone who does so incurs a grave offence (*thullaccaya*).

These prescriptions by the Buddha show how Buddhism maintains the principles of moderation, which the Buddha used to keep the sangha in a state of balance.

Besides steering the monks away from the path of tortuous asceticism, which is considered the extreme of self-mortification (*attakilamathānuyoga*), the Buddha also protected them from falling into a life of luxury and extravagance practised by those householders who delight in sensuality and are engrossed in the extreme of sensual indulgence (*kāma-sukhallikānuyoga*).

For example, in the matter of robes, there was another group of monks who slipped into the opposite extreme, by trying to be smart

rendition here, because the term is accompanied by the phrase ‘a practice belonging to members of other sects.’ Moreover, in other locations in the Thai Tipiṭaka this term is spelled *mūgabbata*. The spelling as *mūgabbatta* is thus a mistake resulting from faulty revision.

This matter becomes even more complicated, because one also finds the spellings *mūga-vatta* and *mūga-vata* mixed up in the Thai editions of the scriptures. In the Burmese editions, of these two terms, one only finds the single spelling *mūga-vata*.

and flashy. The Buddha therefore needed to lay down another training rule:¹

Monks of the group of six wore bright robes aiming to be physically attractive. The laypeople accused them of being like householders who delight in sensual pleasure. The Buddha laid down a rule forbidding monks from using robes with primary or dominant colours, like yellow, red, primrose, black, and pink. Moreover, he forbade monks from using robes that don't have a hem, that have a wide hem, and that have a border with flowery embroidery. He forbade monks from wearing shirts, hats, and turbans. A monk who transgresses these prescriptions incurs an offence of wrongdoing.

Besides looking at the suggestions by those bhikkhus who favoured the path of asceticism, it is also worthy to inspect the development amongst the brahman disciples.²

One story goes that two brothers from a brahman family were ordained as bhikkhus. One day they came to the Buddha and told him that bhikkhus were ordained from various clans and social classes, and each of them used his personal language and dialect, which ends up damaging and undermining the Buddha's words. These brothers proposed that the Buddha's words be preserved in the language of the Vedas (which later developed into Sanskrit).

The language of the Vedas was restricted to those members of the highest social classes, in particular the brahmins. If the Buddha's words were to be preserved in this language, or in Sanskrit, as wished for by these two brothers, the general population would not have access to Dhamma teachings. This would be tantamount to monopolizing education in imitation of the system maintained by the brahmins which excluded members of the lower castes from gaining access to the Vedas.

¹ Vin. I. 305.

² Vin. II. 139.

But this was not the Buddha's wish. He wanted every person, irrespective of caste or social class, to have equal access to the threefold training. He therefore reprimanded these two monks and set down a rule forbidding bhikkhus from translating his teachings into Vedic; a monk who does so incurs an offence of wrongdoing. He went on to say: 'Bhikkhus, I permit you to study the Buddha's words in your own language.'

Ascetic Practices (*vata*) Obscure Moral Conduct Religious Observances (*vatta*) Embrace and Illumine Moral Conduct

Let us return to the subject of ascetic practices (*vata*). For the most part these practices are rejected in Buddhism (although in a sense they are maintained in a different form and with different objectives, for example in the matter of 'suitable gifts'— *dakkhiṇā*). Related to this subject is another Pali term, very similar in spelling to *vata*, and that is *vatta*.

Instead of the pair *sīla* & *vata* (*sīlabbata*), one also finds the new pair *sīla* & *vatta*.

This matter requires some lengthy explanation, which may be of select interest to those keen on academic knowledge.

In general, the term *vatta* refers to minor practices aiming for discipline and order which should be performed regularly or to fulfil a responsibility. For example, it may refer to methods of taking care of and looking after specific people or specific places. It also includes a general sense of politeness in regard to specific circumstances. Sometimes this term is simply defined as 'conduct which should be performed.'

The practices comprising *vatta* help to supplement and support moral conduct (*sīla*), making it more stable, smooth, refined, and effective. For example, in the Pāṭimokkha there is a training rule permitting monks to own only one almsbowl. If one is given an

additional bowl, one may keep it for no longer than ten days.¹ Outside of the Pāṭimokkha there are various supporting observances (*vatta*) pertaining to using and keeping one's almsbowl. There are similar examples in relation to food, robes, and dwellings.

Similarly, in the Pāṭimokkha it prescribes that a monk who has incurred an offence entailing an initial and subsequent meeting of the sangha (*saṅghādisesa*) must perform a penance (*mānatta*) in order to be absolved from that offence, and if he has concealed this offence then he must also live under probation (*parivāsa*).²

One may wonder how to perform this penance and how to live under probation. Outside of the Pāṭimokkha there are prescribed observances for how to behave in these circumstances, which resemble a form of self-chastisement in order to redeem oneself. For instance, to abstain from using one's power and influence that attend one's rank or position in the community, to refrain from using the privileges belonging to ordinary monks, to refrain from using the privileges accompanying one's place in the hierarchy (based on one's number of Rains), and to make distinct gestures of humility, for example by sitting at the end of the line, sitting lower than ordinary monks, and condemning oneself publicly.³

The Vinaya contains general rules on polite behaviour, for example: how one should dress, sit, and speak while entering the village and visiting the homes of the laity; how to maintain etiquette and avoid improper behaviour while eating; and means of proper inquiry (*āpucchā*) from others (this is a form of asking permission before speaking, respecting others, and entrusting things to others).

For example, a monk who is leaving a monastery should put things away neatly, and close the doors and windows of his dwelling. He then 'entrusts' (*āpucchā*) the resident monks with the responsibility of

¹ Vin. III. 242-3.

² Vin. III. 186.

³ E.g.: Vin. II. 32.

looking after the dwelling. If there is no bhikkhu, he entrusts this to a novice; if there is no novice, he entrusts this to a lay steward; if there is no lay steward, he entrusts this to a lay follower from the village; if there is no lay follower, he simply puts things in order and departs. Similarly, if a monk is together with a more senior monk in a monastic building, he should ask permission (*āpucchā*) before speaking on Dhamma, giving a recitation, opening or closing a window, etc.

The combination of moral precepts (*sīla*) and routine observances (*vatta*) is conducive to a way of living, to behaviour, and to social relationships that are virtuous and mutually supportive. This provided the Buddhist monks with a method of practice that was contrary to that belonging to most of the other renunciants at the time of the Buddha, who were using moral precepts (*sīla*) and ascetic practices (*vata*) to burn away evil, as mentioned earlier.

The ascetics kept the practice (*vata*) of licking their hands (they would eat standing up and then lick their hands, and defecate standing up and then wipe themselves with their hands). Bhikkhus, on the other hand, upheld the observance (*vatta*) of sitting while eating and refraining from licking their hands. If they transgressed this observance they incurred an offence of wrongdoing. When they defecated they were to use an outhouse (*vacca-kuṭṭi*), using a stick to wipe themselves and afterwards rinsing themselves with water.

In the descriptions of renunciants at the time of the Buddha, from the hermits in the Himalayas to the Nigaṇṭhā followers, for example Bhaddā Kuṇḍalakesī mentioned above, in almost all cases one finds the specific trait of ‘stained teeth’ or ‘sucking on tartar,’ which made them appear holy, or something of that nature.¹

In regard to the bhikkhus, however, there is a prescription by the Buddha stating: ‘Bhikkhus, I allow tooth-woods (for cleaning the teeth).’² (About fifty years ago, monk disciples in Thailand would

¹ *Paṅkadanta*; occasionally this is modified to *paṅkadharī*.

² Vin. II. 135.

include such tooth-woods along with other offerings when they kept the observance of paying respects to their teachers and preceptors at the beginning of the Rains.)

The term ‘allow’ used here by the Buddha implies a prescription on his part, meaning that the monks should act in such a way. For example, he ‘allowed’ the monks to observe the three-month rainy season retreat, to perform the Pavāraṇā ceremony, and to spread the Kaṭhina.

The large number of observances (*vatta*) help to define the characteristics of Buddhist monks. They also indicate the distinction between Buddhist monastic life and the system held by ascetics at the time of the Buddha. For this reason, let us look at one set of observances, and while doing so compare these to the ascetic practices described earlier.

The set of observances here belong to the responsibilities of a bhikkhu while going out on alms (*piṇḍacārika-vatta*).¹

A bhikkhu wandering for alms thinks: ‘Now I shall enter the village.’ He should wear the robes evenly all around, gird the waist-belt, wrap the robes in overlapping layers, fasten the corner tags, rinse out the bowl, and carry it into the village in a well-mannered way, not in a rush.

He should enter the village well-covered, well-restrained, with downcast eyes. He should refrain from lifting up his robes and laughing loudly; he should make little noise. He should not shake his body, swing his arms, roll his head, place his arms akimbo, cover his head, or walk on his tiptoes.

When entering a house he should determine: ‘I shall enter here, I shall exit here.’ He should not rush in, rush out, stand too far away, stand too near, stand too long, or return too quickly.

While standing he should determine: ‘Do they intend to offer almsfood or not?’ If they stop working, get up from a seat, hold a ladle, hold a vessel, or place food out, he should remain standing,

¹ Vin. II. 215-16.

thinking: 'They intend to make an offering.' When they offer almsfood, he should part the outer layer of his robe with his left hand, incline the bowl forwards with his right hand, and then hold the bowl with both hands to receive the food. He should refrain from looking at the face of a female alms-donor. He should determine: 'Do they intend to offer curries or not?' If they hold a ladle, hold a vessel, or place curries out, he should stand, thinking: 'They intend to offer curries.'

When they have offered the almsfood, he should cover the bowl with the outer layer of his robe, and leave in a well-mannered way, not in a rush....

A bhikkhu who has returned first from almsround should lay out the seating, set out water for washing the feet, footstools, and tiles for scrubbing the feet, rinse and set out the food receptacles, and set out water for drinking and rinsing.

If previously gathered food remains, a bhikkhu who returns from almsround later may eat it if he wishes. If he does not wish to eat it, then he should throw it away in a place free from green vegetation or in water that does not contain living creatures.

That bhikkhu should carry away the seating, collect the water for washing the feet, the footstools, and the tiles for scrubbing the feet; he should wash out the food receptacles and put them away; he should collect the water for drinking and rinsing, and sweep out the refectory.

If a monk sees that a water vessel for drinking, a vessel for communal use, or a vessel for washing is empty, he should fill it up. If it is beyond his strength to set up these water vessels, he should beckon a companion to help, but he should not shout out for this reason.

These are the observances for a bhikkhu who goes out on almsround. A bhikkhu who goes out for alms should keep these observances well.

In order to clarify this matter of religious observances, we can arrange them in the following outline:

There are two main groups of observances (*vatta*). The second group is subdivided, resulting effectively in three groups:

1. Training observances (*sekhiya-vatta*), which are found in the Pāṭimokkha.¹ These are training rules or observances pertaining to basic etiquette around visiting laypeople's homes, receiving and eating almsfood, teaching the Dhamma, etc. All together they comprise seventy-five rules (there are related, refined observances in the following groups).
2. Sectional observances (*khandhaka-vatta*): observances in the section on disciplinary rules, i.e., observances found outside of the Pāṭimokkha. These are divided into two groups:
 - A) Major observances (*mahā-vatta*; crucial observances): rules of practice pertaining to one's conduct, manners, and responsibilities vis-à-vis other people and things with which one is engaged.² These are divided into fourteen sub-groups (an example is only given for the first of these sub-groups):
 - 1) Observances of a visiting monk (*āgantuka-vatta*): the observances to be kept when a monk visits another monastery. For example, when entering the boundary of a monastery, he should take off his shoes, lower his umbrella, uncover his left shoulder, pay respects to the senior resident monk, etc.
 - 2) Observances of a resident monk (*āvāsika-vatta*): the duties of a resident monk towards a visiting monk.
 - 3) Observances of a departing monk (*gamika-vatta*): the responsibilities of a monk who is departing in order to live elsewhere.

¹ Vin. IV. 185.

² This term *mahā-vatta* was established in the sub-commentaries. These begin at Vin. II. 208; rules pertaining to preceptors and teachers begin at Vin. I. 46.

- 4) Observances for giving the verses expressing gratitude (*anumodana-vatta*); this expression of gratitude normally takes place in the refectory.
 - 5) Observances for a monk going to eat (*bhattagga-vatta*).
 - 6) Observances of a monk entering the village for alms (*piṇḍacārika-vatta*).
 - 7) Observances for a monk living in the forest (*āraññika-vatta*).
 - 8) Observances for looking after one's dwelling (*senāsana-vatta*).
 - 9) Observances pertaining to the hot-room (*jantāghara-vatta*).
 - 10) Observances for using the outhouse (*vaccakuṭi-vatta*).
 - 11) Observances a pupil (*saddhivihārika*) should perform for his preceptor (*upajjhāya-vatta*).
 - 12) Observances a preceptor should perform for his pupils (*saddhivihārika-vatta*).
 - 13) Observances a pupil (*antevāsika*) should perform for his teacher (*ācariya-vatta*).
 - 14) Observances a teacher should perform for his pupil (*antevāsika-vatta*).
- B) Minor observances (*khuddaka-vatta*): the sub-commentaries, which established this term, explain that these are minor observances because they pertain to specific occasions and circumstances. They need not be observed regularly by all bhikkhus, as is the case with the 'major' observances. These minor observances refer to those eighty-two (or occasionally eighty) practices of acknowledging one's faults and following through with specific penalties in order to be re-accepted by the sangha. They are divided into two sub-groups:
- 1) Observances kept by those bhikkhus seeking a method of rehabilitation (*vuṭṭhāna-vidhi*) in order to be released from offences entailing an initial and subsequent meeting of the sangha (*saṅghādiseṣa*), i.e., the seventy-one observances of probation (*pārivāsika-vatta*) and observances of penance

(*mānatta-vatta*), e.g.: one should not welcome gestures of honour and the paying of respects by ordinary bhikkhus; one should refrain from walking or sitting in front of, living under one roof with, or using the same seat as ordinary bhikkhus.¹

- 2) The observances for a bhikkhu who has been penalized by the sangha by way of one of the five kinds of censure (*niggaha-kamma*): formal reprimand (*tajjaniya-kamma*); demotion (*niyasa-kamma*); expulsion (*pabbājaniya-kamma*); the obligation to ask forgiveness from a layperson whom one has caused harm (*paṭisāraṇiya-kamma*); and suspension of one's status (*ukkhepaniya-kamma*; to forbid someone from associating with the sangha).² All together there are eleven of these observances.

In any case, in the final analysis, all of these observances are included in the term *sekhiya* ('training'); they are all 'training rules' (*sekhiya-vatta*), because they must all be integrated into one's spiritual training.³

In the second volume of the *Vinayamukha*, which is used by second level Dhamma scholars (*nak tham*), Somdet Phra Mahāsamaṇa Chao Krom Phraya Vajirañāṇavarorasa⁴ emphasizes a practical or contemporary application of these observances. He selected some of them and matched them with other complementary practices from the Pali Canon, and organized these into three kinds of observances: 'The description here is of the gist of those observances which should be applied in the present time, for the convenience in practice and for

¹ From Vin. II. 32 onwards.

² Beginning at Vin. II. 5.

³ VismṬ.: *Silaniddesavaṇṇanā, Pātimokkhasaṃvarasīlavāṇṇanā.*

⁴ [Somdet Phra Mahāsamaṇa Chao Krom Phraya Vajirañāṇavarorasa (1860-1921). A son of King Rama IV and the tenth Supreme Patriarch of Thailand, who helped to institutionalize Thai Buddhism and was one of the leading intellectuals of his generation. He wrote a Pali grammar and several textbooks. He was very active in religious education, sangha administration, and scholarship.]

deriving true benefit. Here the classification of observances is into three kinds: duties to be fulfilled (*kicca-vatta*); matters of etiquette to be practised (*cariyā-vatta*); and standard observances (*vidhi-vatta*). (Examples of the first includes those duties to be performed for one's preceptor; an example of the second is to refrain from stepping on the white cloth laid down at an invitation in a layperson's home; examples of the third include the ways to wear and fold one's robe and the way to store one's bowl.) Those who are interested can look at this material more closely.

As an aside, the commentaries and sub-commentaries establish different headings when classifying these various kinds of observances mentioned above. There is the potential for confusion, however, in that these headings are not always consistent with one another, and in some cases they are even mutually contradictory.

At first I thought that in some cases it was a matter of misspelling, but as I looked more closely into this it became obvious that these headings are truly divergent. It is as if these texts represent different groups or factions (although it even occurs that contradictory terms are used within the same text). For example, those observances described above as minor observances (*khuddaka-vatta*) are referred to in another text as major observances (*mahā-vatta*), and vice versa; another text uses the same classification for major observances, but refers to the minor observances here as sectional observances (*khandhaka-vatta*).

A thorough inspection of these discrepancies results in three main groupings:

- Six texts contain 14 major observances and 82 (or 80) minor observances.
- Eight texts contain 14 major observances and 82 (or 80) sectional observances.
- Seven texts contain 14 sectional observances and 82 (or 80) major observances.

A Clear Distinction Between Ascetic Practices (*vata*) and Religious Observances (*vatta*)

It was mentioned earlier that Buddhism abandoned the ascetic practices (*vata*) of renunciants at the time of the Buddha. There are two remaining points of significance pertaining to this subject.

First, there is a confusion over certain terms in some of the scriptures because of inconsistencies, which occur in some places through inaccurate revision and in other places through incorrect copying.

In Thailand, an ambiguity exists in that the two terms *vata* and *vatta* are sometimes used interchangeably.¹ Alternatively, people have become so accustomed to a particular spelling using one or the other of these terms that they have not checked how the term in that context is spelled in the scriptures.

Take for example the ‘austere practices.’ There is a dilemma over which spelling is correct—*dhutaṅga-vatta* or *dhutaṅga-vata*—or whether both are acceptable.

As far as I have found, in contemporary Pali editions of the Tipiṭaka printed in Thai script, two commentaries contain the spelling *dhutaṅga-vatta*, while three commentaries contain the spelling *dhutaṅga-vata*. This may lead one to believe that these spellings are interchangeable.

Yet it is noteworthy that every volume of the Pali Tipiṭaka in Burmese script contains the uniform spelling *dhutaṅga-vata*; there is not a single instance of the spelling *dhutaṅga-vatta*.

A similar example pertains to the Buddha’s proscription mentioned earlier, forbidding monks from undertaking the vow of silence; again, it is not clear whether to use the term *vata* or *vatta* in this context.

In the Siam Raṭṭha edition of the Pali Tipiṭaka in Thai script, the term *mūgabbatta* (i.e., *mūga-vatta*) is used, with a footnote stating that

¹ In Thai, the term *vata* is often pronounced ‘prot’ (spelled: พรต).

the Burmese editions use the spelling *mūgabbata* (i.e., *mūga-vata*). Yet other editions of the Pali Tipiṭaka in Thai script all use the spelling *mūgabbata* (i.e., *mūga-vata*).

There is a further confusion in that these terms also appear in the spellings of *mūga-vatta* and *mūga-vata*, both of which are found in the Thai editions. The Burmese editions, however, invariably contain the spelling *mūga-vata*.

A similar ambiguity exists in the Thai edition of the Mahānidessa, which uses the terms *hatthi-vatta*, *go-vatta*, and *kukkura-vatta* (the practice of imitating an elephant, cow, or dog, respectively, as religious practices). It contains a footnote, however, stating that the ‘ancient’ or original Thai texts, along with modern Burmese texts, use the spellings *hatthi-vata*, *go-vata*, and *kukkura-vata*, referring to these as ascetic practices.¹

In other Thai texts of the Pali Tipiṭaka containing this list of practices, there are twenty-six occurrences of the spelling *vatta* and thirty-four occurrences of the spelling *vata*. In the Burmese texts, however, one finds only one spelling—*vata*—in sixty-nine occurrences.

In regard to the variant spellings found in the Thai editions, one may come to the conclusion that these spellings are interchangeable. But from another perspective, one may conclude that a single, definitive spelling, as found in the Burmese editions, is preferable.

It is also noteworthy that in the Buddha’s descriptions of observances, including training rules (*sekhiya-vatta*), sectional observances (*khandhaka-vatta*), minor observances (*khuddaka-vatta*), and major observances (*mahā-vatta*), all mentioned above, one only finds the spelling of *vatta*, without any doubtful spellings.

Similarly, one finds no list or passage in the Pali with the spellings *vatta/vata* juxtaposed in reference to the austere practices (*dhutaṅga*).

¹ Nd. I. 92; similarly, the Thai text at M. I. 387 uses the spellings *go-vattika* and *kukkura-vattika*, whereas the Burmese editions read *go-vatika* and *kukkura-vatika*.

Now we can look at some factual evidence, which may help us to draw some distinct conclusions and clear up ambiguity.

To begin with we can look at the probable authenticity in reference to the Burmese editions, which decisively contain only one of the two terms in such compounds as *dhutaṅga-vata*, *mūga-vata*, *go-vata*, etc. Yet we may still waver over which of the alternate terms is truly accurate. So let us put these Burmese texts aside for now.

There is a point, however, where we are forced to be decisive, where there is no room for wavering. Let us return to some subjects discussed earlier.

A short while ago I mentioned those monks who have committed a grave offence, and who consequently must live under probation (*parivāsa*). While living under probation, they must observe a long list of practices, for example refraining from sitting on the same seat or sitting platform as a normal bhikkhu.

Moreover, I mentioned that, when a renunciant belonging to another religious tradition (*titthiya*) gained faith in and wished to go forth in the Buddhist religion, the Buddha decreed that he must first live under probation—called *titthiya-parivāsa*—in order to learn about Buddhism and to act as a test of character.

While living under this form of probation the ordination candidate must follow specific observances (*vatta*), for example refraining from having sex with a prostitute. These Buddhist observances are referred to as *titthiya-vatta*.

In reference to this term, all texts, both Thai and Burmese, contain the spelling *titthiya-vatta*; there is not a single occurrence in this context of *titthiya-vata*.

In answer to the question whether the term *titthiya-vata* exists in the scriptures, yes it does. It refers to those observances practised by members of other religious traditions.

So here we must make a definite distinction between these two terms; one cannot validly state here that these spellings are

interchangeable. These terms are defined in the Pali scriptures thus:

Titthiya-vatta: the observances that a renunciant of another religious tradition, who requests to be ordained in Buddhism, must follow during the time of his probation. For example: to refrain from entering or returning from the village after the accepted time; to refrain from going to unsuitable places, like visiting prostitutes or overly socializing with bhikkhunis; to take an interest in and help out with the work and activities organized by one's companions in the holy life; and to earnestly study and inquire about the threefold training.

Titthiya-vata: the ascetic practices performed by renunciants of other religious traditions. E.g.: the practice of nakedness (*naggiya-vata*); the practice of pulling out one's hair (*kesaluñcana-vata*); the practice of hanging down from a branch like a bat (*vagguli-vata*); and the practice of smearing oneself with oil and rolling in dust and dirt (*rajojallaka-vata*).

In regard to the second term, there is one passage in the Thai edition where the term *titthiya-vatta* is used instead.¹ In the Burmese Pali editions, in which there is normally no confusion between these two terms, there is also one passage that uses *titthiya-vatta* in the sense of *titthiya-vata*.² Yet this same passage is self-contradictory, as it states: 'An example of *titthiya-vatta* is *mūga-vata*.' (Earlier in this text the necessary observances—*titthiya-vatta*—for *titthiya-parivāsa* are discussed, and therefore the author may have got muddled and used the same term here.)

Although one occasionally encounters revisionary errors in the Burmese Pali scriptures, they are extremely few. Some of these texts contradict one another and thus admit to the errors: for example, one text may contain the spelling *vatāni*, and another text referring to the identical subject contains the spelling *vattāni*. Alternatively, the

¹ VinA. VII. 1321.

² Parivāra Aṭṭhakathā: [160].

commentarial text may use *vattāni*, while the sub-commentarial text referring to the commentarial passage uses *vatāni*.¹ The Thai Pali texts, however, contain numerous discrepancies.

One can have sympathy, however, for those who copied or revised these texts, since in this case of *titthiya-vata* versus *titthiya-vatta* one is dealing with a single extra consonant. It is easy to make a mistake.

Making a clear distinction between these terms, however, adds to clarity and understanding:

- *Vata* refers to important ascetic practices adhered to by non-Buddhist renunciants.
- *Vatta* refers to observances performed by Buddhist monks which are used to support and supplement moral conduct.

Dhutaṅga-Vata vs. Dhutaṅga-Vatta

Earlier I mentioned the Pali term *dakkhiṇā* ('gift,' 'offering'). At the time of the Buddha this was an important term that had been used for centuries. With the arising of Buddhism, the Buddha inevitably encountered this term and needed to include it in the Buddhist vocabulary. Its original meaning, however, was incompatible with his teachings, so he needed to alter its meaning, as explained earlier.

The term *tapa* ('religious austerity') is perhaps even more important than *dakkhiṇā*. The Buddha said that patience (*khanti*) is the supreme religious austerity (*tapa*). The term *tapa* is used frequently in Buddhism. In the Buddhist context, however, it does not refer to extreme ascetic practices, like lying on nails. Rather, it is a spiritual quality that one develops oneself, referring in particular to effort and perseverance.

Khanti is the fortitude required in order to remain steadfast in one's efforts until one reaches the goal. It refers to both patience and endurance, and is applied both to striving and to restraint.

¹ The only contradictory terms I have discovered in the Burmese texts are *ukkuṭikappadhānādini vatāni* versus *ukkuṭikappadhānādini vattāni*.

Others may claim that the term *tapa* means ‘to heat up’ or ‘to burn,’ and they may ask: ‘What is it that you burn?’ We can answer: ‘We burn up the defilements of the mind.’ For this reason, Pali students define *tapa* as the effort applied to burn up defilements

The ten royal virtues (*dasa-rājadhammā*) contain the factor of *tapa*. Kings, as well as other prestigious and powerful leaders, have the opportunity to do whatever they please. They can oppress others and seize wealth for themselves, and spend their entire time ministering to their own pleasures. Instead, they are encouraged to practise self-restraint; they should not be indulgent, nor should they simply seek their own gratification. They should be patient and use their power to nurture the happiness of the general public. With a combination of patience (*khanti*) and exertion (*tapa*), true power (*teja*) arises, to which people are genuinely willing to yield and surrender.

For these reasons, in the scriptures the term *tapa* is defined as ‘effort’ (*viriya*).

When one speaks about *tapa*, inevitably one must also speak about *vata* (‘ascetic practice’), which lies at the heart of religious austerity. And here is where the term *vata* appears in the Buddhist context.

As the Buddha rejected the torment of the body, he used the term *vata* to refer to strict and rigorous self-discipline, or to ‘scraping out’ or ‘eliminating’ mental defilements. Buddhism thus does contain ‘austere practices’ (*vata*): the *dhutaṅga* practices. For this reason the spelling of these austere practices is *dhutaṅga-vata*.

As far as I have found in the Thai Pali edition of the commentaries, there are two occurrences of the spelling *dhutaṅga-vatta*, and three occurrences of the spelling *dhutaṅga-vata*. In the Burmese Pali editions to these commentaries, however, there is only the spelling *dhutaṅga-vata*; there is not a single instance of *dhutaṅga-vatta*.

In the Pali Canon, neither of these two terms appear. The Pali Canon does, however, contain passages that form the origin of later definitions for the terms *vata* and *vatta*, and these passages provide

a clarity to this subject.

It is in the Mahāniddeśa (volume 29 of the Tipiṭaka) where these two terms are defined. The Mahāniddeśa expounds the meaning of a collection of suttas from the Suttanipāta and it is attributed to the chief disciple Ven. Sāriputta. This text contains Sāriputta's explanations of teachings by the Buddha contained in the Suttanipāta.

In the Suttanipāta the Buddha refers to moral precepts and religious austerities (*sīla-vata*), stating:

*If someone, without being asked, boasts about his moral standards and religious practices to others, the wise say that such a person is void of noble qualities.*¹

This passage is analyzed and explained in the Mahāniddeśa.² It states that according to Buddhist principles *sīla* here refers to a bhikkhu showing restraint in regard to the Pāṭimokkha, etc., whereas *vata* refers to the eight *dhutaṅga* observances. It goes on to explain that *vata* is equivalent to the undertaking of effort (*virīya-samādāna*) in a specific activity.

In essence, the Buddhist definition of *vata* ('austerity') is to put forth effort. At the heart of such austerity, the scriptures refer specifically to the *dhutaṅga* practices.

Here we come to the question, why, given that there are thirteen *dhutaṅga* practices in total, does the Mahāniddeśa, when defining the term *vata* in a Buddhist context, refer to only eight *dhutaṅga* practices? If this is the case, then only eight of the thirteen *dhutaṅga* practices would constitute 'austere practices' (*vata*). Would this imply that the remaining five practices are *dhutaṅga* practices, but not *vata*?

At first glance, one may assume that at the time the Mahāniddeśa was composed, the list of *dhutaṅga* practices only comprised eight rather than thirteen factors. The eight practices mentioned in the Mahāniddeśa include: forest-dweller's practice (*ārañṇikaṅga*), almsfood-

¹ Sn. 153-4.

² Nd. I. 66-9.

eater's practice (*piṇḍapātikaṅga*), refuse-rag-wearer's practice (*paṃsu-kūlikaṅga*), triple-robe-wearer's practice (*tecivarikaṅga*), house-to-house-seeker's practice (*sapadānacārikaṅga*), later-food-refuser's practice (*khalupacchābhattikaṅga*), sitter's practice (*nesajjikaṅga*), and any-bed-user's practice (*yathāsanthatikaṅga*). The five practices not classified as *vata* are thus: the one-sessioner's practice (*ekāsanikaṅga*), the bowl-food-eater's practice (*pattapiṇḍikaṅga*), the tree-root-dweller's practice (*rukhamūlikaṅga*), the open-air-dweller's practice (*abbhokāsikaṅga*), and the charnel-ground-dweller's practice (*sosānikaṅga*).

When looking at the five practices not included in the list of austerities (*vata*), their exclusion cannot be for the reason conjectured above. Why is that? Because this list of five includes such basic practices such as dwelling at the root of a tree and eating out of one's almsbowl. These practices existed since the beginning, and thus we must seek another reason for their exclusion.

The decision to exclude these five factors is most likely connected to the definition for *vata* presented in the Mahānidessa, of 'undertaking effort.'

The *dhutaṅga* observances are applied for 'shaking off' or eliminating defilements. An essential or basic quality for spiritual development is contentment with little, or fewness of desires. All thirteen of the *dhutaṅga* practices help to generate this quality. But the eight factors listed above require extra effort—a special undertaking of effort—and are therefore classified as austere practices (*vata*). The remaining five practices are considered to require less effort.

The special undertaking of effort is also the criterion in a Buddhist context for distinguishing between austere practices (*vata*) and religious observances (*vatta*).

Let us return briefly to the textual problem. Both the original passage in the Suttanipāta, and the reference to this passage in the Mahānidessa, contain the spelling *sīla-vata*. But in the Thai Pali editions of the Mahānidessa, once the explanatory passages begin, the

term *vata* is clearly altered to *vatta*.

The Thai Pali edition states: *sīlavatānīti atthi sīlañceva vattañca atthi vattaṃ na sīlaṃ*. The term *sīlavatānīti* indicates clearly that *sīla* & *vata* are intended here, but the following clause (*sīlañceva vattañca atthi vattaṃ na sīlaṃ*) divides the respective terms into *sīla* & *vatta*. It is good that this text at least provides a footnote stating that, in reference to this rendering as *vatta*, the older Thai editions, as well as the Burmese editions, all use the term *vata*, without exception.¹

Once this text had rendered the first occurrence of *vata* as *vatta*, every subsequent reference to *vata* is spelled *vatta* (for example, *vatasampanno* is spelled *vattasampanno*).

For more substantiating evidence, let us look at the Thai Pali commentaries to these two canonical texts. In this way we can examine the original Pali passages set aside for explication about 1,500 years ago. Here, it turns out that these Thai editions also contain discrepancies (resulting from faulty revision).²

As mentioned earlier the original passage occurs in both the Suttanipāta and in the Mahāniddeśa. The same analysis of this passage is found in the commentaries to both of these canonical texts:

Suttanipāta Commentary: *tattha sīlavatānīti pātimokkhādīni sīlāni ārañṇakādīni dhutaṅgavatāni ca*.³

Mahāniddeśa Commentary: *tattha sīlavatānīti pātimokkhādīni sīlāni ārañṇakādīni dhutaṅgavattāni ca*.⁴

These two commentarial passages are almost identical, but with one important distinction:

The first passage states: ‘*sīla-vata*, i.e., all of morality, for instance the Pāṭimokkha, and the *dhutaṅga* practices, e.g., living in the forest.’

¹ Po. M. *vatañca ... sabbattha idisameva*.

² Again, the Burmese texts contain no discrepancies.

³ Sn. 153-4.

⁴ Nd. I. 66-9.

The second passage begins in the same way, but ends: ‘... and the *dhutaṅga* observances, e.g., living in the forest.’

In any case, I have added this material out of scholarly interest. It is clear that the ancient term *vata*—religious austerity—was used in a Buddhist context in reference to the *dhutaṅga* practices, which are not included in the list of religious observances (*vatta*) described earlier.

Any bhikkhu who wishes to voluntarily undertake the *dhutaṅga* practices may do so, but they are not formal prescriptions laid down by the Buddha. This differs from the observances (*vatta*), which are an explicit part of the formal discipline—the Vinaya.

(The *titthiya-vatta*, likewise, are not included in the above list of religious observances, because they are not intended for bhikkhus. They are to be kept by those members of other religious traditions who are preparing to take ordination as bhikkhus in the future.)

Balancing Austere Practices with Religious Observances

By comparing the *dhutaṅga* practices with the ascetic practices of other religious seekers at the time of the Buddha, one sees that they share a similarity. The *dhutaṅga* practices, however, are unmistakably a part of Buddhism. They do not stray from the Middle Way, they do not involve the same kind of physical torment, they are purely voluntary, and they are few in number. Buddhism is not preoccupied with the practice of austerities.

Compare the *dhutaṅga* practices with the list of ascetic practices (*tapo-kamma*). In regard to receiving and eating food, the ascetics observed *ekāhika*—the vow to eat food left over for one day; the bhikkhus observe *ekāsanika*—the vow to eat food at only one sitting, i.e., to eat only once a day. The *dhutaṅga* practice of *nesajjika*—of only sitting and refraining from lying down—is quite onerous. However, it is not as severe as the ascetic practice of only standing up and refraining from both sitting and lying down, or the Nigaṇṭhā practice of standing on one leg.

Some of these practices are identical, including the tenth *dhutaṅga* vow of dwelling in the open-air (*abbhokāsikaṅga*) and the twelfth vow of accepting any dwelling that is offered (*yathāsanthatikaṅga*). These same terms were used for identical practices observed by ascetics in pre-Buddhist times.¹ (The practice of dwelling at the root of a tree—*rukkhamūlikaṅga*—was also a practice observed by ascetics in pre-Buddhist times.)²

The Buddha thus gave an opportunity to those individuals who are inclined towards austerity. The Buddha accepted those existing ascetic practices considered suitable, aware that they would be useful for some people, but he ensured that these practices were not excessive. The twelfth practice, for example, was interpreted by other ascetics to mean accepting any seat provided and not budging from that spot. The interpretation in the *dhutaṅga* practice is to accept whichever dwelling (*senāsana*; literally ‘place for lying down and sitting’) is offered.

In sum, the *dhutaṅga* practices are linked to the threefold training, and do not deviate from the Middle Way (*majjhimā-paṭipadā*). Moreover, Buddhism does not claim that by observing these practices one will be assured of purity and liberation.

The commentaries explain that the way of life of a bhikkhu, of going out each day for alms, is in itself an austere practice (*vata*). That is, the bhikkhus practise austerities on a daily basis.³

Generally speaking, those monks who undertook the *dhutaṅga* practices (*dhutaṅga-samādāna*) had a sincere and earnest determination to train themselves and to accomplish what is difficult to accomplish within wholesome limitations. The Buddha thus expressed his

¹ D. I. 166-7. Note that non-Buddhist ascetics at the time of the Buddha observed the open-air-dweller’s practice (*abbhokāsikaṅga*) in a more extreme way than how it is observed by bhikkhus.

² M. I. 281-2; MA. II. 325.

³ *Majjhimā Nikāya Uparipaññāsaka Tīkā*: Mahāsakuludāyisuttavaṇṇanā. There is the additional *dhutaṅga* practice of vowing to eat only almsfood (*piṇḍapātikaṅga*) and no other food.

approval of these individuals.

At one time the Buddha went into seclusion for three months.¹ During that time he forbade anyone from visiting him, except for an attendant who brought him almsfood. But he gave special visiting rights to those bhikkhus who were observing three *dhutaṅga* practices: forest-dwellers (*āraññika*), almsfood-eaters (*piṇḍapātika*), and refuse-rag-wearers (*paṃsukūlika*).

In the case of eight of the *dhutaṅga* practices, there is an equivalent ascetic practice observed by other renunciants at the time of the Buddha, in a similar way to the vow of dwelling in the open-air and the vow of accepting any dwelling that is offered, mentioned earlier.

If stipulated by the Buddha, a monk who undertook a *dhutaṅga-vata* was required to follow an observance (*vatta*) vis-à-vis that austere practice (*vata*). For example, a monk who is a forest-dweller (*āraññika*) is required to keep the observances of a forest-dweller (*āraññika-vatta*)² prescribed by the Buddha.

Don't get confused. This term doesn't mean that dwelling in the forest is a religious observance; rather it means that there are duties for one dwelling in the forest. A monk who is undertaking the single *dhutaṅga* practice of forest-dwelling (*āraññika-vata*) is obliged to keep dozens of observances (*āraññika-vatta*).³

These observances for a forest-dweller include instructions on what to do after getting up in the morning, how to conduct oneself on almsround, what to do on returning from almsround, how to set out water for drinking and washing, how to make a fire, how to prepare fire-sticks, and how to make a walking stick. Further duties include learning the pathway of the stars and knowing how to determine the four directions.

¹ Vin. III. 231.

² Sometimes spelled *āraññika-vatta*.

³ Vin. II. 217.

No-one is compelled to undertake the *dhutaṅga* practice of dwelling in the forest. But if a monk does determine to undertake this practice, then he is obliged to keep the relevant observances. When one undertakes the *vata* as a forest-dweller, one must observe the *vatta* of a forest-dweller.

This is how the terms *vata* and *vatta* are both complementary and distinctive.

Clinging to Rules & Practices

I have gone on at length in order to clarify the distinction between these two terms, *vata* and *vatta*. Before concluding, let us examine the gist of this subject material.

As mentioned earlier, members of other religious traditions at the time of the Buddha held the doctrine that the extreme ascetic practices they followed were in themselves means for reaching purity and salvation. The Buddha however, said that their misguided belief and practice constituted ‘clinging to rules and practices’ (*silabbata-parāmāsa*).

Besides harbouring such an erroneous view, these ascetics devoted themselves entirely to fulfilling these austere practices. They did not care about community life, mutual assistance, or improving society. They were not interested in the relationship between their own actions and the wellbeing of society. For their practice to have been righteous, it would have needed to benefit society; the resulting virtue and wellbeing in society would then have supported the spiritual development of everyone, including these ascetics.

Their behaviour was sometimes even the opposite, of simply pursuing their own individual activities and attending solely to their religious austerities. They didn’t consider whether their actions may have been harmful to society or to their community.

Moreover, by the regular and constant undertaking of strange and unusual acts of self-mortification—of physical torment—these ascetics

often got stuck or attached to the literal meaning or the form of their religious practices. They believed that these forms in themselves lead to spiritual fulfilment. These beliefs were connected to ideas of magic, sacredness, and the supernatural, which then had complex repercussions on the surrounding society. People were often deluded into having faith in and devotion for these ascetics, who would use their religious practices in ways to deceive people.

Things became more complicated as these religious practices became connected to society. They led to material gain in the form of religious offerings. Those individuals who benefited from these gains may then have thought of strategies for deceiving pious people, who in turn became more deluded. This system only stirred up greed and created harmful consequences for individuals and for society, which got caught up in a cycle of corruption.

Psychic powers (*iddhi-pāṭihāriya*) were used as a yardstick for measuring a renunciant's success in spiritual realization. This was the case for the matted-hair ascetics led by Uruvela-Kassapa, whose wrong views it took the Buddha a long time to correct.

This matter was not restricted to the beliefs and practices of renunciants. It also had an important bearing on the beliefs of the laypeople. The matter of psychic powers became the determining factor in regard to the laypeople's faith. The laypeople who were deceived, who became enthralled with these psychic powers and pinned their hopes on the supernatural, were adversely affected.

The religious offerings resulting from maintaining religious practices turned back and tempted many renunciants into a preoccupation with these material things. They were a catalyst for increasing mental defilements, like greed and pride, in those renunciants obsessed with these things. They were similar to those rishis of ancient times who practised austerities to the point of causing distress and discomfort to celestial beings. They became haughty and overconfident, and their behaviour became a quest for power. Greed was

accompanied by anger and hatred, which was expressed by using psychic powers in harmful ways, like cursing other people.

Once power became the principal goal, religion became inextricably bound with mental defilements, of greed, hatred, and delusion. The renunciants were themselves misled, and they directed the laypeople into a fixation with these various kinds of psychic powers.

The Buddha established a monastic community regulated by the formal discipline, in order to be free from the dangers and harm of people abusing religious practices, and in a way that would benefit and support the wider society.

In so far as the Buddha acknowledged and accepted certain psychic powers, he maintained that they should only be used in conjunction with an ending of mental defilement. As the supreme practice, he emphasized the role of teaching, in order to give rise to wisdom. He insisted that the ‘marvel of psychic powers’ (*iddhi-pāṭihāriya*) act as an instrument for the ‘miracle of instruction’ (*anusāsani-pāṭihāriya*).

Yet when the Buddha laid down a system of regulations for his disciples, this gave rise to a new form of systematized practice. Although this system is refined, because people were at different stages of spiritual development, some of them attached to this new form and even used it for unwholesome purposes.

For this reason the Buddha gave some general reminders and warnings, both to the general public and to the monks, encouraging people to be vigilant and aware of the dangers—to not get stuck in the form—as is evident in the following teachings:¹

Undertaking the ascetic practice of nakedness, matted locks, stained teeth, fasting, lying on the ground, smearing oneself with dust and dirt, or standing on one’s tiptoes cannot purify a person who has not overcome doubt.

¹ Dh. verses 141-42, 264; cf.: M. I. 281-2; MA. II. 325.

A shaven head does not make a person a renunciant. How can one who is undisciplined, who speaks nonsense and is full of covetousness and greed, be considered a renunciant?

Although covered with adornments and finely dressed, if a person is virtuous, peaceful, and steadfast in the truth, has developed the sense faculties, leads an immaculate life, and has abandoned the harming of all living creatures, indeed he may be called a brahman, a renunciant, a monk.

Walking the Middle Way with Dignity

While still a bodhisatta the Buddha sought the path to awakening. First, he abandoned the way of life based on sense pleasure, and later he abandoned extreme austerities. Finally, he entered upon the Middle Way, became awakened, proclaimed the holy life, established the monastic sangha, and introduced the Dhamma to the general public.

The Buddhist way of life was entirely new for India at that time, both in regard to religious ideas and concepts, and to spiritual conduct. Buddhism teaches to reach happiness by way of happiness—a happiness separate from sense pleasure and free from unwholesome mind states. The Buddha’s teachings lead to wisdom and liberation, which even the more refined levels of happiness are unable to overshadow. Those who correctly follow this path are able to live simply, access happiness easily, and cease from causing themselves suffering.

The Buddhist community was comprised of both householders and monastics, known as the fourfold assembly, who lived together in harmony. Freedom of the heart and unfettered wisdom was shared by members of all four groups. Although members of these four distinct groups did not intermingle on an intimate basis, they assisted and supported one another. The laypeople provided material requisites and the monks and nuns taught the Dhamma and shared their wisdom.

The uniqueness of the Buddhist way of life and the relationship between the Buddhist assemblies prompted other people, especially renunciants from other traditions in India at that time, to express their distinction and differences.

The Buddha once told Ven. Cunda that wanderers of other traditions might assert that the renunciant sons of the Sakyan are devoted to a practice of happiness (*sukhallikānuyoga*).¹

The Buddha said that one should reply to these wanderers by saying that there are many different kinds of devotion to happiness, and one must first distinguish which kind one is talking about. If the wanderers are referring to the Buddhist devotion to happiness associated with the four jhānas, then their assertion is correct. This is a devotion to happiness that bears good fruit and can lead to the state of complete awakening.

At one time King Pasenadi of Kosala was visiting the Buddha and expressed his faith in the Triple Gem. He went on to describe the considerable differences he had observed between Buddhist monks and renunciants from other religious traditions:²

Again, venerable sir, I have walked and wandered from park to park and from garden to garden. There I have seen some recluses and brahmans who are lean, wretched, unsightly, jaundiced, with veins standing out on their limbs, such that people would not want to look at them again.

I have thought: 'Surely these venerable ones are leading the holy life in discontent, or they have done some evil deed and are concealing it.... I went up to them and asked: 'Why are you venerable ones so lean and wretched ... such that people would not want to look at you again?' Their reply was: 'It is an illness transmitted among our family, great king.'

¹ D. III. 130-31. Note that this is not an indulgence in sense pleasure (*kāma-sukhallikānuyoga*).

² Dhammacetiya Sutta, M. II. 121.

But here I see bhikkhus in the Dhammavinaya of the Buddha smiling and cheerful, sincerely joyful, plainly delighting, their faculties fresh, living at ease, unruffled, subsisting on what others give, abiding with a mind as a wild deer's. I have thought: 'Surely these venerable ones perceive successive states of lofty distinction in the Blessed One's Dispensation.... This too, venerable sir, is why I infer according to Dhamma about the Blessed One: 'The Blessed One is fully enlightened ... the sangha of the Blessed One's disciples is practising the good way.'

The main subject of this chapter has been related to 'virtuous conduct' (*sīla*), which is expressed by way of body and speech, in order to assist and refine one's spiritual practice and to prepare oneself for further stages of development. *Sīla* has a direct bearing on social relationships and on one's entire environment, which one can simply call the 'world at large.' It helps to promote a society, or an environment, which is conducive to each person's spiritual development in regard to 'higher mind' (*adhicitta*) and 'higher wisdom' (*adhipaññā*). Finally, it leads to complete liberation, at which time one is able to devote oneself fully to noble deeds for the welfare and happiness of all beings.

When examined more closely, the moral conduct (*sīla*) acting as a basis for concentration and wisdom is accompanied and completed by the protective, reinforcing, and supportive factors referred to as 'religious observances' (*vatta*). When a person's moral conduct is supported by such observances, one can be confident that he or she will become established in the threefold training leading to liberation.

Besides minor aspects of conduct that comprise the observances (*vatta*), which are often subtle or gentle reminders or supports for moral conduct, there are the thirteen *dhutaṅga* practices, for those people who voluntarily wish to undertake a more strict or austere training. These austere practices (*vata*) add another layer to the development of virtuous conduct.

When included within the threefold training, moral precepts (*sīla*), religious observances (*vatta*), and austere practices (*vata*)—or arranged according to degree of intensity as *vata*, *sīla*, and *vatta*—all fall under the category of virtuous conduct (*sīla*).

I have come across one occurrence in the Tipiṭaka (in a group of four verses) where these three terms are combined into one compound word, as *vatasīlavattaṃ*. This identical group of verses is found in two locations in the Tipiṭaka.¹

On a minor point related to the texts, the Siam Raṭṭha edition in Thai script of the Pali Tipiṭaka contains some inconsistencies. The twenty-seventh volume states *vatasīlavattaṃ* as mentioned above, but the fifteenth volume, although the wording is identical, uses the spelling *vata sīlavattaṃ*. As a consequence the Thai translated edition is also incorrect, as: ‘*sīla-vatta* indeed!’ That is, when the term *vata* is separated from the other two terms, it is interpreted as an interjection.

When one looks at the commentarial explanations of this term, there are further inconsistencies, with the Thai Mahāchūḷa edition containing one spelling and the Thai Mahamakut edition containing another. In the end one must turn to the Burmese commentarial edition, which contains the single spelling *vatasīlavattaṃ*. (This term also appears in the commentaries to the Majjhima Nikāya,² and here the Thai editions are consistent with the spelling as found in the twenty-seventh volume of the Tipiṭaka).

One can see here that when the commentators were reading the Tipiṭaka about 1,500 years ago, these three terms were consistently connected as a single compound. This is one benefit of the commentaries, which are useful for verifying specific terms.

It is important that those individuals who inspect and collate the texts today add a footnote and make a thorough record of these discrepancies.

¹ S. I. 143; J. III. 360.

² MA. II. 409.

Those people who perform this task do a great benefit to the general public. It is painstaking and detailed work, worthy of appreciation. But they need to be resolute and determined to complete any unfinished work.

In any case, the evidence clearly confirms that this term is a single compound: *vatasīlavattaṃ*.

The commentaries (i.e., the Burmese editions, which are conclusive in this matter) explain this compound as *vatasīlavattanti sīlameva vuccati*—austerities, moral precepts, and religious observances comprise moral conduct—which is consistent with the explanation above.

The system of moral conduct (*sīla*), which constitutes the underpinning of the threefold training, is refined and completed with the religious observances (*vatta*).

The Vinaya Piṭaka contains a concluding verse on the subject of religious observances (*vatta*), describing the interconnected development of the threefold training, both in its positive and negating aspects. Here, let me simply cite the positive or supportive sequence:¹

When religious observances are undertaken and developed completely, moral conduct (sīla) is brought to completion. One whose morality is pure, who is endowed with wisdom, experiences one-pointedness of the mind (ekaggatā-citta). A concentrated mind, focused on a single object, fully realizes the Dhamma. Clearly seeing the true Dhamma, one is released from suffering.

An Appreciation of the Monastic Vinaya

Here, we have discussed the subject of moral conduct at length. Before we finish, let me emphasize again the importance of understanding specific Pali terms clearly.

Generally speaking, when people refer to the term *sīla* they do so in a very general and broad sense. They use this single term to

¹ Vin. II. 236.

encompass many other specific or technical terms.

Yet when they use one of the many subsidiary terms referring to nuances of moral or virtuous behaviour, it starts to get complicated and may lead to confusion. Even a general explanation of moral conduct can become ambiguous as a result. To keep things easy and simple, the term *sīla* is used to encompass all of these nuances.

When engaging in formal scholarship, however, it is essential to distinguish between these different terms. Otherwise, because the scholars themselves are confused, the scholarship will lack precision.

To begin with, the terms that need to be distinguished are *sīla*, *vinaya*, and *sikkhāpada*. When speaking in a general sense, one may use the single term *sīla* to refer to all three. The term *sīla*, however, technically does not mean ‘rules of practice,’ ‘moral precepts,’ or ‘regulations set down by the Buddha.’ The term *sikkhāpada* (‘training rule’) is used for these meanings.

Take for example the formal request for precepts from the monks. Here, one may use the general expressions ‘giving *sīla*’ and ‘receiving *sīla*.’ However, when one examines the actual Pali wording in this recitation, one sees that there is no mention of the term *sīla* at all. Instead, the term *sikkhāpadaṃ* is used throughout.

When one practises according to these training rules or moral precepts (*sikkhāpada*), one gives rise to virtuous conduct. This virtuous conduct generates moral virtue within oneself. This moral virtue, this quality of moral integrity and excellence, is referred to as *sīla*.

One can say that training rules are external, while moral virtue (*sīla*) is internal. We are endowed with moral virtue, not with moral precepts. But if we have no moral guidelines and thus fail to practise them, we won’t develop moral integrity. Training rules and moral virtue are interconnected, and they are part of a gradual process.

The laypeople do not ask for morality from the monks; they ask for moral precepts, to be undertaken and practised. Therefore, the ending verses of the recitation state: *sīlena sugatiṃ yanti*, etc. This implies that

by undertaking and practising these precepts, one will give rise to moral virtue. And by way of moral conduct and moral virtue, one reaches a happy destination (*sugati*), etc.¹

Vinaya ('discipline,' 'code of ethics') is a collective term for the numerous training rules (*sikkhāpada*). Bhikkhus are obliged to follow 227 basic training rules, and lay Buddhists observe five principal training rules or precepts. Therefore, when summarizing the bhikkhu training rules, one may refer to them collectively as the bhikkhu 'discipline' (*vinaya*). The bhikkhu discipline is comprised primarily of these 227 rules.

When monks practise according to this code, they are called 'established in the Vinaya' or 'upholding the Vinaya.' Practising according to and being established in the Vinaya is equivalent to 'moral conduct' (*sīla*). Such monks are 'endowed with moral conduct.'

Laypeople may go to monks and ask them for *sīla*, but this is not something monks can bestow on others. All they can do is recite the precepts, which the laypeople may then undertake and practise in order to generate moral integrity. Moral virtue, or morality (*sīla*), is a spiritual quality inherent in an individual; it can't be given to someone else. It is part of the threefold training, of *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā*. All three of these qualities are inherent in people's minds.

- When laypeople ask for morality, the monks give them precepts to undertake.
- When laypeople ask for concentration, the monks give them meditation techniques to develop.
- When laypeople ask for wisdom, the monks give them teachings to examine.

The bhikkhunis too have a moral code of discipline (*vinaya*), comprising 311 principal training rules.

¹ [I.e., one will reach a happy destination, be endowed with good fortune, and realize Nibbāna.]

The formal Vinaya, or the monastic discipline, comprises both the bhikkhu and bhikkhuni codes of training. Of the forty-five volumes of the Tipiṭaka eight of these make up the Vinaya Piṭaka.¹

Note that the monastic discipline comprises both training rules within the Pāṭimokkha and apart from it. The 227 training rules make up the bhikkhu Pāṭimokkha, and the 311 rules make up the bhikkhuni Pāṭimokkha. These two Pāṭimokkhas comprise the first three volumes of the Vinaya Piṭaka, which are collectively referred to as the Vibhaṅga.

One may ask why the first three volumes aren't simply referred to as the Pāṭimokkha. The answer is that the Pāṭimokkha is technically only comprised of the actual training rules which are recited in order to verify and approve the conduct of the monks and nuns, and in order to review the principal monastic discipline. The two Pāṭimokkhas, if published as one book, come to only 100 pages, yet the three volumes of the Vibhaṅga comprise 1,282 pages.

One may then ask why the Vibhaṅga is so much longer. The answer is that, besides the training rules, it also contains formal explanations for each training rule. The word *vibhaṅga* means 'explanation' or 'analysis.' The Vibhaṅga contains an explanation and analysis of each training rule prescribed by the Buddha, including the origin story to each rule, which involved a monk or nun acting in some detrimental way, which prompted the Buddha to lay down the rule.

Some rules have a 'basic regulation' (*mūla-paññatti*; 'ground rule') as well as 'supplementary regulations' (*anupaññatti*; 'subordinate legislation'). The Vibhaṅga also includes definitions for terms used within these regulations. For example, the term *bhikkhu* refers to such-and-such a person, the term *bhikkhunī* refers to such-and-such a person, such-and-such an action is defined in such-and-such a way,

¹ This number of forty-five volumes refers to the Thai edition of the Tipiṭaka. The Suttanta Piṭaka comprises twenty-five volumes, and the Abhidhamma Piṭaka comprises twelve volumes.

etc. In reference to the major training rules, various aspects of the issue are examined, and verdicts are given on different circumstances that can be used as standards of behaviour. Moreover, exceptions to each rule are also provided. Some of the training rules have a lengthy analysis, and it is for this reason that the Vibhaṅga comprises three volumes.

The first two volumes of the Vibhaṅga—the Mahāvibhaṅga—contain the bhikkhu training rules, and the third volume—the Bhikkhunī Vibhaṅga—contains the bhikkhuni rules.

The Mahāvibhaṅga is occasionally referred to as the Bhikkhu Vibhaṅga, although the first title is more common. It is the larger text of the two, and its express objective is to explain the 227 rules in the bhikkhu Pāṭimokkha. This text is also relevant to the bhikkhunis, however, because there are many training rules laid down for the bhikkhus which also apply to the bhikkhunis. There was no need to redefine these rules for the bhikkhunis. For example, it is a *pārājika* offence for bhikkhus to commit an act of theft. The explanation of this rule in the Mahāvibhaṅga is complete; it wasn't necessary to repeat this lengthy explanation in the Bhikkhunī Vibhaṅga.

Because this former text applies to both monks and nuns, its title as Mahāvibhaṅga is more appropriate than the narrower definition as the Bhikkhu Vibhaṅga.

Of the 311 rules in the bhikkhuni Pāṭimokkha, the Bhikkhunī Vibhaṅga explains only those rules (approximately 139) that are not already included in the bhikkhu Pāṭimokkha (and explained in the Mahāvibhaṅga). For this reason the third volume of the Tipiṭaka is rather thin.

The following four volumes of the Vinaya Piṭaka (volumes 4-7) contain training rules apart from the Pāṭimokkha. When monks and nuns are endowed with the basic moral conduct outlined in their respective Pāṭimokkhas, there are additional disciplinary observances for them to keep. (The Pāṭimokkha is often classified as the 'starting

point of the holy life’—*ādibrahmacariya*.) These supplementary rules bring about a refinement of virtuous conduct, promote a stable and harmonious community life, support the development of the threefold training on an individual level, and at the same time act for the wellbeing of the general population. These observances, of which there are many, are referred to as ‘refinements of virtuous conduct’ (*abhisamācāra*).

In these four volumes, those observances dealing with a specific subject are grouped together into chapters (*khandhaka*), of which there are altogether twenty-two. For example, the section on robes is called the *Cīvara Khandhaka* and the section on medicine is called the *Bhesajja Khandhaka*. This term *Khandhaka* is thus used as a main title for these four volumes.

Besides the numerous observances already discussed, the *Khandhaka* contains important training rules pertaining to everyday activities and to the use of the four requisites, for example: the use of robes, lodgings, medicines, leatherwork, and other miscellaneous items, the organization of communal activities, like ordinations, *Uposatha* observances (chanting the *Pāṭimokkha* and establishing *sīma* boundaries), observing the three-month rainy season retreat, the *Pavāraṇā* ceremony, the *Kaṭhina* ceremony, methods of rehabilitation (*vuṭṭhāna-vidhi*), acts of censure (*niggaha-kamma*), settling legal disputes, maintaining communal harmony, and dealing with schisms in the sangha (*saṅgha-bheda*), and it also includes special matters in relation to the bhikkhunis. The *Khandhaka* ends with an account of the First and Second Recitations.

The eighth volume of the *Vinaya Piṭaka* is called the *Parivāra*, which is a supplementary text or a form of guidebook. It contains questions and answers to assist in the review of one’s knowledge of the *Vinaya*.

To sum up, the Vinaya Piṭaka contains the disciplinary rules of the bhikkhus and bhikkhunis. It is divided into three parts (which in the Thai editions of the Tipiṭaka are divided into eight volumes):

1. Vibhaṅga (three volumes): an analysis and explanation of the Pāṭimokkha:
 - 1) Mahāvibhaṅga (volumes 1-2): an explanation of the 227 training rules contained in the bhikkhu Pāṭimokkha: 4 *pārājika* rules (offences entailing defeat), 13 *saṅghādisesa* rules (offences requiring an initial and subsequent meeting of the sangha), 30 *nissaggiya-pācittiya* rules (rules of expiation requiring forfeiture), 92 *pācittiya* rules (rules of expiation), 4 *pāṭidesanīya* rules (offences requiring acknowledgement), 75 *sekhiya* rules (training rules), and 7 *adhikaraṇa-samatha* (matters involved with the ‘settling of issues’).
 - 2) Bhikkhunī Vibhaṅga (volume 3): an explanation of the approximately 139 unique training rules (of the complete 311 rules) in the bhikkhuni Pāṭimokkha: 4 of 8 *pārājika* rules, 10 of 17 *saṅghādisesa* rules, 12 of 30 *nissaggiya-pācittiya* rules, 96 of 166 *pācittiya* rules, 8 *pāṭidesanīya* rules, 2 examples of the 75 *sekhiya* rules, and 7 *adhikaraṇa-samatha*.
2. Khandhaka (four volumes): training rules apart from the Pāṭimokkha; they are organized into twenty-two chapters:
 - 1) Mahāvagga (volumes 4 & 5): the greater division of training rules outside of the Pāṭimokkha containing ten chapters: Mahā Khandhaka (the origin of the bhikkhu sangha, male and female lay disciples, and the ordination ceremony), Uposatha Khandhaka, Vassūpanāyika Khandhaka, Pavāraṇā Khandhaka, Camma Khandhaka, Bhesajja Khandhaka, Kaṭhina Khandhaka, Cīvara Khandhaka, Campeyya Khandhaka, and Kosambika Khandhaka.
 - 2) Cullavagga (volumes 6 & 7): the lesser division of training rules outside of the Pāṭimokkha containing twelve chapters:

Kamma Khandhaka, Pārivāsika Khandhaka, Samuccaya Khandhaka, Samatha Khandhaka, Khuddaka Khandhaka, Senāsana Khandhaka, Saṅghabheda Khandhaka, Vatta Khandhaka, Pāṭimokkhaṭṭhapana Khandhaka, Bhikkhunī Khandhaka, Pañcasatika Khandhaka, and Sattasatika Khandhaka.

3. Parivāra (volume 8): a text linking the other volumes: a handbook for reviewing one's knowledge of the Vinaya.

The Buddhist code of moral conduct based on the Vinaya and comprised of training rules both within and apart from the Pāṭimokkha helps to address any communal problems arising from within the sphere of renunciants—the monks and nuns. Its main aim, however, is to establish and sustain the monastics in the threefold training, to prevent them from deviating or slipping from the Middle Way. Upholding this moral conduct benefits the individual monks and nuns, and it enables them to lead members of the general public to the Noble Path. At the very least this code of moral conduct has the following advantages:

- It prevents people from developing an erroneous adherence to moral precepts and religious practices (*sīlabbata-parāmāsa*), by believing that one may reach purity and liberation simply by keeping such rules and practices.
- It prevents people from keeping moral precepts and observing religious practices merely for their own individual liberation. Rather, it encourages monks and nuns to view their own practice as a way to assist the laypeople and a way to help foster a virtuous society, which is conducive to each individual's spiritual development.
- It prevents people from attaching to and giving too much value to the form of moral conduct. Rather, they recognize and determine it as a means to develop wholesome qualities.

- It prevents people from the pride and overconfidence stemming from attainments in the way of supernatural powers, which develops into infatuation and self-obsession. These proud individuals may then lead their faithful followers into a heedless fixation with these powers.
- It instils virtue and promotes a life of freedom, both in terms of mental freedom and unobstructed wisdom. Note that this is not a freedom from rules and regulations, a state of disorganization or anarchy, which springs from mental agitation and weakness, and which eventually leads to turmoil and self-indulgence.
- Because the monastic community is connected to society and has regular interaction with the general public, the code of moral conduct is a protective measure preventing the monastics from developing into rulers of the state, or preventing them from falling under the sway of political movements, as happened to the brahmans in the past.

Buddhism Changed the Status of Brahma

Let me explain the position and role of Sahampati Brahma, a discussion which will also explain the general position and role of Brahma gods in Buddhism.

An example from the suttas is the story of a brahman woman who had a son named Brahmadeva.¹ Brahmadeva was ordained as a monk with the Buddha and afterwards attained arahantship. One day Ven. Brahmadeva was going for alms and headed for his mother's house. His mother, however, had been offering a constant oblation (*āhuti/āhuna*) to the highest god—Brahma. Brahma Sahampati saw what was happening and thought that he should go and stir up a sense of urgency in this brahman lady. He therefore appeared at her house and spoke to her in seven verses, the gist of which is as follows:

*Far from here, madam, is the Brahma world
To which you offer a constant oblation.
Brahma does not eat such food, lady:
So why mumble, not knowing the path to Brahma?*

¹ S. I. 140-41.

*This Brahmadeva of yours, madam,
Is one in whom mental impurity cannot reside;
He is supreme, surpassing the devas and Brahmas....
This bhikkhu Brahmadeva who has entered your house for alms
Is worthy of reverential gifts (āhuneyya);
He deserves offerings from humans and devas.
Let him eat your oblation, the choicest alms.
With confidence in him, free from wavering,
Present your offering to him who deserves it.
Having seen a sage who has crossed the flood,
O madam, make merit leading to long-standing bliss.*

This story of Sahampati Brahma and the brahman lady gives us a clearer idea of the significance of Brahma in the Buddhist teachings, and it helps us to understand why this Brahma god made the following invitation to the Buddha to teach the Dhamma:

*Venerable sir, let the Blessed One teach the Dhamma....
There are beings with little dust in their eyes
Who will fall away on account of not hearing the Dhamma.
There will be those who will understand the Dhamma.¹*

¹ S. I. 137.

Appendix 2:

The Admonishment of Venerable Ānanda

Dr. Martin: I would like to go back to a previous issue. There is the story which took place at the First Recitation of the sangha charging Ven. Ānanda with an offence of ‘wrongdoing’ (*dukkāṭa*) on account of Ānanda having helped women to be ordained. There are many scholars, both Western and Thai, who wonder whether the monks at the First Recitation disliked women. But this is probably not possible since awakened ones, i.e., arahants, are, per definition, without any sort of bias (and the monks who participated in the First Recitation are said to have all been arahants). Can you please address this question?

Phra Payutto: In regard to Ven. Ānanda and his apparent misdeeds (*dukkāṭa*), this was not a formal decision by the sangha and it was not a violation of a monastic rule. Let us look at the details of this matter so that we truly understand it.

When we are faced with a matter about which we don’t yet have all the necessary data and relevant facts, we shouldn’t get caught up in arguments based on muddled ideas and follow emotions that may cause greater confusion. Rather, we should focus on seeking,

understanding, and verifying the necessary facts. If possible we should go to the original, or if you like, primary, source of the matter, which in this case is found in the Vinaya Piṭaka.¹

Go and read this material and you will see that whenever a formal agreement by the sangha was made in the First Recitation, it is clearly stated in the text. When making a formal proposal, Ven. Mahā Kassapa, the leader of the meeting, began with the following words: *Suṇātu me bhante saṅgho....* ('May the sangha listen to me....'). This is then followed by each specific matter at hand, requesting an agreement on each main issue.

The passage describing Ven. Ānanda's misdeeds (*dukkāṭa*) is found at the end of this account. It occurs after the sangha completed all matters requiring formal agreement, and after it concluded the formal decision-making process. One can argue that the formal council or recitation had already come to a conclusion; this is a matter that is tacked on at the end. The monks continue their discussion and the words used here are simply *therā bhikkhū*, that is, 'many elders' or 'the elders' criticized Ānanda for various actions. We don't know which elders and how many elders spoke during this period of the meeting but there is no mention of Ven. Mahā Kassapa's name.

In response to Ven. Mano's reading of this passage I joked in the booklet 'Wake Up to the Untruths of "The Events Leading to BE. 1"' that if one holds to Ven. Mano's interpretation, then one must assert that Ven. Mahā Kassapa lost control of the meeting.

In fact, these events occurred after the meeting. The wording used for these events are clearly different from the proceedings during the meeting. When the formal recitation and formal acts of the sangha had concluded, some elders criticized Ven. Ānanda for some of his actions. In total there were five points, all having to do with conduct vis-à-vis the Buddha.

¹ Vin. II. 286.

The criticisms had to do with Ven. Ānanda's responsibilities while living close to the Buddha as his attendant, that during this time Ānanda's conduct had not been impeccable. The five points include the fact that Ānanda had stepped on a bathing cloth which he was sewing for the Buddha.

Here I want to add an observation: in criticizing Ven. Ānanda for misdeeds or misconduct the elders used the term *dukkāṭa* (*du* + *kaṭa*: misdeed, misconduct, unsuitable behaviour, wrong action, careless action, unproductive action). It happens that this term is used for a formal transgression of the Vinaya (the least serious of all offences) too. This means the same word is used in different contexts with different meanings.

Let us go back and look at the word *dukkāṭa*, for which the commentaries also offer an explanation. They assert that the criticism of Ven. Ānanda which was voiced by the elders is not a matter of formal offences. Ānanda did not transgress any of the Buddha's prescriptions, so how could his actions constitute an offence? The Buddha had not laid down rules on these matters and it was certainly not the case that the elders were not able to distinguish between what is and what is not a formal offence.

Had the elders formally punished Ven. Ānanda this would have meant that they did not know what the Buddha's prescriptions are, or else they would have been laying down new rules, even though they had just concluded the formal meeting in which they had formally agreed not to lay down any new rules or to revoke any existing rules. (The sangha is only able to lay down principles of conduct that accord with or support the Buddha's regulations, similar to ancillary laws issued to accompany clauses in a state constitution.) Put simply, there was no precept or training rule here which Ānanda could have transgressed as a formal offence.

It is noteworthy here to mention that in the Thai editions of the Tipiṭaka the term *dukkāṭa* here is usually translated as an 'offence of

wrongdoing,' which means that the elders laid down a penalty for a formal offence of wrongdoing. I say noteworthy because normally the translators of the Thai editions of the Tipiṭaka translate according to the explanations found in the commentaries or they consult the commentaries before translating.

I have often remarked that some people claim to give authority only to the Tipiṭaka and not to the commentaries, but the Tipiṭaka they use is a translated Thai edition, which actually means that they use a Tipiṭaka based on the interpretations of the commentaries. Sometimes these people are reading from the commentaries under the guise of the Tipiṭaka; as a result, they are unwittingly referring to the commentaries.

It is unusual in this case that Thai translated editions of the Tipiṭaka do not conform to the interpretation by the commentaries. It is not a very serious matter. The translators saw the simple word *dukkata* and didn't think to look in the commentaries for an explanation.

To sum up, the elders accused Ven. Ānanda of wrongdoing, which means that he did some things that were unsuitable or incorrect, which resembled a disrespect for the Buddha or were troublesome to the Buddha. These actions were perceived as either inappropriate, unhelpful, or not impeccable. Thus, they asked that Ānanda concede these faults.

The statements by the elders do not contain the word *āpatti* ('formal offence'). The Pali wording is: *Idampi te āvuso ānanda dukkaṭaṃ* = 'Friend Ānanda, and even in this matter you acted incorrectly.' There is just this much, but the translators thought that this refers to a formal offence of wrongdoing and therefore in the Thai translated edition there is the added word *āpatti*.

(The term *dukkataṃ* here is opposite to the term *sukataṃ* ('good action'), as is seen in the verse memorized by students studying as

a ‘Dhamma scholar’ (*nak tham*):¹ *Akataṃ dukkaṭaṃ seyyo, pacchā tappati dukkaṭaṃ, katañca sukataṃ seyyo, yaṃ katvā nānutappati*, which is literally translated as: ‘It is better to refrain from *dukkata*, for *dukkata* burns [one] in the end....’ Translating the verse this way gives rise to the question: ‘Why teach ordinary people to refrain from a formal offence of wrongdoing?’ Here, however, *dukkata* does not refer to a formal offence but rather to wrong actions. A more accurate translation for this verse is: ‘It is better to refrain from wrong actions, for wrong actions burn [one] in the end; good actions do not result in burning, thus it is better to perform these actions.’)²

Some of the matters which the elders accused Ven. Ānanda of are identical to matters which the Buddha discussed with Ānanda directly, especially in respect to the frequent occasions when the Buddha gave a clear sign as a way of granting the opportunity for Ānanda to make a request for the Buddha to live longer. The Buddha had told Ānanda that someone who has fully developed the four ‘paths to success’ (*iddhipāda*) can, if he wishes, live for the duration of a full human lifespan³ or even longer, and that the Buddha has fully developed these qualities. If he were to choose, the Buddha could live longer, but Ānanda was unable to catch the meaning.

Later, when the Buddha announced that he was going to die and enter final Nibbāna, Ven. Ānanda requested that he extend his life. The Buddha did not consent to this request and said to Ānanda: *Tasmātiḥānanda tuyhevetāṃ dukkaṭaṃ tuyhevetāṃ aparaddhaṃ* = ‘Therefore, Ānanda, yours is the fault, yours is the failure.’⁴ As you can see, this has nothing to do with a formal offence.

As I said, the First Recitation was performed as a formal act of the sangha. The wording used by Ven. Mahā Kassapa when speaking to the

¹ [*Nak tham*: a three-stage curriculum of religious examination.]

² S. I. 49.

³ [Approximately 100 years.]

⁴ D. II. 118-19.

sangha, either as formal announcements (*ñatti*) or when asking for formal agreements, was of a specific terminology, whether this was in relation to the Vinaya, the suttas, or the Abhidhamma. And when a decision was made not to revoke any training rules, a formal announcement and a formal agreement was issued. The formal act of the sangha at this First Recitation finished at this point.

After this point, when Ven. Ānanda was accused of certain misconduct, it was a matter concerning several elders (*therā bhikkhū*), who were participants at the meeting but whose opinions were not a formal decision by the meeting. The language used here is non-specific: certain elders, or all of the elders, commented that some of Ānanda's actions were inappropriate—may he admit to these misdeeds.

This was not a matter of issuing a formal penalty, nor was it a formal agreement of the sangha within the formal meeting of the First Recitation. This matter went beyond the scope of Ven. Mahā Kassapa's responsibility as leader of the First Recitation—at this point his name is no longer mentioned. Only Ven. Ānanda's name is mentioned as the accused in this matter.

As for the question whether the criticism by some elders (however many it may have been) of Ven. Ānanda's efforts in promoting the ordination of women reveals some form of misogyny or bias against women, these criticisms must be seen in the context of the Buddha's own words after he allowed women to be ordained. He said that the ordination of women would be a cause for the Buddhist teachings (*brahmacariya*) to not last long, just as a family which has many females and few males is more prone to attack by thieves and robbers.¹ Surely it was for this reason that the elders reproached Ānanda.

Let me say something here about scholars or those who offer comment and analysis from an academic perspective. It happens often, or more and more often, that instead of arriving at a clear

¹ The Buddha mentions many other similes in this context as well; see: Vin. II. 256.

understanding based on factual evidence and of expanding the frontiers of wisdom, people seem to come to misleading conclusions, creating confusion and a distorted understanding.

One simple reason for this is that people gather facts in a hasty and careless way, without investigating thoroughly or without verification. They become muddled and confused by facts that are incoherent, ambiguous, and sketchy, and have been garnered in a sloppy, hit-or-miss fashion.

Sometimes these people encounter a small amount of data without examining the matter comprehensively and then pass judgement more from an emotional reaction, or draw rash conclusions. Occasionally, it appears that they act merely from a sense of urgency or speak out of a compulsive sense of excitement.

The first rules in scholarship are to research in order to attain a clear understanding and to speak from a platform based on the most accurate and clear factual evidence, at least with as much evidence as can be found. Moreover, it is important to present one's evidence and submit one's opinions in an honest and straight-forward way.

Were the Elders Biased in Criticizing Ven. Ānanda for Helping to Create the Bhikkhuni Order?

Questioner: I wonder whether the elders had a bias against bhikkhunis and for this reason they admonished Ven. Ānanda for asking the Buddha to ordain them.

Phra Payutto: I believe I may have already addressed this question. But let me repeat that we need to look at the social circumstances prevalent at that time. We are not dealing with the present time. We tend to look at this matter from our own perspective without clearly understanding the circumstances at the Buddha's time. Let us look at this again from an objective point of view.

First, before the bhikkhuni sangha was established, the Buddha refused to give his permission, and when he finally did he showed great caution. If we look at the issue from this perspective, those elders saw Ven. Ānanda as the cause for the Buddha doing something that he did not intend to do. Or they may have simply believed that Ānanda caused the Buddha some trouble and difficulty, and criticized him for this reason.

Second, we don't clearly know what sort of impact the establishment of the bhikkhuni order had on Buddhism—whether it was a weakening or a strengthening force. We still need to do some research to be able to compare the stability of Buddhism before and after the bhikkhuni sangha was established.

Undoubtedly, the bhikkhuni order was beneficial in many ways. But in relation to a wider context, for example the way in which Buddhism existed in a society primarily controlled by brahmans, and the fact that members of other religious traditions were intent on finding fault with Buddhism and causing it harm, we can ask what sort of affect the bhikkhuni order had on the status of Buddhism in society.

And in terms of the internal condition of the monastic sangha, which involved an interaction between monks and nuns, did the bhikkhuni order weaken, hinder, or diminish the effectiveness of the community as a whole? By measuring the pros and cons, what is the reckoning? Of course, sometimes positive, desirable goals involve unavoidable negative results, but one must try and minimize these drawbacks. All of these matters require more research and inspection.

The elders may have seen these disadvantageous circumstances and determined that they were initiated by Ven. Ānanda. They therefore offered words of remonstrance.

In regard to this question we can remain neutral. When we lack clarity over an issue, we can acknowledge this. We remain objective, looking at the issue from different angles, and without hastily drawing a conclusion. In this case, we shouldn't draw a conclusion based on one

perspective, that is, we shouldn't conclude that the elders were biased without gaining a clearer understanding of the surrounding circumstances.

Dr. Martin: In any case, however, we are referring here to arahants, since every one of the participants in the recitation was an arahant.

Phra Payutto: Yes, according to the story, they were all arahants.

Dr. Martin: So can one say that since they were all arahants it would have been impossible for them to be speaking out of personal bias (*agati*)?

Phra Payutto: If they were arahants they could not have had bias. I said earlier that one cannot know whether these elders were biased or whatever, because we don't know (as they had known) what the circumstances were after the establishment of the bhikkhuni sangha. We do not know if the elders were speaking according to their own observations or according to the general outlook of people at that time, in response to the effects the bhikkhuni order had on the wider community. Their criticisms of Ven. Ānanda may have been based on these observations.

If people wish to criticize these elders, that is their business. The important thing is that one tries to study this matter carefully, and refrains from speaking in a prejudiced, oversimplified way.

Dr. Martin: I can connect this with something you wrote about in the book 'The Puzzle...',¹ on a generally-held belief among Theravada Buddhists, a belief that I also share. That is, if one believes that these elders were all arahants and free from bias, one must initially interpret these events in a way that is favourable to these elders, is that correct?

Phra Payutto: Whether one takes sides with these elders or not is irrelevant. It is simply that we accept that we don't know enough

¹ 'The Puzzle: Which Illness Killed the Buddha?': © 2544.

about the circumstances during the Buddha's lifetime.

Arahants normally don't get involved with criticizing others. And they don't care whether other people judge them as being biased or without bias; they simply explain things as they are. As for myself, in this matter I am not that interested in the debate on who has bias or who is without bias. I see this matter from another perspective, which I will describe later.

Let us first look at the previous subject, left unfinished. If one follows the preceding premise, the establishment of the bhikkhuni sangha had an impact on the stability of Buddhism, at least during the Buddha's lifetime. Let us first speak openly according to the facts on this matter, by asking the question: Did the establishment of the bhikkhuni order truly have some kind of negative impact? As for the benefits and advantages of the bhikkhuni order, let us leave these aside for now. We will first address this question directly (without cancelling out the cons with the pros).

It is possible that the elders focused on the fact that Ven. Ananda initiated a situation compelling the Buddha to do something that he saw would weaken the stability of Buddhism. This alone would have been a reason for the elders to criticize him. They were simply commenting on a set of circumstances that had already arisen. This criticism focused on the initial circumstances surrounding the origin of the bhikkhuni order.

We can't be certain about the ensuing events, of how the establishment of the bhikkhuni sangha had an impact on the stability of Buddhism. But we do know that at the time of its establishment, the Buddha was giving this matter great consideration. According to the story in the Tipiṭaka the Buddha was giving great care and attention to (or one can informally say that he was worried about) the stability of the monastic community. This was equivalent to a warning.

It is valid to ask what sort of impact the bhikkhuni order had after it was established. If things progressed as predicted by the Buddha

there must have been some negative repercussions, because he saw that its establishment would affect stability. It was for this reason that he laid down preventative measures by creating a so-called embankment or dam to keep the water from leaking out. According to the Buddha's words, there must have been some repercussions from the establishment of the bhikkhuni sangha, but we are not clear what these were—we don't have many details.

Take for example the way in which the laypeople gossiped and made public accusations about the bhikkhus and bhikkhunis going to visit one another. There were those people who were trying to find fault with the Buddha and his disciples, which meant that the monks and nuns had to constantly be on guard. Or think of the numerous scandals between monks and nuns that are documented in the original stories to the Vinaya rules. These stories point to a loss of stability or at least to a lack of smoothness and ease for the monastic community.

His warning does not mean that the Buddha was going to block the establishment of a bhikkhuni order, but it means that he knew that it would have an impact on the stability of Buddhism. This alone was a reason for admonishing Ven. Ānanda. He prompted the Buddha to do something which the Buddha was concerned about and to which he was calling for caution.

According to these circumstances Ven. Ānanda was the catalyst for the establishment of the bhikkhuni order along with its accompanying difficulties. The elders used this as the reason for admonishing Ānanda. This is what the evidence in the Tipiṭaka reveals.

We do not clearly know what effects the establishment of the bhikkhuni order had on Buddhism. But if things proceeded as predicted by the Buddha, there would have been some negative repercussions on its stability.

Evidence exists, however, in the stories connected to the rules in the Vinaya, clearly testifying to some of the negative effects. For example, when some of the bhikkhunis travelled alone they were

assaulted and raped by bandits. The Buddha consequently laid down a training rule forbidding bhikkhunis from travelling alone; they were required to travel along with bhikkhus.

And when the bhikkhunis travelled along with bhikkhus, as women and men together, some of the laypeople who lacked faith jeered at them and said: 'See, here go the husbands and wives!' The Buddha therefore had to lay down further constraints as precautions for monks and nuns travelling in the same group.

Some of the bhikkhunis living in the forest were likewise assaulted. The Buddha, who had already prescribed that bhikkhunis need to live in a monastery (during the rainy season) where bhikkhus are present, added a prohibition against bhikkhunis living in the forest. This added to the burden of the bhikkhus. They had to worry about the safety of the bhikkhunis, and at the same time they had to guard against developing intimate relationships with them.

We need to be aware that the circumstances during the Buddha's time were different from how they are today. Monks generally didn't live in one place; they wandered about frequently or all the time, travelling alone into forests and jungles. With the establishment of the bhikkhuni order they shouldered a new responsibility of looking after the nuns.

If we look at the regulations in the Vinaya we can see how a burden was set on the bhikkhus. At the very least the monks were not able to go off by themselves as freely as before. Considering that even the illustrious Ven. Uppalavaṇṇā Therī was raped shows that it was impossible for the bhikkhunis to go off alone safely into remote areas like the monks. Yet the original lifestyle of the bhikkhus was marked by a freedom and flexibility of movement. So an honest assessment of this situation reveals an added difficulty for the monastic community. I'll come back to this point.

Our attention now needs to go to how we can support contemporary women. And we need to ask what the obstacles are that we face.

Why are we getting stuck? Aren't there any alternatives to reestablishing the bhikkhuni order? There are likely to be lots of different possibilities. But perhaps Khun Martin has some unanswered questions?

**Ven. Ananda's Attendance on the Buddha:
Settling the Account**

Dr. Martin: Let me return to my previous question. If one is a layperson one can apply the reasoning presented by Tahn Chao Khun Ajahn a moment ago, but if one has been ordained as a monk one needs to uphold certain beliefs, right? Say in this case of the elders at the First Recitation—they were all arahants and thus could not have harboured any bias. For this reason one must take sides with the elders or join forces with them as a form of loyalty, is that correct?

Phra Payutto: No, it's not the case that one must take sides in order to maintain loyalty. This a matter of simple common sense combined with reason. The act of identifying with a group and showing loyalty follows a rational process. Those who align themselves with others have already agreed with certain ideas and offered support; it is for this reason that they align themselves. Loyalty is a natural and logical result of this support. But this loyalty is not the same as prejudice or bias. Technically, one is offering support in line with truthful principles. This is an important distinction.

The point here is that those people who are ordained have hopefully used their wisdom to investigate and agree with certain principles, right? Otherwise it indicates that they come in a state of ignorance and with a lack of circumspection. Why don't they carefully inquire about the institution that they are joining? If it is no good, one has the right to reject it—one won't become a part of it from the very beginning.

When we study this tradition and agree with its teachings, we are satisfied. Such a process accords with the true principles of Buddhism.

One comes to the conclusion: ‘This community is virtuous, these teachings are correct—I want to be a part of this tradition.’ People thus voluntarily accept the associated rules and practices. If people join the monastic community and then disagree with its practices one can ask them why they didn’t first study these matters. Why did they voluntarily join the community? Such action simply reveals confusion and ignorance. This is one point.

While studying the details of this tradition it is acceptable to have doubts and to question different possibilities. But it’s important that one does this in an objective way, rather than trying to match all evidence with one’s assumed ideas or finding whatever supporting facts there are for upholding one’s preconceptions.

It does not really matter whether one criticizes the elders of the First Recitation; they would not have been offended. The important point is the matter of our honesty and integrity. Are our criticisms based on thorough understanding? For our actions reveal our true character.

Let us look more closely at the accusation that the elders were biased in their criticism of Ven. Ānanda with regard to five points. (There is much confusion over this matter, including the belief that the elders accused Ānanda of formal Vinaya offences.)

Remember that the First Recitation took place in connection with the Buddha’s final passing away. It was directly connected to the Buddha and its objective was to compile his teachings and prevent their fading away and disappearance. When the Recitation was officially finished—when the formal act of the sangha was ended, when all formal resolutions had been passed, and when there were no more formal proposals (*ñatti*)—the great disciples like Ven. Mahā Kassapa departed from the meeting place because their duty was finished. Possibly, all of the elders left the venue of the First Recitation.¹

¹ [Tradition holds that the Recitation was held in a hall outside of the Sattapaṇṇiguhā Cave in Rājagaha.]

Subsequently (*atha kho*—‘and then’) there was another incident, that is, some of the elders (we don’t know how many and who they were exactly) met together with Ven. Ānanda. It is uncertain whether they stayed in the same venue as the Recitation or whether they moved to another location, but here Ānanda was at the centre of the meeting.

The elders now discussed the way in which Ven. Ānanda fulfilled his responsibilities as the Buddha’s attendant. They focused on exactly those issues that Ānanda himself had spoken about in the Recitation, issues which every elder present had already heard. (Only the matter of Ānanda stepping on the Buddha’s bathing cloth while he was sewing it is not clearly documented elsewhere.)

Ven. Ānanda recounted what he had done on certain occasions along with the Buddha’s responses, for example by admonishing him for his mistakes. These actions by Ānanda appear to be transgressions, especially in failing to show the Buddha proper respect. The elders focused on these actions which they considered had caused the Buddha discomfort or had been either improper or faulty in regard to Ānanda’s duty as attendant.

The focus here was on Ven. Ānanda’s behaviour as an attendant to the Buddha and his failure to act appropriately. It was not so much a focus on the specific content of these five points. In regard to specific actions, when they were deemed faulty, the elders mentioned this to him, saying that such-and-such an incident was improper, wanting, untidy, or lacking impeccability. Although Ānanda replied that he himself did not believe his actions had been faulty, out of consideration for the other elders he accepted and acknowledged their admonition. The matter thus ended there.

The elders mentioned only five very minor matters in relation to which they said Ven. Ānanda had acted improperly (although one can say that in their minds these minor matters were connected to important principles). These actions by the elders show how conscientious

the disciples were in regard to the Buddha, wishing to spare him from any disturbance or trouble. At the same time they were a way of praising Ānanda's virtues. In all the many years that he had attended on the Buddha, there was nothing of truly serious consequence that he had done wrong—the elders could only find a few relatively trivial matters to comment on. When these lingering and doubtful matters were laid to rest all that remained was a feeling of ease and joy in Ānanda's overflowing goodness.

‘And then’ (*atha kho*), Ven. Ānanda consulted with those elders and together they fulfilled the duty of imposing the ‘highest penalty’ (*brahma-danḍa*) on Ven. Channa. (In response to those claims that Ven. Mahā Kassapa managed the affairs of the monastic community after the Buddha's final passing away, there is no evidence of this apart from his role as leader of the Recitation. The circumstances following the recitation, however, reveal how Ānanda was the true leader administering sangha affairs.)

If one follows the arguments of those people who claim that the elders were biased and that some of them were not happy to see the ordination of bhikkhunis, the debates will be endless. For example, if this was the case and Ven. Mahā Kassapa was present in the subsequent meeting or heard about its content then he would have possibly taken sides with Ven. Bhaddā Kapilānī, and perhaps he would have opposed or criticized those other elders.

To remind you who Ven. Bhaddā Kapilānī was, she was the wife of the young brahman Pippali,¹ before he was ordained as Ven. Mahā Kassapa. The wife and husband consulted with one another and agreed to go forth into the renunciant life simultaneously, by going separate ways in order for each one of them to live a life of celibacy. When Bhaddā Kapilānī had been ordained as a bhikkhuni and realized the fruit of arahantship, she praised Mahā Kassapa as being a beautiful

¹ [The author uses the spelling Pippali.]

friend who shared the supreme realization, and she described him as a Buddha's heir.

This is a reminder that if one draws simple conclusions based on unverified ideas and conjectures, one's interpretations will be muddled. To begin with one should search for comprehensive and clear data. One shouldn't research matters in a hit-or-miss fashion, taking a few facts from here and few from there, and then creating a story and causing confusion. Creating problems is easy, while solving them can take a very long time.

Appendix 3:

Ven. Mahā Kassapa's Role in the Sangha

The Scarcity of Suttas by Ven. Mahā Kassapa

As I said earlier, my focus is primarily on gathering comprehensive, clear, and precise factual knowledge. When I have the opportunity I share this with others. On the level of opinions, I simply stick to saying that according to the facts, the evidence, and the teachings that I have encountered, specific issues are subject to certain conditions. As to how one chooses to respond to these issues or how one wishes for them to proceed, I simply suggest that people give them due consideration. I have neither the time nor the strength to get caught up in these issues more than this. If people ask me, I may suggest options or alternatives, of which there may be several. I then conclude by asking people to reflect on these matters, ideally in a collaborative way. So whether you listen to or read my words, the first step is to simply examine them for yourselves.

The Tipiṭaka contains two texts, the Theragāthā and the Therīgāthā, containing a compilation of verses by various bhikkhus and bhikkhunis.

These verses describe these individuals' life experiences and the profound tranquillity and bliss of realizing the Dhamma. They contain Dhamma teachings by 264 bhikkhu elders and 73 bhikkhuni elders. The discrepancy in numbers is not surprising, because it is likely to reflect the ratio of monks to nuns at that time.

Then there is the somewhat overlooked text, the Apadāna, which is appended to the Tipiṭaka. It contains inspirational verses describing the biographies of various monks and nuns, including their psychic powers. The beauty of its language depends a lot on the specific translation. If one doesn't capture the poetic flavour then it is not so inspiring. It is comprised of the Therāpadāna, presenting the biographies of 550 bhikkhu elders, and the Therī-Apadāna, presenting the biographies of 40 bhikkhuni elders. It is a supplementary text that was probably completed around the time of the Third Recitation, during the reign of King Asoka (235 BE; 308 BC).

If one is skilled at research, however, the Apadāna is a good source of technical information, including the way of life, culture, and implements and utensils of people at that time; descriptions of towns, forests and ethnic groups, names of trees, birds and animals; and names of historical cities and regions, like Yonakā,¹ China (Cīna), Alexandria, Suvanṇabhūmi, Damiḷa (Tamil Country), the Pallava Kingdom, and Aparanta.²

As I mentioned earlier, in comparison to the suttas containing the words of the Buddha, those containing teachings by the disciples are relatively few. The First Recitation gave central emphasis to compiling the Buddha's words. And some of the suttas by the disciples contain teachings that they heard directly from the Buddha, which they wished to repeat and reaffirm.

¹ [The name is probably the Pali equivalent for Ionians, the Bactrian Greeks—'Dictionary of Pali Proper Names' by G.P. Malalasekera.]

² [Aparanta comprises the territory of Northern Gujarat, Kathiawar, the Kutch District, and Sindh.]

Although there were as many as eighty chief disciples, many of whom were designated as outstanding in certain characteristics, only very few of them gave teachings which are preserved in the suttas. In the case of most of them, all that exists are their names, verses describing their life experiences in the Theragāthā and Therīgāthā, and their biographies in the Apadāna. (In many cases it was probably difficult to find any biographical details, and so the descriptions focus on the surrounding environment along with related stories, in order to direct the reader's mind in a wholesome direction.)

The three disciples by whom there are a fair number of suttas are Ven. Sāriputta, Ven. Mahā Moggallāna, and Ven. Ānanda, who all assisted the Buddha in a very intimate way. It was only these three monks whom the Buddha entrusted with the responsibility of teaching the Dhamma while he himself was present, as if they were his representatives at times when he was fatigued and needed a rest.

It is not unusual that Ven. Sāriputta is part of this list, because besides being a chief disciple he is praised as the Dhamma Commander. His excellence was distinguished by the Buddha, who said that he is able to keep in motion the unsurpassed wheel of the Dhamma set in motion by the Buddha himself.¹ The next chief disciple was Ven. Mahā Moggallāna.

Although Ven. Ānanda hadn't yet realized arahantship and was still a stream-enterer while the Buddha was still alive, he was praised by the Buddha as being foremost in great knowledge (*bahussuta*). Moreover, he was closer to the Buddha than anyone else, in his capacity of excelling as the Buddha's attendant, to the extent of being distinguished in this quality as well. And it was surely for this reason that, when the Buddha was entering the period of old-age in his twentieth year of teaching, Ānanda was selected to be his permanent attendant.²

¹ E.g.: A. I. 23.

² As documented by the commentaries.

Suttas, both short and long, by Ven. Sāriputta are spread out throughout the Tipiṭaka. In the Pali version of the Siam Raṭṭha edition, these teachings comprise more than 220 pages. The teachings by Ven. Mahā Moggallāna comprise more than 160 pages.

Although he was still a stream-enterer while giving these teachings, there are more suttas by Ven. Ānanda than by other disciples (despite the others being arahants), with the exception of Ven. Sāriputta, Ven. Mahā Moggallāna, and Ven. Mahā Kaccāna.¹ In the Tipiṭaka there are even two suttas, one long (Subha Sutta) and one

¹ Also known as Ven. Mahā Kaccāyana. His physical appearance was extremely beautiful, to the extent that the son of a treasurer saw him and thought to himself: “Oh, may I find a wife like this venerable one; may my wife be as beautiful as he!” [from the Dhammapada commentary].

The life of Ven. Mahā Kaccāna is very interesting. He was born in the border regions, in the Avanti country of the South, outside of the civilized Middle Country (*majjhima-padesa*). In that area it was very difficult to find monks. Mahā Kaccāna had disciples who wanted to take higher ordination, but it took three years before the necessary number of ten monks could be found. The natural surroundings and the customs of the people were very different from the northern regions. The ground, for example, was jagged and rough, and it made walking difficult.

One of Ven. Mahā Kaccāna's disciples was Ven. Soṇa-Kuṭiikaṇṇa, who asked permission to travel to see the Buddha at Jetavana. Mahā Kaccāna asked him to consult with the Buddha on five difficulties pertaining to life in the border districts, as a way of asking the Buddha to consider making some exceptions to some of the Vinaya rules.

This resulted in the Buddha making a special allowance for monks in the ‘border countries’ (*paccanta-janapada*) to be able to perform a full ordination with only five bhikkhus. As a consequence, it isn't necessary for there to be a complete group of ten, as is required in the Middle Country. Moreover, the Buddha allowed monks there to wear several-layered shoes.

The people in the Avanti country bathed frequently and the Buddha thus allowed monks in the border countries to bathe at any time. The people also made mats out of leather, similar to those mats in the Middle Country made out of woven plant material. The Buddha allowed those monks to make use of these leather mats.

Ven. Mahā Kaccāna was foremost among the disciples in elucidating in full the brief teachings by the Buddha. When he lived in the Middle Country he gave some key teachings which were praised by the Buddha. When he returned to his homeland he continued to give Dhamma teachings and was highly respected. There are eight suttas of his which he gave while living in Avanti and the surrounding region. The entirety of his suttas in the Tipiṭaka comprise about 82 pages.

medium-sized (Gopaka-Moggallāna Sutta), by Ānanda which he gave after the Buddha's final passing away and before the First Recitation.

Here, let me say a little about Ven. Mahā Kassapa, who was one of the great disciples ever since the early days of the Buddha's time of teaching. Normally, his name comes third in line amongst the disciples. There are passages in the Tipiṭaka describing occasions when many great disciples were assembled, for instance while going to visit the Buddha. Here, the list follows this order: Ven. Sāriputta, Ven. Mahā Moggallāna, Ven. Mahā Kassapa, followed by the names of other monks, and ending with Ven. Ānanda, as the eleventh monk, or thereabouts, depending on how many monks were present. This shows the distinction given to Mahā Kassapa, who came next after the two chief disciples.

But in terms of the number of suttas in the Tipiṭaka, there is a scarcity of suttas by Ven. Mahā Kassapa. There is no comparison with the number of suttas by Ven. Ānanda, not to mention Ven. Sāriputta and Ven. Mahā Moggallāna. Moreover, there is not a single long or medium-sized sutta by Mahā Kassapa.

The suttas related to Ven. Mahā Kassapa are all found together in one chapter, called the Kassapa Saṃyutta.¹ It is near the Bhikkhu Saṃyutta mentioned earlier. This chapter contains thirteen suttas, but only five of them are teachings or sayings directly by him. The remaining suttas simply pertain to him in some way or another.

Four suttas contain words of praise by the Buddha in reference to Ven. Mahā Kassapa, encouraging the monks to take him as a role model. (This is similar to the Bhikkhu Saṃyutta, in which various monks are singled out as role models.) The praise focuses on his contentment, his impeccable conduct when visiting lay families, and his realization of supreme states of Dhamma matched by the Buddha.

Five of the suttas containing his teachings describe occasions when he visited the Buddha, who often urged him to teach the monks. (Most

¹ S. II. 194-225.

likely, he didn't usually teach monks in general, as is reflected in his comment that monks in the present time are stubborn, lack endurance, and do not listen carefully.) In one sutta he asks the Buddha why in the past, when there were few training rules, many monks were established in arahantship, but now, when there are many training rules, fewer monks are established in arahantship. The Buddha then answered his question. In two suttas Ven. Mahā Kassapa answers the questions of Ven. Sāriputta. There are also two suttas in this chapter which are about Mahā Kassapa's friendship with Ven. Ānanda.

We know from incidents in the Vinaya Piṭaka that Ven. Ānanda had enormous respect for Ven. Mahā Kassapa, and that each of them thought of the other with fondness. When Mahā Kassapa was preparing to give higher ordination to a disciple, for example, he would invite Ānanda to be one of the two chanting teachers (*ācariya*). Ānanda had such respect for Mahā Kassapa, that when addressing him, he felt ill-at-ease even uttering his name, which prompted the Buddha to allow monks to call others by their surnames (or clan names) instead.

This respect and intimacy is reflected in the story in the Kassapa Saṃyutta, describing how Ven. Ānanda invited Ven. Mahā Kassapa to go to the bhikkhuni quarters. (If their friendship wasn't close, he wouldn't have made such an invitation.) Mahā Kassapa declined twice, until after Ānanda's third request he consented, and in the capacity of an elder he gave the nuns a Dhamma talk. On another occasion Mahā Kassapa admonished Ānanda quite harshly, either out of care or out of intimate friendship, on the matter of how many of Ānanda's disciples had disobeyed, and told him to take better care.

On both of these aforementioned occasions, things proceeded well and normally for Ven. Ānanda. But things were different for the bhikkhunis, who were generally devoted to Ānanda. In both cases an individual bhikkhuni felt unhappy, believing that her respected monk was being bullied or domineered, and spoke ill-mannered and

insulting words about Ven. Mahā Kassapa. This gave rise to minor conflict on an individual level—not on a community level—but this was soon dispelled. Ānanda and Mahā Kassapa continued their relationship as before.

Apart from the suttas in the Kassapa Saṃyutta, I have found only one other sutta by Ven. Mahā Kassapa. This is a short sutta of three pages—the Añña Sutta—in the twenty-fourth volume of the Tipiṭaka.

Ven. Mahā Kassapa's most outstanding attribute, praised by the Buddha, was his contentment with little and fewness of desires. He would avoid those people who wished to support him with lavish gifts. When he went on almsround he would steer for those alleys and neighbourhoods inhabited by the poor, a trait recognized and extolled by the Buddha. (Those suttas in which the Buddha sees Ven. Mahā Kassapa on almsround or while sitting meditation, for example, and then gives a Dhamma teaching are not included in those suttas attributed to Mahā Kassapa, since they are considered to be like other suttas containing the words of the Buddha.)

Normally, Ven. Mahā Kassapa lived in seclusion and didn't play any major role in community affairs. He appears in a more prominent role when he encounters an incident after the Buddha's final passing away, which prompted him to organize a formal recitation (*saṅgāyanā*), in order to compile the Buddha's teachings into a clear 'canon,' before they gradually pass into oblivion. (As explained earlier, the word *saṅgāyanā* does not originally mean a 'council' in the sense of making revisions or adjustments to the Dhamma and Vinaya.) As a consequence of his prompting, the First Recitation took place.

Before the First Recitation, which the scriptures only describe in brief, Ven. Mahā Kassapa lived quietly, without any significant role. Once the formal act of the sangha (*saṅgha-kamma*) associated with the Recitation was finished, even though other matters were discussed by the elders, Mahā Kassapa's name does not appear. His formal role or position was completed along with the official business of the

recitation. After this he returned to a quiet life as before. There is no further mention of him until his final passing away at the age of 120.

It is fair to say that if this quiet yet extremely distinguished disciple hadn't instigated the First Recitation, of gathering together the Buddha's teachings and preventing them from fading away after his *parinibbāna*, it is highly questionable whether they would have reached us up to this day and age, or in what degree of integrity they would have survived.

To sum up, in reference to the bhikkhunis not being mentioned in the context of the First Recitation, we don't have enough information to clearly know what happened. But in regard to the specific point that the bhikkhunis didn't participate in the formal meeting, this was perfectly normal, because there were no formal acts of the sangha (*saṅgha-kamma*) which the bhikkhus and bhikkhunis performed together, at the same time.

Moreover, as far as we know, in Indian society at that time women did not participate in formal meetings, nor did they engage in and carry out formal public functions. Yet with the establishment of the monastic sangha, women as bhikkhunis were given the privilege to engage in formal meetings in the same way as the bhikkhus.

Because of the unfavourable social conditions at the time, along with the need for caution in regard to living a celibate life, each community performed these formal acts separately. When matters arose affecting both communities, there were standard methods for communicating and for gradually settling these matters.

Because the account of the Recitation is so short, we don't know what methods existed for communication and coordination between the two communities. The best we can do is to look at the Tipiṭaka, which is the result of this formal gathering, by considering the roles and functions of the bhikkhus and bhikkhunis, as well as the relationship between the monastic community and the society at that time. Here, we have cast only a preliminary glimpse at these considerations.

The Claim That Ven. Mahā Kassapa Governed the Sangha

I have now spoken at length and cannot remember if I have addressed all the questions. Which questions remain unanswered?

Questioner: The way you have described Ven. Mahā Kassapa seems to be the opposite to how Ven. Mano describes him.

Phra Payutto: I have simply been speaking according to the available facts. I present these facts, along with a summary based on them, for our mutual consideration. I'm not making any final decisions or judgements about them.

In the book I wrote, I called Ven. Mano by the name Ven. Mettā. In fact, I preferred not to mention any names, because I didn't want anyone to feel personally attacked or ill-at-ease. But here it is necessary to mention his name, because this matter now has wider repercussions. It is an important matter directly affecting people at large. If one deliberately shares incorrect data, or through one's own misunderstanding spreads false information, one damages the wisdom and understanding of the general population. This must be taken seriously. To mislead people is a major form of harm.

In fact, this needn't be a big issue. I simply ask that people speak accurately according to the facts. If one has doubts, one can honestly admit, 'I have doubts about this matter. According to this information, it probably means such-and-such.' One then does more research in order to seek clarification, rather than jump to premature conclusions.

One shouldn't rashly draw conclusions after glimpsing only a small part of the available facts. For example, one may encounter a specific term and define it according to one's own rudimentary understanding, without really delving into its true meaning. One then follows one's own ideas or draws upon previous misinterpretations by others, without verification. Finally, one elaborates these ideas into extensive narratives and makes some form of final conclusion.

In Ven. Mano's book 'The Events Leading to BE. 1,' the descriptions of the Buddha's heirs and of the suttas by Ven. Mahā Kassapa are so confused that they become meaningless. One can already see how faulty this presentation is by looking solely at the description of the Buddha's heirs. Readers of his book should go and look up the true facts in the original sources—the so-called 'primary province' (*paṭhama-bhūmi*) of the teachings. By simply reading three accounts in the Tipiṭaka of those who refer to themselves or to someone else as the 'heir to the Buddha,' one will gain an accurate understanding of this expression. One will know who qualifies as the Buddha's heir.

The crucial factor here, however, is his reason for interpreting the concept of the Buddha's heir (along with his interpretation of the suttas by Ven. Mahā Kassapa) as he does. That is, Ven. Mano claims that Mahā Kassapa takes on a governing role for the sangha, as a form of succession of power following on from the Buddha. He goes on to say that Mahā Kassapa then uses this power to deviate from Buddhist principles, subsuming them under the notions of Brahmanism, isn't that so? According to this interpretation, Mahā Kassapa sought power, obtained power, and then used this power to follow through with his objectives.

Here we can ignore Ven. Mano's senseless description of a Buddha's heir. We can simply look at the alleged appointment of someone as supervisor or governor of the sangha, that is, at the question whether Ven. Mahā Kassapa had such a position, and whether he wielded such power.

I mentioned earlier that two suttas by Ven. Ānanda exist—one large and one smaller—which comprise teachings he gave between the Buddha's final passing away and the First Recitation. Of these two suttas, I have already discussed the Gopaka-Moggallāna Sutta, but let me repeat some of the points related to the present topic. After the Buddha's final passing away, three months remained before the start of the First Recitation in the city of Rājagaha, in the Magadha kingdom.

During that time, Ānanda, in the capacity of the Buddha's chief attendant, travelled to Jetavana Monastery in the city of Sāvattṭhi, in the Kosala kingdom, in order to put the Mahā Gandha Kuṭṭi in order, where the Buddha had spent most of his time.

Having completed this business in Sāvattṭhi, Ven. Ānanda then travelled approximately 500 km to the city of Rājagaha, in order to participate in the formal recitation. He probably arrived in Rājagaha shortly before the start of the recitation. One day, however, more or less coincidentally, he met the brahman Vassakāra, the chief minister for the state of Magadha. Vassakāra asked Ānanda whether the Buddha before his final passing away had appointed any single bhikkhu to be the leader of the sangha, to replace the Buddha himself. Ānanda told him that no such appointment had been made.

Vassakāra was an eminent statesman and was perplexed by this answer. He went on to ask how, in the case that the monks are leaderless, are they able to live with one another. Ven. Ānanda replied that the monks are not leaderless. The Buddha didn't appoint a person for this role, but he did lay down a set of principles—the ten qualities inspiring confidence. The monks were well familiar with these qualities, and when they recognized an individual endowed with them, they acknowledged, honoured, and revered him. (He doesn't need to be appointed to a special position as practised say in politics.) Ānanda makes absolutely no mention here of Ven. Mahā Kassapa.

If Ven. Mahā Kassapa had been appointed to such a position of leadership, and had both possessed and wielded power, how could Ven. Ānanda have replied above as he did? Or if he spoke a mistruth, or was in some way at odds with the leader of the recitation (i.e., Mahā Kassapa, whom Ven. Mano's claims was hungry for power), how could this sutta have passed the selection process of the recitation? Wouldn't Mahā Kassapa or one of his disciples have raised objections? On the contrary, this became a vital sutta in the Tipiṭaka.

This sutta by Ven. Ānanda makes the circumstances at this critical juncture—the time between the Buddha’s final passing away and before the First Recitation—abundantly clear. The content of this sutta is in perfect accord with the principles of Buddhism, and they show how Ven. Mahā Kassapa had no special status in the sangha. Indeed, the more one investigates Mahā Kassapa, the more one sees the prominent role held by Ānanda.

Let us look at a related incident from that time period. Shortly before his final passing away, the Buddha spent his last Rainy Season in the city of Vesāli. The Buddha fell gravely ill, but he suppressed the pain with the wish to bid farewell from the sangha. He travelled around performing various activities, and then having renounced the life-principle, he asked the sangha to meet in Vesāli in order to address the community. This was an opportunity for him to teach and to take leave.

During this entire set of incidents there is no mention of Ven. Mahā Kassapa. Only in reference to the time seven days after the Buddha had entered *parinibbāna* is there mention of Mahā Kassapa, while he was travelling along with a group of his disciples. He was not yet aware of what had happened and only found out by coincidence from a non-Buddhist ascetic coming from Kusinārā.

Looking at these circumstances, it seems impossible that the alleged leader of the sangha and successor of the Buddha would have been so distant from the Buddha and from the community that he was going to lead—so far removed from these crucial incidents and unaware of what had happened. How would he have been able to govern the sangha? What is clear is that at the time of the Buddha’s final passing away, he wasn’t in any kind of leadership role.

In sum, Ven. Mahā Kassapa had no formal supervisory role in the sangha before, during, or after the Buddha’s final passing away. It’s as simple as this.

The Condemnation of Ven. Mahā Kassapa Reveals an Ignorance by Scholars

The more one looks, the more one sees how Ven. Mahā Kassapa was a quiet, reserved monk, who had no special role in the community. One also sees how the claims by Ven. Mano are baseless; the evidence he uses to establish his argument and to draw conclusions are inaccurate and thoroughly muddled.

Furthermore, this matter should be used as an encouragement for us to take great care and be responsible in what is referred to as 'scholarship.' (Naturally, we should apply caution and responsibility to all activities we are engaged in.) This sense of responsibility extends both to academic precision and to the general population (in this case to people's wisdom and understanding).

From the perspective of people's general wellbeing, this matter is very worrisome. If Ven. Mano is aware of what he has done, he should make an effort to correct his mistakes. May he reflect on the facts, on what is correct, and on the welfare of the general public. The nature of his work is disturbing. People without sufficient knowledge in the matter may read his books and become all excited. If they don't have a basis for examining and verifying this work, this may lead to much confusion.

Take another example from his text titled: 'How Did the Buddha Die?' Here he makes a serious claim that there is evidence in the *Tiṭṭhaka* that the Buddha did not pass away in *Sālavana* (the *Sāla* Grove), but rather that he 'entered *parinibbāna* in a small chamber in a building in the town of *Kusinārā*.'

Ven. Mano argues: 'When Ven. Ānanda knew for sure that the Buddha was going to enter *parinibbāna*, he became so distraught that he grew faint and was unable to support himself. He needed to hang on to a door-latch shaped like a lion's head. Such a door-latch certainly couldn't have existed alone out in the forest. It must have been that

the Buddha was staying in a room of a building in the city of Kusinārā.’

The reason why Ven. Mano concludes that the Buddha was staying in a room in Kusinārā is because of the term ‘a door-latch shaped like a lion’s head.’ In fact this term doesn’t indicate where the Buddha passed away. It simply acts as an example of how Phra Mano conducts his scholarly work. Anyone can look this up. Where does it say that Ven. Ānanda stood holding on to ‘a door-latch shaped like a lion’s head’? Go search for this in the Tipiṭaka or in any other scriptural text. You won’t find it. Where did Phra Mano come up with this idea?

Let us use Ven. Mano’s own methods and speculate (that is, guess) on where he came up with this idea—in particular, where he came up with the idea of a lion’s head. The reason we must speculate is because we aren’t able to know for sure what he was thinking. If our guesses are incorrect, he can explain himself or make an honest confession, and people will forgive him for any mistakes. No-one will mind, according to the principle of the noble discipline (*ariya-vinaya*) of admitting one’s mistakes, rectifying them, and then being mindful in the future. This is considered growth in the noble discipline. In any case, we can guess or conjecture according to the available facts.

In the Tipiṭaka it clearly states that Ven. Ānanda stood crying while: ‘holding on to a door-latch shaped like a monkey’s head’ (*kapisāṃ ālambitvā*).¹ A *kapisā*² is a piece of wood shaped like the head of a *kapi*—a monkey. How did a monkey’s head in the Tipiṭaka become a lion’s head in Ven. Mano’s book? Here we can guess that he came across a reference to this event in a biography of the Buddha’s life. Either this reference contained a mistranslation, or else it contained the term ‘monkey’s head’ but he has a weakness for lions and read ‘lion’s head.’ Once he had misread the text in this way his imagination took off in the way described above.

¹ D. II. 143-4.

² Usually written *kapisāsaka*.

A door-latch shaped like a monkey's head is a part of a lodging. In monasteries, the Buddha permitted such a latch even in a toilet or lavatory (*vacca-kuṭṭi*)—it is not something precious or expensive. In the royal park of Sālavana belonging to the Mallas (Mallā people) where the Buddha passed away, isn't it reasonable to expect that they would have had a building with rooms for resting in or even a toilet? (Some people may claim that in this royal park there must have been things more elaborate than door-latches shaped like monkeys' heads. Or in the case that door-latches shaped like lions' heads were not made at the Buddha's time, they may accuse Ven. Mano of generating a misunderstanding of cultural history.)

The evidence is thus clear that the door-latch was shaped like a monkey's head. But the more important issue here is the accuracy of scholarship. We are dealing here with facts, which makes the matter more worrisome. This problem is not limited to Ven. Mano, but seems to be more common generally in society these days. We need to really pay attention to this. As I said before, this is a matter concerning the understanding of the general population. Those who impair this understanding cause severe damage. One can say that they destroy the wisdom of other people.

This work by Ven. Mano is an example of careless and slapdash scholarship at all levels. According to a careful and sincere analysis of the facts, we can surmise the following possibilities: first, he considers only terms already translated into Thai and uses only secondary data. Second, even those terms translated into Thai he apprehends inaccurately (he reads 'monkey' and changes it into 'lion.')

Third, if the translated material is supplementary to the main discussion, perhaps one can overlook any errors. But if it constitutes the main point of one's analysis or conclusion, then it must be clearly examined in relation to the original source, that is, to the Pali Tipiṭaka. It behooves us to seek precision in regard to facts, data, and evidence. Let us be rigorous in this matter.

As for personal opinions, people are free to express these. If people have doubts, it is good to speak openly, but don't be in a hurry to draw conclusions. When one is not yet sure, when one is not clear, when one can't make up one's mind, one can honestly say: 'According to these facts, or for these reasons, I have doubts,' or, 'According to these facts this matter may be, or is likely to be, determined in such and such a manner.'

We need to be very careful about this matter of scholarly work. Even when extensive research is done, it is still possible for errors to slip in. If one pays sincere attention to one's research, however, even though there may be some omissions or oversights, these will be minor. As soon as people realize that one has not made these mistakes intentionally and that one is earnest in one's work, they should be able to forgive. Such incidents will also act as a reminder for everyone to be careful.

May people have the freedom to analyze various data and factual evidence. But it is important for this research to be correct, precise, and clear. In regard to opinions, may people have the freedom to express these, but may they do so responsibly, using their intelligence, reason, and wisdom, in order to help develop their humanity.

One shouldn't be too liberal or 'progressive' with factual evidence. For example, one may hear someone else speak, but when alluding to this speech, one tells others that the speaker spoke ineffectively; one will then alter and embellish his words. This is not correct. If one believes that the person spoke ineffectively or poorly, then one should refer to the specifics of that person's speech. One thus remains 'conservative,' preserving the other person's words accurately when referring to them. At the next stage it's fine to be progressive. One makes a critical review of that person's speech, offering the opinion that such and such specifics of his words are incorrect and should be modified or amended.

Here we are talking about a specific individual—Ven. Mano. But this is because this matter is related to our present subject matter and it is urgent. As I mentioned before, I don't want anyone to feel in the slightest way ill-at-ease. But we can't refrain from speaking about and clarifying this matter, because it has become a public issue, and we must look at the benefits in the long run. If we leave it unresolved and allow misunderstandings to spread then this only intensifies the harm and damage.

One can have sympathy for the general public, but it is another matter when it concerns senior teachers. Sometimes people's trust and faith in teachers is unhelpful, as it causes them to neglect making a clear inspection of factual evidence before sharing it with others. They then get caught up in the excitement generated by their disciples. And when it involves specious, incorrect information, the situation becomes very harmful, misleading many people and causing much confusion.

One can sympathize with Ven. Mano, since other senior teachers supported his positions, causing him to further lose his sense of self-awareness. Therefore, when I wrote the book 'Wake Up...', I asked forgiveness from Phra Mano, but stated that I intentionally spoke forcefully in order to reach those scholars who had carelessly offered their support.

Some people to this day, however, do not seek out the necessary knowledge for clearly understanding the Buddhist concept of being an heir to the Buddha. (For those who are still not clear about this matter, go back and read the earlier sutta passage in which gaining an insight into a human skeleton already qualifies one as an heir to the Buddha.)

So I urge people to emphasize the clear gathering and sharing of knowledge, rather than simply exercising the expression of one's opinions.

Everyone Has the Potential to Be an Heir to the Buddha

As I mentioned in the book 'Wake Up...', there were three individuals who praised Ven. Mahā Kassapa as being an heir to the Buddha. The first was Mahā Kassapa himself, the second was Ven. Mahā Moggallāna, who also referred to himself as the Buddha's heir, and the third was Ven. Bhaddā Kapilānī, who was Mahā Kassapa's wife before he was ordained as a monk. Indeed there are two such references by Bhaddā Kapilānī, one in the Therīgāthā and the other in the Apadāna.

If one interprets the concept of a Buddha's heir according to Ven. Mano's idea, as referring to someone who succeeds the Buddha and rules over the monastic community, one can elaborate on this idea, by either following Phra Mano's line of thought or going off in a different direction. For example, one may say: 'Look here, it was Ven. Mahā Moggallāna who claimed to be the Buddha's heir, but Ven. Mahā Kassapa misled people into believing that he was the sole heir in order to seize this position for himself.'

Someone else may counter by saying: 'No, it's not that way. Rather, Ven. Mahā Moggallāna informed others that Ven. Mahā Kassapa was next in line for this position after himself.' Another person may argue: 'Both of these interpretations are incorrect. In fact, Ven. Mahā Moggallāna and Ven. Mahā Kassapa usurped this position from Ven. Sāriputta. See—there is no mention of Sāriputta being the Buddha's heir!'

In regard to Ven. Bhaddā Kapilānī, some people may have different ideas and say: 'It wasn't Ven. Mahā Kassapa's wish to exclude the bhikkhunis from the First Recitation. Bhaddā Kapilānī was his former wife and he wanted her to be the head of the bhikkhunis during this recitation. Her two statements contained in the Tipiṭaka declaring Mahā Kassapa the Buddha's heir were intended to prove to others that he had the authority to bestow this position on her. But Bhaddā Kapilānī was not very popular with the other bhikkhunis, who didn't

accept her as their leader. Mahā Kassapa couldn't force them to accept this idea. When his plan failed he decided to cut the bhikkhunis out of the meeting.' These are the kinds of speculations that can arise if one uses Ven. Mano's methods of reflection.

Yet none of these aforementioned speculations have any truth to them. The term 'Buddha's heir' appears exclusively in poetic verse—it is not used in any formal sense. This term was used by disciples when feeling greatly inspired, by choosing a lyrical term when speaking about one's life experiences or when expressing one's admiration for someone else.

The two references by Ven. Bhaddā Kapilānī exist as an identical verse—the wording is the same in both cases. The verse appears in the Therīgāthā as a description of her life and an expression of her feelings at the time of realizing the Dhamma, and it appears in the Apadāna as a prominent feature of her life. In these verses she states that Ven. Mahā Kassapa is her virtuous friend (*kalyāṇamitta*). She herself has attained the threefold knowledge (*tivijjā*), just as Mahā Kassapa, the Buddha's heir, was a brahman endowed with the threefold knowledge. (The Buddha would frequently play with words, by referring to an arahant as a 'brahman'—*brāhmaṇa*. He stated that arahants are endowed with the threefold knowledge, a pun on the Sanskrit term for the Three Vedas—*trivedi*. It was customary to use such wordplays in poetic verse.)

Being the Buddha's heir is not a matter of status or position that a person needs to take personal pride in. Rather it is a matter of bliss a person feels when realizing Nibbāna, having received the transcendent Dhamma bestowed by the Buddha and making it one's own. Therefore, no-one, including the Buddha, formally appoints someone else as the Buddha's heir.

By sitting alone in the forest and contemplating one's own body, seeing into the truth that it is made up simply of bones, flesh, and organs covered by skin and held together by sinews, subject to

impermanence (*aniccatā*), pressure (*dukkhatā*), and insubstantiality (*anattatā*), wisdom arises and one gains insight into the Dhamma. In this way one becomes a Buddha's heir right there and then.

In many circumstances Ven. Mahā Kassapa referred to himself as the Buddha's heir. When he returned from almsround, walked into the forested mountains, and dwelled in remote places, he would rejoice in nature, living with the birds and deer and listening to the calls of elephants and tigers. He showed no inclination of wanting to administer sangha affairs. Yet he used this expression 'Buddha's heir' more than ten times in verses while delighting in the beauty of nature.

If someone has the time they can go ask Ven. Mano whether when he encountered this expression the 'Buddha's heir' he read the surrounding subject material in the Tipiṭaka in order to find out what it really means, or whether he simply read the term and then followed his own assumptions. We don't have to get stressed about this matter. We can discuss it in a way that makes people feel at ease. But to sum up, this interpretation of a Buddha's heir is groundless and untenable. Whoever wants to be really clear on this matter should go and look at the original scriptures in detail.

The important issue is that scholars not be careless. They should research and investigate matters clearly and accurately, and then present these matters to others with a sense of responsibility in regard to scholarly work and in regard to the wellbeing and wisdom of the general public, as stated earlier.

According to the available evidence, Ven. Mahā Kassapa had almost no formal role in the monastic community at the time of the Buddha. It is for this reason that one must question whether Ven. Mano's work is simply sloppy or whether he had other intentions. His assertions that Mahā Kassapa had some kind of special authority or took on a role of power are simply false. In regard to the term 'Buddha's heir,' dozens of individuals, both monks and nuns, were referred to in the scriptures by this term.

Ven. Mano goes on to claim that Ven. Mahā Kassapa's format for presenting suttas is similar to the Buddha's (as if he were replacing the Buddha), and that he has the greatest number of suttas. The truth is, however, that there are extremely few suttas by Mahā Kassapa, a negligible number when compared to those of other disciples. And the formats of these suttas by various disciples are not unusual in any way.

At the time of the Buddha Ven. Mahā Kassapa's formal role in the monastic community was very minor. He came to prominence after the Buddha passed away due to the fact that one of the monks in his entourage spoke heedlessly. He therefore encouraged the other monks to perform a formal recitation. And such formal recitations already had a precedent and structure. The Buddha had instructed the monks to perform recitations for the stability of the Dhammavinaya, for the endurance of the holy life, and for the wellbeing of the manyfolk. Ven. Sāriputta had already performed such a recitation as a model.

Ven. Mahā Kassapa made his proposal for a recitation to a gathering of the sangha, and since he was an elder (in short, he had been ordained for longer than the other monks) he was selected as the leader of this recitation. After the formal meeting was over, he quietly disappeared. There are no suttas by him dating from after the Buddha's *parinibbāna*. There is only an account of him meeting up with Ven. Ānanda.¹ In contrast, as I mentioned earlier, there are a couple of important suttas by Ānanda which he gave after the Buddha's passing away. Note how Mahā Kassapa generally lived quietly on his own. Later, an incident occurred prompting him to appeal for and participate in a formal recitation, because he wanted the Buddhist religion to remain stable. After the recitation was finished he returned to his solitary way of life.

¹ [S. II. 214-17. This is the sutta in which Ven. Ānanda invites Ven. Mahā Kassapa to visit the bhikkhuni quarters. This event most likely took place between the Buddha's *parinibbāna* and the beginning of the First Recitation.]

If someone has doubts over a particular matter it is acceptable to express them. Then one should research the truth of the matter. We may have never been interested say in this specific issue, but when questions arise we look into it carefully through an impartial examination. That is fine, but we should be sincere and speak according to facts. In this case, however, we can conclude that Ven. Mahā Kassapa didn't have any kind of exceptional role in the sangha.

After the First Recitation was finished, some unnamed elders criticized Ven. Ānanda for particular misdeeds. But Ven. Mahā Kassapa was not among them, because generally when he is referred to in the Tipiṭaka his name is clearly cited. Moreover, these events occurred after the formal act of the recitation, at which point Mahā Kassapa had already quietly departed.

It is as if Ven. Mano is trying to draw a picture of Ven. Mahā Kassapa and Ven. Ānanda as belonging to conflicting factions, isn't this so? He goes on to claim that those elders who criticized Ānanda belonged to Mahā Kassapa's faction, and that Mahā Kassapa was present at the time of voicing criticism.

Here, Ven. Mano is also mistaken. During this act of criticism Ven. Mahā Kassapa had already departed. Had he been present he would have been the leader in an unofficial way and his name would have been mentioned in the capacity of leader. This wouldn't have been overlooked. (The Vinaya contains clear principles for making inquiries —*āpucchā*—of another monk.)

If one were to distinguish to whose group these critical monks belonged, one could say they belonged to Ven. Ānanda's own group. Speaking in an informal way, they needed to clear up matters between themselves. When this was completed those elders consulted further with Ānanda, who was then at the centre of the meeting. Together they considered how to carry out the matter conferred to them by the Buddha in regard to Ven. Channa.

I don't need to take sides with one monk or the other—either Ven. Mahā Kassapa or Ven. Ānanda. In fact, they never represented two different factions. Just the opposite—they were tight-knit with one another. As I said earlier, whenever Mahā Kassapa organized a formal event he would invite Ānanda, and likewise when Ānanda visited the bhikkhunis' residence he invited Mahā Kassapa to come along.

Roughly speaking, in the order of disciples Ven. Ānanda was about eight places behind Ven. Mahā Kassapa, yet they had a very close friendship. When Mahā Kassapa admonished Ānanda he would address him like an intimate younger sibling (*kumāraka-vāda*: 'to address someone as a child'). And Ānanda would acknowledge what Mahā Kassapa said as if he were listening to an older sibling.

Contrary to what Ven. Mano claims, one can say that due to the closeness and sense of ease between these two monks, during the formal recitation Ven. Mahā Kassapa took on the role of leader simply according to his status as senior monk. When the recitation was finished he then handed over the remaining general affairs to Ven. Ānanda's supervision.

Appendix 4:

Sīladharā

In the year 1977, Tahn Chao Khun Rājasumedhācariya (Ajahn Sumedho), who was the first Western disciple of Venerable Luang Por Chah Subhaddo, arrived in England in order to practise as a bhikkhu there. Two years later, in 1979, he established Cittaviveka Monastery in West Sussex, in the South of England.

In that very same year, four laywomen independently asked permission to live at the monastery in order to train in and practise the Dhamma. Towards the end of that year, all four became anāgārikās, keeping the eight precepts and wearing white robes in a similar way to the *mae chi* in Thailand.

As time went on, Ajahn Sumedho decided that these anāgārikās would benefit from practising the Dhamma with an increased number of training precepts, including relinquishing the use of money. As a consequence, in the year 1983, these four women went forth as female renunciants keeping the ten precepts and wearing brown robes. At first the term *sīlavantī* was used to refer to these female renunciants, but after the year 1990 the official term to describe them was changed to *sīladharā*: ‘those who uphold virtuous conduct.’

One of the Western bhikkhus played an important role in creating a clear structure and system of practice for this group of nuns. The result of this process was the ‘Sīladharā Vinaya Training,’ which is comprised of about 150 training rules and observances.

In the year 2005 there were 19 sīladharā and 8 anagārikās.

* * *

Ajahn Candasiṛī writes about her experience of being part of the evolving community of nuns:

Reading Dr. Martin Seeger’s introduction to the order of sīladharā, it would be easy to assume that it all happened very smoothly; the different elements coming together and forming themselves into a coherent whole, almost according to some carefully prearranged plan. In fact it was, and continues to be, a more organic process, an unfolding and gradual evolution happening on many different levels. Try as one might, it seems impossible to predict or determine its course or outcome.

The first four female ordination candidates, who became Anagārikās Rocanā, Sundarā, Candasiṛī and Thānissarā, were from very different backgrounds.¹ Our common interest and inspiration was the Dhamma practice of the fledgling monastic community at Chithurst Monastery. At the candlelit precept ceremony on 28th October 1979 Ajahn Sumedho, wisely, made no promises about our future. Instead, there was the simple instruction to just keep on washing our white robes, and keeping the eight precepts together with the 75 *sekhiya* rules.² Our love of Dhamma, together with a pioneering spirit and the goodwill and appreciation that were shown towards us, was what kept us there—in spite of physically harsh conditions, and hard work—in

¹ Note that the Candasiṛī mentioned here is precisely the author of this extended appendix.

² *Sekhiya* rules: the seventy-five training rules relating to aspects of conduct that are included in the final sections of the bhikkhu/bhikkhuni Pāṭimokkhas.

the kitchen and grounds around the main house. Each, for our own reasons, was determined to stay and gradually bonds of friendship were forged among us, despite our differences. The Dhamma teachings and practice, together with the encouragement and example of the bhikkhus, enabled us to live together, in a small cottage ten minutes' walk from the main monastery. Following the wise teachings of Luang Por Chah, we cultivated the willingness to let go of mistakes and the small hurts that, inevitably, we inflicted on each other; this allowed a new beginning in each moment. Shaving our heads, nine months into our monastic training, was a significant step away from 'ordinary' life. Three years on from that, on 14th August 1983, we were offered the ten precepts (*pabbajjā*). We changed from our white to brown robes and took up ceramic alms bowls. This was an even bigger step.

In the first years there was no explicit training, other than following the monastic routines and adhering to the training precepts as well as we could. We received some guidance in monastic living alongside the monks resident at Chithurst, but it became clear that some specific instruction was needed if we were to establish ourselves as a community of nuns, rather than a group of individuals—each with her own interpretation of how things should be done. There were still many things we needed to learn in order to develop into a well-ordered community with formal procedures for admitting new candidates, the confession of offences and Uposatha recitation, Vassa and Pavāraṇā, and with common standards regarding the precepts and the four requisites.

Eventually Ajahn Sucitto was invited to assist in formulating a training structure that would work for our group of women renunciants who were, predominantly, from a Western background. He drew on the *sāmaṇera sikkhāpada*, the bhikkhu and bhikkhuni Pāṭimokkhas, together with his own sense of what would be suitable. For seven years he was closely involved with the life of our community, making most of the decisions concerning the discipline and way of training.

The move to St Margarets near Hemel Hempstead in 1984 was a further significant milestone for our community. By then, we were eight nuns altogether (five in brown and three anāgārikās). Ajahn Sumedho had envisioned a much larger centre there which would incorporate a residence for nuns, leaving the facilities at Chithurst (Cittaviveka) as a training monastery for the bhikkhus. We were sad to leave Chithurst, so to bring a sense of inspiration to the move, we organized a walking pilgrimage or tudong to our new ‘home’: Amaravati.

With our arrival at Amaravati, the disparity between the male and female monastic communities became more obvious. The more senior nuns who, by that time, had been in training for five years were required to give way to young monks who had less experience of monastic life. In Thailand this would be accepted without the slightest question; in England it gave rise to grave concerns—mainly among the laity, who were highly sensitive to such an imbalance and were not afraid to voice their concerns. However, gradually, small but significant shifts were made in the way things were done: changes to the seating arrangements; the introduction of honourifics: ‘Sister’ or ‘Ayya’ for the nuns, rather than addressing them by their names alone; and we even began to sit at the same level as the monks for ordinary conversation.

Naturally, from time to time, the question of bhikkhuni ordination would arise. It seemed to many of the monks and nuns that this could have provided an equivalent (though, of course, not equal) position for the nuns in relation to our bhikkhu brothers. Even then, in the mid nineteen eighties, the advantage of this had been discerned but there were concerns about the severity of the bhikkhuni rules and the sheer legal impossibility of it; although at one time, the Venerable Anandamaitreya had suggested a strategy that might possibly have been a legitimate way forward.

In fact, for us as nuns, the possibility of higher ordination was not something that concerned us greatly. Our main efforts were in the direction of our practice, and our life in the community we were part of. It was clear that things were evolving in a good way with sensitive adjustments being made in the sharing of administrative responsibility, work and teaching—the more experienced nuns were starting to lead retreats and meditation workshops and to give talks.

In 1991 the supervision of the nuns' community was entirely handed over to the nuns, as Ajahn Sucitto stepped back, leaving us to work out how to lead the community and to manage the different responsibilities. At first this was not at all easy as there was no precedent for us, as nuns, in this lineage. Over the years the community has needed to try out different styles of leadership, gradually gaining confidence as we shifted from an authoritarian model to something more gentle and inclusive. Eventually we found that what works best is for the leadership to be shared among the theris, who consider things as a group before bringing them to the whole community for a final decision.

Great care is taken in the selection of candidates for monastic training; we have found that the life in community can highlight difficulties for even the most balanced individuals. Over the years we have worked to develop skill in supporting one another in letting go of obstacles to liberation, and maintaining some kind of balance within the group. This has been vital because—unlike the male monastics—as nuns we have few places where we can live and practise in this way. If it doesn't work out at Amaravati for someone, she could perhaps move to Cittaviveka.... and vice versa! In fact, for three years (1996–99) there was a third residence for śīladharā and anāgārikās in Devon at Hartridge Buddhist Monastery; sadly, irreconcilable problems in the community there led to its disbanding, the nuns and anāgārikās returning to the existing double communities at Amaravati and Cittaviveka.

From time to time, the community has received bhikkhunis from other Buddhist traditions, as guests. Naturally, this has sparked interest among some of the *śīladharā* to compare the different training standards—more as an academic exercise than any serious interest in promoting bhikkhuni ordination as an option for us. We were very conscious that our own *Śīladharā* Training Rule works well enough; it supports our living in community as alms mendicants. The English language recitation (which takes a mere twenty minutes to recite) can also be seen as an advantage, in that we more readily understand the words and meaning of the rules. Furthermore, the *śīladharā* observance to not ‘go beyond a boundary where there are fellow *samanas* or lay supporters without a female escort trusted by her or by the community or in public transport that lacks responsible supervision’ is much more workable than the equivalent bhikkhuni rule (the third *saṅghādisesa* rule) which imposes the severest of penalties, short of defeat, for a nun being apart from another bhikkhuni overnight. This would be a very difficult training guideline for most women from a Western background to follow. The problems involved in arranging for ordination as a bhikkhuni within the UK or travelling to where such a step would be possible was perhaps the final reason that it wasn’t given serious consideration.

However, the mid 2000’s saw a revival of interest, owing to the increasing number of Western women taking bhikkhuni ordination with different traditions—including some who at different times had practised as *śīladharā* or *anāgārikās* within our own communities. In 2007 there was a conference in Hamburg that was organised at the instigation of His Holiness, the Dalai Lama. This was in response to the growing interest among nuns of the Tibetan tradition to have this opportunity available to them. It was an occasion where information pertaining to the topic of bhikkhuni ordination was shared by prominent academics, scholar monks and nuns, and senior bhikkhus and bhikkhunis from all over the world. There were more than sixty

presentations, given over two and a half days. The material was considered and His Holiness approached, with a view to discerning the way forward. Everyone was surprised and shocked when he announced that on his own he did not have the authority to enable bhikkhuni ordination within his tradition; more time was needed, and more contact between the nuns and the elders of the Tibetan Sangha. Several bhikkhus and sīladharā from our monasteries had attended the conference. Significantly, there were also several of our lay supporters; they were very concerned after listening to the talks (notably Bhikkhu Bodhi's presentation), and felt that it was very important that we, the sīladharā, should have the opportunity to receive bhikkhuni ordination within our own tradition.

As more people made their concerns about the nuns' position known, various attempts were made by the bhikkhu elders to address this issue. Finally, an ultimatum was prepared and put before the nuns. As a result, many left the community, then or shortly thereafter. Others decided to stay and continue their practice within the community at Amaravati.

Our numbers, which at that time dropped to below ten sīladharā in community with only one anāgārikā, are now beginning to increase. There are still only ten sīladharā altogether (one is practising independently) but now there are four anāgārikās—surely a positive sign. There is also the beginning of a small community regenerating at Cittaviveka Monastery, and the possibility of a tiny nuns' community at Milntuim Hermitage in Scotland...

So, in response to such questions as: Should the sīladharā form be promoted as a 'bhikkhuni-like' alternative to full bhikkhuni ordination? I have to say, 'I don't know....' Given our present situation, the sīladharā training is certainly adequate for us—in terms of both material and Dhamma support. Looking to the future, it is not clear to me whether it would be realistic and whether there would be any advantage in promoting it as an option for nuns practising further

afield, either in Thailand, where the *mae chi* form is well established and accepted, or in other Buddhist countries where other nuns are already developing their practice within the existing bhikkhuni vinaya.

Personally, I can see that it could be beneficial for the *siladhara* nuns of our tradition to be part of a more widely recognised organisation, in that it would enable a more supportive relationship with other communities of mendicant nuns. I can also see that while, just as in the time of the Buddha, there will always be differences in style of practice that can be problematic, the possibility of being a *samana* within a world-wide bhikkhuni sangha is deeply inspiring to me. However, from my own perspective, it would require the agreement and full support of elders of the lineage to which I belong. Also needed would be a thorough review of the bhikkhuni Pāṭimokkha so that, as far as possible, an agreement could be arrived at as to how it might be followed with integrity in the twenty-first century and beyond. As I said at the beginning of this short article, the course or outcome seems impossible to determine or predict.... so, immensely grateful for the opportunity to participate in this process, I remain curious.... May our faith in Dhamma continue to support what is of lasting benefit of all beings.

Appendix 5:

Mahapajapati Theri College

Mahapajapati Theri College is the first Buddhist college in Thailand that expressly provides an education to *mae chi* (eight precept nuns) and to laywomen. It is located at Pak Thongchai district in the province of Nakhon Ratchasima. It was formally opened in 1999. It was founded by Mae Chee Khunying Kanitha Wichienchareon and the Foundation of Thai Mae Chi under royal patronage, along with the Society for the Improved Status of Women.

Mahapajapati Theri College is affiliated with Mahamakut Buddhist University. Somdet Phra Nyanasamvara, the late Supreme Patriarch of Thailand (b. 1913; d. 2013), was its formal patron.

Appendix 6:

1st International Congress on Buddhist Women's Role in the Sangha: Bhikshuni Vinaya and Ordination Lineages

The 1st International Congress on Buddhist Women's Role in the Sangha took place in Hamburg, Germany between 28-30th of July 2007. Sixty-five scholars, including bhikkhus, bhikkhunis, and lay scholars, gave lectures on the role of women in the sangha and on the possibility of reviving the bhikkhuni sangha. Approximately four hundred people from nineteen different countries attended this gathering. On the final day, His Holiness the Dalai Lama came to listen and to give a talk. In this talk he said:

The issue is to find the way to ordain bhikṣuṇīs that is in accordance with the Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya texts. There needs to be a Buddha alive and here and now to ask. If I were a Buddha, I could decide; but that is not the case. I am not a Buddha. I can act as a dictator regarding some issues, but not regarding matters of

Vinaya.... The Buddhadharma in general is very flexible, and the Buddhadharma as a whole has to respond to reality. Based on the common-sense viewpoint, I am 100 percent certain that were the Buddha here today, he would give permission for bhikṣuṇī ordination. That would make things much easier. Unfortunately there is no Buddha here, and I cannot act as the Buddha.

On the following day, after the congress was concluded, His Holiness the Dalai Lama said the following words to a group of participants:

When it comes to re-establishing the Mūlasarvāstivāda bhikṣuṇī ordination, it is extremely important that we avoid a split in the saṅgha. We need a broad consensus within the Tibetan saṅgha as a whole....

(In: *Dignity & Discipline: Reviving Full Ordination for Buddhist Nuns*, edited by Thea Mohr and Jampa Tsedroen; Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2010; p. 268-9, 277.)

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November 7, 2009