



INTRODUCTION TO
'VASSA' AND 'KATHINA' CEREMONY

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Aberdeen, Scotland 2016



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2016

All good qualities are wholesome, all bad qualities are unwholesome and all neutral qualities are kammaically neutral.

which are wholesome?

wholesome consciousness pertaining to the sense-sphere accompanied by pleasure and associated with knowledge, arises with any object such as visible object, sound, odour, taste, body-impression and mental object. Sense-impression and calmness in that time, besides other dhammas are physical phenomena depending on each other arising, and these dhammas are wholesome.

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Some phenomena are wholesome; they are wholesome roots but all wholesome roots are wholesome phenomena. all wholesome phenomena have one and the same wholesome root. Besides, those phenomena which have each other as wholesome roots are all wholesome phenomena

Preface

Buddhist history starts with the birth of Prince Siddhattha 80 years before the Buddhist era begins 2559 years ago, in Lumbini, present day Nepal, . However, Buddhist philosophy and practice only started once the Prince had achieved the Buddhahood (enlightenment) *at the 35 years of his age*. After that achievement, he became known as the Buddha, one who knows what should be known.

His achievement concerns the nature of suffering called *dukkha*, the reason *dukkha* arises, that there could be an end to this condition and the way to overcome one's suffering. This is called the Four Noble Truths. 'To understand and see these truths, the mind must be clear and still; in order to be still, the mind must be content, in order to be content, the mind must be free from remorse and guilt; in order to be free from guilt, one needs a clear conscience; the bases of a clear conscience are generosity and good conduct. (Gathin, 1998:83)'

The Buddha for 45 years, travelled from village to village to share his finding, the message of peace and kindness, and the way to overcome the endless cycle of birth, death and rebirth. At the age of 80 years, the Buddha, after establishment of Buddhist dispensation entered into Nibbāna, an ultimate freedom from suffering. It is a state of unborn, unconditioned and a supreme ultimate happiness (*sukkhā* instead of *dukkhā*). Since then his followers continued his mission and spread the dispensation. Meanwhile, they commemorate events, which are related to his life and his work through different ways. These days Buddhist around the world celebrate days which are holy days in the Buddhist calendar. The most significant celebration happens in May on the full moon day of 6th Lunar month, when Buddhists all over the world celebrate the birth, enlightenment and death; destruction of five aggregates, of the Buddha. It has come to be known as *Vesāk*, *Baisakha Purnima* or just Buddha Day.

The second day, Magha Puja Day commemorates the Buddha's first congregation which happened without prior invitation on full moon day. All who were present on this occasion were ordained by the Buddha himself and eventually became enlightened. On the day, the Buddha admonished the summery of his teachings 'avoid all evils, do good and purification of mind.'

The third important event is *Asalha Puja* and the Kathina Robe Offering. The booklet presents a historical account of *Asalha Puja* and Kathina, plus their attendant practices, along with some of the important teachings related to these events.

This booklet is a direct result of obligation to fulfill traditionally required ritual of performing a Kathina Ceremony. Over the period of collecting information and study, having thought of benefit to many, is being published for practical use and also for general interest. This is based on Theravada Buddhism and used Pali language where necessary in order to make things clear. Pali words with 'aa' read as 'father', 'ii' read as 'machine' and '.m / ṃ' read 'sang'. Similarly, 'ā' read as in 'father'.

Similarly, related Passages of observation are provided for practical use. Meanwhile, there are few important vocabularies provided at the end of the booklet. I would like to extend my appreciation to Dr. Angela Dietrich for her linguistic support and valuable comments for the clarity and format for the complete version of this booklet. Similarly, my appreciation goes to Venerable Nagasena, Andrew Singer, Dr. Dharma Shakyia for their valuable contribution and suggestions during the compilation. Lastly but not least, I would like to extend my thanks to all members of the Varapunya Meditation Centre, Aberdeen Scotland for their support and valuable contribution.

May all being be happy.

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Introduction

The Asalha Puja is celebrated on the full moon day of the eighth lunar month (Asalha Purnima) usually in the month of July. There are few legends and stories that related to this day. It is the anniversary of the day that Bodhisattva Siddhattha (the historical Buddha) was thought to have entered into his mother's womb (*Patisandhi*). It is also believed to be the day of 'the Great renunciation' when the Prince Siddhattha abandoned family life in the palace and went in search of Nibbana, the final release from suffering, to benefit the whole of humanity. It is also recorded that on this day the Buddha delivered his first sermon to the Five Ascetics and in so doing he established the Sangha or monastic community. It was on this day that 'The Triple Gem' (*Tiratana*), the unity of Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha, first became established. Furthermore and most importantly, it was the beginning of the Vassa, when the monks observe a three-month rains retreat for the duration of the monsoon.

This day is famously known as the beginning of the rains retreat or vassa. Similarly, as the scriptures record that the Buddha's first sermon 'The *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*,' 'The discourse on the turning of the Wheel of the Dhamma' is regarded as one of the most fundamental teachings of the Buddha. Thus monks, nuns and lay people all over the world celebrate Asalha purnima as either "the Dhammacakkappavattana Day" or, alternatively, the "The Sangha day". The designation of the title of the day depends on the particular community's own customary practices when it comes to the Sangha they serve.

The Asalha Puja and Buddha's life

The Prince Siddhattha renounced his princely status at the age of 29 and became a wandering mendicant. He went to various famous teachers, including contemporary famous masters *Alarakaram* and *Uddakaram*, in search for the ultimate truth. He practiced various extreme methods according to then common ascetic practices, including various forms of self-mortification for nearly six years, but was still unable to achieve his ultimate goal.

In his first sermon, the Buddha proclaimed that finally he realised the error of two forms of extremes those of sensual pleasures (*Kaamasukhallikaanuyoga*), and of self-mortification (*atthakilamathanuyoga*). Pursuing neither of these he insists that it did not take to closer to liberation but instead followed his own way, which was later known as 'the Middle Way'. Following only this path at the age of 35, he achieved Buddhahood, a state of fully enlightened one at Buddhagaya (Bodhi-Gaya) on the full moon day of Vesak (Baishaka purnima). In his first sermon the Buddha said;

‘[the path] leads to the subjugation of passions and attainment of the four supra-mundane paths of sainthood, to understand the Four Noble Truths and finally, the realisation of the ultimate goal of Nibbana.’

After the attainment of Buddhahood the Buddha for seven weeks practiced in lonely retreat at different places in the vicinity of the Bodhi Tree (*Bodhimandala*) under which he had attained Buddhahood. The scripture states initially the Buddha was reluctant to teach realising that it is really difficult for normal people to understand and realise what he had achieved. However, having reflected upon the human capability of understanding, he concluded that there are indeed humans capable of understanding his teachings. Humans are divided into categories ranging from the very ignorant to the intelligent, compared with the lotus flowers: those submerged in mud, those slowly emerging out of the mud, those close to coming out of the water and finally, the fully emerged ones just waiting for the sun’s light. Having realised these different levels of human abilities, the Buddha finally decided to deliver his teachings for the benefit and welfare of the many. He thus announced,

‘open to them are the doors to the deathless state. Let those who have ears repose confidence (in me) (*apaarutaa tesam amatassa dvaaraa- ye sotavantaa pamuncantu saddham*) (Narada 1988:63).

It was the beginning of the journey for the spread of his message and establishment of Buddhist dispensation. On this journey, first the Buddha considered his former two main teachers. Unfortunately, they had already died some days ago. Ultimately, he thought about the Five Ascetics who remained with him during his self-mortification. With his divine power, the Buddha came to know that these five ascetics were living in Isipatana, modern Varanasi and thus he left the *Bodhimandala* for Varanasi to give his first discourse.

The First Discourse of the Buddha

While, the Buddha was on his way to Varanasi, a forest where previous five fellow ascetics are residing that time, the Buddha met an Upaka, a wandering ascetic, near Gaya. On seeing the magnetising aura of the Buddha, Upaka said,

‘On account of whom has your renunciation been performed? Who is your teacher? Whose doctrine do you profess?’

The Buddha replied:

All have I overcome, all do I know. From all am I detached, all have I renounced... Indeed an arahant am I in this world. An unsurpassed teacher am I; Alone am I, the all enlightened. Cool and appeased am I. To establish the

wheel of dhamma in the city of Kasi I go. In this blind world I shall beat the drum of deathlessness... Hence, Upaka, I am called a conqueror,' (MN, Ariyapariyesana sutta, no. 26)

For the ascetic Upaka, unfortunately, it was not the right time to receive the Buddha's message of liberation, despite having met and been impressed by the Buddha. Thus, having heard the Buddha's words, he curtly remarked that 'It may be so, friend!' and nodding his head, turned into a by-way and departed. However, scripture recorded that he does indeed return to the Buddha in his later life and eventually embraced the Dhamma.

The Buddha traveled to meet the Five Ascetics, who were his old associates at Varanasi. It is said that he arrived on the full moon day of Asalha, in the eighth lunar month. When the Five Ascetics, namely, Kondanna, Bhaddiya, Vappa, Mahanama and Assaji saw the Buddha, they jointly decided not to pay him any respect. However, as the Buddha approached closer to them, his august personality compelled them to receive him with due honour. After suitable greetings, the Buddha told them about having achieved Buddhahood but they still refused to accept that he had become the enlightened one, the Buddha. The Buddha questioned them thus: "*O, Bhikkhus! Do you know of an occasion when I ever spoke to you thus (as a Buddha) before?*" and at this point they were convinced and ready to listen to his dhamma (VN. 1-10).

Having seen their receptive behaviour, the Buddha began to share his wisdom which was later known as the First Sermon, the foundation of the Buddha's teaching. This sermon is known as the *Dhammaca-kkappavatana Sutta*, a discourse on the setting into motion of the Wheel of the Dhamma.

In this discourse, the Buddha instructed people to practice in accordance with The Middle Way, which means that one should make an effort, so that if one wishes to be successful in the spiritual life, one should avoid the two extremes:

- [1. Trying too hard, for example, not eating or not sleeping enough, because of reciting scriptures all night without sleeping or torturing the body different ways;
2. Not trying hard enough, such as being lax in one's practice and concentrating too much on worldly pursuits.

According to the first discourse, the Buddha said "*O Bhikkhus! Avoiding both extremes, the Tathagata has realised the middle path; it produces vision... knowledge, and leads to calm...to higher knowledge... to Nibbana.*"

The discourse is emphasising the importance of practice in the realisation of the Four Noble Truths; life is naturally full of problems they have causes, so by knowing their causes the problems can be overcome. The way to overcome them

leading to the natural end of suffering (dukkha) is called ‘the Middle Way’. The Four Noble Truths which the Buddha expounded as the source of dukkha could be compared to the medical sciences based on the recognition of the reality of one’s disease, its diagnosis, cure and treatment. The cure consisting in following the Noble Eight-Fold Path, could therefore be called a way of treatment, the heart of Buddhist teachings being to live a spiritual life and to gain the ultimate liberation of Nibbana. The Noble Eightfold path consists of : 1. Right Understanding 2. Right Thought 3. Right Speech 4. Right Action 5. Right Livelihood 6. Right Effort 7. Right Mindfulness 8. Right Concentration

This Noble Eight-fold Path could be said to comprise three dhammas as the Buddha further advised his disciples to speak, act, and earn their living in good ways (i.e., to live a moral life: Sila), to practice meditation to purify their minds (Samadhi) and he also advised them to acquire profound wisdom (Panna). The Buddha says in *Samyutta Nikaya* concerning the Middle Way:

‘Follow the Middle Way; in every aspect of your life, avoid extreme austerity or indulgence, especially in the practice of religion.’

Thus, this became one of the Buddha’s primary discourses comprising one of the main doctrines of the Awakened One.

At the end of the first discourse, it proclaims the Buddha perceived that Kondanna, the senior of the Five Ascetics, had attained higher knowledge of what in Buddhist terminology is called a ‘stream-winner’ (*Sotapanna*) So the Buddha said,

“Indeed, O friends, Kondanna has understood, Kondanna has understood.”

Then Kondanna requested the Buddha,

“Lord, may I have the permission to take up the ascetic life in the presence of the Buddha; may I receive the higher ordination?”

The Buddha accepted Kondanna to join the dispensation by saying, ‘*Come monk! Lead a righteous life to achieve the complete end of suffering.*’ Kondanna thus became the first Buddhist monk. It was on the day of Asalha that the Buddha performed the first ordination, thereby founding the order of the Sangha comprising “**The Triple Gem**”; The Buddha, The Dhamma and The Sangha. The Triple Gem is considered to be the cornerstone of Buddhism. After Kondanna had become a monk, the Buddha gave guidance and instructions on the practice of the dhamma to the other four and they also attained the higher knowledge, opening their eye of wisdom and became monks in the Buddha’s dispensation.

The Rains-Retreat or Vassa

The Asalha Puja is also the beginning of the Rain retreat that all sangha members must observe every year. This is known as Vassa, a Pali word, which literally means 'rain', and is practiced after Asalha Purnima. It is an obligation that every sangha member should observe three months of retreat in one place. Monks and nuns should observe solitude, cultivate knowledge and practice. Its full name is 'Vassupanaayikaa' referring to living at one place or in the monastery for three months. Therefore, traditionally all the sangha members should ideally observe retreat for three months during the rainy season.

The origin of Vassa

After the establishment of the order of the sangha, the Buddha told his *Bhikkhus* and *Bhikkhunis* to go and teach for the benefit and welfare of all sentient beings:

'Go forth to teach out of compassion for the world, for the benefit, welfare and happiness of people. Let not two of you go the same way. Spread the truth to all.'

It was the Buddha's instruction and guidance that every monastic should reflect and consider as a responsibility. As a result, ever since the venerable sangha members continued to travel to deliver teachings about the way leading to ultimate happiness. The scriptures record that venerables travelled from one place to another in order to share the noble teachings of the Buddha. Even during the rainy season, they crossed paddy fields and cultivated land. they continued to walk across fields and forests in order to reach far-flung villages.

Nevertheless, in due course, this practice had to be stopped because of two main reasons. The first reason was the detrimental effect that their unstopped journey had destroyed borders of cultivated lands, which caused damages on plants and harvest. Lay people complained about the act and its effects. ; the second reason was that the laity preferred to see sangha members reside at one place for a certain period of time as was customary of other religious groups in that period of time. The scripture also suggests that other ascetic groups generally remained at the one place during the rainy season generating a close relationship with local people and sharing their teachings with them. Therefore, the followers of the Buddha also preferred to see monks and nuns remain in their monasteries during that rainy season providing an opportunity to hear their teachings and reflect closely about them as well as giving the laity an opportunity to be involved in meritorious activities and enhancement of their knowledge and practical guidance for the life and to the liberation.

Thus, the compassionate Buddha, having heard these complaints and suggestions, instituted the retreat (vassa) at the request of the laity, primarily for practical considerations. That is how it developed into a tradition and a rule to be followed by all the sangha during the monsoon months, which starts on the full moon day of Asalha. In some monasteries, during the vassa the venerables dedicate themselves to intensive meditation practice, while others may make a vow to fulfill their good wishes. Similarly, during vassa, many Buddhist lay people reinvigorate their spiritual training and adopt a more ascetic lifestyle. For example, in Thailand, the laity will occasionally take monastic vows for the vassa period and then return to lay life.

The Activities involved

There are various activities before the beginning of the vassa, during and after the end of it. One of the first activities is the request a venerable sangha to observe a vassa on the temple by lay Buddhists before the vassa retreat begins. The celebration starts from the very first day of vassa with the offer of ‘Rain Bathing Robes’ (*Vassaavaasika Sadoka*) to the monastic, besides candles and other necessities¹. At the Buddha’s time, the first person to offer rain bathing cloth from which robes are sewn – was the generous Vishakha Upasika. Venerables, respectfully, take this opportunity to make a resolution² to remain at a particular place for three months on the very next day of full-moon to practice with a strong dedication, both the dhamma (the Buddha's teachings) and the vinaya (the Buddha's code of monastic discipline). They also take this opportunity to bless and instruct the congregation. During the period of rains retreat for three months, congregation also benefited from venerables teachings and guidance for the happy life and way to the spiritual liberation.

Lay people, similarly, take the opportunity of the vassa retreat dedicate their time to practice wholesome deeds by observing at least the Five Precepts or Eight Precepts; attending dhamma sermons in monasteries; offering dana (gifts/food) to the monastic; learning and practicing meditation; and thereby purifying their minds.

¹ Namotassa bhagavato arahato sammambuddhassa (3 times)

Imaani maya.m bhante, vassaavaasika-ciivaraani, saparivaaraani, siilavantassa, o.nojayaama. Saadhu no bhante, siilavanto, imaani, vassaavaasika-ciivaraani, saparivaaraani, pa.tigga.nhaatu, amhaaka.m, diigha-ratta.m, hitaaya, sukhaaya.

We present these vassa bathing robes , together with their accompanying articles, to the virtuous ones. May our virtuous ones accept these vassa robes, together with their accompanying articles, for our long-term welfare and happiness.

² Vassa Adhitthana words:

Namotassa bhagavato arahato sammambuddhassa (3 times)

Imasmi.m aavase ima.m temasa.m vassa.m upema (3 times)

(In this dwelling, I make a resolution to remain for three months)

The intention is that these wholesome activities may lead to the end of suffering (dukkha) and to gain ultimate happiness in life.

The vassa period, therefore, is an important communal platform where the Buddhist monastic sangha and lay people work together to gain spiritual progress, mutual understanding and perform different communal activities. Similarly, the vassa is followed by two other major festivals of the year, firstly, the ceremony called *Pavarana*, an 'invitation ceremony'. It is performed on the very last day of the observance of vassa. Pavarana marks the joyous celebration of the end of the vassa through the offering of an alms round called '*devorohana*', signifying the legend of the descent of the Buddha from heaven after teaching *Abhidhamma* (Buddhist psychology).

The Second major festival observed in the month following vassa. This month is a period of 'timely offering' known as the Kathina month, or robe-offering month. During this time people get together to make formal offerings of robes and other requisites to the sangha and the temple. This is formally done through a ceremony known as the Kathina Robe Offering Ceremony, which will be discussed further later.

The Sangha and Duty

Kathina is regarded as a communal act which both monastic and lay people take part. In order to understand the event, first of all the Buddhist concept of 'Sangha' should be understood. 'Sangha' terminologically refers to the community of a certain number of people. According to the Buddhist scripture of discipline, the *vinnaya*, sangha means a group consisting of a minimum of four fully ordained Buddhist monks. The maximum number is limitless, which includes from past, present and future monastic. In Theravada Buddhism, although sangha defines a four groups of people; monks, nuns, men (*upaasaka*) and women (*upaasikaa*), sangha distinctively refers only to the community of Venerable Monks (*bhikkhus*) or Venerable Nuns (*Bhikkhuni*).

One of the sangha's functions is to provide a harmonious institution that can be a shelter (secure refuge) for people regardless of ethnic background, class, race, or sex. It has its own rules and regulations, which allows individuals to practice as a form of training, allowing them to fit in with the community. These rules and regulations are referred to as the Discipline, a Monastic Code or *Vinaya*. The rules and regulations work together to form a practice of '*Sila*' or Morality. They act as training rather than an indenture or obligation. It would therefore not be appropriate to use the term Sangha to refer to lay Buddhists.

At the beginning of the Vassa it is a traditional for the junior sangha members to visit their seniors to pay respect. They can do this at the same monastery or at different monasteries. This paying of respect creates an opportunity, for junior and senior sangha to formally 'request forgiveness' and to formally 'forgive' any transgressions caused intentionally or unknowingly towards each other.³ It is one of the traditions that helps to promote cohesion and harmony in the community.

Similarly, at the end of the rainy season retreat, the Sangha performs a ceremony called the 'Invitation Ceremony' or Pavaarana in Pali terminology. This is a ceremony which invites individual members of the Sangha to point out or acknowledge their offences or wrong doings whether seen or just heard or suspected which they might have carried out living together during three months vassa.⁴ It is also a ceremony to reflect upon one's own actions and to promise to correct one's wrongdoings promptly and dutifully. Meanwhile, one suppose to make a resolution not to repeat similar mistake in future.

It is a ceremony which has been practiced since the time of the Buddha. In this current chaotic and confused world, if every one of us can practice these two beautiful yet humble ceremonies it would definitely bring greater social harmony. It is one of the hardest things to forgive and to request forgiveness, which is the most important way to start and end vassa retreat.

'The Invitation ' and 'The Kathina' are two special ceremonies that only those who have fulfilled the three months' rain retreat uninterruptedly are entitled and qualified to be a part of. Thus the fulfillment of the three months' rain retreat qualifies a monastic to join and perform an invitation ceremony, which functions as a kind of ladder to qualifying for and rejoicing in the acceptance of the Kathina Robe. Should there be any emergency necessities such as community disputes, parents ill-health or died, sangha meetings and invitation to observe any religious activities in other cities, observer of rains retreat is allowed to travel for six nights seven days, which is known as 'Sattaahakaraniya'⁵, taking leave for seven days.

³ Request for forgiveness:

Requester: Aayasmante pamadena, dwarattayena katam, sabbam aparadham khamatha me bhante
(venerable sir, If I have ever transgressed unheedfully through body, speech and mind towards you, please
forgive me for those acts)

Receiver: Aham khamaami tayaapi me khamitabbam (I forgive you and you too forgive me)

Requester: khamaami bhante (Yes, I do)

⁴ Pavaarana wording '

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammaasambuddhassa (3)

Sangha.m bhante pavaaremi ditthena vaa sutena vaa parisankaaya vaa vadantu ma.m aaya.smanto anukampa.m
upaadaaya passanto pa.tikkarissaami

Dutiyampi.... Tatiyampi...

⁵ Sattaahakaraniya wordings:

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammaasambuddhassa (3)

Sattaahakaraniya.m kicca.m me atthi, tasma maya gantabba.m Imasmi.m sattaahabhantare nibattissaami.

The Meaning of Kathina

The word Kathina is a Pali word referring to a wooden frame which was traditionally used for the purpose of sewing pieces of cloths to make a robes in the past. Once the season for making the sangha's robes is over, the component parts of the frame will be kept for the following year. It is also defined as 'difficult'. However, the more general meaning of Kathina would normally refer to the actual robes or '*civara*', which are carefully prepared and presented to the community of monks and nuns who have fulfilled the requirements (i.e. observation of vassa without breaking) during the rain retreat. A Kathina Robe can include one of three pieces: the Outer Robe, '*Civara*'; the Shoulder Robe, '*Sanghati*'; and the Sarong-like garment, '*Antarvasaka*', or '*Sabong*' in Thai language or a set of these. This ceremony is an absolute necessity in the monastic code as it provides sangha members with provisions such as robes and requisites for the whole year. It is commonly supported by generous donations from the devotees to show their appreciation for the guidance and living example.

The origin of Kathina culture

The origin of Kathina culture dates back to the time of the Buddha. The scripture states (Mahavagga, Vinaya) that on one occasion, thirty venerable monks of *Patheyya* province from an ancient city were travelling to Savatthi city to see the Buddha for guidance at Jeta's Grove. As the rains retreat was just about to begin, they were unable to continue their journey to Savatthi. As a result, they had to reside at Saketa city for their observation of vassa. Although they observed vassa at Saketa city, they were longing to see the Buddha. They were only six *yojanas* distance, according to the scripture, but were nevertheless still unable to get a chance to see the Buddha.

As soon as the vassa was completed, despite the muddy paths due to continued rain, water and swamps, they continued their journey to Savatthi, Jeta's Grove, to see the Buddha. Their robes were drenched due to rain and swamps as they approached the Buddha. Having exchanged greetings and friendly discussions, the Buddha gave an admonition to all the monks and addressed them thus: 'I allow you, monks, to make a *Kathina-cloth*.'

The Offering of Kathina

The offering of a Kathina robe is made to the Sangha, and not to an individual monastic. The fulfillment of a rains retreat and an Invitation ceremony is

essential to perform the Kathina ceremony. The observation of Initial Rains-retreat and completes without break, on one hand, and fulfillment of Invitation ceremony on the other are the important factors for the organisation of Kathina Robe Offering. Either breaking the Initial Rains-retreat or observation of later rains retreat disqualifies the Invitation ceremony.

In a situation where there are less than four monks who have completed the rains retreat and attended an invitation ceremony at a single temple or in special circumstances, the Kathina Robe offering ceremony can be still be organised, depending on a devotee's wish to sponsor a ceremony, by inviting monastic from different temples to complete a quorum as the rule requires. According to the commentary, over 5 sangha members regarded as a quorum. Nevertheless, main Kathina Robe should not be offered to visiting monks but to a monk, who is qualified.

The importance of Kathina Robe

The Kathina Robe offering is considered a special offering. At first it is simply a normal Buddhist practice of generosity, an offering to a member in a presence of the sangha community. However, the Kathina Robe offering grew in importance for three reasons.

First of all, it can be organised only once a year at any one temple or monastery.

Secondly, it can only be offered for a specified period starting from the end of Vassa or full moon day in October until the next full moon day in November.

Lastly, the Kathina robe is to be offered to the Sangha as a whole, the community of Bhikkhus and Bhikkhunis, and not to an individual Bhikkhu or Bhikkhuni.

There are two activities involves during the ceremony. . The first activity consists of the actual Robe offering, which should only be offered to the Sangha community as a whole. The second activity is that the Sangha selects an individual qualified member to offer the Kathina robe and rejoice of it. The offering of the Kathina Robe, therefore, is a rare opportunity for lay Buddhists to perform dana to the community of sangha. The Buddha said that offering to the Sangha is always more beneficial and brings more meritorious results than offering to an individual. Whenever one gets a chance, therefore, one should either make an actual offering to the Sangha as a whole or express one's intention to offer it to the sangha.⁶ This is

⁶ There are seven types of offerings to the Sangha, the Bhikkhu and Bhikkhuni sangha with the Buddha's presence, bhikkhu sangha, Bhikkhuni Sangha, Bhikkhu and Bhikkhuni Sangha, representative of the Bhikkhu Sangha and representative of the Bhikkhuni Sangha.

indeed a wholesome deed that would not cause any future dissatisfaction. Buddhists believe that the Sangha is a community of monastic, and that it includes Bhikkhus and Bhikkhunis from the past, right from the time of the Buddha through to the present and lasting in future. Similarly, it is an offering for the communal good and serves to support the community, which preserves and protects the noble teachings, the path that leads to liberation.

According to Theravada Buddhist practice, the event - the Kathina Robe offering and the celebration of Kathina day - , is one of the most sacred ceremonies of Buddhist practice. In Buddhist countries like Thailand, Sri Lanka and Myanmar, devotees may have to wait for years to have the opportunity to perform such an offering. In Thailand, for example, they often need to wait over 20 years. There are, nevertheless, communal Kathina offering ceremonies, in which a number of people may sponsor the entire ceremony. Besides offering the main Kathina Robe, an individual or family can also offer other useful necessities or 'requisites' to support the temple and the Sangha. In this way, all the lay people, apart from just a main sponsor for the Kathina robe, get an opportunity to participate in this function and perform meritorious deeds.

These days, the Kathina robe offering ceremony seems to have become chiefly an opportunity for a particular group of devotees to raise funds to maintain and support their local monastery and its Sangha members to enable them to work and spread the Buddhist teachings. Therefore, it can be concluded that Vassa may be regarded as generally a period for the cultivation of good actions by reducing any bad physical, verbal or mental impurities, and learning to live a moral life.

It is an opportunity for those involved, both sangha and devotees, to gain in spiritual growth and prosperity. Meanwhile, the ceremonies of invitation and forgiveness which occur at this time, are very important in our modern time. Finally, an offering of the monastic robe is an important opportunity for generating merit and for appreciating one's personal sacrifices, dedication, practice, and efforts made on behalf of others, besides the compassionate willingness of people to help others. It may also contribute towards the sharing of good wishes amongst each and every individual. It is a greatly beneficial ceremony, therefore, for both lay people and for monastics for the general goodness and happiness in the present and in the future, in the ultimate reality, until the final achievement of Nibbana.

May this act of merit be a strong support for you, for your success in life and be helpful for you in gaining the ultimate happiness of Nibbana.

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Appendix

The Kathina ceremony procedure

1. Lay people should first offer Kathina to the sangha

Kathina Offering words:

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa (3 times)

Myanmar:

Maya.m bhante, samsaaravatta dukkhato mocanatthaaya nibbaanaayaa saccikaranatthaayaa ima.m kathina civara.m bhikkhu sanghassa dema, kathina.m attharitu.m (3 times)

Sri Lanka:

Ima.m Kathina civara.m sanghassa dema, kathina.m attharitu.m (3 times)

Thailand:

Maya.m bhante, sapaarivara.m kathina-civara-dussa.m sanghassa onojayaama sadhuno bhante sangho ima.m sapaarivara.m katinadussa.m patigganhaatu patiggahetva ca iminaa dussena kathina.m attharatu amhaka.m digaratta.m hitaya sukhaya

2. Consideration of Kathina Offering to the Sangha and scrutiny of the Sangha

First Monk:

Respected venerable sirs, the Kathina Robe offering this year is in the form of '*Kathinasamaggi*', a communal offering headed and offered by..... (**Name of person offering it**) and her relatives along with all other members.

This Kathina is pure in its material and of a pure cloth. It is like floating in the sky and dropping down among the sangha, the community of the venerable monastics. It does not belong to any particular monastic. It belongs to the Sangha as a whole. The Sangha only can consider and scrutinize it.

May the Sangha kindly listen to me: by means of offering this Kathina Robe, it should be understood that the Kathina-Robe does not belong to any particular monastic but it belongs to the Venerable Sangha. The sangha must consider, 'who should receive this Kathina Robe and wear it?' With regard to the discipline of Buddhism, the lord Buddha has allowed the sangha to only offer Kathina to a monastic well-versed in doctrine and discipline, who is able to perform the Kathina Ceremony properly.

Second Monk:

Seeing that the (*Venerable Sujano*) has qualified accordingly, so, I would consider that it is proper for the venerable Sangha to offer this Kathina Robe to him for spreading Kathina according to the basic discipline of Buddhism. If there is any

monk among the sangha who does not agreed with my words, he can say 'NO', but if not, then please remain silent.

May the Sangha now make this resolution that we now offer this Kathina Robe to *Venerable Sujano* in the spirit of the traditional unshakable and well-founded motions and announcements, and then may the sangha utter the word 'sadhu' together in a final agreement. 'Sadhu'

3. The kammavaca for the kathina robe ceremony

This will be chanted by a single monk or two together if necessary.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddassa (3 times)

Suṇātu me bhante saṅgho. Idaṃ saṅghassa kaṭhina-civaram uppannaṃ. Yadi saṅghassa pattakallaṃ, saṅgho imaṃ kaṭhina-dussam āyasmato (*Sujanassa*) dadeyya, kaṭhinaṃ attharituṃ esā ñatti.

Suṇātu me bhante saṅgho. Idaṃ saṅghassa kaṭhina-dussam uppannaṃ. Saṅgho imaṃ kaṭhina-dussassa āyasmato (*Sujanassa*) deti, kaṭhinaṃ attharituṃ. Yass'āyasmato khamati, imassa kaṭhina-dussam āyasmato (*Sujano bhikkhussa*) dānaṃ, kaṭhinaṃ attharituṃ, so tuṅh'assa. Yassa nakkhamati, so bhāseyya.

Dinnaṃ idaṃ saṅghena kaṭhina-dussam āyasmato (*Sujanassa*) bhikkhu no, kaṭhinaṃ attharituṃ. Khamati saṅghassa, tasmā tuṅhī. Evam-etaṃ dhārayāmi.

Venerable Sirs, may the community listen to me. This kaṭhina-cloth has arisen from the community. If the community is ready, it should give this kaṭhina-cloth to Venerable (Sujano or change the name accordingly) to spread – or do you mean 'share'? kaṭhina. This is the motion.

Venerable Sirs, may the community listen to me. This kaṭhina-cloth has arisen from the community. The community is giving this kaṭhina cloth to Venerable (Sujano or change the name accordingly) to spread kaṭhina. He to whom the giving of this kaṭhina-cloth to Venerable (Sujano or change the name accordingly) to spread kaṭhina is agreeable should remain silent. He to whom it is not agreeable should speak out.

This kaṭhina-cloth is given by the community to Venerable (Sujano or change the name accordingly) to spread kaṭhina. This is agreeable to the community, and therefore it is silent. Thus do I hold it.

4. The appropriate monk should replace his old robe with the kathina robe and then should give up one of his three old robes (lower, upper or double robe). The statement below is prepared for the upper robe:

Ima.m uttarāsangha.m paccuddharāmi (3)

I have given up my upper robe for the sake of (receiving a new) kathina robe.

In case of performing three sections it should be done like this

Ima.m Sanghāti.m paccudharāmi

Ima.m Uttarāsanḡha.m paccudharāmi

Ima.m antaravāsaka.m paccudharāmi

This applies to the other two 'Bindu kappa and adhitthana'.

5. Making Robes with marks (Bindu Kappam)

Iminā uttarāsanḡha.m bindukappa.m karomi (3times)

6. Having given up the old robe, he should determine to replace it with the kathina robe formally by uttering the following Pali statement:

Iminā uttarāsanḡhena kathina.m attharāmi (Aditthāmi) (3times)

I have determined (or I determine) that the upper robe will serve as my kathina robe.

7. Finally, he should share his kathina robe with the other monks present by uttering the following statement:

Atthata.m āvuso sanghassa kathina.m dhammiko kathinatthāro anumodatha (3 times)

Venerable Sir, I have completed the Kathina ceremony in accordance with the vinaya and thus may I share the benefit of kathina robe with you?

(Senior receives 'āvuso' and 'anumodatha', junior receives 'bhante' and 'anumodāma', mix 'bhante' and anumodatha')

8. Blessings

Yathā vārivahā pūrā paripūrenti sāgaram,
evameva ito dinnam petānam uppakappati,
icchitam patthitam tumham khippameva samijjhatu,
sabbe pūrentu saṅkappā cando paṇṇaraso yathā, maṇi jotiraso yathā.

Sabbītiyo vivajjantu sabbarogo vinassatu
mā te bhavatvantarāyo sukhī dīghāyuko bhava.
Abhivādanasīlissa niccam vuddhāpacāyino
cattāro dhammā vaḍḍhanti āyu vaṇṇo sukham balaṃ.

Kāle dadanti sapaññā vadaññū vītamaccharā
kālena dinnam ariyesu ujubhūtesu tādisu,
vippasannamanā tassa vipulā hoti dakkhiṇā ye
tattha anumodanti veyyāvaccam karonti vā
na tena dakkhiṇā onā tepi puññassa bhāgino
tasmā dade appaṭivānacitto yattha dinnam mahapphalaṃ
puññāni paralokasmim patitthā honti pāṇinanti

Bhavatu sabbamaṅgalaṃ rakkhantu sabbadevatā
sabbabuddhānubhāvena sadā sotthī bhavantu te
bhavatu sabbamaṅgalaṃ rakkhantu sabbadevatā
sabbadhammānubhāvena sadā sotthī bhavantu te
bhavatu sabbamaṅgalaṃ rakkhantu sabbadevatā
sabbasanghānubhāvena sadā sotthī bhavantu te

sadhu

Just as rivers full of water fill up the ocean, even so does that which has been given on this occasion benefit the deceased, so that whatever you wished or wanted, may it quickly be. May all your wishes be fulfilled on the moon on the fifteenth day, as a wish-fulfilling gem.

May all distress be dispelled, may all diseases be destroyed, may no dangers beset you, may you be happy and have a long life. To him, of respectful nature, whomever the elders honor, may the following four qualities increase, long life, beauty, happiness, and strength.

Those who are discerning, responsive, not lacking in generosity would give in the proper season. Having given in the proper season to the noble ones with pure and stable minds, may their offering produce abundance. For those who rejoice in the gift or assistance, may they, too, have a share of the merit. Do not allow the offering to be depleted by that, and thus, with an unhesitant mind, one should give in those cases in which the gift bears the greatest fruits, as merit is what propells living beings to an auspicious future rebirth.

May there be full blessings may all the devas protect you well by the power of all the Buddhas, ever in safety may you be; may there be full blessings, may all the devas protect you well, by the power of all the dhammas ever in safety may you be, may there be full blessings, may all the devas protect you well, by the power of all the sanghas, ever in safety may you be. – you really need to make a final decision which cases to use, upper or lower, and make them uniform in your paper.

Important procedures and words

1. Offering bathing cloth

Namotassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa (3 times)

Imaani maya.m bhante, vassaavaasika-ciivaraani, saparivaaraani, siilavantassa, o.nojayaama. Saadhu no bhante, siilavanto, imaani, vassaavaasika-ciivaraani, saparivaaraani, pa.tigga.nhaatu, amhaaka.m, diigha-ratta.m, hitaaya, sukhaaya.

We present these vassa bathing robes , together with their accompanying articles, to the virtuous ones. May our virtuous ones accept these vassa robes, together with their accompanying articles, for our long-term welfare and happiness.

2. Vassa Adhitthana words:

Namotassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa (3 times)

Imasmi.m aavase ima.m temasa.m vassa.m upema (3 times)

(In this dwelling, I make a resolution to remain for three months)

'aavase' a dwelling place can be changed accordingly to temple etc)

3. The Five precepts are:

1. Not to harm/kill any beings but share loving-kindness regardless of class
2. Not to steal or not taking that which is not given, but cultivate generosity or a helpful attitude
3. No sexual misconduct but respecting a sense of family and brotherhood
4. Not to speak false/lies but be truthful and live righteously
5. Not to indulge in anything that may impair one's judgement, but being aware moment to moment.

4. Request for forgiveness:

Requester: Aayasmante pamadena, dvarattayena katam, sabbam aparadham khamatha me bhante

(venerable sir, If I have ever transgressed unheedfully through body, speech and mind towards you, please forgive me for those acts)

Receiver: Aham khamaami tayaapi me khamitabbam (I forgive you and you too forgive me)

Requester: khamaami bhante (Yes, I do)

5. Pavaarana wording '

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammaasambuddhassa (3)

Sangha.m bhante pavaaremi ditthena vaa sutena vaa parisankaaya vaa
vadantu ma.m aaya.smanto anukampa.m upaadaaya passanto
pa.tikkarissaami

Dutiyampi Sangha.m bhante pavaaremi ditthena vaa sutena vaa parisankaaya
vaa vadantu ma.m aaya.smanto anukampa.m upaadaaya passanto
pa.tikkarissaami

Tatiyampi Sangha.m bhante pavaaremi ditthena vaa sutena vaa parisankaaya
vaa vadantu ma.m aaya.smanto anukampa.m upaadaaya passanto
pa.tikkarissaami

6. Sattaahakaraniya wordings:

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammaasambuddhassa (3)

Sattaahakaraniya.m kicca.m me atthi, tasma maya gantabba.m Imasmi.m
sattaahabhantare nibattissaami.

Passage of Asalha Puja Observation

[Namo tassa] bhagavato arahato sammaa-sambuddhassa. (Three times.)

Homage to the Blessed One, the Worthy One, the Rightly Self-awakened One.

Yam-amha kho maya.m, Bhagavanta.m sara.nam gataa, yo no Bhagavaa satthaa, yassa ca maya.m Bhagavato dhamma.m rocema:

The Blessed One to whom we have gone for refuge, who is our Teacher, and in whose Dhamma we delight:

Ahosi kho so Bhagavaa, araha.m sammaa-sambuddho, sattesu kaaruñña.m pa.ticca, karu.naayako hitesii, anukampa.m upaadaaya, aasaa.lha-pu.n.namiya.m, Baaraa.nasiya.m isipatane migadaaye, pañca-vaggiyaana.m bhikkuuna.m, anuttara.m dhamma-cakka.m pa.thama.m pavattetvaa, cattaari ariya-saccaani pakaasesi.

is a Worthy One, Rightly Self-awakened. Through his compassion and sympathy for living beings, compassionately desiring their welfare, he first set the unexcelled Wheel of Dhamma in motion on the full moon night of the month of Asalha, in the Deer Refuge at the Meeting Place of the Seers near Varanasi, and proclaimed the Four Noble Truths to the Group of Five Monks.

Tasmiñca kho samaye, pañca-vaggiyaana.m bhikkuuna.m paamukho, aayasmaa Añña-ko.n.dañño, Bhagavanta.m dhamma.m sutvaa, viraja.m viitamala.m dhamma-cakkhu.m pa.tilabhitvaa, “Ya”nkiñci samudaya-dhamma.m sabban-ta.m nirodha-dhammanti.”

At that time, the leader of the Group of Five Monks — Venerable Añña-Kondañña — having listened to the Blessed One’s teaching, gained the vision of Dhamma that, “Whatever is subject to origination is also subject to cessation.”

Bhagavanta.m upasampada.m yaacitvaa, Bhagavatoyeva santike, ehi-bhikkhu-upasampada.m pa.tilabhitvaa, Bhagavato dhamma-vinaye ariya-saavaka-sa”ngho, loke pa.thama.m uppanno ahosi.

Having requested ordination, he gained the Becoming-Bhikkhu ordination in the Blessed One’s very presence, and so became the world’s first noble disciple in the Blessed One’s doctrine and discipline.

*Tasmiñcaapi kho samaye, sa”ngha-ratana.m loke pa.thama.m uppanna.m ahosi.
Buddha-ratana.m dhamma-ratana.m sa”ngha-ratana.m, tiratana.m
sampu.n.na.m ahosi.*

And at that time the Gem of the Sangha first appeared in the world, making the Triple Gem — the Gem of the Buddha, of the Dhamma, and of the Sangha — complete.

*Maya.m kho etarahi, ima.m aasaa.lha-pu.n.namii-kaala.m, tassa Bhagavato
dhamma-cakkappavattana-kaala-sammatañca, ariya-saavaka-sa”ngha-
uppatti-kaala-sammatañca, ratanattaya-sampura.na-kaala-sammatañca
patvaa, ima.m .thaana.m sampattaa,*

Now on this full moon day of Asalha — recognized as the date of the Blessed One’s setting the Wheel of Dhamma in motion, the date of the arising of the Community of the Noble Disciples, and of the completion of the Triple Gem — we have gathered together in this place.

*Ime da.n.da-diipa-dhuupaadi-sakkaare gahetvaa, attano kaaya.m
sakkaar’uupadhaana.m karitvaa,*

We take these offerings — candles, incense, and so forth — and make our bodies a vessel for them.

*Tassa Bhagavato yathaa-bhucce gu.ne anussarantaa, ima.m pa.timaa-ghara.m
[thuupa.m] tikkhattu.m padakkhi.na.m karissaama, yathaa-gahitehi
sakkaarehi puuja.m kurumaanaa.*

Reflecting on the Blessed One’s virtues as they actually are, we will circumambulate this [image shelter] – best just leave it at stupa, as everyone knows what that is [stupa] three times, paying homage to him with the offerings we hold.

*Saadhu no bhante Bhagavaa, sucira-parinibbutopi, ñaatabbehi gu.nehi
atiit’aaramma.nataaya paññaayamaano,*

Although the Blessed One long ago attained total Liberation, he is still discernible through our remembrance of his perceivable virtues.

*Ime amhehi gahite sakkaare, pa.tigga.nhaatu, amhaaka.m diigha-ratta.m hitaaya
sukhaaya.*

May he accept the offerings we donate for the sake of our long-term welfare and happiness.

Glossary

- Arahant :** *a worthy one. A person whose mind is free of all defilement, who has abandoned all ten fetters.*
- Bhikkhu :** *a Buddhist monk; a man who has given up the householder's life.*
- Bhikkhunis :** *a Buddhist nun: a woman who has given up the householder's life.*
- Bodhimandala:** *surrounding place around Bodhi Tree, a tree of enlightenment, where the Buddha attained Buddhahood.*
- Buddha :** *the fully enlightened one, one who knows what should be known.*
- Dhamma:** *the natural truth, lawfulness, and virtue discovered, fathomed, and taught by the Buddha; the Buddha's teaching as an expression of that principle; the teachings that leads to enlightenment and liberation.*
- Dukkha :** *literally means 'hard to bear', unsatisfactoriness, suffering, instability.*
- Nibbana :** *the highest goal of the Buddha's teaching; the unconditioned state, unborn, to be attained by the destruction of the defilements.*
- Pali :** *a language that is used by the Theravada school of Buddhism to preserve the teachings of the Buddha, and that was believed to be in use at the time of the Buddha known as 'magadhi language'.*
- Pavaarana:** *invitation ceremony at the end of the vassa.*
- Sotapanna:** *First stage of noble-hood, who has destroyed initial three fetters.*
- Sukha:** *a happiness, a pleasure; an ease, satisfaction, mainly mental satisfaction and joy*
- Tathagata:** *literally means 'thus come one' or 'thus gone one'. The Buddha used this to refer himself as a pronoun. It is also referring someone who has attained nibbanic state.*
- Tipitaka:** *Literally means, three baskets, in reference to three divisions of the Theravada Buddhist scripture written in Pali language.*
- Uposatha:** *the Buddhist observation days, falling on the days of the full moon and new moon, when the monks gather to monastic code and lay people often visit monasteries and temples to undertake the eight precepts.*
- Varapunya:** *a pali word 'vara' means great or big, and a word 'punya' means merit or wholesome actions, which brings mental satisfaction and happiness, which also leads for individual's spiritual development. Varapunya means 'Great Merit' Varapunya Meditation Centre means a place for the cultivation of great merits, a land of merit.*
- Yojana:** *an ancient Indian measurement of distance, approximately six miles.*

Varapunya Meditation Centre



Introduction

Varapunya Meditation Centre was established in 2012 as a place of study, practice and sharing personal experiences on meditation. It is a place for promoting Buddhist philosophy on ethical living and the application of mindfulness meditation in daily life. It is registered as a Scottish Charitable Religious Organisation in 2013 - SC043989.

In summer 2016 the centre found new home at Easter Mains Cottage, Kingswells. There is regular public transport to Westhills. The Cottage is within 20 minutes walking distance. It is also close to the Aberdeen City, which is 20 minutes drive. Although it is not a far away from the city or shopping centre, the place is a secluded quiet, peaceful and beautiful site, which provides plenty of independent space for contemplation and meditation.

Having seen the benefit for the members and enthusiastic, the centre decided to purchase the property and took a private loan of £360,000 towards the purchase of this property. The centre acquired Easter Mains Cottage on 3rd August 2016 and gradually relocate to its new location. The centre will repay the loan to the lender gradually as agreed, which will begin in the near future.

Therefore, on behalf of the centre I would like to invite everyone to be part of establishing the centre and contribute for the centre and its activities to continue its noble work for the better service of the community. The centre is here for you to heal your heart and your life. So, your every little support will help us to keep its works to help you. With your valuable supports, the centre able to make difference in the community and I look forward to your continued support.

May the triple gem bless you for your good health and happiness until the achievement of Nibbana.

Donation through Banking: HSBC; Varapunya Meditation Centre: Sort Code: 40-01-25 Account No: 8139-2948

IBAN: GB05MIDL40012581392948

BIC: MIDLGB2115T

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