



Minnesota Buddhist

Minnesota Buddhist Vihara
P.O. Box 48601
MN 55448, USA
Tel: 763-786-1811
mnbvusa@yahoo.com
www.minnesotabudhistvihara.org

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Time of Offering *Kathina* Robes

By

Ven. K. Piyathissa Nayake Maha Thero

The most pious Buddhists are waiting to offer Kathina robes during the season. From the full moon of October to the full moon of November. It is more meritorious the offering of the puja if we can make wider understanding of its details. The power of its meritorious ness, its results, and the nature of its using by the receipeant monk and the benefits the monks can gain etc.

It is not easy to make a kathina robe and it has to fulfill many rights before its offering to the Maha sangha. And also it has to be free from twenty four impediments and seven other places to be purified in the hands of the donors and recipient clergy. According to its customs it has to be offered once in a year in one temple.

Also the receiving monks of a Kathina robe must be the monks who observed the spring retreat and duly terminated in the sangha at the full moon day assembly of the chapter house. No other monk will be able to receive the Kathina robe. Monks are supposed to observe spring retreat whether they invited to observe the retreat or not by the lay people and they must not suppose to break the observance before its due termination.

Such monks who duly observed the retreat will be suitable and be qualified to receive the Kathina offering. During the observance they have been maintaining an additional precept to their common following of two hundred and twenty seven precepts. This temporary

observance helps them to maintain the mindfulness for the three months of the practice.

During this time their virtuousness will be more than the usual times. Whether there will be rain or not the monks observe their retreat to practice and strengthening their usual mindfulness. In the ancient times while the Buddha was living, monks leaned the meditation subject at the Buddha and they went to forests, remote villages and to lonely places to meditate and to pace this observance.

So this time is very highly respected by all Buddhists and most in the near future even some lay devotes used to observe higher precepts like eight precepts or ten precepts and they staying at the temples used to meditate with the monks. And they made the merits of many means. In the time of the Buddha many monks became Arahants eradicating their dormant defilements.

So this is a religious custom as well as a rule to observe spring retreat during this time that comes for the past two thousand six hundred of years from the beginning of the Buddha's dispensation of the dhamma. Among Buddhist parishioners we have similar observances known as dhutanga. They also are observed by some monks even in the same time as well as other times. But they are not essentially necessary like these practices.

Clergy and laities both are evaluate this time as it is easy for making merit by them as a free time in the life. People in the villages of all of Buddhist countries people respect this time as a time to acquire more merits. Buddha pujas, dhamma desanas, discussions, and practices of many kinds of good deeds are popular during this period of the time.

Even though this was imposed upon the monks to follow by the Buddha, because of some wondering monks, it is known to everybody the Buddha never impose a precept upon the monks without a reason. However this paved the way to make a very high merit by monks as well as lay disciples of the Buddha.

By offering a kathina robe lay people can make more powerful merit and also monks the same way more as they do. Because they have to maintain the offering with mindfulness for five months from November full moon day to March full moon day of the next year. During these five months they have to be strictly mindful on the robe as a meditation practice.

It helps the monk who holds the robe to bring purity to his mind and to givers who offered to him. And also if he violated the mindfulness or does any mistake of the maintenance of the robe, the whole privileges that can gain by him and those other participant monks will lose.

Among those privileges there are five freedoms from minor offences which do not cause them to reproduce the observances. And they will lose the acceptance of all offerings they got during the season they privileged.

Ven. Kurunegoda Piyathissa Nayake Maha Thero
New York Buddhist Vihara
Spencer Avenue
Parkside Hills, NY 11427
| Abbot Residence

Faith in Buddhism

By

Bhikkhu T. Seelananda

The term "Faith" like the term "Dukkha"(suffering) in Buddhism, has different connotations, in other words, has multi-faceted meanings. In the modern world, we are well aware that it is used to denote religions such as, the Christian Faith or the Hindu Faith. First of all, one should not forget that though there are similarities in religions; there are dissimilarities too. We as cultured and civilized persons, should be humble enough to understand both the similarities and the dissimilarities in all religions; or that by merely reading the bookcover of their teachings, one should not conclude that all religions teach the same thing. This is no doubt, far beyond truth. Faith means reliance, trust, or confidence in a teaching that

guides and is not founded on authority or religious doctrines alone. We know for a fact, that in many other religions the primary characteristic is one of belief in a Creator God.

However, in Buddhism it is otherwise, there is no Creator God. In this sense then, we cannot say that Buddhism is a religion. On the contrary, the devout followers of all religions in the world believe that there is a substance (permanent entity) to be called atman or soul. But again, in Buddhism there is no permanent entity to be called atman or soul; in this sense too, Buddhism is not a religion. Similarly, in many religions there are organized institutions such as churches and temples; there are also various sorts of monastics such as: reverends, fathers (priests), and monks to perform pujas, ceremonies, and prayers etc. Well, on this ground, we can say in Buddhism too there are such and such institutions, and monks, and nuns in this modern world.

Simply because there are these and those institutions with monks and nuns to perform certain ceremonies and offerings or pujas for the worldly pleasure of the followers; one should not hasten to come to the conclusion that Buddhism is also a religion. Since there are no major characteristics of religion in Buddhism, it is unwise to take Buddhism as a religion. On the other hand, some say that it is a philosophy but actually, it is also not sheer philosophy. Of course there are some characteristics of philosophy like epistemological, psychological, metaphysical, and ethical aspects within Buddhism. It is neither a religion nor a philosophy. It is far better say that it is a way of life which could be applied to our everyday life.

In an actual sense, this Way is nothing but practicing and developing one's mind through meditation. It is, certainly, a "Middle Way". This term, 'meditation' itself is insufficient to denote the real meaning of Buddhist meditation. What Buddhist meditation is rather, is a "Mental development". Meditation means, according to modern dictionaries, thinking over and over or thinking carefully and deeply; specifically for religious reasons or to calm one's mind. However, we should understand that Buddhist meditation is not for thinking over and over. We know, in the world there are positives and negatives. If there is something available, we have to say "yes", otherwise we have to say "no".

In conjunction with this, we should be intelligent enough to understand things as they really are. Buddhist meditation helps us to see things as they really are. In Buddhism, we should never believe anything simply

because it is tradition or given in the scriptures or is accepted as the authority as the Master, i.e. such as one's own teacher. Buddhist meditation is called, 'wisdom meditation' or 'insight meditation'. Certainly, I have no intention to touch upon that deep and profound subject at this point, our topic here is faith.

Since there are different faiths in all societies of the world, we must think of each other for every one's benefit. In a religiously plural world, unity is very essential. The prime aim of the teachings and messages of the great religious teachers or founders of world religions, were to alleviate suffering and bring peace and happiness to all mankind through the application of moral and ethical conduct and righteous living. But, today, it is pathetic to see that the moral content of religion and its peace promoting, spiritual values are clouded by the more attractive materialistic values. I suppose it is due to the seeking of power, fame, and various types of material gains. All the while, the real religious values are rapidly deteriorating and disappearing from the minds of all mankind, specifically, youngsters start to think that they can do things well without a religion. That is dangerous. Every intelligent man must have a religion. But man must choose a rational and meaningful religion according to his conviction without depending on mere beliefs, traditions, customs or theories.

In a garden of flowers there are many different kinds of flowers. Some are fragrant while others are without fragrance. You will see many different colors also. In this sense, all flowers irregardless of fragrance or color are in the same family; Flower. There are differences too and we must be mindful and wise to understand these differences among the flowers. That is to say, and is our preference, there is **unity in diversity**. In the same manner, there are discrepancies and similarities in religions. We should not hasten to put them all in one basket.

In a religiously plural world, as human beings, it is incumbent upon us...that we should not only preach tolerance but also that we should develop and maintain religious tolerance. As for the co-existence of the people in a religiously plural world, one should have a sound religious education with strong emphasis on original teachings. It is through this, that all religions preach goodwill and proclaim the brotherhood of man. Whatever the religion, it teaches us to avoid what is bad, what is unwholesome, and do what is good or what is wholesome. This is of course the basic teaching of the religion. There is even more to do in religion

and according to Buddhism, one has to develop and purify one's mind. There is a clear cut way which emphatically stressed by the Buddha himself and is called, 'The Four Foundations of Mindfulness'. The Buddha said that, it is the direct Way for the purification of beings, for the overcoming of sorrow and lamentation, for the disappearance of pain and grief, for reaching the Way, and for the attainment of Enlightenment.

According to the Webster's New 20th century (unabridged) Dictionary, (2nd Edition by Simon and Schuster- USA), there are 7 meanings on faith. As a means to strengthen the background to our discussion, first let's spend a moment to understand the seven meanings given in this Dictionary .

1. Unquestioning belief
2. Unquestioning belief in God, religion etc
3. a religion or a system of religious belief as, the Catholic faith
4. anything believed
5. complete trust, confidence or reliance as, children usually have faith in their parents.
6. faithfulness, fidelity, loyalty, allegiance to some person or thing
7. Credibility or trust.

Faith in Buddhism is, " Saddha". A Buddhist is said to have faith if he believes in the Perfect One's Enlightenment.(saddhati Buddhassa Bodhim) or in the Three Jewels. One's faith, according to the teaching of the Buddha should be, "reasoned and rooted in understanding (akaravatisaddha M.N.47).One is always asked to investigate and test the object of his faith. Buddhists can doubt about dubitable things. Faith or saddha in Buddhism is twofold.

1. Baseless faith =blind faith> (amulika saddha)
2. Reasoned or rooted faith (akaravati saddha)

The Buddha never encouraged blind faith or baseless faith. He never wanted his followers to follow him blindly. Always he encouraged them to come and see, (ehi passiko) and investigate the Dhamma (His teachings).

There are more than 400 religions in the world today; but the freedom of thought given in Buddhism is unparalleled in comparison to that of all other religions. The Buddha very clearly and categorically said, "*Do not believe anything by mere hearsay, mere tradition or simply because it is in the scriptures.*" I think at least some of our friends know the famous utterances of the

Buddha regarding freedom of thought. Once, while addressing a group of people who were bewildered by the expressions of different religious Masters, when they were doubtful, the Buddha said. " *Oh... kalamas it is right for you to doubt, it is right for you to waver? In a doubtful matter wavering has arisen*"; *kalamas, Do not accept anything on mere hearsay. Do not accept anything by mere tradition. Do not accept anything on account of rumors. Do not accept anything just because it accords with your scriptures. Do not accept anything by mere supposition. Do not accept anything by mere inference. Do not accept anything by merely considering the appearances. Do not accept anything merely because it agrees with your preconceived notions. Do not accept anything merely because it seems acceptable. Do not accept anything that the ascetic is respected by you.* "

Thus, the Buddha advised them to investigate things and come to a conclusion after a sound contemplation. These wise saying of the Buddha, uttered some more than 2600 years ago still retain the original force and freshness, even in this twenty first century.

In Buddhism, there is not even a single trace where the Buddha has discouraged his disciples or the followers to blindly believe what he said and he never wanted to impose any sort of hard and fast rules upon them .

Once he said, " As the wise test gold by burning, cutting, and rubbing it on a piece of touchstone; so are you to accept my words after examining them and not merely out of regard for me". According to the Vimansaka Sutta of the Middle length Sayings of the Buddha, he stimulated his disciples to explore even his knowledge and Enlightenment. "(See. M.N. 47 Sutta).

As the Buddha said, what we need first to come to the path to deliverance, is faith. He explains how to tread on this Path. "When one has faith, (in teacher), one visits him (saddha jato upasankamati). When he visits him, he pays respects and associates with him (upasankamanto payurupasati). When he pays respect and associates (with) him, he gives ear (payurupasanto sotam odahati). One who gives ear hears the Dhamma (sotam odahanto dammam sunati). Having heard the Dhamma he memorizes it (sutva Dhammam dhareti). Then he examines the meaning of the teachings he has memorized (dhatanam dhammanam attham upaparikkhati). When he examines these meanings, he gains a reflective acceptance of the teachings (attham upaparikkhanto dhamma nijjhanamkhamanti). When he has gained a reflective acceptance of the teaching, zeal

springs up in him (dhammamnijjhanakkhantiya sati chando jayati) .When zeal has sprung up, he applies his will(Chandam jato ussahati).Having applied his will he scrutinizes and compares it (ussahetva tuletī). Having scrutinized and compared it, he strives (tulayitva padahati). Resolutely striving, he realizes with the body the ultimate truth and sees it by penetrating it with wisdom (pahitattosamano kayena ceva parama saccam saccikaroti pannaya ca nam ativijja passati).-See . M.N. 70 Sutta. ff.582-583-

For the attainment of Enlightenment, faith is to be developed and cultivated by oneself as a spiritual faculty as well as a mental power. There are five faculties to be developed and cultivated, namely: 1.The faculty of faith 2.The faculty of energy 3. The faculty of mindfulness. 4. The faculty of concentration. 5. The faculty of wisdom. The same faculties become mental powers once they are developed and cultivated by the wise by practicing meditation.

In the Group of Discourses, (Snp.77) the Buddha said, that the faith is the seed of all wholesome states because it inspires the mind with confidence. Although, as worldlings, we all have a sort of faith in our religious Masters and the different dignitaries, our faith is shakable. This is why there is a chaos of conversion in the world today. Unshakable faith is attained by self on reaching the first stage called Stream Enterer.

When we discuss this further, faith should be balanced with that of wisdom. If one develops one's faith only, one then becomes a deluded man; and if one develops one's wisdom only, then one becomes a cunning man. Therefore, these both should go together like the two wings of a bird, two wheels of the chariot.

One day, a demon, Alawaka, asked the Buddha "What wealth is the best for man? (kimsudha vittam purisassa settham) ". The Buddha then said, "Faith is the wealth best for man (saddhidha vittam purisassa settham) ". And again, the demon asked, "how does one cross the flood of sense pleasures (Katamsu tarati ogham) ". By faith one crosses the flood of sense pleasures (Saddhaya tarati ogham)", said the Buddha. In this manner like the race of sun is the harbinger of the day, faith is the harbinger of all knowledge and wisdom in the teaching of the Buddha.

Bhikkhu T.Seelananda
New York Buddhist Vihara
Spencer Av, Parkside Hills NY 11427
wordofthebuddha@yahoo.com

Mind is the Most Important Factor

By

Bisho Kirti Maharjan Thero

*Manopubbangama dhamma manosettha manomaya
Manasa ce padutthena bhasati va karoti va
Tato nam dukkhamanveti cakkam va vahato padam*

*Manopubbangama dhamma manosettha manomaya
Manasa ce pasannena bhasati va karoti va
Tato nam sukhamanveti chaya va anapayini*

The two Pali stanzas which I have quoted from the Dhammapada, were recited by the Buddha on two different occasions when he was living in Jetavana in the city of Savatthi. First I shall deal with the first stanza, which was recited on the occasion of a complaint made by some monks that the blind Arhant named Cakkhupala was willfully trampling and killing some insects called cochineal or Indagopaka. The general meaning of the stanza is that:

All thoughts good or evil arise from the mind. The mind is the most important factor. If a person speaks or acts with a polluted mind, it is sure that grief follows him, just like the wheel of a cart which follows the hoof of an ox."

In Savatthi there were two brothers called Mahapala and Cullapala. The elder brother Mahapala listened to a sermon preached by the Buddha and became a monk by entering the Order. After receiving lessons in meditation from the Buddha, he left with several other monks for a distant village. There all the monks started meditating in order to attain Arahantship. Mahapala decided not to sleep or lie down until he became an Arhant. As a result of not having sleep at night his eyes started tearing and he suffered from an eye disease. A king doctor saw him and gave him a kind of medicinal oil to be inhaled through the nostrils. But he said, "Sir, you must lie down and inhale the oil. He did it while sitting or standing. Consequently his eyes became an Arahant on that day. He advised and helped all the other monks to become Arhants.

Later, all the monks except the blind Arhant visited the Buddha in Savatthi. On hearing that Mahapala or

Cakkhupala was blind, his younger brother Cullapala sent his nephew to bring him to Savatthi. So the nephew too became a monk and went to the distant village to fetch his blind uncle. While bringing the uncle back the young novice fell in love with young woman gathering firewood in the jungle, and was driven away by the monk. Sakka the king of gods came in disguise and brought him to Savatthi. There the blind Arhant Cakkhupala resided in a monastery built by his brother. One day a number of monks came to see the blind Arhant. It had rained, and lots of insects were on the promenade or Cankamana where Cakkhupala was walking up and down. These insects were killed by his trampling them, but not intentionally. The monks reported this matter to the Buddha. On that occasion the Buddha recited the above stanza and related a past birth story of the blind Arhant. When he had seen born as an eye doctor, he had treated a certain woman who was suffering from an eye disease, on the promise that she would be his slave. But when he realised that she was trying to cheat him, he gave her a poisonous medicine and blinded her completely. This evil act or Papakamma followed him in every birth just like a wheel following the foot of an ox, and he became blind in every birth. Even in his last birth he became blind in spite of his having become an Arhant. He had blinded the woman's eyes with a polluted mind, a mind polluted by external defilements.

The second stanza was recited by the Buddha, when a young man called Mattakundali was born in heaven. A certain miser called Adinnapubbaka in Savatthi had a son called Mattakundali. When the son fell ill the father did not consult a doctor because he feared that he would have to pay a big sum of money as the doctor's fee. As a result the son fell seriously ill. When he was dying, he was brought out to the verandah lest the visitors would see his wealth inside his house. The Buddha saw all this and sent one of his six colored rays. The dying Mattakundali saw the beautiful rays, turned his eyes and saw the Buddha. With that pleased mind he passed away and was born in heaven.

The father cremated the son in the cemetery and wept day and night over him. His son, now a god, wanted to teach him a lesson; he came to the cemetery in the guise of Mattakundali and started crying, asking for the sun and moon as the two wheels of his toy-cart. A conversation followed, and the father was convinced that he was a bigger fool, by crying for a dead son. Being converted he became a pious devotee of the Buddha. He gave up his miserliness and spent his money lavishly in the Buddhasana. The meaning of the second stanza is;

"If a person speaks or acts or thinks with a pleased mind, happiness follows him like his own shadow which never leaves him. Mattakundalu had faith in the Buddha and died with a pleased mind to be born as a Deva."

Both these stories show that mind and not the body is the important factor.

May you all be well and happy!

Bisho Kirti Maharjan Thero
Minnesota Buddhist Vihara
visvakirti@yahoo.com



Journal of Ven. Witiyala Seewalie

November 25, 2003: Venerable Witiyala Seewalie accepts Dr. Susantha Herath's invitation to build a Sri Lankan Buddhist Temple in Minnesota and continues discussion.

March 12, 2004: Ven. Seewalie visits Minnesota and meets several Sri Lankan families.

March 30, 2004: Minnesota Buddhist Vihara Inc. is registered.

May 14, 2004: Ven. Seewalie visits Minnesota again and attends Vesak Celenration, 2004.

October 28, 2004: Ven. Seewalie informs his move to Minnesota at the end of Vassan period at Los Angles Dharma Vijaya Vihara and gets blessings from Ven. Walpola Piyananda Nayaka thero, Ahangama Dhammarama Nayaka thero, and other bikkhus in the US.

November 25, 2004: Ven. Seewalie moves to Minnesota permanently and starts religious services staying at Vietnam temple in Blaine.

December 26, 2004: Organizes Tsunami Relief activities and attend news/tv conferences and solicited donations.

January 15, 2005: Publish Minnesota Buddhist Vihara annual events calendar.

March 06, 2005: Starts the Dhamma School and other religious services.

April 17, 2005: Celebrates Sri Lankan New Year.

May 22, 2005: Vesak Celebration.

July 16, 2005: Vassana invitation and American baby donation to the Buddha Sasana.

September 11, 2005: Memorial program for 9/11 attack and Hurricane Katrina disaster.

September 14, 2005: Volunteered to load donations to the trucks for Hurricane Katrina victims.

