

## The 4 secrets (Part 4 of 4)

We all awake in the same way  
For a Dhamma future to be possible  
[Previously published as fb191218 piya]

In one of the Buddha's last important instructions, recorded in **the Mahā,parinibbāna Sutta** (D 16), he declares:

“Ānanda, what does the order of monks expect of me? I have taught the Dharma, Ānanda, making no distinction between inner and outer: **the Tathāgata has no guru's fist** in respect of teachings.” (D 16,2.25, SD 9).<sup>1</sup>

This means 2 things:

(1) The Buddha does not see himself as **the leader** of the sangha (both the noble sangha and the conventional community): the Dhamma guides them, as stated in **the Gopāka Moggallāna Sutta** (M 108).<sup>2</sup> This is like a nation being protected and guided by her **constitution**.

(2) The Buddha has **no secret teachings**.

### (1) The sangha has no power structure

The 1<sup>st</sup> meaning of the Buddha “no guru's fist” declaration is that there is neither **power structure** nor hierarchy in the early Buddhist sangha. There is **no** hierarchy like that of Pope, cardinals, bishops and so on. A power structure often means we are in every way under the control of those “above” us. This may work in Politics—which is about Power—but not in Dhamma training—which is about Truth and Beauty: the truth of personal freedom and beauty of awakened joy.

In the Gopāka Moggallāna Sutta (M 108) [2], the elder Ānanda tells Vassakāra, the most powerful man in Magadha after the king, that the sangha has no power-structure because it is defined and guided by the Dhamma, or more fully, by the **Dhamma-Vinaya**. In matters of the monastics, the Vinaya, its regulations and processes keep the sangha “in order.”

### How the sangha works

There is the **Pātimokkha** (monastic code of 227 rules for monks, and 311 rules for the nuns). True monastics meet every fortnight (on the full-moon and the new-moon uposatha or precept days) for remembering these rules by listening to them. (The Sinhala monks here

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<sup>1</sup> Mahā,parinibbāna Sutta (D 16), SD 9: <http://www.themindingcentre.org/dharmafarer/wp-content/uploads/2009/12/SD9-Mahaparinibbana-S-d16-part-2-piya.pdf>. (Please download 2 more files from the website.)

<sup>2</sup> Gopāka Moggallāna Sutta (M 108), SD 33.5: <http://www.themindingcentre.org/dharmafarer/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/33.5-Gopaka-Moggallana-m108-piya.pdf>.

**neither** keep the uposatha **nor** observe the Vinaya. They say things like “we touch money only with the hands, but not the mind.” They take meals in the evening, drive their own cars, and break other big rules. What does this mean?)

When a monastic breaks any rules (other than the 4 defeat or *pārājika* rules) [see previous reflection], he or she must make proper disciplinary amends before the sangha. The sangha, as a properly convened conclave, can “act” like a Parliament to pass corrective measures for such offences.

For serious breach of disciplines, the sangha can expel or “excommunicate” any monastic. This term actually started with the early Buddhist monasticism. Those who are “ex-communicado” means they are no more in “communion” or “fellowship” (*samvāsa*) with the sangha. Effectively, they are no longer monks. Other than breaches of the 4 defeats, such a monk may seek the forgiveness of the sangha and make amends to be reinstated. This is always a joyful event.

### **Importance of the sangha of elders**

The case of Ānanda is inspiring. As the Buddha’s personal attendant, Ānanda made a number of choices he thought were right, such as allowing women to pay their last respects to the Buddha first (the hour was late). Although, technically, he did no wrong, he still respected the sangha’s disapproval of his action. (V 2:287 f)

This incident is vitally important to show that it is the sangha that disciplines its members, and respect should be shown to it both by monastics and the laity. Remember that Ānanda was at that time an arhat; hence, this is a practice in selflessness for non-arhat monastics to emulate.

The laity respects the sangha by not “siding” with the monastic being disciplined. Without this mechanism, each and every monastic becomes a “sangha” in itself. This may be regarded as a “break-up” or “schism” (serious disunity) when the situation is really bad. This is one of very bad karma with “immediate effect” (in this life itself).

### **(2) The Buddha has no secret teachings**

The Buddha may teach in different ways, using suitable language, parables, stories, even silence, depending on the spiritual readiness of the listener. There is **no** secret about this: it is all found well recorded in the suttas. There are **no nagas** (dragons) or other beings hiding teachings underground, **no devas** hiding them in the heavens, until wiser teachers arise (who defines them?)! In the study of religions, such cunning excuses are called **casuistry** (subtly cunning and misleading argumentation). This clearly shows that such teachings are false and should at once be firmly rejected.

In **the Alaggadūpama Sutta** (M 22), the discourse on the water-snake parable, the Buddha, after listing the 4 kinds of noble saints (streamwinners, etc), declares in similar words:

“In the teaching well proclaimed by me, plain, open, clear, free from patchwork,

those who have just a bit of faith in me and just a bit of love for me, are all bound for heaven.” (M 22,47), SD 3.13.<sup>3</sup>

When we keep the precepts, keep mindfulness, and live with faith and love for the Buddha Dhamma, we are certain to be reborn in a happy heavenly life. But there is something even better (since even the heavens are impermanent)

The **suttas** plainly record case-stories and instructions for our personal practice in moral virtue and mental cultivation so that we can gain insight wisdom of **impermanence**. Such a wisdom then helps us understand the suttas better, which further improves our practice, and so on—until we gain liberating wisdom as **streamwinners** in this life itself. We can awaken in here and now—this is the 4<sup>th</sup> secret we should know.

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[an occasional re-look at the Buddha’s Example and Teachings]

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<sup>3</sup> Alaggadûpama Sutta (M 22), SD 3.13: <http://www.themindingcentre.org/dharmafarer/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/3.13-Alagaddupama-S-m22-piya.pdf>.