

# 15

## Patta Nikujjana Sutta

The Discourse on Over-turning the Almsbowl | A 8.87

Theme: How to discipline the laity who unjustly wrong the sangha

Translated & annotated by Piya Tan ©2020

### 1 Sutta summary and significance

#### 1.1 SUTTA SUMMARY

**1.1.1 The Patta Nikujjana Sutta** (A 8.87), “the discourse on over-turning the almsbowl,” is actually a sangha act of “boycotting” a lay person or persons who have done some injustice to the sangha, or shown bad faith towards the 3 jewels. It is technically a Vinaya matter, one initiated by the monastics as a legal person, as a way of communicating its standing and decision on some matter of common concern regarding the community as a whole.

**1.1.2** The Sutta passage on **the 8 conditions** [§1] recurs in the Vinaya, where its history and technical aspects, as a formal (legal) communal act (*saṅgha,kamma*) are explained, in **the Culla Vagga** (Cv 5.20) of the Vinaya. [1.2.1]. Technically, it is an act of “suspension” (*ukkhepanīya,kamma*) upon a lay person or party.

Furthermore, a monk who **reviles another**, no matter from which social class, wishing to shame him, calling him by lowly names or abusive terms, entails an offence of expiation (*pācittiya*). If he reviles indirectly (without mentioning any names), it is an offence entailing wrongdoing (*dukkata*). When such an offence is committed by the use of derisive words, even as a joke, it is an offence of ill speech (*dubbhāsita*), which is karmically potent, too.<sup>1</sup>

**1.1.3** The first 5 of the 8 conditions form a set of its own. A monastic who exhibits any of these conducts may entail **suspension** (*ukkhepanīya,kamma*), which is, essentially, a “bowl down-turning” for a monastic. The 5 conditions for *suspending a monastic* are as follows: [2.1]

- (1) He tries to prevent monks from acquiring gains.
- (2) He tries to bring harm to monks
- (3) He tries to prevent monks from residing (in an appropriate place).
- (4) He insults and reviles monks.
- (5) He divides monks from each other.

We have at least 3 other occasions recorded in the Vinaya of such offences, for which forms of boycott, namely, prohibition (*daṇḍa,kamma*), suspension (*ukkhepanīya,kamma*), and reconciliation (*paṭisaraṇiya,kamma*), are dispensed, thus:

<b>Mv 1.57</b>	V 1:84	Novices who abuse monks are imposed a “prohibition” ( <i>daṇḍa,kamma</i> )
<b>Cv 1.18</b>	V 2:18	The monk Sudhamma [1.1.4] has to seek layman Citta’s forgiveness
<b>Cv 1.25</b>	V 2:21 f	The monk Channa is suspended for refusing to see his offence

<sup>1</sup> Pāc 2 (V 2:4-11). Technically, these are “light offences” (*lahuk’āpatta*), however, they are, in themselves, karmically potent, depending on the unwholesomeness of their intentions. These “offence” are actually warnings that the offender has committed some bad karma. For details, see SD 58.4 (2).

**Pāc 68** V 4:133-136 **Alagaddûpama S** (M 22) records Ariṭṭha for holding the wrong view that sexuality is not a “stumbling block” to the training. This episode is found in 2 places in the Vinaya: his refusing to give up his wrong view entails expiation (*pācittiya*) (Pāc 68); followed by the announcement of the act of suspension (*ukkhepaniya,-kamma*) on Ariṭṭha for refusing to give up his false view (Cv 1.32/V 2:25).

A **prohibition** (*daṇḍa,kamma*) is where the offender is prohibited from entering (that is, residing in) his current monastery (but may stay elsewhere where he is accepted).

### **1.1.4 Layman Citta and the monk Sudhamma** (Cv 1.18/V 2:18)

**1.1.4.1** The monk Sudhamma<sup>2</sup> is a resident in the householder Citta’s<sup>3</sup> grove, Macchika,saṇḍa.<sup>4</sup> Whenever Citta invites monks for alms, he will consult Sudhamma. However, when a number of great elders — Sāriputta, Moggallāna, Mahā Kaccāna, Mahā Koṭṭhita, Mahā Kappina, Mahā Cunda, Anuruddha, Revata, Upāli, Ānanda and Rāhula—travelling through Kāsi, arrive nearby, Citta at once invites them all without consulting Sudhamma.

Sudhamma, annoyed at the layman Citta for having invited those elders for alms-offering without consulting him first, turns down Citta’s invitation despite Citta’s pleas. But then, he turns up for the meal all the same, at which he complains that despite all the sumptuous offerings, sesame cake (*tila,saṅgulika*) is missing.

**1.1.4.2** Citta<sup>5</sup> replies “Bhante, much treasure is there in the Buddha Word, but the noble Sudhamma mentions only this one thing, that is to say, sesame cake.” Then, to highlight his point, he relates a humorous tale of the cross-bred hen-crow that crows when it wants to caw, and caws when it wants to crow. Even more annoyed now, Sudhamma, protesting that Citta was reviling him, announces that he is leaving.

Citta insists that he is not reviling Sudhamma, and will continue to offer him the 4 supports. Sudhamma tells Citta that he is leaving for Sāvattihī to complain to the Buddha himself. Citta then advises him to “tell everything (without missing anything),” and that he would only return to Macchika,saṇḍa.

**1.1.4.3** Indeed, when Sudhamma meets the Buddha and recounts his tale, the Buddha at once chides him for abusing and scolding, in such a lowly manner<sup>6</sup> [1.1.2], a man of great faith, a sangha benefactor and a Dharma worker.<sup>7</sup> The Buddha then instructs the monks to assemble and perform a formal act of reconciliation (*paṭisaraṇiya,kamma*).

<sup>2</sup> Dh 73 is spoken on his account. See AA 1:385,21-27, 2:158; DhA 5.14/2:74-83.

<sup>3</sup> Citta is the foremost of lay disciples who are Dharma-speakers (A 1:26) and who have wisdom (AA 2:158,5). Teachings related to him are in **Citta Saṁyutta** (S 4:281-304). He is said to be the ideal layman, an example for other laymen (A 1:88 = S 2:235). See SD 8.6 (8.3); SD 16.16 (1); SD 40a.7 (1).

<sup>4</sup> A township in Kāsi, within which was located Ambāṭaka,vana (the wild mango grove); hence, Macchika,saṇḍa was said to be a woodland grove (*vana,saṇḍa*, SA 3:91,5); a town (*nagara*, DhA 2:74,6 + AA 1:386); this last adds that it was “in the kingdom of Magadha” (meaning that Kāsi was then ruled by Magadha).

<sup>5</sup> Comy notes that Citta speaks neither as a monk nor as a layman (*n’eva bhikkhu,vacanaṃ na gihi,vacanaṃ vuttan ti*, VA 1158,17 f). It is possible that he is already a streamwinner then. On Citta’s humour, see **Nigaṇṭha Nāta,-putta** (S 41.8), SD 40a.7.

<sup>6</sup> *Hīnena khur̥sesassi hīnena vambhessasi* (V 2:18,6 f). Cf where the offender is a preceptor (Mv 1.25.22/V 1:49). At Mv 9.7.8 is a case where a monk reviles householders (V 1:330,23-27).

<sup>7</sup> *Cittar̥ṃ gahapatir̥ṃ saddhar̥ṃ pasannaṃ dāyakaṃ kārakaṃ saṅgh’upaṭṭhākaraṃ* (V 2:18,5 f).

The sangha should recite a formal act charging Sudhamma with abusing such a virtuous layman (informing the monk of his offence). Then, the sangha should recite the text of the formal act (*kamma, vācā*) that presents **the motion** (*ñatti*) announcing that Sudhamma should approach Citta and ask for his forgiveness.<sup>8</sup>

## 1.2 SUTTA SIGNIFICANCE

### 1.2.1 Overturning the almsbowl (*patta nikujjana*)

**1.2.1.1** The formal act of **overturning the almsbowl and turning it upright** are authorized in the **Culla Vagga** of the Vinaya<sup>9</sup> [1.1.2]. The monks do not actually turn the almsbowl over before the offender. It is a symbolic but legally binding gesture. They perform a sanghakarma (a formal act) of “overturning the almsbowl,” meaning that they will thenceforth not have any dealings with that person or party, especially by way of accepting alms offerings from them.<sup>10</sup>

**1.2.1.2** The Vinaya Commentary says: “Here, if a person possesses any one of these 8 qualities, the sangha, having gone within the boundaries (of the monastery) or even outside of them (on a raft on river, etc) turns the bowl over. When the bowl has been overturned upon a person, no almsmeal may be taken in his house.” (VA 1209,5-9).

The sangha (a quorum of 5 monks and a presiding elder) sit in close proximity (“within arm’s length,” *hattha, pāsa*) of each other. The elder then recites the proclamation (*kamma, vācā*) just once. If there is no objection, he recites it again, and the motion is carried. This is known as “a formal act consisting of a motion and a resolution” (*ñatti, dutiya, kamma*). [1.2.2.2]

**1.2.1.3** An interesting feature of this legal procedure is that its motion is carried or resolved by a silent consensus (*qui tacet consentire videtur*, “he who is silent is taken to agree” or “silence means consent”). This “**silence procedure**” was known in the mediaeval west, too, where it was known by its French term, *procédure d’approbation tacite*. This procedure, also observed in international law,<sup>11</sup> is technically called the **silence of the conclave**.<sup>12</sup>

### 1.2.2 Turning the almsbowl back upright (*patta ukkujjana*)

The Sutta also lists the 8 conditions [§2; 2.1] when the situation may be rectified, that is, the sangha, by a sangha-karma, turns the bowl upright (*ukkujjeyya*) again, that is, rescinds the boycott, so that from then on, monks may accept his offerings, teach or counsel him, and so on. The formal act of turning the bowl upright again consists of a motion and a resolution (*ñatti, dutiya, kamma*) [1.2.1.2], that is, the motion is read twice and then carried (Cv 5.2,5-7;<sup>13</sup> VA 12209,9-11).

<sup>8</sup> For the full account of the Citta-Sudhamma narrative, see Cv 1.18 (V 2:15,29-18,30).

<sup>9</sup> Cv 5.20 (V 2:124,14-127,12).

<sup>10</sup> See VA 1:171,9 f; AA 4:159,23-25; also Vajirañāṇavarorasa, *Entrance to the Vinaya* 3, 1983:220-223; Thanissaro, *Buddhist Monastic Code* 1, 3<sup>rd</sup> rev ed, 2013:345-348, 472-475 (App 4(J)) digital.

<sup>11</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Silence\\_procedure](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Silence_procedure).

<sup>12</sup> Also at SD 44.1 (2.5).

<sup>13</sup> Cv 5.2.5-7 (V 2:125-127).

### 1.2.3 Significance of the almsbowl-overturning

**1.2.3.1** The early Buddhist ecclesiastical act of “overturning the bowl” to the laity when any of them shows the monks or the 3 jewels blatant disrespect, is the closest that monastic Buddhism wields any political power. We may consider such a gesture as that of “**moral politics**,” asserting the monastic right when the sangha sees any of its basic principles violated.

**1.2.3.2** In the recent politics of Myanmar, the military (known as Tatmadaw) had been in power since 1962. In 2007, the military government, the sole supplier of fuel, decided to remove subsidies on its sale prices of fuel. This at once caused diesel and petrol prices to increase by 66-100% and the price of compressed natural gas for buses to increase 500% in less than a week.

This led to a massive public protest, known as the **Saffron Revolution**<sup>14</sup> on account of the significant involvements of their country’s monks (who wore saffron robes). It was a series of economic and political protests and demonstrations occurring from August to October 2007. The protests were led by students, political activists, including women, and Buddhist monks. It was a campaign of non-violent resistance (that is, a civil resistance).<sup>15</sup> In September 2007, Myanmar’s monks in the cities quietly walked down the streets **with their bowls actually turned upside down** to express disapproval of the military rulers’ actions.<sup>16</sup>

Starting in 2011, the military government allowed parliamentary elections and other reforms. By popular vote, Aung San Suu Kyi became the civil leader. In 2021, Aung San Suu Kyi’s party, the National League for Democracy, again won the elections, getting 83 percent of the seats in the country’s Parliament. The military, in a turnaround, charged that the election was rigged, and on 1 February, seized power again in a coup. All protests were harshly repelled by the military, resulting in widespread bloodshed, house raids and arrests.

## 2 Sutta commentary

### **2.1 THE 8 CONDITIONS**

The Sutta lists 8 conditions [§1] when a lay person (or a group of them) may face a communal boycott by a sangha-act, that is, an official boycott [1.1.2]. This means that the sangha (any monk or nun) would have nothing to do with that person or group, including (especially) accepting almsfood (and any kind of donations) from them. Any monastic communing with the ostracized party, such as accepting almsfood from him (or them) would entail an offence of “wrongdoing” (*dukkata*). However, there seems to be no record of this in the Vinaya—which probably suggests that the almsbowl-overturning act was rare, and when it was imposed, no monastic had violated it.<sup>17</sup>

Here are **the 8 conditions** of a lay person on whom the sangha may, if it wishes, place a boycott ruling. They are here briefly explained by way of a modern commentary:

<sup>14</sup> ရွှေဝါရောင် တော်လှန်ရေး shwaywarraung tawlhaan ray.

<sup>15</sup> Christina Fink, “The moment of the monks: Burma, 2007,” in (edd) Adam Roberts & Timothy Garton Ash, *Civil Resistance and Power Politics: The Experience of Non-violent Action from Gandhi to the Present*, Oxford Univ Press, 2009:354-370.

<sup>16</sup> See <https://www.nytimes.com/2007/09/30/weekinreview/30mydans.html> (charges payable); <https://www.nytimes.com/article/myanmar-news-protests-coup.html>; <https://www.asiaone.com/News/The%2BStraits%2BTimes/Story/Turning%2Bthe%2Bbowl%2Bupside%2Bdown%2B52C%2BMyanmar%2Bmonks%2Btake%2Bon%2Bjunta.html>.

<sup>17</sup> I thank Ajahn Brahmali for confirming this (8 Dec 2021).

### **2.1.1 “He tries to prevent monks from acquiring gains.”**

The Commentary says that “the 4 supports” (*catu,paccaya*) refer to robes, almsfood, shelter and medicine and healthcare (AA 4:160,1). Any lay follower who, in any way, obstructs a bona fide monastic in seeking and gaining any of these supports, may have the sangha rightfully overturn the almsbowl on him.

The irony here is where the monastics do not depend on the laity for these supports, or these are offered only in a ritual manner for merits. In fact, many modernist Vinayaless monks are known not to use their bowl or even have one. Many such urban monks, for example, have their own house “Viharas,” which they own, buy their own food, do their own cooking, and practically live like the laity.

### **2.1.2 “He tries to bring harm to monks.”**

If and when the laity do try to harm monastics, especially bona fide ones, this would, of course, be not only wrong, but it is bad karma. In fact, this is practically unheard of. We do, however, hear of political killings of monks in south Thailand by Muslim separatists since 2004.<sup>18</sup> Amongst our modernist urban monks, we are more likely to hear of some laymen taking them to court over some financial irregularity or dishonesty on the monastic’s part.

In 2017, a Singaporean Mahāyāna priest, took a number of huge “loans” from various Buddhist organizations for his “psychology course” in Australia. He did not complete his studies, and used the loans to buy property there. A trustee of the Temple where he lived sued him for the return of the loan of A\$240,000, among other issues.<sup>19</sup> The matter was taken to court.<sup>20</sup>

This is perhaps the closest we may have today of a case where a layman tries to “harm” a monastic. If we interpret taking such loans by a priest, and not returning any of them as having “taken the not-given,” then it entails a “defeat” (*pārājika*) offence, that is, automatic loss of one’s monastic status.<sup>21</sup> Here again the situation is complicated by the local Sangha not taking any action on one of its own members partly because that Sangha was split along lineage politics; partly because, the Vinaya was, as a rule, not actually observed.

The worst violation of Buddhist monastics must surely have been the Turkish invasion and destruction of Buddhist universities, monasteries and stupas, and the massacre of the monastics beginning in 711, with the occupation of the Punjab. By the 13<sup>th</sup> century the Turks, under various military leaders, had overrun northern India and obliterated Buddhism there. The sangha was simply powerless to act against such overwhelming violence.

### **2.1.3 “He tries to prevent monks from residing (in an appropriate place).”**

Within living memory, no laity, individual or group has been known to prevent any monks from setting monasteries or even House Viharas anywhere. Perhaps when the majority of the local people object to a monastery or House Vihara being set up in their locality, would there be such a problem.

In recent decades, monks of Ajahn Chah’s forest tradition of NE Thailand have set up numerous monasteries for their sangha with almost no issues whatsoever. Financial and worldly matters are, as a rule, managed by lay licitors and stewards. In other words, these are monasteries (*āvāsa*) in the proper traditional sense of the term.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Since 2004, Muslim separatists in South Thailand had killed over 6,900 people and injured some 13,000: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-thailand-south-idUSKCN1PC26B>.

<sup>19</sup> A similar large loan was also taken from the Buddhist Fellowship.

<sup>20</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guo\\_Jun](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guo_Jun).

<sup>21</sup> This is Pār 2 (v 3:46,16-20). On the *pārājika* offence, see SD 52.12 (1.2.1.1); SD 58.4 (2.1.1.3).

<sup>22</sup> For a register of such monasteries, see <https://forestsangha.org/>.

On the other hand, modern priests, especially the Sinhala missionaries who, as a rule, take a very lax view of the Vinaya, would set up their own House Viharas, often living on their own. They are likely to own the premises and hence have free rein on how it is run. Here again, there is no issue of the laity preventing monks or priests setting up their own centres: in the case of the former (the forest monks), these are often in remote areas, often welcome by the laity; in the case of the latter, these are often urban houses owned and run by the priests themselves.

#### **2.1.4 “He insults and reviles monks.”**

Interestingly, this is one of the most common features of modern attitudes by informed Buddhists and observers of Buddhist temple or clerical activities. Although, as a rule, no Buddhist would openly “insult and revile” monastics or priests, criticisms and oppositions against them are very common from the laity who are today better informed about the Dharma-Vinaya.

No judicious cleric would take action against any laity who criticizes them for a couple of practical reasons. The first is that of the “**silent treatment**,” of not responding to criticism, which is likely to be read by most others as good sense, and perhaps integrity and virtue amongst the criticised.<sup>23</sup> Secondly, any response is likely to attract public attention, and give the critics a common goal and group to work together more effectively, like a lightning-rod in heavy storm.

In the 1980s, when Malaysian monk Piyasilo openly criticized the Chief High Priest of the Siyam<sup>24</sup> Nikaya foreign mission, the priest judiciously insinuated to local Buddhist elders who were his Vihara followers, “Piyasilo is criticizing me!” and so on. These elders then approached Piyasilo, gently warning him that they would not “support” him if he conducted himself in this manner. Piyasilo replied: “When have you ever supported our local Buddhist work?” In colonial history, this Machiavellian move is known as “**divide and rule**.” A century of Sinhala missionary presence has effectively divided local Buddhists who are more loyal to Sri Lanka and their foreign Missions than to promoting local Buddhist social growth.

Many modernist monks often worked alone, and did not rely on the sangha to sort out any case of perceived abuse or defamation. In the late 1970s, a Singapore university medical student had called the controversial Sinhala monk, Ananda Mangala (1917-1986)<sup>25</sup> “a communist,” a label which he detested. Furious, he had a student of his, a lawyer, draft a warning letter, insinuating that his accuser might lose his scholarship if he did not withdraw his statement. Terrified by the lawyer’s letter, he promptly apologized.

#### **2.1.5 “He divides monks from each other.”**

Again, we have no post-Buddha records of any laity slandering against any monastics to divide them. Over the centuries, as Buddhism spread throughout Asia, and now to the West, Australasia, Africa and the rest of the world, we see numerous forest monasteries [2.1.3] growing in almost all the continents of the world. The billionaire Chinese Mahāyāna priest, Hsing Yun, planted impressive monasteries in various continents, and even started a university in Los Angeles, USA.<sup>26</sup>

Even in Singapore, the way that Chinese Buddhism is run and prospers is best described as tax-free religious businesses. In most cases, Temples are actually owned by the priests or priestesses themselves. However, unlike the high-caste Goyigama Siyam Nikāya Viharas, which are handed down from uncle (the

<sup>23</sup> On “conniving silence,” see SD 44.1 (1.2.1.9).

<sup>24</sup> “Siyam,” from Siam (*syāma*).

<sup>25</sup> On Ananda Mangala, see SD 7.9 (4.4.1).

<sup>26</sup> The Los Angeles Times reports on 25 Nov 1990 that he had over 400,000 followers in Taiwan, 27 monasteries around the world, and assets valued at over US\$400 million: <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1990-11-25-mn-7147-story.html>.

abbot) to his nephew,<sup>27</sup> the Chinese Temples today run like business corporations within a lineage, each of which is effectively a religious family headed by a patriarch.

In other words, we see a great deal of professional “live and let live” attitude of not interfering in one another’s religious business or network for the sake of a common prosperity. In this ambience, these various Chinese Buddhist lineages are unified in strictly prohibiting their laity from even reading their Vinaya, which seem to be regarded as “business secrets.”<sup>28</sup> Ironically, we have here a case of “knowing the law is no excuse”!

### **2.1.6 “He speaks in dispraise of the Buddha.”**

**2.1.6.1** The idea of *not* speaking in dispraise of the Buddha (and also the Dharma and the sangha) is not an offence deserving the penalty of having the almsbowl overturned on the speaker. The point is that we naturally respect the Buddha when we have taken refuge in the 3 jewels. However, when such a person speaks ill of the Buddha, surely it must be out of ignorance or some misunderstanding of the teaching. This is what is being addressed. Only when rehabilitating efforts fail, the sangha may then have good cause to boycott that person or party, since he persists in showing no respect for a teacher who is his refuge, whom he should look up to.

**2.1.6.2** Centuries after the Buddha, with the rise of the sectarian and ethnic Buddhisms, and Buddhist cults, especially beyond India, the Buddha’s position was usurped by strange new Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. Even if we accommodate such religious forms as representing qualities or aspects of the Buddha, criticizing any of them does not amount to speaking in dispraise of the Buddha. This is like when we criticize those who pretend to be our parent, or masquerade as them: we are not speaking in dispraise of our parent. However, we would not go so far as to abuse them either verbally or physically. Certainly, we would not be foolish enough to take any of them to be our parent or even to represent our parent!

### **2.1.7 “He speaks in dispraise of the Dharma.”**

**2.1.7.1** We have already stated that the idea of *not* speaking in dispraise of the Dharma, the Buddha’s teaching, should not be at once punishable with the overturning of the almsbowl on the ill speaker [2.1.6.1]. The sangha should diligently investigate and correct the wrong view of the person. Only after such efforts have been made, and the person persists in his wrong view, or worse in spreading it about, then, the almsbowl should be overturned on him.

**2.1.7.2** Even then, the overturning of the almsbowl is merely a gesture of our respect for the Buddha Dharma, and that, out of that respect, we are willing to distance ourselves from those who disrespect it. Furthermore, we need to publicly and clearly declare our stand on such matters to show where we seriously stand on them. In other words, we should make every appropriate effort to show what right view is and how it should be properly practised.

### **2.1.8 “He speaks in dispraise of the sangha.”**

**2.1.8.1** The sangha we take refuge in is **the noble sangha**, the holy community of noble ones, that is, streamwinners, once-returners, non-returners and arhats, including, of course, the Buddha. Hence, to speak in dispraise of the sangha means disrespecting the sangha in a broad sense. This includes putting

<sup>27</sup> See Piyasilo, *Charisma in Buddhism*, 1992h:20-43 (repaged 27-57); SD 7.9 (4.4.1.2).

<sup>28</sup> See SD 59.6 (1.2.2).

other deities, teachers or persons above the Buddha; and following teachings other than the Buddha Dharma, including not keeping the precepts. Broadly, respect for the sangha implies that, just as the noble saints of the path have, through their own efforts, gained awakening, we, too, should cultivate self-reliance to know, tame and free our mind.

When we look up to gurus or any kind of external agency as refuge, for inspiration, as our path and goal, we have turned away not only from the noble sangha, but from the 3 jewels. To take the noble sangha as our refuge is to take the Dharma as above everything else: the Buddha himself places the Dharma above even himself, as stated in **the Gāraṇa Sutta** (S 6.2 = A 4.2.1) [2.2.3.2].

**2.1.8.2** To “go for refuge” means to hold up as an ideal for our spiritual life, especially working to gain the path in this life itself. Hence, we take the historical Buddha as our only true teacher; the Buddha Dharma as path of training; and the sangha of the path saints as our role models. The conventional sangha members, too, go for refuge; hence, we do not go to them as refuge, especially when they have themselves not reached the path.

The conventional Sangha is at best a community of **renunciants** who have taken the vow witnessed by other sangha members during the ordination, to live the “holy life” (the monastic life) for the sake of “escape” (*nissaraṇa*) from suffering in this life itself. Hence, such a Sangha provides the ideal conditions for cultivating moral virtue, mental concentration and wisdom for attaining the supramundane path, that is, at least streamwinning.

Then, there are the monastic rules of the Pātimokkha which monastics must follow. They have to live with their senses restrained: in short, they should avoid any kind of sensual pleasure. They should live by the renunciant’s right livelihood (having nothing to do with money, wealth and pleasure), and live morally virtuous lives, supported by the 4 supports of almsfood, robes, shelter and medicine and health support.<sup>29</sup>

**2.1.8.3** The Vinaya states that a novice monk (one who is less than 5 years in the order) should remain under the tutelage (*nissaya*) of a proper teacher for at least 5 rains (monastic years) before he is allowed to practise on his own.<sup>30</sup> In this way, the monastic learns to appear as a proper renunciant, live and think as one. Otherwise, the more he socializes, the likelier he is to feel awkward, even ashamed, regarding his monastic looks, and keep his head unshaven for long periods, wear his robes looking more like laity, and conducts himself in a worldly manner. Or, worse, he may take up worldly learning and occupations or activities, instead of mastering the Dharma and working towards the path for his own spiritual progress. In doing so, he falls into the habitual offence of “wrongdoing” (*dukkata*) [1.1.2], that is, a karmically potent offence.

In such cases, the laity may certainly criticize the monastic for his worldly and wrong ways, just as the houselord **Citta** does with the monk Sudhamma, whom he supports with 4 supports, resident in his own grove [1.1.4]. Considering, how much the modern monastics have secularized themselves, often taking the robe as a career and retirement plan, we can and must play an effective role in stopping this devolution of the Sangha. We should encourage such monastics to return to the true life of renunciation and its benefits of moral virtue, concentration and wisdom here and now, for their own good and for the good and happiness of the many. Otherwise, it is we who now must overturn the bowl on them, and keep up our own practice of self-reliance, and head for the path of awakening ourselves.

<sup>29</sup> These are the “fourfold utter purity of moral virtue” (*catu parisuddhi, sīla*): SD 24.6a (2.3).

<sup>30</sup> On *nissaya*, see SD 40a.8 (4.2.2.3).



## 2.2 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE 8 CONDITIONS

**2.2.1** The Buddha speaks on these 8 conditions whereby the sangha may overturn the almsbowl on laymen for 2 main reasons: those who show malice against them and those who disrespect the 3 jewels. For the monastic boycott of the laity to work, **the sangha** must be Vinaya based and Dharma-spirited, in other words, peopled by good monastics and led by even better leaders. The connection between such a sangha and the laity is Dharma-based practice on either side.

Furthermore, the sangha is a community unified by an interconnected ordination lineage. The vitality of such a lineage is that the monks are properly ordained and trained: in other words, they are **authentic** renunciants who are sincerely practising the Buddha Dharma. Secondly, such monastics are answerable to their teachers and the sangha itself. This prevents renegade monastics and Tartuffes from secularizing themselves, a trend that is common today.

**2.2.2** The Buddhist “sangha” today is split in a number of ways.

Firstly, although the Theravada sangha claims to have a common **ordination lineage** (*parampara*), it is significantly divided racially and politically. This is clearly the case in the Theravada of Sri Lanka, Myanmar and Thailand. Much of **the Sinhala sangha**, for example, is becoming deleteriously secularized like the Chinese Mahayana sangha in Singapore. However, while the latter enrich themselves through death rituals and temple donations, the former are gainfully employed in various ways, even as legislators in the country’s politics.<sup>31</sup> In either case, many of their clergy own much wealth and property.

**The Thai sangha** comprises of 2 denominations—the majority Mahānikāya and the royalist Dhammayut—but both are controlled by the state. The Burmese sangha in our times faces much difficulty since the country is ruled by a military junta, with some of the monks supporting it, but the majority do not. The point here is that so long as the sangha has no independent existence, it really has no significant voice even as a Buddhist community. In our own times, however, **the Burmese sangha** is credited with having overturned their almsbowl against the military regime. [1.2.3.2]

### 2.2.3 Sangha and state

**2.2.3.1** While the Buddha lived, the sangha was very much able to hold itself up and apart up from the world as a community of renunciants. It was populated by numerous arhats, those on the path, those working to reach the path, and numerous lay followers who kept the precepts. Just 2 months after the Buddha’s passing, when king Ajātasattu of Magadha was formally told by the monks that they would be rehearsing the Dharma-Vinaya, he famously replied: “Very well, bhante, do so with full confidence. Let mine be the ‘wheel of (worldly) power’ (*āṇā,cakka*); let yours be **the ‘wheel of Dharma’!** Instruct me, I will do it.”<sup>32</sup>

**2.2.3.2** A good account of how the sangha was governed in the Buddha’s after-centuries is given in **the Gopaka Moggallāna Sutta** (M 108). When Ānanda is asked how the sangha is able to remain united, he replies that the Buddha has not appointed any one person to lead or rule the sangha, and that its governance is based on the following principles:

<sup>31</sup> For a detailed study of the anthropological study of the secularization of the Sinhala sangha, see Seneviratne, *The Work of Kings*, 1999.

<sup>32</sup> *Sadhu bhante vissatthā karotha, mayham āṇā,cakkaṃ, tumhākaṃ dhamma,cakkaṃ hotu. Āṇāpetha me bhante kiṃ karomī ti* (VA 1:1014 f = KhpA 95,2-4; cf in connection with Sakra and Brahma: DA 1:264,23-25 = MA 2:278,-6-12).

- “the Dharma is our refuge”
- “the course of training is the Pātimokkha, laid down by the Blessed One”
- “the Dharma deals with us”<sup>33</sup>

“The Dharma is our refuge” means that the sangha is not person-centred but “truth-centred”: the teaching is above the teacher and anyone else, as taught in **the Gāraḥ Sutta** (S 6.2 = A 4.21).<sup>34</sup>

— — —

## Patta Nikujjana Sutta

### The Discourse on Over-turning the Almsbowl

A 8.87

**1** Bhikshus, when a lay follower possesses 8 qualities, the sangha, if it so wishes, **may overturn the almsbowl on him.**<sup>35</sup>

What are the eight?<sup>36</sup> [345]

- (1) He tries to prevent monks from acquiring gains.
- (2) He tries to bring harm to monks
- (3) He tries to prevent monks from residing (in a certain place).
- (4) He insults and reviles monks.
- (5) He divides monks from each other.
- (6) He speaks in dispraise of the Buddha.
- (7) He speaks in dispraise of the Dharma.
- (8) He speaks in dispraise of the sangha.

*bhikkhūnaṃ alābhāya parisakkati  
bhikkhūnaṃ anattāya parisakkati  
bhikkhūnaṃ avāsāya parisakkati  
bhikkhūnaṃ akkosati paribhāsati  
bhikkhu bhikkhūhi bhedeti  
buddhassa avaṇṇaṃ bhāsati  
dhammassa avaṇṇaṃ bhāsati  
saṅghassa avaṇṇaṃ bhāsati*

When a lay follower possesses these 8 qualities, bhikshus, the sangha, if it so wishes, may overturn the almsbowl on him.

**2** Bhikshus, when a lay follower possesses 8 qualities, the sangha, if it so wishes, **may turn the almsbowl upright on him.**<sup>37</sup>

What are the eight?

- (1) He does not try to prevent monks from acquiring gains.
- (2) He does not try to bring harm to monks.
- (3) He does not try to prevent monks from residing (in a certain place).
- (4) He does not insult and revile monks.
- (5) He does not divide monks from each other.
- (6) He speaks in praise of the Buddha.
- (7) He speaks in praise of the Dharma.
- (8) He speaks in praise of the sangha.

<sup>33</sup> M 108/3:7-15 (SD 33.5).

<sup>34</sup> S 6.2 = A 4.1 (SD 12.3). See SD 59.13 (3.1.2.2).

<sup>35</sup> *Pattāṃ nikkujjeyya*. On the theoretical and practice aspects of the “almsbowl downturning” act (*ukkhepanīya-kamma*), see (1.2).

<sup>36</sup> These 8 conditions and the formal act of almsbowl overturning is detailed in Cv 5.20 (V 2:124-126). See [1.1.3].

<sup>37</sup> The formal act of turning the almsbowl upright again (*patta,ukkujjana*) [1.2.2].

When a lay follower possesses these 8 qualities, bhikshus, the sangha, if it so wishes, may turn the almsbowl upright on him.

— evaṃ —

200510 211201 211224