

Early Buddhist prophecy

The decline of the sangha

Source: **Bhaddāli Sutta** (M 65,29-32), SD 56.2

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3.6.1.1 The next section deals with the Buddha's **prophecy** of decline in the sangha [§§29-31], another sign of lateness. This is obvious enough: decline, as a rule, follows the rise and heyday of a religion or nation. The Buddha's warning of the sangha's decline is given in answer to Bhaddāli's question of the situation in the sangha then. Knowing that there were less training-rules before but more arhats ("who were established in final knowledge," *aññāya saṅghahimsu*), he asks: "**Why are there now more training-rules and fewer monks become established in final knowledge?**" (§29).

The Buddha explains that when the Dharma begins to disappear, then, the society will deteriorate, and the sangha, too, will decline—monastics, following the way of the world, will weaken in their renunciant life and become more worldly [§30]. The sangha declines when the "**influxes**" (*āsava*)—those of lust, of existence (becoming this and that), of ignorance—flood and drown its members.

3.6.1.2 What are **the signs of the rise in these influxes**? The Buddha declares these as the signs, that is:

- (1) the sangha reaches **greatness** (*mahatta*);
- (2) the sangha reaches **the peak of worldly gain** (*lābh'agga*);
- (3) the sangha reaches **the peak of fame** (*yasa'agga*);
- (4) the sangha reaches **great learning** (*bahu,sacca*);
- (5) the sangha reaches **long-standing renown** (*ratta-ñ,ñūta*).

When the Buddha Dharma becomes well known and respected, the sangha **grows in wealth and size**, attracting more supporters and support. Monastic life becomes more luxurious, comfortable and secure, and will greatly attract opportunists and those with ulterior motives. The crowded monasteries mean that they become less conducive for personal practice and encourage greater socialization, becoming more worldly.

The sangha becomes more **famous**, attracting more publicity to itself so that the monasteries and centres become more involved with society and social work, and forget its original ideals of renunciation and the quest for the path.

The sangha is burdened with **worldly learning**, following academic standards, being schooled for qualification, salaried jobs and status. The true spirit of sutta learning, Dharma wisdom and meditative insight are seriously diluted and forgotten.

The long-term **existence** of such a sangha is seen as some kind of power structure or organization closely connected with worldly politics and power. The sangha is no more a sanctuary for Vinaya practice, Dharma learning, mindfulness and meditation, or quest for the path of awakening. The sangha has become another appendage of worldly activity.

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

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