

Turning the bowl upside down

Patta Nikujjana

[Previously published as fb200520 Piya Tan]

Sutta and vinaya

The Patta Nikujjana Sutta (A 8.87), the discourse on the down-turning of the almsbowl (SD 59.15) records the Buddha as declaring thus:

“Bhikshus, when a lay follower possesses 8 qualities, the sangha, if it so wishes, may overturn the almsbowl on him.

What are the eight?

- (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.
- (6) He speaks in dispraise of the Buddha.
- (7) He speaks in dispraise of the Dharma.
- (8) He speaks in dispraise of the sangha.

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

Commentary

“Monks” (*bhikkhu*) means a properly ordained monk, and who properly keeps to the Vinaya and practices the Buddha Dhamma.

(1) means that the laity prevents monks from properly getting support that are allowable for monastics. This excludes the giving of inappropriate (unallowable) gifts like Rolex watches, cars, etc.

(2) refers to physically harming monks.

(3) means prevents monks from setting up their residence (for resting, meditation, etc) in a suitable, quiet place away from populated areas,

(4) means being unreasonably rude to monastics who are morally virtuous practitioners.

(5) means breaking up the sangha of morally virtuous practitioners.

(6) includes claiming other buddhas when Sakyamuni is the one and only historical Buddha, praying to them, etc.

(7) includes demeaning the Buddha's teachings about streamwinning, non-self, self-reliance and so on, and claiming some "superior" teachings, and some "hidden" teachings that the Buddha has clearly spoken against in his last days.

(8) includes speaking against the sangha of noble ones: the arhats, making fun of them (such as in the Lotus Sutra, which is clearly influenced by early Christianity).

Bowl turning

The monastic formal act of turning the bowl upside down is explained and defined in the **Vinaya**, Cullavagga section 20 (V 1:124-127). See also Thanissaro, *The Buddhist Monastic Code II*, Valley Center, CA, 3rd rev ed, 2013:462-646 (App 4(I)) digital.

No bowl, no turning

As a rule, we will not see any modern Vinayaless Sinhala monk having a bowl with him. Moreover, they do not hold any fortnightly recital of the Patimokkha (which most of them are ignorant of anyway). Hence, they are unable to practise what is taught in the Patta Nikujjana Sutta and practised in the Vinaya. The importance of this practice is highlighted by the fact that a Vinaya practice is included in the suttas!

Basically, the spirit of the teaching is that of withdrawing support and attention to those who do not respect the 3 jewels. Monastics who do not follow the Vinaya or behave more like the laity when they have taken the vows of renunciation are disrespecting the 3 jewels in serious ways.

As the laity, we can peacefully protest by "turning the bowl" on them. This is, in fact, what happened to the quarrelsome monks of Kosambi who rejected even the Buddha's advice, saying that it does not concern him! This account is found in the Dhammapada Commentary (**Kosambaka Vatthu**, DhA 1.5/1:53-65). See also the **Pārileyya Sutta** (S 22.81), SD 6.1.

Burmese monks

In Sep 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.¹

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

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¹ See <https://www.nytimes.com/2007/09/30/weekinreview/30mydans.html>;
<https://www.asiaone.com/News/The%2BStraits%2BTimes/Story/Turning%2Bthe%2Bbowl%2Bupside%2Bdown%252C%2BMyanmar%2Bmonks%2Btake%2Bon%2Bjunta.html>.