

## **The Meaning of Kathina Robe-Offering**

***by Sayadaw U Pandita on 01-Nov-09***

I (Sayadaw U Pandita) would like to thank the sponsors of this Kathina ceremony, including all supporters, overseas visitors, donors, monks and nuns, Sayadaws and Sayalays. We join together in this 6th Kathina Robe-offering ceremony for Dhamma Sukha Meditation Centre to share our loving kindness by metta chanting.

Kathina is a one-month long ceremony, held once a year normally around the last day of the full month after the end of the rainy season (vassa) between the October full moon and the November full moon. Each temple can only hold the event once a year. For DSMC, this is held today, the last day of the full month.

As with previous years, each year I give a short talk in English. In other temples, the talk may be in Burmese or other languages, depending on the audience. According to the Theravadan tradition, the robe-offering is for the lay people to provide support to the Sangha or the noble community. The most important being the four requisites: Supatiya (1) robe (sewara), (2) dwelling (civara), monastery, (3) breakfast & lunch meal for food and nutrition (Bhojana). As required by animals and other living beings, monks too require nutrition. The last requisite is (4) medicine (Bhesajja) – to maintain our health. This was the teaching of the Buddha for his followers and disciples, who referred to this rule (or regulation) as 'vinaya dana'. Today's offering is considered 'vinaya offering' which is the four just described. The 'Suttanta' offerings consist of 10 types of offerings: nutrition, clothing, shower room, soap, other necessities, bed, light, toiletries and perfumes. As Buddha's teaching is very complete, abhidhamma offering or donation is for eye sight, ears, smell, body and enjoyment for the mind - not

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to spend too much money and excessive wastage, but to be neat, clean and tidy for sufficiency for a well managed way of life.

For the Kathina today, devotees from different countries, background, races, different customs – all gather here with the common intention to support the noble community of the Sangha, setting a good example for all. Who or what is the Sangha? What is the real meaning of Sangha (Pali) – known also as Reverend or Venerable – and why do we call them as such? The title is also called Sayadaw (Burmese), Ajahn (Thai) or Bhanté (Sri Lankan). As you research more and more, you will find that this community are those who have attained a purified mental state. These are the people who show the best example in the world.

The different reverends from other temples who are seated next to me all wear the same type of robe, as well as those around the world. The robe signify a tradition handed down from 2,500 years ago – the oldest uniform in the world! One that has not been changed since the time of the Buddha. It did not end up in a museum – it is displayed in front of you. You are very lucky, otherwise if you like to know and find out, you will need to seek out the museum that displays this robe – you are indeed most fortunate today.

The meaning of Sangha – we are different from others – day and night, we live a life different from others for the rest of our lives or when we disrobe. We practise freedom, in a liberal manner – you can choose to join the community or disrobe if you are unhappy, and if you wish to return again, we will accept you. However, from the time we don this robe, we love this robe, we respectfully wear it because for 2,500 years, we know of the 'ariya' – purification of the mental state or mind – for only those who attained this state are allowed to wear this robe – so called 'the Sasana flag' or 'the ariya flag'. Different from other international flags, this is a flag propagates the Noble Eight Fold Path. Today, you see before you the Sangha in full robes,

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their bowls held in alms round, all together – samana dassana (Pali) means 'seeing the noble sangha in alms round'.

We offer you the abhidhamma way – even if you have gained wealth and success by earning millions in your business and you are now happy. But one day your health will fail, and you are hospitalised – all that money cannot help you. The doctor has given you three more weeks to live... you are no longer happy... you are going to die. You seek out the temples, you offer alm rounds, you donate a set of robes in the process making yourself happy. This feeling of happiness is different; better than just gaining a million dollars. When you are healthy, you feel happy – if you're unhealthy, you feel unhappy. So offering a set of robes, a scoop of rice into the alms bowl – these images will support you the day when your health fails you. That is why the uniform, the people who wear it, the one who bears the Decision - the Noble Sangha is very important. In the Kathina ceremony, we sustain and remind all of the Buddha Teaching in supporting the Noble Sangha. If the Buddha did not introduce this ceremony for the lay people to look after and offer robes to the Sangha, they would have forgotten the Sangha over time and cease to support the noble community. The Sangha too, will have to buy for themselves – from robes to everything else – to live their lives. Like you, the Sangha have to go shopping – you wear the same jeans as you wear(!) Over time, you and the Sangha would have to wear the same clothes and be no different. Fortunately because of Kathina, today they are different.

Being different is important for protection of the two sides: For you: protect yourself in the faith - the 'satha' race. For Sangha: protect us - the 'vinya' race. For example, if we wear this robe, we cannot go into the Crown Casino {"Ha-ha! There goes the Reverend..." (everyone laughs)}. If our devotee's car is parked in there, we are 'caught' and we have to go by but not to go in to play. A night club or a football match – we cannot go there when wearing this robe. This is the difference – Buddha has wisely thought of this way to protect the

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Sangha community against going to an unsuitable place. This is also protect the lay people so that you are clear in your trust in the faith provided by the Sangha. That is why this robe is meaningful – as much as you, the lay people support the Sangha, we teach the Dhamma and support the lay people by showing you the best system to live our own lives, and your lives.

This is the meaning of Kathina robe-offering – explained in simple terms, and we hope that every year, you will offer the robe to support the Sangha, knowing the meaning of your offering according to the Vinaya rules: Happiness, Safety, Concentrated Mind, approach to the highest level of happiness ‘vinyaki’ or ‘mega halat’ (Pali), that is, an end goal is to attain nibbana. And for the lay people, it’s the same: providing continuous support for the Sangha to be meritorious, to help you in ageing, in sickness, in death – at that time, all this generosity, morality, meditation and mental purification practice, lay people will find these merits to be very, very valuable – I hope that not only in this Kathina, not only this temple, everywhere in your own heart, you will support the poor, helpless and those less fortunate, so that you can fulfil your three-fold training: generosity (dana), morality (sila) and mental development (bhavana).

On behalf of the Noble Sangha, I would like to express our thanks to you for every year, every day and every instance that your own heart is supporting the Sangha community. Thank you, thank you very much... especially today, with so many people from different countries, backgrounds, culture and traditional food, joined together here with the different foods in our stomachs (laugh), it is the best merit. Thank you all again, may all of you attain the highest level of inner peace in this very life. Sadhu! Sadhu! Sadhu! ◼