

# *What is the Triple Gem?*

*by*

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## INTRODUCTION

Parts of this analysis of the Triple Gem were originally used to teach new monks here at the temple and have been printed twice in book form. Now that a group of people who feel that the book would be beneficial to people interested in the Buddha's teachings have pooled their resources and asked permission to print it a third time, I have decided to expand it into a handbook for all Buddhist adherents – i.e., for all who have declared the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha to be their refuge. Once we have made such a declaration, we have to learn exactly what the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha are. Otherwise, we will follow our religion blindly, without realizing its aims or the benefits – called *puñña*, or merit – that come from its practice, inasmuch as Buddhism is a religion of self-help.

Furthermore, we as Thai people are known throughout the world as Buddhists, but I feel that there are very few of us who know the standards of the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha. Although many of us are 'Buddhist,' we are Buddhist mostly through custom, not through the principles of informed knowledge.

Altogether, there are two ways of adhering to the religion: rationally and irrationally. To adhere to the religion irrationally means to adhere to it blindly, following one's teachers or companions, holding to whatever they say is good without showing any interest as to whether it really is good or not. This is like a person of no discernment who uses whatever paper money comes his way: If it turns out to be counterfeit, he'll be punished and fined in a variety of ways. This is what it means to adhere to the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha irrationally.

To adhere to the religion rationally means not to follow one's own prejudices or those of one's teachers or companions, but to follow the principles of informed knowledge; holding to the Dhamma-Vinaya as one's standard, like a law affixed with the king's seal, enforceable throughout the land, making exceptions for no one. Whoever then transgresses the law can't be regarded as a good citizen. So it is with those who practice the religion: If we want to know if a practice is good or bad, right or wrong, worthy of respect or not, we should check it against the standards established by the Buddha, which are eight in number: Any behavior that –

1. leads to passion,
2. leads to the compounding of suffering,
3. leads to the accumulation of defilement,
4. leads to overweening ambition,
5. leads to discontentment with what one has – i.e., having this, one wants that (greed that goes beyond moderation),
6. leads to socializing (of the wrong sort),
7. leads to laziness,
8. leads to being burdensome to others:

None of these eight forms of behavior qualify as the Dhamma or Vinaya of Buddhism. Once we know clearly that these forms of behavior are not what the Buddha intended, we should abandon them completely.

For this reason, all of us who respect the Buddha's teachings should – instead of working at cross-purposes – join our hearts to cleanse and correct the practice of the religion. Laymen, laywomen, monks and novices should make a point of helping one another in the area of reform. Whatever is already good, we should maintain with respect. Whatever isn't, we should exert pressure to improve. We'll then meet with what's truly good, like rice: If you cook good, clean, husked white rice, you'll eat with pleasure. If you cook unhusked rice or a pile of husks, they'll stick in your own throat. If we let any bad factions go uncorrected, they will burden the hearts of their supporters, who will become like people who cook rice husks to eat. Are we going to let one another be so stupid as to eat rice husks?

By and large, though, most laypeople don't see this as their duty. As for the monks and novices, they throw the responsibility on the laypeople, and so we do nothing but keep throwing it back and forth like this. When things have a bearing on all of us, we should by all means unite our hearts and accept joint responsibility. Only things that have no bearing on us should we leave to others. Unless we act in this way, what is good – the religion – will fall from our grasp. And when the religion falls from our grasp, laymen (*upāsaka*) will become obstacles (*upasak*), i.e., they'll keep creating obstacles in the way of finding merit. Laywomen (*upāsikā*) will become the color of crows (*sikā*), i.e., dark and evil in their behavior. Novices will become sham novices, careless, spattered, and filthy; and monks (*phra*) will become goats (*phae*), missing out on the flavor of the Dhamma, like the nanny goat who has to go hungry because the milk under her stomach has been taken and drunk by people more intelligent than she. In India, for instance, there are hardly any monks left to make merit with.

Monks are the important faction, because they are the front-line troops, the standard-bearers in the fight with the enemy – evil. Ordinarily, soldiers have to adhere to the discipline of their army and to be sincere in performing their duties. As for the duties enjoined by the religion, they are two:

1. *Gantha-dhura*: studying the Dhamma of the texts. Once we know the texts, though, we can't stop there. We have to put them into practice, because the level of study is simply knowledge on the level of plans and blueprints. If we don't follow the blueprints, we won't receive the benefits to be gained from our knowledge. And when we don't gain the benefits, we're apt to discard the texts, like a doctor who knows the formula for a medicine but doesn't use it to cure any patients. The medicine won't show any benefits, and this will cause him to go looking for a living in other ways, discarding any interest to pursue that formula further. Thus, putting the Dhamma texts into practice is one way of preserving them, for once we've put them into practice and seen the results arising within us – i.e., our own bad qualities begin to wane – we will appreciate the value of the texts and try to keep them intact. This is like a doctor who is able to use a medicine to cure a fever and so will preserve the formula because of its

use in making a living. Thus, the Lord Buddha set out a further duty – the practice of the Dhamma – for those who are ordained:

2. *Vipassanā-dhura*: the practice of tranquility and insight meditation. These two practices are our primary duties as monks and novices. If we don't devote ourselves to these two lines of practice, we'll become a fifth column within the religion, enemies of the good standards of the Dhamma and Vinaya. Monks will become political monks, war-making monks, loudspeaker monks – loudspeaker monks are those who can teach others but can't teach themselves. They're good only at speaking Dhamma, but their hearts have no Dhamma, and so they become the enemies of those who practice the Dhamma and Vinaya rightly and well.

So I ask all Buddhists not to turn a deaf ear or a blind eye to these problems. If we hold that it's none of our business, the consequences could well flare up and spread to burn us. For this reason, I ask that we all help one another to look after the religion.

Actually, all human beings born need a set of customs and traditions – called religion – to which they give special respect. Otherwise, we will have no principles of good and evil or of moral virtue. Whatever religion this may be is up to the individual adherents. I ask only that they respect their religion sincerely and rightly, for the sake of true purity.

If we were to use only worldly knowledge to keep order, it would work only in public places. In private or secret places, order wouldn't last. But as for religion, once people have studied so that they really know good and evil, they wouldn't dare do evil, either in public or in private. Religion is thus one of the important mainstays of the world. If we human beings had no moral virtue imbedded in our hearts, even the greatest power on earth would be able to keep us in line only temporarily, and even then it wouldn't be able to influence our minds the way the moral virtue that comes from religion can. For this reason, the practice of moral virtue is one way of helping the religion and the world.

Now, I'm not claiming to be a heavenly being or anyone special. I'm simply a person who wishes the religion well. So if anything in this book is defective – in terms of the expression or the Pali – I hope that knowledgeable people will forgive me, for it's not the case that I'm expert in a wide range of matters.

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### ***I. Buddhāṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi: I go to the Buddha for refuge.***

Ordinarily, for the world to experience happiness and harmony, there has to be a teaching or tradition generally respected as good. This being the case, bodhisattvas arise – people who develop goodness on the grand scale for the sake of attaining right self-awakening. Once they have reached this goal, they are termed ‘Buddhas,’ Awakened Ones. For bodhisattvas to succeed in this way, they have to give themselves over to perfecting ten qualities –

1. *Dāna-pāramī*: generosity.
2. *Sīla-pāramī*: virtue.
3. *Nekkhamma-pāramī*: renunciation of sensuality (and of the household life).
4. *Paññā-pāramī*: the search for discernment.
5. *Viriya-pāramī*: persistence.
6. *Khanti-pāramī*: endurance, patience.
7. *Sacca-pāramī*: truthfulness.
8. *Adhiṭṭhāna-pāramī*: determination.
9. *Mettā-pāramī*: goodwill.
10. *Upekkhā-pāramī*: equanimity (in proper cases, i.e., in areas that are beyond one’s control).

These ten perfections are the factors that enable a bodhisattva to succeed in becoming an arahant, a Pure One, in the world. Once he attains this state, three qualities – called actualized virtues – arise in his heart:

*Visuddhi-guṇa*: purity.

*Paññā-guṇa*: sharp discernment.

*Karuṇādhiguṇa*: compassion for living beings throughout the world.

These qualities enable the Buddha to teach the Dhamma in a beneficial way. His conduct in this area is of three sorts: Having achieved his own purposes (*attattha-cariyā*), he acts for the benefit of living beings throughout the world (*lokattha-cariyā*) and teaches the Dhamma to his own circle of relatives (*ñātattha-cariyā*).

There are three aspects to the Buddha:

1) The physical aspect – the body (properties [*dhātu*], aggregates [*khandha*], and sense media [*āyatana*]), which is the external aspect of the Buddha, called *Buddha-nimitta*, or the symbol of the Buddha. (This is like the bark of a tree.)

2) The good practices he followed – such as virtue, concentration, and discernment, which are aspects of his activity. These are called *dhamma-nimitta* of the Buddha, symbols of his inner quality. (These are the sapwood.)

3) *Vimutti* – release from ignorance, craving, clinging, and kamma; attaining nibbāna, the supreme quality, a quality that does not die (*amata-dhamma*). (This is the heartwood, or essence of the Buddha.)

A person of little intelligence will use bark to build himself a home; a person of medium intelligence will use sapwood; while a person of sharp intelligence will build his home of heartwood. So it is with those of us who take refuge in the Buddha: We're like the three types of people who take wood to build ourselves a home. But in any case we're better off than people without a home. Like rats or lizards who have to live in the hollows of trees and are in for trouble if people set the trees on fire: If we place our trust in our bodies, our worldly possessions, or our livelihood, we'll have no refuge when the fires of death reach us. Or as when a boat sinks in the middle of the ocean: A person without a life-vest is in serious danger. For this reason, we should educate ourselves so as to find a refuge that will benefit us both in this life and in lives to come.

Another comparison: The sages of the past used the term *Buddha-ratana*, comparing the Buddha to a jewel. Now, there are three sorts of jewels: artificial gems; gemstones, such as rubies or sapphires; and diamonds, which are held to be the highest. The aspects of the Buddha might be compared to these three sorts of jewels. To place confidence in the external aspect – the body of the Buddha or images made to represent him – is like dressing up with artificial gems. To show respect for the practices followed by the Buddha by giving rise to them within ourselves is like dressing up with rubies and sapphires. To reach the quality of deathlessness is like dressing in diamonds from head to toe.

But no matter what sort of jewels we use to dress up in, we're better off than savages who go around hanging animal bones or human bones from their necks, who look unkempt and – what's more – are bound to be haunted by the bones they wear. The bones, here, stand for our own bones, i.e., our attachment to the body as really being ours. Actually, our body comes for the most part from the bodies of other animals – the food we've eaten – so how can we seriously take it to be our own? Whoever insists on regarding the body as his or her own should be called a savage or a swindler – and, as a swindler, is bound to receive punishment in proportion to the crime.

So we should regard the body as money borrowed for the span of a lifetime, to be used as capital. And we should search for profits so as to release ourselves from our debts, by searching for another, better form of goodness: the qualities of the Buddha that he left as teachings for all of his followers. These qualities, briefly put, are –

1. *Sati*: the continual mindfulness (wakefulness) found in the factors of *jhāna*.
2. *Paññā*: the intuitive discernment that comes from developing the mind in concentration.
3. *Vimutti*: release from defilement

These are qualities that all Buddhists should develop within themselves so as to gain awakening, following the example of the Buddha, becoming Sāvaka Buddhas (Disciple Buddhas), an opportunity open – without exception and with no restrictions of time or place – to all who follow his teachings.

Buddhists who revere the Buddha in the full sense of the word should have two sorts of symbols with them, to serve as reminders of their tradition –

1. *Buddha-nimitta*: representatives of the Buddha, such as Buddha images or stūpas in which relics of the Buddha are placed. This sort of reminder is like a nation's flag.

2. *Buddha-guṇa*: the qualities that form the inner symbol of the Buddha, i.e., the proper practice of his teachings. Whoever takes a stand in this manner is bound to be victorious both within and without, safe from such enemies as temptation and mortality.

Our nation's flag and the people of our nation are two different things. Just as our flag will have value only if the people of our nation are good and preserve the fullness of the nation's qualities; so too, we Buddhists have to respect both our flag – images of the Buddha – and the qualities of the Buddha if we are to turn ourselves into good Buddhists. Otherwise, we will suffer from not having fulfilled our responsibilities.

To take an example, we Thai people, in order to be Thai in the full sense, have to possess a number of qualifications: the ability to speak and to read Thai, acquaintance with Thai customs and traditions, the ability to benefit ourselves (*attattha-cariyā*) and to spread those benefits to help care for the needs of our parents, spouses, and children (*ñātattha-cariyā*). And not only that: If we have the ability and the energy – physical, mental, financial, or the energy of our virtues – we should expand those benefits to help other groups in general, our companions in happiness and suffering, throughout the nation (*lokatttha-cariyā*). This is what it means to be Thai in the full sense of the word. In the same way, we who revere images of the Buddha and the Buddha's good qualities should have them with us at all times if we are to receive the full benefits that come from respecting the Buddha's teachings and to maintain the peace and well-being of Buddhists at large.

## ***II. Dhammaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi: I go to the Dhamma for refuge.***

There are three levels to the Dhamma, the teachings of the Buddha –

A. *Pariyatti-dhamma*: studying the words of the Buddha as recorded in the Canon – the Discipline, the Discourses, and the Abhidhamma.

B. *Paṭipatti-dhamma*: following the practice of virtue, concentration, and discernment as derived from one's study of the Canon.

C. *Paṭivedha-dhamma*: Nibbāna.

A. The study of the Dhamma can be done in any of three ways –

1. *Alagaddūpama-pariyatti*: studying like a water viper.

2. *Nissaraṇ'attha-pariyatti*: studying for the sake of emancipation.

3. *Bhaṇḍāgārika-pariyatti*: studying to be a storehouse keeper.

*Studying like a water viper* means to study the words of the Buddha without then putting them into practice, having no sense of shame at doing evil,

disobeying the training rules of the Vinaya, making oneself like a poisonous snake-head, full of the fires of greed, anger, and delusion.

*Studying for the sake of emancipation* means to study the Buddha's teachings out of a desire for merit and wisdom, with a sense of conviction and high regard for their worth – and then, once we have reached an understanding, bringing our thoughts, words, and deeds into line with those teachings with a high sense of reverence and respect. Some people try to change themselves to be in line with the Buddha's words. To try to change the Buddha's teachings to be in line with ourselves is the wrong approach – because when we're ordinary, run-of-the-mill people, we're for the most part full of defilements, cravings, views, and conceits. If we act in this way we're bound to be more at fault than those who try to bring themselves into line with the teachings: Such people are very hard to find fault with.

*Studying to be a storehouse keeper* refers to the education of people who no longer have to be trained, i.e., of arahants, the highest level of the Noble Ones. Some arahants, when they were still ordinary, run-of-the-mill people, heard the Dhamma directly from the Buddha once or twice and were able immediately to reach the highest attainment. This being the case, they lacked a wide-ranging knowledge of worldly conventions and traditions; and so, with an eye to the benefit of other Buddhists, they were willing to undergo a certain amount of further education. This way of studying the Dhamma is called *sikkhā-gāravatā*: respect for the training.

B. The practice of the Dhamma means to conduct oneself in line with the words of the Buddha as gathered under three headings:

- Virtue: proper behavior, free from vice and harm, in terms of one's words and deeds.
- Concentration: intentness of mind, centered on one of the themes of meditation, such as the breath.
- Discernment: insight and circumspection with regard to all fabrications, i.e., the properties, aggregates, and sense media.

To conduct oneself in this manner is termed practicing the Dhamma. By and large, though, Buddhists tend to practice the Dhamma in a variety of ways that aren't in line with the true path of practice. If we were to classify them, there would be three types:

1. *Lokādhīpateyya* – putting the world first.
2. *Attādhīpateyya* – putting the self first.
3. *Dhammādhīpateyya* – putting the Dhamma first.

*To put the world first* means to practice for the sake of such worldly rewards as status, material gains, honor, praise, and sensual pleasures. When we practice this way, we're actually torturing ourselves because undesirable things are bound to occur: Having attained status, we can lose it. Having acquired material gains, we can lose them. Having received praise, we can receive censure. Having experienced pleasure, we can see it disintegrate. Far from the paths, fruitions, and nibbāna, we torture ourselves by clinging to these things as our own.

*To put the self first* means to practice in accordance with our own opinions, acting in line with whatever those opinions may be. Most of us tend to side with ourselves, getting stuck on our own views and conceits because our study of the Dhamma hasn't reached the truth of the Dhamma, and so we take as our standard our own notions, composed of four forms of personal bias –

- a. *Chandāgati*: doing whatever we feel like doing.
- b. *Bhayāgati*: fearing certain forms of power or authority, and thus not daring to practice the Dhamma as we truly should. (We put certain individuals first.)
- c. *Dosāgati*: acting under the power of anger, defilement, craving, conceits, and views.
- d. *Mohāgati*: practicing misguidedly, not studying or searching for what is truly good; assuming that we're already smart enough, or else that we're too stupid to learn; staying buried in our habits with no thought of extracting ourselves from our sensual pleasures.

All of these ways of practice are called 'putting the self first.'

*To put the Dhamma first* means to follow the noble eightfold path –

- a. Right View: seeing that there really is good, there really is evil, there really is stress, that stress has a cause, that it disbands, and that there is a cause for its disbanding.
- b. Right Resolve: always thinking of how to rid ourselves of whatever qualities we know to be wrong and immoral, i.e. seeing the harm in sensual desires in that they bring on suffering and stress.
- c. Right Speech: speaking the truth; not saying anything divisive or inciting; not saying anything coarse or vulgar in places where such words would not be proper or to people to whom they would not be proper to say; not saying anything useless. Even though what we say may be worthwhile, if our listener isn't interested then our words would still count as useless.
- d. Right Action: being true to our duties, not acting in ways that would be corrupt or bring harm to ourselves or others.
- e. Right Livelihood: obtaining wealth in ways that are honest, searching for it in a moral way and using it in a moral way.
- f. Right Effort: persisting in ridding ourselves of all that is wrong and harmful in our thoughts, words, and deeds; persisting in giving rise to what would be good and useful to ourselves and others in our thoughts, words, and deeds, without a thought for the difficulty or weariness involved; acting persistently so as to be a mainstay to others (except in cases that are beyond our control).
- g. Right Mindfulness: being firmly mindful in the correct way; making sure, before we act or speak, not to act or speak through the power of inattention or forgetfulness, making sure to be constantly mindful in our thoughts (being mindful of the four frames of reference).
- h. Right Concentration: keeping the mind firmly centered in the correct way. No matter what we do or say, no matter what moods may strike the heart, the heart keeps its poise, firm and unflinching in the four *jhānas*.

These eight factors can be reduced to three – virtue, concentration, and discernment – called the middle way, the heart of the Buddha’s teachings. The middleness of virtue means to be pure in thought, word, and deed, acting out of compassion, seeing that the life of others is like your own, that their possessions are like your own, feeling goodwill, loving others as much as yourself. When ‘you’ and ‘they’ are equal in this way, you are bound to be upright in your behavior, like a well-balanced burden that, when placed on your shoulders, doesn’t cause you to tip to one side or the other. But even then you’re still in a position of having to shoulder a burden. So you are taught to focus the mind on a single preoccupation: This can be called ‘holding in your hands’ – i.e., holding the mind in the middle – or concentration.

The middleness of concentration means focusing on the present, not sending your thoughts into the past or future, holding fast to a single preoccupation (*ānāpānaka-jhāna*, absorption in the breath).

As for the middleness of discernment: No matter what preoccupations may come passing by, you’re able to rid yourself of all feelings of liking or disliking, approval or rejection. You don’t cling, even to the one preoccupation that has arisen as a result of your own actions. You put down what you have been holding in your hands; you don’t fasten onto the past, present, or future. This is release.

When our virtue, concentration, and discernment are all in the middle this way, we’re safe. Just as a boat going down the middle of a channel, or a car that doesn’t run off the side of the road, can reach its destination without beaching or running into a stump; so too, people who practice in this way are bound to reach the qualities they aspire to, culminating in the paths and fruitions leading to nibbāna, which is the main point of the Buddha’s teachings.

So in short, *putting the Dhamma first* means to search solely for purity of heart.

C. The attainment of the Dhamma refers to the attainment of the highest quality, nibbāna. If we refer to the people who reach this attainment, there are four sorts –

1. *Sukkha-vipassako*: those who develop just enough tranquility and discernment to act as a basis for advancing to liberating insight and who thus attain nibbāna having mastered only *āsavakkhaya-ñāṇa*, the knowledge that does away with the fermentation of defilement.

2. *Tevijjo*: those who attain the three skills.

3. *Chalābhiñño*: those who attain the six intuitive powers.

4. *Catuppaṭṭisambhidappatto*: those who attain the four forms of acumen.

To explain *sukkha-vipassako* (those who develop insight more than tranquility): *Vipassanā* (liberating insight) and *āsavakkhaya-ñāṇa* (the awareness that does away with the fermentation of defilement) differ only in name. In actuality they refer to the same thing, the only difference being that *vipassanā* refers to the beginning stage of insight, and *āsavakkhaya-ñāṇa* to the final stage: clear and true comprehension of the four Noble Truths.

To explain *tevijjo*: The three skills are –

*a. Pubbenivāsanussati-ñāṇa*: the ability to remember past lives – one, two, three, four, five, ten, one hundred, one thousand, depending on one's powers of intuition. (This is a basis for proving whether death is followed by rebirth or annihilation.)

*b. Cutūpapāta-ñāṇa*: knowledge of where living beings are reborn – on refined levels or base – after they die.

*c. Āsavakkhaya-ñāṇa*: the awareness that enables one to do away with the fermentations in one's character (sensuality, states of becoming, and ignorance).

To explain *chalaḥhiñño*: The six intuitive powers are –

*a. Iddhividhi*: the ability to display miracles – becoming invisible, walking on a dry path through a body of water, levitating, going through rain without getting wet, going through fire without getting hot, making a crowd of people appear to be only a few, making a few to appear many, making oneself appear young or old as one likes, being able to use the power of the mind to influence events in various ways.

*b. Dibbasota*: clairaudience; the ability to hear far distant sounds, beyond ordinary human powers.

*c. Cetopariya-ñāṇa*: the ability to know the thoughts of others.

*d. Pubbenivāsānussati-ñāṇa*: the ability to remember previous lives.

*e. Dibba-cakkhu*: clairvoyance; the ability to see far distant objects, beyond ordinary human powers. Some people can even see other levels of being with their clairvoyant powers (one way of proving whether death is followed by rebirth or annihilation, and whether or not there really are other levels of being).

*f. Āsavakkhaya-ñāṇa*: the awareness that does away with the fermentation of defilement.

To explain *catuppaṭṭisambhidappatto*: The four forms of acumen are –

*a. Attha-paṭṭisambhidā*: acumen with regard to the sense of the Dhamma and of matters in general, knowing how to explain various points in line with their proper meaning.

*b. Dhamma-paṭṭisambhidā*: acumen with regard to all mental qualities.

*c. Nirutti-paṭṭisambhidā*: acumen with regard to linguistic conventions. (This can include the ability to know the languages of living beings in general.)

*d. Paṭibhāṇa-paṭṭisambhidā*: acumen in speaking on the spur of the moment, knowing how to answer any question so as to clear up the doubts of the person asking (like the Venerable Nagasena).

This ends the discussion of the virtues of the four classes of people – called arahants – who have reached the ultimate quality, nibbāna. As for the essence of what it means to be an arahant, though, there is only one point – freedom from defilement: This is what it means to attain the Dhamma, the other virtues being simply adornment.

The three levels of Dhamma we have discussed are, like the Buddha, compared to jewels: There are many kinds of jewels to choose from, depending on how much wealth – discernment – we have.

All of the qualities we have mentioned so far, to put them briefly so as to be of use, come down to this: Practice so as to give rise to virtue, concentration, and discernment within yourself. Otherwise, you won't have a refuge or shelter. A person without the qualities that provide refuge and shelter is like a person without a home – a delinquent or a vagrant – who is bound to wander shiftlessly about. Such people are hollow inside, like a clock without any workings: Even though it has a face and hands, it can't tell anyone where it is, what time it is, or whether it's morning, noon, or night (i.e., such people forget that they are going to die).

People who aren't acquainted with the Dhamma within themselves are like people blind from birth: Even though they are born in the world of human beings, they don't know the light of the sun and moon that give brightness to human beings. They get no benefit from the light of the sun and moon or the light of fire; and being blind, they then go about proclaiming to those who can see, that there is no sun, no moon, and no brightness to the world. As a result, they mislead those whose eyes are already a little bleary. In other words, some groups say that the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha don't exist, that they were invented to fool the gullible.

Now, the Dhamma is something subtle and fine, like the fire-potential (*tejas*) that exists in the air or in various elements and that, if we have enough common sense, can be drawn out and put to use. But if we're fools, we can sit staring at a bamboo tube [a device for starting fire that works on the same principle as the diesel engine] from dawn to dusk without ever seeing fire at all. Anyone who believes that there is no Buddha, Dhamma, or Saṅgha, no series of paths or fruitions leading to nibbāna, no consciousness that experiences death and rebirth, is like the fool sitting and staring at the bamboo tube.

Here I would like to tell a story as an allegory of those who aren't acquainted with the Dhamma. There once was a man living in the woods who, with his five sons, started growing crops in a clearing about a mile from their home village. He built a small shack at the clearing and would often take his sons to stay there. One morning he started a fire in the shack and told his sons to look after the fire, for he was going out to hunt for food in the forest. 'If the fire goes out,' he told them, 'get some fire from my bamboo tube and start it up again.' Then he set out to search for food to feed his sons.

After he had left, his sons got so wrapped up in enjoying their play that when they finally took a look at the fire, they found that it was completely out. So they had the first son go get some fire to start it up again. The first son walked over and tried knocking on the bamboo tube but didn't see any fire. So they had the second son get some fire from the tube: He opened it up but didn't see any fire inside. All he saw were two bamboo chips but he didn't know what to do with them. So the third son came over for a look and, since he didn't see any fire, he took a knife to cut the tube in half but still didn't see any fire. The fourth son

went over and, seeing the two halves lying there, shaved them down into thin strips to find the fire in them but didn't see any fire at all.

Finally the fifth son went over to look for fire, but before he went he said to his brothers, 'What's the matter with you guys that you can't get any fire from the bamboo tube? What a bunch of fools you are! I'll go get it myself.' With that, he went to look at the bamboo tube and found it split into strips lying in pile. Realizing what his brothers had done, and thinking, 'What a bunch of hare-brains,' he reached for a mortar and pestle and ground up the bamboo strips to find the fire in them. By the time he ran out of strength, he had ground them into a powder, but he still hadn't found any fire. So he snuck off to play by himself.

Eventually, toward noon, the father returned from the forest and found that the fire had gone out. So he asked his sons about it, and they told him how they had looked for fire in the bamboo tube without finding any. 'Idiots,' he thought angrily to himself, 'they've taken my fire-starter and pounded it to bits. For that, I won't fix them any food. Let 'em starve!' As a result, the boys didn't get anything to eat the entire day.

Those of us who aren't acquainted with the brightness of the Dhamma – '*Dhammo padipo*' – lying within us, who don't believe that the Dhamma has value for ourselves and others, are lacking in discernment, like the boys looking for fire in the bamboo tube. Thus we bring about our own ruin in various ways, wasting our lives: born in darkness, living in darkness, dying in darkness, and then reborn in more darkness all over again. Even though goodness lies within us, we can't get any use from it and so we'll suffer for a long time to come, like the boys who ruined their father's fire-starter and so had to go without food.

The Dhamma lies within us, but we don't look for it. If we hope for goodness, whether on a low or a high level, we'll have to look here, inside, if we are to find what's truly good. But before we can know ourselves in this way, we first have to know – through study and practice – the principles taught by the Buddha.

Recorded Dhamma (*pariyatti dhamma*) is simply one of the symbols of the Buddha's teachings. The important point is to actualize the Dhamma through the complete practice of virtue, concentration, and discernment. This is an essential part of the religion, the part that forms the inner symbol of all those who practice rightly and well. Whether the religion will be good or bad, whether it will prosper or decline, depends on our practice, not on the recorded Dhamma, because the recorded Dhamma is merely a symbol. So if we aim at goodness, we should focus on developing our inner quality through the Dhamma of practice (*paṭipatti dhamma*). As for the main point of Buddhism, that's the Dhamma of attainment (*paṭivedha dhamma*), the transcendent quality: nibbāna.

### ***III. Saṅghaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi: I go to the Saṅgha for refuge.***

The word *Saṅgha*, if translated as a substantive, refers to those who have ordained and are wearing the yellow robe. Translated as a quality, it refers to all

people in general who have practiced correctly in line with the Buddha's teachings. Members of the monastic order, however, are of all sorts, and so we have two groups –

- A. *Sammuti-saṅgha*: the conventional Saṅgha.
- B. *Ariya-saṅgha*: the Noble Saṅgha.

Membership in the conventional Saṅgha is attained through consent of the Order, in a formal ceremony with witnesses, following the procedures set out in the Vinaya. Membership in the Noble Saṅgha is attained when the quality of transcendence (*lokuttara dhamma*) appears in one's heart as a result of one's own behavior and practice, with no formalities of any sort whatsoever. All Buddhists – whether formally ordained or not, no matter what their gender, color, or social position – can become members of this Saṅgha. This is termed being ordained by the Dhamma, or being self-ordained in a way that cannot be faulted.

To speak in terms of qualities, the qualities of transcendence, stable and sure, that appear in the hearts of those who practice – leading them solely to good destinations and closing off the four states of destitution (*apāya*) – are, taken together, called the Noble Saṅgha.

A. Members of the conventional Saṅgha, with regard to the way they conduct themselves, fall into four groups –

1. *Upajīvikā*: those who become ordained simply because they're looking for ways to make a living, without searching for any higher virtues to develop within themselves. They use the yellow robe as a means of livelihood, without any thought of following the threefold training of virtue, concentration, and discernment.

2. *Upakīlikā*: those who become ordained without any respect for the training, looking simply for pastimes for their own enjoyment – collecting plants, playing chess, gambling, buying lottery tickets, betting on horses – looking for gain in ways forbidden by the Vinaya, disobeying the words of the Buddha, disregarding the virtues he promulgated, undermining the religion.

3. *Upamuyuhikā*: those who are close-minded and misguided, unwilling to train themselves in heightened virtue, concentration, or discernment. Even though they may have some education and knowledge, they still keep themselves closed-minded, making excuses based on their teachers, the time, the place, and their accustomed beliefs and practices. Stuck where they are, such people are unwilling to change their ways so as to accord with the principles of the Dhamma.

4. *Upanissaraṇikā*: those who desire what's meritorious and skillful; who search for the true principles of the Dhamma and Vinaya; who set their hearts on studying with reverence and respect, and conduct themselves in line with what they have learned; who aim for the merit and skillfulness offered by Buddhism, for the path leading to release from suffering; who rightly follow the Buddha's teachings, i.e. –

- a. *Anūpavādo*: They don't berate others in inappropriate ways.

*b. Anūpaghāto:* They aren't vindictive or violent to others.

*c. Pāṭimokkhe ca saṅgho:* They stay well within the precepts of the Pāṭimokkha and don't disobey the training rules of the Vinaya – like good citizens, desired by the nation, who stay within the bounds of the government's laws. (If people don't keep within the laws of the land, it will lead only to turmoil, because people who have no bounds are like farmers who have no boundary markers and who will thus infringe on one another's property, giving rise to needless disputes and ill-feeling, serving no purpose whatsoever.)

*d. Mattaññūtā ca bhattasmiṃ:* They have a sense of moderation in searching for and using the four necessities of life. They understand how to make the best use of things – knowing what's beneficial and what's harmful, what is and what isn't of use to the body, considering things carefully before making use of them (in line with the principles of morality and the Buddha's teachings).

*e. Pantañca sayanāsanaṃ:* They favor quiet, secluded places to stay. To quote from the Canon, these include:

– *Arañṇagato vā:* going to a forest wilderness, far from human society, free from social interaction

– *Suñṇāgāragato vā:* or to uninhabited dwellings, in places far off the beaten track

– *Rukkhamūlagato vā:* or living under the shade of a tree, in a cave, or under an overhanging cliff face, so as to aid the heart in attaining concentration.

*f. Adhicitte ca āyogo:* They make a persistent effort, through the practice of concentration, to cleanse the heart, freeing it from such hindrances as sensual desire.

*Etam buddhāna-sāsanaṃ:* All of these factors are the teachings of the Buddhas.

*Na hi pabbājito parūpaghāti  
Samaṇo hoti paraṃ viheṭṭhayanto.*

How can a person who harms himself and others be a good monk?

These, then are the attributes of the Saṅgha. In broad terms, they come down to two sorts:

1. *Saṅgha-nimitta:* the symbol of having been ordained (the mode of dress, etc.).

2. *Guṇa-sampatti:* the inner qualifications – virtue and truth – of those worthy meditators who are held to be the field of merit for the world.

Those with the necessary resources – i.e., discernment – will obtain a good field. Whatever seed they plant will give a yield well worth the effort involved, just as an intelligent person who puts his savings in a safe national bank will protect his capital from loss and even earn a profit.

Just as a good rice field has four characteristics – the ground is level and even, the dike has a water gate that is easy to open and close, the soil is rich in nutrients, the rainfall comes at the proper season – in the same way, members of

the Saṅgha who are to be a field of merit for the world have to be endowed with the four following qualities:

1. The analogy of level, even ground refers to those monks who are free from the four forms of personal bias. Whatever they do in thought, word, and deed, they are free from:

*a. Chandāgati* – i.e., they don't act solely under the power of their own likes and inclinations;

*b. Dosāgati* – or under the power of ill will or anger towards others;

*c. Mohāgati* – or under the power of delusion;

*d. Bhayāgati* – or under the power of fear or apprehension of any sort whatsoever. They aim at what is right and true as their major concern, both in the presence of others and in private, keeping themselves always on a par with their principles.

2. As for the analogy of a water gate that is easy to open and close, 'closing' refers to exercising restraint so that evil doesn't arise within us. Restraint has four aspects –

*a. Pāṭimokkha-saṁvara-sīla*: staying within the bounds of the Pāṭimokkha.

*b. Indriya-saṁvara-sīla*: exercising restraint over our senses of sight, hearing, smell, taste, feeling, and ideation so as to keep the mind quiet, unagitated, and in good order.

*c. Ājīva-parisuddhi-sīla*: searching for the necessities of life – food, clothing, shelter, and medicine – only in ways that are proper.

*d. Paccaya-paccavekkhaṇa-parisuddhi-sīla*: considering the necessities of life before using them so as not to use them out of craving.

To exercise restraint in these ways is called 'closing.' 'Closing,' however, can be understood in another way, i.e., exercising restraint so that corruption doesn't arise in the three areas of our thoughts, words, and deeds.

a. To close or control our deeds means, in broad terms, not to kill living beings or to oppress or torment them in any way; not to steal the belongings of others; and not to engage in sexual misconduct (or in the sexual act) or to give rein to any sensual defilements. Even though such defilements may arise in the heart, we keep them under control. This is what it means to close our deeds.

b. To close our words means not to tell lies, either to others people's faces or behind their backs; not to speak divisively, i.e., in a way that would lead to a needless falling-out between people; not to speak coarsely or abusively, not cursing, swearing, or being vulgar; and not to engage in useless chatter, saying things that are of no real use to ourselves or our listeners. To be intent on restraining ourselves in this way is called closing off evil words so that they don't have a chance to arise.

c. To close off evil thoughts means:

– *Anabhijjhā-visama-lobha*: refraining from the greed that goes above and beyond our sphere and powers to the point where dissatisfaction defiles the mind.

– *Abyāpāda*: not storing up feelings of ill will to the point where strong anger takes over and we let envy and jealousy show,

– *Sammā-ditṭhi*: keeping our views correct in line with right principles, eliminating wrong views that arise from the mind’s being clouded and untrained – i.e., overpowered by ignorance and delusion – to the point of believing that there is no good or evil, and from there to deeply ingrained unskillful mental states. When we take care to ward off these unskillful mental qualities so that they can’t arise in our hearts, they will give way to Right View: seeing that there really is good, there really is evil; that virtue, generosity, and meditation really give results; that the paths and fruitions leading to nibbāna really exist. When we see things in this way, we have in effect closed off evil, preventing it from penetrating our hearts, just as rice farmers close their dikes to prevent salt water from flowing into their fields.

As for ‘opening,’ it refers to practicing the five forms of unselfishness –

*a. Āvāsāmacchariya*: not being possessive of the place over which we have control, such as our temple or monastery; not preventing good people from coming to stay. If people are pure in their behavior and able to impart what is good to us, we should give up our space to make room for them so that they can stay in comfort. Evil people, however, shouldn’t be allowed to infiltrate our group; and bad people who are already in the group should be expelled. This is how to behave with discernment in this area.

*b. Kulāmacchariya*: not being possessive of our families. On the external level, this refers to the families who support us. We don’t prevent them from making offerings to other individuals and we don’t prevent capable individuals from teaching and advising them. Some monks stand in the way of such interchanges, creating barriers with their thoughts, words, and deeds. Sometimes if their supporters make merit with other individuals, they even make reprisals, such as refusing to allow that family to make merit with their own groups or factions. These unskillful attitudes shouldn’t be allowed to arise in our hearts.

This is on the external level.

On the internal level, being possessive of our ‘family’ refers to the heart’s attachment to sensations and mental acts, which form the family line of unawakened people. We should abandon this attachment so that we can enter the lineage of the Noble Ones.

*c. Lābhāmacchariya*: not being possessive of the material gains we have attained through proper means, not regarding them as being our own. Material gains, as classified by the Vinaya, are of four sorts: food, clothing, shelter (lodgings and the items used in them, such as furniture, matting, etc.), and medicine. We should see that when people present us with offerings of this sort, they have abandoned an enemy – their own stinginess and selfishness – and have gained in merit and skillfulness through the power of their sacrifice. Anyone who receives such an offering and clings to it as really being his own is like a person who collects coconut pulp or sugar cane pulp from which others have already squeezed and drunk the juice. For this reason, people of wisdom and discernment aren’t possessive of their belongings and don’t really see them

as their own.. They are always willing to relinquish and share their gains – in proportion to the amount they have received – so that others can make use of them.

This is external relinquishment. As for internal relinquishment: Whereas we once ate as we liked, many times a day, we now eat less, only one meal a day. We use only one set of robes. We relinquish our comfortable lodgings and undertake the ascetic practice of living in the forest or under the shade of a tree. If we become ill, we search for medicine and treat our disease with moderation, in a way that doesn't create burdens for others. In other words, we relinquish ourselves as an offering to the religion by putting it into practice. This is classed as the internal relinquishment of material gain through the power of our practice and conduct.

*d. Vaṇṇāmacchariya:* not being possessive of our 'color' (*vaṇṇa*). 'Vaṇṇa,' here, has been interpreted in two senses. In one sense, it refers to social caste or class. For example, the ruling class, the religious elite, property owners, and laborers are held to be unequal in status, and the members of one group are unwilling to let other groups mix with theirs. If such mixing occurs, they regard it as something base and disgraceful and so they continually put up barriers to prevent it from happening. In this sense, we can infer that we shouldn't make distinctions based on faction, nationality, color, or race, because the Buddha taught that a person's worth comes not from his or her birth, but from the goodness of his or her own actions; or, as we say, 'Those who do good will meet with good, those who do evil will meet with evil.' For example, we at present worship and respect the Buddha even though he wasn't Thai as we are. We respect him through the power of his goodness. If we were to be close-minded and nationalistic, we Thai's wouldn't have any religion to worship at all aside from the religion of spirits and ghosts.

The second sense of 'vaṇṇa' refers to the complexion of our skin. This, too, we cling to, unwilling to sacrifice it for what is meritorious and skillful. We hesitate to observe the precepts, to meditate, or to undertake the ascetic practices for fear that we'll spoil our looks and complexion.

*e. Dhammāmacchariya:* not being possessive of the Buddha's teachings we have learned. Possessiveness in this case can mean not wanting to teach unless we are reimbursed, not wanting to preach unless there is an offering, or complaining if the offering is small.

On another level, being possessive of the dhamma can refer to holding on to the unskillful qualities (*akusala-dhamma*) within us; being unwilling to rid ourselves of such evils as greed, anger, delusion, pride, conceit, or any of the other fermentations of defilement; clinging to these things without searching for the techniques, called the Path, for relinquishing them, i.e.:

- the precepts of the Pāṭimokkha that, if we observe them carefully, can eliminate the common defilements arising through our words and deeds;
- the practice of concentration that, when developed in our hearts, can eliminate intermediate defilements, i.e., such hindrances as sensual desire;

– the discernment that, when it arises within us, can eliminate such subtle defilements from our hearts as *avijjā* – mental darkness; *taṇhā* – craving; and *upādāna* – clinging to false assumptions that defile the mind.

When we develop these five forms of unselfishness, we can be classed as open – and our eyes will be open to perceiving the highest quality, the transcendent.

3. The analogy of soil rich in nutrients refers to our putting four qualities into practice –

*a. Mettā*: goodwill, friendliness, hoping for our own happiness and well-being, and for that of all other living beings.

*b. Karuṇā*: compassion for ourselves and others, which induces us to be helpful in various ways.

*c. Muditā*: appreciation for ourselves for having cultivated goodness; appreciation (not feeling jealousy) for the goodness cultivated by others.

*d. Upekkhā*: equanimity in cases beyond our control. For instance, when death has come to a person we know, we see that it's beyond our help and so we keep our hearts neutral, not allowing feelings of sadness or gladness to arise.

For these four qualities to arise in fully mature form, they have to appear in our thoughts, words, and deeds. Whatever we may do in thought, word, or deed should not be done through the power of anger. We should regard anger as an ogre – and when anger takes over, our body becomes an ogre's tool: his bludgeon. To see the drawbacks of anger in this way can give rise to goodwill in thought, word, and deed, extending without partiality to all people and living beings throughout the world.

Even with our enemies we should try to develop these same thoughts of goodwill, by looking for their good side, in one way or another, instead of looking just at their bad side, which can cause hatred to invade and consume our hearts. Anger is a fire that can't burn other people; it burns only ourselves. This is why we should develop goodwill within our hearts. The power of goodwill brings good to everyone – just as food that contains the nutrients needed by people brings health and contentment to all who eat it; or as fertilizer with the proper nutrients can cause plants and trees to grow, flower, give fruit, and so be of use to people and other living beings. Goodwill is thus a form of goodness that can be classed as a nutrient. (Goodwill is what cools the fevers of the world.)

4. The analogy of seasonable rain refers to our establishing ourselves in the four bases of success (*iddhipāda*) –

*a. Chanda*: feeling a love and an affinity for goodness and virtue as much as for life, or more.

*b. Viriya*: being persistent, audacious, and persevering in cultivating goodness within ourselves.

*c. Citta*: being intent on whatever we set about to do.

*d. Vimāṃsā*: using appropriate attention, being discriminating and circumspect at all times in whatever we set about to do.

These four qualities can lead to two kinds of success: *iddhiriddhi* – success through the power of thought; and *puññariddhi* – success that comes on its own. Both of these forms of success, on the level of the world or the Dhamma, have to be based on the four qualities mentioned above. These four qualities are like preservatives: Whoever is saturated with them won't go sour or stale. And when we're free from going stale, our work is bound not to stagnate and so is sure to succeed.

Another comparison: These four qualities are *sacca-kamma* – actions that give rise to truth, achieving our purposes. Those who bring these qualities into themselves will become true people. Truth can be compared to salt: If we try to keep food, like vegetables or fish, without salting it, it soon turns rotten and wormy, making it unfit for human consumption. But if we salt it, it can keep for a long time. A good example of this is our Lord Buddha, whose actions gave rise to truth and who thus was able to establish the religion so as to benefit people at large. Even the body he left behind still serves a purpose for human and divine beings. For instance, his bones, which have become relics, are still with us even though he gained total nibbāna a long time ago. As for his teachings, they have lasted for more than 2,500 years. And he himself is deathless, i.e., he has entered total nibbāna. All of this was achieved by means of truth, i.e., the four bases of success.

Those of us who have no truth, though, are like unsalted fish or meat, and are bound to go wormy. The worms, here, refer to our various defilements and are of three main species: The first species is composed of passion, aversion, and delusion; these feed on us from our feet to our waists. The second species – sensual desire, ill-will, sloth & torpor, restlessness & anxiety, and uncertainty – latch on and bore into us from our waists to our necks. And the third species – the fermentations of sensuality, states of becoming, views, and ignorance (cloudy, unclear knowledge) – eats us up whole: ears, eyes, nose, mouth, body, and mind. Whoever is all worm-eaten like this is classed as a person gone rotten and stale, who hasn't reached any qualities of substance. And for this reason, the bones of such a person after death are no match for the bones of chickens and pigs, for no one wants them. If the bones and meat of such a person were put up for sale, no one would buy. And furthermore, such a person will have to come back as an angry demon, lolling its tongue and rolling its eyes, to frighten its children and grandchildren.

So whoever develops the four qualities mentioned above will reach deathlessness – *amata-dhamma* – which is like a crystalline shower that comes from distilling away all impurities, just as rain water, which is distilled from the sea, rises into the air and falls back on the earth, nourishing the grasses, crops, and trees, giving refreshment to people and other living beings.

These, then, are some of the characteristics of those who form the field of merit for the world both on the mundane and on the transcendent levels, who conduct themselves rightly in keeping with the phrase in the chant of the virtues of the Saṅgha:

*Puññakkhettaṃ lokassāti*  
The field of merit for the world.

Now we will discuss the chant of the virtues of the Saṅgha further as a path to practice, because the virtues of the Saṅgha are open to all Buddhists in general, without excluding any individual, race, or social class at all. Whoever puts these principles into practice is capable of becoming a member of the Noble Saṅgha within the heart, without having to go through the formalities of the Vinaya. In other words, this is a community and a state of worthiness in the area of the Dhamma open to all who put the following principles into practice –

1. *Supaṭipanno*: being a person whose conduct is good. ‘Good conduct’ refers to seven principles –

a. We should gather frequently – for the daily chanting services, to hear the Dhamma explained, to seek out wise people, and to join whole-heartedly in the work of the group. This is external gathering. What is really important, though, is internal gathering, i.e., collecting the mind in concentration, which is the gathering point of all that is good and forms the basic skill for bringing the factors of the Path together (*magga-samaṅgi*).

b. When a meeting of the group disperses, we should all disperse at the same time and not act at variance with the group. On the internal level, we should all as a group disperse evil from our thoughts, words, and deeds.

c. We should neither establish new rules that were not established by the Buddha nor abandon those that were. For example, don’t make a practice of doing things the Buddha declared to be worthless, evil, or wrong; develop within yourself the things he taught to be good, right, and worthwhile.

d. Be respectful of your elders, parents, teachers, etc.

e. Whatever you do in thought, word, or deed, don’t act under the influence of craving, anger, or delusion.

f. Make a point of searching out virtuous people.

g. Take pleasure in solitude.

This is what is meant by good conduct.

2. *Uju-paṭipanno*: being a person whose conduct is straightforward, firmly established in the threefold training – virtue, concentration, and discernment – which leads straight to nibbāna; being fair and just, unswayed by any of the four forms of personal bias. This is what is meant by straightforward conduct.

3. *Ñāya-paṭipanno*: being a person whose conduct leads to higher knowledge. This refers to following fifteen procedures (*caraṇa-dhamma*) –

a. *Pāṭimokkha-saṁvara*: keeping restrained within the precepts of the Pāṭimokkha, respecting the training rules of the Vinaya. (For laypeople, this means observing the five or eight precepts.)

b. *Indriya-saṁvara*: keeping watch over your senses of sight, hearing, smell, taste, feeling, and ideation so as to keep the mind properly collected and at peace.

c. *Bhojane mattaññutā*: knowing moderation in the requisites of life, i.e., eating only just enough food.

*d. Jāgariyānuyyoga*: being persistent in cleansing the mind so that it is pure and bright, not allowing lapses in mindfulness or alertness to occur.

*e. Saddhā*: conviction, i.e., being convinced of the truth of good and evil, of the paths and their fruitions; having conviction in people who merit it.

*f. Hiri*: feeling shame at the thought of doing evil, not doing evil either in public or in private.

*g. Ottappa*: having a sense of compunction at the thought of doing evil.

*h. Bahu-sacca*: being well-educated and always willing to listen and learn.

*i. Viriya*: being persistent, unflagging, and courageous in performing your duties.

*j. Sati*: being mindful before doing anything in thought, word, or deed.

*k. Paññā*: developing discernment as to what should and should not be done, as to what is and isn't beneficial.

*l. Paṭhama-jhāna*: the first jhāna, composed of five factors – directed thought, evaluation, rapture, pleasure, and singleness of preoccupation. (Jhāna means to be absorbed in or focused on a single object or preoccupation, as when we deal with the breath.)

*m. Duttiya-jhāna*: the second jhāna, composed of three factors – rapture, pleasure, and singleness of preoccupation.

*n. Tatiya-jhāna*: the third jhāna, composed of two factors – pleasure and singleness of preoccupation.

*o. Catuttha-jhāna*: the fourth jhāna, composed of two factors – equanimity and pure mindfulness, which is the single preoccupation of your concentration.

This is what is meant by conduct leading to higher knowledge.

Here we will discuss how to give rise to the first jhāna.

Directed thought: Think of the breath until you can recognize it both as it comes in and as it goes out.

Singleness of preoccupation: Let the mind become one, at rest with the breath, not straying away to other objects. Watch over your thoughts so that they deal only with the breath until the breath becomes comfortable.

Evaluation: Focus exclusively on issues connected with the breath and acquaint yourself with how to let this comfortable breath-sensation spread and co-ordinate with the other breath-sensations in the body. Let these breath-sensations spread until they all merge. Once the body has benefited from the breath, feelings of pain will grow calm. The body will be filled with good breath energy.

For jhāna to arise, these three factors have to be brought to bear on the same breath sensation. This breath sensation can lead all the way to the fourth jhāna, the level of refinement depending on the act of focusing through the power of mindfulness: Sometimes the focus is broad, sometimes narrow, in accordance with the different factors in the different jhānas. But to be really beneficial, you should let the breath spread as broadly as possible, being constantly aware throughout the body of the various aspects of the breath. You will then get excellent results from your practice of jhāna. You might even gain liberating

insight on this level, because the first jhāna is what constitutes threshold concentration (*upacāra samadhi*).

If you want to go on to fixed penetration (*appanā samadhi*), you should keep practicing this level until you are adept, i.e., adept at fixing the mind on a single object and keeping it there, adept at adjusting and expanding the object, and adept at staying firmly in place. When you want your concentration to have energy, make the breath light and refined – but keep your mindfulness broad. Otherwise, the mind might go into *arūpa jhāna*, where it has no sense of the form of the body; or you might sit absolutely still, without any awareness of the body at all, while the mind pays attention to another area, such as simple awareness, completely disregarding the body or sitting unconscious, like a log. This is *bāhira-jhāna*, concentration outside of the Buddha's teachings, incapable of giving rise to liberating insight.

So when you begin, you should develop the three above-mentioned factors as much as possible, and the mind will then be able to go on to the second jhāna. When you fix the mind on the breath repeatedly using these three beginning factors, they give rise to two more factors:

Rapture: a sense of fullness and refreshment of body and mind, going straight to the heart, independent of all else.

Pleasure: a sense of ease arising from the body's being still and undisturbed (*kāya-passaddhi*), and from the mind's being at rest on its own, placid, serene, and undistracted (*citta-passaddhi*).

The factors of the first jhāna, then, are of two sorts: cause and result. The causes are directed thought, evaluation, and singleness of preoccupation; the results, rapture and pleasure.

As for the second jhāna, with its three factors of rapture, pleasure, and singleness of preoccupation: This refers to the state of mind that has tasted the results coming from the first jhāna. The sense of fullness becomes more powerful, as does the sense of pleasure, allowing the mind to abandon its thinking and evaluating, so that the singleness of the preoccupation takes the lead from here on in. Make the mind still in the refined sense of the breath. Body and mind are full and at ease; the mind is more firmly implanted in its object than before. After a while, as you keep focusing in, the sense of fullness and pleasure begins to expand and contract. Focus the mind down to a more refined level and you will enter the third jhāna.

The third jhāna has two factors – pleasure and singleness of preoccupation: The mind is solitary; the body, solitary and still. The breath is refined and broad, with a white glow like cotton-wool throughout the body, stilling all painful feelings in body and mind. Not a single hindrance (*nivaraṇa*) arises to interfere. The four properties – earth, water, fire, and wind – are at peace with one another in every part. You could almost say that they're pure throughout the entire body. The mind is completely still – steady, solid, and sure – reaching oneness in a solitary sense of ease. Body and mind are in solitude. Even if you're with a group of people, you feel as if you were alone. The mind is strong, expansive, and large. Mindfulness is expansive – spreading throughout the body, focused exclusively on the present, not affected by any perceptions of past or future. The

breath gives rise to an energy that is pure white. The mind has power. The focus is strong, and the light brilliant. Energy is strong, so that you are no longer concerned with your sense of pleasure, which dilates somewhat. This causes the mind to focus on into the fourth jhāna.

The fourth jhāna has two factors – equanimity and singleness of preoccupation (or mindfulness). The breath energy is still, with no ripples or gaps. The properties of the body are undisturbed. As for the mind, it's undisturbed with regard to all three time periods: uninvolved with the past, uninvolved with the future, undisturbed by the present. When the mind stays with this undisturbed sense of equanimity, this is the true meaning of 'singleness of preoccupation.' The breath is at peace, the body at peace in every part. There is no need to use the in-and-out breath. The breath energy has reached saturation point.

The four properties (*dhātu*) are equal, all with the same characteristics. The mind is completely at peace, with a brilliance streaming in all directions. The brilliance of the breath at peace reaches full strength. The brilliance of the mind arises from the power of mindfulness focused on all four of the great frames of reference: body, feelings, mind, and mental qualities. The question of their being four doesn't arise, for in this mental moment they coalesce in perfect unity. The brilliance of the mind and of the body, which arises from the power of their solitary stillness, shines as *jāgariyānuyoga*, the purifying inner fire (*tapas*) that can dispel darkness thoroughly. The bright light of the mind reaches full strength. The purity of the different parts of the breath energy keeps the other properties in good order. The body is completely at peace, like a factory at rest. In other words, you don't have to use the in-and-out breath. The body develops potency; the mind, resilient power. When these reach saturation point, if you then want to give rise to knowledge, shift your awareness so that it dilates slightly, and the important skills that arise from the power of the mind – such as the Eight Skills – will appear, i.e.:

1. *Vipassanā-ñāṇa*: clear insight into the properties, aggregates, and sense media.
2. *Manomayiddhi*: the ability to achieve one's aims through the power of thought.
3. *Iddhiiddhi*: the ability to display a variety of supra-normal powers.
4. *Dibba-sota*: clairaudience, the ability to hear far distant sounds.
5. *Cetopariya-ñāṇa*: the ability to know the mental states of other people.
6. *Pubbe-nivāsānussati-ñāṇa*: the ability to remember past lives. (This is a basis for proving whether death is followed by annihilation or rebirth, and whether or not there really are other levels of existence.)
7. *Dibba-cakkhu*: clairvoyance, the inner eye that arises from the power of the mind, relying to some extent on the optic nerves.
8. *Āsavakkhaya-ñāṇa*: knowing how to eliminate the fermentations of defilement as they relate to your various forms of knowledge.

If you want to give rise to supernormal powers, formulate an intention at that point, and it will appear openly, so that ordinary people will be able to see it.

Both of these aspects – knowledge and power – can lead to mastery on the level of the world and of the Dhamma. The properties in the body acquire potency; the mind becomes a potent center of consciousness. This is the science of the mind on an advanced level, giving rise to an advanced form of Buddhist learning: *lokavidū*, wide-ranging knowledge of the cosmos.

To develop the factors discussed here is to warrant the name, *ñāya-paṭipanno*, one whose conduct leads to higher knowledge.

(The moment in which the enemies of the body – impure properties – disband and disappear is termed *saṅkhata-lakkhaṇa-nirodha*, conditioned disbanding. When the enemies of the mind – i.e., the five hindrances – disappear completely, leaving the mind radiant and clear, that is termed *bhujissaka-nirodha*, disbanding in a state of dependency.)

4. *Sāmīci-paṭipanno*: being a person whose conduct is masterful. This refers to our conduct in developing two qualities: tranquility and insight.

a. The practice of tranquility means stilling the mind in a single preoccupation, free from the five hindrances, so as to attain the four levels of *rūpa-jhāna*.

b. The practice of insight means seeing clearly and truly into the nature of all fabrications (*saṅkhāra*), e.g., seeing that they are inconstant, stressful, and not-self; gaining discernment that sees distinctly in terms of the four Noble Truths; seeing fabrications from both sides, i.e., the side that is inconstant, stressful, and not-self, and the side that is constant, pleasant, and self; giving rise to the purity of knowledge and vision termed *gotarabhū-ñāṇa*, escaping from the assumption that things are either constant or inconstant; knowing both the side that arises and disbands, as well as the side that doesn't arise and doesn't disband, without making assumptions about or being attached to either side. Theories, views, and conceits disappear. The mind doesn't fasten onto anything at all: past, present, or future. This is termed *asesa-virāga-nirodha*, utter disbanding and dispassion. This is the way of insight.

Insight, analyzed in detail in terms of the Dhamma in line with the conventions of the sages of the past, means knowledge of the four Noble Truths:

– *Dukkha*: mental and physical stress, the result of being overcome by the power of birth, aging, illness, death, and defilement.

– *Samudaya*: the cause of stress – i.e., *taṇhā*, craving or thirst – which includes *kāma-taṇhā*, insatiable craving for sensual pleasures; *bhava-taṇhā*, the desire to be or have certain states of becoming; and *vibhava-taṇhā*, the desire not to be or have certain states of becoming.

– *Nirodha*: the disbanding of stress; the extinguishing of the fires of defilement.

– *Magga*: the path of practice that puts an end to craving, the cause of stress.

All four of these Noble Truths already exist in the world, but ordinarily are hard to perceive because they show us only their images or reflections. On this level, we can't yet see them for what they really are. But for the Buddha to know them, he had to start out with the reflections that appear, before he was able to trace them back to the real thing. This is why they are termed Noble Truths:

They are the possessions of noble people; only those who search and explore can know them. Thus, the Noble Truths have two aspects: their first aspect, which is the way they are found in the experience of ordinary people in general; and their second aspect, which is more subtle and can be known only by people of wisdom who explore in the area of the heart and mind.

An example of the four Truths on the ordinary level, as experienced by ordinary people: Physical discomfort, such as illness or disease, can be called the truth of stress. Knowing enough to buy the right medicine, or being a doctor who knows the medicine for curing that particular kind of disease, is the truth of the path. As the symptoms of the disease disband and disappear, that is termed conditioned disbanding. When the disease is cured, that is the truth of disbanding. If, however, we suffer from a disease, such as a wound, but don't know how to treat it – simply wanting it to heal and using whatever medicine we can lay our hands on, without any knowledge (this is termed craving and ignorance) – the wound will only worsen, for the medicine we take isn't right for the disease. This is the truth of the cause of stress.

If we want to go deeper than the ordinary level, we have to practice correctly in line with the way of the Path, developing our virtue, concentration, and discernment, before we will be able to perceive the four Truths on the noble level.

The heartwood or essence of the Dhamma, by its nature, lies mixed with its outer bark. If we don't have the right knowledge and skill, we won't get very much use from the Dhamma. Whatever benefits we *do* get will be only on the mundane level. We can make a comparison with diamond or gold ore buried in the ground: If a person doesn't have enough knowledge to extract the ore, he will get only the traces that come flowing out in spring water or that adhere to rocks along the surface of the ground. These will earn him only a meager profit, which won't be enough to insure his livelihood. A person with knowledge and skill, though, can use the gold to insure his livelihood without having to search for any other occupations, but he'll have to follow the traces down into the earth until he meets with the real thing, i.e. the genuine ore. Even just a single hunk – if it's large and of high quality, weighing a ton – will enable him to rest secure for the rest of his life. In the same way, those who are wise in Buddhism see stress as a noble treasure and so go digging down into stress; they see the cause of stress as a noble treasure and so dig down into it; they see the Path as a noble treasure; they see disbanding and nibbāna as noble treasures and so dig on down until they meet with the genuine ore. Only then can they be called noble sages.

Those of us who are dauntless enough to unearth our inner resources in this way will be able to use those resources to protect ourselves throughout time, gaining release from the cycle of rebirth, the jail for imprisoning foolish and ignorant people. We who like to explore in general should be glad that we've come across a good mine with genuine ore whose traces lie scattered about for us to see. If we don't disregard the things we see, we'll meet the four Truths mentioned above.

If we were to summarize the four Noble Truths briefly, we could do so as follows: The objects or preoccupations of the mind that arise and disappear are

the truth of stress. The mental act that deludedly enters into and takes possession of those objects is the truth of the cause of stress. The mental act that focuses in on those objects and examines them as they arise and disappear is the truth of the Path; and the mental act that lets go of those objects as they arise and disappear is the truth of disbanding, or release – i.e., that which knows the reality that doesn't arise and doesn't disappear.

These, then, are the four Noble Truths. Those who see these four Truths directly for themselves will give rise to the noble path and fruition termed 'stream-entry.' Such people are a field of merit for the world: worthy of respect, worthy of welcome, worthy of offerings and veneration.

Whoever possesses the qualities mentioned here qualifies rightly as a member of the Saṅgha in line with the Dhamma and Vinaya taught by the Buddha, and may be called, *sāmicī-paṭipanno*, one whose conduct is masterful, reaching the apex of the mundane level and becoming transcendent.

B. Now we will discuss the second main heading, the Noble Saṅgha, the family of the Noble Ones, which may be joined by virtue of having developed one's inner qualities, with no need to go through the formalities of the Vinaya. The Noble Saṅgha, like the conventional Saṅgha, is composed of four groups:

1. *Stream-enterers*: those who have reached the beginning stage of the current leading to nibbāna. At most they will have to be reborn only seven more times. They have developed enough tranquility and insight for the Path to converge in a single mental instant, enabling them to gain true insight into all phenomena – mundane and transcendent – as they really are. When they see in this way, they have cut three of the fetters (*saṅyojana*) that keep living beings under the spell of the world. The fetters they have cut absolutely are –

a. *Sakkāya-ditṭhi*: the view that the body – together with its properties, aggregates, and sense media – belongs to the self. Stream-enterers, unlike ordinary run-of-the-mill people, don't hold that these things are the self or belong to the self. They see them simply as common property – that we didn't bring them when we came and won't take them when we go – and that they arise simply through kamma.

b. *Vicikicchā*: doubt and uncertainty about the practices one is following. Stream-enterers have no such doubts, because they have reached the quality attained by the Buddha.

c. *Silabbata-parāmāsa*: attachment to customs or traditions that are held to be good in this way or that. Stream-enterers are not attached to any external practices dealing with actions or manners.

These three fetters, stream-enterers have cut absolutely, once and for all. They have attained the noble quality of having closed off completely the four states of deprivation. In other words, they are destined never again to be born in hell, on the level of the angry demons, the level of the hungry ghosts, or the level of common animals. This is what it means to close off all four states of deprivation.

2. *Once-returners*: those who have gained the second level of Awakening, who will attain nibbāna after being born once more in the world. Once-returners have cut three fetters, like stream-enterers, but have also reduced the amount of desire, anger, and delusion in their hearts. (They know how to keep the mind within bounds.)

3. *Non-returners*: those who have awakened to the third level and who will never again return to the human world. After they die they will be born in the Brahma worlds on the levels of the Pure Abodes, there to attain nibbāna. They have absolutely abandoned five of the fetters –

a. *Sakkāya-diṭṭhi*.

b. *Vicikicchā*.

c. *Sīlabbata-parāmāsa*.

d. *Kāma-rāga*: passion and delight caused by the power of sensual desires and sensual objects.

e. *Paṭigha*: irritation and displeasure caused by the power of anger.

4. *Arahants*: those who have awakened to the ultimate level of the four Noble Truths and have reached the quality of deathlessness, free from all the fermentations of defilement; whose ignorance, craving, attachments, and kamma have ended. Arahants have abandoned their fetters by means of the factors of the highest of the noble paths. The fetters they have abandoned are ten:

a. *Sakkāya-diṭṭhi*.

b. *Vicikicchā*.

c. *Sīlabbata-parāmāsa*.

d. *Kāma-rāga*.

e. *Paṭigha*.

f. *Rūpa-rāga*: passion for the sense of form that can act as the object of *rūpa jhāna*.

g. *Arūpa-rāga*: passion for formless phenomena, such as the feeling of pleasure that comes from seclusion.

h. *Māna*: conceiving or construing oneself to be this or that.

i. *Uddhacca*: restlessness and distraction, being carried away with one's thoughts. The thoughts on this level deal with the activity of discernment, which is something good, but they go out of bounds.

j. *Avijjā*: ignorance, i.e., not recognizing stress, its cause, its disbanding, and the path to its disbanding – in short, not being acquainted with the fabricated phenomena (*saṅkhata dhamma*) that exist within each of us; not being acquainted with the unfabricated (*asaṅkhata dhamma*), which is a genuine property, existing naturally. This, briefly, is what *avijjā* means.

Another meaning for *avijjā* is not being acquainted with the way we are – e.g., not recognizing our perceptions of the past and thus becoming immersed in them; not recognizing our perceptions of the future; not recognizing the present, which is the important aspect of all physical and mental phenomena. Thus,

delusion with regard to all three time periods is called *avijjā*: counterfeit knowledge, falling short of the four genuine Truths.

These ten fetters, arahants – both men and women – have cut absolutely, freeing themselves from every sort of bond or domination, so that their hearts are brilliant and dazzling, like the full moon unobscured by clouds. This is *sāmīci-paṭipanno* – one whose conduct is masterful – on the transcendent level.

The four groups mentioned here are termed the Ariya Saṅgha, the Noble Community, which can be found only in Buddhism. Therefore, all Buddhists who daily pay homage to the Saṅgha should make themselves aware of what the Saṅgha is, of how genuine or counterfeit the members of the Saṅgha are. Otherwise, our respect will be blind and misguided, ignorant of what the Buddha is like, what the Dhamma is like, and what the Saṅgha is like. We should use our judgment and reason to be selective so that we can help one another look after the state of the religion, bringing it into proper line with the principles of the Buddha's teachings.

The Saṅgha can be compared to a tree: Some members are like the heartwood, others are like the sapwood, others are like the outer bark, and still others are like parasitic creepers. Another popular analogy is to compare the Saṅgha to a jewel. Now, there are many kinds of jewels, just as there are many parts to a tree: artificial gems, zircons, rubies, amethysts, sapphires, emeralds, and diamonds. Just as all of these are called jewels, and are all of differing value, so it is with the members of the Saṅgha. Whoever is rich in discernment will obtain a valuable jewel as an adornment. Whoever is poor in discernment will end up with nothing but artificial gems or bits of gravel: Some people believe that all who wear the yellow robe are alike. They 'make donations to the yellow robe,' or 'pay respect to the yellow robe,' or 'make donations to the virtuous'... Thus I ask that all Buddhists make a point of learning where the gems of the religion that we as a nation revere may be found.

A person who doesn't know what the Saṅgha is, is like a child who doesn't know his family and relatives – who doesn't know who his father is, who his mother is, who his elder brothers and sisters are. When this is the case, he has no one to rely on. If he tries to rely on others, he can do so only as long as he has money in his pockets. As soon as he runs out of money, he's in for trouble: His friends and companions are sure to act as if they don't recognize him; and he can't turn to his family and relatives because he doesn't know where they are. So in the end he'll meet with nothing but suffering.

This is why we're taught that, as long as we still have life, we shouldn't rest complacent. We should urgently make the virtues of the Saṅgha our guardians – because our friend, the body, can be relied on only as long as it doesn't die. And when the time comes, who will care for us aside from our guardians, the virtues of the Saṅgha?

We shouldn't waste our time engrossed simply with the life of the body for, as far as I can see, there's nothing to the life of the body but eating and then sleeping, sleeping and then eating again. If we let ourselves get stuck simply on

the level of sleeping and eating, we're eventually headed for trouble. This can be illustrated with a story:

Once in a village by the seaside, there came a time of unbalance in the natural elements, and large numbers of the livestock – the water buffaloes – died of the plague. The men of the village, fearing that the disease would spread, took the buffalo carcasses and threw them into the sea. As the carcasses floated away from shore, a flock of crows came to feed on them for many days. Each day, when the crows had eaten their fill, they would fly back to spend the night in the trees by the shore; and then would fly out the following dawn to continue eating. As days passed, and the carcasses floated further and further out to the deep sea, some of the crows – seeing the hardships in flying back to shore – decided to spend the night floating on the carcasses; others of the flock, though, didn't mind the hardships and continued flying back to shore every evening.

Finally, when the carcasses had floated so far out to sea that flying back and forth was no longer possible, the flock decided to abandon that source of food and to search for a new source of food on land. One of the crows, though, had stayed with the carcasses; when he saw that his fellows were no longer coming to claim a share of the food, he became overjoyed, thinking that the food he had would last him a long time. He became so engrossed in his eating that he never thought of looking back to shore. As the carcasses went floating further and further out, swarms of fish came from below to devour them until there was nothing left to eat. Finally, the remains of the carcasses sank deep into the sea; and at that point, the crow realized that the time had come to fly back to shore. With this in mind, he flew to the north, but didn't see land. He flew to the south, to the east and west, but didn't see land. Finally, he ran out of strength and could fly no further, and so lowered his wings and dropped into the sea, where he became food for the fishes.

This is human life. If we let ourselves become engrossed only with eating and sleeping and mundane pleasures, without searching for virtue – i.e., if we don't practice the virtues of the Saṅgha as we've been taught – we're sure to reap the rewards – suffering – just like the crow who had to fall to his death in the sea. This story is about us: The sea stands for the world, the flood of rebirth; the carcasses of the water buffaloes who had died of the plague stand for the body; the trees on the shore stand for monasteries and the Dhamma, and the crows stand for the heart – i.e., sometimes we feel like going to a monastery to practice the Dhamma and sometimes we don't.

The virtues of the Saṅgha are subtle, deep, and hard to perceive. If we don't have knowledge in ourselves, we won't be able to see them, just as a mute person doesn't know how to speak his native tongue.

Here I would like to tell another story to illustrate what it means not to know the virtues of the Saṅgha. Once there was a mute person who made his living by playing a conch shell trumpet. Now, the way he played the conch shell was to make it sound like human voices or animal calls. When he had perfected his skill, he wandered about the cities and country towns, playing his conch. One day he went to play in a village deep in the countryside. As he was about to reach the village, he stopped to rest under the shade of a tree and picked up his conch to

practice for a moment. Within minutes a swarm of people, hearing the sound of the conch, came bursting wide-eyed from the village to see what it was. They saw the mute man sitting under the tree and so asked him, 'What was that beautiful sound we heard just now?' The mute man pointed to the conch shell lying nearby. The people, thinking that they had heard the cry of the conch, ran over to tap on it to make it cry again, but it didn't make a sound. Some of them picked it up and tried shaking it, but still no sound, so they put it back down. Others turned it over to see exactly where its cry came from, but no matter what they did, the sound of the conch wouldn't come out. So they ran back to the mute person.

The mute person didn't know what to say, but he could tell from their actions that they wanted to know what made the sound of the conch come out in such a variety of calls, so he pointed to his mouth. The villagers ran to take a look. They had him open his mouth and looked up and down inside, but didn't see how it could be made to sound. So the mute man flickered his tongue for them to see. With this, they realized that the sound came from the mute man's tongue; and so they tried flickering their own tongues, but no beautiful sounds came out. So they ran back to the mute man, who blew air out of his mouth, meaning that the sound came from the breath. They tried blowing air from their own mouths, but still no beautiful sounds. Finally, the mute man reached for the conch, put it to his lips – and out came the beautiful sounds: the sounds of people crying, people laughing, people wailing and mourning, the sounds of birds, mice, and forest beasts.

So it is with us: If we don't know how to train ourselves so as to attain the virtues of the Saṅgha, we won't know how beneficial to us the Saṅgha can be. We'll become uncivilized savages, not knowing whether the Saṅgha is good or bad, and we'll end up like the villagers who didn't know where the sound of the conch came from.

This story doesn't refer to anything distant: The mute man, producing various sounds from his conch shell, stands for preaching monks. For example, sometimes they try to be correct, proper, and principled in their preaching; sometimes they preach like animals, i.e., using a song-like voice or cracking jokes that go beyond the bounds of the Dhamma and Vinaya. In this way they are like the man blowing the conch. As for the villagers who came running wide-eyed to hear the sound of the conch, they stand for Buddhist laypeople who don't understand the virtues of the Saṅgha and so are destined not to find the Saṅgha, just as the villagers couldn't find the sound of the conch. When this is the case, they will simply shell out money to hear the sound of conch trumpets, without any thought of the practices taught by the Buddha. Monks will be deluded into blowing conch shells for their living, without any thought of the qualities of the Saṅgha; and so our religion will degenerate day by day, becoming ultimately a theater or playhouse for the world.

This has been an extended discussion of the Triple Gem. If we were to put it briefly, there wouldn't be a great deal to say. We've kept the discussion drawn-out in this way so as to show the general usefulness of the Triple Gem for those who revere it. If you want to go for refuge in the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha

in a way that will reach their genuine benefits, then you should gather their main points into yourself, *training yourself so as to give rise to the virtues of the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha in your heart*. This is where the value of the Triple Gem lies.

## SUMMARY

The gist of our discussion of the Triple Gem comes down simply to this:

A. *'Buddha'* can be divided into a number of levels. The *'Buddha'* of his physical representatives refers to Buddha images, stūpas, and places worthy of veneration such as his birthplace, the place of his Awakening, the place where he delivered his first sermon, and the place where he entered total nibbāna, which at present lie within the boundaries of India and Nepal. All of these things qualify on the physical level as symbols of the Buddha for those who revere them, but they may be disqualified if the people who revere them lack the necessary inner qualifications.

Take Buddha images as an example: You should understand Buddha images as having three characteristic types –

1. those inhabited by angry demons;
2. those inhabited by devas;
3. those that people of virtue have invested with the potency of the mind – these can be termed, *'inhabited by the Dhamma.'*

In other words, Buddha images can be beneficial or harmful depending on how they are used by those who revere them. Even people who use them as charms in committing robbery, casting spells, or performing black magic may get results because of the power of their conviction. But if we can be selective and use these images in ways that are right, the potency they contain will benefit us, bringing us blessings and protecting us from danger. Thus, the symbols of the Buddha can function in various ways. There is much more to this topic, but if we were to discuss it here, it would draw things out even further. These images can either qualify or be disqualified as symbols of the Buddha, depending on the people who revere them, but the images in themselves are neutral.

The important point for people who hope for true welfare, though, is to invest themselves with the qualities that serve on the inner level as symbols of reverence for the Buddha. These qualities are three –

1. *Sati*: wakefulness.
2. *Paññā*: the intuitive discernment and cognitive skill that come from concentrating the mind.
3. *Vimutti*: purity and release from mental defilement: This is the essence of *Buddha-ratanam*, the gem of the Buddha.

B. *Dhamma*: Good Dhamma is of three sorts –

1. *Pariyatti-dhamma*: This refers to studying and memorizing passages from the Discourses, the Vinaya, and the Abhidhamma, which qualify on the physical level as a symbol of the Dhamma or of the Buddhist religion. But this, too, can either qualify or be disqualified as a symbol. Some people, for example, use passages from the Dhamma in committing robbery or casting spells. For instance, they repeat the chant of the virtues of the Dhamma or the phrase, '*Namo buddhāya*,' three times or seven times, and then commit thievery or highway robbery, believing that they have made themselves invincible. Or when casting spells, they repeat the phrase, '*Na-mettā, mo-karuṇā, da-love me, I won't go, you come, omasavāha*' – they say that this makes a woman really fall for a man. *This sort of thing disqualifies the phrase, even though its original meaning may have been something good.*

But if we revere the Dhamma and make use of it through the power of our conviction, memorizing passages of Pali for the sake of what is good and pure, and then putting them into practice, they will give rise to merit and skillfulness. For example, if we repeat the phrase, '*Dhammaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi* (I go to the Dhamma for refuge),' or '*Namo buddhāya* (Homage to the Buddha),' with heartfelt conviction, giving rise to a sense of joy, this mental state can then serve to protect us from certain kinds of accidents and harm. We may reap real benefits from the phrase we repeat. This is something that people who have respect for the Dhamma should investigate carefully.

These passages, then, can qualify as symbols of the Dhamma – or be disqualified, if we don't know their true purposes.

2. *Paṭipatti-dhamma*: This refers to behaving sincerely in line with the Buddha's teachings:

a. *Sīla*: putting our thoughts, words, and deeds in order.

b. *Samādhi*: keeping the mind firmly intent in the four jhānas, free from the mental hindrances.

3. *Paṭivedha-dhamma*: This refers to disbanding defilement completely, releasing the mind from all suffering and stress. This qualifies as the true treasure of the Dhamma.

All three of the levels mentioned here form the inner qualifications of those who truly revere and follow the Dhamma.

C. *Saṅgha*: If we translate this as a substantive, it refers to those who shave their heads and wear the yellow robe as a sign of having been ordained. These people can qualify on the external level as symbols of the Saṅgha or they may be disqualified. To qualify, they have to meet three criteria:

1. *Vatthu-sampatti*: The individual to be ordained as a monk has to possess the proper characteristics in line with the principles of the Vinaya.

2. *Saṅgha-sampatti*: The monks who gather to witness the ordination constitute a legitimate quorum in line with the Vinaya.

3. *Simā-sampatti*: The territory in which the ordination is held has had its boundaries properly defined.

When an individual ordains in line with these criteria, he qualifies as a symbol of the Saṅgha. But viewed from another angle, if the individual has met these criteria and becomes a monk but doesn't behave in line with the Dhamma and Vinaya – disobeying the training rules established by the Buddha, committing major and minor offenses with no sense of shame – he becomes disqualified on the personal level, just as a Buddha image that has been properly consecrated but is then put to improper uses by evil or low-minded people is bound to lead to harm. A monk with no sense of shame or compunction is like a Buddha image inhabited by an angry demon. Normally, when an angry demon takes possession of a person, it reveals itself by its behavior. For example, when some angry demons take possession, they like to run around naked, harassing other people. If a person has no sense of shame or compunction, it's as if he were possessed by an angry demon. In other words, if he doesn't have any moral restraint, it's as if he lacked the clothing needed to hide his nakedness. And when this is the case, he is disqualified as a symbol of the Saṅgha.

A person who meets the three external qualifications mentioned above has to behave in line with the inner virtues of the Saṅgha –

- 1.a. *Cāga*: relinquishing external and internal enemies (worries and concerns).
- b. *Sīla*: keeping one's words and deeds in proper order.

To have these two qualities is to qualify as a human being (*supaṭipanno*).

2.a. *Hiri*: having a sense of shame at the thought of doing evil; not daring to do evil in public or private.

b. *Ottappa*: having a sense of compunction at the thought of the results of doing evil.

If a monk has these qualities (termed *deva-dhamma*, the qualities of heavenly beings), it's as if he were inhabited by a deva (*uju-paṭipanno*).

3. *Samādhi*: steadying the mind so as to reach the first jhāna and then developing it up to the fourth jhāna, making it radiant and free from the mental hindrances. If a monk does this, it's as if he were inhabited by a Brahma, for he has the inner qualifications of a Brahma (*ñāya-paṭipanno*).

4. *Paññā, vijjā, vimutti*: gaining release from the mundane level, abandoning the three fetters beginning with self-identification, reaching the Dhamma of the Buddha, attaining the state where we are guaranteed by the Buddha as being upright, certain, honest, and sincere toward the Dhamma and Vinaya; gaining Awakening following his example, becoming a reliable member of the Saṅgha. Such people are termed *ariya sotapanna* – Noble Ones who have reached the stream – and deserve to be called *visuddhi-deva*, devas through purity, whose virtues are higher than those of human beings, devas, Indras, or Brahmas. Even though such people are still subject to death and rebirth, they are not like other human beings. The pure aspect of their heart will never again become defiled. Thus they deserve to be called, in a partial sense, devas through purity (*sāmīci-paṭipanno*).

All four of these qualities form the inner qualifications of the Saṅgha.

Speaking in terms of these inner qualifications, every person can become a member of the Saṅgha. But if we don't develop these qualities within ourselves and then take refuge in the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha only on the external level without practicing, how will we get the full benefits? We're taught that if we can't depend on ourselves, how can we hope to depend on others? For example, if an evil person breaks the law, commits robbery, and then asks the government to give him help, you can rest assured that the only help the government will give him will be to build a home for him to live in discomfort – a jail. In the same way, if we don't practice in line with the virtues of the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha, how can we go around taking refuge in the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha? The Buddha taught:

*Attāhi attano nātho, ko hi nātho paro siyā.*

'The self is its own refuge, for who else could be refuge?'

So we should develop the inner qualifications of the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha within ourselves. Then we will belong to the company of the Buddha's followers. If we belong to the religion as laywomen, we're called *upāsikā*. If we belong as laymen, we're called *upāsaka*. If we observe the ten precepts and are endowed with the virtues of the Saṅgha, we're termed *sāmaṇera*. If we take a vow to join the community of those who fully observe the 227 precepts, we're termed *bhikkhu*. When we join the company of the Buddha's followers (*Buddha-parisā*) in this way, all people in general who practice and revere the teachings will benefit – just as when we meet the qualifications of a good citizen as set out by the policies of the government: If we are trained and educated to be good, we are bound to help the nation progress and prosper. But if we don't view ourselves as part of the nation and don't think of making a living to support ourselves, and instead simply go around looking for pleasure or for help from others, the results are bound to be bad.

Therefore, we as Buddhists have to study and practice before we can be Buddhists of virtue and value. We will then reap rewards in the visible present. And even if we are no longer able to live in this world, then when our bodies die and we head for another world, we have a good destination awaiting us, as in the verse from the Mahāsamaya Sutta:

*Ye keci buddhaṃ saraṇaṃ gatāse*

*Na te gamissantī apāya-bhūminī.*

*Pahāya mānusaṃ dehaṃ*

*Deva-kāyaṃ paripūressantī.*

'Those who reach the refuge of the Buddha (in their own hearts, with purity) will close off all four of the lower realms (such as hell). When they leave this life they are bound for a good bourn (heaven), there to fill the ranks of the gods.'

*Buddhaṃ dhammaṃ saṅghaṃ jīvitāṃ yāva-nibbānaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi.*

'I go to the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha as my life and refuge till reaching nibbāna.'

## GLOSSARY

*Abhidhamma*: The third of the three collections forming the Pali Canon, composed of systematic treatises based on lists of categories drawn from the Buddha's teachings.

*Apāya*: States of deprivation, i.e., the four lower realms of existence: rebirth in hell, as a hungry ghost, as an angry demon, or as a common animal. In Buddhism, none of these states are regarded as eternal conditions.

*Āyatana*: Sense medium. The six inner sense media are the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and intellect. The six outer sense media are their respective objects.

*Brahmā*: An inhabitant of the higher heavens of form and formlessness, a position earned – but not forever – through the cultivation of virtue and meditative absorption, along with the attitudes of limitless goodwill, compassion, appreciation, and equanimity.

*Gotarabhū-ñāṇa*: Change of lineage knowledge – the glimpse of nibbāna that changes one from an ordinary, run-of-the-mill person to a Noble One.

*Jhāna*: Absorption in a single object or preoccupation. *Rūpa-jhāna* refers to absorption in a physical sensation; *arūpa-jhāna*, to absorption in a mental notion or state.

*Kamma*: Acts of intention that result in states of being and birth.

*Khandha*: Aggregate – the component parts of sensory perception; physical and mental phenomena as they are directly experienced: *rūpa* – sensations, sense data; *vedanā* – feelings of pleasure, pain, and neither-pleasure-nor-pain that result from the mind's savoring of its objects; *saññā* – labels, perceptions, concepts, allusions; *saṅkhāra* thought-fabrications (see below); *viññāṇa* – sensory consciousness or cognizance. In Ajaan Lee's writings, this last khandha refers to the act of attention that 'spotlights' objects so as to know them distinctly and pass judgment on them.

*Nibbāna*: Liberation; the unbinding of the mind from greed, anger, and delusion; from sensations and mental acts. As this term is also used to refer to the extinguishing of a fire, it carries the connotations of stilling, cooling, and peace. (According to the physics taught at the time of the Buddha, the property of fire exists in a latent state to a greater or lesser degree in all objects. When activated, it seizes and sticks to its fuel. When extinguished, it becomes unbound.)

*Nivarāṇa*: Hindrance; one of five mental qualities that hinder the mind from attaining concentration and discernment: sensual desire, ill will, sloth & torpor, restlessness & anxiety, and uncertainty.

*Pali*: The name of the most ancient recension of the Buddhist scriptures now extant; and – by extension – of the language in which it was composed.

*Pāṭimokkha*: The basic code of monastic rules, composed of 227 rules for monks and 311 rules for nuns.

*Vinaya*: The first of the three collections forming the Pali Canon, dealing with the disciplinary rules of the monastic order. The Buddha's own name for the religion he founded was, 'this Dhamma-Vinaya' – this Doctrine and Discipline.