

Lay Buddhist
Practice

The Shrine Room, Uposatha Day &
Rains Residence

Bhikkhu Khantipālo

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A practical manual for lay Buddhists covering devotional practices (chanting, setting up a shrine room, etc.), uposatha day observances, lay precepts, and basic meditation techniques.

This manual is written for lay Buddhist whose home is far away from Buddhist lands, or even from Buddhist temples and societies, but even where Buddhists are fortunate enough to be near a Buddhist center, they will still benefit from these practices.

ISBN: 978-955-24-0382-8

Buddhist Publication Society Inc.

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by
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P.O. Box 61,
54, Sangharaja Mawatha,
Kandy, Sri Lanka.

First published: 1974
Reprinted: 1982, 2011

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National Library and Documentation Services Board -
Cataloguing-In-Publication Data

<p>Bhikkhu Khantipālo Lay Buddhist Practice: Bhikkhu Khantipālo. - Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 2011. BP 431.- 96pp.; 18.5cm. ISBN 978-955-24-0382-8 i. 294.34 DDC 23 ii. Title i. Buddhism - Doctrines and Practices.</p>

ISBN 978-955-24-0382-8

Printed by
Ruchira Offset Printers
Kandy—Sri Lanka

Preface

In the following pages I have tried to write about those things that a lay Buddhist can do even though his home is far away from Buddhist lands, or even from Buddhist temples and societies. I have had to consider the various daily and periodic events of the Buddhist calendar and retain here only those items which can be practised by lay Buddhists without access to bhikkhus, monasteries, temples, stupas, and so on. Out of the rich traditions found in Buddhist countries, only three subjects have been dealt with: the daily service chanted in homage of the Three Treasures with some recollections and meditation; the Uposatha days with the Eight Precepts; and the Rains-residence of three months. Most has been said here about the first of these as it is very important to have some regular daily Dhamma-practice.

Even where isolated Buddhists are fortunate enough to be near some Buddhist centre, they will still benefit from these Buddhist practices, all of which are based on similar methods used in the East.

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Introduction

These days there are many books on Buddhism, some reliable and some speculative, so that a Buddhist living in a country where his religion is quite newly introduced is likely to have some difficulty in discerning what is really the teaching of the Buddha. However, this difficulty can be overcome by the study of the original sources, the Pāli Canon, and need not be a great hindrance. Of course, if the student can gain the help of some well learned and practised Buddhist he will understand Dhamma more quickly and thoroughly.

He will also be able to practise more easily. For it is a great difficulty, even if one has a good acquaintance with the Suttas (the Discourses of the Buddha), to know *how* to practise their teaching. This is more a problem for Buddhists who have never been to any Buddhist country and who have had to acquire all their knowledge about the Dhamma from books. One hears people like this say, “I am a Buddhist but what should I practise?” It is not enough to answer this question with more or less abstract categories, saying for instance, “Well,

practise the Eightfold Path!” After all, it is not so easy to practise the Dhamma in an alien environment where bhikkhus (Buddhist monks), vihāras (temple-monasteries) and stupas (monuments containing relics, also called cetiyas, pagodas or dagobas) are not found.

In Buddhist lands where these and other signs of the Dhamma are to be seen, the lay person has many aids to practice and is not without help when difficulties arise. But elsewhere the layman must rely upon books. Leaving aside those which are misleading (frequently written by western people who have never thoroughly trained themselves in any Buddhist tradition) and if even the most authentic sources alone are studied, still the mind tends to be selective of the materials available so that it is possible to get one-sided views. Now it can be a good corrective to stay in a Buddhist country for some time and get to know how things are done but not everyone has the opportunity to do this. Here then I should like to touch upon a few common ways of Buddhist practice. I shall try to be as general as possible in these matters so that my descriptions are not peculiar to the Buddhist country that I know best, Siam, but may be common to many Buddhist traditions.

Daily Practice

The Shrine Room

It is best to start with practices which are common to all Buddhist traditions for every-day observance. It is usual, among the more wealthy lay Buddhists, to have a small room set aside for their daily devotions, or at least a curtained-off recess. A few might even have a small separate building. Even poor people, with little space in their houses, have a special shelf high on the wall on which a Buddha-image or picture is placed together with the usual offerings (see below).

Nowhere in the Buddhist world are Buddha-images treated as ornaments for a living room. And a Buddha-image is always given the highest “seat” in the room; that is, the Buddha-image is displayed in the place of honour. In the shrine room this will be on the highest part of a shrine. If on a special shelf (often carved and decorated with colour and gold), then that shelf is usually high on the wall and has nothing above it. The fact that one places the symbol of one’s Teacher in the highest place shows one’s high regard for him. For this reason alone it is obvious that Buddha-images should not be placed on

mantelpieces and miscellaneous furniture. Also, if the shrine occupies part of the room used for sleeping (this would be contrary to some Buddhist traditions), it should be near the head of the bed, not at its foot. This is because that part of the body which houses most of the organs of sense and is the physical base of much mental activity—that is, the head—the topmost part of a person, should be directed to what one esteems as the highest, in this case, the symbol of the Buddha. But feet, however useful, are easily dirtied and become ill-smelling quickly and should never be pointed at any person who is respected and certainly not at a shrine, whether Buddha-image or stupa.

Perhaps some may object to such matters. One may be able to hear some people growling, “Buddhism has nothing to do with such things!” But this attitude ignores the fact that the Dhamma is relevant to all circumstances; also that fine conduct was praised by the Buddha, not ignored by him. So such things do matter if one is going to have objects of reverence such as Buddha-images. Whenever we think that such matters are not worth troubling over then we are just careless and unmindful. A Buddha-image should be treated respectfully and it is a good way of training oneself to treat the Buddha-image as one would Gotama the Buddha himself. Reverence (*apacāyana*) is a part of the Dhamma which should not be neglected for it helps in the overcoming of conceit. Buddhists of all traditions have shrines with images, paintings, stupas and so on, just because

reverence is an essential part of Buddhist training. From practices based on reverence are born humility in oneself and harmonious relationships with others and the Buddha tells us that four qualities increase for those who are respectful and honour those who are senior to them: “Long life and beauty, happiness and strength” (Dhp 109). Who does not want them?

To digress a little here on the objection raised above. This might be made by a person of rational temperament who had been able to read some translations from the Pāli Canon but who had never met with Buddhist teachers or been to Buddhist countries. From his reading such a person might get the impression that Theravada is coolly logical, in fact a sort of eastern humanism. But this shows the selectiveness of the mind since all through the Suttas there are examples of reverence and devotion. It is true that the Buddha did not encourage his followers to give full reign to their emotions with unrestrained outbursts (in contrast to Hindu and other teachers who have emphasized that *bhakti* (devotion to a god) is all). However, he did lay down three forms of reverence for bhikkhus: wearing the robe with the right shoulder bared, kneeling down, and holding the palms of the hands together in the gesture of reverence. Prostration at the feet of the Buddha is also mentioned many times in the Suttas. Lay people are free to show their reverence in any suitable way and people of those times were recorded in the Suttas as expressing their reverence variously: “So the

Kālāmas of Kesaputta approached the Lord. Having approached him, some prostrated towards the Lord and sat down at one side; some greeted the Lord politely, and having conversed in a friendly and courteous way, sat down to one side; some raising their hands in añjali to the Lord sat down to one side, some called out their names and those of their clans and sat down to one side; while others saying nothing sat down to one side.”¹ No doubt these expressions depended upon their confidence and serenity (*saddhā-pasāda*). Down to the present time, Theravada tradition in any Buddhist country is rich in the various forms of reverence accorded to Buddha-images, stupas and to the Sangha. So a negative view as the one mentioned is neither an advantage for practice nor in agreement with tradition.

But other people too might have such ideas; for instance some who have read about the iconoclastic attitude of some Zen masters, or of the *siddhas* who were the last partly-Buddhist teachers in India before the extinction of Buddhism there. There are remarks and actions recorded of some of the former teachers which might lead one to expect that whatever else Zen is, surely reverence plays no part in it. Such people are bound to be a little startled by the emphasis on reverence and the large devotional element present in

1. Kālāma Sutta, Aṅguttara-nikāya III 65 (PTS edition). See *A Criterion of True Religion*, Mahamakut Press, Bangkok, and *The Kalama Sutta*, Wheel No. 8, BPS, Kandy.

the daily training of anyone, monastic or lay, who stays in a Zen training temple. The *siddhas* too spoke against rituals but that was because they were faced with a great overgrowth of Buddhist ritualistic devotion gradually accumulated through centuries of Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna. In matters of devotion, as in other things, one should remember that the Buddha himself taught “Dhamma in the middle,” with the rejection of extremes. Confidence (*saddhā*) should be balanced with wisdom (*paññā*), but one-sided practice will not lead to great fruits.

Another sort of objection which has been raised is that the forms of respect in Buddhist tradition are specially Asiatic and not suitable for Buddhists in other countries. One hears of calls for a peculiarly British or American Buddhism divested of “Asiatic trimmings.” Perhaps the various non-Indian peoples to whom Buddhism has spread also raised such objections when Buddhist tradition contrasted with their own established cultures. However that may have been, the Dhamma requires some time before it puts its roots down in any culture and before one can even begin to imagine western forms of Buddhism, westerners who have long trained in the Sangha and become learned and serene in their hearts are necessary. The priority in Buddhism is on properly trained people, not on arguments as to exterior forms.

Now, to return to the shrine room. Lay people will find it most useful in the morning and evening,

and perhaps on some days when more time can be given to the cultivation of calm and insight. The usual course of practice taught for lay people in Buddhist countries is that they should practise giving (*dāna*) according to their faith, and as far as their circumstances allow, make an effort to keep the precepts (*sīla*) pure, and as far as they are able so develop the mind in meditation (*bhāvanā*). That is to say, those who are less interested in Dhamma practice should at least make an effort to be generous. If they give nothing, or very little when more could be given, they are making little or no effort to go against the worldly stream of craving. Some who cultivate generosity may not be very good at keeping some of the precepts but they are practising a valuable part of Dhamma. And it is reckoned much more practical to be open-handed and devoted to the Buddha than it is merely to have a lot of unpractised book-learning. Next will come people who not only make an effort to give generously but also try to keep the precepts. They try to conform their actions to what agrees with the Five Precepts and perhaps on special occasions undertake Eight Precepts as well, a subject to be discussed below. Finally, there are those who are able to practise more than *dāna* and *sīla* and try to cultivate their minds every day through meditation. Now the shrine-room is the place where at least the last two of these three Dhamma-practices may be undertaken.

It should be a quiet place and one which is screened or curtained off from the sight of people not interested in Dhamma. It is desirable to have some such place apart from ordinary living rooms, devoted only to Dhamma-practice and where the furnishings will remind one only of Dhamma. Though these may be quite elaborate in Buddhist countries, really nothing is needed which is difficult to obtain. Probably the most difficult, and perhaps expensive, is the Buddha-image. Failing to obtain that, an inspiring picture of the Buddha may be used. Or if one cannot be found then a good reproduction of some famous stupa could be one's focus. Whatever it is, with its beauty it should evoke harmony and peace. If there is an image then one requires a low table to place it on so that the Buddha-image is just a little higher than one's head when kneeling down. So it will be an advantage if one can kneel down on a soft mat on the floor and dispense with chairs. Once kneeling, it is easy to seat oneself after offerings and recollections in meditation posture. The table upon which the Buddha-image is placed could be covered with a new cloth, perhaps something beautiful in colour and texture, for beauty used with restraint, is an aid to devotion. In front of the Buddha-table another and lower one might be used for the offerings.

The Offerings

Apart from the Buddha-image in the place of honour, one may have other Buddhist objects around or on the shrine, such as scroll-paintings, Buddhist symbols such as the lotus-bud, wheel of Dhamma or the Bodhi-leaf, or miniature stupas, and so on. But three things are certainly needed on the shrine for making the usual offerings: candlesticks (lamps for oil, etc., in some traditions), an incense burner and vases or trays for flowers.

In Asian countries one may see many other things offered: food, water, drinks, fruit, etc. The idea behind this kind of offering is gratitude to the Teacher, and the consideration that one should not partake of good things without first having offered something, symbolically, to Lord Buddha. The word “offering” rather suggests that one expects those things to be “accepted” but of course the Buddha having attained Nibbāna is beyond acceptance and rejection. The Pāli word for these things makes this matter clearer: *sakkāra* is that which should be *done properly* and means firstly, *honour* and *hospitality* given to guests and so by extension, to a symbol of one’s Teacher.

Regarding the incense-burner, though various patterns are used in the East, the cleanest method is to part fill an open-mouthed bowl with clean sand and to place this on a saucer or other flat vessel. This should collect most of the ash. Some Buddhist

traditions do not use vases but—as in Sri Lanka—arrange the flowers in patterns on trays or platters. This method, of course, requires time, while the flowers quickly demonstrate their impermanence.

People quite often ask why these three things in particular are offered. The offering of flowers is a bridge to the contemplation of the body's impermanence. An ancient Sinhalese Pāli composition may be translated like this:

These flowers, bright and beautiful,
 fragrant and good-smelling, handsome and well-
 formed—
 soon indeed discoloured, ill-smelling and ugly
 they become.
 This very body, beautiful, fragrant and well-
 formed—
 soon indeed discoloured, ill-smelling and ugly it
 becomes.
 This body of mine too is of the same nature,
 will become like this, and has not escaped from
 this.

Candles or lights are lit to symbolize the light of Dhamma which one should find in one's own heart, driving out the darkness of the defilements there. In the Dhammapada (verse 387) there is a suitable verse for recitation while making this offering:

The sun is bright by day,
 the moon lights up the night,
 armoured shines the warrior,

contemplative, the brāhmaṇa,
but all the day and night-time too
resplendent does the Buddha shine.

Incense having a good smell is lighted to remind one that the Dhamma-light can only be found with the aid of good moral conduct (*sīla*) which has been so many times praised by the Buddha, as in these Dhammapada verses (56, 54, 55):

Slight is this perfume
of *tagara* and sandalwood,
best the perfume of the virtuous
blowing even to the devas.

The perfume of flowers does not go against the
wind,
neither that of sandalwood, jasmine, or *tagara*:
but the perfume of the virtuous does go against
the wind.

The good man suffuses all directions,

Sandalwood or *tagara*,
lotus or the jasmine great—
of these perfumes various,
virtue's perfume is unexcelled.

If these offerings are made with mindfulness of their meaning then they are not without good results.² Also, they act as objects for focusing the mind, which in the morning may still be sleepy, or in the evening may be distracted by the events of the day. These offerings lead one to concentrate the mind when

reciting the Refuges and precepts, the recollections and during meditation. So we can see that these actions agree with that quality of the Dhamma called “leading inward” (*oṇanayiko*). However, before we come to these aspects of practice a few words should be said on the traditional gestures of respect.

2. Perhaps at this point someone who has read the discourses of the Buddha might object, “But the Buddha before his Parinibbāna said, ‘Ānanda, the twin *sāla* trees are quite covered with blossoms though it is not the season. They scatter and sprinkle and strew themselves on the Perfect One’s body out of veneration for him. And heavenly Mandāra flowers and heavenly sandalwood powder fall from the sky and are scattered and sprinkled and strewed over the Perfect One’s body out of veneration for him. But this is not how a Perfect One is honoured, respected, revered, venerated or revered: rather it is the bhikkhu or bhikkhunī, or the man or woman lay-follower, who lives according to Dhamma, who enters upon the proper way, who walks in the Dhamma that honours, respects, reveres and venerates a Perfect One with the highest veneration of all. Therefore, Ānanda, train thus: ‘We will live in the way of the Dhamma, entering upon the proper way, and walking in the Dhamma.’” (Ven. Nāṇamoli’s translation)

There is no doubt that the practice of giving (*dāna*), moral conduct (*sīla*), meditation (*samādhi*) and wisdom (*paññā*) are the best way of honouring the Buddha—they are called the *pūja* of practice (*paṭipatti-pūja*), but offerings and chanting are found useful by many people as it stimulates practice. It is only when *sakkāra-pūja*, the *pūja* with material offerings, supplants *paṭipatti-pūja* that there is the danger that peoples’ “Buddhism” becomes mere ceremonials. In time, these tend to become complex, like a strangling vine overgrowing the majestic tree of the Buddhāsāna.

Gestures of Respect

Dhamma is the way for training mind, speech and body. But the Buddha dhamma is sometimes regarded in a way which is too intellectual and theoretical so that there is a danger that it is not practised as a way of training. To help with the training of the body there are various gestures which are expressions of one's confidence in and reverence for the Three Treasures. These actions, when performed with due mindfulness, are wholesome kamma made by way of the body. Repeated frequently they become habitual bodily kamma and it is good to have the habit of reverence as part of one's character. The Buddha, soon after his Enlightenment, thought that to live without reverence was not suitable, so he looked around with the divine eye to find some teacher under whom he could live, revering him and his teachings. But he found no teacher superior to himself, nor any teaching superior to the Dhamma which he had discovered. But out of reverence for that Dhamma he decided to make the Dhamma his Teacher and to live revering Dhamma. We who are his followers should follow in his footsteps and live with reverence for those three aspects of Enlightenment: Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha.

The gestures used for this are mainly two: respectful salutation with the hands (*añjalikamma*),³ and the five-limb prostration (*pañc'āṅga-vandana*).⁴

The first of these, which may be remembered as “*añjali*” as there is no satisfactory English equivalent, is made by bringing the palms of the hands together, and raising them to the region of the heart or higher, according to circumstances. For instance, in the shrine room after kneeling down in front of the Buddha image, one makes *añjali* before offering flowers, lights and incense. And as the Teacher was the highest in the world and one to go beyond the world, so one respects him by placing one’s hand in *añjali* to the forehead. But while chanting, the hands are held in *añjali* at heart level. This action and others described here, should be done with mindfulness and therefore gracefully. And one should be careful to see that exaggerated and impetuous movements are

3. *Añjali*, in many Asiatic lands, is the common form of greeting, just as shaking hands is in the west. The latter custom is said to have been derived from the need to show that one had no kind of weapon in one’s right hand, while *añjali* perhaps derives from a gentle attitude towards other people. This respect becomes reverence when *añjali* is made to religious teachers, and so by extension to the objects symbolizing the Teacher of gods and men (the Buddha), such as images and stupas. In the Buddhasāsana it does not have the significance—that of prayer—given to it in western religion.

4. This is not “surrender,” as such an action might be in a “devotion-only” religion, nor of course is it an abject debasement of oneself, a sort of fawning of favours, since Buddhists do not approach their shrines with such ideas. And of course it is not “bowing down to idols.” It is rather the bowing down of one’s own idol—of self-pride, to Enlightenment.

avoided. As we remarked before, the Dhamma does not encourage unrestrained expressions of emotion; rather, with its aid, one endeavours to calm one's heart.

After all these preliminary remarks, we have just got into our shrine room, knelt down, made *añjali* and offered the three offerings. Now there are flowers placed in their vases or upon some offering tray, candles or lamps burning brightly and a blue column of incense smoke rising to the ceiling. It is time to pay one's respects with the whole body to the Teacher. When afterwards one says "*namo tassa ...*" that word "*namo*" (homage) comes from the root *nam* meaning "to bend." So now one bends oneself, one's mind and body, down and acknowledges that the Buddha was indeed the Perfectly Enlightened One and that one's own understanding of Dhamma is insignificant. In the kneeling position, one's hands in *añjali* are raised to the forehead and then lowered to the floor so that the whole forearm to the elbow is on the ground, the elbow touching the knee. The hands, palms down, are four to six inches apart with just enough room for the forehead to be brought to the ground between them. Feet are still as for the kneeling position and the knees are about a foot apart. This is called the prostration with the five limbs, that is the forehead, the forearms, and the knees. This prostration is made three times, the first time to the Buddha, the second to the Dhamma, and the third to the Noble Sangha.

An ancient tradition from Thailand makes this more explicit as it adds a Pāli formula to be chanted before each of the prostrations. Before the first, one may chant:

*Araham sammāsambuddho bhagavā
Buddham bhagavantam abhivādemī.*

The Arahant, the Buddha perfected by himself,
the Exalted One.

I bow low before the Exalted Buddha.

Before the second prostration:

*Svākkhāto bhagavatā dhammo
Dhammam namassāmi.*

The Dhamma well-expounded by the Exalted
One.

I bow low before the Dhamma.

And before the last one:

*Supatīpanno bhagavato sāvakaṅgho
saṅgham namāmi.*

The Sangha of the Exalted One's disciples who
have practised well.

I bow low before the Sangha.

Some people feel that this prostration is “foreign” and not at all important. They say that it may discourage people from the practice of Dhamma if their first sight of it is so alien a custom. As there are a few points to discuss here another digression must be made. Prostration in this way, or similar

ways which may be more complicated (as in Chinese and Tibetan traditions) do not seem “foreign” at all when seen in a Buddhist country. There they are just the traditional ways of paying respect and western people, even some non-Buddhists, seldom have any difficulties. In these days when there are so many Asian religious and cultural movements in western countries, a practice of this sort loses its strangeness. Certainly it is a practice which any able-bodied Buddhist may do in the seclusion of his shrine room and not feel embarrassed but at public meetings where non-Buddhists may be present it is better perhaps to restrict one’s courtesies to the *añjali* and a simple bow. It is well to consider, whatever one’s beliefs about this practice, that it is a long-established way of showing respect in every Buddhist tradition, both in the Sangha and among lay people. It is part of the common inheritance of all Buddhists in Asia, and practices of this sort may be expected to spread in time to new Buddhists in other parts of the world with the increase in the number of Buddhist temples, images, stupas, and above all, with the gradual establishment of the Sangha in those countries.

Formula for Revering the Buddha

Though most of one’s devotions are made in English (etc.), it may be good to retain this short sentence in Pāli—*Namo tassa bhagavato arahato Sammā-sambuddhassa*. It is very ancient and found several times in the Suttas.

Here is one example of its use:

Thus have I heard: At one time the Lord was staying near Sāvattthī in the Jeta Grove at Anāthapiṇḍika’s monastery. Now at that time the brahmin Jāṇussoṇi was leaving Sāvattthī early in the day in an all-white carriage (drawn by four white) mares. The brahmin Jāṇussoṇi saw the wanderer Pilotika coming in the distance and seeing him he spoke thus to the wanderer Pilotika: “Now where is the revered Vacchāyana (Pilotika’s clan-name) coming from so early in the day?”

“Sir, I am coming from the presence of the Samaṇa Gotama.”

“What do you think about this, Vacchāyana? Has the Samaṇa Gotama lucidity of wisdom? Do you think him wise?”

“But who am I, sir, that I should know whether the Samaṇa Gotama has lucidity of wisdom? Surely only one like Him could know whether the Samaṇa Gotama has lucidity of wisdom.”

“Undoubtedly it is with lofty praise that the revered Vacchāyana praises the Samaṇa Gotama.”

“But who am I, sir, that I should praise the Samaṇa Gotama? Praised by the praised is the revered Gotama, chief among devas and men ...”

When this had been said, Jāṇussoṇi the brahmin got down from his all-white carriage

(drawn by four white) mares, and having arranged his upper cloth over one (his left) shoulder, having bowed down to the Lord three times with his hands in *añjali*, he uttered these inspired words: “*Namo tassa Bhagavato Arabato Sammā-sambuddhassa! Namō tassa Bhagavato Arabato Sammā-sambuddhassa! Namō tassa Bhagavato Arabato Sammā-sambuddhassa!*” (MN 27)⁵

Evidently this sentence expressive of praise and devotion was quite widely known, as several lay people, some Buddhists and others not, some brahmins and at least one king, uttered these inspired words. So when today we chant these words, it is a sound that rings back through the ages to the Buddha-time. We may chant as the brahmin did:

Namo tassa bhagavato arabato Sammā-sambuddhassa

three times in Pāli while recollecting its meaning silently, or use may be made of a method of chanting which translates this formula, interspersing the Pāli with English, like this:

5. Translated by Dr. I. B. Horner in *Middle Length Sayings* (P.T.S.) Vol. I. p. 220, 222.

*Namo tassa bhagavato*⁶

I (we) wish to revere with body, speech and
mind that Lord apportioning Dhamma

Arabato

that One far from defilements

Sammā-sambuddhassa

that One Perfectly Enlightened by himself.

(Repeat the Pāli and English three times. This is according to an old Thai method of chanting, frequently heard today in that country's schools.)

These three epithets of Gotama the Buddha express the three great qualities of Enlightenment. *Bhagavato* shows the Great Compassion (*mahākaruṇā*) of the Buddha and this we should recollect first, as loving-kindness and compassion is the necessary base for our own practice of Dhamma. *Arabato* represents the Purity (*visuddhi*) of the Buddha, a purity unforced and ever-present to be approached by us through the practice of the precepts. *Sammā-sambuddhassa* stands for the quality of Wisdom (*paññā*), the Unsurpassed Perfect Enlightenment (*anuttara sammā-sambodhi*) which distinguishes a Buddha from all other men. Here, “*sammā*” means “perfect,” “*samī*” stands for “by

6. *Bhagavā*: a very frequent term of respect for the Buddha (usually translated, “Lord,” “Blessed One,” “Exalted One”) is hard to render in English. It means: “The compassionate Lord who by his skilful means apportions Dhamma which exactly corresponds to the needs of those who hear.”

himself,” and “*buddhassa*” is “to the Enlightened” or “to the Awakened.”

The Three Refuges (*Tisarāṇa*)

When people ask, “Who is really a Buddhist?” the answer will be, “One who has accepted the Three Refuges—Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha—as his shelter and guiding ideal.”⁷ So now that we have paid our respects to the Teacher, it is usual for Buddhists to continue by affirming their Refuge in Enlightenment (*bodhi*) in three aspects: the Buddha, the rediscoverer of Enlightenment; the Dhamma, the way to that Enlightenment; and the Sangha, those who are practising that way have discovered Enlightenment for themselves. That which has the nature of the Unsurpassed Perfect Enlightenment, unconfused and brilliant with the qualities of Great Compassion, Purity and Wisdom, that is a secure refuge. So we recite this sure refuge as a reminder every day:⁸

To the Enlightened One I go for refuge.
 To the Way to Enlightenment I go for refuge.
 To the Enlightened Community I go for refuge.

For the second time to the Enlightened One I
 go for refuge.

For the second time to the Way to

7. See *The Three Refuges*, Wheel No. 75, BPS, Kandy.

8. The Pāli of the Going-for-Refuge and the other chantings (etc.) is in the Appendix above. Where “Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha” are felt to be more meaningful, they can be used in place of “The Enlightened One,” “The Way to Enlightenment,” and “The Enlightened Community.”

Enlightenment I go for refuge.
For the second time to the Enlightened
Community I go for refuge.

For the third time to the Enlightened One I go
for refuge.

For the third time to the Way to Enlightenment
I go for refuge.

For the third time to the Enlightened
Community I go for refuge.

There is a reason for repeating each refuge three times. The mind is often distracted and if words are spoken or chanted at that time then it is as though they have not been spoken at all. Then there is no strong intention behind them and one's Going for Refuge will be like that of a parrot. Repeating words three times is common in many Buddhist ceremonies (such as ordination) and ensures that the mind is concentrated during at least one repetition.

When one has gone for refuge and so affirmed that one is following the way taught by the Buddha, then it is time to remind oneself of the basic moral precepts for daily conduct.

The Five Precepts (*Pañcasīla*)

These are the words of the Buddha from the Dhammapada (vv. 246–7):

Whoever destroys living beings,
speaks false words, who in the world
takes that which is not given to him,
or goes too with another’s wife,
or takes distilled, fermented drinks—
whatever man indulges thus
extirpates the roots of himself
even here in this very world.

So these actions are to be avoided if one wishes to be not only human in body but also to have a human mind. And birth as a human being depends to a great extent upon the practice of the Five Precepts which are also called “the Dhamma for human beings” (*manussa-dhammā*). The practice of these precepts makes this human world bearable, but when such practice declines then it becomes a place of suffering and distress.⁹

Therefore, it is a practice among Buddhists to bring to mind every day the Five Precepts while sitting with hands in *añjali* in front of the shrine. At that time one should resolve as strongly as possible

9. See *The Five Precepts*, Wheel No. 55, BPS, Kandy, for the precepts explained; also the excellent article, “Sīla in Modern Life” in *The Buddhist Outlook* by Francis Story, BPS.

to practise them and not to depart from them. They may be recited in translation as follows:

I undertake the rule of training to refrain from killing living creatures.

I undertake the rule of training to refrain from taking what is not given.

I undertake the rule of training to refrain from wrong conduct in sexual pleasures.

I undertake the rule of training to refrain from false speech.

I undertake the rule of training to refrain from distilled and fermented intoxicants, which are the occasion for carelessness.

These precepts are the basic and minimal observance of moral conduct by a Buddhist. They are designed to restrain him from making bad kamma in speech and body and to serve as the basis for further growth in the Dhamma. If a Buddhist wishes to meditate, for instance, he must be trying to practise the Five Precepts. Meditation trains the mind away from unwholesome states but how could this be done if body and speech were uncontrolled? In connection with precepts and meditation, it may be said again that all kinds of drugs should be given up before trying meditation. They confuse the mind, or merely alter it temporarily—and so fall under the fifth precept—while meditation is the step by step purification of it.

Now that the Going-for-Refuge and the Five Precepts have been recited, it is time to recollect the virtues of the three things most precious to a Buddhist in the world.

Recollections

Recollection of the Three Treasures

The Treasures (*ratana*) of the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha are not excelled by any other sort of treasure, for these treasures have the nature of Enlightenment and are beyond the realm of arising and passing away. So that we appreciate well the value of these Three Treasures, this translation of the passages recollecting their virtues should be recited every day.

1. Recollection of the Virtues of the Buddha

“Indeed the Exalted One is thus: The accomplished destroyer of defilements, a Buddha perfected by himself, complete in clear knowledge and compassionate conduct, supremely good in presence and in destiny, the Knower of the worlds, incomparable Master of men to be tamed, the Teacher of celestials and men, the Awakened and Awakener, and the Lord by skill-in-means apportioning Dhamma.”

2. Recollection of the Virtues of the Dhamma

“The Dhamma of the Exalted One is well-expounded, to be seen here and now, not delayed in time, inviting one to come and see,

leading inwards, and to be known by each wise man for himself.”

3. Recollection of the Virtues of the Sangha

“The Sangha of the Exalted One’s disciples who have practised well, the Sangha of the Exalted One’s disciples who have practised straightly, the Sangha of the Exalted One’s disciples who have practised rightly, the Sangha of the Exalted One’s disciples who have practised properly—that is to say, the four pairs of men, the eight types of persons—that is the Sangha of the Exalted One’s disciples, worthy of gifts, worthy of hospitality, worthy of offerings, who should be respected, the incomparable field of making merit (*puñña*) for the world.”¹⁰

The advantage in making these recollections, even in a brief form chanted once or twice a day, is a gradually increasing appreciation of the Three Treasures. It is like a precious balm contained in an unglazed vessel—gradually the whole of the vessel is pervaded by the sweetness of its contents.

Affirmation of Refuge in the Three Treasures

Before going on to chant other recollections these three traditional verses from Sri Lanka can be

10. A long explanation of these three passages which often occur in the Suttas can be found in *The Path of Purification*, Ch. VII, pp. 206–240.

chanted to make one's mind firm in the Refuges. It is easy for the distracted and weak mind to take refuge in the impermanent and unstable things of this world while neglecting the true Refuge which is like an incomparably brilliant diamond of adamant quality in one's own practice of Dhamma. To put aside other refuges, dogmatic and materialistic, one recites:

For me there is no other refuge,
the Buddha truly is my Refuge—
by the speaking of this truth
may I grow in the Master's Way.

For me there is no other refuge,
the Dhamma truly is my Refuge—
by the speaking of this truth
may I grow in the Master's Way.

For me there is no other refuge,
the Sangha truly is my Refuge—
by the speaking of this truth
may I grow in the Master's Way.

The mind which is established in the Three Refuges does not suffer from doubt and wavering; there are no thoughts such as, "Was the Buddha really enlightened?" and so on. When the mind has firm confidence in the Three Treasures then it is not disturbed by scepticism (*vīkicchā*), a hindrance to the experience of deep meditation.

The Five Subjects for Daily Recollection

There are other recollections which one can make and which help one to appreciate the state of a human being. People tend to hide away from decay, disease and death while greatly attached to sentient beings and insentient objects. Some people try also to ignore moral responsibility for their actions. The recollections below bring all these subjects out into the light and make us face them squarely. Therefore, the Buddha has said that they should be recollected by everyone daily.

1. I am of the nature to decay. I have not got beyond decay.
2. I am of the nature to be diseased. I have not got beyond disease.
3. I am of the nature to die. I have not got beyond death.
4. All that is mine, beloved and pleasing, will change and vanish.
5. I am the owner of my kamma, heir to my kamma, born of my kamma, related to my kamma, abide supported by my kamma; whatever kamma I shall do, whether good or evil, of that I shall be the heir.

This recollection is especially good for arousing mentally vigorous states and for getting rid of laziness and drowsiness. Repeated every day, these recollections make one value this life so that one makes the best use of it.

The Development of Loving-Kindness

Another practice which is beneficial, as it counteracts states of mind rooted in aversion (*dosa*) is *mettā-bhāvanā*, widely practised by people in Buddhist countries. The advantages are many, ranging from an increase in personal happiness, through such social benefits as having many good friends, to ease of meditation practice, dying unconfused and at least gaining a good rebirth. So as part of one's daily practice one should recite this traditional passage used in all the Buddhist countries of Southeast Asia.

May I have no enmity;
 may I have no hurtfulness;
 may I have no troubles of mind and body;
 may I be able to protect my own happiness.

Whatever beings there are—may they have no enmity;
 whatever beings there are—may they have no hurtfulness;
 whatever beings there are—may they have no troubles of mind and body;
 whatever beings there are—may they be able to protect their own happiness.

While chanting both these recollections one should not be too hurried. Take time over them and pause for reflection after each phrase has been chanted. In this way one prepares the mind for the next part of one's practice.

Meditation

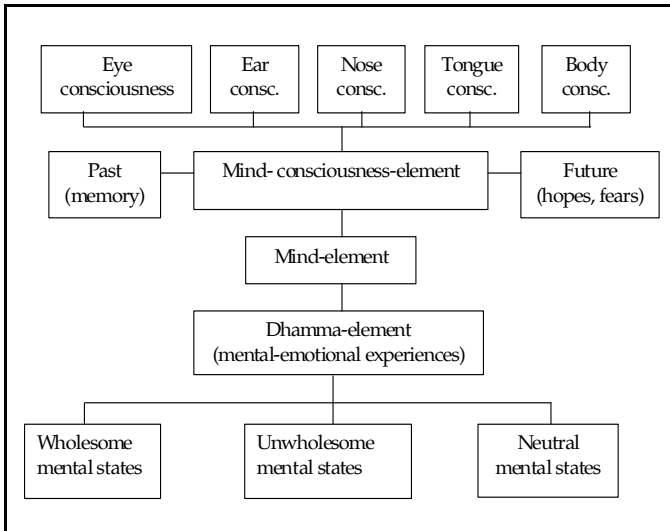
When the last reflection has been finished, one should change from kneeling seated on the heels to a cross-legged posture, whichever one is most suitable. Those who find it difficult to get their knees anywhere near the floor may find it useful to sit with a small hard cushion (or folded blanket) 3–6 inches thick under the buttocks. One should also sit on a reasonably soft surface, and a square of folded rug, soft carpet, etc., underneath one will make for the greater comfort of the knees.

When seated ready to meditate, one's body should be upright, and yet relaxed. Carefully notice any physical strain and try to correct it. Also one must ensure that the body is balanced and comfortable before meditating—this can be done by moving the body around while seated—for once started the body should not be moved. Clothes should be loose and not constricting in any way.

Of all the sitting positions, the lotus posture is the best and firmest. But not so many people are able to get their legs into this position without a good deal of practice; so the half-lotus posture may be tried as it also makes the body firm.¹¹ Other people find the

11. The lotus posture is made by placing the feet, soles up, on the opposite thighs. In the half-lotus one foot is on the opposite thigh, the other under the opposite upper leg. In the lion posture, one lower leg lies over the other, the foot on the knee, or slightly behind it.

lion posture better, or where none of these can be done, just sit in the ordinary cross-legged way—but the back must be straight. If it is found difficult to keep the back straight (and drowsiness and sleep are the results of sitting hunched up), then put a cushion in the small of the back and sit against a wall. This will help to straighten the back while it gives support to anyone who has a weak back. When all of these ways of sitting are impossible a chair may be used,



although it is difficult to feel really firm on a chair.

When the legs are stiff, it will be useful to try loosening the three joints of ankle, knee and thigh with these exercises: While standing, raise one leg keeping it straight, a foot off the floor. Support the

body by grasping hold of something firm with the hand on the other side of the body. Revolve the foot from the ankle in the widest possible circle while keeping the rest of the leg still. Turn the foot a number of times both clockwise and anticlockwise. Then raise the top part of the leg until it is parallel with the ground and swing the lower leg in as wide a circle as possible from the knee. Do not move the upper leg. Reverse direction of swing and repeat several times. Then straighten the leg and swing it, keeping it straight, from the thigh in the largest possible circle, in both directions. Repeat these three exercises with the other leg. The whole procedure may be done two or three times a day but do not overdo it to begin with—the result will be a lot of aching joints! After a month or two, the joints will have become more flexible and the leg muscles more relaxed. It should then be quite easy to adopt one of these cross-legged postures for a long period of time. So much for the body.

Having quietened the body and resolved not to move it while meditating, what about the mind? Most people find that it moves much too fast for their mindfulness to catch. Usually, what is called “mind” means the *present time* consisting of:

So a “mind” may be concerned with any one of the five sense consciousnesses, or it may be mind-consciousness-element having as object something from the past, present or the future, or again it can be the dhamma-element consisting of the three species

of mental states. It will not be mind-element, which is the passive state of minds operating in deep sleep. Now a mind, or rather a succession of “minds,” which is concerned with such highly differentiated data cannot become very concentrated.

Even when “minds” are not concerned with outer sensual stimulation and only with inward reflection, they will still be discursive with words, concepts, pictures and feelings, etc. In the state of meditation we try to cut out even these inward disturbances by fixing the mind upon one subject which is not discursive. This will conduce to our “minds” being only wholesome states (*kusaladhamma*) which tend towards concentration and peacefulness. The mental stream of “minds” concerned with many unwholesome states (*akusaladhamma*—often fed by sense-stimulation), defiled by being rooted in greed, aversion and delusion (*lobha, dosa, moha*), are unconcentrated. Defilements lead to mental troubles, among them distraction, dullness, boredom, drowsiness, lust, attachment and aversion. But the absence of defilements means the growth of strong wholesome states and hence of increased clarity and concentration.

So when one has sat down already and made one’s body comfortable, then reflect a little: “This is not the time to think about the past or the future. Even thoughts about the present must be put down now. This is the time to quieten and concentrate the mind. To follow the Way of Lord Buddha to make the

mind firm and unshakable. Now I shall only observe my meditation subject ... Breathe in ... out ... in ...”

Two subjects in particular are suitable for a Buddhist who has no direct contact with a meditation teacher. One is mindfulness of breathing, the other the development of loving-kindness. There are many other subjects but these two are the most widely used and can usually be employed (given due care) without a meditation teacher’s guidance. Here, each one will be treated briefly, as there are other books in which they are dealt with in greater detail.

Mindfulness of breathing¹² was, by tradition, the subject used by Gotama in his efforts to attain Enlightenment. It is most suitable for promoting calm and concentrated states and so for quelling the distracted mind. It is taught in a number of different ways but in all of them the meditator must first find one point in the breathing process where the breath can be watched. Concentration upon the breath entering and leaving the nostrils, or upon the upper lip, is good for encouraging clear and concentrated mental states, except for people who experience some tension in the head, or for those who find this subject too subtle. For both types of persons, or for people when affected in these ways, to concentrate upon the rising and falling of the diaphragm is

12. For this in greater detail, see: *The Path of Purification*, Ch. VIII, para 145 ff, and *Mindfulness of Breathing*, both translated by Venerable Ñāṇamoli Thera (from BPS, Kandy).

beneficial. When one has sat down and begun meditation it is advisable not to change one's subject (except in case of fear or some other strong defilement, see below) but from time to time as the quality of meditation practice changes, for better or worse according to circumstances, the point of concentration or even the subject may be changed as it becomes necessary.

One should view the meditation subject as a medicine to cure the diseases of the mind (distraction, drowsiness, and so on), and as the symptoms of those diseases change, so the subject of one's meditation can be changed. For instance a person practising with mindfulness of breathing may find that he is being disturbed by angry thoughts; it may become necessary then for the control of such thoughts to switch to the meditation on loving-kindness. However, before changing the subject of meditation, it is very helpful to get the advice of someone who is well-established in meditation practice.

Having fixed upon one point for watching the breath, keep the mind there. You can judge for yourself how successful you are by what happens after this. If the mind is continuously just fixed on "breathing-in-out" with no other sense-objects, not even of other parts of the body, and no discursive thought, then one is doing well, for meditation is fine and calm. If you do perceive other sense-objects, for instance, loud or soft noises from outside, but your mind is not shaken from the concentration, on

breathing-in-out, merely having awareness of them which returns immediately to the breathing when they cease, without discursive thought, concentration is good. If the mind is mostly fixed on breathing-in-out but also strays to body (touch) consciousness elsewhere round the body but still without discursive thoughts, then it is not so bad. But if one's breathing-in-out-mind is frequently disturbed by other mental states consisting of ideas, pictures, etc., then there is still a lot of work to do. Even if one's meditation is up to the first standard, there is no need for complacency as there is plenty more to do. The more advanced aspects of meditation do require guidance and one should make every effort to get in contact with a reliable source of teaching.

The time that one gives to meditation must depend upon the individual although less than 15–20 minutes is of little benefit unless the mind is very well concentrated. Also, it is a good discipline to resolve to practise *every day* and *at the same time* (in so far as outside circumstances like work allow). One should not practise on some days but not on others. This shows a wavering mind and cannot accomplish much. And when one has determined to meditate every day one should also resolve to practise for *the same length of time* each day, not one day twenty and the next only five minutes. If one's practice is not regular then this shows weakness of the mind and such a mind is good at suggesting "Today it is too hot," "Today I am too tired ..." and a thousand and

one other excuses. The best time for meditation is early morning when everything is quiet and while the mind and body are rested. If one meditates once a day then this is the best time to do it. Some people like to meditate twice and do some practice also in the evening. However personal experience will soon make it clear that while hunger is not conducive to meditation, neither is a full stomach. Tiredness may also be a limiting factor in the evening.

The development of loving-kindness¹³ is another very valuable practice. It aims at the dissolution of angry, averse states of mind and the increase of that kind of love which is cool, capable of extension to all and non-possessive. A word here about love. In English we have only this one word which has to describe a great range of emotions, whereas in Pāli there are several words describing three levels.

The lowest is the one we share with the animals: lust, which is based on powerful desires for pleasant feelings and is completely selfish. This kind of love does not consider others at all and cares only for self-gratification. In Pāli its name is *kāma* (a word which has the wider meaning also of the objective stimulants of the senses and the defiled sensual stimulation in the heart). When there is no *kāma*, deliberate sexual

13. For this in greater detail, see: *The Path of Purification*, Ch. IX; *The Practice of Loving-kindness*, Wheel No. 7; and *The Four Sublime States*, Wheel No. 6.

intercourse is impossible (as for the arahants). *Kāma* causes sex to appear attractive and is strengthened when the senses are not guarded. Hence the Buddha's injunction for bhikkhus to restrain their senses. A lay meditator will also need to restrain his senses to some extent (for instance, limiting the amount of television that he watches, and other distracting amusements), and this will help to limit the arising *kāma*, making for greater peace of heart. Second is *sneha*, the viscous attachment which holds families together. This love is not totally selfish but rather regards the attachment as a bargain out of which oneself and others get something. For instance, the husband gets home cooking while the wife obtains security to rear a family. The terms of this bargain, of course, may differ quite widely. But *sneha* is only capable of being extended to a few people who are involved in this bargain. By contrast, *mettā* or loving-kindness, is a love not hot with lust nor sticky with attachment: it is cool and does not consider personal benefits. The person who has *mettā* is concerned with the happiness of others before he thinks about himself. No human relationship can last long and be of great benefit if it is not founded on *mettā*, for only such love can be extended to other beings generally and without limitation to some group. Usually our relations with other people are made up of *kāma* sometimes, *sneha* frequently, with a sprinkling of *mettā* now and again. From the point of view of meditation practice, *kāma* hinders it while *mettā* helps it.

Mettā must be practised first towards oneself. That is to say, one cannot love others unless first one has established love in one's own heart. To try spreading *mettā* to others before strengthening it in oneself is like a poor man who proposes to give out money for others' benefit. To have *mettā* for oneself means a relative absence of conflicts in oneself, to be at peace with oneself. So the first thing to do in sitting meditation is to repeat over and over again: "May I be at peace." When the mind becomes calm and one can feel about one's heart the brightness of *mettā* then it is possible to start practising it towards other people. Having cultured loving-kindness in one's heart, one may next picture any person whom one respects deeply and constantly wish for that person "May he (or she) be happy!" Having developed towards that person the same, or greater intensity of *mettā*, then go on to see in the mind a person with whom one is just friendly, and after that a neutral person. Only then may one consider a person who is disliked or even one who is hated. In each case, the emotional tone accompanying the mental picture should be the same and only when it has reached the same intensity should one move on to the next person to be considered. It is useless to begin with those one dislikes as such practice is merely the extension of what is already there—aversion—rather than the development of something new—*mettā*. To begin with the disliked just wearies oneself and gets one nowhere. In this meditation, thoughts of loving-

kindness must be backed up by the emotional feeling associated with loving-kindness, if they are to be really effective in ridding oneself of aversion.

This power of *mettā* is used to break down the “walls” which we erect around ourselves, the walls of aversion and dislike, so that *mettā*, properly practised, becomes by deep meditation not only widespread but infinite in extent. One to whom each person and each living being are equally dear, who wishes happiness for all sentient beings, visible and invisible in every direction and state of existence, whose heart is “endued with loving-kindness, abundant, exalted, measureless, free from enmity and free from affliction” has truly succeeded with this practice.

But *mettā* fails when it falls into either of two extremes. The first of these is called “the near enemy,” that is, selfish physical desire or *kāma*. So one should not attempt to practise *mettā* in meditation towards a person for whom one has *kāma*. The second is known as “the far enemy” and means the opposite of *mettā*—ill-will, anger and so on. So much for the practice of *mettā* as a meditation.

Besides mind, a human being has two other channels of communication—speech and bodily action. Therefore, digressing again from what is done in the shrine-room, one should make efforts to express loving-kindness in these two ways as well. As far as speech is concerned, make an effort to cut out sharp or harsh words when they are spoken in anger, while trying to cultivate kindly speech. And as speech

to be convincing has to be backed up by bodily action, one's body should express loving-kindness too. See that it performs acts of helpfulness and service. See that one is "clean-handed"—that is, that things which could be given do not "stick" to one's hands, for generosity is a companion and supporter of loving-kindness. If one makes an effort like this with one's speech and body, it will be helpful to one's meditation on *mettā*, while that in turn will ensure that one's good actions are not just an empty facade.

The subject of meditation is vast, as the mind with which it deals is intricate and there are many different methods suited to different minds with their defilements. In this brief section only two methods have been mentioned and their development has only been outlined upon the side of calm. The development of calm is very necessary before going on to the development of insight, in which impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and non-self are investigated, as the mind must be strong and undistracted for insight to penetrate towards enlightenment. The development of insight, like the deeper ranges of the development of calm, cannot be dealt with here and no book, however extensive, can replace the advice of a meditation master.

It is possible that if the mind becomes deeply concentrated and states quite new to the meditator are suddenly experienced, then fear may arise. Fear can also be troublesome if an object of mind comes up, a mental picture, which is horrible to the meditator. If

such fear should arise then the meditator should leave that object and turn to the Recollection of the Three Treasures, mentally repeating: “Indeed the Exalted One is thus: The accomplished destroyer of defilements ...” If the fear is banished by the first Recollection then one’s meditation can be resumed, otherwise one should go on to recite: “The Dhamma of the Exalted One is well-expounded ...” and “The Sangha of the Exalted One’s disciples who have practised well ...” until all fear is cured in the mind. It is sure to be dispelled as the Buddha has said, in the Dhajagga Sutta (The Discourse on the Foremost Banner), that one is recollecting the qualities of Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha which are “free of greed, free of aversion and free of delusion” and are therefore free from fear. This is where strong and sure Refuge in the Three Treasures is shown to be so valuable, for if strong confidence in them is present, fear has no chance. But the mind in which there are many doubts is easily shaken and fear can get a hold there. Well-balanced Dhamma practice should dispel the causes giving rise to fears, but if these persist it is necessary to ask someone competent in meditation how they should be treated.

At the conclusion of meditation, one should gently bring the mind back to its usual state of engagement with the senses. During this time the limbs should not be moved quickly but gently rubbed if they are cool or have “gone to sleep.” When one is quite ready, then it is time to chant the Anumodanā.

Anumodanā

This is one of those words which it is very difficult to translate into English. It means literally “rejoicing with or after” but implies “asking beings to rejoice in the good kamma which one has made and so benefit themselves.” It is often translated “blessing” but this gives the wrong picture, as one is inviting other beings to rejoice at what one has done; one is not invoking some blessing of another power upon them.

The person who is inviting others to rejoice does not actually “share his merits,” although this expression is often seen. How can merits (a poor translation of *puñña*, which means all kinds of actions which cleanse and purify the mind of the doer) be shared indeed? As *puñña* is good kamma, one should remember “I am the owner of my kamma, heir to my kamma ...” so how can it be “shared” with others? Good kamma or *puñña* is not like a cake which can be cut up into pieces and handed round! What one does is not “sharing” but dedicating one’s *puñña* to other beings (either to particular beings who are suffering, such as parents, relatives, friends, etc.; or generally to all beings (see below), “infinite, immeasurable”). And these beings to whom one dedicates kamma may be either living this life or else reborn in other states. In dedicating it to them one asks them to rejoice (“By rejoicing in this cause, this gift of *puñña* given by me...”) and when they do so they also make good kamma which is the direct cause

of their happiness (“a happy life and free from hate... and their good wishes all succeed”). The “Path Secure” mentioned in the verses below is the attainment of Stream-entry when a person has seen Nibbāna for the first time, known the Truth of Dhamma for himself and is no longer liable to fall into low, subhuman births.

These verses are part of a longer Pāli composition by King Mahamongkut (Rāma IV) of Siam, possibly written while he was still a prince and bhikkhu holding the position of Abbot of Wat Bovoranives in Bangkok.

May the *puñña* made by me,
now or at some other time,
be shared among all beings here—
infinite, immeasurable.

By rejoicing in this cause,
this gift of *puñña* given by me,
may beings all forever live
a happy life and free from hate,
and may they find the Path Secure
and their good wishes all succeed!

Having finished this recitation one should stay quiet with a heart full of loving-kindness for all beings just for a short while. Then to conclude the service one again makes the prostration with five limbs three times.

Chanting

In Theravada Buddhist countries, the traditional verses and passages, as well as the Discourses of the Buddha, whether used in services or for other occasions, are usually recited in Pāli, the language spoken by the Buddha. In each country there are somewhat different traditions of chanting and pronunciation of Pāli. (In other Buddhist lands also, traditions exist for the chanting of Buddhist scriptures, usually in a special and now archaic form of the vernaculars). Besides the established traditions of Pāli chanting, there are also, in countries like Thailand, ways of chanting in the language of the people. Few lay people understand the grammar of Pāli though many may know a number of important phrases and terms in that language, so we find that lay people (and sometimes bhikkhus as well) chant in Pāli following each phrase with a translation in the vernacular. This can often be heard in Thailand where school children also chant verses composed in Thai on the respect that should be given to the Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha, parents and teachers (the Five Treasures).

In countries where Buddhism is either newly introduced or again flourishing after a period of neglect, there may be very few who understand Pāli, while, on the other hand, many may wish for some devotional and reflective practice for their daily lives. Hence the short number of texts suggested here are

all in English. Then comes the question of how to chant in this language. Lay Buddhists can be guided by the Buddha's words when some bhikkhus began to sing the Dhamma:

Bhikkhus, there are these five dangers when Dhamma is chanted with a long, singing sound:

6. He is pleased with himself regarding that sound (= pride)
7. others are pleased regarding that sound (they have regard for it but not for Dhamma)
8. householders look down upon him (as music is for those who enjoy sense-pleasures)
9. while trying for accuracy of sound his concentration is broken (he neglects the meaning of what he is chanting)
10. people coming after fall into views (by emulation) ("saying: Our teachers and preceptors sang it thus" [Commentary]—a source of both pride and quarrelling among later generations of Buddhists).

— Vinaya Piṭaka, II 108

From these five disadvantages we understand that it is disrespectful for a bhikkhu to sing or intone the Dhamma in such a way that its meaning is lost.¹⁴ This rule, of course, does not apply to lay people but

14. In *The Entrance to the Vinaya II* (Mahamakut Press, Bangkok, BE 2516) we read: "It is prohibited for a bhikkhu to preach Dhamma with a long-drawn intonation. To preach Dhamma or recite Dhamma in an artificial long-drawn way of chanting until it brings about mispronunciation, should not be done."

in Buddhist lands lay people, perhaps guided by the conduct of bhikkhus, have made little or no use of music for religious purposes. After all what are we trying to achieve by chanting the words relating to the Buddha and his teaching? Is it not to gain calm through a mind concentrated on Dhamma? Then music has rather an exciting effect on many people and so is opposed to our aim. Again, compared with western religion, Buddhism has a different aim. There, the object of chanting and singing is to make sounds pleasing to the Creator's ear, out of love or fear of him. But Buddhists are not burdened with such an idea, for our aim and goal lies within, to be attained by our own efforts, not by propitiation of an external power. Lord Buddha was one who spoke in praise of silence and restraint, so in preparing ourselves to be silent, restraint should be used in our chanting.

The various passages which have been recommended here for this purpose are embedded in much explanatory matter and people who wish to use them and any other reflections which they have found stirring, could copy them all out to form a chanting book.¹⁵ Then only one thing remains to be done and that will come about through daily use: *learn these texts by heart*. Even if one is far from home

15. See the author's *Buddhist Texts for Recitation* (Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy; Vesak 1974.

one can then quietly repeat them to oneself and so not break one's regular practice.

In the various Buddhist countries there is a great variety of chants and recollections and even neighbouring monasteries may have their own traditions and not use all the same items. Those given here in English translation are among the most popular and common to most traditions. Others can be added according to individual preference and knowledge. There is no such thing as a standard morning and evening service in the Buddhist world and even between these two there may be differences of items used. So much for daily practice in the shrine room.

The Laity's Practice of Dhamma

Then what about Dhamma-practice outside the shrine-room? This is really a subject which goes beyond the scope of this book. All the important aspects of a layman's practice of the Dhamma have been written about in other books. However, mention may be made of these things:

Dāna (Giving)

The giving of material things (*āmisa-dāna*), for instance, to support bhikkhus, to give to the poor, starving and so forth: There is no lack of opportunity to practise this in our over-populated world. And

Buddhists who have enough of this world's wealth, enough of clothes, food, shelter and medicine which are the basic necessities for life should practise *dāna* bearing in mind that what is given away is truly well preserved while what is kept is wasted. This practice, running counter to the worldly way of craving and attachment, is very important in the present materialistic civilization with its emphasis upon gain and accumulation of possessions. Nothing much can be done in Dhamma until one is prepared to open one's heart and one's hands to others.

The giving of Dhamma (*dhamma-dāna*) means the gift of some useful teaching and advice for others. It is necessary to know what will benefit them if one would give this gift in the right way. Dhamma is the supreme gift in the world, as said by the Buddha:

All gifts the gift of Dhamma does excel,
all tastes the taste of dhamma does excel,
all joys the joy of Dhamma does excel—
the craving-ender overcomes all dukkha.

Dhp 354

All material things wear out with use but the Dhamma increases as we practise it. And material things give benefit only in this life, while the Dhamma benefits the practicer now and in future lives as well.

The giving of non-fear (*abhaya-dāna*). This means acting in such a way that other beings do not

have any cause to fear oneself. This is another name for the practice of loving-kindness (*mettā*) and is based upon good moral conduct (*sīla*).

Sīla (Moral Conduct, Precepts)¹⁶

The Five *Sīla* have been mentioned above. The Eight *Sīla* will be dealt with in connection with the Uposatha day (below). Besides these lists of precepts which are guides to good conduct, one should study those discourses of the Buddha, like the *Sigālovāda*¹⁷ in which he has given the principles which will conduce to a harmonious society. This must be founded upon wholesome mental states in the individual and for this the following practices are essential.

Bhāvanā

(Development or cultivation of the mind)

The four divine abidings: loving-kindness, compassion, joy-with-others, and equanimity, bring two blessings: harmony within and peace with other people. Their importance in Buddhist practice cannot be over-emphasized. They are the educators of the heart or emotions and from a Buddhist point

16. See Wheel Nos: 14, *Everyman's Ethics*; 55, *The Five Precepts*; 50, *Knowledge and Conduct*; 104, *Early Buddhism and the Taking of Life*; 175/176, *Ethics in Buddhist Perspective*.

17. The Exhortation to *Sigāla*—see *Everyman's Ethics*, Wheel 14.

of view it will be better to be gentle and non-aggressive though lacking intellectual knowledge of Dhamma. Such a person shows that he has been tamed by the Dhamma of non-harming, but mere knowledge of the Dhamma divorced from practice makes only for conceit and an increase of views (*ditthi*).

Reading the Suttas in translation, especially the *Āṅguttara-nikāya*,¹⁸ will bring to light many discourses containing valuable advice for lay Buddhist practice. It would be useful to collect these together and then read them through from time to time. A reading of such relevant suttas might be introduced into the evening service every day, or else read on Uposatha days. This brings us to the subject of the second part of this book.

18. See *Āṅguttara Anthology*, by Bhikkhu Bodhi and Nyanaponika Thera, from BPS, Kandy, and *Gradual Sayings*, the complete translation in 5 vols. from the Pāli Text Society London.

Uposatha

The word means “entering to stay,” in the Buddhist sense, in a vihāra or monastery. But it has a long history before Buddhist times as it was the custom of the brahmins who performed the Vedic rites and sacrifices to go to the sacred place away from their homes and families and purify themselves by leading a secluded life for a day and night, returning after the rites were finished. The days when they kept this seclusion were determined by the phases of the moon, the most important being the Full Moon and the New Moon days. Two other days, the quarter-moon days, were also observed.

Here it may be helpful to say something about the lunar month. This is a month (originally this word is cognate with “moon”) of 29½ days. Two months have 59 days, that is, one of thirty and one of twenty-nine. Each month is divided into fortnights: of the waxing moon and of the waning moon. Each half is therefore of 14 or 15 days and in each half the days are numbered from the first of the waxing moon (the day after new moon day) to the fourteenth (or fifteenth) of the waxing moon, and then from the first of the waning moon to the fourteenth of the waning moon. A new lunar month always begins (in Buddhist reckoning) with the waxing half-month. The eighth day (usually) of both bright and dark halves is the quartermoon day.

In the Buddha-time, various groups of ascetics and wanderers used the traditional Full and New moon days for expounding their theories and practices, while the Buddha allowed bhikkhus to assemble on these days to listen to the recitation of the Pātimokkha (the fundamental rules of a bhikkhu) and to teach Dhamma to the lay people who came to their monastery.

From that time down to the present, the Uposatha days have been observed by Buddhists, both ordained and laity, in all Buddhist countries. The practice of Buddhists in Thailand—and there are many local variations—is along these lines. Early in the morning lay people give almsfood to the bhikkhus who may be walking on almsround¹⁹ or invited to a layman's house; or the lay people may take the food to the monastery. Usually lay people do not eat before serving the food to the bhikkhus and they may eat only once that day, especially where the bhikkhus practise eating a single meal. In any case, their food is finished before noon. Before the meal the laity request the Eight Precepts (see below), which they promise to undertake for a day and night.

It is usual for lay people to go to the local monastery and to spend all day and night there. In different monasteries, of course, the way that they spend their time will not be the same and much depends on which aspect of the Dhamma is stressed

19. See Wheel No. 73, *The Blessings of Piṇḍapāta*.

there: study or practice. Where there is more study, they will hear as many as three or four discourses on Dhamma delivered by senior bhikkhus and they will have books to read and perhaps classes on Abhidhamma to attend. But they are quite free to plan their own time with meditation, discussion of Dhamma with the bhikkhus and so on. In a meditation monastery lay people will get less instruction and that will be about the *practice* of Dhamma, while most of their time will be spent mindfully employed—walking and seated meditation with some time given to helping the bhikkhus with their daily duties. So the whole of this day and night (and enthusiastic lay people restrict their sleep) is given over to Dhamma. The bhikkhus on these days have to meet (if they are four or more in number) and listen to one bhikkhu recite by heart the 227 rules of training contained in the Pātimokkha. This meeting may take an hour or more and lay people may, or may not, attend, according to the tradition of that monastery. Apart from this regular observance, some bhikkhus may undertake an extra austere practice, such as not lying down on the Uposatha night, which means the effort to try and meditate in the three postures of walking, standing, and sitting all night.

This is the practice in brief, of “entering to stay at” (*uposatha*) a monastery in Asia. Obviously a Buddhist who has no facilities like these in a non-Buddhist country must spend his Uposatha differently. Perhaps the first thing to consider is

whether it is worth trying to keep the Uposatha days. Why are they kept on the phases of the moon? The origin of the Uposatha days in Buddhist teachings is found in the following story.

The occasion was this: The Blessed One was living at Rājagaha on the Vulture-Peak Rock, and at that time Wanderers of other sects were in the habit of meeting together on the Half Moons of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth and the Quarter Moon of the Eighth and preaching about Dhamma. People went to hear about the Dhamma from them. They grew fond of the Wanderers of other sects and believed in them. So the Wanderers gained support.

Now while Seniya Bimbisāra, king of Magadha was alone in retreat he considered this, and he thought: “Why should the venerable ones not meet together too, on these days?”

Then he went to the Blessed One and told him what he had thought, adding: “Lord, it would be good if the venerable ones met together too, on these days.”

The Blessed One instructed the king with a talk on the Dhamma, after which the king departed. Then the Blessed One made this the occasion for a discourse on the Dhamma and he addressed the bhikkhus thus: “Bhikkhus, I allow meetings on the Half Moons of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth and the Quarter Moon of the Eighth.”

So the bhikkhus met together on those days as allowed by the Blessed One, but they sat in silence. People went to hear the Dhamma. They were annoyed, and they murmured and protested: “How can the monks, the sons of the Sakyans, meet together on these days and sit in silence dumb as hogs? Ought not the Dhamma to be preached when they meet?”

Bhikkhus heard this. They went to the Blessed One and told him. He made this the occasion for a discourse on the Dhamma, and he addressed the bhikkhus thus: “Bhikkhus, when there is a meeting on the Half Moons of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth and the Quarter Moon of the Eighth, I allow preaching of the Dhamma.²⁰”

We can see from this that the Uposatha day was already popular at that time; in fact India already had a lunar calendar. The Buddha sometimes allowed popular practices when he had investigated them to see whether they were profitable. In this case he saw that there were advantages for Dhamma-practice in the Uposatha days, so he allowed them. But we should understand clearly that Dhamma in its various aspects was not taught by him out of conformity with pre-Buddhist traditions. (How often one sees statements like “The Buddha accepted and taught the Hindu

20. From *The Life of the Buddha*, trans. by the late Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli, p. 157.

doctrine of karma and reincarnation!”) Dhamma was taught by him based on Enlightenment—having seen everything as it truly is. So the teaching—for instance, of kamma—was because he had seen the truth of this for himself. Similarly with the Uposatha days, the importance of which are underlined by a number of discourses on the subject in the Anguttara-nikāya, the Book of the Eights.

But if the timing of the Uposatha days in Buddhist tradition was fixed merely to coincide with the existing lunar calendar and the traditional observances connected with it, then today when most people work in countries which do not follow a lunar calendar it would seem sensible to have days for special Buddhist observance during the weekends. Is there any other significance to the Uposatha days falling on the phases of the moon? A fairly new branch of biology, called chronobiology, studies the rhythmicity in nature and appears to support the importance of the Uposatha days, particularly the full moon observance. Dr. W. Menaker of New York, writing in the *American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology* (77:905, 1959) has observed as the result of an analysis of data on birth and conception that the coincidences between the lunar month of 29.53 and the average duration of the menstrual cycle of 29½ days “constitutes a combination of circumstances that points to the synodic lunar month as the time unit of the human sexual reproductive cycle.” It seems as though the

keeping of the Uposatha days by large numbers of the Buddhist laypeople until recent times will have helped to limit the growth of the population in Buddhist countries. Some people have also observed that sexual desire comes to a peak with the full moon. Those who understand that restraint in this and other sensual appetites is good, will see that there is a good cause for keeping at least the full moon as an Uposatha day.

Chronobiologists are now working on the assumption that as the oceans are affected by the moon, so the water in the body is also affected—“As our bodies are about two-thirds ‘sea’ and one-third ‘land,’ we must sustain ‘tidal’ effects.” (Dr. Menaker, op. cit.) This seems reasonable looked at from the teaching given on the elements by the Buddha: “Whatever is internal liquid element and whatever is external liquid element, just these are the liquid element” (see *Mahārāhulovāda Sutta*, MN 62)—though the context for this quotation is the development of insight. At any rate, development in the Dhamma goes in the direction of becoming less affected by desires concerning the body, for to have such desires is to have a defiled mind.

The defilements and passions can best be controlled when they can be seen—when they are strongest. It is impossible to restrain defilements in oneself when they are not apparent, though they may be operating underground. For instance, the person who is well-provided with wealth and comforts may

not be able to see greed or aversion at work in himself; these defilements have not surfaced since the sea of satisfied desires in which they swim is deep enough. But place this person in a bare little hut with poor food only once a day and a strict discipline to control his actions and then see what happens! The monsters of the deep all rise to the surface and clamour for more extensive waters in which to sport. On the other hand, the attitude of good bhikkhus shows the right way to deal with defilements. Some of the strongest—sensuality and sloth—manifest themselves at night, so the night was recommended by the Buddha as the time when they could be tackled most effectively. An enemy that one has not seen and known cannot be defeated, but an enemy well known and attacked with the weapons of Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Collectedness, has no hope to win.

It is the same on Uposatha days. The defilements that show themselves then can be restrained and limited with the aid of the Uposatha discipline, which includes the Eight Precepts.

Let us consider it from another point of view. Renunciation is a thread which runs through all Buddhist practice. If one practises Giving, then one renounces the pleasures that could be bought with that wealth. When the Five Precepts are practised then one renounces the actions covered by them which may be pleasurable or thrilling to some and are, in any case, unwholesome. And when effort is

made to meditate, the earnest practitioner will soon find that certain pleasures and distractions offered by this world just do not go with a calm and mindful mind, so he renounces them.

The Eight Precepts to be discussed below are part of the same way of practice, a discipline for a lay person's temporary renunciation. In the Sutta mentioned above the Buddha speaks of a noble disciple reflecting: By undertaking the Uposatha with its eight precepts for a day and a night I renounce the way of common men and live as the Arahants do for all their lives, compassionate, pure and wise.

So the Eight Precepts are really a test of how far one can discipline oneself. That means really, to what extent do wholesome states of mind consonant with Dhamma-practice predominate in one's character over unwholesome desires built on greed, aversion and delusion? The practice of the Eight Precepts gives one a chance to find out about this. And this is an investigation which one can make four times a month if one wishes.

We have seen how lay people in Buddhist countries periodically withdraw for twenty-four hours to a monastery for the practice for some special Dhamma. But what is to be done where there is no monastery, no bhikkhus, and no possibility of taking time off from work?

First, on these days, or on some of them, one could be a bit more in the shrine room. This would include reciting the Eight Precepts instead of the

Five; and if one knows any special discourse of the Buddha, in Pāli or in English, it should be chanted or read through. A very appropriate sutta to chant or read is the Discourse on the Eight-part Uposatha (see below) and to this could be added such popular suttas as the Discourse on Loving-kindness (Karāṇiya-mettā Sutta) and the Discourse on the Truly Auspicious (Mahā-maṅgala Sutta). Longer suttas such as the Discourse on Treasures (Ratana Sutta) and the Discourse on Setting in motion the Wheel of Dhamma (Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta) would be appropriate if one has time.

Apart from precepts and discourses, more time should be given to meditation on these days, so if one uses the shrine room only once on ordinary days, it should be used twice upon these days, while making the effort to sit rather longer. When the Eight Precepts are backed up by the calm strong mind produced in meditation then they become easy to keep.

The Dhamma that one can practise during the day at work must be decided by each person, taking account of his own personality and of the circumstances surrounding him. Of course, one tries to keep one's conduct within the bounds of the Eight Precepts and do only those things which are consonant with the spirit of the precepts. One may find it possible to practise Giving (*dāna*) in some way on these days and some short periods devoted to some of the recollections might be possible—it depends on each person to find his own ways and means.

The Eight Precepts

This brings us to the Eight Precepts and some remarks upon them. The precepts are as follows:²¹

1. I undertake the rule of training to refrain from killing living creatures.
2. I undertake the rule of training to refrain from taking what is not given.
3. I undertake the rule of training to refrain from unchaste conduct.
4. I undertake the rule of training to refrain from false speech.
5. I undertake the rule of training to refrain from distilled and fermented intoxicants which are the occasion for carelessness.
6. I undertake the rule of training to refrain from eating outside the time.
7. I undertake the rule of training to refrain from dancing, singing, music, going to see entertainments, wearing garlands, smartening with perfumes and beautifying with cosmetics.
8. I undertake the rule of training to refrain from a high or large sleeping-place.

It has always been understood by Buddhist lay people that if one undertakes these Eight Precepts then great efforts should be made not to break any of them. The Five Precepts represent a general measure

21. See the Appendix for the Pāli.

for ordinary life and in practice people have a flexible attitude towards minor infringements of some of them. But the Eight Precepts are a more serious commitment and should not be undertaken lightly. If one does take them on, then one should feel reasonably certain, whatever one's interior and exterior circumstances, that none of the precepts will be broken.

In the case of **the first precept**, not only should one not kill any living being but also one should not do the sort of work which might involve one in killing unintentionally (work such as digging and cultivating). Even acts which are harmful in any way to others should be avoided on an Uposatha day. Few people have work which involves killing and fewer still of these people will be Buddhists, as such work must be repugnant to sincere Dhamma-practicers.

The **second precept** will need attention in such things as using for one's own purposes materials belonging to the firm (government, etc.) that one works for, or taking extra or surplus materials for oneself or others without permission to do so. Taking what is not given would also include such practices as adulteration of materials for sale and making others work without adequate remuneration.

The **third precept** is changed from the set of five. There "wrong conduct" means all kinds of sex which results in harm to others—breaking up others' marriages, rape and the seduction of minors, for

instance. But under this precept “unchaste conduct” means that all kinds of sexual behaviour are to be avoided whether they are wrong conduct or are allowable in normal lay life, whether with others or by self-stimulation. The Buddha has said:

Do not engage in heedlessness!
 Do not come near to sexual joys!
 The heedful and contemplative
 attains abundant bliss.

Dhp 27

And when this abstinence is to be practised only for one, two or four days a month there should be no great difficulty.

The **fourth precept** requires a special watch on the runaway tongue. This means the effort to practise Right Speech that is, speech which is *true*, brings *harmony* between people, is *gentle* and has *meaning*. Dhamma has all these qualities and one’s speech should be in accordance with it. One who has taken the Uposatha precepts should try not to become involved in worldly chatter or arguments. And similarly with words on paper: news-papers and magazines which just distract the mind should be avoided for this day. If one wants to read then it should be a book on Dhamma.

It should not be too hard to keep the **fifth precept** strictly on these days. Under this precept one must include any kind of intoxicant taken for pleasure and escape, so drugs soft and hard find a

place here as well as alcohol. At all times a Buddhist is trying to increase in the quality of heedfulness:

Heedfulness—the path to Deathlessness,
 heedlessness—the path to death:
 the heedful ones do not die,
 the heedless are like unto the dead. Dhp 21

But intoxicants only increase unwholesome states of mind so that a person becomes more heedless (or *careless* as *pamāda* has been translated in this precept).

The **sixth precept** also follows the practice of bhikkhus and aims at cutting down the sloth which is experienced after a day's work and a substantial evening meal, while it ensures that the body is light and fit for meditative practice. In the precept, the words "outside the time" mean after twelve noon until dawn the following day. During this time no food is eaten. However, some flexibility will be needed here with people going out to work. For them it would mean no food after their midday lunch until breakfast the next day. If one is troubled by tiredness after work on a day when these precepts are undertaken then tea or coffee are allowable as refreshing drinks. If hunger is the trouble then cocoa (or even plain chocolate) should cure it. None of these refreshments should contain milk, which is considered a food, though sugar, honey and butter are allowed (to bhikkhus, and therefore to lay people keeping the Eight Precepts), presumably because one

can take only a little of these things. Fruit juices which have been strained (without fruit pulp) are other possible drinks.

The **seventh precept** is really a compound of two in the Ten Precepts of a novice and therefore falls into two parts: the first on “dancing ... entertainments,” and the second concerned with “wearing garlands ... cosmetics.” The first half is aimed at keeping mind, speech and body away from all kinds of amusements. Not of course that they are “sinful,” but that they turn the mind out through the senses, arouse defilements and cause conflicts where there might be peace. So these days, under this precept must be put radio, television, theatre, cinema and sporting events. These are all ways of escape from being quiet. The second half of the precept is directed against vanity and conceit arising by way of the body. The tradition in the East is for Buddhists who undertake these precepts to clothe themselves simply in white cloth with no adornments. This will not be possible for the lay Buddhist who goes out to work, but on such days jewellery could be left at home, scents and lotions not used on the body, nor cosmetics on the face.

The **last precept** concerns sleep. Just as all the other luxuries have been cut out, so the luxury of a large, soft bed should be dispensed with for this night. In warm Buddhist countries a mat on the floor is enough, but where the weather is colder a hard mattress or folded blankets on the floor could be

used. On a hard surface the body actually relaxes more than on a soft one, also there is less desire to sleep long. On these nights an effort should be made to restrict sleep to the minimum. A “large bed” means one in which two people sleep. The Buddhist who practises these precepts for a day and a night always sleeps by himself.

This summarizes the practice of the Uposatha day. Some people may think these precepts too difficult to carry out in the midst of an alien society. Others may think them too easy to bother about. But before any judgment is passed on them try practising them for a few Uposathas and then see what is the result. Effort made to practise Dhamma can never bear bad fruits.

According to tradition, one may practise the Eight Precepts on the Full Moon, New Moon and two Quarter-moon days. This is for someone who is really making an effort and whose circumstances allow him to do so. Others might undertake them on the two Uposatha days—the Full and New Moon days. Or if they are to be undertaken one day a month this will usually be on the Full Moon.

Where this has been found by experience to be quite impossible, then the Uposatha could be kept on weekends. Better this than nothing at all! But then married lay people may find that this will conflict with their family responsibilities—perhaps to others in the family who are not Buddhist. This is

something for individual Buddhists to decide for themselves.

This indeed is called the eight-part Uposatha taught by the Buddha, gone to dukkha's end.

(see the Discourse to Visākhā, below)

The Rains Residence²²

This is a period of three months when bhikkhus must reside in one place and cannot wander, though they may undertake all their usual duties provided that they do not take them away from their monasteries overnight. In special circumstances they may even be absent from the monastery or residence where they have vowed to keep the Rains for as long as seven days. As bhikkhus do not withdraw more than usual at this time from involvement with lay people, unless they are devoting all their time to meditation, it is better to translate *vassāvāsa* literally as “rains-residence” rather than “rains-retreat.”

The rains residence was instituted by the Buddha to prevent bhikkhus travelling during the Rainy Season of India and S.E. Asia, and so damaging the crops and the living creatures which are abundant then. No doubt he considered their health as well when he laid down that bhikkhus must spend the rains with four walls round them and a roof over their heads.

From the beginning this was a time when a bhikkhu could live near a teacher, a senior bhikkhu

22. This should *not* be called “Buddhist Lent”! There is no basis for comparing Christian Lent with the Buddhist Rains-residence, as they do not spring from the same religious ideas, nor have the same purpose, nor apply to the same people.

who had specialized in meditation, in the Discipline, or in the Discourses. He had the chance then to make intensive efforts and learn whatever the teacher taught. After the Rains, especially in the early days when bhikkhus mostly wandered and had few monasteries, the teacher might receive an invitation to go elsewhere and the settled association with pupils would be broken. And then during the Rains there are fewer visitors to the quieter and more secluded monasteries so that more intensive efforts are possible at this time.

In Buddhist countries this is still the time for intensive activity: the meditator meditates more and undertakes more of the austere practices; the student of books makes more effort to master his studies; the teacher-monk is more active in teaching Dhamma and the writer in writing. In some countries this is the time when many laymen, mostly the young, get temporary ordination as “Rains-bhikkhus” (fewer women also become nuns for some time), usually for about four months, after which they disrobe and return to the layman’s state. They are honoured by others with the name “*pandit*” (a learned man) for the learning and good conduct that they have acquired in the monastery and benefit their families and society in general by bringing this knowledge back with them. This general intensification of activities in the Sangha leads lay people to consider what they can do during this period.

Usually a lay person on the day of entering the Rains makes a vow or vows to practice in a certain way during the three months of the Rains-residence. This vow may be told to a senior bhikkhu or it may be kept private but in any case it is made in front of a Buddhist shrine. This is something which could be done by any one who wanted to tighten up on practice for the duration of the Rains-residence. The content of the vows must vary with one's character, country and circumstances. Below are a number of typical vows made by lay people on Rains-entry day, some of which could be practised by isolated Buddhists:

- During the Rains I shall give almsfood to bhikkhus every day.
- I shall give up smoking while the Rains are on. For the Rains, I shall chant morning and evening service every day.
- I shall go to the monastery to hear Dhamma on every holy day (i.e., 4 days a month).
- While the Rains are on I shall not take any intoxicants, or see or hear any form of entertainment.
- During the Rains I shall undertake the Uposatha precepts on each Full Moon day.
- For the whole Rains I shall practise meditation twice a day.
- Each holy day during the Rains I shall keep the Eight Precepts and meditate twice, each time for an hour.

The vows must be practicable. It is no good making vows, perhaps quite exalted ones, which are out of one's range and only another extension of one's ego. A person who practises the Dhamma for a while gets to know his strength and weaknesses and will know therefore what is possible for him to undertake. At the end of the Rains, having accomplished one's vows without a break, one feels that something worthwhile has been done. And sometimes these temporary practices have a lasting effect—the smoker does not go back to tobacco, or the meditator finds that his practice goes so much better that he continues to sit twice a day, and so on.

During the Rains residence, some lay people in Buddhist countries undertake one or two of the austere practices which were allowed by the Buddha for bhikkhus.²³ It is not possible for lay people to practise most of them but Acariya Buddhaghosa in his "*Path of Purification*" (*Visuddhimagga*) has written there (Ch. II para 92) that they can undertake the One-sessioner's practice and the bowl-food-eater's practice. (For an isolated Buddhist who goes out to work, even these two could not be practised.)

The One-sessioner's practice means eating one meal in one session a day. Practised strictly a person does not even drink foods (such as milk and milk beverages) at other times but having sat down eats enough to last for twenty-four hours.

23. See Wheel No. 83–84, *With Robes and Bowl*.

The Bowl-food-eater's practice is undertaken when a person does not have many plates and dishes but puts all the food to be eaten on one vessel—the sweet with the main part of the meal, though without necessarily mixing them.

Both practices are good for limiting greed for food, for fine flavours and desires for fine textures, etc. Food is taken by such lay people as a medicine which is necessary to cure the disease of hunger. It is not used for the satisfaction of sensual desires. Particularly for greed characters (in which greed or desire is the strongest of the Roots of Evil) such restraint can be valuable.

And if during the Rains one cannot do anything else, at least one should at this time practise *dāna* to the best of one's ability and in whatever personal ways it is possible to give. Impersonal giving, for instance, having amounts stopped out of one's wage packet, should be avoided as there is little or no good kamma made in such ways. It may be that giving time and sympathy with the effort to help others may be more effective than giving money or goods. The Rains traditionally is the time when lay people have the chance to increase their practice of *dāna* and even though one may not live near to the Sangha there are still plenty of opportunities for giving.

The Purpose of These Practices

This is simply to generate some zeal for Dhamma in oneself. To bring the Dhamma to life in oneself. To get away from reading books on it and into doing it. Not just to take a mild intellectual interest in it but to make it the basis of one's life. Not only to go to an occasional lecture on the subject but to consider. "What can I DO?" Not to be content to play with the ideas of "Buddhism"—making sure that these do not touch one's precious self, but to get into Dhamma so that what is rotten in oneself is changed. Not to haggle about the finer points of *attā* and *anattā* (self and non-self) when one has not even got around to making effort with the Five Precepts. Not to talk of the Void while one harbours hatred in one's heart. Not to be way up there with subtle ideas but to get down to being loving and generous. Not to be swayed at every turn by the world but to have a discipline based on Dhamma for one's life.

A lay person in a non-Buddhist country is not only surrounded by a culture which is opposed to the practice of many aspects of Dhamma but he is often without the help which can be got from bhikkhus and experienced lay teachers. If then he does not make the effort to practise along the lines suggested here, sooner or later he will be engulfed. His mild interest in Dhamma fades away or gets lost in the jungle of conflicting desires.

One cannot stand still in Dhamma. Either one makes effort and cultivates oneself, or one slides away from Dhamma to deterioration. Everything

suggested here is on the side of Dhamma and leads one to grow in Dhamma, so here is a chance to put into practice the Buddha's words:

Make haste towards the good
and check your mind from evil.
Whoso is slow in making *puñña*
his mind delights in evil.

If a man should *puñña* make
let him do it again and again;
he should make a wish for that:
happy is the piling up of *puñña*.

Dhp 116, 118

The Discourse to Visākhā on the Uposatha with the Eight Practices

Uposatha-aṭṭhaṅgika Sutta

Thus have I heard: At one time the Exalted One was staying near Sāvattihī at the Eastern monastery in the mansion (given by) Migāra’s mother. Then Visākhā,²⁴ Migāra’s mother, approached the Exalted One; having approached and bowed down she sat down in a suitable place. When she was seated the Exalted One spoke thus to Visākhā, Migāra’s Mother:

“Visākhā, when the Uposatha undertaken with its eight component practices,²⁵ is entered on, it is of great fruit, of great advantage, of great splendour, of great range. And how, Visākhā, is the Uposatha undertaken with its eight component practices, entered on, is of great fruit, great advantage, great splendour and great range?

24. Visākhā: a very generous woman lay-disciple who, by listening frequently to Dhamma, became a Streamwinner and who was, perhaps, already a noble disciple (*ariya*) when this discourse was spoken.

25. *Aṅga*: lit. part, component, practice; here meaning practices composing the Uposatha.

“Here,²⁶ Visākhā, a noble disciple considers thus: ‘For all their lives the Arahants dwell having abandoned killing living beings, refrain from killing living beings. They have laid down their staffs, laid down their weapons; they are conscientious,²⁷ sympathetic, compassionate for the good of all living beings. So today I dwell, for this night and day, having abandoned killing living beings, refraining from killing living beings. I am one who has laid down my staff, laid down my weapon; I am conscientious, sympathetic, compassionate for the good of all living beings. By this practice, following after the Arahants, the Uposatha will be entered on by me.’

“It is undertaken by this first practice.

“(He considers:) ‘For all their lives the Arahants dwell having abandoned taking what is not given, refrain from taking what is not given, they are takers of what is given; those who expect only what is given, themselves become clean without thieving. So today I dwell, for this night and day, having abandoned taking what is not given, refraining from taking what is not given. I am a taker of what is given, one who expects only what is given, by myself become clean without thieving. By this practice,

26. “Here”: meaning “in the Buddhasāsana,” the Buddha’s instructions or religion.

27. *Lajji*: one who has shame (*hiri*) of doing evil, and fear of doing evil (*ottappa*), the two qualities which are called “the world guardians.”

following after the Arahants, the Uposatha will be entered on by me.’

“It is undertaken by this second practice.

“(He considers:) ‘For all their lives the Arahants dwell having abandoned unchaste conduct; they are of chaste conduct, living aloof, refrain from sex which is the way of common society. So today I dwell, for this night and day, having abandoned unchaste conduct; I am of chaste conduct, living aloof, refraining from sex which is the common way of society. By this practice, following after the Arahants, the Uposatha will be entered on by me.’

“It is undertaken by this third practice.

“(He considers:) ‘For all their lives the Arahants dwell having abandoned false speech, refrain from false speech; they are speakers of truth, joiners of truth,²⁸ firm-in-truth,²⁹ grounded-on-truth,³⁰ not speakers of lies to the world. So today I dwell, for this night and day, having abandoned false speech, refraining from false speech, a speaker of truth, a joiner of truth, firm-in-truth, grounded-on-truth, not a speaker of lies to the world. By this practice, following after the Arahants, the Uposatha will be entered on by me.’

“It is undertaken by this fourth practice.

28. *Saccasandha*: “they join truth to truth” (Comm.).

29. *Theta*: lit. “firm, established,” that is, in the experience of ultimate truth.

30. *Paccayika*: truth that has been seen by perceiving its conditional arising.

“(He considers:) ‘For all their lives the Arahants dwell having abandoned distilled and fermented intoxicants which are the occasion for carelessness and refrain from them. So today I dwell, for this night and day, having abandoned distilled and fermented intoxicants which are the occasion for carelessness, refraining from them. By this practice, following after the Arahants, the Uposatha will be entered on by me.’

“It is undertaken by this fifth practice.

“(He considers:) ‘For all their lives the Arahants are one-mealers, refrain from eating outside the time, desisting at night.³¹ So today I am a one-mealer, refraining from eating outside the time, desisting at night. By this practice, following after the Arahants, the Uposatha will be entered on by me.’

“It is undertaken by this sixth practice.

“(He considers:) ‘For all their lives the Arahants refrain from dancing, singing, music, going to see entertainments, wearing garments, smartening with perfumes and beautifying with cosmetics. So today I refrain from dancing, singing, music, going to see entertainments, wearing ornaments, smartening with perfumes and beautifying with cosmetics. By this practice, following after the Arahants, the Uposatha will be entered on by me.’

“It is undertaken by this seventh practice.

31. Bhikkhus do not eat after midday until the following dawn.

“(He considers:) ‘For all their lives the Arahants having abandoned high beds³² and large beds,³³ refraining from high beds and large beds, they make use of a low sleeping place, a (hard) bed or a strewing of grass. So today I have abandoned high beds and large beds, refraining from high beds and large beds, I make use of a low sleeping place, a (hard) bed or a strewing of grass. By this practice, following after the Arahants the Uposatha will be entered on by me.’

“It is undertaken by this eighth practice.

“Thus indeed, Visākhā, is the Uposatha entered on and undertaken with its eight component practices, of great fruit, of great advantage, of great splendour, of great range. “How great a fruit? How great an advantage? How great a splendour? How great a range?

“Just as though, Visākhā, one might have power, dominion and kingship³⁴ over sixteen great countries abounding in the seven treasures³⁵—that is to say, Aṅga, Magadha, Kasi, Kosala, Vajji, Malla, Ceti, Vamsa, Kure, Pañcāla, Maccha, Surasena, Assaka, Avantī, Gandhāra and Kamboja, yet it is not worth a sixteenth part of the Uposatha undertaken

32. High beds means luxurious beds which are soft and well-sprung.

33. Large beds means those in which two people can sleep.

34. *Rajjan*: lit., “kingship,” but meaning generally great authority.

35. The seven treasures: gold, silver, pearls, crystal, turquoise, diamond, coral.

with its eight practices. For what reason? *Miserable is kingship over men compared with heavenly bliss.*

“That which among men is fifty years, Visākhā, is one night and day of the devas of the Four Great Kings, their month has thirty of those days, their year twelve of those months; the lifespan of the devas of the Four Great Kings is five hundred of those heavenly years. Now here a certain woman or man, having entered on the Uposatha undertaken with its eight practices, at the break up of the body, after death, may arise to fellowship with the devas of the Four Great Kings—such a thing indeed is known, Visākhā. It was in connection with this that I have said: *Miserable is kingship over men compared with heavenly bliss.*

“That which among men is a hundred years, Visākhā, is one night and day of the devas of the Thirty-three, their month has thirty of those days, their year twelve of those months; the lifespan of the devas of the Thirty-three is one thousand of those heavenly years.³⁶ Now here a certain woman or man,

36. If calculated in human years, the devas of the Four Great Kings live 9,000,000 years; of the Thirty-three 36,000,000 years; of the Yama 144,000,000 years; of the Tusita 576,000,000 years; of the Nimmānaratī 2,304,000,000 years; of the Paranimmitavasavatī devas the life is 9,216,000,000 years. Man can live at most one day in the life of the Thirty-three. It is worth reading the story in the Dhammapada Commentary (trans. *Buddhist Legends*, Harvard Oriental Series Vol. 29, reissued by the Pāli Text Society, London, 1969), called *Husband-honourer*, which brings to life this comparative time scale.

having entered on the Uposatha undertaken with the eight practices, at the break up of the body, after death, may arise to fellowship with the devas of the Thirty-three—such a thing indeed is known, Visākhā. It was in connection with this that I have said: *Miserable is kingship over men compared with heavenly bliss.*

“That which among men is two hundred years, Visākhā, is one night and day of the Yama devas, their month has thirty of those days, their year twelve of those months; the lifespan of the Yama devas is two thousand of those heavenly years. Now here a certain woman or man, having entered on the Uposatha undertaken with the eight practices, at the break-up of the body, after death, may arise to fellowship with the Yama devas—such a thing indeed is known, Visākhā. It was in connection with this that I have said: *Miserable is kingship over men compared with heavenly bliss.*

“That which among men is four hundred years, Visākhā, is one night and day of the Tusita devas, their month has thirty of those days, their year twelve of those months; the lifespan of the Tusita devas is four thousand of those heavenly years. Now here a certain woman or man, having entered on the Uposatha undertaken with the eight practices, at the break up of the body, after death, may arise to fellowship with the Tusita devas—such a thing indeed is known, Visākhā. It was in connection with this that I have said: *Miserable is kingship over men compared with heavenly bliss.*

“That which among men is eight hundred years, Visākhā, is one night and day of the Nimmānaratī devas, their month has thirty of those days, their year twelve of those months; the lifespan of the Nimmānaratī devas is eight thousand of those heavenly years. Now here a certain woman or man, having entered on the Uposatha undertaken with the eight practices, at the break up of the body, after death may arise to fellowship with the Nimmānaratī devas—such a thing indeed is known, Visākhā. It was in connection with this that I have said: *Miserable is kingship over men compared with heavenly bliss.*

“That which among men is sixteen hundred years, Visākhā, is one night and day of the Paranimmitavasavattī devas, their month has thirty of those days, their year twelve of those months; the lifespan of the Paranimmitavasavattī devas is sixteen thousand of those heavenly years. Now here a certain woman or man, having entered on the Uposatha undertaken with the eight practices, at the break up of the body, after death, may arise to fellowship with the Paranimmitavasavattī devas—such a thing indeed is known, Visākhā. It was in connection with this that I have said: *Miserable is kingship over men compared with heavenly bliss.*

“Kill no life, nor take what is not given,
 speak no lie, nor be an alcoholic,
 refrain from sex and unchaste conduct,
 at night do not eat out-of-time food,
 neither bear garlands nor indulge with perfume,

and make your bed a mat upon the ground:
this indeed is called the eight-part uposatha
taught by the Buddha gone to dukkha's end.

The radiance of the sun and moon,
both beautiful to see, follow on from each other,
dispelling the darkness as they go through the
heavens, illumining the sky and brightening the
quarters
and the treasure found between them:
pearls and crystals and auspicious turquoises,
gold nuggets and the gold called "ore,"
monetary gold with gold dust carried down—
compared with the eight-part *uposatha*,
though they are enjoyed, are not a sixteenth
part—
as the shining of the moon in all the groups of
stars.

Hence indeed the woman and the man who are
virtuous
enter on uposatha having eight parts
and having made merits³⁷ bringing forth
happiness
blameless they obtain heavenly abodes."

37. Merit (*puñña*): good kamma which purifies and cleanses the mind of the doer, such as the practice of the three ways of merit-making: giving, moral conduct (or precepts), and meditation.

(The upāsaka Vāseṭṭha, when he heard this same discourse on another occasion in Vesālī, after the Buddha had finished speaking the above verses, exclaimed:)

“Lord, if my dear kin and relatives were to enter on the uposatha undertaken with its eight practices, it would be for their benefit and happiness for many a day. Lord, if all the warrior-nobles, brahmins, merchants and labourers were to enter on the uposatha undertaken with its eight practices, it would be for their benefit and happiness for many a day.”

“So it is, Vāseṭṭha. If all the warrior-nobles, brahmins, merchants and labourers were to enter on the uposatha undertaken with its eight practices, it would be for their benefit and happiness for many a day. If this world with its devas, māras and brahmas, this generation with its samaṇas and brahmins, together with its rulers and mankind were to enter on the uposatha undertaken with its eight practices, it would be for their benefit and happiness for many a day. Vāseṭṭha, if these great Sāla trees were to enter on the uposatha undertaken with its eight practices it would be for their benefit and happiness for many a day, that is, if they were conscious, what to speak of mankind.”

Āṅguttara Nikāya, IV 255–259

The Precepts or Moral Conduct (*sīla*)

A great crossbar preventing entrance into the
four woeful states,
a tree of the gods fulfilling all wishes,
an autumnal sun dispelling the miserable
darkness,
a seedbed in which wholesome dhammas grow,
an adamant casket full of various sorts of
gems,
a ladder ascending to the palaces of the heavenly
worlds,
a bubbling source from which the waters of
loving-kindness flow,
a ship to cross over the great sea of all fears,
a great bridge to pass over the ocean of
wandering-on,
a great cloud cooling the blaze of birth, decay
and death,
the one vehicle for entering the City of
Nibbāna.

From “The Adornment of the Buddhist Laity”
(*Upāsakajanāṃkāra*)

Appendix of Pāli Passages

Preliminary formula

Namo tassa bhagavato arabato Sammā-sambuddhassa
Namo tassa bhagavato arabato Sammā-sambuddhassa
Namo tassa bhagavato arabato Sammā-sambuddhassa

Three Refuges

Buddhaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi
Dhammaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi
Śaṅghaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi
Dutiyampi Buddhaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi
Dutiyampi Dhammaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi
Dutiyampi Śaṅghaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi
Tatīyampi Buddhaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi
Tatīyampi Dhammaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi
Tatīyampi Śaṅghaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi

Five Precepts

1. *Pāṇātipātā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi*
2. *Adinnādānā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi*
3. *Kāmesu micchācārā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi*
4. *Musāvādā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi*
5. *Surā-meraya-majja-pamādaṭṭhānā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi*

Eight Precepts

1, 2, 4, 5, are the same as the Five Precepts. The others are:

3. *Abrahmacariyā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi*
6. *Vikālabhojanā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi*
7. *Nacca-gīta-vādita-visūka-dassanā mālā gandhaviḷeḷana dhāraṇa-maṇḍana-vibhūsanatṭhānā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi*
8. *Uccāsayana-mahāsayanā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi*

Recollection of the Three Treasures

Iti pi so bhagavā arahamaṃ Sammā-sambuddho, vijjācarāṇa-sampanno sugato lokavidū, anuttaro purisadhamma-sārathi satthā-deva-manussānaṃ buddho bhagavā'ti

Svākkhāto bhagavatā dhammo sandiṭṭhiko akāliko ehipassiko, opanayiko paccattaṃ vedītabbo viññūhi'ti

Supaṭipanno bhagavato sāvakasaṅgho, ujupaṭipanno bhagavato sāvakasaṅgho, ñāyapaṭipanno bhagavato sāvakasaṅgho, sāmīcipaṭipanno bhagavato sāvakasaṅgho yadidaṃ cattāri purisayugāni attha purisapuggalā, esa bhagavato sāvakasaṅgho, ābuneyyo pābuneyyo dakkhineyyo añjalikaraṇīyo, anuttaraṃ puññakkhettaṃ lokassā'ti.

Affirmation of Refuge in the Three Treasures

Natthi me saraṇaṃ aññaṃ

Buddho me saraṇaṃ varam

Etena saccavajjena

Vaḍḍbeyaṃ satthusāsane

Natthi me saraṇaṃ aññaṃ

Dhammo me saraṇaṃ varam

Etena saccavajjena

Vaḍḍbeyaṃ satthusāsane

Natthi me saraṇaṃ aññaṃ

Saṅgho me saraṇaṃ varam

Etena saccavajjena

*Vaḍḍbeyaṃ satthusāsane.*³⁸

Five Subjects for Daily Recollection

1. *Jarādhammombi, jaraṃ anatīto*
2. *Byābhidhammombi, byābhiṃ anatīto*
3. *Marāṇadhammombi maraṇaṃ anatīto*
4. *Sabbehi me piyehi manāpehi nānābhāvo vinābhāvo*
5. *Kammasakkombi kammaḍāyādo kammayoni
kammabandhu kammaṇṇisaṇaṇo, yaṃ kammaṃ
karissāmi kalyāṇaṃ vā pāpakāṃ vā tassa dāyādo
bhavissāmi*

38. Traditionally the last line is either *botu me jayamaṅgalaṃ* (May there be for me an auspicious victory), or *sotthi me botu sabbadā* (May there ever be safety for me) but the variant given above, presumably composed by Prince Mongkut may be more meaningful.

Development of Loving-kindness

Ahaṃ avero homi
Ahaṃ abyāpajho homi
Ahaṃ anīgho homi
Ahaṃ sukhī attānaṃ paribarāmi
Sabbe sattā averā hontu
Sabbe sattā abyāpajjhā hontu
Sabbe sattā anīghā hontu
Sabbe sattā sukhī attānaṃ paribarantu.

Anumodanā

Puññassidāni katassa
Yanāññāni katāni me
Tesaṅca bhāgino hontu
Sattānantāppamānākā
....
Mayā dinnāna-puññānaṃ
Anumodanābetunā
Sabbe sattā sadā hontu
Averā sukhajīvino
Khemaṃpadaṅca paṇṇontu
Tesāsā sījjhataṃ subhā.

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