

VEN. PEMASIRI THERA ON BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATING THE KATHINA

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SUMATHIPALA NA HIMI MEDITATION CENTRE
SRI LANKA, OCTOBER 2011

PEMASIRI THERA: For the lay people who have chosen to keep the five precepts, there are times when one or more of the precepts are broken. Generally, the result will be unwholesome, but if someone has offered the kathina robe, then this unwholesomeness of a broken precept is nullified. This is one of the consequences of offering the Kathina robe. And that is why many lay people are involved in the Kathina activities. So, that is the first positive consequence of giving the Kathina robe.

The second one is that the people who have given the Kathina robe have the opportunity to be involved in monastic activities of the place where they have offered the robe for five more months, until March Poja day. Therefore, the offering of the Kathina robe is wholesome for those who are involved in the Kathina activities as well as the monks who benefit from it.

In relation to monks, there are many rules they have to adhere to, in this Kathina process. The monks have what we call the three robes – the double cloth robe, the single cloth robe and the under-skirt robe – they have those three robes. So one needs to offer the Kathina robe to a monk who wears those three robes, and who has this aspiration, or determination to do so. When he goes to sleep, he should have those three robes with him, and he has the determination that they will be with him in the morning when he wakes up. In fact, these three robes should be close at hand, at the length of his arm. These are rules monks have to adhere to. So if by any chance these three robes which have to be at the arms length when he is sleeping, if they are not kept at such a distance, that monk has to undergo a particular monastic ritual or rule to cleanse it. Following the Vinaya rules, this has to be remedied. The monk has to ask for the permission of the Maha Sangha to use the robe again. Only after the permission has been granted, he can continue to use this robe.

That particular rule for keeping the robe at arms length distance becomes loosened up, and does not apply during the five months after the Kathina. That is one of the benefits that the monks get for being involved in the Kathina ceremony and activities.

There are monks who don't keep the determination that their three robes should be at arms length at the time they go to sleep in the night, and at the time they wake up in the morning. Some monks don't adhere to this rule not only during the five months after the Kathina, but also during the remaining part of the year. So a monk who doesn't have the determination to keep the three robes at arms length during the period after the five months following the Kathina have expired, doesn't refer to it as robes any more, but as pieces of clothing instead. The reference is different. He doesn't call it 'the three robes that I wear', he calls it 'a piece of clothing' instead. But when a monk takes a higher ordination, he has to make this determination that from then on, for the next five years, he will keep his three robes at arms length distance when he goes to sleep.

After he has taken this determination, and if he was given another robe, he would remove one out of the old set of his three robes, and keep the new one, so that the three robes set is complete. Likewise, there are many other rules, I have told you only a few.

The fact that the rule about keeping the robes at arms length is not applicable for the five months after the Kathina, makes life so much easier for the monks. Because of that, a monk can leave his robes at one place and go traveling to another place. Otherwise he has to take his robes wherever he goes.

Sometimes we see monks having a piece of cloth folded on their left shoulder. Nowadays some monks do it out of following a trend. However, a monk who doesn't follow the fashion, will fold the double robe on his shoulder to carry it when he is traveling. Therefore, because he doesn't have many possessions, life becomes more simplified.

There is another rule relating to traveling – if a monk is leaving the premises or going somewhere, he has to tell another monk, the chief incumbent, the helpers or a lay person in the monastery. Not only he needs to inform them that he is going, but he needs to let them know where he is going as well. As a monk, you can't leave a place just like that. On the other hand, lay people can just lock up their house and go away without having to tell somebody. But that is not applicable to monks. If monks don't tell somebody where they are going, there can be lot of problems. If a monk doesn't tell where he is going, in the context that monks are staying in some very dangerous places like forest where they are wild animals, people may wonder what happen to that monk. So it is really important to tell others where they are going to. In the late 1980s, for example, there were insurgents in Sri Lanka, so if a monk went missing during that time, the others would wonder where he is and what happened to him. This rule exists since Lord Buddha's time – wherever you were going, you had to tell somebody else about that.

Even as young person, if you are leaving home to go somewhere, you might inform your older sibling or your mother before you leave the house, and you will tell them where you are going. Once the others know where you have gone, there is no great stress on them. In the context of the lay life, if the child does disappear somewhere without previously informing anyone about his whereabouts, it is a problem for the parents.

So the monastic rule about telling somebody in the community about where a monk is going to, is quite similar to the lay person's practice of telling others in the house. That particular rule of having to tell somebody when a monk is leaving the monastery also gets loosened and not applicable during the next five months.

The Kathina robe which has today been offered to the monks, can not be altered or mended until March when the five months period after the Kathina ceremony has ended. So if it gets thorn, for example, you can't even stitch it during that time. Lay people, or the monks who have accepted the robe, can't make any alterations on the robe, it is against the rule. This is why I have asked you in the morning, after you have handed the robe to the Sangha: "Is this robe in perfect order?" Because if it isn't, the rule doesn't allow one to make any changes to the robe. So now, if there is some defect on the new Kathina robe, a little, tiny tear, for example, then the robe is not acceptable.

There is a particular monastic rule which says that if there is a hole in the robe, you have to stitch it. If the hole on the robe varies, it says, from the size of a peacock eye to the size of a flea, it has to

be stitched. The Kathina robe can not be worn even with such a small hole. On the other, non-Kathina robes, monks can do work and amendments any time they like.

The consequences of giving this Kathina robe are not only applicable for the monk who receives it, but also for others around him. Though we offer the Kathina robe to one monk, the consequences of offering it is spread amongst all the monks who are there. So all the offerings that have been made today, are given to the Maha Sangha. It was customary for one to say a certain stanza, to offer the robe to the Maha Sangha, but today one doesn't have to do that, because it is implied that whatever offerings are brought by lay persons, they are automatically offered to the Maha Sangha.

Even if a person offers a piece of thread out of a woven mat, even that is offered to the Maha Sangha. But not the food items. This is not applicable for the food items. Other than food items, any items offered today, mats, brooms, rakes, whatever, it is automatically implied that they are offered to the Maha Sangha.

You have created the Kathina robe with your hands and you have offered it. Then there could be a person who is very poor, who can't afford much. He brings a piece of thread and he offers it – the positive, wholesome consequences of giving the Kathina robe and a piece of thread are the same at that time. Say, if a person offers an extremely expensive robe, and a beggar comes along and offers a small piece of dirty clothing, a small piece of cloth, and he is very pure in his mind when he offers it, the wholesome consequences of giving this really expensive robe and a piece of cloth are the same.

You are now in an advantaged position, because for the next Kathina ceremony, you can give a small piece of cloth, or a thread, and be happy. But if you do it in a cunning way, if your mind is not pure, you will not get the wholesome consequences. You can even give a hair band, and have the same positive consequences if your mind is in that particular, pure state.

Long time ago, my sister went to give the offering for the Kathina to a temple, and in her car, she also had another gift for somebody else – a pair of pants and a shirt. So she got those two mixed up. She offered the wrong gift to the monastery, and when they opened it, they saw the pants and the shirt. So the monk who was giving the sermon, who got offered this pants and the shirt by my sister was concerned, and he called to ask me what is the meaning of this. Then we realized that the robes my sister intended to offer were still at her home.

Do you think that giving this clothing would have the same wholesome consequences as giving robes? No, it wouldn't, because those are lay people's clothes, you can't do things like that, of course.

There is another rule which says that a monk can wear lay person's clothes for seven days – if for example, his life is challenged or in danger, or his robes are missing, until he gets to a monastery, he can wear lay person's clothing. So if monks ends up wearing lay person's clothes, it should only be done due to genuine circumstances, and at all times he has to own up to the fact that he is actually a monk.

There are many monks who are currently in jail in Burma. They don't wear robes, they are in prisoner uniforms, and they are made to work, but they are still monks, although they are not wearing robes.

Whatever a person offers, whether is a piece of cloth, a strainer, or whatever, the same, wholesome consequences will be bestowed on that person.

Offering of the Kathina robe has the wholesome consequences for the lay people and for the monks.

Though the Kathina activities seem to have finished this morning, until tomorrow morning, a lay person can still make offerings, which will still be considered as the Kathina offerings.

The monks who accept the Kathina robe should know how the robe is made, the robe specifications. The first Kathina robe was stitched by Venerable Anurudha, the arahant. Many other monks got involved in the making of this robe. Even the Lord Buddha gave importance to the creating of this Kathina robe.

In another instance, the Lord Buddha's stepmother, the Mahapajapati Gotami, had stitched the robe for him. She knew his size, and she designed and created the robe to suit him. When she offered the robe to the Buddha, he told her: "Offer it to the Sangha." But she insisted that she wanted to give it to him, because she considered him to be her son, and not to the Maha Sangha. Then for the second time Lord Buddha told her: "Give this robe to the Sangha." Three times, Mahapajapati Gotami asked him to accept it, and every time he told her to give it to the Sangha. When she asked for the third time, the Lord Buddha explained to her that she will get the same wholesome consequences by giving the robe to the Sangha, the same as if she gave robe to him. Read the Dakkhina Vibhanga Sutta in the Middle Length Discourses.

The Lord Buddha is the one who knows the qualities of the Sangha, and this is why he advised Mahapajapati to offer the robe to the Sangha. The person who knows the qualities of the Sangha the best, is the Buddha. Therefore he told his stepmother that she will get the wholesome consequences by offering the robe to the Sangha. This is what we mean by the 'sanghika' – offering to the Sangha.

Because of the wholesome consequences of creating the Kathina robe, the nun Podimanio has instructed you how to do it properly. Somebody should know perfectly well how to create the Kathina robe. If one knows how to do it properly, then the wholesome consequences become even more enhanced.

If we had rains like this yesterday, we wouldn't have to be able to do anything. *(It is around 1700h, and it is raining heavily. The noise of the pouring rain and the thunder are so loud, that the students sitting on the sheltered porch in front of Ven. Pemasri, are at times struggling to hear what he is saying.)* This is the nature of things, that it didn't rain yesterday. It is natural not to have rain during the Kathina, as it would have made things difficult for us yesterday. If our Kathina activities were today, it is possible it would have rained yesterday or tomorrow, but not today. So it's like the way of the world, the way of the nature of the great elements and how they are structured. It so happens that those things occur in wholesome activities like that. So the for great elements also work in relation to this. It is a kind of a power, or a force of the Lord Buddha's dispensation.

I knew it was going to rain today. After having been involved in those activities for a long time I am aware of how this things change and what occurs.

When I was based at some very remote monasteries, until we got to the remote monastery, it didn't rain, then it started raining. Or when we were leaving the monastery, until we got to the vehicle, it didn't rain. Things like this happen.

Sometimes, if we take deviations to an already planned journey, then of course, there can be this kind of thing that challenge us, but if we stick to our course, those issues don't arise.

Recorded and edited by Aleksandra Kendel

Link for the Dakkhina Vibhanga Sutta

<http://dharmafarer.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2009/12/1.9-Dakkhina-Vibhanga-S-m142-pto11.pdf>



As per rule and tradition, Ven. Pemasiri Thera asking the lay community who have offered the Kathina robe: "Is this robe in perfect order?"