

**Buddhist Rain Retreat (Vassa) &  
Kathina Robe offering Ceremony**  
- Ven. S.M. Sujano

## **Introduction**

The term ‘Buddhism’ refers to Buddha Dhamma, the doctrine or the teachings of the Buddha, fully awakened. In general, the Buddhist history starts with the birth of prince Siddhattha in Lumbini present day Nepal about 2600 years ago. However, Buddhist philosophy and practice was started after his enlightenment at the age of 35 and taught for 45 years. Today, it has become a globally accepted one of the World Religion because of its openness as well as a religion that makes sense to the people.

There are many special or holy days held throughout the year by the Buddhist community. Many of these celebrated days are related to the life of the Buddha and other significant dates in the Buddhist calendar. Amongst the Vesak day (Buddha’s birth, enlightenment and passing away), Asalha puja and Kathina day (see below for detail) and Maghapuja day (great congregation of the sangha) are the most significant events in the Buddhist world.

## **The Asalha Puja Day**

The Asalha Puja Day, the full moon day of the eighth lunar month (Asalha Purnima, usually in July), is one of the most sacred days in Buddhism. The legends say that it is the anniversary of the day that Bodhisatva Siddhattha (Buddha to be) entered to his mother’s womb (Patisandhi), and also, the Great renunciation (leaving family life) in search of truth. Similarly, the Buddha delivered his first sermon after his enlightenment to the five ascetic, establishment of the Sangha Community, fulfilment of The Triple Gem (Tiratana) also took place on the day. Further, most importantly, it is the beginning of the rains retreat (Vassa). Importantly needless to recall, the scripture records that on the day the Buddha delivered his first sermon ‘Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta’, which is the discourse on the turning the wheel of the dhamma regarded as the discourse on the fundamental teachings of the Buddha. Thus the Monk’s and lay people all over the world also celebrate this Asalha purnima as “The Dhammacakkappavattana Day” or celebrates as the “The Sangha day”, which depends on community of sangha or the community’s agreements. Kathina robe offering Ceremony follows after end of the vassa will be discussed later.

## **The Rain-Retreat (Vassa) and its practice**

“Vassaavasa” a Pali word literally, ‘Vassaa’ means rain and Vasa means remain or stay, therefore, remain in one place. It is an obligation that every Monk should observe three months of Retreat in one place or observe solitude and cultivate his knowledge and meditation is called ‘Vassupanaayikaa’ (Thai:Phansa). Vassaa (Vassupanayika), living at one place or monastery for three months, therefore, traditionally all the Sangha members must observe for three months during rainy season.

The origin of the Vassa is directly related to the times of the Buddha. Buddhist monks, in general, travel regardless of place or community for good cause as their daily routine, which begins from collecting alms-round in the early morning. The scripture records that venerable Monks also used to travel one place to another in order to share noble teachings of the Buddha, which it says they did not stop even during the rainy season. Nevertheless, in due course it had been stopped because of two main reasons. First reason was direct effect on plants/crops of laities from travelling and secondly, laities would like to see monks at one place for certain times as other contemporary religion practices. The compassionate Lord Buddha, having heard these complains and suggestion, instituted the retreat, primarily for practical considerations. It is, as a result, become a vassa retreat as an additional rule to be followed by all the Buddhist Monks during the monsoon months, which normally starts on the full moon day of Asalha month in Asia. Similarly on this occasion, many lay Buddhists reinvigorate their spiritual training and adopt more ascetic practices, for example, in Thailand, the laity will often take monastic vows for the Vassa period and then return to lay life.

The celebration starts from the very first day of the vassa with the offer of 'Rain Bathing Cloths' (vassaavaasika) to the monks, donate candles and other necessities to the temple. Buddhist monks and lay people also observe the vassa together for spiritual growth and progressive life. Venerable Monks, respectfully, take this opportunity make a resolution<sup>1</sup> to remain at the place for three months to practice Dhamma (teaching) and Vinaya (discipline) with strong dedication. They also take this opportunity to bless and instruct the people. The lay people, similarly, take the opportunity to practice wholesome deeds by observing the five precepts<sup>2</sup> or Eight Precepts, attending Dhamma sermons, offering dana (gifts/food to the monks), learn and practice meditation and learn to purify minds, which leads to the end of their sufferings and gain the ultimate happiness in their life. The vassa period, therefore, is one of the important communal platforms, where Buddhist monks and lay people work together to gain spiritual progress, mutual understanding and perform different communal activities inside the residence and outside.

Vassa, the retreat, is followed by two other major festivals of the year among Buddhists. Firstly, the Pavarana – an invitation ceremony, is the last day of the observance of vassa, which marks by joyous celebration by offering alms-round called 'devorohana'. Secondly, the following one month is a period of timely offering known as Kathina month, a robe offering month that people get together to make a formal offerings of robe cloth and other requisites to the Sangha known as the Kathina Ceremony.

### **A Sangha and their duty**

Sangha terminologically is a community of a certain number of people. According to Buddhist scripture of discipline, Sangha, however, means a group of minimum of four fully ordained Buddhist Monks. Maximum number is limitless. Distinctively, therefore, in Theravada Buddhism, it only refers to the community of venerable Monks (Bhikkhu) or Nuns (Bhikkhuni). Sangha has its own beauty that established functions, and its purity. Undoubtedly, it is a harmonious institution that can be a shelter regardless of class, race or sex etc. It has got its own rules and regulations that allows individual to practice to fit into the community rather than an indenture or obligation. It is, therefore, would not be appropriate to refer sangha to lay Buddhist.

At the beginning of the Vassa, it is a tradition that junior Monks visit to the senior Monks; it can be same monastery or different monasteries, to pay respect for teachings and guidance. Similarly, at the end of the rainy season retreat, the Sangha performs a ceremony Called 'Invitation Ceremony' or Pavarana<sup>3</sup> in Buddhist Pali terminology. It is a ceremony of inviting individual members of the Sangha to point out offences or wrong doings, if that, whether saw, heard or doubted, might have carried out living together during three months retreat. It is also a ceremony to reflect upon one's own action and to promise to correct the wrongdoing promptly and dutifully. Take this opportunity, both sides exchange requesting forgiveness and forgiving, if they might have caused intentionally or unknowingly towards each other. It is one of the beautiful traditions that help to promote cohesion and harmony in the community.<sup>4</sup>

'The invitation ceremony' and 'The Kathina', on the other, are two special ceremonies that only those who fulfils the three months retreat without breaking are entitled and qualified. Three months rainy retreat fulfilment qualifies<sup>5</sup> a monk to join and perform an invitation ceremony, which is a ladder to qualifying to rejoice on Kathina robe. The offering a Kathina robe, although, is made to the Sangha, and not to an individual Monk, fulfilment of retreat and invitation ceremony are essential to perform Kathina ceremony. In case of less than a four monks observing a retreat and fulfilled both requirements, the Kathina Robe offering ceremony can be organised, depending on devotee's wish to sponsoring a ceremony and inviting Monks from different temples to complete quorum as the rule requires.

### **The Kathina Ceremony**

There are two activities or ceremonies involved in Kathina ceremony. One is the Kathina Robe is offered to the Sangha as a whole and second activity is that the Sangha select an individual Monk to offer that Kathina robe. The word Kathina, a pali word in origin, means a wooden frame used in sewing robes on. On the other hand,

Kathina also refers to the clothes prepared and presented to monks who have fulfilled the requirements during the rains retreat. Kathina Robe signifies only a robe not other pieces of cloths or items. Other items are just a basic things that the centre or people may want to offer it to the sangha. A set of robe of a monk consist of, in general, these three pieces; outer robe (civara), shoulder robe (Sanghati) and Sarong like garment (Antarvasaka=sabong in thai). This ceremony is necessarily a monastic code supported by generous devotees.

Its origin dates back to the time of the Buddha. The scripture gives a background story that once, a group of thirty monks travelled from Pava city to Savatthi city, the Jetavana monastery, where the Buddha was living, in order to pay respect and seeking for some guidance from him. They, unfortunately, could make it only to neighbouring city Saketa before the Vassa retreat began. As per rules, when the compulsory observing day had began they stopped their journey and waited for the invitation ceremony, which will be after three months. It, without a second thought, might be mentally very hard that longing to see the Buddha, who was residing about 60 miles (6 yojana) away. When vassa came to an end after three months, therefore, they set to Jetavana monastery, immediately, without having any delay despite the rain or muddy pathways. On their arrival at the monastery, having seen the unusual poor condition of the 30 monks, the Buddha, realised a need of extra robes for monks after the rains retreat, declared a permission to collect or receive new pieces of clothes/robes given by the devotees ever since to form a robe.

### **Why offering Kathina is special?**

The Kathina Robe offering is considered as a special offering, a first Buddhist practice is generosity, in Buddhism because of these three reasons. First of all, the Kathina robe can be organised once a year at one monastery. It cannot be done twice or more a year at same temple. Secondly, the Kathina robe can be offered only during a specified period, which starts from the end of Vassa or full moon day of October to the next full moon day of November. Thirdly, Kathina robe is to be offered to the Sangha, the community of the monks, not to an individual monk. The offering of the Kathina Robe, therefore, is a rare opportunity for lay Buddhists to perform and also to pay gratitude to the sangha for their tireless service to the society. Similarly, it is also beneficial to the Monks in more than one ways. As the Buddha says that offering to the Sangha is always more beneficial and brings meritorious results than offering to an individual. Whenever one get a chance, therefore, the Buddha says, should make an offering to the Sangha as a whole, which is indeed wholesome deed. Once the recipient is virtuous our offerings will bring more results, thus Buddhists belief the Sangha is a community of monks that all the monks include past, right from the time of the Buddha, present and future.

The Kathina Robe and the celebration of Kathina offering day, according to Theravada Buddhist practice, is one of the most sacred functions in Buddhism. In Buddhist countries like Thailand, Sri Lanka, Myanmar devotees may have to wait for years to have such an offering the Kathina Robe to the Sangha. Sometimes in some countries they even have to wait over 20 years, such as in Thailand. There are, nevertheless, communal Kathina offerings ceremonies, in which a number of people can be a sponsor for ceremony. Beside the main Kathina Robe by an individual or a family, participants also offer other useful necessities materials to support the temple and the Sangha. Thus, all the lay people get an opportunity to participate in this function and perform meritorious deeds. These days, however, Kathina robe offering ceremony has transformed into a function to raise a fund to maintain and support the monastery and Sangha members to work and spread of Buddhist teachings. Therefore, based on this information, in can be concluded that Vassa is a period of cultivating good action by reducing any bad physical, verbal or mental impurities and learning to live moral life. It is an opportunity to gain spiritual growth and prosperity into our life. Meanwhile, the ceremonies of forgiveness, most importantly, are most needed live examples for modern days. Finally, an offering of robe appreciating sacrifices, dedications, practices, efforts and compassionately willing to help and sharing good wishes to each and every individuals. It's a greatly beneficial ceremony, therefore, for both lay people and Monks for the goodness and happiness in the present, in the middle and in the ultimate until the achievement of Nibbana. May this act of merit be a strong support for you, for success in life and helpful in gaining the ultimate happiness of Nibbana.

## Kathina ceremony procedure

1. Laypeople should first offer the kathina to the sangha

### **Kathina Offering words:**

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammasambuddhassa (3 times)

### **Mayanmar:**

Mayam bhante, samsaravatta dukkhato mocanattaya nibbanaya saccikaranattaya imam kathina civaram bhikkhu sanghassa dema, kathinam attharitam (3 times)

### **Sri Lanka:**

Imam Kathina civaram sanghassa dema (3 times)

### **Thailand:**

Mayam bhante, saparivaram kathinacivaradussam sanghassa onojayama sadhuno bhante sangho imam saparivaram kathinadussam patigganhatu patiggahetva ca imina dussena kathinam attharatu amhakam digarattam hitaya sukhaya

2. Consideration of Kathina Offering to the Sangha and scrutiny of the Sangha

### **First Monk:**

Respected venerable sirs, Kathina Robe offering this year is in the form of 'Kathinasamaggi- a communal offering headed and offered by (Mrs Rudee Barker) and her relatives along with all other members.

This Kathina is a pure material and pure cloth. It is like floating on the sky and dropping down among the sangha, the community of the venerable monks. It does not belong to any particular monks. It belongs to the Sangha and group of venerable monks. The Sangha only can consider and scrutinize it.

May the Sangha kindly listen to me; by means of this offering Kathina Robe, it should be understood that the Kathina-Robe does not belong to any particular monk but it belong to the Venerable Sangha. The sangha must consider, 'who should receive this Kathina Robe and wear it?' with regards to the discipline of Buddhism, the lord Buddha has allowed the sangha to offer Kathina to the monk who is well-versed in the doctrine and discipline, who is able to perform Kathina Ceremony properly.

### **Second Monk:**

I have considered as seeing that the (venerable Sujano) has qualified accordingly. So, the venerable Sangha should offer this Kathina Robe to him for spreading Kathina according to the basic discipline of Buddhism. If any monk among the sangha who has not agreed with my words can say 'NO', if that has agreed with you please remain silence.

May the Sangha now make this resolution that we now offer this Kathina Robe to Venerable Sujano by unshakable and well founded motion and announcements, and then may the sangha utter the word sadhu together for final agreement. 'Sadhu'

3. The kammavaca for kathina robe will be chanted by a monk or two together if necessary.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammasambuddhassa (3 times)

Suṇātu me bhante saṅgho. Idaṃ saṅghassa kaṭhina-civaram uppannaṃ. Yadi saṅghassa pattakallaṃ, saṅgho imaṃ kaṭhina-dussam ayasmato (Sujanassa) dadeyya, kaṭhinaṃ attharitaṃ. Esā ñatti.

Suṇātu me bhante saṅgho. Idaṃ saṅghassa kaṭhina-dussam uppannaṃ. Saṅgho imaṃ kaṭhina-dussassa ayasmato (Sujanassa) deti, kaṭhinaṃ attharitaṃ. Yass'āyasmato khamati, imassa kaṭhina-dussam ayasmato (Sujano bhikkhussa) dānaṃ, kaṭhinaṃ attharitaṃ, so tuṇh'assa. Yassa nakkhamati, so bhāseyya.

Dinnaṃ idaṃ saṅghena kaṭhina-dussam ayasmato (Sujanassa) bhikkhu no, kaṭhinaṃ attharitaṃ. Khamati saṅghassa, tasmā tuṇhī. Evam-etam dhārayāmi.

*Venerable sirs, may the Community listen to me. This kaṭhina-cloth has arisen for the Community. If the Community is ready, it should give this kaṭhina-cloth to Venerable (Sujano or change name accordingly) to spread the kaṭhina. This is the motion.*

*Venerable sirs, may the Community listen to me. This kaṭhina-cloth has arisen for the Community. The Community is giving this kaṭhina-cloth to Venerable (Sujano or change name accordingly) to spread the*

*kathina. He to whom the giving of this kathina-cloth to Venerable (Sujano or change name accordingly) to spread the kathina is agreeable should remain silent. He to whom it is not agreeable should speak. This kathina-cloth is given by the Community to Venerable (Sujano or change name accordingly) to spread the kathina. This is agreeable to the Community, therefore it is silent. Thus do I hold it.*

4. The monk who is appropriate for the kathina robe should be replaced his old robe with the kathina robe. So he should give up one of his three robes (lower, upper or double robe). The statement below is prepared for the upper robe:

**Imam uttarasangham paccuddharami (3)<sup>6</sup>** I have given up my upper robe for the sake of kathina robe.

5. Making Robes with marks(Bindu Kappam)

**Imina uttarasangham bindukappam karomi (3times)**

6. Having given up old robe, he should determine to replace it with the kathina robe formally. He should state the following pali statement:

**Imina uttarasanghena kathinam attharami (Aditthami) (3times)**

I have determined or I determine the upper robe as my kathina robe

7. Finally, he should share his kathina robe with other monks. He should state the following statement:

**Atthatam avuso sanghassa kathinam dhammiko kathinattharo anumodatha (3 times)** (Senior receives ‘avuso’ and ‘anumodatha’, junior receives ‘bhante’ and ‘anumodama’, mix ‘bhante’ and anumodatha’) Venerable Sir, I have already done Kathina ceremony in accordance with the vinaya and may I share the benefit of kathina robe with you.

8. Blessings

Yathā vārivahā pūrā paripūrenti sāgaram,  
evameva ito dinnam petānam uppakappati,  
icchitam patthitam tumham khippameva samijjhatu,  
sabbe pūrentu saṅkappā cando paṇṇaraso yathā, maṇi jotiraso yathā.

Just as rivers full of water fill up the ocean, even so does that here given benefit the deceased, whatever you wished or wanted, may it quickly be, May all your wishes be fulfilled as the moon on the fifteenth day, or as a wish-fulfilling gem.

Sabbītiyo vivajjantu sabbarogo vinassatu  
mā te bhavatvantarāyo sukhī dīghāyuko bhava.  
Abhivādanasīlissa niccam vuddhāpacāyino  
cattāro dhammā vaḍḍhanti āyu vaṇṇo sukham balaṃ.

May all distress be dispelled, may all diseases be destroyed, may no dangers be for you, may you be happy, living long. He of respectful nature, whomever the elders honor, Four qualities for him increase, long life, beauty, happiness, and strength.

Kāladānasutta-gāthā (Offering by Seasons)

Kāle dadanti sapaññā vadaññū vītamaccharā  
kālena dinnam ariyesu ujubhūtesu tādisu,  
vippasannamanā tassa vipulā hoti dakkhiṇā  
ye tattha anumodanti veyyāvaccam karonti vā  
na tena dakkhiṇā onā tepi puññassa bhāgino  
tasmā dade appaṭivānacitto yattha dinnam mahapphalaṃ  
puññāni paralokasmim patitṭhā honti paṇinanti

Those who are discerning, responsive, without stinginess, would give in the proper season, having given in the proper season to the noble ones with straightened and stable mind, their offering bears an

abundance, those who rejoice in the gift or assistance, they, too, have a share of the merit and the offering isn't depleted by that, so, with an unhesitant mind, one should give where the gift bears great fruit, merit is what establishes living beings in the next life.

### Sumaṅgalagāthā (Verses of excellent blessing)

Bhavatu sabbamaṅgalaṃ rakkhantu sabbadevatā  
sabbabuddhānubhāvena sadā sotthī bhavantu te  
bhavatu sabbamaṅgalaṃ rakkhantu sabbadevatā  
sabbadhammānubhāvena sadā sotthī bhavantu te  
bhavatu sabbamaṅgalaṃ rakkhantu sabbadevatā  
sabbasanghānubhāvena sadā sotthī bhavantu te

May there be all blessings, may all the devas protect you well, by the power of all the Buddhas, ever in safety may you be, may there be all blessings, may all the devas protect you well, by the power of all the Dhammas, ever in safety may you be, may there be all blessings, may all the devas protect you well, by the power of all the Sanghas, ever in safety may you be.

### Reference;

Bhikkhu Dhammasami, 'Kathina Robe-Offering Ceremony: Historical and Spiritual Significance',  
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#### <sup>1</sup> Vassa Adhitthana word:

Namotassa bhagavato arahato sammasambuddhassa (3 times)  
Imasmim aavase imam temasam vassam upema (3 times)  
(In this dwelling, I make a resolution to remain for three months)

#### <sup>2</sup> Five precepts are :

1. Learn not to harm/kill any beings but share loving-kindness regardless of any class
2. Learn not to steal or not taking which is not given but be generous or helping mind
3. Learn not to sexually misconduct but respecting sense of family and brotherhood
4. Learn not to speak false/lies but be truthful and living righteously
5. Learn not to indulging any things that reduce consciousness but being aware of the moments

#### <sup>3</sup> Pavarana word

Sangham bhante pavaaremi, ditthena va suttena va parisamkaya va vadantu mam aayasmanto anukampam upadaya.  
passanto patikarisami.

Dutiyampti bhante sangham pavaaremi...

Tatiyampi bhante sangham pavaaremi...

In case of only a monk observes vassa on the pavarana he should end with the word ‘

‘ajja pavaaranaa pannarasi, aham pavaaranam adhitthami (3 times)

#### <sup>4</sup> Asking for forgiveness and forgiving tradition

Request : There pamaadena dwarattayena katam sabbam aparadham khamatha me bhante.

(More than one monks are requesting say 'Khamatu no bhante')

Receiver : Aham khamami tayaapi me khamitabbam (if many monks requesting change to 'Tumhehi')

Request : Khamami bhante (If many monks were requesting change 'mi' to 'ma'.)

#### <sup>5</sup> Monks, during a retreat period, apart from special circumstances, such as religious duties, family matters, hospitalisation or natural causes, are not subject to move or leave the monastery and stay over-night next place. Further to leave a residence area depending on these circumstances, they can leave the monastery for not more than seven days. This practice is called 'Sattahakaraniya.

Namotassa bhagavato arahato sammasambuddhassa (3 times)

sattaahakaraniyam kiccam me atthi, tasma maya gantabbam. Imasmim sattaahabbhantare nivattissaami

#### <sup>6</sup> In case of performing three sections it should be done like this

Imam Sanghatim paccudharami

Imam Uttarasangham paccudharami

Imam antaravasakam paccudharami

# This applies other two 'Bindu kappa and adhitthana'.