

The Sangha and the Spread of Buddhism

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Wandering Bhikkhus and the Rains—Residence—support of Bhikkhus—merchants and kings -Bhikkhus never 'missionaries'—qualities for spreading Dhamma—the learned and the meditative—Reciters—lost discourses—reasons for the First Council—its work—the Baskets of Vinaya and Sutta analysed—the Abhidhamma—the minor rules—Purana and the variant traditions—Second Council and lax Vinaya—Schism created by the Great Assembly—their wrong views and corruption of their texts—Emperor Asoka and the Third Council—the attitude of one successful Bhikkhu who spread Dhamma.

In the Buddha's time most Bhikkhus wandered. For most of the year they travelled by themselves or in larger or smaller groups around a Teacher-monk (*ácariya*). They might stop in a place they found suitable for their practice for a few months or intermittently even for years.

In some cases people might invite them to stay and guarantee their alms food and other simple needs. These people would have huts and a meeting-hall erected, these small buildings being the beginnings of Buddhist monasteries. There are many stories in the Dhammapada Commentary, which picture such wandering Bhikkhus and their friendly reception by villagers[1] who were not always Buddhists.

During the Rains, the monsoon from July to October, the Buddha laid down a rule that Bhikkhus were to stay in one place and

this period is now called the Rains-residence. It is observed by all Bhikkhus (Sámaóeras as well) as a time for the intensification of meditation practice, or for greater efforts to study. Generally Bhikkhus gather round well-known Teachers to be instructed and exhorted by them for these three lunar months. Lay people also have the chance to learn Dhamma at this time, perhaps becoming Buddhists if they had not already Gone for Refuge to the Triple Gem, while at the end of the Rains some or all of the Bhikkhus would move on.

Wandering is one way in which Dhamma was spread throughout India and beyond by Bhikkhus. They do not have many possessions, unlike householders who must have a lot of things, so they can come and go easily. The Buddha compared the Bhikkhu to a swan, a bird that is plain and unadorned but capable of flying very far and strongly. The layperson is compared to the peacock, beautiful but burdened by its beauty and therefore slow and unable to fly long distances. It is for this reason that Dhamma was spread far and wide mostly by Bhikkhus. It is very rare to read of a layman or woman propagating the Dhamma in distant lands for usually they would have their families to look after. Of course, there have always been learned lay Buddhists, and those who have been able to practise meditation deeply, but they have rarely travelled far. Their influence

was usually limited to their own towns or villages where they would be foremost among the supporters of the local Teacher-monks and leaders of the lay Buddhist community.

But the Bhikkhus did not have the burden of family and possessions. They could come and go freely after their first five years. (After the Acceptance-ceremony a Bhikkhu had to stay with a Teacher-monk for at least five years). There were Teachers to go and learn with, holy shrines to revere, invitations of lay people to accept, new monasteries to establish—many reasons for travel. So the Dhamma spread in these ways. It was never a methodical effort at 'conversion' because it is not the aim of Buddhism to convert everyone. Such an idea was not considered possible by the Buddha for he recognised that people have many and various opinions. Their views will never be one, however hard organisations, religious or political, try to coerce them into it.

Dhamma is for those who want to understand, who want to know why there is suffering (*dukkha*) in this world and all worlds and what can be done about it. For the Buddha's teaching was simply and directly just this, "*Dukkha* and its Cessation." If one is really interested in its cessation, or at least in lessening it, then the teachings of the Buddha based on the subtle cause-effect relations in the mind, will be very appealing. Belief and dogmas are not at all

important—clear understanding is what is needed without a clutter of views and opinions. The Dhamma then 'spreads' to those who are ready to investigate themselves fearlessly. It is like one candle held against another, the light of one causes light to come into existence on the other, Dhamma is present in the heart of every person but is more or less obscured by the defiling passions of greed, aversion and the views which arise upon them.

A Bhikkhu should have no money. This means that if he travels in the present time, it will be either on foot or with tickets bought by supporters. In the Buddha-time, his travel had to be on foot and even down to the last century and the beginning of this one, in Thailand for instance, this was the case.

This meant that he had to be able to rely upon his bowl as the way of obtaining alms food. He could of course, accept invitations from householders when they wanted to make merit but mostly he would maintain his body on the offerings which lay people were happy to make him. This method worked well enough in India. (Even today it is still possible for a Bhikkhu to get alms food there). But it is not a method, which would succeed very well once Bhikkhus get out of the sphere of Indian culture. Among people who had no traditions of supporting wandering religious, a Bhikkhu's alms bowl was likely to be as clean on his return from the alms

round as when he set out! And there are other factors, which will affect the Bhikkhu. Alms rounds are possible in reasonably warm climates but it would become rather difficult in England say, in midwinter! When you consider that a Bhikkhu should go on alms round barefoot and with no covering on his head, it becomes obvious that in some seasons or weathers Bhikkhus could not get their support in this way. Yet they have no money, nor can they cultivate their own food, nor cut or pick any vegetable or fruit, nor cook their own food, for the Buddha in the Vinaya has intentionally made them completely dependent upon lay supporters. (Sámaóeras or novices cannot possess money but they can do all the other things mentioned. Hence a Bhikkhu may travel with a Sámaóera who can help with food, or with a layman who can aid him with both money and food).

So a Bhikkhu who ventures outside the Indian sub-continent needs some other arrangements for support. Unlike missionaries of other religions, he could not take along a fund of money to set himself up in a new place until he had gained supporters there. And, if he was going to travel into Central Asia, or to the lands of South-east Asia he would have to have an invitation.

Invitations in the early times of Buddhism came frequently from merchants. They usually travelled in great caravans, even of

hundreds of carts or pack-animals or in fleets of ships, some of their journeys lasting longer than a year. If a merchant had faith in the Buddha's teachings, before he set out on his long and often perilous journey, he would go to his Teacher-monk and make offerings to all the Bhikkhus in that monastery and no doubt request their blessings upon his venture. He would be happy too if he could find a monastery or two along his route where he could pay his respects to the Triple Gem—the Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha—and set out again, his confidence renewed.

It was likely, however, that he would reach towns so far distant that nobody there had ever heard of the Buddha, let alone have a Buddhist monastery. So, on his long homeward journey, he would not be able to hear the wise words of a good Teacher nor the sound of all the Bhikkhus chanting the Buddha's discourses. And perhaps, while slowly making his way back, he would decide, along with other like-minded friends, to invite a Teacher monk and some Bhikkhus to accompany them on their next journey and to establish them in a monastery which they would build and finance. When this was done, at first, support would come only from the fund provided by such merchants and administered by some local trading partners, but soon some of the people of that place would become interested and want to know what the Bhikkhus taught. And so the Dhamma

spread ...

Sometimes too, invitations came from kings, for Bhikkhus were bearers of the high Buddhist culture. Small outlying states and even great empires through their kings and nobles received the blessings of this culture founded upon the Buddha's teachings. Even where Bhikkhus did not go at the invitation of the king, it was often the king and his court that became firm Buddhists before other people, as in Sri Lanka. This is because the Dhamma, can be understood—at least intellectually, best by those whose minds are developed through education.

Bhikkhus were never missionaries—nor are they now, in the sense that this word is used in Western religion. Wherever they have gone, either they would set support anyway as we have seen, or they have gone by invitation. An invitation means that one is welcome, that support is guaranteed and that the Dhamma will be listened to respectfully and probably practised well too. So a Bhikkhu does not impose anything. He harms no one—as the Buddha says in the Dhammapada:

“As the bee to a flower goes

and having gotten its nourishment

harms neither colour nor scent,

so in a village should the *muni* fare.“

(Dhp 49)

A *muni* is a wise man, one who is silent, as a Bhikkhu is, when collecting alms food—no one comes to grief through the gentle conduct of the Bhikkhu.

Bhikkhus who take the Dhamma with them to far countries are called Emissaries of Dhamma, in Pali language *Dhammadúta*. The Buddha said that a Bhikkhu is fit to be a Dhammadúta when he has eight qualities:

1. He is one who has listened (to much Dhamma-Vinaya),
2. and leads others to listen (he is able to teach them),
3. he is learned (having reflected upon what he has heard),
4. and remembers (what he has learned),
5. he is one who understands (the letter and spirit of Dhamma-Vinaya),
6. and leads others to understand,
7. he is skilled in what is beneficial and not beneficial (for the practice of Dhamma),
8. and he does not make trouble“ (between Bhikkhus or

lay people).

(Numerical Collection, Book of the Eights, Discourse 16)

Among the qualities listed above, a Dhammadúta Bhikkhu should be one who has great learning, which in the Buddha-time did not mean from books as there were no religious books then and the art of writing was used only for business transactions and possibly for secular poetry. Such a Bhikkhu learnt by heart from his Teacher a certain section of the Buddha's discourses.

We have a picture of such 3 young Bhikkhus in venerable Soóa Kutikaóóa who spent a night, at the Buddha's invitation, in the Buddha's *kupi* (hut). When they had meditated most of the night and the dawn gladdened the sky, the Buddha asked him to recite some Dhamma. “He recited all the sixteen Octets,[2] intoning them. When he had finished, the Blessed One approved, saying: `Good, good, Bhikkhu. You have learnt the sixteen Octets well; you know them and remember them well. You have a fine voice, incisive and without faults, which makes the meaning clear.’” (Udána, V. 6).

Even before the First Council the discourses of the Buddha were classified for easy memorisation, but it seems that their general order was not as we have them now. The first method of

classification was probably the Teacher's Ninefold Instruction, a list of different types of discourses often mentioned by the Buddha: Prose discourse, Song, Exegesis, Verse, Inspired Utterance, Saying, Birth-story, Wonderful event, Question and Answer.

Young Bhikkhus, then, would learn part of the Buddha-word by heart, usually specialising in one particular section so that they became experts on Dhamma (or Vinaya). This kind of Bhikkhu had to recite some part of his learning every day in order to keep it fresh in his mind. And because chanting out loud during the day or night would disturb those Bhikkhus who were developing their minds through meditation, senior Bhikkhus, like venerable Dabba Mallaputta, who were in charge of allotting lodgings to newly arrived Bhikkhus, were careful to segregate the different types of Bhikkhus. “He allocated lodgings in the same place to Bhikkhus who knew the Suttas, saying, “They will be able to chant over the Suttas to one another.” He allocated lodgings in the same place to Bhikkhus versed in the Vinaya rules, saying, “They will decide upon the Vinaya with one another.” He allocated lodgings in the same place to the Dhamma-preaching Bhikkhus, saying, “They will discuss the Dhamma with one another.” He allocated lodgings in the same place to meditative Bhikkhus, saying, “They will not disturb one another.” He allocated lodgings in the same place to the

Bhikkhus who lived indulging in low talk and playing about, saying, “These revered ones will live according to their pleasure.” (A nice touch, this last sentence!)

(Basket of Discipline, Bhikkhu's Analysis, Saòghádisesa VIII).

It seems that even from the time when the Buddha was still alive that some rivalry existed between the scholars and the meditators. Here is a discourse given by venerable Mahá-Cunda, a famous Arahant disciple.[3] (Words in brackets are commentarial).

Thus have I heard. Once the venerable Mahá-Cunda lived at Sahajáti among the Ceti people and there he addressed the Bhikkhus, saying:

“Venerable Sirs, there are Bhikkhus who are keen on Dhamma (the preachers and those with an intellectual approach) and they disparage those Bhikkhus who are meditators, saying, “Look at those Bhikkhus! They think, We are meditators, we are meditators!” And so they meditate and meditate, meditating up and down, to and fro! What then do they meditate and why do they meditate?” Thereby neither these Bhikkhus keen on Dhamma will be pleased nor the meditators. (By acting in that way) their life will not be conducive to the welfare and happiness of the people nor to the benefit of the

multitude; it will not be for the welfare and happiness of gods and men.

Then, venerable sirs, there are meditative Bhikkhus who disparage the Bhikkhus who are keen on Dhamma, saying: `Look at those Bhikkhus! They think, “We are Dhamma-experts, we are Dhamma-experts!” And therefore they are conceited, puffed up and vain; they are talkative and voluble. They are devoid of mindfulness and thoughtful awareness, and they lack concentration; their thoughts wander and their senses are uncontrolled. What then makes them Dhamma-experts, why and how are they Dhamma-experts?’ Thereby neither these meditating Bhikkhus will be pleased nor those keen on Dhamma. By acting in that way ... it will not be for the welfare and happiness of gods and men.

There are Dhamma-experts who praise only Bhikkhus who are also Dhamma-experts but not those who are meditators ... And there are meditators who praise only those Bhikkhus who are also meditators but not those who are Dhamma experts. Acting thus ... it will not be for the welfare and happiness of gods and men.

Therefore, venerable sirs, you should train yourselves thus: `Though we ourselves are Dhamma-experts we shall also praise those Bhikkhus who meditate.’ And why? Rare in the world are such outstanding men who have personal experience of the Deathless

Element (Nibbána).

And (the other Bhikkhus too) should train themselves thus: 'Though we ourselves are meditators we shall also praise those Bhikkhus who are Dhamma experts.' And why? Rare in the world are such outstanding men who can by their wisdom clearly understand a difficult subject."

(Numerical Collection, Book of the Sixes, Discourse 46).

We shall have more to say about these two classes of Bhikkhus in Chapter V, and their ways of life in Chapter VI.

Bhikkhus who learnt the Buddha's discourses (or Vinaya) by heart were called *bhāóakas* or reciters. They would usually be present when the Buddha spoke, committing his words to memory while he was speaking. If there were no reciter-bhikkhus present then the foremost among them, venerable Ánanda who was also the Buddha's attendant, would request the Buddha to repeat his teaching so that it could be preserved. The Buddha made the memorising of his discourses easier (though this may have been a general feature of teaching in the age before books), by repetition of key phrases and the harmonious grouping of words.

It may be partly for this reason that the Buddha often spoke in verse. The idea of a religious teacher speaking verse instead of prose

is not familiar now in the West (though many of the Old Testament Prophets did so). But this is not strange because in his youth as a prince his education would have included poetics, the ability to compose extemporaneous verse being valued highly. No doubt there were other reasons too for speaking in verse: it could be more forceful than prose, even acting as a shock, or it could inspire deep faith. Besides this, much teaching could be compressed into a short discourse. A large number of such verse discourses have been preserved, the most important collection of which is the Suttanipáta (The Book of Discourses) in the Minor Collection.

To return now to the reciter-bhikkhus, who later that day would meet and chant that teaching together, so that variations due to individual memories could not obscure the Buddha's words. That discourse would then be added to one of the nine sections mentioned above. In this way, the great collections of what are now called the Case of Discipline and the Basket of Discourses in the Pali Canon, were built up through the forty-five years of the Buddha's teaching.

Some material has certainly been lost, or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that it was never recorded. We hear of discourses delivered by the Buddha, which have not come down to us. For instance, after the first discourse when venerable Añña-Kondañña was already a Bhikkhu and a Stream-winner, the text of

the Vinaya relates, “Then the Blessed One taught and instructed the rest of the Bhikkhus with talk on Dhamma.” But we do not know what that talk consisted of, though it was probably an amplification of the headings in the First Discourse. Again, in the case of the venerable Yasa's mother and former wife, we read, “He gave them progressive instruction, that is to say, talk on giving, on virtue, on the heavens; he explained the dangers, the vanity and the defilement in sensual pleasures, and the advantages of renunciation. When he saw that the minds of Yasa's mother and former wife were ready, receptive, free of hindrance, eager and trustful, he expounded to them the teaching peculiar to the Buddhas: *Dukkha* its causal arising, its cessation, the path to its cessation.” (Vinaya Piṭaka Mahāvagga Kh. I) Although there are many discourses extant upon subjects like giving and the rest, we do not know the precise content of this talk which resulted in the two ladies becoming Stream-winners.

However, the reciter-bhikkhus were marvellously diligent for it is due to them that we have today the Discipline (Vinaya), and the Discourses (Sutta), which were divided, in the First Council, into the five Collections (*nikāya*).

This brings us to the time after the Buddha had passed away or as Buddhists say, after the Great Parinibbāna. Many Bhikkhus were no doubt concerned that the Dhamma-Vinaya should last long. Some

time before this, after the Jain teacher Nigaópha Nátaputta (or Mahávira) had died, his disciples quarrelled over his teaching and different parties formed. It was to prevent this that venerable Sáriputta spoke, in the Buddha's presence, the Recital Discourse (Sangiti Sutta) in which important teachings are classified in groups from one to ten.

Already, just after the Parinibbána, the Bhikkhu Subhadda who had gone forth in his old age, said to the other Bhikkhus: “Enough friends, do not sorrow, do not lament. We are well rid of the Great Samaóá (an epithet of the Buddha). We have been frustrated by his saying, ‘This is allowed to you; this is not allowed to you.’ But now we shall do as we like and we shall not do as we do not like.” This was cause enough for venerable Mahá-Kassapa to say at a meeting of the Sangha: “Now friends, let us rehearse the Dhamma-Vinaya. Already wrong teachings and wrong discipline have been courted and right teachings and right discipline have been flouted. And already upholders of wrong teachings and wrong discipline are strong while upholders of right teachings and right discipline are weak.” So it was agreed that a Sangha of five hundred Arahants should stay in Rájagaha for that Rains-residence and systematically recite the Buddha's teachings.

The leader of the Sangha in this great assembly was venerable

Mahá-Kassapa, possibly the most senior of the Buddha's disciples still alive, while the authority for the Vinaya, was venerable Upáli and that for Dhamma, venerable Ánanda. The account as we have it says that venerable Mahá-Kassapa asked questions about the rules of the Pátimokkha in the order we now have them and then about the Suttas, beginning with the Collection of Long Discourses, in the order we have them now. If nothing has been omitted from the account of this Council (which is very brief), then it has been surmised that the Vinaya was put in its final order during the days of the Buddha—likewise the Suttas were ordered into the five Collections then.

It is more probable that at this great assembly, the rules, allowances, prohibitions and legal procedures were collected and the Vinaya codified. The old word-by-word Commentary would have been added, or at least received the approval of all the venerable Arahants and those portions of the Analysis (Vibhanga) which systematically clarify when a Bhikkhu has committed an offence and when he has not, would probably have been settled and 'incorporated' into the Vinaya. These parts may not be even as old as this, but certainly they did not come from the mouth of the Buddha.

In the case of the Discourses, it is likely that they were previously arranged as the Teacher's Ninefold Instruction This may

not have proved a convenient classification and certainly would not have been as systematic as that of the Five Collections. The re-sorting of this great mass of material into these Collections may then have been the main work of this Council. It will certainly have been necessary as some of the Discourses were known only to a very few Bhikkhus and lay people. Without any use of writing, this was a stupendous achievement.

The reciter-bhikkhus would not only have to chant the Discourses known to them at the Council, but then to re-order them in their memories in the sequence decided upon. It is difficult for us to imagine how this could have been accomplished. Perhaps the summaries of the different collections were written down at this time as a check and guide to their order. Some of the small books in the Minor Collection could well be the material memorised by particular groups of Bhikkhus—such books as the Suttanipáta , Udána and Itivuttaka. The Dhammapada,[4] a collection of 423 verses spoken by the Buddha, might be the personal compilation of a great Arahant, which has been incorporated as it stands.

Here is a chart showing the classification of the Basket of Discipline and the Basket of Discourses as we have them now :--

Vinaya (Discipline))

VINAYA-PITAKA*—BASKET OF DISCIPLINE

I. Analysis of 2. Analysis of 3. The Great 4. The Lesser
Bhikkhu's Rules Bhikkhunìs' Rules Chapter chapter
(Bhikkhu-Vibhaḍḡa)(Bhikkuni-Vibhanga)(Mahāvagga)(Cullavagga)
Divided into rules, their origins and analysis. Divided Divided into
(Bhikkhunìs). different subjects, including
5. The Parivāra a summary and classification, may have been added
at this council, or at the second one.

Dhamma (DOCTRINE) SUTTA-PITAKA—BASKET OF DISCOURSES

Collection of Collection of Collection of Collection of Minor
Collection

Long Discourses Middle-length Related Discourses Numerical
Discourses divided into

(Digha-Nikāya). Discourses (Samyutta-Nikāya). (Anguttara-
Nikāya).1. Minor Readings.

34 discourses (Majjhima-Nikāya). Traditionally Traditionally 2. Path
of Truth.

152 discourses. 7762 discourses 9557 discourses:, Inspired
Utterances.

divided into 56 divided into 114. Sayings.

related groups books 5. Book of Discourses.

(Samyuttas) of (Nipatas) of 6. Stories of Heavenly Mansions.
subjects.The Ones, 7. Stories of Ghosts.

The Twos... 8. Verses of the Elder Monks.

The Elevens. 9. Verses of the Elder Nuns. 10. Birth Stories.

Translated Translated Translated Translated 11. Analytic
Explanation."

"Dialogues of Discrimination. "

aBs "Middle Lengthas "Kindredas "Gradual 1123. . The Legends

Path." of the Buddha", Sayings" Sayings" Sayings"14. Lineage of the
Buddhas

3 Vols.3 Vols. 5 Vols. 5 Vols. 15. The Basket of Good Conduct. "

Available from the Pali Text Society of the Pali Canon", by Russell Webb, Wheel 217/220. B.P.S., except volumes marked with double asterisk.

According to the traditional Commentaries to the Buddha-word, which were written down in Pali about the year one thousand of the Buddhist Era, though of much earlier origin, another collection called Abhidhamma, a philosophical and psychological treatment of Dhamma, was also classified at this Council. But though this is claimed by the Commentaries, the record of the Council in the Vinaya mentions only the Dhamma and the Vinaya as having been the subject of deliberation. Even the seven Abhidhamma books themselves make no mention of their origin, only the Commentaries inform us that the Buddha had spoken them. This is a controversial matter and cannot now be decided one way or the other. It has become a tradition to speak of the Tipiṭaka, the Three Baskets including the Abhidhamma as the third part of the Buddha-word. It is these Three Baskets which are often called the Pali Canon in the West.

When the business of recitation and classification had been concluded venerable Ānanda said that the Buddha before his Parinibbāna had allowed the abolishment of the "minor and lesser

rules." But he had not been mindful enough to ask which these rules were. Then the assembly expressed various opinions on this matter, at which venerable Mahá-Kassapa spoke these words: `Let the Sangha hear me, friend; there are certain of our training rules that involve laymen, by which laymen know what is allowed to bhikkhus who are sons of the Sakyans and what is not. If we abolish these minor and lesser rules, there will be those who say, `The Training Rule proclaimed by the Samaóá Gotama to his disciples existed only for the period ending with his cremation: they kept his training rules as long as he was present; but now that he has finally attained nibbana they have given up keeping his training rules.' If it seems proper to the Sangha, let not what is undeclared be declared, and let not what is declared be abolished; let the Sangha proceed according to the training rules as they have been declared"*

* In this list sentence venerable Mahá-Kassapa is quoting the Buddha, see Appendix 1, "Seven conditions for the non-decline of bhikkhus." (Vinaya Pit. Cv. Kh II).

This motion was accepted by the Council and is still the ruling in Theraváda countries, being the reason why the Sangha in those lands has changed least in its form and still preserves the original teachings and practices of the Buddha.

Due to the wisdom of the Arahants in that Council and to the diligence of successive generations of bhikkhus, that the Dhamma has been transmitted to us today. But for their great efforts there would be no teachings of the Buddha remaining, for who could have and who would have preserved them? Only the Sangha had the freedom and time to pass on this great body of teaching. Out of gratitude to them many passages and lines in Buddhist devotion are respectfully chanted, such "I revere that Noble, group who are perfectly purified."

Only five hundred Arahants attended the Council but there were at that time tens of thousands of bhikkhus, some of them also with great followings. We have a picture of one of these Teacher-monks in a little incident recorded at the end of the account of this Council. Venerable Puráóa came to the Council-elders when they had finished. He was asked, `Friend Puráóa, the Dhamma-Vinaya has been rehearsed by the elders. Do you support that rehearsal?" His rather cryptic reply was, "Friends, the Dhamma-Vinaya has been well rehearsed by the elders. I, however, shall remember it as I heard it from the Blessed One's own lips."

Here is the beginning of the many slightly differing Buddhist traditions which were later found in India. The Buddha had already allowed bhikkhus to learn his teaching in their own dialects,* a fact

which could easily make for varying traditions in course of time; no doubt with the slow communications of those days, with the Sangha spread far and wide, this tendency would be increased. But variation in the texts (the original meaning of the word in Páli) established by that First Council would be more difficult since large numbers of Teacher-monks, some of them Noble Ones, knew them by heart.

There follows a period of one hundred years about which we have very little information. We have to picture bhikkhus steadily spreading out from the Middle Country into the surrounding areas. Already in the days of the Buddha, we find venerable Mahá-Kaccána in North central India, in the area where the famous stupas of Sáníchì are found. But he had difficulty to assemble ten bhikkhus there for an Acceptance ceremony and only managed it after three years. There is also the story of venerable Puóóa, who went on the long journey to Sunaparanta and who was such a successful Dhammaduta, which will be told at the end of this chapter. The Buddha himself taught as far West as the country of the Kurus which was around New Delhi, while he had at least one pupil, Báhiya Dáruciriya, who heard about him as far away as Bombay. So even in the Buddha's time bhikkhus were travelling far afield.

* See "Concept and Reality Bhikkhu Nyanananda B.P.S. pp. 41-45.

The Second Council was held one hundred years after the first.

It is known as the “Council of the Seven Hundred” since that number of Arahants participated. The reason for calling the Council was the wrong Vinaya practices of the Vajji bhikkhus of Vesáli. They had started to practise Vinaya in ways which would be comfortable for themselves and the stricter bhikkhus saw that this could easily lead the Sangha into decline. What lax things did they do? The most important things are as follows. They ate after noon. The Buddha laid down that the bhikkhu's food must be finished by midday. So long as the shadow cast by the sun was not past the meridian by more than two finger-breadths. A bhikkhu can eat more than once in the period from dawn to that time but he must have finished his food, when the shadow cast by the sun is shortest. Without such a rule and with the strength of attachment that people often have to food, some bhikkhus would have taken afternoon tea, dinner and supper too! So this lengthening of the mealtime was a danger and showed lack of restraint and contentment.

The Vajjian bhikkhus said that in large monasteries it was allowable for different groups of bhikkhus to do the Uposatha ceremony—which is confession of offences followed by the recitation of the 227 rules of the Pátimokkha—separately and in different places. This ceremony; which is held on each Full Moon and New Moon day, the Buddha said must be attended by all the

bhikkhus in a monastery. To do as the Vajjians did, would only encourage the formation of parties and sectarian differences.

The Vajjians also allowed official acts of the Sangha to be carried out in the absence of some bhikkhus who resided within the boundary of the monastery, expecting that they would agree afterwards. This is also a dangerous practice probably leading to contentions. The Buddha had laid down that bhikkhus who could not be present, for instance, at the Uposatha or an Acceptance-ceremony, could send their consent by way of another bhikkhu.

Again, the Vajjian bhikkhus stated that one could do things, proper or improper, taking one's Teacher as one's example. The Buddha never agreed to `blindly following a guru—which is typically an Indian trait; he told people to question even his own actions to see whether the influence of greed, aversion and delusion could be seen in them. One's Teacher should be followed, therefore, when he practises according to Dhamma, but if he does things contrary to Dhamma then, respectfully, he could be advised what he had better do.

The last of such Vajjian bhikkhus' practices was similar to a position with regards sense-pleasures for a lay person in which he would apparently be able `to buy happiness.' However by making it an offence for a bhikkhu to possess or handle money, the Buddha

pointed to the 'real' source of happiness, a mind purified through meditation and not one scattered through indulgence in sensual pleasures. These were some of the Vajjians' ten wrong practices.

The Council met and condemned them all, showing that they were offences under various headings in the Vinaya. Also, the Dhamma and Vinaya were rehearsed again, and a few late discourses, given by different bhikkhus after the Great Parinibbána, must have been added on this occasion. Possibly small books in the Minor Collection like the Lineage of the Buddhas (Buddhavamsa) and the Collection of Ways of Practice (Cariyapitaka) were also added at this time. And two non-canonical works* which are manuals to guide one in composing commentaries perhaps come from this period. These books contain quotations of the Buddha-word which cannot now be traced in the Pali Canon. Here, it seems, some discourses have been lost but where and how we shall probably never know.

A great assembly of bhikkhus must have been attracted to the town of Vesáli by the presence of so many Arahants in solemn assembly. Among them the decisions of these enlightened senior bhikkhus did not go unchallenged. We read in the Chronicles of Sri Lanka that the Vajjian bhikkhus and their supporters, out of their conceit, did not accept the decisions of the Arahants and decided to

hold their own meeting, the Great Assembly, calling themselves the 'Great Assemblists' (Mahásaòghikas). By doing so they became guilty of causing the first great schism in the Sangha. To cause schism is not only to burden oneself with a serious offence (see under the thirteen offences entailing initial and subsequent meeting of the Sangha, in Chapter III) but also is among the heaviest kinds of evil kamma that can be made.** The immediate result of splitting the Sangha is to be born without fail in one's next life in hell.

* For these works, all P.T.S. publications, see "Chronicle of the Buddhas" and "Basket of Conduct" 1975; *The Guide* (Nettipakaraóa) 1962; "*Pitaka-disclosure*" (Petakopadesa) 1964.

** Five kinds of kamma with immediate fruit: Killing one's mother, killing one's father, killing an Arahant, wounding a Buddha, causing schism in the Sangha.

And in an effort to besmirch the purity of the Arahants and the original tradition, the Vajjian bhikkhus represented, the rebel party's account of the Proceedings (not in Páli) and omitted all mention of their deficiencies in Vinaya but discussed instead some supposed deficiencies in the Arahants!

The Chronicle of the island (of Sri Lanka, the *Dìpavamsa*) says this about them: "The bhikkhus of the Great Assembly made a reversed teaching. They broke up the original collection (of the Buddha-word) and made another collection. They put the Sutta

collected in one place elsewhere. They broke up the sense and the doctrine in the Five Collections."

Scholars considering the evidence found in early Mahasanghika texts are now aware that it is from the party of the Great Assembly (mahasanghika) that Mahayana, the Great Vehicle, grew up. This matter, however, belongs to the wider history of Buddhist thought, so we must leave it here. It remains only to say that the schismatics, (as so often seen in other religions), were themselves rent by even more schisms until eventually Buddhist authors could talk of the eighteen schools of the disciples (*sāvaka*).

The doctrinal differences in many cases were not very great as can be seen from the Book of Discussions (Kathávatthu)* in the Theraváda Abhidhamma. It is unlikely that these many minor points, or the minor variants in discipline among the different schools will have made much impact upon lay people. Most of these matters will have been of interest only to the more scholastic bhikkhus. One suspects that many bhikkhus with more practical interests will have taken little or no part in these polemics, the sort of wrangling of which the Buddha had never approved. He had condemned the holding of views and opinions which are only another extension of the ego; however, this is exactly what many later generations of Indian Buddhists did. Much of it is politely called "Buddhist

Philosophy" these days. This only made for weakness when the Dhamma was eventually confronted with the new strength of the brahmins and, later, the violence of marauding Muslims.

When one hears of `Buddhist sects', such sectarianism was confined to bhikkhus and lay people generally being supporters of any good Teacher-bhikkhu, whatever his 'sect.' And even amongst these bhikkhus, in spite of any differences, there was undoubtedly much contact and friendship between them for, whatever their orientation, Buddhists rarely lost sight of the Buddha's, teaching on the importance of loving-kindness.

*Translated as 'Points of Controversy', P.T.S. London.

The bhikkhus in groups headed by the original teaching, later called Theraváda, the Doctrine of the Elders, continued to spread the Dhamma from the time of the Second until the Third Council.

This took place in the reign of the great Buddhist Emperor Asoka (reigned 325-288 B.C.). By this time, it seems that differences in the Sangha were irreconcilable, for the Third Council consisted only of bhikkhus from the Theraváda tradition. The position was that the Theraváda, Sangha had become famous for its purity of teaching and practice and, therefore, had many wealthy patrons. The monasteries they erected were splendid in construction and the

comforts which bhikkhus could enjoy, still without breaking the Vinaya, were ample. With good robes, food; shelter and medicine provided by devoted followers, it is not surprising that some wrong sorts of people were attracted and thus became bhikkhus. Once they were in robes some of them began to display and propagate their wrong views so that eventually, once again, such disharmony developed in the Sangha such that it became no longer possible to hold the Uposatha ceremony.

This went on for several years until venerable Moggaliputta Tissa, an Arahant, came to the notice of the Emperor, Asoka. He asked the venerable Arahant what should be done about the discord and was told that if a meeting of the Sangha was held then a purification of its members could be instituted. He told the Emperor to enquire from each bhikkhu what philosophical method the Buddha had practised and upheld. Any who stated that he was an eternalist (believing in an eternal soul) or an annihilationist (declaring that death is followed by nothing) or other such positions were to be politely but firmly handed a pair of white cloths with the invitation to disrobe themselves. Only those bhikkhus who said that the Buddha was an analyst, a proclaimer of an analytical way (*vibhajjavádi*), were to continue as bhikkhus. We do not know how this sorting out of the bhikkhus was organized but the Great

Chronicle (of Sri Lanka, the *Mahávaísa*) tells us that large numbers of bhikkhus were disrobed. Presumably, this refers only to people masquerading as Theraváda bhikkhus but maybe this purification of the Sangha also affected some of the other schools.

Once the Sangha was again in harmony, the Uposatha ceremony was held and the Dhamma-Vinaya rehearsed as it had been in the two previous councils. In this council, certainly, the Abhidhamma piṭaka was completed since venerable Moggaliputta-Tissa added to it the Kathávatthu or Book of Discussions, already mentioned.

Emperor Asoka was not yet satisfied that he had done as much as he could to support the Buddha-Dhamma, so he requested that a number of groups of bhikkhus be sent in different directions both inside and outside his frontiers. He would see that they had adequate support and protection while they should teach Dhamma to all the peoples in his empire and to the various nations on his frontiers and beyond. The Emperor states in his edicts engraved on stone that such parties proceeded to the furthest points of the Mauryan state and beyond to Sri Lanka in the south, to the Golden Land in the east (perhaps Burma or peninsular Thailand), to the Indo-Greek kingdoms on his northwest frontier and also to the Hellenized lands of the far west—Syria, Egypt, North Africa, Epirus and Macedonia.

Regarding this latter expedition, the first Buddhist mission to the West, we do not know how it fared so far away from India though Christian writers have recorded the presence in Alexandria (Egypt) of bhikkhus before the Christianization programme that followed Constantine.

The group sent to Sri Lanka was very successful, for the mission was headed by the Emperor's son, the Arahant Mahinda who was able to teach and lead the Sinhalese monarch Devánampiyatissa to the Three Refuges. Thereafter, Sri Lanka was the island of Dhamma (Dhammadīpa) and the fortress in which the original teachings of the Buddha were preserved under the name Theraváda or Doctrine of the Elders. This tradition was, however, forgotten in large parts of India where speculation, metaphysics and logic combined with a taste for mystical experiences which were not properly understood, provided the basis for all sorts of Buddhist schools. As time went on, these departed further and further from the Buddha's genuine teachings.

We are not sure what happened to the group sent to the Golden Land or exactly where they travelled to. No Buddhist remains from the period of the Emperor Asoka have yet been found in either Burma or Thailand (as far as the writer is aware), but this does not mean that they do not exist: The Buddhist custom of continually

rebuilding monasteries and temples on same site means that the later buildings would obscure the former, so Asokan remains may yet be found. In Burma, the revered Shwe Dagon pagoda in Rangoon is held to go back even beyond Asokan days—to the Buddha-time—when the 'nor chants Tapussa and Bhallika, the first people to give food to the Buddha after his Enlightenment and the first Buddhists, received from him some hair from his head which they enshrined in their own country. This history, however, like that of the Buddha's Buddha's three visits to Sri Lanka, still needs to be confirmed.

However, the general result of the Emperor's efforts to stimulate Dhammaduta work cannot be doubted. His royal support must have been of great value and given many the chance to hear Dhamma who otherwise would not have known of it. But it perhaps goes too far to state, as some authors have done, that it was due to the Emperor that Buddhism began to spread, as though it had not already been spread before by earlier bhikkhus! The Dhamma would have spread anyway due to its universal appeal. It did not have to wait for an emperor before it could spread, although the fact that such a powerful a king advocated the Dhamma would have lent it prestige in the eyes of other kings and princes.

We have mentioned already some examples of Dhammaduta work from the days of the Buddha. Here, as a conclusion to this

chapter, is the story of one bhikkhu from the Buddha-time:

"Thus have I heard: At one time the Exalted One was staying near Sávathhì at the Jeta, Grove, Anathapindlka's monastery. Then venerable Puóóa, emerging from solitary meditation towards evening, approached the Lord, bowed down to him and sat down nearby. Sitting there he spoke thus to the Lord: "It would be good, revered sir, if the Lord would exhort me briefly so that having heard Dhamma from the Lord, I might live alone, remote, diligent, ardent and aspiring."

"Puóóa, there are forms cognizable by the eye, sounds cognizable by the ear, smells cognizable by the nose, tastes cognizable by the tongue, touches cognizable by the body, mental factors cognizable by the mind, all of which are agreeable, pleasant, enticing, connected with sense-pleasures, alluring. If a bhikkhu delights in them, welcomes them and persists in clinging to them then because of this, attachment arises in him. From the arising of attachment, there is the arising of dukkha, thus I declare, Puóóa. But if a bhikkhu does not delight in them, does not welcome them, does not persist in clinging to them then, because of this, attachment ceases in him. From the cessation of attachment there is the cessation of dukkha, thus I declare, Puóóa.

And in what district will you stay now that you have been

briefly exhorted by me?"

"There is a district called Sunaparanta - I shall stay there, Lord".

"The people of Sunaparanta are fierce and rough, Puóóa. If they revile and abuse you, how will it be for you there?"

"If they revile and abuse me, revered sir, it will be like this for me there - (I shall think) `Good indeed are the people of Sunaparanta, very good are the Sunaparanta people, in that they do not give me blows with their hands.' In this case, Lord, it will be like this for me, like this, Wellfarer."

"But if they do give you blows with their hands, how will it be with you there?"

"If they give me blows with their hands ... (I shall think), `Good indeed are the people of Sunaparanta in that they do not give me blows with clods of earth'."

"But if they do give you blows with clods of earth ... ?"

"If they give me blow's with clods of earth ... I shall think, `Good indeed are the people of Sunaparanta in that they do not strike me with a stick'."

"But if they do strike you with a stick ... ?"

"If they strike in, with a stick ...

I shall think, `Good indeed are the people of Sunaparanta in

that they do not stab me with a dagger',"

"But if they do stab you with a dagger . . . , ?"

"If they stab me with a dagger ... I shall think, 'Good indeed are the people of Sunaparanta that they do not deprive me of life with a sharp dagger'."

"But if they do deprive you of life with a sharp dagger ... ?"

``If they stab me with a sharp dagger and deprive me of life . . . I shall think, `There are disciples of the Lord who when tormented by and disgusted with the body (as when severely diseased) look around for a weapon (to take their own lives). I have come upon this dagger without looking round for it'. In this case, Lord it will be like this for me, like this, Wellfarer."

``Good, Puóóa, it is good! You will be able to live in the Sunaparanta district since you have much calm and tranquility. 'Now you should do whatever you think is proper to do'."

Then venerable Puóóa, gladdened by and rejoicing in the Exalted One's words, rising front his seat; bowed down to the Lord, circumambulated him keeping him on the right, set in order his lodging and taking his bowl and robes, set off on his journey to Sunaparanta. Journeying by stages, he gradually approached Sunaparanta. While he was there, venerable Puóóa stayed in that district among the people and during the Rains he brought into (the

Dhamma) about five hundred laymen and five hundred lay-women. During the Rains, also, he realized the Three Knowledges. After a time venerable Puóóa attained Final Nibbána.

When this had happened, many bhikkhus approached the Lord; bowed down and sat down nearby. Sitting there they spoke this to the Lord: "Revered Sir, that young man of excellent family who was briefly exhorted by the Lord, has died. What is his bourn, what is his, future state?"

“Puóóa 'was wise, bhikkhus. He followed the Dhamma according to Dhamma. He did not harass me with (senseless) queries on Dhamma. Puóóa has attained Final Nibbána."

Thus spoke the Lord. Delighted, those bhikkhus rejoiced in the Exalted One's words."

(Middle Length Collection Discourse 145: The Exhortation to Puóóa)

Notes

[1] See, *Buddhist Legends* Vol. I p. 146f, and “Minor Readings and Illustrator” p. 267f.

[2] The Apphaka-Vagga (Chapter on the Eights) in Suttanipáta . See the new translation to be issued by P.T.S. This passage is from *The Life of the Buddha*, translated by Ven. Nyanamoli, BPS

[3] Translated by venerable Nyanaponika Maháthera in *Anguttara Nikáya, An Anthology, Part II*, Wheel 208-211, BPS

[4] The most translated book of Buddhist scriptures. See the author's translation, *The Path of Truth*, Mahámakut Press, Bangkok.

Chapter IV

from

BANNER OF THE ARAHANTS

Bhikkhu Khantipálo

Buddhist Monks and Nuns from the Buddha's time till now

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