

THARAVADA MYANMAR BUDDHIST INITIATION INTO NOVICE

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ABSTRACT

The initiation to become a novice is compulsory and the most important of all religious ceremonies for a Buddhist boy. Of all the merits acquired through charity (dāna)¹, the gain accrued by the celebration of the initiation ceremony is the most auspicious one for devout Buddhists in Myanmar. It is deemed worthy to offer one's own son to the Monastic Order of the Lord Buddha, by which the parents of the novice consequently become members of the royal family of the Sakya-muni Gotama, the Buddha.

Key words: Lord Buddha, Jetavana monastery

1. INTRODUCTION

The initiation to become a novice is compulsory and the most important of all religious ceremonies for a Buddhist boy. Of all the merits acquired through charity (dāna)², the gain accrued by the celebration of the initiation ceremony is the most auspicious one for devout Buddhists in Myanmar. It is deemed worthy to offer one's own son to the Monastic Order of the Lord Buddha, by which the parents of the novice consequently become members of the royal family of the Sakya-muni Gotama, the Buddha.

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11. Ordinance of ten Excommunicable offences.
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1. Presentation and introduction of the boy aspirant to the order of monks

The master of ceremonies presents the parents and boy aspirant or neophyte to the assembly of monks seated on the stage, and supplicates for the performance of the initiation ceremony.

2. supplicating the order for the election of a monk to shave the head of the neophyte

The neophyte is reassured that he has sought the consent from his parents, because it is illegal or unlawful to initiate a boy without the permission of his parents. The master of ceremonies then supplicates the order of monks on behalf of the neophyte for the appointment of the person to shave the head of the boy aspirant, the prince.

3. Shaving of the head and the preliminary meditation of the neophyte

When the abbot or a member of the order agrees to novitiate him, the boy's head is shaved by monks or a lay-person. There are in this body; hair of the head, hair of the body, nails, teeth, and skin which are unclean, abominable, filthy, lifeless and unsubstantial.

4. Requesting permission for participation

Having his head shaved and washed well with soap powder and turmeric, the candidate asks permission to sit amidst the congregation of the Chapter of monks. may I, your reverend

¹ Dāna = charity

² Dāna = charity

³ three Retanas = Buddha, Dham and Sangha

sirs, ask your permission to join the congregation of the Chapter of monks.”

5. Handing over of the robes to the Chapter

Equipped with the eight requisites of a novice, the candidate is brought into the assembly of monks to request for the formal initiation to become a novice. The candidate squats properly holding the robes in his hands paying due respect to the assembly and recites; reverend sirs, would you be kind enough to accept this robe and out of your compassion initiate me in order that I may realize Nibbana⁴.

Eight compulsory requisites of a novice are;

1. Alms bowl (patta)⁵, 2. Two upper garment robes, 3. One underwear robe, 4. One girdle, 5. One razor, 6. One needle, 7. One water-strainer.

6. Asking for the robes from the chapter and the candidate recites again Reverend sirs, would you be kind enough to return to me that robe and out of your compassion initiate me in order that I may realize Nibbana.

7. Changing from layman clothes into the monastic robes

Then the Preceptor helps the candidate divest himself of all his royal dress, and clothes him in the yellow robes of a Buddhist Novice.

8. Request for admission into the order

The candidate, clad in yellow robes and fully equipped with other essential requisites of a novice, squats properly facing the chapter of monks and supplicates for formal initiation.

9. Taking refuge in the three Ratanas⁶ (Buddha, Dhamma and samgha) and pledging to observe the ten precepts

Ten precepts of a novice shall then be observed with the consent of the preceptor.

Reverend sir, I request for the ten precepts to be observed by a novice, together with the three Refuges. Would you be kind enough to counsel me on the precepts.

Then the preceptor leads intoning the sacred words of the three refuges.

May me honour be to the Glorious, the Almighty, the Infallible, and the self-enlightened exalted Buddha. I take refuge in the Buddha. I take refuge in the Dhamma (the doctrine). I take refuge in the Samgha . You have fulfilled taking refuge in the three precious ideals.”The postulant replies to this, ama bhante⁷ (Thus it is) The preceptor then counsels the postulant to observe the ten precepts. I observe the precept not to kill any sentient being . I observe the precept not to steal things that are not given. I observe the precept not to indulge ignoble sexual pleasure. I observe the precept not to tell falsehood. I observe the precept not to take intoxicants. Translation from pali to English; I observe the precept not to take any food after noontime. I observe the precept not to indulge in the use of flowers, perfumes or any other cosmetic. I observe the precept not to use high and grand seats and beds.

10. The appointment of a preceptor ,the Spiritual Teacher or Spiritual Master

The newly initiated novice there after seeks for a spiritual teacher or preceptor, approaching an elderly monk saying; “ Uppajjhayo me bhante hohi”= would you please be my preceptor. When the preceptor instructs the novice that he

must in all sincerity fulfil the duties And ordinances of a novice, the novice pledges. “ Ama bhamte “= Thus is shall be. **11,12. The ordinance of ten punishable (abhorrent / abominable) offences**

A novice shall be punished either by the preceptor or by any member of the Bhikkhu⁸ Samgha Order if he transgresses any one of the ten offences.

1. He shall not take any food after noon time until the dawn of the next day.
2. He shall not enjoy dancing, singing or playing of musical instruments.
3. He shall not indulge in cosmetics perfume and flowers.
4. He shall not sit on high and grand seats.
5. He shall not be engaged in monastery matters or handling of gold and silver.
6. He shall not attempt to prevent the income of their monks.
7. He shall not attempt to create the loss of benefit of other monks.
8. He shall not attempt to dislocate the residence of other monks.
9. He shall not abuse or curse the other monks.
10. He shall not create dissension amongst the members of the order.

13. Four articles on retrospective knowledge (Paccavekkhana)⁹ Meditatio

A novice shall everyday meditate upon the four sustenances, namely, robe , food ,dwelling, and medicine. This is also known as “The recital of rosary telling or beads counting.”

1. With proper meditative introspection and attention. I wear these robes just to avoid cold to avoid heat, to prevent the bite of insects, mosquitoes, snakes, scorpions, and bugs, to take shelter from wind and sun, and to cover the shameful parts of the body.
2. With proper meditative introspection and attention. I partake of the food not to play, not to be mad with strength, not to beautify my physical structure, not to decorate my body ; however I take it just to sustain the vitality of this body , to appease hunger , to support the noble religious practices and that the former diseases may be (cured) dispelled and that the new diseases may not arise ,that the balance of diet may be there to me , that there may be no (inconvenience) fault , and so that I may stay comfortably.
3. With proper meditative introspection and attention I live in the monastic shelter and use the facilities merely to avoid cold, heat; to prevent the bites of insects, mosquitoes, snakes, scorpions, and bugs, to take shelter from wind and sun; to be able to adjust to the weather and climatic conditions so as to be comfortable and easy in religious practices.
4. With proper meditative introspection and attention I take the medicine and utilize medical

⁴ Nibbana⁴ = (the perfect emancipation from the entire cycle of sufferings).

⁵ (patta)⁵ = Alms bowl

⁶ three Ratanas⁶ = Buddha, Dhamma and samgha

⁷ ama bhante⁷ = Thus it is

⁸ Bhikkhu⁸ = monk

⁹ (Paccavekkhana)⁹ = 1. Attitude adopted by monk and novices when making use of the four requisites
2. retrospection (of pathconsciousness, fruition etc attained)

facilities for the benefit of health, merely to avoid and cure the illness and diseases which may arise and only to overcome the suffering of sickness and pain.

14. Salutation and reverence of parents to the new Novice

After the formal admission by the Chapter of senior monks, the lay devotees file up to the front of the assembly hall, the novice's parents in the lead, and then prostrate themselves in reverence before the newly initiated novice. For the young novice this act of religious reverence on the part of his own parents is the most moving part of the entire ceremony.

15. The sermon and Water Libation

The Master of Ceremonies announces that the Reverend Abbots are going to preach and recite holy discourses of protection and that the water libation is going to be performed. Then the senior monk delivers a short sermon stressing the various merits to be derived from the Novitiation ceremony. The sermon ends with some words from the Abhidhamma Pitaka¹⁰, about the Doctrine of Morality, Immorality and Equanimity. Then all the member of the Order recite in unison the Holy Discourses of protection. Finally the water libation is performed by the parents of the novice pouring down the water jointly. They then announce that they share their merit with others.

2. CONCLUSION

The noble teaching of Lord Buddha were prepare him to lead a rewording life. The strict discipline and austerity of monastic life will mould his delicate character and encourage him to confront the future with understanding and loving kindness for all living beings. He will become a Buddhist who can withstand the ups and downs of life most courageously. He is and will be gradually moving onward to the ultimate Goal of extinction (Nibbana) just as the slow, deep, rhythmic beating of the great drums. This farewell music of the Orchestra proclaims the happy climax and final of the Novitiation Ceremony.

3. REFERENCES

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¹⁰ Abhidhamma Pitaka¹⁰, = the Doctrine of Morality