

VINAYA

Ownership and Administration of Monasteries

Ajahn Brahmavamso

Vinaya is the name for the body of monastic rules and traditions that are binding on every Buddhist monk and nun. The Vinaya was established by the Buddha himself and is now preserved in written form, both in the ancient Indian languages and in English translation.

With so many new people having come into the Society in the last few years, many of our members and friends know very little about the rules of discipline of the monastic community. It is important for the lay community to have an understanding of these rules to ensure that we do not behave in any way which is offensive to the Sangha nor which could create difficulty for them. We have therefore decided to reprint a series of articles in this and forthcoming newsletters, which were written by Ajahn Brahm a number of years ago.

Ownership and Administration of Monasteries:

In the time of the Buddha, when a lay Buddhist offered lands or buildings, or money for such things, to establish a monastery, they would dedicate it to ***The Sangha of the Four Quarters Present and Yet to Come***. The Sangha of the four quarters present and yet to come means ALL properly ordained monks and nuns. This would include all legitimate Buddhist monks and nuns, of all nationalities and sects. Today it would probably include most Chinese Mahayana monks and nuns (bhiksus and bhiksunis) but it would exclude some Tibetan lamas and most Zen roshis, the married ones at least! Thus the owners of the monastery are the worldwide and "timewide" community of monks and nuns.

The administrators of the monastery were those monks or nuns who lived there. They would meet regularly to make any decisions concerning their monastery and all such decisions had to be unanimous. But there are many rules of Vinaya which restrict what the resident monastics may do, in order to safeguard the monastery from corrupt monks. For example, they can't decide to give Sangha property away (unless it is trifling), nor to divide up the goods among themselves, (then disrobing, selling up, and moving to Majorca!). The community at a monastery is bound to preserve and maintain in good order all Sangha property, holding it in trust for the monastics now and in the future.

In large monasteries, and some had thousands of monks and nuns, the community would delegate some of its responsibilities to competent monks and nuns. Thus there would be a monk in charge of allocating lodgings, and one in charge of building and maintenance. Ven. Maha Moggalana, one of the Buddha's two chief monk disciples, was perhaps the most effective of the building monks. Once the Buddha commissioned him, with the assistance of 500 monks, to build the grandiose dwelling called the "Migaramatu Pasada" at Savatthi, with funds donated by the foremost female lay disciple Visakha. This monastic dwelling had two stories, each with 500 rooms pinnacled with gold! Because of Ven. Maha Moggalana's psychic powers (they didn't have cranes and bulldozers then) it took only 9 months to complete. It makes our efforts at Bodhinyana look puny.

In conclusion, in the time of the Buddha, the resident monastic community ran their monastery in every respect, maintaining it in good order for the benefit of all monks and nuns, now and in the future. And monastics did get involved in the building, although only now and again. The famous monasteries in ancient India, such as the Jeta Grove outside of Savatthi where the Buddha spent 19 rains retreats, were owned by the Sangha and run by the monks -- there was no Buddhist Society of Savatthi! Then there was no need.

*Ajahn Brahmavamso
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