

Paying Homage to the Three Ratanas

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Abstract

The Myanmar Buddhist pays obeisance to the Three Gems before bed-time. It has also described the tradition of this homage as mentioned in the Canonical literature: human and *devas* paid respect to the Buddha with the formula of '*Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammā-sambudhassa*', the Elders composed verses to extol the Buddha's attributes at His Great Demise, and the authors in those days showed their respects to the Three Gems in the Prologues of their books. Homage can be paid in three ways-bodily, verbally and mentally- and out of them paying homage by words is deemed to be the best and the most beneficial. Moreover, worshipping of all the Three *Ratanas* has the power of goodwill to dispel totally the harms inside and outside of the sentient beings. In this paper, one can find the benefits to be accrued from such veneration to the Three Gems.

Introduction

Buddhism is classified into three Gems categories. These are *Buddhaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi* (I take refuge in the Buddha, the Enlightened One), *Dhammaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi* (I take refuge in the *Dhamma*, the Doctrine) and *Samghaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi* (I take refuge in the *Samgha*, the Order). The Buddha promotes the interests, deters those things which destroy the interests and protects them from various dangers that would befall on them of those who take refuge in the Buddha. The *Dhamma* provides consolation to those who are suffering from the agonies of existence and leads them to liberation from the difficult journey of *saṃsāra* of those who take refuge in the *Dhamma*. The *saṃghā* can bring about enormous benefits from a little bit of meritorious deed to those who take refuge in the *Samghā*.

The Myanmar Buddhists usually says prayer in front of the Buddha images before going to bed and just after getting up. When they do so, they do not pay homage to the images or stupa of the Buddha. They pay homage to the three *Ratanas* (Gems); namely, The Buddha (The Enlightened One), The *Dhamma* (His teaching) and The *Samgha* (His Order). They revere the attributes of the Buddha, which are infinite in terms of glory, *kamma*, wisdom and beneficence. They revere such attributes of the *Dhamma*-comprising the four paths, the four Fruitions, and *Nibbāna*-as the attributes of the '*svakkhātātā*' being expounded carefully by the Buddha. They revere such attributes of the *Samgha* as the attributes of practicing well the threefold training and that of practicing them righteously. In doing so the worshipper observes the five-fold touches which includes touching of the floor with the forehead, two palms and the knees. While doing so he recites the formula *Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammasambudhassa* "Homage to the Blessed, the worthy and The Self-Enlightened One!" The follows are taking three times of refuge in the three jewels. Then they come taking the five precepts.¹ (Abstinence from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, telling lies, and liquors and intoxicants). If the worship takes place in the morning the worshipper may offer light, water and cooked rice with fruit or a dish of curry. But in the evening offering of light and water is adequate. If he has time, he directs his thoughts of *Mettā* (loving-kindness) to all beings all over the world so that they may be well, happy and free from dangers. Finally he contemplates on the three *Lakkhaṇas* (characteristics of existence) such as *Anicca* (impermanence), *Dukkha* (suffering) and *Anatta* (Non-Self). In this way he acquires merits which he shares with other beings and his worship is ended for the day.

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¹ The Buddha pointed out that faith in the Three Gems and observance of the five precepts can lead one to the stream-winner stage. *Samyutta* Vol.III, *Buddhasāsana* Council, Yangon, 1960, 229.

Paying homage to the wonderful attributes of the Buddha

Even in the lifetime of the Buddha, the humans, *devas* and *Brāhmas* paid homage to the wonderful attributes of the Buddha. Any utterance due to joyful reverence of the Buddha's attributes is called 'udāna' (joyous utterance). It is found that the commonest utterance of showing one's delight in the Buddha's attributes has been the formula of '*Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsambuddhassa*' (Homage to Him, the Blessed One, the Worthy one and the Fully Enlightened One!). One *brāhman* lady called *Danañjānī*, who had attained the stream-winner stage, uttered this formula thrice when she slipped on her way to bring a meal her husband *brāhman* for *Bhāradvāja*.¹

One professor of a Brahman family called *Brahmāyu* learnt the attributes of the Buddha from his pupil, young *Uttara*. Then he reverently uttered the same formula with hands clasped palm to palm and put forth in the direction of the Lord.²

Once, the king of gods *Sakka* received permission, through *Mātali*, to see the Buddha. He asked the Buddha what he wanted to know. After that, he worshipped the Lord and with joy uttered the formula of '*Namo Tassa Sammāsambuddhassa*' three times.³

One *Ārāmadāṇḍa* a Brahman learnt, from the Venerable *Kaccāyana*, that the Buddha had freed Himself from defilements. With veneration, the *brāhman* uttered the formula three times and paid homage with hands in obeisance and five touches on earth, facing *Sāvatti* where the Buddha was then residing.⁴

It is found, therefore, that human beings, *devas* and *brāhmas* revere the Buddha very much when they learn the immeasurable attributes of the Buddha. Even in His lifetime, the beings who venerated the Buddha paid homage with the formula of '*Namo tassa Sammāsambuddhassa*'.

Moreover, we find in such treatises as the *Therāpadāna* that the elders composed different verses of eulogy on the Buddha's attributes when the Lord's passing-away was near. In other words, they verbally paid respects to Lord Buddha.⁵

So it is worth noting that the tradition of saying prayers in praise of the Buddha's attributes is a long accepted tradition of gaining merit. As devout Buddhists of later generations have preserved this tradition, scholars have kept their tradition of composing verses on the Buddha's attributes according to their best abilities of faith, intellect and diligence.

The compilers of Buddhist treatises used to put in the prologues to their books some verses of eulogy on the attributes of the Three Gems. In the following will be described how ancient commentators eulogized the attributes of the Gems in their Prologues. The noted commentators of the Buddhist Canon are the Venerable *Mahā Buddhaghosa*, the Venerable *Dhammapāla*, the Venerable *Buddhadatta*, the Venerable *Upasena*, the Venerable *Mahānāma* and the Venerable *Sāriputta*.⁶

¹ Saṃyutta Vol.I, Buddhasāsana Council, Yangon, 1959, 162.

² Majjhimaṇṇāsa, Buddhasāsana Council, Yangon, 1956, 334-341.

³ Dīghanikāya Vol. II, Buddhasāsana Council, Yangon, 1955, 201-30.

⁴ Aṅguttara Vol.I Buddhasāsana Council, Yangon, 1959, 68.

⁵ Apadāna Vol. I, Buddhasāsana Council, Yangon, 1957, 52. Apadāna Vol. II, Buddhasāsana Council, Yangon, 1957, 210.

⁶ Ti-Piṭaka pāli-Myanmar Abhidhān, Vol, I, Buddhasāsana Council, Yangon, 2004, 98-101. (Hereafter referred to as Ti-pi-dhān)

Among the above mentioned commentators, the Venerable *Mahā Buddhaghosa*¹ is the best-known and most prolific author of the canonical commentaries.

From his commentaries, we find that the commentator *Mahā Buddhaghosa* had profound knowledge about Buddhism and the allied subjects and had firm belief in the Three Gems. In the Prologue to the *Sīlakkhandā* Commentary, the Venerable *Buddhaghosa* extolled the attributes of the Three Gems in the following verses:

Karuṇāsītalalahadayam, paññāpajjotavihatamohatamam.
Sanarāmaralokagarum, vande sugatam gati vimuttam.
Buddhopi Buddhabhavam, bhāvetvā ceva sacchikatvā ca.
Yam upagato gatamalam, vande tamam nuttaram dhammam.
Sugatassa orasāna, puttānam mārasenama thanānam.
*Aṭṭhannampi samūham, sirasā vande ariyasamgam.*²

I pay homage to the compassionate Buddha who is peaceful, who has dispelled the darkness of *avijjā* with the light of *Arahatta Magga Paññā*, who is a teacher of all sentient beings including men, *devas* and *brāhmas* and who is free from five kinds of existence.

Buddha reflects on the Buddhahood, and knows the ten kinds of such *Dhammas* as the Four Paths, the Four Fruitions, *Nibbāna* and *Pariyatti* which are unsurpassed by any *Dhamma* and the opposites of the impurities of defilements. I pay homage to those ten kinds of *Dhamma*.

I pay homage to the eight persons who have destroyed the army of *Māra* and the *Ariya Saṅgha* who know moderation.

Venerable *Buddhadatta* compiled *Buddhavaṃsa Aṭṭhakathā*.³ At the beginning of this commentary, the noble *Thera* wrote the preliminary paying of homage to the Three *Ratanas*-Buddha, *Dhamma* and *Saṅgha*.

Anantañānam karuṇālayam layam,
malassa Buddhaṃ susamāhitam hitam.
Namāmi dhammam bhavasam varamvaram,

¹ Buddhaghosa Thera was a brahman born in a village near Buddhagaya and became proficient in the Vedas and allied branches of knowledge. One day he met a monk, named Revata, and on being defeated by him in controversy, entered the Order to learn the Buddha's teaching. Because his speech was profound, like that of the Buddha, and because his words spread throughout the world (like those of the Buddha), he came to be called Buddhaghosa. Malakasekers. G.P: Dictionary of Pāli Proper Name, Vol. II, Munshiram Manoharalal Publishers Pvt Ltd, New Delhi, 2002, 306. (Hereafter referred to as DPPN)

² Mahābuddhaghosa, Bhaddanta, Dīghanikāya Aṭṭhakathā Vol. I, Buddhasāsana Council, Yangon, 1957, 1.

³ Venerable Buddhadatta was called "Mahākavi Buddhadatta" in Ceylon. He was a native of Uragapura in the Southern India. He came to Mahā-vihāra monastery in Anurā-dhapūra of Ceylon and made a study of Mahā Aṭṭhakathā, etc. The noble Thera compiled commentary texts on Abhidhammāvatāra, Vinaya Vinicchaya Pāli, Uttara Vinicchaya Pāli, Rūpārūpa Vibhāga Pāli, and Buddhavaṃsa Pāli. He was a scholarly Thera who was proficient in Piṭakas. DPPN, Vol. II, 307. Kelāsa, Ashin, Ashin Vicittasārā-bhivasa Theruppatti, Buddhasāsana Council, Yangon, 1980, 36. (Hereafter referred to as Vicitta). Ti-pi-dhān, 31.

*guṇakarañceva niraṅgaṇaṃ gaṇaṃ.*¹

I pay homage to the Buddha who has boundless *Sabbāññuta Ñāṇa*, who is the location of great compassion, who has cut off the impurity of defilements with the sword of *Arahatta-magga Ñāṇa*, who has the right concentration, and who bears the welfare of sentient beings such as men, *devas* and *brāhmas*, to the ten noble *Dhammas* which prevent existence, the goal desired by sentient beings such as men, *devas* and *brāhmas*, and the eight *Ariya-saṃgha* who are the location of good qualities such as *Suppaṭipanna*, the location of the attributes such as *sīla* (morality) and who are totally cleansed of *kilesas* (defilements).

Venerable *Dhammapāla*² was the noble *Thera* who compiled the commentary texts on the *Pāli* texts of *Udāna*, *Itivuttaka*, *Vimāna Vatthu*, *Peta Vatthu*, *Theragāthā*, *Therī gāthā*, *Cariya Piṭaka* and *Netti* belonging to the *Khuddaka Nikāya*.³ Here is presented the preliminary paying of homage to the Three *Ratanas* at the beginning of the commentary text on *Peta Vatthu*.

Mahākāruṇikaṃ nāthaṃ, ñeyyasāgarapāraguṃ.

Vande nipuṇagambhīra, vicitrānāyadesanaṃ.

Vijjācaraṇasampanno, yena niyyanti lokato.

Vande tamuttamaṃ dhammaṃ, Sammāsambuddha pujiṭaṃ.

Sīlādiguṇa sampan, tḥito magga phelesu yo.

*Vande ariyasamṅhaṃ taṃ, puññakkhettaṃ anuttaraṃ.*⁴

I pay homage to the Buddha who is possessed of great compassion, who knows the *Ñeyyadhamma* (Five Knowable Principles), who has reached the shore of *Nibbāna* on the other side of *Samsāra*, who preached *Dhamma* in subtle and profound ways and who is the saviour of the Triple World. I pay homage to the *Dhammas* of *Magga* (Path), *Phala* (Fruit) and *Nibbāna* expounded by the Buddha who is endowed with knowledge and noble practice for the deliverance of sentient beings. I pay homage to the *Ariya-saṃgha* who is replete with attributes such as *sīla*, who are established at *Magga* and *Phala* and who are like peerless fertile paddy fields where wholesome seeds are sown.

The preliminary devotion *gāthās* of the commentator *Theras* are composed extolling the various attributes of the Buddha. Homage is also paid to the profundity and nobility of the *Dhamma* and also reverentially paid to the *Ariya-saṃgha* who are well-practised in the noble *Dhamma* and who are replete with worthy attributes and qualities. The devotion *gāthās* are composed with embellishments in accordance with the rules of *Pāli* prosody. Thus the commentators' wealth of knowledge, ability to compose *Pāli* verses and mastery of *Pāli*

¹ Bhuddadatta, Ashin, *Buddhavaṃsa Aṭṭhakathā*, Buddhasāsana Council, Yangon, 1959, 1.

² He lived at Badaratiṭṭha in south India. He was a native of Kiñcipura. His dates are uncertain though it is generally agreed that he is posterior to Buddhaghosa. He seems to have studied in the Mahāvihāra, because he mentions this fact in the introduction to his books. DPPN. Vol. I, 1146.

³ *Ti-pi-dhān*, Vol. I, 32.

⁴ *Dhammapāla*, Ācariya, *Thera*, *Peta Vatthu Aṭṭhakathā*, Buddhasāsana Council, Yangon, 1958, 1.

literature are highly admirable. The *gāthās* possess qualities to invoke rapture of *saddhā* (faith) over the Three *Ratanas* in the mind of the *gāthās* reciters.

The subcommentators of the Aṭṭhakaṭṭhā¹ texts also composed *Pāli gāthās* on the attributes of the Three *Ratanas* so that they inspire devotion and respect. The novelty and the versification of the subcommentators enable to promote *saddhā* in the mind of the readers. The devotion *gāthās* of three subcommentators will be presented.

Venerable *Coḷiyakassapa*² compiled a subcommentary text on *Vimativinodanī*. The noble *Thera* also compiled *Mahavicchedanī* text.³ He was well-known as the Sayadaw who was proficient in three Piṭatka.⁴ The noble *Thera* composed the preliminary obeisance in *Ganthārambha* (endeavour) of *Vimativinodanī Ṭikā* text.

*Karuṇāpunṇahadayaṃ, Sugataṃ hitadāyakaṃ. Natvā Dhammañca vimalaṃ, Saṃghañca guṇa sampadaṃ.*⁵

I pay homage to the Buddha who is endowed with great compassion, and who brings the welfare of men, devas and *brahmas*, to the *Dhammas* of *Magga*, *Phala* and *Nibbāna* which are cleansed of the impurities of defilements, and to the *Ariya-saṃgha* who are the replete with the attribute of *Suppaṭipanna*.

Venerable *Sāriputta* compiled a subcommentary text of *Sāratthadīpanī Ṭikā* on *Samantapāsādikā*.⁶ The noble *Thera* possessed the intellectual capacity to be skilled in *Takka* text, Sanskrit text, etc.⁷ The noble *Thera* composed an act of obeisance to Buddha, *Dhamma* and *Saṃgha* as follows:

Mahākaruṇikaṃ Buddhaṃ, dhammañca vimalaṃ varaṃ.

*Vande ariyasamghañca, dakkhiṇeyya nirāṅgaṇaṃ.*⁸

I pay homage to the Buddha who is possessed of great compassion, to the *Dhamma* which is noble and pure, and to the *Saṃgha* who are peerless in being worthy of receiving offering and cleansed of impurities of defilements.

Venerable *Vijīrabuddhi*⁹ was a noble *Thera* who compiled a subcommentary text of *Vajīrabuddhi Ṭikā* on *Samantapāsādikā* (five *Vinayas*) Aṭṭhakaṭṭhā.¹⁰ The text was named *Vajīrabuddhi Ṭikā* after the name of the commentator who resided at *Mahāvihāra Kyaungdaik*

¹ Venerable Vajirabuddhi, Venerable Sāriputta, Venerable Coḷiyakassapa, Venerable Dhammapāla, Venerable Ānandā, Venerable Saddhammapāla, Ti-pi-dhān, Vol. I, 98-101.

² Venerable Coḷiyakassapa was a resident of Coḷa Kingdom in Southern India. Mahāsīriyeyasu Mīngyi: Piṭakataw Tamainn, haṃsāvati Press, Yangon, 1955, 166. (Hereafter referred to as Ptk Tamainn)

³ Ptk Tamainn, 126.DPPN, Vol. I, 551.

⁴ Vicitta, 41.

⁵ Coḷiyakassapa, Venerable, Vimativinodanī Ṭikā Vol. I, Buddhasāsana Council Yangon, 1960, 1.

⁶ Venerable Sāriputta was a renowned *Thera* during the reign of King Parakkamabāhu in Ceylon. The noble *Thera* was a Sanskrit scholar. He compiled *Vinaya Saṃgha Aṭṭhakaṭṭhā*, *Disāratthamañjūsā*, and *Pañcīkālaṅkāra Ṭikā* texts. DPPN. Vol. II, 1118.

⁷ Vicitta, 41.

⁸ Sāriputta, *Thera*, *Sāratthadīpanī Ṭikā*, Vol. I, Buddhasāsana Council Yangon, 1960, 1.

⁹ Venerable Vajirabuddhi was a noble *Thera* who appeared in about A.D. 1036 in Ceylon. He was proficient in Buddhist Scriptures. The Sinhalese scholars consider that Venerable Vajirabuddhi compiled a commentary text of *Nyāsa* text on *Kaccāyana*. Vicitta, 40.

¹⁰ DPPN, Vol. II. 554. Ti-pi-dhān, Vol. I. 32, 34.

in the south of *Anurādha* town in Ceylon.¹ The noble Thera composed the obeisance prologue prologue at the beginning of this *Ṭīkā* as follows:-

*Paññāvisuddhāya dayāya sabbe, Vimocitā yena vineyyasattā. Taṃ cakkhubhutaṃ siratā namitvā, Lokassa lokanta gatassa dhammaṃ. Saṃghaṅca sīladiguṇehi yuttaṃ.*²

I pay homage to the Buddha who causes the liberation of all sentient beings from the *Samsāra* whirlpool with especially pure wisdom and great compassion, and who is also like the eyes of the Triple World, to the noble *Dhamma* of the *Buddha-Magga*, *Phala* and *Nibbāna*, and to the *Ariya-saṃgha* who are endowed with attributes such as *sīla*, etc.)

Above mentioned commentators of the *Ṭīkā* texts composed preliminary devotion *gāthās* at the beginning of their *Ṭīkā* texts by extolling the peerless nobility of the Three *Ratanas*. Buddha's attributes are wonderfully praised. It is quite astounding to find the commentators' implicit faith in Buddhism and their proficiency and skill in Buddhist literature.

The commentators used to pay homage to the Three *Ratanas* at the beginning of their commentary texts. It is known as *Ratanas Paṇāma* (Homage to the Three *Ratanas*). It is of three kinds. They are:-

- (1) *Kāyapaṇāma* - bodily worshipping by bowing down respectfully,
- (2) *Vacīpaṇāma* - verbally worshipping by reciting, and
- (3) *Manopaṇāma* - mentally worshipping by recollecting the attributes.

Of the three kinds, *Vacīpaṇāma* is more beneficial. *Kāyapaṇāma* and *Manopaṇāma* can be the homage of a single commentator. *Vacīpaṇāma* should be the homage of Sotujana (one who studies scriptures, listeners and learners) and the commentators. Therefore the *Vacīpaṇāma* is more beneficial than *Kāyapaṇāma* and *Manopaṇāma*.³

Furthermore homage by *Kāyapaṇāma* and *Manopaṇāma* has the power of dispelling harm. Thus it is beneficial for oneself. As worshipping by *Vacīpaṇāma* shows the special attributes of the Buddha and so it can inspire respects and devotion in others. Thus it is also beneficial for oneself. Therefore *Vacīpaṇāma* excels *Kāyapaṇāma* and *Manopaṇāma*.⁴

Vacīpaṇāma is further divided into two kinds. They are:-

- (1) *Kevalapaṇāma* - worshipping by uttering "I pay homage to the Buddha" without describing the attributes and
- (2) *Thomanāpaṇāma* - worshipping by reciting "I pay homage to the Buddha who is possessed of attributes such as *Arahaṃ*, etc."

¹ Ptk Thamainn, 116.

² Vajirabuddhi, Ashin, Vajirabuddhi Ṭīkā, Buddhasāsana Council Yangon, 1960, 1.

³ Janakābhivamsa, Ashin, Saṅgrobhāsāṭīkā, Kuthalavadī Press, Yangon, 1957, 2 (Hereafter referred to as Saṅ-bhā-

ṭ) paññājota, Ashin, Alaṅkāṭīkā-Thit-Nissaya&Alaṅkā-ṭīkābhāsā, Hlaing Ratana Press, Yangon, 1982, 20.

(Hereafter referred to as Alaṅkā. Ti, Thit).

⁴ Tejodīpa Thera, Ashin, Parittaṭīkāpāṭh, Buddhasāsana Council Yangon, 1973, 23.

The worshipping with *Thomanāpaṇāma* can inspire *saddhā*, *paññā*, etc. more than worshipping with *Kevalapaṇāma*. Therefore successive commentators usually worship with *Thomanāpaṇāma*.¹

By worshipping the Three *Ratanas*, the benefits such as safe completion of the text, ability to study the text in peace etc. are accrued.² Therefore the commentators have the habit of paying homage to the Three *Ratanas* first and foremost.

Moreover, worshipping of all the Three *Ratanas* has the power of goodwill to dispel totally the harms inside and outside of the sentient beings.³

Again, those who are accustomed to worship and giving respects to those who are senior in age, merit and dignity begets four benefits, namely, *āyu* (longevity), *vaṇṇa* (good looks), *sukha* (happiness) and *bala* (strength).⁴

There are four other kinds of worshipping. They are:-

- (1) *Bhayavandanā* - worshipping in fear,
- (2) *Lābhavandanā* - worshipping with expectation of getting official position, honors, wealth and gifts,
- (3) *Kulācāravandanā* - worshipping without inclination, merely according to tradition,
- (4) *Ācariyavandanā* - worshipping of one's teacher who teaches secular knowledge.

The kinds of worship described above are not the ways of the commentators worship. The commentators worship having belief in the attributes of the Three *Ratanas* and with ardent good will.⁵

Conclusion

The three gems put away the fear, the physical and mental suffering, the dangers of the four miserable Abodes and *Samsāra* who take refuge in the three gems. Therefore, it is found that taking refuge in the three Gems-Buddha, *Dhamma* and *Samgha*-have the capability of making a person peaceful and happy. So one should have take refuge in the Three Gems out of one's own volition and critical appraisal.

Acknowledgement

I would like to express my thanks to my parents who supported me throughout preparation for this paper. I am also grateful to the following persons who give me valuable suggestions and guidance:-

*Baddanta Therinda, Professor and Head of the Department of Pāli Literature, State Pariyatti Sāsana University, Yangon and

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⁴ Dhammapada, Buddhasāsana Council, Yangon, 1955, 109.

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