

INTRODUCTION TO KATHINA

By Ven. Phramaha Somboon Siddhinyano

The word Kathina literally means 'difficulty' but in its extended sense it signifies a wooden frame, the frame on which a robe is spread and cut or sewed along its line. When the season for making yellow robes is over the component parts of the frame will be taken apart and kept for next year's use. In ancient days Bhikkhus used the wooden frame on which to sew and cut their robes and also their Kathina-robe-making was to have been finished in one day. But nowadays there is no need to use it because there are people who are skillful in making the robes for the monks without using the wooden frame as mentioned above.

The origin of Kathina – is as follows: At that time the Awakened One, the Lord was staying at Sāvattī City, in Jeta Grove in Anāthapīṇḍika's monastery. Now at that time there were thirty monks-1 of Paṭheyya Province, all forest-dwellers, all almsmen, all wearers of rag-robes, all wearers of the three robes, going to Sāvattī so as to see the Lord when the beginning of the Rains-residence (vassūpanāyika) was approaching, were unable to reach Sāvattī for the beginning of the Rains-residence; they entered upon the Rains on the way, at Sāketa City. They spent the Rains in a state of longing, thinking: The Lord is staying close to us, six yojanas-2 from here, but we are not getting a chance to see the Lord”.

Then these monks, after the lapse of three months of the rainy season, kept the Rains, after the Admonition had been carried out, while it was still raining, while waters were gathering, while swamps were still forming, with drenched robes and in a state of weariness approached Sāvattī, the Jeta Grove, Anāthapīṇḍika's monastery. Having approached and greeted the Lord they sat down at a respectful distance.

Then the Lord exchanged friendly greetings with the in-coming monks and spoke thus to these monks: 'I hope, monks, that things went well with you, I hope you had enough to support life, I hope that, in unity, being on friendly terms and harmonious, you spent a complete rainy season and did not go short of alms-food?.

'Things went well with us, Lord, we had enough to support life, Lord, and unity we, Lord, being on friendly terms and harmonious, spent the rainy season did not go short of alms-food. Here are we, Lord, as many as thirty monks of Paṭheyya Province, coming to Sāvattī so as to see the Lord, but when the beginning of the Rains-residence was approaching, we were unable to reach Sāvattī for the beginning of the Rains-residence; we entered on the Rains on the way, at Sāketa City. We spent the Rains, Lord, in a state of longing for you, thinking: 'The Lord is staying close to us, six yojanas from here, but we are not getting a chance to see the Lord. Then we, Lord, having, after the lapse of three months of the rainy season, kept the Rains, and after the Admonition had been carried out, while it was still raining, while waters were gathering, while swamps were forming, with drenched robes and in a state of weariness came along on journey.

-
1. meaning thirty bhaddavaggi bhikkhus given ordination by the Lord Buddha in the cotton plantation.
 2. One yojana – 15 kilometers (see Vinayamukkha Vol. 1, pp 235)

Special Note:- A person who first offered Kathina to Sangha was Mahaupasika Visakha and Dr Ajivaka offered Pha Pa (money tree).