

Frontispiece: the calligraphy in seal
script by Shì Weimiao, translated into
Chinese by Shi Liaocan, reads:

*For one who has completed his journey,
is without sorrow, is freed in every way,
has left behind every fetter,
there is no suffering.*

Dhammapada VII, v.90 (tr. K.R. Norman)
© 1997 Pali Text Society

THE PATH OF THE HOUSEHOLDER: BUDDHIST LAY DISCIPLES IN THE PĀLI CANON

ROBERT BLUCK

It is often argued that Buddhism is an essentially monastic religion, where the lay people support the monks and practise morality, rather than aim for substantial spiritual progress themselves. This is tacitly assumed to be the case both historically and in many modern Buddhist communities. I will examine the extent to which this view is supported by the ancient Pāli texts. Was the original difference between monastics and lay Buddhists a qualitative one (where monastic status itself gave access to spiritual progress) or a quantitative one (where lay people simply had fewer daily opportunities for spiritual practice)? Or was it perhaps a mixture of the two?

A combination of modern commentators and Pāli texts in translation will be used to investigate the role of lay disciples in the Buddha's time. I will look in turn at: the relative status of lay people and monastics; the teachings offered to lay people by the Buddha himself and by his senior monks; the categories of spiritual progress which could be made; and examples of both ordinary and exceptional lay people in the texts. This should allow a conclusion to be drawn as to whether the earliest lay disciples were 'second-class Buddhists' or not.

*

Conze argues strongly for the primacy of the monastic life throughout Buddhism:

In its essence and inner core, Buddhism was and is a movement of monastic ascetics ... The monks are the Buddhist elite. They are the only Buddhists in the proper sense of the word. The life of a householder is almost incompatible with the higher levels of the spiritual life'.¹

¹ E. Conze, *Buddhism: Its Essence and Development*, Oxford 1951, pp.70, 53.

The lay person's role is seen here as supporting the monks, their spiritual aspiration being faith in the Buddha, Dhamma and Saṅgha, together with the belief in karma and the wish to acquire merit to escape from 'the burden of his past misdeeds. . . Nirvana was too remote to aim at in this life'.²

Although there are large numbers of lay disciples in the Pāli texts, even the term *upāsaka* for the 'devout layman (or laywoman – *upāsikā*)' means one who follows, serves, attends or accords honour.³ Bowker defines *upāsaka* as 'one who sits close by', a layperson who has taken refuge in the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Saṅgha, and has 'undertaken the five precepts... Although far from the goal of *arhat*, they can acquire merit, especially through support of the *Saṅgha*, and can hope to reappear as a monk'.⁴ It seems from this that the limit of the layperson's spiritual activity is *dāna* (giving, generosity) and *sīla* (morality).

Richard Gombrich confirms that most of the Buddha's sermons to lay people concentrated on morality as 'the foundation of spiritual progress'. They did not provide such fertile soil for the Dhamma as the monks and nuns (although of course many sermons were given to lay people who then ordained). Despite very rare cases in the Canon of lay disciples gaining enlightenment, and examples of them making advanced spiritual progress,

These few lay religious virtuosi... do not invalidate the generalization that the Buddha expected those seriously interested in attaining salvation to become monks or nuns, that meditation was considered to be normally impossible for the laity, and that much of the Buddha's teaching was given only to the Saṅgha.⁵

This expectation has been made in much of Buddhist history. As Harvey states, 'most Buddhist schools see monasticism as a superior way of life, one that all should respect and aspire to join in this

² Conze, *op. cit.*, p.79.

³ Trevor Ling, *A Dictionary of Buddhism*, New York 1972, p.260.

⁴ J. Bowker, ed., *Oxford Dictionary of World Religions*, Oxford 1997, p.1008.

⁵ R. Gombrich, *Theravada Buddhism: A Social History from Ancient Benares to Modern Colombo*, London 1988, p.73.

or some future life'.⁶

Turning to the Pāli texts themselves, there seems to be support for this view. The Buddha recalls his decision to leave home as a vital step in his search for enlightenment:

Household life is crowded and dusty; life gone forth is wide open. It is not easy, while living in a home, to lead the holy life as utterly perfect and pure as a polished shell. Suppose I shave off my hair and beard, put on the yellow robe and go forth from the home life into homelessness'.⁷

This passage is repeated by the Buddha at the beginning of several discourses about the bhikkhu training in the holy life, as representing the initial feeling of a householder who wishes to make spiritual progress.⁸ He also describes one of the obstacles to Nibbāna as 'being caught by human beings', which he explains as the entanglements of the home life:

Here, someone lives in association with laypeople; he rejoices with them and sorrows with them... and he involves himself in their affairs and duties.⁹

Elsewhere he tells the bhikkhus plainly that there are the 'two pleasures' of home life and homelessness, and 'that of home-leaving has the pre-eminence'.¹⁰ He declares to the wanderer Vacchagotta that 'there is no householder who, without abandoning the fetter of householdership, on the dissolution of the body has made an end of suffering'.¹¹ The Commentary explains here

⁶ P. Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhism: Teachings, History and Practice*, Cambridge 1990, p.218.

⁷ MN I, 240; tr. Bh. Nāṇamoli and Bh. Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, Boston 1995, p.335.

⁸ E.g. DN I, 63; tr. M. Walshe, *The Long Discourses of the Buddha*, Boston 1995, p.99; MN I, 179, 345; tr. Nāṇamoli, pp.272, 448.

⁹ SN IV, 178-80; tr. Bh. Bodhi, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, 2 vols, Boston 2000, p.1242.

¹⁰ AN I, 80; tr. F.L. Woodward and E.M. Hare, *The Book of the Gradual Sayings* (5 vols, London 1932-6), I, p.74.

¹¹ MN I, 483; tr. Nāṇamoli, pp.588.

that even those very rare individuals who became Arahants while still laymen, immediately either were ordained or passed away.¹² This may be based on the post-canonical *Milindapañha*, where it is explained that the householder's situation is too weak to sustain arahatship.¹³

Before considering these 'very rare individuals', let us look briefly at the first lay disciples, and then examine the standard moral teaching of the Buddha to lay people.

Schumann cites the ~~post-canonical~~ *Mahāvagga* of the Vinaya to show that the Buddha's very first followers were not the five ascetics to whom the first sermon was preached at Isipatana, but two merchants named Tapussa and Bhallika, who offered him food in the fourth week after his enlightenment, taking refuge in the Buddha and the (as yet unpreached) Dhamma.¹⁴

Soon after the first sermon, the Buddha preached the first 'step-by-step discourse' to a young man named Yasa, beginning with easily understood ideas such as alms-giving, moral rules and the futility of sense-pleasures, and moving on to teach the Four Noble Truths when he could see that Yasa would be able to understand. Yasa's father came looking for him, listened to the first part of such a discourse, took refuge for the first time in 'Buddha, Dhamma and Saṅgha' and so became the third lay follower (*upāsaka*). Yasa became ordained, and his mother and 'former wife ... took the threefold refuge, thus becoming Gotama's first female followers (*upāsikās*).¹⁵ The fact that Yasa became only the seventh Arahant (again according to the *Mahāvagga*) shows that the establishment of lay-followers came at the very beginning of the development of Buddhism.

Schumann points out the important role of the merchant class (*vessas*) in disseminating the Dhamma to other lay people, carried

'by means of the clumsy ox-carts of the trade caravans. . .'. But the Buddha's teaching drew lay disciples from all classes, partly because 'it did not stamp lay-followers as second-rate Buddhists'.¹⁶

The teaching given to such lay people appears at first to be the conventional Buddhist morality. In a chapter on the lay disciple, the Buddha repeatedly emphasises the importance of the five precepts (avoiding killing, stealing, wrong sensuality, lying and intoxicants). Breaking them causes fear and rebirth in hell, but keeping them leads to confidence and rebirth in heaven. He further proscribes the five trades which break the precepts and so 'ought not to be plied by a lay-disciple' (trading in arms, human beings, animal flesh, intoxicants and poison).¹⁷

When a lay-disciple asks how a monk and a layman should both act well, the Buddha replies that a monk should practise detachment, but a layman should keep the five precepts (or eight precepts on observance days), provide food for the monks, support his parents and 'pursue a blameless career'. This moral life will ensure a favourable rebirth.¹⁸

Ling uses the Pāli scriptures to build up a detailed picture of the 'ordinary man' (*puthujjana*) who has no glimpse of Nibbāna. He is seen as addicted to pleasure, with senses uncontrolled, greedy, and easily provoked to violence. He is distressed by pain, disease, old age and death, and may be tormented by sorrow, because he ignores the truth and fails to see things as they really are. However, this condition is not seen as final, and between:

'the common people ... and the *Saṅgha* there exists an important relationship, not of reciprocity exactly, but of complementariness'.

This relationship is set out in the well-known *Sigālaka Sutta*, which may be seen as a 'vinaya for the householder'.¹⁹

¹² Nāṇamoli, pp.1273-4.

¹³ Miln 265-6; tr. I.B. Horner, *Milinda's Questions* (2 vols, London 1954-9), II, p.80f.

¹⁴ H.W. Schumann, *The Historical Buddha*, London 1989, p.61; *Mahāvagga* I, 4; tr. I.B. Horner *The Book of the Discipline* (6 vols, London 1938-66), IV, pp.5-6.

¹⁵ Schumann, *op. cit.*, pp70-2.

¹⁶ *Op. cit.*, p.190.

¹⁷ AN III, 203-13; tr. Woodward and Hare, III, pp.150-7.

¹⁸ *Sutta-nipāta*, vv.376-404; tr. H. Saddhatissa, *Sutta-Nipāta*, London 1985, pp. 42-5.

¹⁹ T. Ling, *The Buddha: Buddhist Civilization in India and Ceylon*, London 1973, pp.133-5.

(Of course entry into the monastic Saṅgha does not provide automatic release from the unfortunate state of the ordinary man. A monk or nun may still be a *puthujjana*.)

The *Sigālaka Sutta*²⁰ provides a thorough explanation of both moral and social teaching for lay people, emphasising the need to keep the five precepts and giving practical advice to avoid fairs, bad company, idleness and false friends. Each category has detailed examples to underline the point. Finally, the Buddha advises Sigālaka to 'protect the six directions' by ministering to his father and mother (east), teachers (south), wife and children (west), friends and companions (north), servants, workers and helpers (nadir), and renunciants and Brahmins (zenith). Again, details are given to emphasise the reciprocal relationship between children and parents, pupil and teacher, husband and wife, friends, servant and master, and between lay people and renunciants and Brahmins (including the Buddhist monastics). This final relationship is particularly interesting: in response to a man who is kind and supplies their needs, the monastics will:

restrain him from evil, encourage him to do good, be benevolently compassionate towards him, teach him what he has not heard and point out to him the way to heaven.²¹

Again, this seems to imply the kind of 'step-by-step discourse' which leads from moral rules towards a deeper spiritual teaching.

Many of the verses in the most well-known of all Pāli texts, the *Dhammapada*, were addressed to lay people, according to the Commentary, though a quick survey suggests that these tend to be sayings on morality, and that the verses specifically on meditation or the Four Noble Truths tend to be addressed to monks.²²

The Buddha explains to lay-followers at Pāṭaligāma the perils of failure in morality (loss of property, reputation and confidence; a confused death and rebirth in hell), and the advantages of

success in morality (gaining wealth, reputation and confidence; a mindful death and a favourable rebirth). Ling refers to this episode, commenting that for the Buddha, lay-followers:

had an important place in the scheme of things, and it was for this reason that he undertook to instruct them in detail in the matters of social morality, pointing out to them the various advantages of moral uprightness and integrity.²³

But after this conventional teaching 'the Lord instructed, inspired, fired and delighted the lay-followers of Pāṭaligāma with talk on Dhamma until far into the night'.²⁴ The text of this talk is not given, but it may well have been a version of the 'step-by-step discourse' where the Buddha goes beyond discussing morality and teaches the Four Noble Truths to those who are ready to hear the Dhamma in more detail.

There is further evidence of at least some kind of 'complementariness' between monastics and lay disciples. The Buddha praises 'right conduct' in both the householder and the monk, saying that they can both win through to the Path, the Dhamma, in this way.²⁵ When asked directly whether the monastic path or the way of the lay disciple is the right way, the Buddha replies that he praises 'the right way of practice': either the householder or the monk who is engaged in this right practice 'is accomplishing the true way, the Dhamma that is wholesome'.²⁶ Elsewhere he defines this right practice as the Noble Eightfold Path and confirms that in this way the householder or the layman 'attains the method, the Dhamma that is wholesome'.²⁷

Nyanaponika and Hecker provide a wealth of detail about the lives of eminent lay disciples, drawn from the Pāli texts. Bhikkhu Bodhi's Introduction makes clear that the path of the monastic and that of the lay-follower are both leading in the same direction.

²⁰ DN III, 180-93; tr. Walshe, pp.461-9.

²¹ DN III, 191; tr. Walshe, p.468.

²² E.W. Burlingame, *Buddhist Legends (Dhammapada Commentary)*, London 1969.

²³ Ling, *op. cit.*, p.103.

²⁴ DN II, 85-6; tr. Walshe, pp.236-7.

²⁵ AN I, 69; tr. Woodward and Hare, I, pp.64-5.

²⁶ MN II, 197-9; tr. Ñāṇamoli, pp.808-10.

²⁷ SN IV, 179-80; tr. Bh. Bodhi, *op. cit.*, p.1536.

Different guidelines are appropriate for lay followers and monastics, and the individual must choose between them:

But all such guidelines, originating from different starting points, eventually converge upon a single path, universal and unique, leading infallibly to the final goal. This is the Noble Eightfold Path, the way to the cessation of suffering.²⁸

The most important distinction within the overall category of *sāvaka*, the disciple of the Buddha, is not between monastics and lay people, but the spiritual distinction between 'the ordinary disciples and the noble disciples'. Ordinary disciples (the large majority) are 'still technically classed as worldlings or commoners (*puthujjana*)'. Despite going for refuge and practising *dāna* and *sīla*, 'they have not yet reached the plane where liberation is irrevocably assured'. The noble disciples (*ariyasāvaka*), by contrast, have achieved 'a radical transformation ... of the mind', and have understood the Dhamma in a deeper sense.²⁹

It may be helpful to pause here to explain briefly the four important stages on the path to Nibbāna. Walshe describes these as follows:

1) The Stream-Winner ('stream-enterer' in Nāṇamoli) has 'glimpsed Nibbāna', discarded three of the 'five lower fetters' (i.e. belief in a self ... doubt ... attachment to rites and rituals) and is thus assured of attaining Nibbāna within the next seven rebirths. 2) The Once-Returner has weakened the remaining lower fetters of sensuality and ill-will, and will attain Nibbāna 'after at most one further human rebirth'. 3) The Non-Returner has abandoned sensuality and ill-will and all worldly attachments, and after death will attain Nibbāna after a heavenly rebirth. 4) The Arahant has destroyed the 'five higher fetters' (i.e. 'craving for existence in the Form World ... in the Formless World ... conceit ... restlessness ... ignorance), has attained Nibbāna, and 'will attain final Nibbāna

²⁸ Nyanaponika Thera and H. Heckler, *Great Disciples of the Buddha*, Boston 1997, p.xvi.

²⁹ Nyanaponika, *op. cit.*, pp.xvi-xix.

"without remainder" at death'.³⁰

The *Dīghanaka Sutta* gives a fascinating glimpse of what might be described as the parallel spiritual development of a monk and a lay person. The Buddha skilfully encourages the wanderer Dīghanaka to abandon his fixed views, explaining that all feelings are impermanent and that the 'well-taught noble disciple' regards them dispassionately and so obtains liberation. At this moment Dīghanaka

saw the Dhamma, reached the Dhamma, understood the Dhamma, fathomed the Dhamma, overcame all doubt and perplexity, and became self-sufficient in the Master's Teaching.³¹

This is the standard description of one who becomes a Stream-Winner. Dīghanaka must have been a remarkable young man to progress so swiftly from a non-Buddhist to one assured of Nibbāna.

Meanwhile the monk Sāriputta, who is fanning the Buddha, attains arahantship as he considers these words on liberation. This is highly significant, not only as Sāriputta was to become one of the Buddha's chief disciples, but also since he 'had been a bhikkhu for only two weeks and was still a stream-enterer'.³² But the sutta concludes with Dīghanaka (incidentally Sāriputta's nephew) formally taking refuge as a lay-follower, in a passage repeated frequently at the end of suttas:

Magnificent, Master Gotama! Master Gotama has made the Dhamma clear in many ways, as though he were turning upright what had been overthrown, revealing what was hidden, showing the way to one who was lost, or holding up a lamp in the dark ... I go to Master Gotama for refuge and to the Dhamma and to the Sangha of bhikkhus. From this day forth let Master Gotama remember me as a lay follower who has gone to him for refuge for life.³³

This leads us on to the spiritual attainment of lay people in the

³⁰ Walshe, *op. cit.*, pp.26-7.

³¹ MN I, 501; see Nyanaponika, *op. cit.*, p.xix.

³² Nāṇamoli, *op. cit.*, p.1276, n.730.

³³ MN I, 501; tr. Nāṇamoli, p.606.

Pāli texts. In the *Nalakapāna Sutta*, the Buddha explains that when he declares a particular bhikkhu to be an Arahant, Non-Returner, Once-Returner or Stream-Winner, it is not for flattery but to inspire others. These four categories are repeated for bhikkhunīs, but only the last three are given for laymen and laywomen,³⁴ implying firmly that arahantship was extremely rare for a lay person. In reply to Ānanda's questions in the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* about those who have died at Nādikā, the Buddha says that 'more than fifty lay-followers' there have destroyed the five lower fetters and become Non-Returners, over ninety have become Once-Returners, and 'well over five hundred' are Stream-Winners.³⁵ This says something about both the size of the lay Buddhist community there and their remarkable spiritual progress.

Walshe states that there is 'no scriptural authority' for the widely-held view that 'while lay persons can attain to the first three paths, only monks can become Arahants'.³⁶ Schumann says that although the *upāsaka* might find it harder than the monk 'to gain inner detachment and release from suffering', the Canon lists 'twenty-one householders who became Arahants without ever being monks'.³⁷ Harvey gives further details of the attainments of lay people in the Pāli Canon and draws a similar conclusion:

The early texts do refer to many lay Stream-enterers, more than 1,000 eight-precept lay Non-returners (M I, 490-1), and a few lay *Arahats* (A III, 450-1). Indeed, while the conditions of lay life pose more obstacles, those who make the effort in spite of them can attain good spiritual progress.³⁸

Both of these textual references are worth examining. In the *Mahāvaccagotta Sutta* the Buddha explains that more than five hundred bhikkhus and a similar numbers of bhikkhunīs 'abide in the deliverance of mind' (i.e. have become Arahants). There are more than five hundred celibate laymen Non-Returners, and more

than five hundred non-celibate laymen who are either Once-Returners or at least Stream-Winners. The same numbers and categories are given for laywomen.³⁹ So in all three cases the number of monastic Arahants, lay Non-Returners and lay Once-Returners or Stream-Winners is over a thousand (perhaps well over, as the Buddha actually says 'far more' each time). Despite the lack of Arahants here – and assuming that the figures are genuine, rather than a later pious inflation – this is compelling evidence for the spiritual progress of lay people.

The 'twenty-one householders' listed as notable disciples in the *Āṅguttara-Nikāya* include Tapussa and Bhallika, Anāthapiṇḍika, Citta, Hatthaka, Mahānāma, Ugga of Vesālī, Uggata, Sūra Ambaṭṭha, Jīvaka and Nakulapitā. Each of them is said to have 'gone to the end, seen the deathless and had his being in the realization of the deathless', because of their faith in the Buddha, Dhamma and Saṅgha, and also their 'virtue, knowledge and release'.⁴⁰ These are indeed 'very rare individuals', and it is worth looking at some of them in a little more detail, together with important laywomen.

In listing his chief disciples,⁴¹ the Buddha begins with forty monks and thirteen nuns, each with their special category of pre-eminence. The names of eleven laymen (given above) and ten laywomen follow. Of the laymen, Tapussa and Bhallika are included as the first disciples; Anāthapiṇḍika is chief of alms-givers; Ugga is chief of those 'who give pleasant gifts'; and Hatthaka is chief of those 'who gather a following by the four bases of sympathy' (i.e. 'liberality, kind speech, a useful life and equal treatment of all alike'). Of the laywomen, Sujātā (who offered rice to the ascetic Gotama before his enlightenment) is included as the first laywoman disciple; Samāvātī is chief of those 'who live in kindliness'; and Suppiyā is chief of those who nurse the sick. These and others all appear as the exemplars of *dāna* and *sīla* which we would expect.

³⁴ MN I, 465-8; tr. Nānamoli, pp.568-71.

³⁵ DN II, 92-3; tr. Walshe, pp.240-1.

³⁶ Walshe, *op. cit.*, pp.26-7.

³⁷ Schumann, *op. cit.*, pp.190-1.

³⁸ Harvey, *op. cit.*, p.218.

³⁹ MN I, 490-1; tr. Nānamoli, pp.596-8.

⁴⁰ AN III, 450-1; tr. Woodward and Hare, III, pp.313-14.

⁴¹ AN I, 23-6; tr. Woodward and Hare, I, pp.16-25.

However, the layman Citta is described as 'chief among my disciples, lay-followers, of Dhamma teachers'; the laywoman Khujjuttarā is chief of those 'of wide knowledge'; Uttarā, Nanda's mother, is chief of those 'of meditative power' (these three categories have been applied first to monks or nuns); and the laywoman Kālī is said to have become a Stream-Winner after merely overhearing two yakkhas praise the Triple Gem.⁴²

There are two implications here. Clearly these individual lay-followers have achieved deep understanding and practice of the Dhamma, but they may only be chief among an unspecified number of other laymen and laywomen who are Dhamma teachers, 'of wide knowledge', or advanced meditators.

Some of the 'pre-eminent ones' are elsewhere given as exemplars by the Buddha. A laywoman should encourage her son to become like Citta or Hatthaka, who are 'the standard and criterion for my male disciples who are lay followers'. She should encourage her daughter to become like Khujjuttarā and Velukantiyā, Nanda's mother (presumably another name for Uttarā), who are 'the standard and criterion for my female disciples who are lay followers'.⁴³ The implication is that lay-disciples should not only aspire to gain merit by *dāna* and *sīla*, but also to acquire knowledge of the Dhamma, meditative powers and even perhaps to become Dhamma teachers themselves.

In the same passage, it is stated that those who wish to become monks should emulate Sāriputta and Moggallāna, while potential nuns should emulate sister Khemā and Uppallavanā. Hecker comments pragmatically that the lay and ordained ways of life are substantially different 'and an example taken from one's own background is bound to prove more effective'.⁴⁴

There are other references to most of the lay Arahants listed above. The Buddha explains to Mahānāma that a lay-disciple develops his own welfare by faith, virtue, renunciation, seeing monks

and hearing the Dhamma mindfully, reflecting on the meaning of the Dhamma. Similarly, he may help others to achieve this.⁴⁵

In three identical suttas, Ugga of Vesāli, Uggata and Nakulapitā each come to ask the Buddha why some beings 'attain Nibbāna in this very life' while others do not. The Buddha gives them the same reply as he had to Sakka, lord of the *devas*:⁴⁶ there are sights, sounds, smells, tastes, tangible objects and thoughts which are 'desirable, lovely, agreeable, pleasing, sensually enticing, tantalizing'. Only by not clinging to them can one attain Nibbāna.⁴⁷

Ugga of Vesāli is said by the Buddha to have 'eight wonderful and marvellous qualities', which not only include sharing his wealth and respecting the monks, but also understanding the Dhamma when the Buddha explained the Four Noble Truths to him. He listens attentively to a monk who preaches the Dhamma or 'If he preach not Dhamma to me, I preach Dhamma to him'; *devas* come and praise the Dhamma to him, but he feels no elation.⁴⁸

An almost identical story is told about Uggata, though here the eighth quality is 'that the Exalted One should declare to me: "There is no fetter, fettered by which, Ugga, the householder of Hatthigāma shall come again to this world"'.⁴⁹ This may imply that he is a Non-Returner rather than an Arahant.

The Buddha advises Nakulapitā, an old man in poor health, to train himself with the phrase: 'Even though I am afflicted in body, my mind will be unafflicted'. Sāriputta explains that the worldling sees the body, feeling, perception, (mental) activities and consciousness (i.e. the five *khandhas*) as the self, as 'mine', and so suffers greatly when these inevitably change. But the disciple who is trained in the Dhamma does not have this false view and so can face change with equanimity.⁵⁰

⁴⁵ AN IV, 220; tr. Woodward and Hare, IV, pp.149-50.

⁴⁶ SN IV, 101; tr. Bodhi, *op. cit.*, p.1192.

⁴⁷ SN IV, 108-9; tr. Bodhi, *op. cit.*, p.1193.

⁴⁸ AN IV, 207-11; tr. Woodward and Hare, IV, pp.142-5.

⁴⁹ AN IV, 211f; tr. Woodward and Hare, IV, pp.145-6.

⁵⁰ SN III, 1-5; tr. Bodhi, *op. cit.*, pp.853-6.

⁴² AN I, 25-6; tr. Woodward and Hare, I, pp.23-5.

⁴³ SN II, 235-6; tr. Bodhi, *op. cit.*, pp.688-9.

⁴⁴ Nyanaponika, *op. cit.*, p.365.

Citta is even able to answer complex questions on the Dhamma put to him by bhikkhus, and to engage in detailed conversation about the liberation of the mind. On one occasion he explains to a group of senior bhikkhus the difference between the fetters and the sense objects, and they are so pleased by his answer that they 'declared that Citta must be in possession of the eye of wisdom which ranges over the profound teaching of the Buddha'.⁵¹ When his friend the naked ascetic Kassapa asks him how long he has been a follower of the Buddha and whether he had 'attained any superhuman distinction in knowledge and vision', Citta replies that he has followed the Buddha for thirty years, and he can 'enter and dwell in' the four *jhānas* 'to whatever extent I wish'. Moreover, if he were to die before the Buddha, 'it would not be surprising if the Blessed One were to declare of me: "There is no fetter bound by which Citta the householder could return to this world"'.⁵² Again this implies he is a Non-Returner rather than an Arahant.

In the context of lay meditation, it is worth adding the example of Pessa the elephant driver's son. When the Buddha briefly describes the four foundations of mindfulness, Pessa praises his explanation but adds:

From time to time, venerable sir, we white-clothed lay people also abide with our minds well established in those four foundations of mindfulness ... ardent, fully aware, and mindful, having put away covetousness and grief for the world.⁵³

The story of Anāthapiṇḍika, the rich merchant who becomes the chief patron of the Saṅgha in Sāvattihī, will be considered in more detail. The Buddha frequently gave teachings to Anāthapiṇḍika, which Hecker describes as 'a comprehensive code of lay Buddhist ethics. . . from the simplest message to the most profound'.⁵⁴ The Buddha explained that the householder's duty (i.e. offering robes, almsfood, lodging and medicine to the monks) is 'a

path which brings good repute and leads to the heavenly world'.⁵⁵ The householder may win 'four kinds of bliss': ownership (from honest work); wealth (which facilitates meritorious deeds), debtlessness; and blamelessness (in actions, speech and mind).⁵⁶ Wealth honestly acquired may be used to support family and friends, or to make offerings to the Saṅgha: if wealth is gained for these reasons, the noble disciple will not be upset whether his wealth is lost or increases.⁵⁷

Desirable things such as long life, beauty, happiness, fame and a favourable rebirth cannot be obtained by prayers or vows, but only by following an appropriate path of life.⁵⁸ The conditions for winning desirable things such as wealth, a good report, a long life or a favourable rebirth are: 'Perfection of faith, perfection of virtue, perfection of generosity, and perfection of wisdom'.⁵⁹

The Buddha also gave Anāthapiṇḍika a step-by-step discourse, beginning with *dāna* and *sīla* and the futility of sensual pleasure; but seeing that he was 'ready in heart and mind', he also explained the Four Noble Truths to him, with the result that the merchant understood the Dhamma and became a Stream-Winner.⁶⁰

Elsewhere stages of practice are described, leading from *dāna* through *sīla* towards the gaining of insight. One might offer a meal to the Saṅgha, or to the Buddha himself, or even build a monastery:

But better yet would be the going for refuge to the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Saṅgha. And this deed would be perfected if one observed the Five Precepts. It would be better still if one could imbibe a slight fragrance ... of loving-kindness (*mettā*). Best of all, however, would be to cultivate, even for the time of a finger-snap, the insight into impermanence.⁶¹

⁵¹ Nyanaponika, *op. cit.*, pp.367-9.

⁵² SN IV, 301; tr. Bodhi, *op. cit.*, p.1329.

⁵³ MN I, 340; tr. Ñāṇamoli, p.444.

⁵⁴ Nyanaponika, *op. cit.*, p.351.

⁵⁵ AN II, 66; tr. Woodward and Hare, II, p.73.

⁵⁶ AN II, 68; tr. Woodward and Hare, II, pp.77-8.

⁵⁷ AN III, 46; tr. Woodward and Hare, III, p.38; see Nyanaponika, *op. cit.*, pp.351-3.

⁵⁸ AN III, 47; tr. Woodward and Hare, III, pp.39-40.

⁵⁹ AN II, 66; tr. Woodward and Hare, II, p.74; see Nyanaponika, *op. cit.*, p.354.

⁶⁰ Nyanaponika, *op. cit.*, p.339.

⁶¹ AN IV, 394; tr. Nyanaponika, *op. cit.*, pp.355-6.

On another occasion the Buddha urged Anāthapiṇḍika and ‘several hundred lay followers’ not to be satisfied as householders with providing for the needs of the Saṅgha: ‘May you also from time to time strive to enter and abide in the joy of (inner meditative) seclusion’.⁶²

With a similar audience, the Buddha declared to Sāriputta that a ‘white-clad householder’ (i.e. an *upāsaka*) who keeps the moral precepts, and who can ‘obtain at will the four lofty mental abidings which bring happiness in the present’, may if he wishes declare himself to be a Stream-Winner, ‘assured of final enlightenment’. These ‘lofty mental abidings’ are not the four *jhānas*, as one might expect, but instead are an unshakeable faith in the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Saṅgha, and the possession of noble virtue.⁶³

When Anāthapiṇḍika is seriously ill, Sāriputta and Ānanda visit him, and Sāriputta urges him to train himself not to cling to ‘what is seen, heard, sensed, cognized, encountered, sought after, and examined by the mind’. Anāthapiṇḍika is profoundly affected by this teaching and begins to weep, explaining that ‘I have served the master and the spiritually accomplished monks for a long time, yet I have never heard such a profound discourse’. Sāriputta says that this kind of teaching will not be clear to lay followers, only to monastics. But Anāthapiṇḍika replies:

Venerable Sāriputta, let such talks on the Dhamma be given to white-clad lay followers too. There are those with just a little dust on their eyes. If they do not hear such teachings they will be lost. Some may be able to understand.⁶⁴

Ñāṇamoli comments that although Sāriputta’s statement does not imply an exclusiveness in the Buddha’s teaching, ‘such talk leading to complete detachment’ would not be appropriate for lay people who ‘must look after their families, possessions, and occupations’.⁶⁵ But worldly concerns no longer apply here to Anātha-

piṇḍika, who is almost on the point of death. His plea to Sāriputta echoes Brahmā Sahampati’s request to the Buddha after his enlightenment, when he is inclined not to teach:

Let the Blessed One teach the Dhamma. There are beings with little dust in their eyes who are wasting through not hearing the Dhamma. There will be those who will understand the Dhamma.⁶⁶

Hecker comments here on the difference between hearing the teachings and actually practising them: this is ‘the essential difference between the methods the Buddha used to teach householders and those he used to teach monks’.⁶⁷ Lay people saw the teachings as ‘a matter of knowledge’, while for monks ‘the Buddha introduced the practice that would lead to complete liberation even in this life’. This is why Anāthapiṇḍika had not heard the teaching in this form:

In his dying hour he was already far removed from worldly concerns and, while thinking of the Dhamma, had renounced attachment to worldly possessions as well as his body; thus he found himself in a situation comparable to that of the most advanced monks.⁶⁸

This is reminiscent of a passage where Mahānāma asks the Buddha how one ‘wise lay follower’ should comfort another who is seriously ill.⁶⁹ The Buddha replies that he should be urged to take comfort in his loyalty to the Buddha, Dhamma and Saṅgha, and in his possession of the noble virtues. He should be encouraged progressively to let go of the attachment to parents, to children, to sense-pleasures, and to fix his mind on higher and higher heavenly realms. Finally he should be encouraged to ‘direct it to the cessation of identity’ (i.e. to the attainment of Nibbāna). If he is able to do all this:

then Mahānāma, I say there is no difference between the lay follower who is thus liberated in mind and a bhikkhu who has been liberated in mind for a hundred years, that is, between one liberation and the

⁶² AN III, 206; tr. Nyanaponika, *op. cit.*, p.356.

⁶³ AN III, 210f; tr. Nyanaponika, *op. cit.*, pp.356-7.

⁶⁴ Nyanaponika, *op. cit.*, p.360; MN III, 261; see Ñāṇamoli, pp.1110-11.

⁶⁵ Ñāṇamoli, *op. cit.*, p.1351, n.1306.

⁶⁶ MN I, 168; tr. Ñāṇamoli, p.261.

⁶⁷ Nyanaponika, *op. cit.*, p.361.

⁶⁸ *Id., ibid.*

⁶⁹ SN V, 408f; tr. Bodhi, *op. cit.*, pp.1834-6.

other.⁷⁰

*

In conclusion, the spiritual progress of the early Buddhists in the Pāli Canon depends on their understanding and practice of the Dhamma, rather than their status as lay people or monastics. If the latter are more likely to make substantial progress, this is because of their unique situation. The householder who is fully engaged in working and supporting his or her family may have to concentrate on *dāna* and *sīla*, and the teachings offered to lay people by the Buddha and by senior monks usually concentrate on various aspects of these two methods of acquiring *puñña*, 'merit' or 'karmic fruitfulness'. But teachings on the Four Noble Truths, or on various aspects of meditation, may also be included if the hearers are seen as ready to understand more of the Dhamma. While many became Stream-Winners, those lay disciples in particular who have a measure of independence from worldly ties, or those who are coming to the end of their lives, seem to have a genuine opportunity to become Once-Returners, or even Non-Returners, and (in very exceptional cases) Arahants.

So the difference between monastics and lay Buddhists in the Pāli Canon is more quantitative than qualitative. The monastic life provides ample opportunity for spiritual progress, but of course the individual monk or nun has to make the effort for themselves. The household life has many distractions, but for the determined lay disciple these need not be barriers to spiritual progress. In the Pāli Canon – and by implication in historical and contemporary Buddhism – the progressive path of morality, meditation and wisdom is open to monastics and lay-followers alike. The essential distinction, both then and now, is not between the monastic and the lay-follower, but between the 'ordinary disciple' (who may still be a devout Buddhist rather than a merely nominal one), and the 'noble disciple' who has glimpsed Nibbāna and who is genuinely committed to the understanding and practice of the Dhamma.

Robert Bluck (University of Sunderland)

⁷⁰ SN V, 411; tr. Bodhi, *op. cit.*, p.1836.

THE BAD KARMA OF THE BUDDHA¹

GUANG XING

The bad karma of the Buddha is more than probable an important historical issue concerning the concept of the Buddha because it is found in all three Buddhist traditions: Theravāda, Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna. In the Pāli Canon, the Buddha's unskillful deeds are recorded in the *Pubbakammaṭṭhi* of the *Apadāna* and also referred to in the *Milindapañha*.² In the Chinese translation of the Tripiṭaka, they are found in ten different texts,³ while in the Tibetan Canon there are at least five texts concerning this matter.⁴

¹ Originally presented at the UKABS conference, SOAS, 3 July 2001.

² In the Theravāda tradition there is another source relevant to this issue, a *Saṃmaṭṭiya* list of sixteen incidents transmitted by Daśabalaśrimitra in his *Saṃskṛtāsamskṛtaviniścaya*. It is probably a Dhammarucika list in a Sinhalese work of the fourteenth century or earlier called *Deṭis Karmaya*, which allegedly describes thirty-two such incidents. The manuscript of this work is preserved in the British Library; see K.D. Somadasa, *Catalogue of the Hugh Nevill Collection of Sinhalese Manuscripts in the British Library* 2 (Pali Text Society, 1989), pp.122-3. See also Paul Harrison, 'Some Reflections on the Personality of the Buddha', *The Otani Gakuho* LXXIV, 4 (1995), p.11. Since this is a very late work it does not fall into the scope of our discussion of the debate on the physical body of the Buddha in the period of the early Buddhist schools.

³ (1) the *Pañcaśatasthavirāvadāna*, T 199, 190a-202a, (2), the *Xingqixing Jing*, T 197, 163c-174b, (3) the *Bhaiṣajyavastu* of the Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya, T 1448, 94a-97a, (4) the *Lokānuvartanasūtra*, T 807, 751b-753c, (5) the *Pusha-xingwushiyuansheng Jing*, T 812, 773a-774c, (6), the *Upayakauśālyasūtra*, T 310:38, 594c-607c; T 345, 156a-165c, T 346, 166a-178b, (7) the *Mahāyānadaśa-dharmakasūtra*, T 310:9, 154c-157a, T 314, 767b-769a, (8) the *Tathāgata-pratibimbapratisthānūsamsāsūtra*, T 692, 788a-c, T 693, 788c-790a, T 694, 790a-796b, (9) the *Mahāprajñāpāramitāsāstra*, T 1509, 121c, (10) the *Mahāyānā-vatāraśāstra*, T 1634, 37b-c.

⁴ (1) the *Upayakauśālyasūtra*, translated by Gos Chos Grub (Chi. Wu Facheng) based on Dharmarakṣa rendition (T 345), (2) the *Upayakauśālyasūtra*, translated by Dānaśīla, Karmavarman and Ye šes sde from Sanskrit, (3) the *Bhaiṣajyavastu* of the Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya, (4) the *Lokānuvartanasūtra* and (5)