



Introducing religions

Becoming a Buddhist monk

Narrator:

In the suburbs of Colombo, Sri Lanka, the Maharagama Bacau Training Centre plays a vital role and preserving and developing Theravada Buddhism, by training monks.

Boys who want to become monks enter the centre to study the monastic way of life. The young acolytes are dressed in white. They may later be ordained as novices and wear monastic robes. Senior monks are responsible for guiding the novices through their monastic training.

Samadhi:

Here we are teaching only, the languages. Saying Nepali and Sanskrit And the typical grammar. And the history also. And the culture of the Buddhist, Buddhism. Acolytes, they are layman's actually and they came for ordain to here. Then before they got ordained, there is a probation period for them. But the teachers deciding how long they have to stay in the temple. They have to do the things in this monastery. And they have to study for their monkhood. Their behaviour should be so calm. Then that can satisfy the teacher. Everybody should stay at about three months and onwards. The teacher will decide how long it will take. Because, you know, some of these people are suitable for monkhood and some of them are not suitable. Sometimes because of some things.

Narrator:

There are forty novices at this centre. The youngest is ten years old. But men can join the order even as mature adults like Lal.

Lal:

After going through a hard life in my life. For about nearly 50 years. Well gradually I thought of just going out of that life. And I started practicing yoga for some time and then I moved on to meditation. Then gradually I thought I should meet someone who can teach me further. If you have started young, you have the opportunity to learn the Dharma right from the beginning. But when I had this stage, if I start it will take some time for me to learn all what I should learn. And then I think.. I don't think that I can learn all that. But the basic principles are there with me. So I know that as a Buddhist.

I have been a sort of quiet character. So I have got used to that kind of thing. Because I have been in and out of the temples and learning Dharma and all that. So it's very easy for me to adjust to this sort of life. From here I think most probably I might be sort of transferred to another temple, where I could continue with my meditation.

Narrator:

From the beginning of the monastic day before dawn, until it ends after sunset, monks live according to a traditional pattern. They follow precepts which cover every aspect of communal life.

Male:

We are not taking food for our energy or in order to reduce my.. some fat. Or to probably make my skin so bright and some like that. The food is not for that. Only for maintain this celibacy, and to reduce the pains that coming from the hunger, just that. That is a purpose of eating.

Narrator:

Monks spend part of every day chanting and meditating.

On the evening of full moon days the higher ordained monks gather in a dedicated building to recite the Patimokha.

Male:

It is a summarised base of the Vinaya Piṭaka. That the rules and regulations, the precepts that a monk, high ordained monk should protect. That is the main Patimokha. There are 227 rules and regulations, precepts of the monk.

Narrator:

For the lay person Dana, giving or generosity is central to Buddhist practice. The most common practice of Dana is the offering of alms food to the monastic Sangha.

Mr Wijetilleke:

Whenever we do some service to someone, we get something in return. I mean that's how we look at it. Sometimes we might not get the results of it. But we believe in rebirth. So if we don't get during this birth, it will help us to reach our final goal Nibbana.

Narrator:

This meal is being offered to the monks by a local family. In memory of their ancestor who helped to establish the centre.

Male:

Only in this Buddhist discipline, Buddha is saying that we can take those foods or something like that, for the order. Not as a personal thing. That offered to the person. But to the order. That means hunger. That the meaning of the people giving the Dana, is that they are helping to maintain the bodies of these high ordained monks.

Narrator:

Here, the senior monk is reciting some verses in Pali, which explain the importance of Dana.

As well as offering a meal, the family gives a parcel, which contains everything a monk needs.

Mr. W:

We give that respect to the priests. They come out with the Lord Buddha's very words. So they get dressed up with three robes. Namely, ..., ... and ..., bottom thing. So that a huge thick parcel consisted of those three robes. And then the shaving kit, when they shave off their head. And also a belt to tie and then the begging bowl.

Narrator:

Buddhist practice in Sri Lanka is maintained by a symbiotic relationship between lay people and monks. The lay people benefit from the monks preserving and preaching the teachings. The Sangha benefits from the practical support of lay people.

One of the most important days in the Buddhist calendar for monks and lay people, is Full Moon Day. Or, as it is called in Sri Lanka 'Poya Day'. Buddhists in Sri Lanka observe this special day by visiting their local temple. And observing extra training precepts.

Female:

Generally I said we observe five precepts. Now on a Poya Day to these five precepts is there are another three, and make it eight. During other times, except on a Poya Day, we listen to music. We listen to singing, and we do dance. And we decorate ourselves and giving to a lot of pleasures of the senses. On this day we give up all that. Then another precept is we are in the habit of always seeking comfort. We want a comfortable seat. And that is also something today we abstain from and we suffer a little discomfort as part of training for a nobler life. The third one to add to these five, we also abstain from taking any food after lunch. After lunch we only take liquids, not heavy food.

Male:

All the people are here equal. Whether rich or poor or you are say well qualified or non qualified. All the people come here in white, and that is the way how you must come to a temple. And you all sit on your mat and then you will be equal. There is no, whether you are rich or poor. Nothing here.

Narrator:

On these special days, a monks duties include preaching and leading the Paritta chanting.

Male:

We are used to going to work, coming back home and again sleeping or watching a DVD and again the following day, same routine. But when we come here we've got a completely different picture. And our minds are clear. Whereas Buddhists we have to do something. We are just, otherwise we eat, drink and then we die. That is not the way.

Male 2:

Well it's just the subject matter that you learn at a school. Say it's maths or physics or chemistry, anything. But that won't do for a person who's building up his life to live a life, leading a life that don't help. Yes, helping you to get a good job, or do something like that. But to associate the people to get along with life, face the problems you come across. You need something as they teach you. That is our, what you call a philosophy.

Female:

It helps me to learn how to cope with things. And how to get on with people. And many things like that.

(CLEAR FOCUS PRODUCTIONS)