

Modern Buddhist Sangha: Triratna Bauddha Mahasangha And Spiritual Development

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Abstract

The *Dhamma* is the means to liberation, a raft that carries us across the ocean of *samsāra* (cyclic existence) to the far shore, the incomparable state of security, namely *Nibbāna*. The Buddha himself says, "Just as the water of the ocean has but one taste the taste of salt so too, O monks, my *Dhamma* and *Vinaya* have but one taste liberation." This statement of the Buddha clarifies the singular purpose of the *Dhamma*. The sole aim of the Buddhist *Dhamma* is to attain *Buddhahood* or *Nibbāna*. The founder of the *Triratna Buddhist Community*, Ugyen Bhante Sangharakshita, says, "The *Dhamma* is only *Dhamma* when its purpose is the attainment of *Buddhahood*; otherwise, it may be something else, but it cannot be the Buddha's *Dhamma*." *The Triratna Buddhist Community* supports this goal by fostering an environment for spiritual growth through practices like *bhāvanā* (meditation), ethical training, *kalyāṇamittatā* (spiritual friendship), and embodying the *Bodhisatta* ideal. *Saraṇagamana* going for refuge to the *Buddha*, *Dhamma*, and *Saṅgha* is the central act of spiritual life, around which all else revolves. Without it, there is no true religious life. This research examines whether the *The Triratna Buddhist Community* fosters *Bodhicitta* and spiritual stages like *sotāpanna* (stream-enterer). *Buddhahood*, the pinnacle of mental development, is achieved through *sīla* (ethical conduct), *samādhi* (concentration), and *paññā* (wisdom). *Sīla* calms the mind, enabling *samādhi*, which fosters *paññā*. These three pillars counter the four perversions of ignorance mistaking the impermanent (*anicca*) as permanent, the unsatisfactory (*dukkha*) as satisfactory, the non-self (*anatta*) as self, and the impure as beautiful which cause suffering. In the *Theravāda* tradition, spiritual progress unfolds through four stages: *Sotāpanna*, *Sakadāgāmī*, *Anāgāmī*, and *Arahant*. The *The Triratna Buddhist Community* supports practitioners in cultivating *Bodhicitta* and attaining these stages through disciplined practice, ethical *sīla*, meditation, *kalyāṇamittatā*, and spiritual guidance.

Key Words: *Sotāpanna, Sakadāgāmī, Anāgāmī, Arahant, Avihimsā, Mettā, Karūṇā, Kusalatā, Paññā, Citta, Nibbāna, Sakkāyadiṭṭhi, Vicikicchā, Sīlabbataparāmāsa*

Introduction

The *Triratna Buddhist Community* is an international Buddhist *Saṅgha* established by Bhante Urygen¹ Sangharakshita in 1968 as “The Friends of the Western Buddhist Order” in the heart of London, England, near the main shopping center at 14 Monmouth Street. In India, it was established as the “*Trailokya Bauddha Mahasangha*” in Pune, Maharashtra, in 1978². (In 2009, the organization’s name was changed from “*Trailokya Bauddha Mahasangha*” to “*Triratna Buddhist Saṅgha*”.) Currently, the *Saṅgha* represents the spiritual vision and understanding of Urygen Bhante Sangharakshita and Babasaheb Dr. Ambedkar in over 35 countries. Commitment to the *Triratna*, or “going for refuge” (*saraṇagamana*), is the central act of spiritual life, making this commitment the personal cornerstone of every *Saṅgha* member’s spiritual journey. All activities of the *Saṅgha*, whether collective or individual, revolve around the going for refuge (*saraṇagamana*). Ethical conduct (*sīla*), meditation (*samādhi*), and wisdom³ (*paññā*) form the foundation of the *Saṅgha*. The *Saṅgha* regards the *Bodhisattva* as its ideal and considers faith (*saddhā*) and confidence as means of spiritual progress in the *Bodhisattva*’s practice. The five spiritual faculties *saddhā* (faith), *vīriya* (energy), *sati* (mindfulness), *samādhi* (concentration), and *paññā* (wisdom) are developed equally to work toward complete spiritual progress. Additionally, in India, the *Saṅgha* is dedicated to spreading Babasaheb’s religious vision to the masses as part of his *Dhamma* revolution. Through this research paper we will try to investigate whether the Modern Buddhist *Saṅgha*, *Triratna Bauddh Mahāsaṅgha*, supports practitioners in cultivating *Bodhicitta* or attaining the state of Stream-Enterer (*Sotāpatti*) or other higher spiritual stages.

The *Triratna Buddhist Community* And The *Āryasaṅgha*

The *Dhamma* is the means to liberation, a raft that carries one from this shore of the “*bhavasāgara*” (ocean of existence, i.e., birth and death) to the far shore, to an incomparable state of security, namely *Nibbāna*⁴. The Buddha says, “Just as the water of the great ocean has but one taste the taste of salt so too, O monks, my teaching and discipline have but one taste the taste of liberation⁵.” This statement by the Buddha is absolutely certain and clear, elucidating the sole purpose of the *Dhamma*. To ignore or divert one’s attention from this, whether deliberately or unknowingly, and to believe or act otherwise is a wrong mental attitude, the result of which is nothing but the gravest misunderstanding. In short, this means that the sole purpose of Buddhism is the attainment of *Buddhahood* or *Nibbāna*; beyond this, it

may be anything, but it cannot be Buddhism. Bhante Sangharakshita says, “The *Dhamma* is only the *Dhamma* when its aim is the attainment of *Buddhahood*.”⁶

The *Saṅgha*, established by Urgyen Bhante Sangharakshita as the *Triratna Buddhist Community*, is dedicatedly working toward achieving this sole purpose of Buddhism. In fact, in the modern context, the *Triratna Bauddha Mahasangha* is the most suitable place for attaining this purpose. The *Saṅgha* provides a conducive environment for an individual to reach the highest stage of spiritual development through guidance in meditation (*bhāvanā*), study of the *Dhamma*, training in ethical conduct (*sīla*), and *kalyāṇamittatā* (spiritual friendship). What does it mean when a person is initiated into Buddhism or takes Buddhist ordination? When someone takes ordination, they say: *Buddhaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi*, *Dhammaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi*, *Saṅghaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi*, meaning “I go for refuge to the *Buddha*, I go for refuge to the *Dhamma*, I go for refuge to the *Saṅgha*.” What does it mean to “go for refuge”? The term *sharaṇa* is a Sanskrit word, and in Pali, *saraṇa*, which means to take shelter, to surrender, or to dedicate oneself. In other words, it means, “I have dedicated or surrendered myself to the *Buddha*, *Dhamma*, and *Saṅgha*.” This is a commitment to becoming like the *Buddha*, to attaining the same state that Siddhārtha Gautama achieved, namely the state of *Buddhahood*. *Buddhahood* signifies the highest development of the mind, a state of complete mental awakening, ultimate happiness, or ultimate peace the state of realizing the ultimate truth⁷.

The *Dhamma* is the path to attaining *Buddhahood*, and the *Saṅgha* is the community of those who have attained or are progressing on the path as *sotāpanna* (stream-enterer), *sakadāgāmī* (once-returner), *anāgāmī* (non-returner), and *arahant*, or those who have attained or are on the path to *Nibbāna*. The initiate makes a commitment to this *Saṅgha*. It cannot necessarily be said that the *Āryasaṅgha*, to which the initiate goes for refuge at the time of ordination, exists in a tangible form. However, those who have attained the fruit of *sotāpanna* or higher stages, wherever they exist physically in the world, are united on a spiritual level. Every initiate goes for refuge to this *Āryasaṅgha*. In this sense, the *Triratna Bauddha Mahasangha* is not the *Āryasaṅgha*, but if any of its members have attained the fruit of *sotāpanna* or are progressing on the path, they are undoubtedly individual members of the *Āryasaṅgha*. Not only this *Saṅgha* but also no Buddhist *Saṅgha* can be considered the *Āryasaṅgha*, as a Buddhist *Saṅgha* consists of all kinds of people newly ordained and senior members alike. Individually, members of any Buddhist *Saṅgha* may be part of the *Āryasaṅgha*. However, in reality, no individual can attain any level of spirituality without the *Saṅgha*, as the *Saṅgha* provides the conducive conditions for a person on the path to *Buddhahood* to attain that state.

Going For Refuge (*Saraṇagamana*)

Going for refuge to the *Buddha*, *Dhamma*, and *Saṅgha* is not a cultural act but a purely spiritual one, a commitment to attaining the ultimate truth. This commitment is called *saraṇagamana* (going for refuge). *Saraṇagamana* is a central, decisive, and unequivocal component of spiritual life.⁸ It is the most significant aspect of a Buddhist's spiritual life, truly defining the path of a Buddhist life. In fact, whether a person is a Buddhist or not depends on whether they have undertaken *saraṇagamana*. Bhante Sangharakshita says, "We do not go for refuge because we are Buddhists; rather, we are Buddhists because we have gone for refuge⁹." This means that a person becomes a Buddhist only by undertaking *saraṇagamana*. Commitment to the *Triratna* (the *Buddha*, *Dhamma*, and *Saṅgha*) is the central act of a Buddhist's life, and their entire spiritual development depends on this act. Every action in their life is not only influenced but also guided by it. No part of their life can be separate from this commitment. They remain mindful of it at every moment. Often, we see that Buddhists begin each day by reciting this commitment, and not only that, every spiritual act starts with the formula of the three refuges to maintain mindfulness of *saraṇagamana* and keep the purpose of life alive.

Spiritual Levels And The Possibility Of Attaining Them

The *Tiṭṭaka* describes four levels or stages of spirituality: *sotāpanna*, *sakadāgāmī*, *anāgāmī*, and *arahant*¹⁰. A person on the *Buddha*'s path progressively attains these stages of spiritual or mental development, ultimately reaching the *arahant* stage, i.e., attaining *Nibbāna*. Two very important and fundamental questions arise here: Is it possible to attain these spiritual levels? And if so, how? Naturally, we should start with the first question: Is it possible to attain these spiritual levels? In fact, every member of the *Triratna Buddha Mahasangha* firmly believes that attaining these levels is entirely possible. Even if we do not reach the ultimate spiritual level of *arahant* in this lifetime, attaining the *sotāpanna* stage should be the goal of our life. This belief is held by every *Saṅgha* member and should be so. Bhante Sangharakshita says that every *Saṅgha* member should aim to attain at least the *sotāpanna* stage in their current lifetime. These spiritual levels are not imaginary but real, and we can know them through the small experiences of our spiritual life. When we experience the *Buddha*'s teachings, our faith and confidence (*saddhā*)¹¹ in them grow. However, this is only possible when we engage with the *Buddha*'s teachings not merely on an intellectual level but through direct experience. Secondly, this faith is also strengthened by history. If we look at history from the time of the *Buddha* to the present, we find that many people have attained the same mental state that the *Buddha* achieved. Even in the present day, there are individuals around the world whose spiritual level

has reached great heights. It is a belief in Buddhism and not merely a belief but a truth that since the time of *Śākyamuni Buddha*, the world has never been devoid of humans who have attained the highest dimensions of spiritual levels. Somewhere, someone always exists who has reached such a state.

The second question is the most important and fundamental: How can these spiritual levels be attained? Certainly, the answer to this question must be sought in the Buddha's *Dhamma*. Once, in the court of King Ajātaśatru, with the intention of defeating the Buddha, the most learned among the Brahmins, Ācārya Sonadaṇḍa, was invited for a face-to-face discussion with the Buddha. After all formalities of respect and hospitality were completed, the discussion began. The court was filled to capacity.

First, Sonadaṇḍa said to the Buddha, "You are younger in age, so I give you the first opportunity to ask a question."

The Buddha, bowing to Sonadaṇḍa, asked, "Sonadaṇḍa, can you tell me what qualities are essential for a true Brahmin? If you wish, you may also provide examples from the Vedas."

Sonadaṇḍa replied, "There are five characteristics of a true or complete Brahmin: 1) a beautiful appearance, 2) proficiency in chanting mantras and performing rituals, 3) purity of lineage for seven generations, 4) good knowledge, and 5) virtuous conduct."

The Buddha asked further, "Which of these five qualities are the most important? And can one be a true Brahmin in the absence of those qualities?"

Sonadaṇḍa responded, "The last two qualities good knowledge and virtuous conduct. A beautiful appearance, proficiency in chanting mantras and performing rituals, and purity of lineage for seven generations are not necessary to become a true Brahmin."

The Buddha asked, "Ācārya Sonadaṇḍa, how can virtuous conduct and knowledge be developed to their highest level?"

Ācārya Sonadaṇḍa, unable to answer this question, said, "Buddha! You have attained the ultimate truth, the supreme truth. Please explain it yourself. We only know the principles; I do not know how to attain them. The Buddha replied, "There are three stages to attaining the highest state of virtuous conduct and knowledge, i.e., liberation: *sīla* (ethical conduct), *samādhi* (meditation), and *paññā* (wisdom) . Through the practice of *sīla*, *samādhi* is enhanced, and the mind becomes concentrated. Through the concentration of the mind, *paññā* is attained. With continuous practice, a person overcomes greed, hatred, delusion, and craving (*taṇhā*). By developing virtuous conduct and *paññā* to

their highest level, a person attains perfection. This means that the spiritual levels can be attained through *sīla*, *samādhi*, and *paññā*.”

The *Tipiṭaka* reveals that whenever a visitor came to take refuge with the Buddha, after their ordination (*upasampadā*) in the *Saṅgha*, they were given certain *vinaya* (disciplinary rules), such as how to wear the robe (*cīvara*), how to walk, the rules of *Saṅgha* discipline, and, most importantly, they were given *sīla* (ethical precepts) and taught meditation (*samādhi*). Gradually, they were molded according to the discipline of the *Saṅgha*. Equal emphasis was placed on mental concentration and the practice of *sīla*, as these are the two primary means of purifying the mind. However, the practice of *sīla* alone cannot lead to the complete purification of the mind or full awakening. Awareness of what the ultimate truth is, is also essential, because morality (*sīla*) and meditation (*samādhi*) are merely means to reach the ultimate truth. Attaining the ultimate truth is the goal. A goal can only be achieved by being committed and mindful of the purpose. As long as one does not reach the ultimate truth, attachment or craving (*taṇhā*) for the world persists, and the mind continues to run toward sensory pleasures. In reality, the higher mental state can be attained only through the practice of *sīla* and *samādhi* (mental concentration). When a person begins practicing *sīla*, their ingrained habits (*saṅkhāra*) prevent them from understanding what changes they need to make in their nature or what circumstances or habits (*saṅkhāra*) are causing the suffering in their life. In reality, all this happens in life due to ignorance (*avijjā*). Generally, it is almost impossible to understand this. To comprehend it, one needs to deeply understand what *avijjā* is, how it operates, and how it encompasses the entirety of existence within itself.

Ignorance And The Path Of *Sīla*, *Samādhi*, And *Paññā*

In reality, ignorance (*avijjā*) is the absence of knowledge, which can be understood through the four wrong views (*viparyāsa*). These are as follows: 1) considering the impermanent (*anicca*) as permanent, 2) considering the non-self (*anatta*) as self, 3) considering the painful (*dukkha*) as pleasurable, and 4) considering the impure as beautiful¹². These four wrong views of perceiving the world constitute ignorance (*avijjā*). Their impact on the mind is so profound that it is generally impossible to comprehend. They can only be seen through *paññā* (wisdom). Without *paññā*, the complexity of one’s nature cannot be understood at a subtle level. On the surface, it may seem that everything is fine, yet suffering (*dukkha*) continues to arise in our lives, and a person fails to understand which aspect of their nature or actions is causing this suffering or what the root causes of this suffering are. This is because our perspective is worldly, or in other words, we view life through the lens of the four *viparyāsa*. In the

Mahānidānasutta, while explaining the profundity of *paṭiccasamuppāda* (dependent origination), the Buddha says, “Ānanda, this *paṭiccasamuppāda* is indeed profound and appears profound as well. Ānanda! Due to not understanding this principle, due to not knowing the depths of the world, humans remain entangled like a tangled skein, a knotted rope, or a bundle of grass, wandering in this world, falling into unfortunate states (*apāya*) and misery¹³.”

The complexity of one’s nature is the result of various conditioned tendencies (*saṅkhāra*) arising due to the four wrong views or ignorance (*avijjā*). In Buddhism, these tendencies are explained by dividing them into ten fetters (*saṃyojana*). According to Theravāda, a person attains the ultimate truth, the highest state of mental development, complete awakening, or mental purity by breaking these ten fetters. These ten fetters are: 1) *sakkāya-diṭṭhi* (view of a permanent self), 2) *vicikicchā* (skeptical doubt), 3) *sīlabbata-parāmāsa* (clinging to rites and rituals), 4) *kāmarāga* (sensual desire), 5) *byāpāda* (ill-will), 6) *rūparāga* (craving for form), 7) *arūparāga* (craving for formless existence), 8) *māna* (conceit), 9) *uddhacca* (restlessness), and 10) *avijjā* (ignorance)¹⁴.

These fetters (*saṃyojana*) can only be seen or understood through *paññā*, and unless they are understood, how can they be broken? According to Theravāda, the entire teaching of the Buddha is aimed at understanding these fetters and becoming completely free from them. Just as *paññā* is necessary to understand these fetters, *sīla* (ethical conduct) is essential for mental concentration. Even in general, a certain degree of *paññā* is needed to understand anything, and for the development of *paññā*, mental concentration is necessary. Ultimately, mental concentration or stability can only be achieved through *sīla* or ethical conduct. It is a natural fact that no human can imagine happiness by causing suffering to others. One may experience fleeting, unwholesome pleasure by causing suffering, but lasting peace cannot be attained, and an unpeaceful mind can neither be concentrated nor give rise to creative thoughts.

Attaining mental purity or complete awakening is not a sudden event; it is a long process. A person begins practicing *sīla*, which calms the disturbances of the mind, and simultaneously starts practicing meditation (*samādhi*). Ethical conduct (*sīla*) calms mental restlessness, meditation (*samādhi*) brings mental concentration, and concentration fosters the development of *paññā*. Through *paññā*, a person gradually begins to understand their complex nature. The knots of their complex nature start to unravel, and they begin to see which thread is connected where. The complexities of their nature begin to dissolve, false views (*micchā-diṭṭhi*) start to break, and the practice of *sīla* deepens. As the practice deepens, mental concentration increases, and the more concentrated the mind becomes, the more

paññā develops. As *paññā* develops further, the complexities of one's nature become clearer, making it easier to break false views. The practice deepens further, and the mind gradually moves toward purity.

Worldly Fetters And Spiritual Levels

The Buddha's three principles *sīla*, *samādhi*, and *paññā* are intrinsically interconnected. *Sīla* is not possible without *paññā*, because what are *sīla*? And why and how should we practice them? This can only be understood through *paññā*. Similarly, the development of *paññā* is not possible without a calm or concentrated mind, and mental concentration is not possible without *sīla*. How can a mind burning with the fire of hatred (*dosa*) achieve concentration? Thus, these three are intrinsically linked. If we have strayed too far from the main topic, let me return to it and state that we have now reached a point where we can understand how the various dimensions or levels of spirituality can be attained. The ten worldly fetters (*saṃyojana*) mentioned above can be broken through *sīla*, *samādhi* (meditation), and *paññā*. As these fetters are broken, a person attains new dimensions or levels of spirituality. By breaking the first three fetters (*sakkāya-diṭṭhi*, *vicikicchā*, *sīlabbata-parāmāsa*), a person enters the stream of *Buddhahood*, becoming a *sotāpanna*¹⁵. Until we break these first three fetters and enter the stream of *Buddhahood* as a *sotāpanna*, we cannot claim how ethically strong we are or how firm the foundation of our ethical conduct (*sīla*) is. Similarly, after breaking the first three fetters and weakening the next two fetters (*kāmarāga* and *byāpāda*), a person becomes a *sakadāgāmī*, reaching the next level of spirituality. By breaking the first five fetters and weakening the next three (*rūparāga*, *arūparāga*, and *māna*), a person becomes an *anāgāmī*, meaning one who does not return to take rebirth. Finally, by breaking all fetters both the lower five and the higher five (*rūparāga*, *arūparāga*, *māna*, *uddhacca* (restlessness), and *avijjā* (ignorance)) a person becomes an *arahant*, attaining *Nibbāna*¹⁶.

By breaking the first three fetters, a person becomes a *sotāpanna* or enters the stream of *Buddhahood*. These are referred to as the first type of noble person (*puggala*) in the *Saṅgha* veneration (*vandana*¹⁷). To break these three fetters, one must develop sufficiently powerful insight through *sīla*, *samādhi*, and *paññā*. Once these three fetters are broken, a person enters the stream of *Buddhahood*, attaining a state of mental development or insight from which they cannot regress to worldly life. No matter how negative worldly circumstances may be, their ethical integrity cannot deteriorate. Attaining the *sotāpanna* state in this lifetime is the life goal of every member of the *Triratna Buddhist Community*. Therefore, let us try to understand these three fetters in a bit more detail, as follows:

The First Fetter: *Sakkāya-dit̥ṭhi*

This is known as the view of a permanent self (*sakkāya-dit̥ṭhi* in Pali), meaning the “personality view.” It is of two types. The first is called *sassata-dit̥ṭhi* (eternalism), according to which personal identity remains unchanged after death. This is a form of the traditional belief in a permanent self. It posits that there is a soul (an unchanging ego-identity) within you, entirely separate from your body, which persists after your death (either going to heaven or taking rebirth). The key point is that it is unchanging; it is an entity, not a process. The second type of personality view is *uccheda-dit̥ṭhi* (annihilationism), which holds that nothing remains after death—death is the end, everything ceases. The traditional term for this is *uccheda* (Pali), meaning “cutting off” or “annihilation.” In other words, it assumes that the mental aspect of life, like the physical aspect, ceases at the time of death. According to Buddhism, both these views are misunderstood extremes, and Buddhism teaches the Middle Way. Buddhism teaches that “death” is not the end in the sense that when the physical body dies, there is no complete cessation of mental, psychological, and spiritual processes they continue. However, it is not an unchanging ego-self that continues. It is a process mental, psychological, spiritual that, with all its complexities, is always changing, flowing like a stream. The Buddhist perspective is that what happens after death is like a flow of mental events¹⁸.

The Second Fetter: *Vicikicchā*

This is commonly translated as “skeptical doubt” (*vicikicchā* in Pali), referring to a state of indecision. It is not positive doubt in the sense of questioning with faith. Rather, *vicikicchā* indicates an unwillingness to reach a definite conclusion. People waver; they prefer to sit on the fence; they do not wish to commit themselves. They remain in this state of indecision, unable to make up their minds or even make an effort. If asked about a topic, they may think one way today and another way tomorrow. They do not commit to pursuing matters to their conclusion or thinking things through clearly. Thus, this complacent state is a significant fetter, a major obstacle in spiritual life. To progress in spiritual life, this fetter must be broken¹⁹.

The Third Fetter: *Sīlabbata-parāmāsa*

Bhante Sangharakshita says, “This is commonly translated as ‘attachment to rites and rituals,’ but this is entirely incorrect. *Sīlabbata-parāmāsa* literally means ‘considering moral rules and religious practices as ends in themselves.’ Here, *sīla* refers to ethical observance or rules. *Vata* is a Vedic term meaning ‘vow,’ but in the sense of ‘religious ritual.’ The term *parāmāsa* means ‘clinging.’ Clinging to moral rules or even (good) religious practices as ends in themselves is a fetter. This brings us back to

the Buddha's parable, where he says that his teaching is like a raft. Through this parable, the Buddha explains that his teaching, in all its aspects, is a means to reach the goal. If we consider moral rules, the three refuges (*tisarāṇa*), recitation of *sīla* and veneration, or even meditation and scriptural study as ends in themselves, they become shackles in spiritual life, completely obstructing and halting our spiritual progress. The raft signifies that religious practices and ethical conduct are excellent as means to the goal, but they are not the goal themselves²⁰."

These are the first three fetters (*saṃyojana*). Therefore, by understanding one's limitations, recognizing the need for firm commitment, and understanding the relativity of all religious practices and ethical conduct, one attains the *sotāpanna* state. Once a person enters the stream of *Buddhahood*, according to Buddhist tradition, they will not take more than seven rebirths within the *bhava-cakra* (Wheel of Life) fewer are possible, but not more. Thus, the *sotāpanna* state represents a significant level in spiritual life. It can be said to represent transformation in the truest sense. Moreover, the *sotāpanna* state is achievable for all serious practicing Buddhists. In fact, these first three fetters are intellectual fetters that can be broken through clarity of intellect. It is not an exaggeration to say that they are within the reach of all Buddhists. Without some degree of meditation and formal adherence to the teachings, there is no benefit in advancing with a vague vision toward *Nibbāna*. One should seriously consider that in this lifetime, it is possible to break these three fetters, attain the *sotāpanna* state, and progress on the path of insight²¹.

The Triratna Bauddha Mahasangha and Conditions for Attaining Higher Mental States

To live a spiritual life, mental preparation and commitment to the *Triratna* (the three jewels: *Buddha*, *Dhamma*, and *Saṅgha*) are essential, but external conditions must also be conducive. A person who has attained a higher mental state can shape external conditions to their advantage, but for someone who has just embarked on the spiritual path, favorable external conditions are indispensable. By external conditions, we mean all those factors necessary for spiritual development. To live a spiritual life or to progress spiritually, continuous inspiration is required. This is a critical component, as without inspiration, one cannot sustain their commitment for long. Certainly, the source of inspiration should ideally be internal, but in the initial stages, external inspiration is necessary. This inspiration comes from the company of those who have walked the path before us our teachers, *ācāryas* (spiritual guides), *upādhyāyas* (preceptors), spiritual friends (*kalyāṇamitras*), and all those who are further along the path. The company of those proficient in *Dhamma* study and steadfast in ethical conduct (*sīla*), along with *Dhamma* study to correctly understand principles and truths, training in living the *Dhamma*

practically, and training to experience these truths directly these are the external conditions essential for spiritual development. The *Triratna Buddhist Community* and its supporting groups provide all these conditions, creating a conducive environment. Just as when a seed is sown, it requires a favorable environment to sprout and grow into a plant, with the soil being well-tilled, fertilized, and watered at regular intervals to create the right conditions for growth, similarly, the *Saṅgha* creates a conducive environment for spiritual development. This is done through weekly meditation and practice classes, one-day training retreats, five- to seven-day meditation and practice retreats, spiritual communities, guidance from *kalyāṇamitras*, *ācāryas*, *upādhyāyas*, and other senior *Saṅgha* members, as well as other programs. In this conducive environment, a person earnestly practices *sīla* (ethical conduct), *samādhi* (meditation), and *paññā* (wisdom), breaking the first three intellectual fetters (*saṃyojana*) to attain the *sotāpanna* state, a definite dimension of spiritual development.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we can say that through the earnest practice and cultivation of *sīla*, *samādhi*, and *paññā*, based on the insight gained, one can break worldly fetters (*saṃyojana*) and attain higher dimensions of spirituality. For this, a strong commitment to *saraṇagamana* (going for refuge) to the *Triratna* and favorable external conditions such as training in the *Dhamma* under the guidance of experienced and ethical teachers, *kalyāṇamittatā* (spiritual friendship), and the guidance of *ācāryas* and *upādhyāyas* are continuously necessary. This is a long process that does not happen suddenly; rather, one must gradually understand their conditioned mind (*saṅkhāra*) through *paññā* and progressively reduce its conditioning. The *Triratna Buddhist Community* provides all the conducive conditions necessary for spiritual development. All local centers and retreat centers of the *Triratna Buddhist Community* welcome everyone with an open heart, transcending distinctions of religion, caste, gender, high or low status, region, language, or superiority and inferiority, for the sake of spiritual development.

References

¹ “Urgyen” is a holy word that refers to the holy land called Oddiyana where Guru Rinpoche (Padmasambhava) was born. It is considered the source of Tantric Buddhist teachings and a symbol of spiritual power.

² Kennedy Alex, *Bringing Buddhism to the West*, Windhorse Publications, Unit 1-316 The Custard Factory, Gibb Street, Birmingham, B9 4AA. P. No.-117.

³⁴ Wisdom (*paññā*)- to see the things as they are or the ability to see the truth or the awareness to the truth.

⁴ “Nibbana” is made up of the negative particle *ni* and *vana* meaning selfish desire or craving. Hence the traditional explanations of Nirvana as the blowing out' of the fires of greed, hatred and delusion and as the state wherein the thirst for sensuous experience, for continued existence, and even for non-existence is altogether absent. (A Survey of Buddhism – Sangharakshita, -1993,page- 26)

⁵ Sangharakshita, A Survey of Buddhism, Triratna Granthamala, Dhammachakra Pravartana Mahavihar, Dapodi Pune- 411012, 1996.P. No.-33

⁶ Ibid;p no - 34

⁷ Sangharakshita, A Guide to the Buddhist Path, Windhorse Publications, Unit 1- 316 The Custard Factory, Gibb Street, Birmingham, B9 4AA, 1995, P. No- 35.

⁸ Sangharakshita, The history of my Going for Refuse,(Marathi) Translator – Ambika Sarkar, Triratna Granthmala, Dapaudi Pune -411012, 1991. P.11.

⁹ Ibid;p no- 11

¹⁰ Upadhyaya Acharya Baldev, Bauddha Darshan Mimansa, Chaukhamba Vidyabhavan, P.O. Box No. 1069, Varanasi 221001, Edition - 2011, Page 103.

¹¹ “*saddhā*” - Shraddha (Sanskrit; Saddha in Pali) refers to faith, confidence, or trust in the Buddha, the Dharma (his teachings), and the Sangha (the community of practitioners). It is a foundational quality in Buddhist practice, often described as a positive, heartfelt conviction with full of awareness towards ultimate goal of Buddhism.

¹² *Āṅguttara Nikāya*, Volume II, edited by R. Morris and E. Hardy, Pali Text Society (PTS), London, 2016, p. 52

¹³ Dighanikaya Pali (2. Mahavaggo), Dwarikadas Shastri (Translator and Co-publisher), Bauddha Bharati, P.O. Box No. 1049, Varanasi – 221001 (India), First Edition – 1996, Page 310.

¹⁴ Sangharakshita, A Guide to the Buddhist Path, Windhorse Publications, Unit 1-316 The Custard Factory, Gibb Street, Birmingham, B9 4AA, 1995, P.No-107.

¹⁵ Upadhyaya Acharya Baldev, Bauddha Darshan Mimansa, Chaukhamba Vidyabhavan, P.O. Box No. 1069, Varanasi 221001, Edition - 2011, Page 103.

¹⁶ Sangharakshita, A Guide to the Buddhist Path, Windhorse Publications, Unit 1-316 The Custard Factory, Gibb Street, Birmingham, B9 4AA, 1995, P.No-106.

¹⁷ Digha Nikaya, (*The Long Discourses of the Buddha*), translated by Maurice Walshe, Wisdom Publications, 1995, pages 245–246.

¹⁸ Sangharakshita, *A Guide to the Buddhist Path*, Windhorse Publications, Unit 1-316 The Custard Factory, Gibb Street, Birmingham, B9 4AA, 1995, P.No-105

¹⁹ Ibid;p 106.

²⁰ Ibid;p 106.

²¹ Sangharakshita, *A Guide to the Buddhist Path*, Windhorse Publications, Unit 1-316 The Custard Factory, Gibb Street, Birmingham, B9 4AA, 1995, P.No-106