

## **What benefit is there in becoming a temporary monastic?**

One of the most inspiring practices of South-East Asia where Theravada Buddhism is practised is the easy passage of men and women in and out of the monastic order, especially in Burma and Thailand. The practice of young men and women entering the order even for a week, is understood to be beneficial. Many of any age will spend up to three months at a monastery, especially during the Rainy Season.

In terms of the individual, it means that there is an opportunity to taste monastic life and understand what it has to offer. Hopefully, they will find an atmosphere conducive to contemplation, a community of people all and a discipline that allows them to further their understanding of the Dhamma and their practice of meditation.

It also inculcates in them a respect for the ordained Sangha and a willingness to support the monks and nuns who have made a lifelong commitment. It may be that they want to build up a store of merit for a better rebirth. But a more wholesome reason is that they identify with monastics as ordinary people who want to put an end to their dukkha, their suffering and dissatisfaction. The lay supporter who provides the necessary needs to a monastery has the opportunity of offering from a pure heart without hope of return. This is true generosity. It is hoped that this experience will now flow into society. If the monastic interlude is used to reflect on the teachings and to purify the heart, this ought to manifest in ordinary daily life. After all this is the flow of the Eightfold Path. Because of Right Understanding, Right Attitude arises in the heart. Because there is a wholesome attitude, Right Speech, Right Action and Right Livelihood follow naturally.

Indeed, it is only in ordinary daily life even for the monastic that such virtue can express itself. And this virtue needs to be expressed in all areas of life from individual relationships, to the work place, to society at large with its local, regional and country socio-politics and finally to concern with world issues. In this way the effect of the Dhamma can manifest in the world and affect it for the good.

There are, of course, benefits for the monastics. Lay practitioners bring fresh energy. Their enthusiasm is infectious. Their questions make it necessary to keep revising the Dhamma and because of their involvement in the world force monastics to reconsider the Dhamma in the light of present day science, economics, politics and so on. The Dhamma is of little use confined to the boundary of a monastery!

The main aim of the Satipanya Buddhist Trust is to establish a monastic meditation centre where lay people can either follow a strict meditation regime in the Mahasi Tradition or come to live the contemplative life. They may not actually want to shave their heads, but simply follow the rule. Indeed, that would be enough to savour the benefits of an institution the Buddha established so that people could devote their whole energy to spiritual practice in an environment free of worldly distractions.