



right start right finish  
thai temples

Anandapanyo Bhikkhu

# Right Start Right Finish

Thai Temples

*Anandapanyo Bhikkhu*

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Cover Design

Tanawat Pisanuwongse

ISBN: 978-1-935207-20-7

Retail Price: \$5.95





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## INTRODUCTION

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**F**OR MANY PEOPLE FOREIGN to Thai culture, coming to a temple for the first time can be quite a culture shock. During my many years as an English-speaking monk at Wat San Fran Dhammaram, I have had to answer many questions on Thai temples and Thai customs. I have compiled these questions in this small booklet. My hope is that they help you understand Buddhism through understanding Buddhist customs and temples.



Chapter One

**GREETINGS AND  
BOWING**

*Greetings*

## WHAT IS THE STANDARD GREETING IN THAI TEMPLES?

---

**T**HAI S USE THE “**WAI**” AS the traditional standard greeting. To do this, press your palms together in a prayer like fashion. Then, with your head slightly bowed, speak your greeting. The common greeting is “Sawasdee,” which means hello in Thai.

This is the most common way to greet laypeople. However, there is a more formal way to greet monks, novices and nuns.

## HOW SHOULD WE GREET MONKS?

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**T**HAI MONKS DO NOT EXPECT all Westerners to follow Thai customs. However, any effort is greatly appreciated. We should try to refrain from shaking hands, hugs, or kisses. In addition, since monks cannot touch women, females should not attempt to shake hands with monks when they meet them.

The formal way to greet monks is a proper bow.

*Bowing*

# WHY SHOULD WE BOW?

---

**B**OWING ACCOMPLISHES TWO THINGS:

1. Expressing respect and reverence
2. Practicing humility

## TO WHOM SHOULD WE BOW?

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**WE SHOULD ONLY BOW TO THOSE** who are higher in status than we are. In Buddhism, the hierarchy, as the Buddha laid out for us, is as follows:

1. The Buddha (the actual person)
2. Dhamma (the Buddha's teachings)
3. Sangha
  - a. Monks (Ordained men, over the age of 20, 227 precepts)
  - b. Bhikkhuni's (Ordained women, 311 precepts)

- c. Novices (Ordained boys or men, any age, 10 precepts)
- d. Nuns (Ordained women, 8 precepts)
- 4. Laypeople (Non-ordained men and women and children, 5 precepts)

So, just to clarify:

**As a laypeople:**

**You would bow to:** All ordained people.

**You would not bow to:** Other laypeople.

**As a nun:**

**You would bow to:** All monks, all novices, all bhikkhunis, and all nuns ordained before you.

**You would not bow to:** Laypeople or nuns ordained after you.

**As a bhikkhuni:**

**You would bow to:** All monks, and all bhikkhunis ordained before you.

**You would not bow to:** bhikkhunis ordained after you, nuns or laypeople.



**As a novice:**

**You would bow to:** All monks and all novices ordained before you.

**You would not bow to:** novices ordained after you, nuns, and laypeople.

**As a monk:**

**You would bow to:** monks ordained before you

**You would not bow to:** monks ordained after you, novices, bhikkhunis, nuns, and laypeople.

Note: I am not certain to the relationship of bowing between bhikkhunis and novices. There has not been official bhikkhunis in quite some time so this problem is not often encountered. Therefore, I left their relationship out of the above text.

## WHEN SHOULD WE BOW?

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**WE SHOULD PAY ATTENTION TO** whether the person to whom we are bowing is ready to accept our bow. Just as a handshake or a wave, we would not do it to someone who has their back turned or is otherwise engaged in attention-demanding activity. We would politely wait until he or she is ready and the time is proper for that person to receive our bow. For example, if a monk is walking away, we would not bow to him. If he is talking to others, we would not bow to him. We should wait until the monk is seated and ready for us to formally bow to him.

Just as it is customary to greet and bid farewell to the owner of the house we visit, it is customary to greet and bid farewell to monks. Tradition requires that we bow 3 times to the Buddha statue when we arrive, followed by 3 bows to the monks, and 3 bows to the nuns. Then, before we leave, we would bow to the Buddha statue 3 times, followed by 3 bows to the monks, and three to the nuns.

## HOW SHOULD WE BOW?

---

**A**S STATED BEFORE, WE SHOULD first wait until the person to whom we are bowing is ready. We should make sure to seat him or her higher than us in a place of respect. Once the monk or nun is seated properly, we can begin our bow.

### **Step 1**

Begin by kneeling, facing towards the Buddha image, monks, or nuns to whom you intend to bow. Men should kneel with the heels raised and the toes curled under them. Their knees should be about shoulder-length apart.

Women should kneel with the tops of the feet on the floor. Their knees should be together.

### **Step 2**

After we are sitting on the floor in the proper position, we should place our hands in the common prayer position (lotus position), palms together in front of the sternum.

### **Step 3**

We will start by raising our hands to our foreheads.

### **Step 4**

We then lower our hands and head to the floor.

### **Step 5**

The final position has five points of the body in contact with the ground - that is, our forehead, palms, elbows, knees and feet touching the ground. This movement is usually done from the hips and not the knees. This will prevent

our backsides from sticking up in the air. After this step, we will repeat steps 2-5 twice more, for a total of 3 bows.

The complete movement should be done as fluidly and gracefully as possible. It is an offering of humility and inner respect. Therefore, we should do it as beautifully and reverentially as possible.

## WHY DO WE BOW 3 TIMES?

---

**T**YPICALLY, WE BOW THREE TIMES to show respect for the Triple Gem (the three refuges – Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha).

Since the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha (referring to all enlightened people) are higher than all of us, everyone (including monks through laypeople) bows to the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha.

## WHY DO SOME PEOPLE BOW 5 TIMES?

---

**T**HOUGH THE PRACTICE IS NOT COMMON, you might see some people bow 5 times. The additional two bows are usually for our parents and teachers.

However, we should respect the customs and traditions of the temple we visit. So, if we see the monks and nuns bowing 3 times, we should bow three times. If we see them bowing 5 times, we should bow 5 times. It is as the saying goes,

“When in Rome, do as the Romans do”



# WHAT IF WE DON'T LIKE OR DON'T RESPECT THE PERSON TO WHOM WE ARE SUPPOSED TO BOW?

---

**T**HIS IS A COMMON CONCERN that arises for many Buddhists who are unsure of what to do in this situation. Since bowing is a sign of respect, inner conflict may arise if they do not respect the person to whom they are supposed to bow.

This problem occurs because we do not understand the true meaning behind the bow. When we bow to a monk, novice, bhikkhuni, or a nun, we are not bowing to that individual person, but to the entire institution of the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha. We are

respecting and revering the institution, not the person. If we have this understanding, we can easily bow to anyone, since they are merely there to give us a chance to pay respects to the institution left to us by the Buddha.

## TO WHOM DO WE BOW FIRST?

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**W**E ALWAYS START FROM THE TOP and work our way down. So, if there were monks and nuns in a room together, we would start by bowing three times to the monks and then three times to the nuns.

## HOW TO TELL WHO THE ELDER IS?

---

**T**HERE ARE TWO EASY WAYS to tell who the elder is. In general, those who are elder will be treated with the utmost respect by those who are less senior. Therefore, if we pay attention, we can see who is eldest.

The second way is by the sitting order.

## WHY DO MONKS SIT IN PARTICULAR ORDER?

---

**M**ONKS USUALLY SIT IN ORDER of seniority. The eldest monk will sit closest to the Buddha, either on the right or the left side. The rest of the monks will sit according to seniority. The least senior monk will sit at the very end, furthest from the Buddha. The senior novice will sit immediately following the least senior monk. The novices will then sit according to seniority. Following the novices, the most senior nun will sit following the least senior novice. The rest of the nuns will sit in order of seniority.

# WHY IS IT THAT SOME YOUNG LOOKING MONKS ARE ACTUALLY MORE SENIOR THAN OLDER MONKS?

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**W**ITHIN THE **SANGHA**, AGE IS NOT the criterion for determining seniority. Date of ordination determines seniority. Ordination is considered a rebirth in the holy life. So, those in the holy life are ranked according to their date of ordination. Therefore, if a 30 year old monk has been ordained for 9 years, but a 60 year old monk has been ordained for 4 years, the 60 year old monk would have to bow to and venerate the 30 year old monk. Each year in the life of a member of the Sangha

is measured by Vassas, or rains retreats. (A rains retreat is a period of 3 months each year where monks must stay in one location).

Chapter Two

# **OFFERINGS**



*Puñña - Merit*

## WHAT IS MERIT?

---

**M**ERIT IS A CONCEPT IN BUDDHISM in which the accumulation of good deeds, acts, or thoughts carry over later in this life or in the next life.

As an example, imagine a bank. When you put your money in the bank, the bank can use that money for various purposes. In return, they pay you interest. That interest is the equivalent of merit. The more good deeds you put in the "bank," the more interest (i.e. merit) you will get. In the end, the more interest you have, the more money you will have. With

more money, you can enjoy yourself or invest it. If you spend your money, it will eventually be gone. However, if you invest your money, you will earn more money.

Merit works in the same way. One gains merit by doing good deeds, engaging in good speech, and having good thoughts. The more good deeds, speech, and thoughts you have, the more merit you will acquire. If you choose to stop accumulating merit, you will still have the benefits of the old merit you have done. When that runs out, so will your happiness. On the other hand, if you keep making good merit, then you will not run out of it.

As with everything, the opposite is also true. If you decided to borrow money from a loan shark, he would charge you an exorbitant interest rate. The more you borrow, the more you will owe. If you pay off your debt, you will be free from debt. However, if you do not pay off your debt, you will constantly be looking over your shoulder for the loan shark. Demerit

works in the same way. Demerit is gained by doing bad actions, committing bad speech and having bad thoughts. If you stop doing demerit, you can eventually pay off your old karma, however, if you do not stop, you will never be free of your negative karma.

## DOES THE AMOUNT OF MERIT RECEIVED DEPEND ON THE AMOUNT DONATED?

---

**T**HE AMOUNT OF THE DONATION IS insignificant. Do not let anyone tell you otherwise. The most important and significant part of the donation is how you feel before, during and after your donation. Before giving, you should be happy anticipating the opportunity to exercise your generosity. While giving, you should be happy that you are making someone happy by fulfilling a need. After giving, you should feel satisfied that you have done a good deed.

If donating a lot makes you feel better and does not create a burden on you both financially and emotionally, it is encouraged. However, if donating a lot creates a stress on you financially or emotionally, then you must learn to practice moderation.

The only set amount there is for donating is the amount that you can give and still feel happy. One should give according to one's means. Gifts from one's meager resources are considered very valuable.

According to the Buddha's teachings:

“If a person leads a righteous life even though he ekes out a bare existence on gleanings, looks after his family according to his means, but makes it a point to give from his limited stores, his generosity is worth more than a thousand sacrifices”

In addition,

“Alms given from wealth righteously earned is greatly praised by the Buddha.”

Even if someone gives a small amount with a heart full of faith and rejoicing, one can gain happiness now and later.

In fact, in a very insightful and popular scripture known as the Velama Sutra, the Buddha described to a wealthy patron that achievement of merit. The wealthy patron had been giving continuous alms to the Buddha and his monks. Over time, his wealth became depleted and the quality of the offering diminished. From full grain rice, they were left with offering broken rice. From full curry, they were left with offering soupy curry. The patron felt sad and disappointed in his offering. When the Buddha asked him about whether he was going to continue making offerings, he responded of course, but felt bad about the quality.

The Buddha then told him of a wealthy merchant in the distant past who also wanted to make offerings to those who are worthy. That merchant grew up in a time where there were

no noble individuals in the world. Therefore, all the most valuable commodities in the world given to an unworthy person would not yield high results. That past merchant was most unfortunate. If he had only encountered one Sotapanna (Stream Enterer level of enlightenment) and given him the offerings his merit would have grown exponentially. His merit would be even greater if he had offered it to a Sakadagami (Once Returner level of enlightenment), and even more if he had offered it to an Anagami (Non-returner level of enlightenment). He would earn even more if he had offered it to an Arahant (Fully Enlightened Being), and still more if he had offered it to a PaccekaBuddha (Self-Awakened Arahant, Silent Buddha, Non-teaching Buddha). He would earn even more if he had offered it to a SammasamBuddha (Self-Awakened Arahant, Teaching Buddha), and even more if he had offered it to a SammasamBuddha and his retinue of monks. He would earn even more if he had instead built a temple for them. All these would have had increasing exponential



## NON-PHYSICAL MERIT

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**T**HE BUDDHA FURTHER EXPLAINED THAT there were four more types of merit that were even higher than building thousands of temples for the religion of the Buddha and his followers (the highest physical donation possible). All other physical merits and donations pale in comparison to these four. Each of the four, continuing up the chain greatly outshines the previous in amount of merit accumulated. The following is listed from the lowest (4) to the highest (1) of the four.

4. Taking refuge in the Triple Gem (Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha)
3. Steadfast determination to uphold the Five Precepts (Restraint from Killing, Stealing, Sexual Misconduct, Harmful Speech and Intoxication).
2. Having any level of Metta (compassion, loving kindness) for anyone or anything.
1. Changing your wrong viewpoints into right viewpoints.

The Buddha then concluded to the wealthy patron that his offerings to the Buddha and Sangha (community of monks and nuns) would not go wasted, no matter the quality of the offering. After hearing this, the wealthy patron was overjoyed and renewed his vigor in making the offerings and practicing the Lord Buddha's teachings.

## DOES OUR MERIT REACH OUR DEAD RELATIVES?

---

**L**UANG POR THOON, A RECENTLY DECEASED Arahant, says that of the twelve types of spirits, only one is able to accept the merit that we send them. This is the spirit that is awaiting rebirth. They need more merit in order to be reborn. However, since they do not have a physical body, all they can do is rejoice in the good actions of others. So when we dedicate our merit to these spirits, they will rejoice in our actions and through their rejoicing, accrue merit and thus be reborn.

The reason the other spirits are not able to receive our merit is because those in heaven already have their heavenly food. Those spirits existing in hell are too consumed with their suffering.

The action of dedicating merit to one's deceased relative is more for the living than for the dead. Those who are still alive would like to feel that they have done something for the deceased, which allows them to feel better about themselves.

## *Dāna - Offerings*

## WHY GIVE OFFERINGS?

---

**W**HEN MONKS UNDERTAKE THE VOW of poverty, they are completely dependent on the generosity of others to survive. Monks are not allowed to make their own food, ask for anything in particular, nor carry money. Therefore, monks cannot provide for themselves. Without the offerings, the monks would have no food, clothes, nor shelter. Offerings from lay people support the entire Buddhist religion.

In return for the offerings of the lay people, the monks, novices, bhikkhunis, and nuns share

what they have learned during their quest for the freedom from suffering and rebirth. In addition, those who have ordained allow the religion to continue to exist, and therefore to continue helping people. The offerings of the laypeople not only help the Sangha, but also the laypeople themselves and others in the world.

In Buddhism, Dāna, or giving, is an important concept. In fact it is the first of the 10 spiritual perfections. It is one weapon we have against greed. Greed arises from our egos and a misunderstanding of ourselves and our belongings. The act of giving can help create space between us, our egos, our sense of ownership, and our selfishness.

According to the Buddha, proper giving will lead to three things:

1. Birth in happy states
2. Material wealth
3. Less attachment to material

possessions

However, lack of giving will lead to:

1. Birth in unhappy states
2. Poverty
3. More attachment to material possessions

The more we give without seeking anything in return, the wealthier we will become both in the worldly and spiritual senses. In the end, we give for our own benefit and through that, we also help others.

The Buddha taught that we should give to others without the expectation of a reward. We should give without attaching to either the gift or the recipient. We should practice giving to release ourselves from the bonds of greed and self-clinging.

In addition, giving is good because it accrues merit and creates positive karma that will result in future happiness in this life, one's next life, and future lives.



# HOW DO YOU KNOW WHAT IS GOOD AND WHAT IS BAD?

---

**T**HERE ARE THREE BENCHMARKS IN deciding whether speech, thought, or an action is good or bad:

1. The intention – did you intend for the action, speech, or thought to be good or bad?
2. The action, speech, or thought – was it good or bad?
3. The result – did it negatively affect you or others in any way?

If you intended for it to be good, the action taken was good and the result was good, then

ultimately it was good speech, thought, or an action, and therefore it constitutes merit.

However, if any of the three benchmarks result in harm or evil, then the entire action is polluted and therefore, it constitutes demerit.

## WHAT CAN WE GIVE AS OFFERINGS?

---

**T**HERE ARE MANY DIFFERENT TYPES of offerings done at a Wat (“Wat” is the Thai term for temple). In general, offerings are called dāna which can be in the form of money, food, requisites and/or services. Traditionally, people will bring items such as food, fruit, flowers, candles, incense, paper towels, napkins, coffee, and medicine. Some other people come to the temple and vacuum, dust, or clean the bathrooms.

## IS IT NECESSARY TO BRING GIFTS OR FOOD TO A TEMPLE?

---

**I**T IS NOT NECESSARY TO BRING GIFTS or food to a temple. Many people come to the temple to listen to Dhamma, to help clean or just to feel happy.

## WHAT IF I'M POOR AND CANNOT AFFORD MUCH?

---

**I**F YOU ARE POOR AND CANNOT AFFORD much, it does not take away from the merit you gain through your offerings or contributions. In fact, it could work in your favor. Those who have \$100 million and give \$1000 might get less merit than those who have \$10 and give \$5. It does not depend solely on the amount, nor does it depend on the ratio; it depends on your mindset. Do you feel like you are making a sacrifice? Do you feel like you are giving enough? Do you feel like you are practicing less attachment to physical belongings? Do you feel enthusiastic and energetic because

of your offering? Sometimes, it is harder to give \$5 if you have only \$10 than it is to give \$1000 if you have \$100 million. You can also gain merit through overcoming your attachment and your clinging to physical belongings.

## WHAT IS SANGHADĀNA?

---

**S**ANGHADĀNA IS A COMBINATION OF two words. Sangha means holy order, and dāna means generosity or gifts. Directly translated, Sanghadāna means Sangha gifts or gifts to the holy order.

Sanghadānas are the formal way to offer gifts to a temple. Sanghadānas typically have 6 parts:

1. The individual desiring to give gifts/donations/requisites to the monk will sit in front of the monk with the item(s) in front

of them. Then before starting, he or she will bow to the monk 3 times.

2. Then he or she will say the words of homage to the Buddha three times:

**“Namo tassa, Bhagavato Arahato  
Sammā Sambuddhassa”**

This means:

**“Homage to the Blessed one,  
the Worthy One, the Rightly Self-  
Awakened One.”**

3. The person will then say the traditional words of offering in Pali. Then he or she will say the translation in his or her native language. This is done so that the individual(s) giving the gifts will know what they are saying and so that the meaning of the words gets internalized.



4. When this is done, the monks will raise their hands in the lotus position and say, “Saddhu” (Let it be so, it is proper). Then the individual will pick up the offering with two hands and offer it to the monk. If the individual is a male, then the offering can be given directly to the monk without an intermediary. However, if the individual is a female, the offering must be placed on a cloth the monk is touching. The cloth will serve as the intermediary since the monk cannot directly touch women.
  
5. After this, the monk usually gives a short Dhamma talk to the people. After the Dhamma talk, the monks will give a blessing in the Pali language. Once the monks have started the blessing, the people can pour the water from the prepared receptacle into the bowl. This is done slowly and while the individual thinks about the people he wishes to also receive the blessing that he is getting from the monks.

6. At the end of the blessing, say “Saddhu” three times. Then conclude with bowing to the monks three times. Take the water that has been poured in the bowl, take it outside and pour it onto the ground.

## WHAT IS THE CORRECT WAY TO MAKE OFFERINGS AS A MALE OR FEMALE LAYPERSON?

---

**I**F YOU ARE A MALE LAYPERSON, the proper etiquette is to patiently wait until the monk is ready to accept the offering. During this time, hold the offering with two hands to make sure you do not drop it. Before you make your offering, be sure to make your aspiration. Then, after you have made your aspiration, when the monk is ready, hand the offering to the monk with two hands. Do not let go until you are certain the monk has received it securely. Then either make your next offering or move aside so that others can make their offerings. After making an offering

to the monks, you are not allowed to touch it again. If an offering is touched by another layperson, then it must be re-offered.

If you are a female layperson, the only difference is that you cannot hand the offering to the monk directly. You must wait for the monk to lay out an intermediary such as a cloth. Wait for him to touch one end of the cloth and then you may make your offering with two hands.

For both male and female laypersons, after you make your offering, it is customary to bow three times to the monks.

## WHY INCENSE, CANDLES, AND FLOWERS?

---

**T**RADITIONALLY, INCENSE, CANDLES AND FLOWERS are Brahmanic traditions. These are not Buddhist traditions. The Buddha never asked his followers to worship him with incense, candles, and flowers. These traditions have been incorporated into Buddhism by Buddhist followers.

Originally, Brahmans believed that candles would light the way for spirits and devas and guide them to where we are committing meritorious actions. Then these spirits can

share and rejoice in our actions and also receive merit.

The incense works the same way as the candles. The spirits and devas will become aware of the scents and follow it to where we are committing meritorious actions.

Flowers represent beauty, cleanliness, freshness, and life. Through these flowers we will be born beautiful, fresh and clean.

These are beliefs and ideals originally foreign to Buddhism. However, over time, they have been adapted and incorporated into common Buddhist practice.

# *Blessings*

# DOES A BLESSING MAKE ME LUCKY OR IMBUE ME WITH POWER?

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**U**NFORTUNATELY, THAT IS NOT HOW REAL LIFE works. No one can chant a magical verse that suddenly causes all your woes and distress to magically disappear on their own. The Buddha taught that this world is run by the Law of Karma. One will receive the fruits of what one creates. One will not receive fruits of an action one does not do.

Then what is the benefit of a blessing? If you look closely at the meaning of the blessing, there is a teaching within. Most blessings in Thai Theravada Buddhism began



as teachings from the Lord Buddha. These teachings were chosen for their superb and valuable messages. If we listen to the verse and internalize the message, through that new understanding and application of the teaching, we can change our viewpoints and thereby change how we interact with the world. Through this new perspective and understanding, we will no longer do things in the way we used to. This will change our futures and cause new things to flow into our lives.

The bottom line is - through these teachings, the message of the Buddha can help us improve the way we live our lives. It can help us make better decisions and choices. These better decisions and choices are what will lead us to a better future.

So as you can see, we are the ones who determines our future. We are the ones that determine our "luck." The blessing is only meant to guide our decisions and perception.

However, in the current day and age, most people do not know what the blessings mean. Instead of learning the message, they focus on the medium - the Pali chant itself. The listening to the chanting in a foreign language then creates a sort of placebo effect. They feel good because we think they should. This good feeling can lead to many short-term benefits. We can feel happy for the day. We can associate good feelings with the temple and our offerings. However, it will not lead to long-lasting improvement because we haven't changed anything within us.

So as a recommendation, after listening to the blessings, you should find an appropriate time and ask the monks for a translation. If that is not possible, find out the name of the blessing and search for the translation online. Then sit and contemplate the message and see how you can incorporate the Buddha's teachings into your life.

## WHAT DOES THE BLESSING MEAN?

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**T**HE BLESSINGS GIVEN ARE USUALLY PICKED AT the discretion of the leader. The blessings are given in three parts – the opening, the middle verses, the closing.

### **The opening:**

“Yathā vārivahā ...” Then the rest of the monks will join in.

**The middle verses:**

After the opening, the leader picks from a variety of verses. He can pick as many as he feels are necessary and appropriate.

**The closing:**

“BhavatuSabbaMangalam...” Then the rest of the monks will join in.

Since the blessings are usually given in Pali, most people do not understand their meanings. The following is a translation of YathāVārivahā (a very common opening verse):

*“Just as rivers full of water fill the ocean full, even so does that here given benefit the dead (the hungry shades). May whatever you wish or want quickly come to be. May all your aspirations be fulfilled, as the moon on the fifteenth (full moon) day, or as a radiant, bright gem.*

*May all distresses be averted, may every disease be destroyed. May there be no*

*dangers for you. May you be happy & live long. For one of respectful nature who constantly honors the worthy, four qualities increase: long life, beauty, happiness, strength.”*

For the middle verses, the following is a translation of a common verse chanted in the occasion of someone's passing:

*"He gave to me, he acted on my behalf, and he was my relative, my companion and my friend." Offerings should be given for the dead when one reflects (thus) on what was done in the past. For no weeping or sorrowing or any kind of lamentation benefit the dead whose relatives keep acting in that way. But when this offering is given, well-placed in the Sangha, it works for their long-term benefit and they profit immediately. In this way the proper duty to relatives has been shown and great honor has been done to the dead and the monks have been given strength: You've acquired merit that's not small.”*

For the closing verses, the following is a translation of “BhavatuSabbaMangalam (a very common closing verse):

*“May there be every good blessing, may the devas protect you, through the power of all the Buddhas, Dhamma and Sangha may you always be well.”*

# *Watering Ceremony*

# WHAT DOES THE POURING OF THE WATER DURING THE BLESSING MEAN?

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**T**HE POURING OF WATER DURING the blessing is a tradition that has been incorporated into Buddhism over time. It started as a way for laypeople to focus their attention on the water flowing while receiving the blessing.

The water symbolizes purity and connectivity. Water is pure, just as we wish our hearts and minds to be. In addition, water can take the shape of any vessel it is poured into; it never runs out and can travel from small streams to large oceans. Water connects things. When water is poured into the ground it doesn't



disappear. Instead, it flows, connects, and nourishes.

Our merit shares the same qualities. Once made, it does not run out. It can make us happy in any state that we are in. It flows and connects with others and causes others to rejoice and share in our happiness.

**WHEN POURING THE WATER  
DURING THE BLESSING, I SEE  
PEOPLE TOUCHING EACH OTHER.  
WHAT SHOULD I DO?**

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**T**HIS IS ANOTHER TRADITION THAT has been adapted into general Thai Buddhism after the Buddha's time. There is a belief that by being physically connected, the merit that is gained from the watering ceremony will flow to every person who is connected. That is why you will see people gently and respectfully touching each other on the shoulder or back in order to create a connection chain. Should you join the chain? When in Rome, do as the Romans. Just be careful. Some people do not like to be touched by strangers. Some women do not like to be touched by men they

do not know. Keep these things in mind when seeking to join in the connection.

However, if you do not connect to the chain, there is no loss or lack of merit. You can still focus on receiving the blessing and still receive the full benefit.

**DO I NEED TO CHANT ANYTHING  
DURING THE BLESSING? I  
SOMETIMES SEE OTHER PEOPLE  
WHISPERING SOMETHING.**

---

**T**HE BLESSINGS THE MONKS GIVE are not magical nor mystical. They are the teachings of the Buddha meant to give you something to think about and apply to your life, to make your life better. However, over time, the meaning of the chanting has gotten lost and the chanting sounds themselves have become the focus. Some teachers then tell people receiving blessings to chant a prayer or mantra while receiving the blessing. This is contradictory. If the monk is giving a blessing, you should listen and try to absorb the lesson. Then after the blessing, you can dedicate yourself and

chant any mantras or prayers that you desire. Imagine if you go to a concert to hear your favorite singer sing your favorite. While they are singing your favorite song, will you start to sing a different song to yourself at the same time? If you want to sing that song, just wait until the singer is done and you can sing your song. The same thing goes for blessings or Pali chanting. The purpose is for you to receive a holy Dhamma message.

**AFTER A BLESSING, I SEE SOME  
PEOPLE RUN THEIR HANDS  
THROUGH THEIR HAIR;  
WHAT IS THIS?**

---

**S**OME THAI PEOPLE ARE VERY SUPERSTITIOUS. They believe that if they run their hands through their hair or over their head, they are absorbing the blessings and good luck. This is only a superstition.

Chapter Three

# **ETIQUETTE AND ATTIRE**

*Manners*



## WHAT ACTIONS ARE CONSIDERED RUDE AT A TEMPLE?

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**A**CTIONS AT A **B**UDDHIST TEMPLE should be respectful and polite. Respect should be given not only to ordained people, but also the location, Buddha images, and all other visitors. This does not mean that one must be overly serious when visiting a temple.

Impolite actions can include sitting with your feet pointed at a Buddha image, monk or nun. This is because in Thai culture, the feet are considered the “dirty” and “unholy” part of our bodies. Typical sitting positions include kneeling, or sitting with both legs to

one side. However, Thais understand that it is sometimes difficult for Westerners to sit on the floor for long periods of time, so sitting cross-legged or on a cushion is often acceptable. Just make sure that when you change positions, you do not inadvertently point your feet towards the Buddha image or monks.

Laypeople should not stand over or sit in a position higher than monks or nuns. However, certain exceptions can be made for the elderly or those with physical difficulties.

Giving or receiving items from a monk should always be done with two hands. This is to ensure that there is proper distance between the monk and the layperson. We would not want the item to drop because the layperson was too far away from the monk.

On the other hand, we should try not to stand or sit too close to monks and nuns.

In Thai culture, as with many Asian cultures, the head is the center of thought and is considered a distinguished point of the body. Therefore, we should never pat, touch or step over someone's head, especially that of a monk or nun.

In addition, shoes should never be worn inside a building in Thai communities or homes. Thais consider the shoes dirty and should be left outside the building. As a good practice, your shoes should be placed deliberately paired and out of the way of people trying to enter and exit the temple. Even though it has happened, not many people experience shoe theft at temples.

## PERSONAL SPACE AND TOUCHING

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**I**N THAI CULTURE, IT IS INAPPROPRIATE for males to touch women unless you have their express permission. Therefore, a simple hand on the shoulder or tap would be inappropriate.

In terms of greetings, hugging is only done among women and between close family members. Thai males seldom hug Thai females due to the respect for personal space.

## HOW DO YOU AVOID TAKING ADVANTAGE AT A TEMPLE?

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**A** TEMPLE IS A VERY HOLY PLACE for Thai people. It represents the faith, dedication, donations, and effort and energy that the Buddhist community puts into helping create, build and maintain a temple and temple community. Therefore, when people come to the temple, they are very careful to not take advantage.

Even if you are given books, food or other things for free, you should still leave a donation.

When going to a temple, one should go with the intention to give and to help. The only thing in Thai temples that is acceptable to take is the Dhamma. Of this you can take as much as you can. However, as for food or other material things, you should never take without reciprocating or donating. You do not necessarily have to donate money. You can donate time and effort. For example, if you are given a free book or some food to take home, you can trade by helping clean a bathroom or sweep a hall. This way you do not leave the temple in its debt.

When I was younger, my mother used to take me to temples. After I finished playing and running around, my mother would always tell me to make a donation in order to “repay the debt owed to the Sangha.” She explained that we use their land, their time, their resources, and their kindness. We should always repay so that we are not in debt, and do not owe them anything.

Since Thais believe in rebirth, we want to limit the amount of spiritual debt we owe in order to limit the reasons we need to be reborn.

So, as a basic rule of thumb, leave a temple letting them have the advantage. Never leave a temple feeling like you had the advantage. The only exception is with Dhamma teachings; take as much as you can.

# WHAT IS THE PROPER WAY TO ADDRESS A MONK?

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## **M**ONKS CAN BE ADDRESSED AS:

<b>Ajahn</b>	Teacher
<b>Phra (name)</b>	Monk (name)
<b>Phra Ajarn</b>	Monk teacher
<b>Phra Ajarn (name)</b>	Monk teacher (name)
<b>Tahn</b>	Respectful sir
<b>Tahn (name)</b>	Respectful sir (name)
<b>Than Ajarn</b>	Respectful teacher
<b>Luang Pee</b>	Venerable Brother



<b>Luang Por</b>	Venerable Father
<b>Luang Bu</b>	Venerable Grandfather
<b>Bhante*</b>	Elder
<b>Bhante (name)*</b>	Elder (name)

\*mainly used in Buddhist groups outside of Thai Theravada

<b>Kuba**</b>	Teacher
<b>Kuba (name)**</b>	Teacher (name)

\*\*commonly used with Thai monks from the Isaarn region. Typically used with young monks or newly ordained monks.

For example, my given monk name is Anandapanyo. For short, sometimes I go by Anan. I've been called:

Ajahn, Phra Anan, PhraAnandapanyo, PhraAjahn, Than Anan, Luang Pee Anan, Bhante Anandapanyo, Kuba Anan.

## WHAT DO I CALL A MONK WHO IS YOUNGER THAN I AM?

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**I**'VE OFTEN HEARD THE QUESTION, "I've heard that Luang Pee means Venerable "Older" Brother. What if the monk is younger than I am? Can I call him Luang Nong (Venerable "Younger" Brother)?" No, in Thai Theravada Buddhism, there is Luang Nong. Nong has a connotation of less respect. It is an elder calling down to a younger person. In this case, once the monk has been ordained, he is viewed first as a monk before comparing ages. If you wish to call him something that stems from familiarity, Luang Pee is the lowest you can go.

Just like when Thais go to restaurants, even if the waiter or busboys are older than you, they will still call you Pee, in order to show you respect. They do not call you that because you are older; they do that to prevent disrespect and talking down to you.

# WHAT IS THE PROPER WAY TO ADDRESS A NUN?

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**N**UNS CAN BE ADDRESSED AS:

<b>Mae Chee</b>	Nun
<b>Mae Chee (name)</b>	Nun (name)
<b>Mae</b>	Mother

For example, if the nun's name is Yo, you could address her as Mae Chee Yo or Mae Yo. If you do not know her name, just call her Mae.

# HOW SHOULD I PROPERLY LISTEN TO A MONK TEACHING ME THE DHAMMA?

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**I F POSSIBLE, YOU SHOULD RESPECTFULLY** request the monk to give a Dhamma explanation. You should wait until he is not walking, not standing, not eating and should be in a proper form of dress.

Then, you should prepare yourself. You should start by bowing to the monk three times in order to show respect. Then you should sit with your legs to one side and focus yourself. You must be seated; you cannot stand while listening to the Dhamma. Monks have rules prohibiting teaching the Dhamma in 16 cases:

The person listening has an umbrella, staff, knife or weapon. The person is wearing footwear, in a vehicle, lying down, sitting clasping the knees wearing headgear (hats), head is covered, sitting on a seat, sitting on a high seat. The only exception is if the listener is ill; then he or she may break some of these rules. As a good rule of thumb, your hands should be clasped in front of your heart in the lotus position while listening to the Dhamma.

*Attire*

## WHAT SHOULD ONE WEAR TO A THAI TEMPLE?

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**A**LL COLORS OF CLOTHING CAN BE WORN. However, when spending a long period of time (days or weeks) at a temple, many people will dress in white to represent purity.

Any type of shoes can be worn as they will be taken off before entering the temple.

For females, it is recommended that clothing be clean, modest and comfortable. People should dress in a manner that is respectful to the Buddha.



Provocative clothing is considered to be impolite and improper. Since many people sit on the floor at Thai temples, clothing should be selected that will not result in inappropriate exposure. Form-fitting clothes, halter tops, tank tops, short shorts, short dresses and skirts or low-cut blouses should be avoided.

However, if you feel that you are dressed improperly and find yourself at a temple, do not worry. Just ask one of the nuns for a cloth. Many temples provide cloths that can be placed over your lap when sitting in front of a monk or nun.

As for males, shirts may be long- or short-sleeved. Shirts can be of most varieties. However, tank tops and baggy clothes may be considered impolite. Just as with females, shorts should be avoided. Neck ties, jackets or other formal attire is not required, but may be worn.

*Counseling and seeking  
guidance*

## I AM HAVING SOME PERSONAL PROBLEMS. AM I ALLOWED TO SEEK COUNSELING FROM THE MONKS OR NUNS?

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**C**ERTAINLY. IN FACT, THIS IS THE **one** of the monks' and nuns' foremost duties. Their foremost duty is to themselves. They have a duty to learn the Buddha's teachings, apply them to their lives, and use those teachings to eliminate defilements from their minds. Once they have done this, their duty is to share and spread the Buddha's teachings to the laypeople who have supported them and helped them during their quest for self-improvement.

Commonly, visitors to the temple will make a Sanghadana offering and at some point during the ceremony they will ask the monk for guidance.

Otherwise, you can also call ahead to the temple and make an appointment with one of the monks or nuns and ask when the best time is for you to come speak with him or her.

## ARE ALL MONKS AND NUNS ABLE TO GIVE ME COUNSELING?

---

**A**LL MONKS AND NUNS CAN GIVE YOU counseling. However, monks and nuns are still humans in search of Truth. Therefore, they are not all-knowing and all-capable. Sometimes what they tell you will be dead on and the perfect remedy for your situation. Sometimes what they tell you will not be applicable to your situation. Sometimes what they tell you will be wildly incorrect. You still have to use your own discernment to apply what is told to you.

Since most monks and nuns are still ‘in training’, you have to use your discernment to pick which monk or nun can best answer your questions. Just because one monk does not answer your question to your liking, it does not mean he doesn't have knowledge to share. However, just because he is a monk, it does not mean that he automatically knows what he is talking about.

## CAN I SPEAK TO A MONK ALONE IF I AM A FEMALE LAYPERSON?

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**U**NFORTUNATELY, THE ANSWER IS NO. MONKS have a strict rule that they are not allowed to be in unseen or unheard quarters with women. This means that monks are not allowed to be left alone with a woman in a room. The monk is also not allowed to speak to a woman in a manner that others cannot hear. This is due to the monks' vow of celibacy. In order for people to not be able to fault him for breaking his precepts, it is good to have another person present with you if you are a female and wish to speak to a monk.

As a female, you can speak to a nun one-on-one in private. Some women prefer this. However, if you wish to speak to a monk, just make the proper arrangements and it can be done.



Chapter Four

# **CEREMONIES**

## *Formal Requests*

## HOW DO I REQUEST THE FIVE PRECEPTS?

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**A**S A PRECURSOR TO ALMOST ALL Buddhist rituals and situations, a Buddhist will typically request the Five Precepts first. This is to signify his or her intention to be pure and clean as of this moment forth. Therefore, we are deserving and pure enough to participate in something as holy as the Dhamma.

The procedure goes as follows:

**The Request:**

**Mayam Bhante, (visun visun rakkhanatthaya)  
Ti-saranena saha panca silani yacama**

**Dutiyampi Mayam Bhante, (visun visun  
rakkhanatthaya) Ti-saranena saha panca  
silani yacama**

**Tatiyampi Mayam Bhante, (visun visun  
rakkhanatthaya) Ti-saranena saha panca  
silani yacama**

**Translation:**

*“Venerable Sirs, we request the Three Refuges  
and the Five Precepts (in order to maintain  
them individually)*

*For a second time...*

*For a third time...”*

Some temples use the **visunvisun** and some temples do not. The significance is that if you

use it you are promising to try to keep each precept individually. If you break one, you have not broken all five since you are doing it individually. Saying it without the **visunvisun** means that you plan to take all five at once. If you break one, you have broken all of them.

The monk will then recite the following three times and you will then recite it three times after he is finished:

**Namo tassa Bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhasa (3x)**

Translation:

*“Homage to the Blessed One, the Worthy One, the Rightly Self-awakened One.”*

This is probably one of the most chanted Buddhist verses. I would highly recommend memorizing it. Thai students are forced to memorize it in school at a young age.

Then, after this, the monk will begin reciting the following line by line. After he recites one line, you will repeat after him.

**Buddham Saranam gacchami  
Dhamma Saranam gacchami  
Sangham Saranam gacchami**

**Dutiyampi Buddham Saranam gacchami  
Dutiyampi Dhamma Saranam gacchami  
Dutiyampi Sangham Saranam gacchami**

**Tatiyampi Buddham Saranam gacchami  
Tatiyampi Dhamma Saranam gacchami  
Tatiyampi Sangham Saranam gacchami**

Translation:

*“I go to the Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha for refuge. For a second time...For a third time...”*

This is also a very highly used chanting verse. I would also recommend memorizing this verse.

After this stage, we have finished going to the Triple Gem for refuge, the monk will then say:

### **Ti-sarana gamanam nitthitam**

Translation:

*“This ends the going for refuge”*

At which you will respond:

### **Ama Bhante**

Translation:

*“Yes, Venerable Sir”*

Then the monk will recite the Five Precepts line by line and you will repeat after him at the end of each Precept.

### **Panatipata veramani sikkha padam samadiyami**

**Adinnadana veramani sikkha padam  
samadiyami**

**Kamesu micchacara veramani sikkha  
padam samadiyami**

**Musavada veramani sikkha padam  
samadiyami**

**Sura-meraya majja pamadatthana  
veramani sikkha padam samadiyami**

Translation:

*“I will refrain from taking life  
I will refrain from stealing  
I will refrain from sexual misconduct  
I will refrain from using harmful speech  
I will refrain from intoxicants”*

At this point, the monk will chant:

**Imani panca sikkhapadani  
Silena sugatim yanti  
Silena bhoga sampada**



**Silena nibbutim yanti  
Tasma silam visodhaye**

Translation:

*“These are the five training rules  
Through virtue they go to a good destination  
Through virtue is wealth attained  
Through virtue they go to Unbinding  
Therefore we should purify our virtue.”*

Thus you have finished receiving the Five Precepts.

## HOW DO I REQUEST A DISCOURSE?

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**I**F YOU ARE IN A SITUATION WHERE you need to request a discourse (sermon) from the monk, you can use this:

**Brahma ca loka dhipati sahampati  
Katanjali andhivaram ayacatha  
Santidha satta parajakkha-jatika  
Desetu dhamma manukam pimampajam**

Translation:

*“The Brahma Sahampati, Lord of the World,  
with hands palm to palm before his heart,*

*requested a blessing: There are beings here with only a little dust in their eyes. Please teach the Dhamma out of compassion for them.”*

The legend goes that when the Buddha first became enlightened, he considered not teaching the Dhamma. He felt that it was difficult and might be overwhelming for souls in the world to try to understand. However, when the Buddha had this thought, it is said that Brahma Sahampati, a high level spirit, arrived and, sitting at the Buddha's feet, hands clasped at his heart, pleaded with the Lord Buddha to have compassion for the creatures of this world. He begged the Buddha to teach the Dhamma.

The Buddha took it under consideration and decided to go forth teaching the Dhamma. His reasoning was that there were many people of varying levels of dust blocking their eyes. Some could see clear with a little help; some needed a lot of help. Some were lost causes. He would help those who could use

the help. And thus, we have Buddhism to this day. Therefore, when requesting a discourse, we borrow the verse supposedly used by Brahma.

This should be only used in the case of a formal sermon given in special situations. In general only one person needs to chant this as a representative of the community. However, some places have been known to all chant it together. Some places actually have a good singer sing this verse.

If you are in a situation where it is not a formal setting (event) and you would like to hear the Dhamma or hear a sermon, you can simply ask the monk to explain the Dhamma to you.

## HOW DO I REQUEST A BLESSING?

---

**S**OME PEOPLE ARE INTERESTED IN asking the monks to chant specific Pali verses of blessing. They will often do this during new house ceremonies, birthdays, funerals, new babies, new jobs or other major life milestones. Keep in mind that the act of chanting is not the important part, but the message contained is.

In order to request a blessing:

**Vipatti-patibahaya**  
**Sabba sampatti siddhiya**

**Sabba-dukkha-vinasaya  
Parittam brutha mangalam**

**Vipatti-patibahaya  
Sabba sampatti siddhiya  
Sabba-bhaya-vinasaya  
Parittam brutha mangalam**

**Vipatti-patibahaya  
Sabba sampatti siddhiya  
Sabba-roga-vinasaya  
Parittam brutha mangalam**

Translation:

*“For warding off misfortune, for the achievement of all good fortune, for the dispelling of all **pain**, may you chant a blessing and protection.”*

*“For warding off misfortune, for the achievement of all good fortune, for the dispelling of all **danger**, may you chant a blessing and protection.”*

*“For warding off misfortune, for the achievement of all good fortune, for the dispelling of all **illness**, may you chant a blessing and protection.”*

It is customary that when you invite a monk or monks to do a blessing ceremony, you will request the Five Precepts and then request a blessing. During the blessing all you have to do is fold your hands in the lotus position in front of your heart and listen to the teachings.

## HOW DO I REQUEST FORGIVENESS?

---

**I**N SOME SITUATIONS WHEN LEAVING a monk or formally leaving a retreat or major long-term event, it is customary for lay people to request forgiveness for any wrong doings they might have committed through thought, speech or actions. This way, there is to be no karmic debt to be paid.

First off, you must bow three times and repeat **Namo tassa...(3x)**. then:

**[Acariye] pamadena, dva rattayena katam,  
Sabbam aparadham khamatu no bhante. (3x)**



**[Mahathere]** is used for very senior and highly respected monks (20+ vassas). Change it to **[There]** for slightly less senior monks (10-19 vassas). **[Upajjhaye]** for one's preceptor, **[Acariye]** for one's teacher and **[Ayasmante]** for monks in general.

Then you will bow down once and stay in the lowest position with your hands in front of you and your forehead resting on your hands.

The monk will say:

**Aham khamami, tumhehi pi me  
khamitabbam**

Translation:

*"I forgive you, may you all also forgive me"*

From the bowed position, you will say:

**Khamana bhante**

Translation:

*“We forgive you, Venerable Sir”*

Then the monk will usually recite a blessing after which you will say:

**Sadhu Bhante**

Translation:

*“Let it be so, Very good, Venerable Sir”*

Now you can rise and bow three times.

# *Funerals*

# SOMEONE CLOSE TO ME DIED AND I WANT TO HAVE A BUDDHIST FUNERAL. WHAT DO I DO?

---

**W**E ARE SORRY FOR YOUR LOSS. It is customary for Thai Theravada Buddhists to turn to the temple in the case of a death in the family.

Let's go over the different stages and what services a temple can provide for you.

## END OF LIFE SPIRITUAL SUPPORT

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**S**OME PEOPLE WISH TO HAVE MONKS visit their relatives in the hospital when they are nearing the end of their lives. Some temples provide this service. Normally, they will travel (or you can provide transportation) to the hospital and visit the patient. You can ask for spiritual advice, blessings, or emotional comfort. In general cases, the family will provide a Sanghadana offering for the patient to make or will make the offering on the behalf of the patient. This is to make sure that the patient has made merit before the end of his or her life. This is also so that he or she have an

image of a monk in their minds before death. In addition, the patient can cling to his or her good deeds before death. Buddhists believe that a mind's state right before death has great impact on whether a soul is reborn in heaven, hell, or earth. Therefore it is beneficial to have a monk or nun at the bedside of the patient in order to solidify the image in their minds. In addition the monk will remind the people to ask forgiveness from one another and to control their emotions so as to not influence the ailing person's mind state.

## ON THE DAY OF PASSING

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**O**N THE DAY OF PASSING, SOME FAMILIES wish to have a watering ceremony in order to pay respects to the recently deceased. It is customary to invite a monk or monks to the house to receive offerings (food or Sanghadana) and have them preside over a watering ceremony. Some monks will give a sermon and words of wisdom from the Buddha that are meant to guide the lay people in training their minds in this time of distress. Then, the lay people will line up next to the body of the deceased and pour some water on its outstretched hand in a symbol of saying

goodbye and asking for forgiveness for past transgressions. In addition, they will express forgiveness for what the recently deceased might have done to them. After the watering ceremony, the monk can receive offerings and give a blessing befitting of the situation.



## 7 DAYS AFTER THE PASSING

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**A**FTER THE RELATIVE HAS PASSED, the family will normally move the body to a funeral home where the body will be stored until the family is ready for cremation or burial (Buddhists tend to favor cremation).

For each of the seven days after the passing, the family will usually take this time to go to the temple every day and make offerings to the monks and spend time reflecting at the temple. Friends and family will join in these ceremonies in order to show their support and remorse in the death of the loved one. At

each of these ceremonies the monks will do an Abhidhamma chanting (usually at night). There will be four monks (or two if there are not enough) chanting. During the chanting, the family and loved ones will sit quietly in reflection.

On the seventh day, the family will hold a large get together at the temple in remembrance of the deceased. Usually on this date, the body will be cremated.

## 50 DAYS AFTER THE PASSING

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**50** DAYS AFTER THE LOVED ONE'S PASSING, the family will usually come to the temple and have an offering ceremony in remembrance of the deceased.

## 100 DAYS AFTER THE PASSING

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**100 DAYS AFTER THE LOVED ONE'S PASSING**, the family will usually come to the temple and have an offering ceremony in remembrance of the deceased.

*Weddings*

# I WANT TO GET MARRIED IN A BUDDHIST CEREMONY. WHAT DO I DO?

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**T**HERE IS NO SUCH THING AS a Buddhist marriage ceremony. In Thailand, the ceremony is more culturally Thai than Buddhist. Therefore, if you want to be married at a Thai temple, you will be married in the Thai way, not a Buddhist way.

The reason behind this is that Buddhists do not view marriage as a joyous or celebratory occasion. They do not look down upon it, nor do they praise and celebrate it.

## CAN A MONK OFFICIATE THE WEDDING?

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**A** THAI BUDDHIST MONK CANNOT OFFICIATE a wedding. There are rules in the monks' discipline that forbid setting couples up, cheering people towards marriage, or breaking couples up.

This is due to the inherent karmic risk associated. If a monk were responsible for setting you up, he is karmically linked to your relationship. If he breaks you up, he is also karmically tied to you. This is not the Buddhist way. All people must make their own choices and live with their choices.

## CAN A MONK BLESS THE MARRIAGE?

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**A** MONK CAN BLESS MOST SITUATIONS. A blessing basically entails a chanting of the Buddha's teaching appropriate to the situation. The laity make an offering to the monk or temple and the monk provides valuable Dhamma and/or Buddha's teachings to the couple. Usually the monk will give a teaching on how to properly live together and deal with each other.



# *Blessing Ceremonies*

## NEW CAR BLESSINGS

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**A**FTER BUYING A NEW CAR, many Thai Buddhists go to the temple and ask a monk to give a blessing for their new car. A new car blessing can include the following:

- Chanting a verse of blessing and auspiciousness for the occasion.
- Taking "holy" water and sprinkling it around the car
- Placing a Buddha coin or icon in the car
- Using powder to write a symbolic ward of protection in the car

## HOUSE OR RESTAURANT BLESSING

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**I**N A HOUSE OR RESTAURANT BLESSING CEREMONY, it is customary to come pick up the monks at the temple and transport them to the house. Then the monks will sit in the appointed seat and the laity will request the five precepts and then request a blessing chanting. The monks will then give a blessing chant. After the blessing chant, the laity will usually offer a Sanghadana offering after which the monks will give a blessing. Then at that point, the head monk or a designated monk will take the water receptacle and enter each room

and sprinkle water in each room. After these ceremonies, it is customary for the laity to offer lunch, as long as it is before noon.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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**A** **NANDAPANYO BHIKKHU (ARNOLD THIAN-NGERN)** is a first-generation Thai-American, born and raised in San Francisco. He was raised Buddhist, and is fluent in both Thai and English.

Throughout his adolescence, Arnold studied many religions, and experimented with various Buddhist traditions. However, none could quench his thirst for true understanding. After meeting Acariya Thoon Khippapanyo, a modern-day Enlightened Thai monk, this quest for truth finally began to gain traction. He spent ten years studying under Acariya Thoon and his disciples,

gaining insight into the techniques in wisdom-based practice, and decided to ordain in 2009. He was given the monk name of Anandapanyo, meaning "immense wisdom."

As San Fran Dhammaram Temple's resident English-speaking monk, Anandapanyo Bhikkhu has dedicated his time to sharing Acariya Thoon's teachings with the greater public. Anandapanyo Bhikkhu frequently travels overseas to give sermons and put on Dhamma retreats.

Upon noticing the common questions asked by new practitioners, Anandapanyo Bhikkhu decided to compile those questions into an easy to understand book. This introduction to Buddhism series is a great way to ease into the culture and teachings of wisdom-based Buddhism.

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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**I WOULD LIKE TO EXPRESS MY SINCERE GRATITUDE** to all my teachers, for without them, my Dhamma practice would be impossible.

I am most grateful to the Lord Buddha, who provided the Noble Eightfold Path for us to follow. Without him the path to eliminate our suffering would be unknown.

I am eternally grateful to my teacher, Venerable Acariya Thoon Khippapanyo, who led me down that path and saved me from wasting valuable years of my life practicing incorrectly.

I am forever indebted to Mae Yo for breathing life into my body and my soul. My mother is my inspiration, my example, my guide, my teacher, and my friend. She has given me everything I will ever need in my practice; all that remains is for me to do it.

I would like to thank my sister and Dhamma teacher Neecha Thian-Ngern. Thank you for being patient and straightforward with me during my practice. In addition, thank you for helping to check content and edit language in each of my books.

I would like to thank the Abbott of San Fran Dhammaram Temple, Phra Nut Nuttapanyo. Your technical expertise was very valuable.

I would like to thank all my Dhamma friends. I have learned so much from your Dhamma journey. I am grateful to Alana Denison, Jason Konik, and John Sum for their valuable edits, comments, and stories in this book. It was very refreshing to have other people look at my work and provide constructive feedback; it allowed me



to see all the mistakes I made. Without seeing my mistakes, I would never be able to improve.

Lastly, I'd like to thank the ever-talented Tanawat Pisanuwongse for the cover design and invaluable artistic input.