

Who is Sangha ?

The Pāli word *Sangha* is used – properly in its original meaning – to designate the assembly of the followers of Buddha, which is then further specified as *Bhikkhusangha* (A I, 56 ff, D I.1 ff) or *Bhikkhunīsangha* (S 5, 360 ff), i.e. the assembly of monks or nuns. The leader of a particular assembly is called *Sangha-Thera* or *Sanghin* (D I. 47, 116 ff), in case of the ACES (Ayukusala Central European Sangha) the leader is the Āyukusala-Thera, who nevertheless keeps also his personal name. During the time of our historical Buddha, the Buddha himself was the leader of the whole Sangha, known under his personal name as the Samana Gotama.

The Buddha Gotama explained that he has several types of followers (*sāvaka*):

1. monks of varied seniority (*therā bhikkhū, majjhimā bhikkhū, navā bhikkhū*),
 2. nuns of varied seniority (*bhikkhunī*), 3. laymen (*upāsakā*) who are oriented or not to consummate the sensual life (*kāma bhogi*), 4. laywomen (*upāsikā*) of varied orientation.
- And all of them prosper in the spiritual holy life (*brahmacariyaṃ iddhañceva phītaṃ*).

Santi kho pana me, Cunda, etarahi therā bhikkhū sāvakā honti viyattā vinīta visāradā ... pe ... majjhimā bhikkhū sāvakā ... navā bhikkhū sāvakā ... therā bhikkhuniyo sāvikā ... majjhimā bhikkhuniyo sāvikā ... navā bhikkhuniyo sāvikā ... upāsakā sāvakā gihī odātavasanā brahmacārino ... upāsakā sāvakā gihī odātavasanā kāma bhogino ... upāsikā sāvikā gihiniyo odātavasanā brahmacāriniyo ... upāsikā sāvikā gihiniyo odātavasanā kāma bhoginiyo ... Etarahi kho pana me, Cunda, brahmacariyaṃ iddhañceva phītañca vitthārikaṃ bāhujaññaṃ puthubhūtaṃ yāva devamanussehi suppakāsitaṃ. (Pasādika-Sutta, D III. 6, 124f)

In the Āyukusala Tradition the following definitions are used according to the Pāli Canon:

Upāsaka, Upāsikā

A lay person who accepts the five ethical decisions (*pañca sīla sikkhā-pada*) and becomes for that particular training-day (*uposatha*) a member of Sangha.

Samana, Samanī

Every practitioner of the Buddha Dhamma, lay and monastic, who has been ordained and continues daily the uninterrupted training (*sikkhā*) is either male Samana or female Samanī. Possibly some practitioners of other systems (Brahmanic, Hindu, Jain etc.) use the Pāli term *Samana* or Sanskrit *Sramana* to designate their followers. Our Buddha was also a Samana.

Sāmanera, Sāmanerī

Those who are trained for monastic life (*bhikkhu-ājīva*) according to the Bhikkhu-Pātimokkha, but cannot yet follow the Patimokkha-rules in full, practice according to the ten ethical decisions (*dasa sīla sikkhā-pada*), which include not using money, eating only before noon, etc.

Bhikkhu, Bhikkhunī

Those who undergo strict training (*bhikkhu-sikkhā*) according to the Pātimokkha, following the 227 rules for high ordained monks (*bhikkhu*) or the 311 rules for nuns (*bhikkhunī*). A Bhikkhu is an almsman; and translating this Pāli word as “monk” or “priest” is misleading in many ways.

Nowadays in Europe and elsewhere, there are Buddhist “monks” titled as Ashin, Achan, Bhante, Hamuduru, Sayadaw, Thera, Mahāthera etc. – yet they generally do not keep even the ten ethical decisions (*dasa sīla sikkhā-pada*) of a Sāmanera, not to speak about the Bhikkhu-Pātimokkha.

Thera, Therī

The word *Thera* means Elder or Senior or Wise (A I, 67 f, Samacittavaggo). This is a honorific title of a Samana (or a Samanī), which is endowed upon them either due to seniority or because of their perfect virtue or reputation. The word Mahāthera is a yet higher gradation of this title.