

## Sangha

In the suttas the word *sangha* (lit. "group, assembly") is usually used in one of two ways: it refers either to the community of ordained monks and nuns (*bhikkhu-sangha* and *bhikkhuni-sangha*) or to the community of "noble ones" (*ariya-sangha*) — persons who have attained at least stream-entry, the first stage of Awakening.

### **The definition (*ariya-sangha*)**

"The Sangha of the Blessed One's disciples who have practiced well... who have practiced straight-forwardly... who have practiced methodically... who have practiced masterfully — in other words, the four types [of noble disciples] when taken as pairs, the eight when taken as individual types — they are the Sangha of the Blessed One's disciples: worthy of gifts, worthy of hospitality, worthy of offerings, worthy of respect, the incomparable field of merit for the world."

— *Anguttara Nikaya* 11.12

### **"Four types of noble disciples..."**

"In this community of monks there are monks who are arahants, whose mental effluents are ended, who have reached fulfillment, done the task, laid down the burden, attained the true goal, totally destroyed the fetter of becoming, and who are released through right gnosis: such are the monks in this community of monks.

"In this community of monks there are monks who, with the total ending of the first set of five fetters, are due to be reborn [in the Pure Abodes], there to be totally unbound, never again to return from that world: such are the monks in this community of monks.

"In this community of monks there are monks who, with the total ending of [the first] three fetters, and with the attenuation of passion, aversion, & delusion, are once-returners, who — on returning only one more time to this world — will make an ending to stress: such are the monks in this community of monks.

"In this community of monks there are monks who, with the total ending of [the first] three fetters, are stream-winners, steadfast, never again destined for states of woe, headed for self-awakening: such are the monks in this community of monks."

— *Majjhima Nikaya* 118

## "...the eight when taken as individual types"

"Just as the ocean is the abode of such mighty beings as whales, whale-eaters, and whale-eater-eaters; asuras, nagas, and gandhabbas, and there are in the ocean beings one hundred leagues long, two hundred... three hundred... four hundred... five hundred leagues long; in the same way, this Doctrine and Discipline is the abode of such mighty beings as stream-winners and those practicing to realize the fruit of stream-entry; once-returners and those practicing to realize the fruit of once-returning; non-returners and those practicing to realize the fruit of non-returning; arahants and those practicing for arahantship... This is the eighth amazing and astounding fact about this Doctrine and Discipline."

— *Udana* 5.5

### **Worthy**

"A monk endowed with eight qualities is worthy of gifts, worthy of hospitality, worthy of offerings, worthy of respect, an incomparable field of merit for the world. Which eight?"

[1] "There is the case where a monk is virtuous. He dwells restrained in accordance with the Patimokkha, consummate in his behavior and sphere of activity. He trains himself, having undertaken the training rules, seeing danger in the slightest faults.

[2] "When given food, whether coarse or refined, he eats it carefully, without complaining.

[3] "He feels disgust at bodily misconduct, verbal misconduct, mental misconduct, at the development of evil, unskillful [mental] qualities.

[4] "He is composed and easy to live with, and doesn't harass the other monks.

[5] "Whatever tricks or deceits or wiles or subterfuges he has, he shows them as they actually are to the Teacher or to his knowledgeable companions in the holy life, so that the Teacher or his knowledgeable companions in the holy life can try to straighten them out.

[6] "When in training he gives rise to the thought, 'Whether the other monks want to train or not, I'll train here.'

[7] "When going, he goes the straight path; here the straight path is this: right view, right resolve, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration.

[8] "He dwells with his persistence aroused, [thinking,] 'Gladly would I let the flesh and blood in my body dry up, leaving just the skin, tendons, and bones, but if I have not attained what can be reached through human steadfastness, human persistence, human striving, there will be no relaxing my persistence.'"

"Endowed with these eight qualities, a monk is worthy of gifts, worthy of hospitality, worthy of offerings, worthy of respect, an incomparable field of merit for the world."

— *Anguttara Nikaya* 8.13

"Monks, this assembly is free from idle chatter, devoid of idle chatter, and is established on pure heartwood: such is this community of monks, such is this assembly. The sort of assembly that is worthy of gifts, worthy of hospitality, worthy of offerings, worthy of respect, an incomparable field of merit for the world: such is this community of monks, such is this assembly. The sort of assembly to which a small gift, when given, becomes great, and a great gift greater: such is this community of monks, such is this assembly. The sort of assembly that it is rare to see in the world: such is this community of monks, such is this assembly — the sort of assembly that it would be worth traveling for leagues, taking along provisions, in order to see."

— *Majjhima Nikaya* 118

### **A community supreme**

"Among whatever communities or groups there may be, the Sangha of the Tathagata's disciples is considered supreme — that is, the four types [of noble disciples] when taken as pairs, the eight when taken as persons. Those who have confidence in the Sangha have confidence in what is supreme; and for those with confidence in the supreme, supreme will be the result."

— *Itivuttaka* 90

### **Recollecting the Sangha**

"At any time when a disciple of the noble ones is recollecting the Sangha, his mind is not overcome with passion, not overcome with aversion, not overcome with delusion. His mind heads straight, based on the Sangha. And when the mind is headed straight, the disciple of the noble ones gains a sense of the goal, gains a sense of the Dhamma, gains joy connected with the Dhamma."

In one who is joyful, rapture arises. In one who is rapturous, the body grows calm. One whose body is calmed experiences ease. In one at ease, the mind becomes concentrated."

— *Anguttara Nikaya* 11.12

"When you recollect the Sangha, monks, any fear, terror, or horripilation you may have will be abandoned."

— *Samyutta Nikaya* 11.3

**See also:**

- *Refuge: An Introduction to the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha* by Thanissaro Bhikkhu
- Into the Stream (Study Guide)

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