Anumodana for the Kathina

October 24, 2021

Today we had the kettana. The cloth was given. It’s been made into a robe. It’s drying right now. Pretty soon it’ll be ready for the next step, which is called the anamodana. Strictly speaking, the anamodana is the monks expressing their approval of the fact that the kettana has been properly spread. And when they do that, then they gain the rewards of the kettana. Some of the rules are relaxed, primarily the rule about having robes with you at dawn. These rules will be relaxed potentially up to the full moon in March. But the spreading of the kettana also means that the robe season gets extended, so the time for monks to make robes is a little bit less pressure on it. They don’t have to be made quite so fast if you’re planning to make robes. Traditionally, this was the time after the rains retreat for the monks to set out, go into the forest, and find some time alone. But the anamodana also means that we’re expressing our joy, our approval of the whole process. All the people who came today, all the people who contributed, just got to stop and think about how many people were dependent on here. Those of us who’ve lived here, especially during the pandemic, sometimes can forget how much we are dependent on people outside. It’s just our community, but it’s not just us. Some of the donations came from different countries in the world today. People are inspired by the fact that there is this monastery here where people are practicing. They’re giving their support, and we want to express our joy in their support, our joy in the fact that they are doing good things. When I was first in Thailand, I learned the word anamodana. People asked, “What would be a good way to express that in English?” And my first response was, “Congratulations!” I still think it’s a pretty good response, because we’re congratulating people on the goodness they’ve done, the good things they’ve done, the fact that they had that inspiration to be generous. And it’s something to be congratulated. There’s just so much selfishness in the world. It seems to be amplified in the internet and the media that it’s good to stop and appreciate the goodness that people have done, the times when they’ve chosen to be generous, and to express our joy in their joy. The word anamodana is related to the root that’s also found in the word mudita, empathetic joy. You’re happy for their happiness. You’re happy for the goodness they’ve done that’s going to lead to their happiness. Then you want to express your appreciation. One way of doing that, of course, is to spread thoughts of goodwill, thoughts of empathetic joy, in their direction. Another way, of course, is to devote yourself more seriously to the practice. The Buddha offers this as one of the motivations for wanting to practice properly. You realize that the further you go in the practice, the more benefits will accrue to the people who’ve been supporting you. So as you’re sitting here right now, try to make your mind the kind of mind that you’d be happy to give to somebody else. Have it settle down. Drop whatever concerns are particular to you. Bring it more and more into the present moment, where the narrative view gets boiled down to the next breath and the next breath and the next breath, seeing the mind at those breaths, and really taking seriously the Buddha’s second part of instructions on how to get the mind to settle down, which is putting aside greed and distress with reverence to the world. Any hindrances that come up—sensual desire, ill will, torpor and lethargy, restlessness and anxiety, uncertainty—you have to recognize them as hindrances. They are your enemies. They’re getting in your way. I was talking today to someone who’s pretty nostalgic about some of his sensual desires. He said, “Isn’t it enough just to recognize that it’s there?” The implication being, “Let it keep on being there.” You can tell yourself, “Well, as long as I recognize that it’s sensual desire, it’s okay.” That’s not okay. You have to realize it is an enemy of your concentration. When it arises, you have to ask yourself, “Why do I want to hang on with it? What’s the appeal? What are the drawbacks? Is it worth it? Because every thought that goes through the mind requires a fair amount of effort to keep it going. It may be sparked by something that comes from past karma, but then when you continue it, that’s your present karma. If it’s going to pull you down, why get involved? Why devote that much energy to pulling yourself down? Think of it in that way. You’re going to expend energy in pulling the mind up out of those thoughts, and then devote as much energy as you can to getting the breath to be a really good place to be, the body and the present moment to make it a really good place to be. That way, the mind can get into and seep into the present moment. It’s not just sitting in the present moment; it’s melding into the present moment, melding into the body in the present moment. That way, it gets more and more solidly here. So you feel that this is the most natural place to be. You nourish the mind with concentration, and then when it’s well-nourished, then you can pull back. Think a little bit and observe it. Look at the effort that goes into meditation. To what extent can you lessen the effort and yet maintain the mind in stillness? This is the beginning of discernment. When you begin to see that there’s unnecessary effort going into things, you can get more and more skilled at getting the mind to settle down with a sense of just right where the breath, the body, and the mind all seem to meld into one another. Then you pull out again. Watch that. Pull out, not so far that you destroy it, but just enough so you can observe it as each time the mind moves to a more subtle level. It takes a while to settle in and gain the nourishment that you can from that level before you’re ready to analyze it, gain a sense of the mind’s rhythms, how long you need to stay in stillness before it’s time to move on to even more subtle levels of stillness. It requires a fair amount of insight into the mind to move down into those subtle levels. This way you get your concentration and your insight together. The more fully you’re here, the better influence your mind has on you and on the people around you. And you think of those people who’ve supported you. We’re able to put you in a situation where you have this opportunity to practice, to bring the mind here, and your sense of gratitude for them gets stronger and stronger. The greater the sense of well-being you find in meditation, the greater your goodwill for them, your empathetic joy for them, becomes more and more sincere. And this is how you really express that goodwill, that empathetic joy. It commits you once you’ve decided that it would be good for that person to be happy and you’re happy for whatever happiness they have. You don’t just leave it there. You think about what you can do to increase that happiness. Unfortunately, one of the ways you can do that is to get more and more serious about your meditation. It’s in this way that the meditation is a gift to yourself and a gift to the world. It’s a way of expressing goodwill all around. So as you go through the ceremony of anamotana tonight, remember, the best way to extend that anamotana is to keep on practicing. Whether you’re staying here or moving on to someplace else, keep reminding yourself that you’ve been supported by a lot of people. They’ve placed their trust in us. We’re going to do good without support, so keep on doing good. Don’t get lax. As you start getting lax, it’s almost as if you betrayed their trust. The more we can act in a way that induces trust and confirms trust, rewards trust, the better it’s going to be for the world.

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