

# Triratna Dharma Training Course for Mitras – Foundation Year

## Part 1: Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels

---

### *Week 9: The Sangha (1) – The Sangha as a Means of Development*

---

#### **Introduction**

The Triratna Buddhist Community has a strong tradition of emphasising the crucial importance of the spiritual community, or Sangha. Experience shows that we need Sangha to practice effectively. The people we mix with have a profound effect on us. We need the support and encouragement of like-minded people. We need advice and inspiration from people who are somewhat further along the path. And we need a social context of trust, honesty, and friendship if we are to open up and develop the emotional warmth that is an essential part of spiritual development. This crucial importance of the Sangha has always been recognised in Buddhism, and in these individualistic times it is more important than ever.

So the Sangha is important as a means to an end – the end being our own spiritual progress. But it is also important as an end in itself. For many people the most attractive thing about being a Buddhist is the Sangha itself. And the ideal of helping to build a community of people who relate to each other on the basis of warmth, generosity, and openness can be one of the the most inspiring aspects of the spiritual life.

The texts covered in the last two sessions of Part 1 of the course are meant to bring out these two aspects of Sangha. In the first, we look at a story from the Pali Canon that illustrates the need for a spiritual friendship as an essential part of our own development – and gives us a clear warning against spiritual individualism. In the last session two modern Buddhists use some other characters from the Pali Canon to illustrate how the ideal of Sangha can be an inspiring goal in its own right.

***‘Sangha as a means to an end – the story of Meghiya’***  
*(Text from ‘The Udāna’, The Meghiya Chapter, based on the translations of Woodward and Ireland)*

‘Thus have I heard. Once the Buddha was staying at Cālikā, on Cālikā Hill. Now on that occasion the venerable Meghiya was in attendance on the Buddha. The venerable Meghiya came to the Buddha, saluted him, stood at one side, and said to the Exalted One:

“I desire, sir, to go to Jantu village for alms food.”

“Do whatever you think it is time for, Meghiya.”

So the venerable Meghiya, robing himself and taking his bowl and robe, went to Jantu village in search of alms food, and after making his rounds and eating his

meal he went towards the bank of the river Kimikālā. And on reaching it, while taking exercise by walking up and down, he saw a lovely, delightful mango-grove. At the sight of it he thought:

“Truly lovely and delightful is this mango-grove! Surely this would be a good place for a clansman to work on his meditation. If the Exalted One will give me leave, I would like to come here to this mango-grove to practice meditation.”

So the venerable Meghiya went to the Exalted One and sat down at one side, and told the Exalted One what he had thought, saying:

“If the Exalted One will give me leave, I would like to go to that mango-grove to practice meditation.”

At these words the Exalted One said to the venerable Meghiya:

“Wait a little, Meghiya. I am alone until some other monk arrives.”

Then a second time the venerable Meghiya said to the Exalted One:

“Sir, the Exalted One has nothing more to do, he has nothing more to add to what he has done. But for me, sir, there is more yet to be done, there is more to be added to what I have done. If the Exalted One will give me leave, I would like to go to that mango-grove to practice meditation.”

Then a second time the Exalted One replied:

“Wait a little, Meghiya. I am alone until some other monk arrives.”

Then yet a third time the venerable Meghiya made his request, and the Exalted One replied:

“Well, Meghiya, what can I say when you talk of practising meditation? Do what you think it is time for, Meghiya.”

So the venerable Meghiya rose from his seat, saluted the Exalted One, and went to that mango-grove, and on reaching it he plunged into it and sat down at the foot of a tree. But while Meghiya was staying in that mango-grove there habitually came upon him three unskilful forms of thought, namely, lustful thoughts, malicious thoughts, and harmful thoughts. Then the venerable Meghiya thought:

“This is certainly strange! This is certainly surprising, that I, who went forth from home to the homeless life so full of faith, should be assailed by these unskilful forms of thought, namely, lustful thoughts, malicious thoughts, and harmful thoughts!”

So he left his solitude and went to the Exalted One, and said:

“Sir, while I was staying in that mango-grove there habitually came upon me three unskilful forms of thought. Then, sir, I thought: This is certainly strange! This is surprising, that I should be assailed in this way!”

The Buddha replied:

“Meghiya, when the heart's release is immature, five things lead to its maturity. What are these five?”

Meghiya, a monk needs spiritual friends, good associates, he needs the companionship of good people. When the heart's release is immature, Meghiya, this is the first thing that leads to its maturity.

Then again, Meghiya, a monk should be virtuous, keeping to his vows, practising ethical behaviour, seeing danger even in small faults, training himself in the precepts. When the heart's release is immature, Meghiya, this is the second thing that leads to its maturity.

Then again, Meghiya, a monk should be surrounded by talk that is serious and opens up the heart, that conduces to detachment, to dispassion, to calm, to understanding, to insight, to nibbāna; that is to say, talk about having few wants, about contentment, about avoiding worldly company, about arousing energy; talk about ethics, meditation and wisdom; talk about liberation, knowledge and insight. When the heart's release is immature, Meghiya, this is the third thing that leads to its maturity.

Then again, Meghiya, a monk needs to be firm and energetic in abandoning what is unskilful and acquiring what is skilful. He should be stout and strong in effort, not laying aside the burden of pursuing what is skilful. When the heart's release is immature, Meghiya, this is the fourth thing that leads to its maturity.

Finally, Meghiya, a monk should have insight, he should be endowed with the penetrating insight that sees all things rise and fall, and leads to the end of suffering. When the heart's release is immature, Meghiya, this is the fifth thing that leads to its maturity.

Now, Meghiya, a monk who has spiritual friendship can be expected to become virtuous, he will keep to his vows, he will practice ethical behaviour, he will see danger even in small faults, he will train himself in the precepts. Also Meghiya, a monk who has spiritual friendship will be surrounded by talk that is serious, about meditation, insight and liberation. And again Meghiya, a monk who has spiritual friendship can be expected to be firm and energetic in abandoning what is unskilful and acquiring what is skilful. And finally, Meghiya, a monk who has spiritual friendship can be expected to develop the penetrating insight that leads to the end of suffering.’

## Questions for reflection and discussion

1. What can we deduce about Meghiya's character from this story?
2. Why do you think that Meghiya is plagued by unskillful thoughts when he is alone in the mango grove?
3. Why is he so surprised by this? Why didn't this happen when he was with the Buddha?
4. What is the connection between spiritual friendship and the other conditions that the Buddha says lead to "the heart's release"? (You could draw a diagram of how these lead to each other.)
5. Meghiya learned a valuable lesson from his 'bad' meditations, about how the conditions in which we live affect our meditation practice. How could we reorganise our lives to improve our meditation practice?