

## The Sangha: The Buddhist Community

*Summary: The Buddha established the Sangha—originally a community of celibate monks and nuns who follow strict discipline and teach the Dharma to fellow Buddhists. Some consider the Sangha to include both monastics and Buddhist laypeople.*

Those who followed the Buddha came to be called the *Sangha*—the community of monks (*bhikkhus*) and nuns (*bhikkhunis*). Those who became monks and nuns underwent an ordination ceremony of shaving their heads and donning robes to symbolize world-renunciation. They entered into the homeless life of wandering monastics who settled down in monasteries only during the months of the rainy season.

For some, the *Sangha* is the whole community of the Buddha's followers. From the beginning, the Buddha's disciples included laypeople who followed the Buddha's teachings but remained householders.

Both the ordained and the laity followed the five precepts of basic ethics that are the foundation of religious life. In addition, a more extensive code of monastic rules, the *Pratimoksha*, eventually developed to govern the conduct of ordained persons.

The monastic and lay communities are interdependent. Even today, the laity receive teachings and guidance from monastics, while the monastics receive food, clothing, shelter, and in some cases all of their material requirements from the laity. Providing food and supplies to the monks is considered by many lay Buddhists to be an act of “merit-making,” earning good *karma* for oneself or loved ones.