

These days society is in chaos due to the coronavirus. We constantly see or hear about incidences of hoarding on TV, radio or social media. Many people buy so much that they empty the shelves in the stores and there are even fights over limited supplies.

Hearing these stories I cannot help but feel bad about how deep our human greed can be. Of course we can all understand the desire to hoard under the current circumstances, but we should think of others and not just of ourselves with regard to hoarding.

Because these are the circumstances today, I wonder if it is particularly important to think right now about what a Sangha is.

The reading of the “Threefold Refuge” is our custom. The third requirement of the Threefold Refuge is to take refuge in the Sangha.

The original meaning of the word “Sangha” was the community of the followers of Sakyamuni Buddha who practiced the Dharma together. In order to maintain the community it was necessary for all to help one another.

For example, in the days of Sakyamuni Buddha, his followers were mendicants, that is they begged for their living and did not work in order to concentrate on their spiritual activities. All the followers would go out every morning with a bowl to ask for alms. The monks would gather together all that they received from their begging and share it with those who could not go out because of illness or some other reasons. This kind of cooperative action allowed the monks to survive even in times of crisis. The Sangha today is not the same as it was in the Buddha’s day but the spirit of cooperation is still fundamental to it.

Therefore, the Sangha is not just gathering together on Sundays but is the cultivation of the spirit of cooperation. Sakyamuni Buddha himself is traditionally shown as a mendicant in sculpture paintings and stories who relied on the cooperation of others to live. Sakyamuni Buddha would not have expected us to do something that he could not do. So he must have believed that we are all capable of cultivating the spirit of cooperation.

In other words, without the spirit of cooperation there can be no such thing as a Sangha. Therefore, in this time of crisis if we cannot cooperate can we really consider ourselves a Sangha?

The other day our Co-president Maya asked if we should support any Sangha members with high risk individuals in their households by delivering supplies. I thought that this was a splendid idea and writing to Maya on an Email cc’ed our other Co-President Andrea, Maya agreed to contact the Stewardship leaders who can contact those in need.

However, for those so doing, I have a request.

Please everyone be aware of others so that if you are asking, think about how much others can give comfortably. On the other hand, if you are giving, think about how you can do so without being overbearing. Balance is everything. Only with balance can we really have harmony.

As we recite,

*“I take refuge in the Sangha, may we together with all sentient beings become units in true accord, in harmony with all things.”*

P.S. A phone call or email is also a meaningful way to reach out if you do not have the means to provide supplies and food.