

What is „forest cloth“ (phā pā)? What is pamsukūla?

When the Buddha established the bhikkhu order about 2500 years ago, he initially did not allow the monks to accept robes or robe cloth from the lay supporters. The bhikkhus had to be content with thrown away, ownerless cloth which they found in the forest, in cities and villages and especially on the charnel grounds. This kind of cloth is called pamsukūla cloth – “pamsukūla” is the Pāli word for “garbage”. The monks had to sew their robes with that!

Later the Buddha did allow to accept robes and robe cloth . But even today a newly ordained monk is instructed immediately after his ordination, that actually the rag robe or pamsukūla robe constitutes one of the “four supports” of a monk, and that a robe made from new cloth or a robe donated by householders is an allowable extra.

And in the old days there were some monks who wanted to continue using only ownerless cloth in order to practise contentment and frugality. But the lay people wanted to support exactly those inspiring and exemplary monks. So, what to do?

They invented the trick to “throw away” a cloth donation in the forest, in a place where the intended recipient would find it. They hung cloth up in the trees, e.g. in front of that Venerable One’s hut, next to the path leading to his alms round, next to his path for walking meditation and so on.

That was the origin of the “phā pā” or “forest cloth” ceremony, the hanging up of “thrown away” forest cloth (in Thai: phā pā). This dates back a long time and it was practised by the supporters of Luang Pu Mun Bhūridatto, too.

We, the supporters of Muttodaya monastery, wish to continue this tradition. Today, after presenting a general donation to the sangha, we want to invite the monks to go for a walk in the forest and have a good look for some forest cloth, thus combining making good kamma and having some fun.