

Majjhima Nikāya - The Middle Length Discourses

Advice from Venerable Nandaka (Nandakovaadasutta)

I heard thus.

At one time the Blessed One lived in the monastery offered by Anathapindika, in Jeta's grove in Savatthi.

Then Mahapajaapati Gotami approached the Blessed One with about five hundred bhikkhunis. They worshipped the Blessed One and stood on a side, and Mahapajapati Gotami said to the Blessed One. 'Venerable sir, advise the bhikkhunis, give them a talk on the Teaching.'

At that time the elder bhikkhus were advising the bhikkhunis in turns. Venerable Nandaka did not like to advise the bhikkhunis when his turn came. The Blessed One then addressed venerable Ananda. 'Ananda, who will advise the bhikkhunis today?' 'Venerable sir, it is venerable Nandaka's turn and he does not like to advise the bhikkhunis.' The Blessed One then addressed venerable Nandaka. 'Nandaka, advise the bhikkhunis. Holy man, give the bhikkhunis a talk on the Teaching. (*1)' Venerable Nandaka agreed and the next morning, putting on robes and taking bowl and robes went the alms round in Savatthi. After collecting alms and when the meal was over, approached the monastery of the royal women. The bhikkhunis seeing venerable Nandaka approach prepared a seat and administered water to wash the feet. Venerable Nandaka sat on the prepared seat and washed his feet. The bhikkhunis too worshipped venerable Nandaka and sat on a side. Then venerable Nandaka said to those bhikkhunis. 'Sisters, there will be a session of asking questions and replying them. Those who know should say, I know and those who do not know should say I do not know. When there is doubt or consternation, it should be asked from me, venerable sir, what is the meaning of this.'

‘Even while hearing this announcement, of venerable Nandaka we are pleased and happy.’

‘Sisters, is the eye permanent or impermanent?’

‘Impermanent. Venerable sir.’

‘That which is impermanent, is it unpleasant or pleasant?’

‘Unpleasant. Venerable sir.’

‘In that unpleasant, changing thing, is it suitable to reflect, it’s mine, I’m in it, it’s self?’

‘Venerable sir, it is not suitable.’

‘Sisters, is the ear permanent or impermanent?’

‘Impermanent. Venerable sir.’

‘Sisters, is the nose permanent or impermanent?’

‘Impermanent. Venerable sir.’

‘Sisters, is the tongue permanent or impermanent?’

‘Impermanent. Venerable sir.’

‘Sisters, is the body permanent or impermanent?’

‘Impermanent. Venerable sir.’

‘Sisters, is the mind permanent or impermanent?’

‘Impermanent. Venerable sir.’

‘That which is impermanent, is it unpleasant or pleasant?’

‘Unpleasant. Venerable sir.’

‘In that unpleasant, changing thing, is it suitable to reflect, it’s mine, I’m in it, it’s self?’

‘Venerable sir, it is not suitable, because even before this, we have seen with right wisdom, as it really is that the six internal spheres are impermanent.

‘Good! Sisters, that is so. It is the noble disciple that sees this, as it really is with right wisdom

‘Sisters, are forms permanent or impermanent?’

‘Impermanent. Venerable sir.’

‘That which is impermanent, is it unpleasant or pleasant?’

‘Unpleasant. Venerable sir.’

‘In that unpleasant, changing thing, is it suitable to reflect, it’s me, I’m in it, it’s self?’

‘Venerable sir, it is not suitable.’

‘Sisters, are sounds permanent or impermanent?’

‘Impermanent. Venerable sir.’

‘Sisters, are scents permanent or impermanent?’

‘Impermanent. Venerable sir.’

‘Sisters, are tastes permanent or impermanent?’

‘Impermanent. Venerable sir.’

‘Sisters, are touches permanent or impermanent?’

‘Impermanent. Venerable sir.’

‘Sisters, are thoughts permanent or impermanent?’

‘Impermanent. Venerable sir.’

‘That which is impermanent, is it unpleasant or pleasant?’

‘Unpleasant. Venerable sir.’

‘In that unpleasant, changing thing, is it suitable to reflect, it’s me, I’m in it, it’s self?’

‘Venerable sir, it is not suitable, because even before this, we have seen with right wisdom, as it really is that the six external spheres are impermanent.’

‘Good! Sisters, that is so. It is the noble disciple that sees it, as it really is with right wisdom.’

‘Sisters, is eye-consciousness permanent or impermanent?’

‘Impermanent. Venerable sir.’

‘That which is impermanent, is it unpleasant or pleasant?’

‘Unpleasant. Venerable sir.’

‘In that unpleasant, changing thing, is it suitable to reflect, it’s me, I’m in it, it’s self?’

‘Venerable sir, it is not suitable.’

‘Sisters, is ear consciousness permanent or impermanent?’

‘Impermanent. Venerable sir.’

‘Sisters, is nose consciousness permanent or impermanent?’

‘Impermanent. Venerable sir.’

‘Sisters, is tongue consciousness permanent or impermanent?’

‘Impermanent. Venerable sir.’

‘Sisters, is body consciousness permanent or impermanent?’

‘Impermanent. Venerable sir.’

‘Sisters, is mind consciousness permanent or impermanent?’

‘Impermanent. Venerable sir.’

‘That which is impermanent, is it unpleasant or pleasant?’

‘Unpleasant. Venerable sir.’

‘In that unpleasant, changing thing, is it suitable to reflect, it’s me, I’m in it, it’s self?’

‘Venerable sir, it is not suitable, because even before this, we have seen with right wisdom, as it really is that the six bodies of consciousness are impermanent.

‘Good! Sisters, that is so. It is the noble disciple that sees it, as it really is with right wisdom.’

‘Sisters, of a burning oil flame, the oil is impermanent, a changing thing. The wick is impermanent, a changing thing. The fire is impermanent, a changing thing. The flame is impermanent, a changing thing. Sisters, if someone were to say, of this burning oil flame, the oil is impermanent, a changing thing. The wick is impermanent, a changing thing. The fire is impermanent, a changing thing. As for the flame, it’s permanent, eternal a not changing thing. Is that said correctly?’

‘Venerable sir, it is not well said, because, of this burning oil flame, the oil is impermanent, a changing thing. The wick is impermanent, a changing thing. The fire is impermanent, a changing thing. So also the flame, is impermanent, a changing thing.’

‘Sisters, in the same manner, if someone was to say; my six internal spheres are impermanent and whatever pleasant, unpleasant or neither unpleasant nor pleasant feelings experienced on account of the six internal spheres are permanent, eternal, not changing things. Is that said correctly?’

‘Venerable sir, it is not well said, because, on account of this and other reason, there arises this and other feeling and when that reason subsides, the respective feeling fades.’

‘Good! Sisters, that is so. It is the noble disciple that sees it, as it really is with right wisdom.’

‘Sisters, of a standing huge tree full of heartwood, the root is impermanent, a changing thing. The trunk is impermanent, a changing thing. The branches and foliage are impermanent, changing things. The shadow is impermanent, a changing thing. Sisters, if someone were to say, of this standing huge tree full of heartwood the root is impermanent, a changing thing. The trunk is impermanent, a changing thing. The branches and foliage are impermanent, changing things. As for its shadow, it’s permanent, eternal a not changing thing. Is that said correctly?’

‘Venerable sir, it is not well said, because, of this standing huge tree full of heartwood the root is impermanent, a changing thing. The trunk is impermanent, a changing thing. The branches and foliage are impermanent, changing things, so also its shadow is impermanent a changing thing.’

‘Sisters, in the same manner, if someone was to say; my six external spheres are impermanent and whatever pleasant, unpleasant or neither unpleasant nor pleasant feelings experienced on account of the six external spheres are permanent, eternal, not changing things. Sisters, is that said correctly?’

‘Venerable sir, it is not well said, because, on account of this and other reason there arises this and other feeling and when that reason subsides, the respective feeling fades.’

‘Good! Sisters, that is so. It is the noble disciple that sees it, as it really is with right wisdom.’

‘Sisters, a clever butcher or his apprentice would kill a cow with a sharp carving knife, and would chop it into small bits without hindering the internal flesh or the external skin. He would chop all the internal tissues, veins and ligaments, into small bits, as they stand and would put the cow together in the outer skin as it was and would say. This is the same cow complete in that same skin. Sisters, is that said correctly?’

‘Venerable sir, it is not so, because, that clever butcher or his apprentice would kill a cow with a sharp carving knife, and would chop it into small bits without hindering the internal flesh or the external skin. He would chop all the internal tissues, veins and ligaments, into small bits, as they stand and would put the cow together in the outer skin as it was and would say. This is the same cow complete in that same skin. Yet, that cow is unyoked from the skin.’

‘Sisters, this is a comparison to explain the meanings. This is its meaning. Internal flesh, is a synonym for the six internal spheres. (*2) External skin, is a synonym for the six external spheres.

(*3) Internal tissues, veins and ligaments is a synonym for interest and greed. A sharp carving knife is a synonym for the noble one's wisdom. With that noble wisdom the internal impurities, bonds and bindings are cut and chopped again and again.

Sisters, these seven are the enlightenment factors, developing and making much of them, the bhikkhu destroying desires (*4) releases the mind, releases through wisdom, (*5) here and now abides by himself knowing and realizing. (*6) What are the seven? Here, sisters the bhikkhu develops the enlightenment factor mindfulness, settled in, seclusion, detachment and cessation maturing in surrender. Develops the enlightenment factor, examining the Teaching, (*7) effort, (*8) joy, (*9) appeasement and equanimity settled in, seclusion, detachment and cessation maturing in surrender (*10). Sisters, these are the seven enlightenment factors, developing and making much of which, the bhikkhu, destroying desires releases the mind, releases through wisdom and here and now abides knowing by himself and realizing.'

Venerable Nandaka advising the bhikkhunis in this manner said. 'Sisters, go now, it's late.' And sent them away.

'Those bhikkhunis, delighting, hearing the words of venerable Nandaka, got up from their seats, worshipped him, going away respectfully with their right sides towards venerable Nandaka approached the Blessed One, worshipped the Blessed One and kept standing. The Blessed One said. 'Sisters, go now, it's late.' Those bhikkhunis worshipped the Blessed One and went away respectfully with their right sides towards the Blessed One. When the bhikkhunis had gone away the Blessed One addressed the bhikkhus. 'Bhikkhus, Many people seeing the moon on the fourteenth day of waxing, do not entertain doubts such as is the moon incomplete or not, but that it is incomplete. In the same manner, the bhikkhunis are delighted hearing the Teaching, but their aims are not fulfilled.

Then the Blessed One addressed venerable Nandaka. ‘Therefore, Nandaka, advise the bhikkhus, on that same topic again.’

Venerable Nandaka agreed, and at the end of that night, the next morning putting on robes and taking bowl and robes went the alms round in Savatthi. After collecting alms and when the meal was over, approached the monastery of the royal women. The bhikkhunis seeing venerable Nandaka approaching,, prepared a seat and administered water to wash the feet. Venerable Nandaka sat on the prepared seat and washed his feet. The bhikkhunis too worshipped venerable Nandaka and sat on a side. Then venerable Nandaka said to those bhikkhunis. ‘Sisters, there will be a session of asking questions and replying them. Those who know should say, I know and those who do not know should say I do not know. When there is doubt or consternation, I should be asked, venerable sir, what is the meaning of this.’

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‘Sisters, is the eye permanent or impermanent?’

‘Impermanent. Venerable sir.’

‘That which is impermanent, is it unpleasant or pleasant?’

‘Unpleasant. Venerable sir.’

‘In that unpleasant, changing thing, is it suitable to reflect, it’s me, I’m in it, it’s self?’

‘Venerable sir, it is not suitable.’

‘Sisters, is the ear permanent or impermanent?’

‘Impermanent. Venerable sir.’

‘Sisters, is the nose permanent or impermanent?’

‘Impermanent. Venerable sir.’

‘Sisters, is the tongue permanent or impermanent?’

‘Impermanent. Venerable sir.’

‘Sisters, is the body permanent or impermanent?’

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‘Of that unpleasant, changing thing, is it suitable to reflect, it’s me, I’m in it, it’s self?’

‘Venerable sir, it is not suitable.’

‘Sisters, are sounds permanent or impermanent?’

‘Impermanent. Venerable sir.’

‘Sisters, are smells permanent or impermanent?’

‘Impermanent. Venerable sir.’

‘Sisters, are tastes permanent or impermanent?’

‘Impermanent. Venerable sir.’

‘Sisters, are touches permanent or impermanent?’

‘Impermanent. Venerable sir.’

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stand and would put the cow together in the outer skin as it was and would say. This is the same cow complete in that same skin. Yet, that cow is unyoked from the skin.’

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Sisters, these seven are the enlightenment factors, developing and making much of them, the bhikkhu destroying desires (*4) releases the mind, releases through wisdom, (*5) here and now abides by himself knowing and realizing. (*6) What are the seven? Here, sisters the bhikkhu develops the enlightenment factor mindfulness, settled in, seclusion, detachment, cessation and maturing in surrender. Develops the enlightenment factor, examining the Teaching, (*7) effort, (*8) joy, (*9) appeasement and the enlightenment factor equanimity settled in, seclusion, detachment, and cessation maturing in surrender. Sisters, these are the seven enlightenment factors, developing and making much of which, the bhikkhu, destroying desires releases the mind, releases through wisdom and here and now abides knowing by himself and realizing.’

Venerable Nandaka advising the bhikkhunis in this manner said. ‘Sisters, go now, it’s late.’ And sent them away.

The Blessed One, soon after the bhikkhunis had gone away, addressed the bhikkhus. ‘Bhikkhus, many people seeing the moon on the fifteenth day of waxing, do not entertain doubts such as is the moon incomplete or complete. They know that the moon is complete. In the same manner, the bhikkhunis are delighted hearing Nandaka’s preaching, and their aims are fulfilled. The least of those five hundred bhikkhunis is a stream entrant, not falling from that, is aiming extinction.

The Blessed One said that and those bhikkhus delighted in the words of the Blessed One.

Notes.

1. Holy man, give the bhikkhus a talk on the Teaching. ‘karohi tva.m braahmana, bhikkhunina.m dhammikatha.m’ A holy man is one who has attained worthiness, one who has done the dispensation of the Blessed One.

2. The six internal spheres ‘channeta.m ajjhattikaana.m aayatanaana.m’ Six internal spheres are the spheres of eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind.

3. The six external spheres. ‘channeta.m baahiraana.m aayatanaana.m’ Six external spheres are forms, sounds, smells, tastes, touches and ideas.

4 The bhikkhu destroying desires, ‘bhikkhu aasavaana.m khayaa’ Desire is the root cause for a person’s transmigration from one birth to another. To stop this transmigration, the bhikkhu has to destroy desires.

5. Releases of the mind and releases through wisdom. ‘anaasava.m cetovimutti.m pa~n~naavimutti.m. The release of the mind is attained when the bhikkhu does not desire anything. The desiring starts with a contact at one or the other, of a door of mental contact, such as from a sight, sound, scent, taste, touch or an idea. To stop desiring the mind should be developed much. This is also called the release through knowing here and now. The living worthy ones ‘arahantaa’ enjoy this bliss of not being touched by any of the contacts at any of the doors of mental contact. Should be something very pleasant. Someone released through wisdom does not enjoy this bliss yet, he has read much or heard much and knows what it is and he aims to attain that bliss.

6. Here and now abides by himself knowing and realizing. ‘di.t.th’eva dhamme saya.m abhi~n~naa sacchikatvaa upsampajja viharati.’ Here and now means in this very life, the bhikkhu by himself knowing realizes that highest aim of a Buddhist, that is the worthy state.

7. The enlightenment factor of examining the Teaching. ‘dhammavicayasambojjhanga.m bhaaveti,’ This is to consider the complete Teaching, not overlooking any minor details, to come to a grand decision, so that the ultimate aim could be attained.

8. The enlightenment factor effort, ‘viriyasambhojjhanga.m bhaaveti.’ This is nothing but a mental effort to see that non arisen demerit does not arise, arisen demerit is dispelled, non arisen merit is aroused and arisen merit is developed and completed to the highest limit. This arisen merits are the developed mind such as the fruition of the entry into the stream of the Teaching, etc.

9. The enlightenment factor joy. ‘piitisambojjhanga.m bhaaveti.’ This is some internal joy on account of complete confidence of the path, and enjoyed only by a disciple of the Blessed One.

10. And the enlightenment factor equanimity settled in seclusion, detachment and cessation maturing in surrender. ‘upekhaasambojjha.nga.m bhaaveti vivekanissita.m viraaganissita.m nirodhnissita.m vossaggaparinaami.m’

Here equanimity is developed, settled in seclusion, detachment and cessation, until everything is given up. This amounts to extinction.