AN 3.99 — Potthaka Sutta (A Rough Burlap Cloth) / Kāsikam Vattha Sutta (A Fine Varanasi (Kāsi) Fabric)

English translation by Bhikkhu Candana.

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Text

97. Potthaka Sutta (A Rough Burlap Cloth) Bhikkhus, even though it may be new, a piece of rough burlap cloth still happens to be very coarse and ugly, uncomfortable to the touch, and therefore of little value. The same is the case when that rough burlap cloth is worn, as it continues to be ugly and coarse, uncomfortable to the touch and of little value. And when that rough burlap cloth gets old, it still remains ugly and coarse, uncomfortable to the touch and still of little value. Therefore, it is no surprise, that a rough burlap cloth is used to clean out dirty pots, or that it even gets discarded and thrown into a heap of rubbish.

a. Bhikkhus, in the same manner, if a novice Bhikkhu is non-virtuous in his behavior, who lives an immoral life and entertains evil thoughts, I call such a person “ugly and no different than a rough burlap cloth,” matching it in all its negative attributes.

The reason for this is, because those who attend to such a Bhikkhu, who associate with him, and follow his example, will end up being harmed and fall into much suffering, for a very long time.

For, he will be uncomfortable to be around, and therefore I declare, that such a person is no different than a rough burlap cloth. And when the laity offers him robes, alms food, dwellings, and medicinal requisites, such acts will not bear much benefit at all, and thus will be of little value or benefit to them, similar to the rough burlap cloth that is of little or no value. It is for these reasons, that I call such a person “ugly and no different than a rough burlap cloth.”

b. Furthermore, Bhikkhus, if a Bhikkhu of middle standing is non-virtuous in his behavior, who lives an immoral life and entertains evil thoughts, I call such a person “ugly and no different than a rough burlap cloth,” matching it in all its negative attributes.

The reason for this is, because those who attend to such a Bhikkhu, who associate with him, and follow his example, will end up being harmed and fall into much suffering, for a very long time.

For, he will be uncomfortable to be around, and therefore I declare, that such a person is no different than a rough burlap cloth. And when the laity offers him robes, alms food, dwellings, and medicinal requisites, such acts will not bear much benefit at all, and thus will be of little value or benefit to them, similar to the rough burlap cloth that is of little or no value. It is for these reasons, that I call such a person “ugly and no different than a rough burlap cloth.”

c. Further, Bhikkhus, if a senior Bhikkhu is non-virtuous in his behavior, who lives an immoral life and entertains evil thoughts, I call such a person “ugly and no different than a rough burlap cloth,” matching it in all its negative attributes.

The reason for this is, because those who attend to such a Bhikkhu, who associate with him, and follow his example, will end up being harmed and fall into much suffering, for a very long time.

For, he will be uncomfortable to be around, and therefore I declare, that such a person is no different than a rough burlap cloth. And when the laity offers him robes, alms food, dwellings, and medicinal requisites, such acts will not bear much benefit at all, and thus will be of little value or benefit to them, similar to the rough burlap cloth that is of little or no value. It is for these reasons, that I call such a person “ugly and no different than a rough burlap cloth.”

And if such an elder or senior Bhikkhu speaks in the midst of the Saṅgha of Bhikkhus, the Bhikkhus would then tell him:

“What right do you have, a foolish and incompetent man, to think that you can actually speak?

How do you consider yourself somehow ‘entitled’ to even speak here?”

At this, he becomes angry and hurls insulting and harsh words at them. In response to such a wrongful act, the Saṅgha would then expel him, much like the ugly and rough burlap cloth, that is thrown away and discarded as rubbish.

98. Kāsikam Vattha Sutta (A Fine Varanasi (Kāsi) Fabric) Bhikkhus, even while being new, a fine Kāsi fabric is beautiful, soft to the touch, and of great value. So too, when a fine Kāsi fabric is worn, it continues to be beautiful, soft and smooth to the touch, still being of great value. And when a fine Kāsi fabric gets old, it remains beautiful, being soft and smooth to the touch, and still of great value.

So, it is no surprise, that a fine Kāsi fabric is used to encase rare gems, often used to deck the interior of a fragrant and precious box.

a. Bhikkhus, in just the same manner, if a novice Bhikkhu is virtuous in his behavior, who lives a virtuous life and does not entertain evil thoughts, I call such a Bhikkhu “beautiful and quite similar to a fine Kāsi fabric” in his attributes.

The reason for this, is because those who attend to such a Bhikkhu, who associate with him, and follow his example, will surely be rewarded with many benefits and thus experience much happiness and wellbeing, for a very long time.

For, such a Bhikkhu will certainly be a genuine comfort to be around, and therefore I declare, that such a person is quite similar to a fine Kāsi fabric. And when the laity offers him robes, alms food, dwellings, and medicinal requisites, such acts will bear much benefit, as well as generate many merits, and be of great value, similar to the fine Kāsi fabric that is of great value. It is for these reasons, that I call such a Bhikkhu “beautiful and quite similar to a fine Kāsi fabric” in his attributes.

b. Also, Bhikkhus, in the same manner, if a Bhikkhu of middle standing is virtuous in his behavior, who lives a virtuous life and does not entertain evil thoughts, I call such a Bhikkhu “beautiful and quite similar to a fine Kāsi fabric” in his attributes.

The reason for this, is because those who attend to such a Bhikkhu, who associate with him, and follow his example, will surely be rewarded with many benefits and thus experience much happiness and wellbeing, for a very long time.

For, such a Bhikkhu will certainly be a genuine comfort to be around, and therefore I declare, that such a person is quite similar to a fine Kāsi fabric. And when the laity offers him robes, alms food, dwellings, and medicinal requisites, such acts will bear much benefit, as well as generate

many merits, and be of great value, similar to the fine Kāsi fabric that is of great value. It is for these reasons, that I call such a Bhikkhu “beautiful and quite similar to a fine Kāsi fabric” in his attributes.

c. Furthermore, Bhikkhus, in the same manner, if a senior or elder Bhikkhu is virtuous in his behavior, who lives a virtuous life and does not entertain evil thoughts, I call such a Bhikkhu “beautiful and quite similar to a fine Kāsi fabric” in his attributes.

The reason for this, is because those who attend to such a Bhikkhu, who associate with him, and follow his example, will surely be rewarded with many benefits and thus experience much happiness and wellbeing, for a very long time.

For, such a Bhikkhu will certainly be a genuine comfort to be around, and therefore I declare, that such a person is quite similar to a fine Kāsi fabric. And when the laity offers him robes, alms food, dwellings, and medicinal requisites, such acts will bear much benefit, as well as generate many merits, and be of great value, similar to the fine Kāsi fabric that is of great value. It is for these reasons, that I call such a Bhikkhu “beautiful and quite similar to a fine Kāsi fabric” in his attributes.

If such a senior or elder Bhikkhu speaks in the midst of the Saṅgha of Bhikkhus, the Bhikkhus would say to everyone else present:

“Venerable sirs, please let us all be quiet now. An elder Bhikkhu is about to speak on The Dhamma and The Discipline. Let us all pay attention and listen!”

And why is that?

It is because words that are to be spoken by such a Bhikkhu are indeed worthy of being preserved, just as fine Kāsi fabric is used to encase rare gems, often used to deck the interior of a fragrant and precious box.

It is in this manner, Bhikkhus, that you must train yourselves, by saying:

“Throughout our Training, we shall strive to be like the fine Kāsi fabric, and not like the ugly and rough burlap cloth!”

Therefore, it is in this way that you all must train yourselves.