AN 3.99 — AN 3:100 Bark-fiber Cloth | Potthaka Sutta

English translation by Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu.

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Changes: Presentation only: original HTML markup reflowed into plain text; wording, numbering and source repetitions retained. No repetitions expanded.

Completeness: ABBREVIATED. Every source-unit character is preserved, including introductions, notes and verse structure. Thanissaro's collection-level note explicitly states that repetitions were cut: https://www.dhammatalks.org/suttas/about.html. This is evidence about the translation method, not an assertion that every individual unit contains an omission; no repetitions reconstructed.

Text

Bark-fiber Cloth

Potthaka Sutta (AN 3:100)

“Monks, a new piece of bark-fiber cloth is ugly, rough to the touch, and of next-to-no value. A piece of bark-fiber cloth of middle standing [in terms of its age] is ugly, rough to the touch, and of next-to-no value. An old piece of bark-fiber cloth is ugly, rough to the touch, and of next-to-no value. People use an old piece of bark-fiber cloth to scrub pots or they throw it away on a trash heap.

“In the same way, monks, when a new monk is unvirtuous & of bad character, that, I tell you, is his ugliness. Just as a piece of bark-fiber cloth is ugly, this person, I tell you, is like that.

“For those who associate with him, resort to him, eat with him, attend to him, & follow his example, that will be for their long-term harm & suffering. That, I tell you, is his being rough to the touch. Just as a piece of bark-fiber cloth is rough to the touch, this person, I tell you, is like that.

“For those from whom he receives robes, alms food, lodging, & medicinal requisites for curing the sick, there is no great fruit, no great reward. That, I tell you, is his being of next-to-no value. Just as a piece of bark-fiber cloth is of next-to-no value, this person, I tell you, is like that.

“When a monk of middle standing is unvirtuous & of bad character…

“When an elder monk is unvirtuous & of bad character, that, I tell you, is his ugliness. Just as a piece of bark-fiber cloth is ugly, this person, I tell you, is like that.

“For those who associate with him, resort to him, eat with him, attend to him, & follow his example, that will be for their long-term harm & suffering. That, I tell you, is his being rough to the touch. Just as a piece of bark-fiber cloth is rough to the touch, this person, I tell you, is like that.

“For those from whom he receives robes, alms food, lodging, & medicinal requisites for curing the sick, there is no great fruit, no great reward. That, I tell you, is his being of next-to-no value. Just as a piece of bark-fiber cloth is of next-to-no value, this person, I tell you, is like that.

“And when an elder monk like this speaks in the midst of the Sangha, the monks say to him, ‘What’s the use of you—foolish, inexperienced—speaking? One would suppose that you should be spoken to!’

“He, provoked & displeased, lets loose with the sorts of words such that the Sangha throws him out,1 just like a piece of bark-fiber cloth on a trash heap.

“Monks, a new piece of Kāsi cloth is beautiful, smooth to the touch, and of great value. A piece of Kāsi cloth of middle standing is beautiful, smooth to the touch, and of great value. An old piece of Kāsi cloth is beautiful, smooth to the touch, and of great value. People use an old piece of Kāsi cloth as a wrapping for gems or they keep it in a scented chest.

“In the same way, monks, when a new monk is virtuous & of admirable character, that, I tell you, is his beauty. Just as a piece of Kāsi cloth is beautiful, this person, I tell you, is like that.

“For those who associate with him, resort to him, eat with him, attend to him, & follow his example, that will be for their long-term welfare & happiness. That, I tell you, is his being smooth to the touch. Just as a piece of Kāsi cloth is smooth to the touch, this person, I tell you, is like that.

“For those from whom he receives robes, alms food, lodging, & medicinal requisites for curing the sick, there is great fruit, great reward. That, I tell you, is his being of great value. Just as a piece of Kāsi cloth is of great value, this person, I tell you, is like that.

“When a monk of middle standing is virtuous & of admirable character…

“When an elder monk is virtuous & of admirable character, that, I tell you, is his beauty. Just as a piece of Kāsi cloth is beautiful, this person, I tell you, is like that.

“For those who associate with him, resort to him, eat with him, attend to him, & follow his example, that will be for their long-term welfare & happiness. That, I tell you, is his being smooth to the touch. Just as a piece of Kāsi cloth is smooth to the touch, this person, I tell you, is like that.

“For those from whom he receives robes, alms food, lodging, & medicinal requisites for curing the sick, there is great fruit, great reward. That, I tell you, is his being of great value. Just as a piece of Kāsi cloth is of great value, this person, I tell you, is like that.

“And when an elder monk like this speaks in the midst of the Sangha, the monks say [to one another], ‘Be quiet, friends. The elder monk is speaking Dhamma & Vinaya!’2

“Therefore, monks, you should train yourselves: ‘We will be like Kāsi cloth, and not like bark-fiber cloth.’ That’s how you should train yourselves.”

Notes

1. Ukkhipati. In the formal language of the Vinaya, this means that they suspend him from the Saṅgha. None of the monks will have anything to do with him until he mends his ways. See The Buddhist Monastic Code, volume two, chapter 20.

2. The Puggalapaññatti, an Abhidhamma text, when describing the three individuals like Kāsi cloth, completes the analogy here by saying, “His words should be kept in safe keeping, like a piece of Kāsi cloth in a scented trunk.”

Publisher references (not part of the sutta)

See also: DN 26; MN 7