AN 4.159 — AN 4:159 The Nun | Bhikkhunī Sutta

English translation by Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu.

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Source revision: sha256:06db98f11dbe5b66e3b290b0f8bcaa44ec5f2fe3d1e1b74062fcf0baea044036

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Text

The Nun

Bhikkhunī Sutta (AN 4:159)

I have heard that on one occasion Ven. Ānanda was staying in Kosambī at Ghosita’s monastery. Then a certain nun said to a certain man, “Go, my good man, to my lord Ānanda and, on arrival, bowing your head to his feet in my name, tell him, ‘The nun named such-&-such, venerable sir, is sick, in pain, severely ill. She bows her head to the feet of her lord Ānanda and says, “It would be good if my lord Ānanda were to go to the nuns’ quarters, to visit this nun out of sympathy for her.”’”

Responding, “Yes, my lady,” the man then went to Ven. Ānanda and, on arrival, having bowed down, sat to one side. As he was sitting there he said to Ven. Ānanda, “The nun

named such-&-such, venerable sir, is sick, in pain, severely ill. She bows her head to the feet of her lord Ānanda and says, 'It would be good if my lord Ānanda were to go to the nuns' quarters, to visit this nun out of sympathy for her.'"

Ven. Ānanda acquiesced with silence.

Then in the early morning, having adjusted his lower robe and carrying his bowl & outer robe, Ven. Ānanda went to the nuns' quarters. The nun saw Ven. Ānanda coming from afar. On seeing him, she lay down on a bed, having covered her head.

Then Ven. Ānanda went to the nun and, on arrival, sat down on a seat made ready. As he was sitting there, he said to the nun: "This body, sister, comes into being through food. And yet it is by relying on food that food is to be abandoned.

"This body comes into being through craving. And yet it is by relying on craving that craving is to be abandoned.

"This body comes into being through conceit. And yet it is by relying on conceit that conceit is to be abandoned.

"This body comes into being through sexual intercourse. Sexual intercourse is to be abandoned. With regard to sexual intercourse, the Buddha declares the cutting-off of the bridge.

"'This body, sister, comes into being through food. And yet it is by relying on food that food is to be abandoned.' Thus it was said. And in reference to what was it said? There is the case, sister, where a monk, considering it thoughtfully, takes food—not playfully, nor for intoxication, nor for putting on bulk, nor for beautification—but simply for the survival & continuance of this body, for ending its afflictions, for the support of the holy life, (thinking,) 'Thus will I destroy old feelings (of hunger) and not create new feelings (from overeating). I will maintain myself, be blameless, & live in comfort.' Then, at a later time, he abandons food, having relied on food. 'This body, sister, comes into being through food. And yet it is by relying on food that food is to be abandoned.' Thus it was said. And in reference to this was it said.

"'This body comes into being through craving. And yet it is by relying on craving that craving is to be abandoned.' Thus it was said. And in reference to what was it said? There is the case, sister, where a monk hears, 'The monk named such-&-such, they say, through the ending of the effluents, has entered & remains in the effluent-free awareness-release & discernment-release, having known & realized them for himself right in the here & now.' The thought occurs to him, 'I hope that I, too, will—through the ending of the effluents—enter & remain in the effluent-free awareness-release & discernment-release, having directly known & realized them for myself right in the here & now.' Then, at a later time, he abandons craving, having relied on craving. 'This body comes into being through craving. And yet it is by relying on craving that craving is to be abandoned.' Thus it was said. And in reference to this was it said.

"'This body comes into being through conceit. And yet it is by relying on conceit that conceit is to be abandoned.' Thus it was said. And in reference to what was it said? There is the case, sister, where a monk hears, 'The monk named such-&-such, they say, through the ending of the effluents, has entered & remains in the effluent-free awareness-release & discernment-release, having directly known & realized them for himself right in the here & now.' The thought occurs to him, 'The monk named such-&-such, they say, through the ending of the effluents, has entered & remains in the effluent-free awareness-release & discernment-release, having directly known & realized them for himself right in the here & now. Then why not me?' Then, at a later time, he abandons conceit, having relied on conceit. 'This body comes into being through conceit. And yet it is by relying on conceit that conceit is to be abandoned.' Thus it was said. And in reference to this was it said.

"This body comes into being through sexual intercourse. Sexual intercourse is to be abandoned. With regard to sexual intercourse, the Buddha declares the cutting-off of the bridge."

Then the nun—getting up from her bed, arranging her upper robe over one shoulder, and bowing down with her head at Ven. Ānanda's feet—said, "A transgression has overcome me, venerable sir, in that I was so foolish, so muddle-headed, and so unskilled as to act in this way. May my lord Ānanda please accept this confession of my transgression as such, so that I may restrain myself in the future."

"Yes, sister, a transgression overcame you in that you were so foolish, so muddle-headed, and so unskilled as to act in this way. But because you see your transgression as such and make amends in accordance with the Dhamma, we accept your confession. For it is a cause of growth in the discipline of the noble ones when, seeing a transgression as such, one makes amends in accordance with the Dhamma and exercises restraint in the future."

Publisher references (not part of the sutta)

See also: SN 51:15; AN 3:40; AN 5:75—76; AN 7:48; Sn 4:7