

AN 4.159
Bhikkhuni Sutta
“Discourse to a Bhikkhuni”
Translated by Bhikkhu Candana

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At one time, Venerable Ānanda was staying at Ghosita’s monastery, in Kosambi, when a certain Bhikkhuni addressed a man and said:

“Good one, please go and approach Venerable Ānanda and after paying homage to him with your head at his feet, convey to him this message, in my words:

‘Venerable Sir, this Bhikkhuni is gravely ill and is suffering badly. She pays homage with her head at the feet of Venerable Ānanda. It would be good if Venerable Ānanda could approach the monastery of the Bhikkhunis, and approach this one, out of compassion.’”

By saying, “Yes, Venerable Lady,” the man agreed to do what that Bhikkhuni had said, as he went and approached the Venerable Ānanda, and after paying homage to him with his head at the Venerable’s feet and sitting to one side, he conveyed to him the following message:

“Venerable sir, this Bhikkhuni is gravely ill and is suffering badly. She pays homage with her head at the feet of Venerable Ānanda. It would be good if Venerable Ānanda could approach the monastery of the Bhikkhunis, and approach this one, out of compassion.”

The Venerable Ānanda accepted the message by remaining silent.

Then, Venerable Ānanda, by taking his outer robe and alms bowl, went to the monastery of the Bhikkhunis. Now, on seeing the Venerable Ānanda approaching in the distance, that Bhikkhuni quickly removed her robes and laid on her bed, while barely covering herself from her head down with a thin cloth, as she laid visibly naked underneath.

Having entered that Bhikkhuni’s chamber, the Venerable Ānanda sat on the prepared seat and said:

“Sister, this body is the product of food, and even though being supported by food, one should abandon the attachment to food.

“Sister, this body is the product of craving, and even though being supported by craving, one should abandon craving.

“Sister, this body is the product of comparing and conceit, and even though being supported by the tendency to compare, one should abandon conceit.

“Sister, this body is the product of sexual intercourse, but The Blessed One has declared clearly how sexual intercourse destroys the very bridge that takes us to the culmination of the Holy Life.

“Now sister, what is the meaning behind the statement:

‘This body is the product of food, and while being supported by food, one should abandon the attachment to food?’

“Here, sister, food should be looked at through wise reflection. It is not to be seen as amusement, nor to be intoxicated by, nor for looking a certain way or to look beautiful or attractive. Food is simply consumed to maintain and support this body, to avoid getting sick and to help one lead the Holy Life.

Thus, the person considers the following:

‘I will eliminate the earlier unwholesome feelings and not arouse any new ones. I will live blamelessly, living healthy for my comfortable abiding.’

In this manner, one abandons the attachment to food, while being supported by food.

“This, therefore, is the meaning behind the statement: *‘This body is the product of food, and while being supported by food, one should abandon the attachment to food.’*

“Next, sister, what is the meaning behind the statement:

‘This body is the product of craving, and while being supported by craving, one should abandon craving?’

“Here sister, the Bhikkhu hears, such and such a Bhikkhu has destroyed the contaminants of the mind, the āsavas in *this* very life, whereby he now lives, through direct understanding and by his own realization, in the taintless liberation of the heart, the liberation through wisdom.

“Then in hearing this, it occurs to the other Bhikkhu:

‘When will I too be able to destroy the contaminants of the mind, the āsavas, in this very life, whereby I may also now live, through direct understanding and by my own realization, in the taintless liberation of the heart, the liberation through wisdom?’

“And after some time has passed, while being supported by this craving for liberation, he too abandons craving itself.

“This, therefore, is the meaning behind the statement: *‘This body is the product of craving, and while being supported by craving, one should abandon craving.’*”

“And what, sister, is the meaning behind the statement:

‘This body is the product of comparing and conceit, and while being supported by the tendency to compare, one should abandon conceit?’”

“Here sister, the Bhikkhu hears, such and such a Bhikkhu has destroyed the contaminants of the mind, the āsavas in *this* very life, whereby he now lives, through direct understanding and by his own realization, in the taintless liberation of the heart, the liberation through wisdom.

“Then in hearing this, it occurs to this Bhikkhu:

‘That Venerable Bhikkhu has destroyed the contaminants of the mind, the āsavas in this very life, whereby he now lives, through direct understanding and by his own realization, in the taintless liberation of the heart, the liberation through wisdom.

‘Well, if he could do it, then so can I!’

Then, after some time has passed and while being supported by the tendency to compare and conceit, he abandons conceit altogether.

“This, therefore, sister, is the meaning behind the statement: *‘This body is the product of comparing and conceit, and while being supported by the tendency to compare, one should abandon conceit.’*”

“Now, sister, this body is the product of sexual intercourse, but The Blessed One has declared unequivocally how sexual intercourse destroys the very bridge that takes us to the Goal of the Holy Life.”

“Then, realizing her unwholesome intention and behavior, that Bhikkhuni got up from under her bed and after quickly putting on her robes, she fell to the ground and paid homage to the Venerable Ānanda, with her head at his feet, exclaiming:

“Bhante, I beg for your forgiveness, for I have committed an offense due to my foolishness, my stupidity, and unskillful conduct. Please, Bhante, pardon me for my offense, as I promise I will exercise restraint from now on.”

“Sister, there is indeed an offense that you committed here, due to your foolishness, your stupidity, and unskillful conduct. But, as you are able to see your offense and ask for my

forgiveness, then in accordance with the Dhamma, we accept your apology and forgive you.

“For it is a sign of growth in the Noble One’s discipline, when one sees their offense as an offense and asks for pardon, according to the Dhamma, as one promises to exercise restraint from now on.”

Sadhu Sadhu Sadhu