

Gotamī Sutta
“Mahāpajāpati Gotamī”

Translated by Bhikkhu Candana

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At one time, The Blessed One was staying at the Nigrodha Monastery in the royal city of Kapilavatthu, among the Sakyans.

It was during that time that Queen Mahāpajāpati Gotamī came and approached The Blessed One, and after paying her respects by worshipping Him, she stood to one side, and then addressed The Blessed One by saying:

“Bhante, please allow for women to also join the Sangha, by permitting them to leave the household life and go forth into homelessness, within this Dhamma and Discipline, as declared by The Tathāgata.”

“Enough, Gotamī, asking us about what is unsuitable! Do not pursue this desire to have women be allowed to also join the Sangha, by permitting them to leave the household life and go forth into homelessness, within this Dhamma and Discipline, as declared by The Tathāgata!”

But for a second time, and a third time, Queen Mahāpajāpati Gotamī repeated her request by saying:

“Bhante, please allow for women to also join the Sangha, by permitting them to leave the household life and go forth into homelessness, within this Dhamma and Discipline, as declared by The Tathāgata.”

And for a second and a third time, The Blessed One repeated his reply to her, as He said:

“Enough, Gotamī, asking us about what is unsuitable! Do not pursue this desire to have women be allowed to also join the Sangha, by permitting them to leave the household life and go forth into homelessness, within this Dhamma and Discipline, as declared by The Tathāgata!”

Then, Queen Mahāpajāpati Gotamī, on seeing that The Blessed One did not allow for women to also join the Sangha, by permitting them to leave the household life and go forth into homelessness, became deeply saddened and began crying, shedding tears as she again paid homage to The Blessed One, and after circumambulating by keeping Him to her right, she left.

Then, having spent sufficient time at Kapilavatthu, The Blessed One, along with the Sangha of Bhikkhus, left in the direction of Vesālī. And, after several days of stopping to rest in various locations, He arrived in Vesālī and went to the Great Forest and stayed there, at the Gabled Hall.

Meanwhile in Kapilavatthu, Queen Mahāpajāpati Gotamī and a group of other royal Sakyan women cut their hair and shaved their heads, and having dressed in maroon-colored robes, all decided to follow The Blessed One. Thus, they too set off on the long journey towards Vesālī.

After some time, the caravan of the Sakyan women headed by Queen Mahāpajāpati Gotamī finally reached Vesālī, having also traveled in many stages, barefoot. However, upon arriving there at the Gabled Hall, in the Great Forest, the tired and dust-covered women all had blisters on their swollen feet, and were already in much pain and distress, sad and tearful.

Then, the Venerable Ānanda, on seeing Queen Mahāpajāpati Gotamī, along with the other Sakyan women, standing at the gate entrance, barefoot, all covered in dust, blistered, miserable, disheveled and sad, with tears in her eyes, said this to her:

“Gotamī, why have you come all this way, along with the other Sakyan women, standing at the gate entrance, barefoot, all covered in dust, blistered, miserable, disheveled and sad, with tears in your eyes?”

“My Dear Bhante Ānanda, The Blessed One has not allowed for women to also join the Sangha, by permitting us to leave the household life and go forth into homelessness, within this Dhamma and Discipline, as declared by The Tathāgata.”

“In that case, please wait here a moment, Gotamī, I will go and speak with The Blessed One, as I try and ask Him to allow for women to also join the Sangha, by permitting them to leave the household life and go forth into homelessness, within this Dhamma and Discipline, as declared by The Tathāgata.”

Then, the Venerable Ānanda went and approached The Blessed One, and after paying his respects, he sat down to one side and said:

“Bhante, Queen Mahāpajāpati Gotamī, along with the Sakyan royal women, is standing outside at the gate, having walked all this way from Kapilavatthu, barefoot. Their injured feet are all covered with blisters from the long journey, and she now stands outside, with the rest of the women all covered in dust, miserable, disheveled and sad, with tears in her eyes, as she exclaims:

‘The Blessed One has not allowed for women to also join the Sangha, by permitting us to leave the household life and go forth into homelessness, within this Dhamma and Discipline, as declared by The Tathāgata.’

“Bhante, please, kindly give your permission, allowing women to also join the Sangha, by permitting them to leave the household life and go forth into homelessness, within this Dhamma and Discipline, as declared by The Tathāgata.”

“Enough, Ānanda, asking us about what is unsuitable! Do not pursue this desire to have women be allowed to also join the Sangha, by permitting them to leave the household life and go forth into homelessness, within this Dhamma and Discipline, as declared by The Tathāgata!”

And, for a second time, and a third time, Venerable Ānanda repeated his request by saying:

“Bhante, please allow for women to also join the Sangha, by permitting them to leave the household life and go forth into homelessness, within this Dhamma and Discipline, as declared by The Tathāgata?”

But, for a second and a third time, The Blessed One repeated his reply to the Venerable Ānanda, as He said:

“Enough, Ānanda, asking us about what is unsuitable! Do not pursue this desire to have women be allowed to also join the Sangha, by permitting them to leave the household life and go forth into homelessness, within this Dhamma and Discipline, as declared by The Tathāgata!”

Then, the Venerable Ānanda, realizing that The Blessed One was not going to allow for the women to go forth into homelessness, nevertheless, decided to try a different tactic to persuade The Blessed One into changing His decision. Thus, he addressed The Blessed with this question:

“Bhante, is it possible for a woman, once she has been allowed to go forth from household life into homelessness, within this Dhamma and Discipline, as declared by The Tathāgata, to attain the fruits of Stream-Winning, Once-Returning, Non-Returning, and of Arahantship?”

“Ānanda, it is possible for a woman, once she has been allowed to go forth from household life into homelessness, within this Dhamma and Discipline, as declared by The Tathāgata, to attain the fruits of Stream-Winning, Once-Returning, Non-Returning, and of Arahantship.”

“In that case, Bhante, if a woman is able to attain the fruits of Stream-Winning, Once-Returning, Non-Returning, and of Arahantship, once she has been granted the permission to go forth from household life into homelessness, within this Dhamma and Discipline, as declared by The Tathāgata, then why not allow these women to just go forth?”

“Bhante, Queen Mahāpajāpati Gotamī has done so much for The Blessed One, by becoming his second mother after Queen Mahāmāyā’s death, nursing and giving her own breast milk, as she nurtured and kept taking care of The Blessed One, raising Him like her very own son, since birth.

“So, Bhante, please kindly consider her request, by allowing women to also join the Sangha, permitting them to leave the household life and go forth into homelessness, within this Dhamma and Discipline, as declared by The Tathāgata.”

Then, The Blessed One instructed Ānanda by saying:

“Ānanda, if Mahāpajāpati Gotamī fully accepts these Eight Tough Guidelines for all female monastics to follow throughout all time, then, once she does, right at that moment, her very indisputable acceptance of these eight rules itself will be her Higher Ordination!

“Now, Ānanda, pay close attention, for these are the Eight Tough Guidelines to be followed by all female recluses, within this Dhamma and Vinaya, as declared by The Tathāgata:

1. “A Bhikkhuni, even if she has a Hundred Rains’ Retreats since her Higher Ordination, still must worship and pay respect to a Bhikkhu who has just been ordained, while she attends willingly, with her clasped hands in *anjalī*, exchanging friendly greetings with a Bhikkhu who has not even a single Vassa since his Higher Ordination.

“This is the first of the Eight Tough Guidelines for all Bhikkhunis, who must fully honor, revere, respect, and abide by it, never disregarding, minimizing, nor abstaining from adhering to it strictly, never objecting to any part of it whatsoever, now and in the future, not transgressing against it, until the end of life.

2. “A Bhikkhuni should not observe the Rains’ Retreat in a monastery where there are no Bhikkhus.

“This is the second of the Eight Tough Guidelines (*aṭṭha garudhamme*) for all Bhikkhunis, who must fully honor, revere, respect, and abide by it, never disregarding, minimizing, nor abstaining from adhering to it strictly, never objecting to any part of it whatsoever, now and in the future, not transgressing against it, until the end of life.

3. “Every two weeks, the Bhikkhuni should approach the Sangha of Bhikkhus to ask for two things from them, which must be provided to the Bhikkhunis. The first is informing the Bhikkhunis of the date for the next Full Moon Uposatha Day, and the second is providing them with instructions and advice, to be handed by the Bhikkhus.

“This is the third of the Eight Tough Guidelines for all Bhikkhunis, who must fully honor, revere, respect, and abide by it, never disregarding, minimizing, nor abstaining from adhering to it strictly, never objecting to any part of it whatsoever, now and in the future, not transgressing against it, until the end of life.

4. “A Bhikkhuni, having completed her Rains’ Retreat, must go and make herself fully available for any castigation or criticism in the presence of both the Bhikkhu Sangha and the Bhikkhuni Sangha, in order to make the most of her training and to clear up any possible suspicions or misunderstandings, for actions committed through thought, speech, and her body.

“This is the fourth of the Eight Tough Guidelines for all Bhikkhunis, who must fully honor, revere, respect, and abide by it, never disregarding, minimizing, nor abstaining from adhering to it strictly, never objecting to any part of it whatsoever, now and in the future, not transgressing against it, until the end of life.

5. “A Bhikkhuni who has been found guilty of transgressing against any of the Eight Tough Guidelines should apologize immediately in the presence of both the Bhikkhu Sangha and the Bhikkhuni Sangha, for having broken or disobeyed these rules, as she abides by the admonitions that she receives from both.

“This is the fifth of the Eight Tough Guidelines for all Bhikkhunis, who must fully honor, revere, respect, and abide by it, never disregarding, minimizing, nor abstaining from adhering to it strictly, never objecting to any part of it whatsoever, now and in the future, not transgressing against it, until the end of life.

6. “A Sāmānerī, who has reached her probationary period in the Training, must spend at least two more Rains’ Retreats, while closely observing the six precepts. It is only after both the Bhikkhu Sangha and the Bhikkhuni Sangha approve of her accomplishment in maintaining these six precepts, that she can be granted the Higher Ordination.

“This is the sixth of the Eight Tough Guidelines for all Bhikkhunis, who must fully honor, revere, respect, and abide by it, never disregarding, minimizing, nor abstaining from adhering to it strictly, never objecting to any part of it whatsoever, now and in the future, not transgressing against it, until the end of life.

7. “A Bhikkhuni should not abuse nor insult a Bhikkhu for any reason, at any time, whatsoever.

“This is the seventh of the Eight Tough Guidelines for all Bhikkhunis, who must fully honor, revere, respect, and abide by it, never disregarding, minimizing, nor abstaining from adhering to it strictly, never objecting to any part of it whatsoever, now and in the future, not transgressing against it, until the end of life.

8. “From today onwards, Bhikkhunis are forbidden from criticizing or admonishing any Bhikkhus. However, Bhikkhus are not forbidden from criticizing or admonishing any Bhikkhunis.

“This is the eighth of the Eight Tough Guidelines for all Bhikkhunis, who must fully honor, revere, respect, and abide by it, never disregarding, minimizing, nor abstaining from adhering to it strictly, never objecting to any part of it whatsoever, now and in the future, not transgressing against it, until the end of life.

“Therefore, Ānanda, if Mahāpajāpati Gotamī fully accepts these Eight Tough Guidelines for all female monastics to follow throughout all time, then once she does, right at that moment, her very indisputable acceptance of these eight rules itself will be her Higher Ordination!”

Then, the Venerable Ānanda, by memorizing these Eight Tough Guidelines in the presence of The Blessed One, having heard them from The Blessed One’s own lips, went back to Queen Mahāpajāpati Gotamī and said:

“Gotamī, if you fully accept these Eight Tough Guidelines for all female monastics to follow throughout all time, then your very indisputable acceptance itself of these eight rules will be the declaration of your Higher Ordination!

“Now, Gotamī, pay close attention, for these are the Eight Tough Guidelines to be followed by all female recluses, within this Dhamma and Vinaya, as declared by The Tathāgata:

1. “A Bhikkhuni, even if she has a Hundred Rains’ Retreats since her Higher Ordination, still must worship and pay respect to a Bhikkhu who has just been ordained, while she attends willingly, with her clasped hands in *anjalī*, exchanging friendly greetings with a Bhikkhu who has not even a single Vassa since his Higher Ordination.

“This is the first of the Eight Tough Guidelines for all Bhikkhunis, who must fully honor, revere, respect, and abide by it, never disregarding, minimizing nor abstaining from adhering to it strictly, never objecting to any part of it whatsoever, now and in the future, not transgressing against it, until the end of life.

2. “A Bhikkhuni should not observe the Rains’ Retreat in a monastery where there are no Bhikkhus.

“This is the second of the Eight Tough Guidelines for all Bhikkhunis, who must fully honor, revere, respect, and abide by it, never disregarding, minimizing, nor abstaining from adhering to it strictly, never objecting to any part of it whatsoever, now and in the future, not transgressing against it, until the end of life.

3. “Every two weeks, the Bhikkhuni should approach the Sangha of Bhikkhus to ask for two things from them, which must be provided to the Bhikkhunis. The first is informing the Bhikkhunis of the date for the next Full Moon Uposatha Day, and the second is providing them with instructions and advice, to be handed by the Bhikkhus.

“This is the third of the Eight Tough Guidelines for all Bhikkhunis, who must fully honor, revere, respect, and abide by it, never disregarding, minimizing, nor abstaining from adhering to it strictly, never objecting to any part of it whatsoever, now and in the future, not transgressing against it, until the end of life.

4. “A Bhikkhuni, having completed her Rains’ Retreat, must go and make herself fully available for any castigation or criticism in the presence of both the Bhikkhu Sangha and the Bhikkhuni Sangha, in order to make the most of her training and to clear up any possible suspicions or misunderstandings.

“This is the fourth of the Eight Tough Guidelines for all Bhikkhunis, who must fully honor, revere, respect, and abide by it, never disregarding, minimizing, nor abstaining from adhering to it strictly, never objecting to any part of it whatsoever, now and in the future, not transgressing against it, until the end of life.

5. “A Bhikkhuni who has been found guilty of transgressing against any of the Eight Tough Guidelines should apologize immediately in the presence of both the Bhikkhu Sangha and the Bhikkhuni Sangha, for having broken or disobeyed these rules, as she abides by the admonitions that she receives from both.

“This is the fifth of the Eight Tough Guidelines for all Bhikkhunis, who must fully honor, revere, respect, and abide by it, never disregarding, minimizing, nor abstaining from adhering to it strictly, never objecting to any part of it whatsoever, now and in the future, not transgressing against it, until the end of life.

6. “A Sāmānerī, who has reached her probationary period in the Training, must spend at least two more Rains’ Retreats, while closely observing the six precepts. It is only after both the Bhikkhu Sangha and the Bhikkhuni Sangha approve of her accomplishment in maintaining these six precepts, that she can be granted the Higher Ordination.

“This is the sixth of the Eight Tough Guidelines for all Bhikkhunis, who must fully honor, revere, respect, and abide by it, never disregarding, minimizing, nor abstaining from adhering to it strictly, never objecting to any part of it whatsoever, now and in the future, not transgressing against it, until the end of life.

7. “A Bhikkhuni should not abuse nor insult a Bhikkhu for any reason, at any time, whatsoever.

“This is the seventh of the Eight Tough Guidelines for all Bhikkhunis, who must fully honor, revere, respect, and abide by it, never disregarding, minimizing, nor abstaining from adhering to it strictly, never objecting to any part of it whatsoever, now and in the future, not transgressing against it, until the end of life.

8. “From today onwards, Bhikkhunis are forbidden from criticizing or admonishing any Bhikkhus. However, Bhikkhus are not forbidden from criticizing or admonishing any Bhikkhunis.

“This is the eighth of the Eight Tough Guidelines (*aṭṭha garudhamme*) for all Bhikkhunis, who must fully honor, revere, respect, and abide by it, never disregarding, minimizing, nor abstaining from adhering to it strictly, never objecting to any part of it whatsoever, now and in the future, not transgressing against it, until the end of life.

“So, Gotamī, if you fully and unequivocally accept these Eight Tough Guidelines for all Bhikkhunis not to transgress against until the end of life, then by doing so, you would be declaring your Higher Ordination!

“Dearest Bhante Ānanda, it feels just as if a young man or a woman, or even a child who, having just washed his head, upon being offered a garland of freshly cut colorful flowers such as blue lotuses, jasmines or any other fragrant and beautifully weaved collection of flowers, would delightedly accept it, and with both hands, respectfully and adoringly, would place it on their head.

“In just the same way, Dearest Bhante Ānanda, I fully and unequivocally accept these Eight Tough Guidelines for all Bhikkhunis, both those of the present and of the future, declaring that they shall fully honor, revere, respect, and abide by these guidelines, never disregarding, minimizing, nor abstaining from adhering to them strictly, never objecting to any part of these

eight rules whatsoever, now and in the future, and not transgressing against them until the end of life!”

Then, the Venerable Ānanda went and approached The Blessed One and after paying his respects, sat down to one side and said:

“Bhante, Gotamī has fully and unequivocally accepted these Eight Tough Guidelines for all Bhikkhunis, both those of the present and of the future, declaring that they shall fully honor, revere, respect, and abide by these guidelines, never disregarding, minimizing, nor abstaining from adhering to them strictly, never objecting to any part of these eight rules whatsoever, now and in the future, and not transgressing against them until the end of life!”

“Ānanda, know this, that had women not been given the permission to obtain the going forth from the household life into homelessness, living the Holy Life in this Dhamma and Vinaya, as declared by The Tathāgata, this Dhamma and Vinaya would have lasted at least for a thousand years, Ānanda!

“But, Ānanda, because today women have been allowed to go forth from the household life into homelessness, this Dhamma and Vinaya, as declared by the Tathāgata, will not last very long. This True Dhamma will only last for five hundred years.

“It is just like those families, Ānanda, which have more women than men to protect them from being attacked by murderers and thieves, thus falling prey to their merciless assaults.

“So too, Ānanda, in whatever Dhamma and Vinaya that is proclaimed, when women are allowed to go forth from the household life into homelessness, that spiritual life will not last as long.

“Imagine a rice paddy that is full of rice, Ānanda, having reached the time of a rich harvest, yet suddenly some pervasive disease like bleaching comes along and the crops are ruined; hence they would not last long, nor produce as much healthy rice.

“So too, Ānanda, in whatever Dhamma and Vinaya that is proclaimed, when women are allowed to go forth from the household life into homelessness, that spiritual life will not last as long.

“Much like a rich sugar cane field, Ānanda, that suddenly finds itself surrounded by the disease called ‘rotting redness,’ it causes the sugar cane field to no longer be as productive, nor last very long.

“So too, Ānanda, in whatever Dhamma and Vinaya that is proclaimed, when women are allowed to go forth from the household life into homelessness, that spiritual life will not last as long.

“Ānanda, imagine someone, who by anticipating future catastrophes like flooding, decides to build a strong barrier and protection around a huge reservoir, to deter any danger by stopping the waters from overflowing.

“So too, Ānanda, I have placed now these Eight Tough Guidelines for all Bhikkhunis, both those of the present and of the future, for them to follow and not transgress against until the end of life, as a protection for the future of this Sāsana.”

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