Thag 6.13 — Sirimanda Thera: Beaten Like a Thief

English translation by Andrew Olendzki.

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

Completeness: UNKNOWN. Entire protected source unit, including notes and verses, preserved; canonical completeness has not been independently established.

Text

Translator's note

These powerful words echo through twenty five centuries of humanity to reach our ears today. It makes one's spine tingle to think how many voices — now long silent — have uttered these words in each of the one hundred generations that have come and gone since Sirimanda first composed them. How many have heeded their message? How many can hear it today?

This is the kind of literature that leads some to view Buddhism as holding a pessimistic outlook on the world. But in fact it is merely expressing in a forthright and dramatic manner some facts with which we are all quite familiar. Perhaps we would prefer to ignore the facts of aging and death; but the Buddha's compassion is manifest in his not leaving the world to wallow in the shallow happiness that comes from ignoring our danger.

Above all these stanzas are a call to action, provoking us to wake up from the complacent slumber of our denial and urging us to dwell "without confusion." This is a reference to mindfulness, the practice of insight meditation. For by nurturing awareness of what is

actually going on in our experience — both what is pleasurable and what is painful — we sow the seeds of wisdom. And wisdom, according to the Buddhist tradition, can help us see through the desires and cravings that obscure what is ageless and deathless.

The world is assailed by death And smothered by old age; Pierced with the arrow of craving And always obscured by desires. The world is assailed by death And besieged by old age; Eternally beaten, with no relief-- Like a thief beneath the rod. Old age, illness and death approach Like three great masses of fire. No strength can resist them. No speed can out-run them. Spend your days without confusion, Whether few or many [remain]. For every night that slips away, There is that much less of life left. Whether walking or standing, Sitting or lying down — Your final night is drawing near. You have no time to be lazy.