MN 105 — With Sunakkhatta

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Text

Middle Discourses 105

With Sunakkhatta

So I have heard. At one time the Buddha was staying near Vesālī, at the Great Wood, in the hall with the peaked roof.

Now at that time several mendicants had declared their enlightenment in the Buddha's presence:

"We understand: 'Rebirth is ended, the spiritual journey has been completed, what had to be done has been done, there is nothing further for this place.'"

Sunakkhatta the Licchavi heard about this.

He went to the Buddha, bowed, sat down to one side, and said to him, "Sir, I have heard that several mendicants have declared their enlightenment in the Buddha's presence. I trust they did so rightly—or are there some who declared enlightenment out of overestimation?"

"Some of them did so rightly, Sunakkhatta, while others did so out of overestimation. Now, when mendicants declare enlightenment rightly, that is their truth. But when mendicants declare enlightenment out of overestimation, the Realized One thinks: 'I should teach them the Dhamma.' If the Realized One thinks he should teach them the Dhamma, but then certain futile men, having carefully planned a question, approach the Realized One and ask it, then the Realized One changes his mind."

"Now is the time, Blessed One! Now is the time, Holy One! Let the Buddha teach the Dhamma. The mendicants will listen and remember it."

"Well then, Sunakkhatta, listen and apply your mind well, I will speak."

"Yes, sir," replied Sunakkhatta. The Buddha said this:

"Sunakkhatta, there are these five kinds of sensual stimulation. What five? Sights known by the eye, which are likable, desirable, agreeable, pleasant, sensual, and arousing. Sounds known by the ear … Smells known by the nose … Tastes known by the tongue … Touches known by the body, which are likable, desirable, agreeable, pleasant, sensual, and arousing. These are the five kinds of sensual stimulation.

It's possible that a certain individual person may be intent on worldly pleasures of the flesh. Such an individual engages in pertinent conversation, thinking and considering in

line with that. They associate with that kind of person, and they find it rewarding. But when talk connected with the imperturbable is going on they don't want to listen. They don't actively listen or try to understand. They don't associate with that kind of person, and they don't find it rewarding.

Suppose a person had left their own village or town long ago, and they saw another person who had only recently left there. They would ask about whether their village was safe, with plenty of food and little disease, and the other person would tell them the news. What do you think, Sunakkhatta? Would that person want to listen to that other person? Would they actively listen and try to understand? Would they associate with that person, and find it rewarding?"

"Yes, sir."

"In the same way, it's possible that a certain individual may be intent on worldly pleasures of the flesh. Such an individual engages in pertinent conversation, thinking and considering in line with that. They associate with that kind of person, and they find it rewarding. But when talk connected with the imperturbable is going on they don't want to listen. They don't actively listen or try to understand. They don't associate with that kind of person, and they don't find it rewarding. You should know of them: 'That individual is intent on pleasures of the flesh, for they're detached from things connected with the imperturbable.'

It's possible that a certain individual person may be intent on the imperturbable. Such an individual engages in pertinent conversation, thinking and considering in line with that. They associate with that kind of person, and they find it rewarding. But when talk connected with worldly pleasures of the flesh is going on they don't want to listen. They don't actively listen or try to understand. They don't associate with that kind of person, and they don't find it rewarding.

Suppose there was a fallen, withered leaf. It's incapable of becoming green again. In the same way, an individual intent on the imperturbable has dropped the connection with worldly pleasures of the flesh. You should know of them: 'That individual is intent on the imperturbable, for they're detached from things connected with pleasures of the flesh.'

It's possible that a certain individual person may be intent on the dimension of nothingness. Such an individual engages in pertinent conversation, thinking and considering in line with that. They associate with that kind of person, and they find it rewarding. But when talk connected with the imperturbable is going on they don't want to listen. They don't actively listen or try to understand. They don't associate with that kind of person, and they don't find it rewarding.

Suppose there was a broad rock that had been broken in half, so that it could not be put back together again. In the same way, an individual intent on the dimension of nothingness has broken the connection with the imperturbable. You should know of them: 'That individual is intent on the dimension of nothingness, for they're detached from things connected with the imperturbable.'

It's possible that a certain individual person may be intent on the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception. Such an individual engages in pertinent conversation, thinking and considering in line with that. They associate with that kind of person, and they find it rewarding. But when talk connected with the dimension of nothingness is going on they don't want to listen. They don't actively listen or try to understand. They don't associate with that kind of person, and they don't find it rewarding.

Suppose someone had eaten some satisfying food and thrown it up. What do you think, Sunakkhatta? Would that person want to eat that food again?"

"No, sir. Why is that? Because that food is deemed repulsive."

"In the same way, an individual intent on the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception has vomited the connection with the dimension of nothingness. You should know of them: 'That individual is intent on the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception, for they're detached from things connected with the dimension of nothingness.'

It's possible that a certain individual person may be rightly intent on extinguishment. Such an individual engages in pertinent conversation, thinking and considering in line with that. They associate with that kind of person, and they find it rewarding. But when talk connected with the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception is going on they don't want to listen. They don't actively listen or try to understand. They don't associate with that kind of person, and they don't find it rewarding.

Suppose there was a palm tree with its crown cut off. It's incapable of further growth. In the same way, an individual rightly intent on extinguishment has cut off the connection with the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception at the root, made it like a palm stump, obliterated it, so it's unable to arise in the future. You should know of them: 'That individual is rightly intent on extinguishment, for they're detached from things connected with the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception.'

It's possible that a certain mendicant might think: 'The Ascetic has said that craving is a dart; and that the poison of ignorance is inflicted by desire and ill will. I have given up the dart of craving and expelled the poison of ignorance; I am rightly intent on extinguishment.' Having such conceit, though it's not based in fact, they would engage in things unconducive to extinguishment: unsuitable sights, sounds, smells, tastes, touches, and ideas. Doing so, lust infects their mind, resulting in death or deadly pain.

Suppose a man was struck by an arrow thickly smeared with poison. Their friends and colleagues, relatives and kin would get a surgeon to treat them. The surgeon would cut open the wound with a scalpel, probe for the arrow, extract it, and expel the poison, leaving some residue behind. Imagining that no residue remained, the surgeon would say: 'My man, the dart has been extracted and the poison expelled without residue. It is still capable of harming you. Eat only suitable food. Don't eat unsuitable food, or else the wound may get infected. Regularly wash the wound and anoint the opening, or else it'll get covered with pus and blood. Don't walk too much in the wind and sun, or else dust and dirt will infect the wound. Take care of the wound, my man, heal it.'

They'd think: 'The dart has been extracted and the poison expelled with no residue. It's not capable of harming me.' They'd eat unsuitable food, and the wound would get infected. And they wouldn't regularly wash and anoint the opening, so it would get covered in pus and blood. And they'd walk too much in the wind and sun, so dust and dirt infected the wound. And they wouldn't take care of the wound or heal it. Then both because they did what was unsuitable, and because of the residue of unclean poison, the wound would expand, resulting in death or deadly pain.

In the same way, it's possible that a certain mendicant might think: 'The Ascetic has said that craving is a dart; and that the poison of ignorance is inflicted by desire and ill will. I have given up the dart of craving and expelled the poison of ignorance; I am rightly intent on extinguishment.' Having such conceit, though it's not based in fact, they would engage in things unconducive to extinguishment: unsuitable sights, sounds, smells, tastes, touches, and ideas. Doing so, lust infects their mind, resulting in death or deadly pain.

For it is death in the training of the Noble One to resign the training and return to a lesser life. And it is deadly pain to commit one of the corrupt offenses.

It's possible that a certain mendicant might think: 'The Ascetic has said that craving is a dart; and that the poison of ignorance is inflicted by desire and ill will. I have given up the dart of craving and expelled the poison of ignorance; I am rightly intent on extinguishment.' Being rightly intent on extinguishment, they wouldn't engage in things unconducive to extinguishment: unsuitable sights, sounds, smells, tastes, touches, and ideas. Doing so, lust wouldn't infect their mind, so no death or deadly pain would result.

Suppose a man was struck by an arrow thickly smeared with poison. Their friends and colleagues, relatives and kin would get a surgeon to treat them. The surgeon would cut open the wound with a scalpel, probe for the arrow, extract it, and expel the poison, leaving no residue behind. Knowing that no residue remained, the surgeon would say: 'My man, the dart has been extracted and the poison expelled with no residue. It's not capable of harming you. Eat only suitable food. Don't eat unsuitable food, or else the wound may get infected. Regularly wash the wound and anoint the opening, or else it'll get covered with pus and blood. Don't walk too much in the wind and sun, or else dust and dirt will infect the wound. Take care of the wound, my man, heal it.'

They'd think: 'The dart has been extracted and the poison expelled with no residue. It's not capable of harming me.' They'd eat suitable food, and the wound wouldn't get infected. And they'd regularly wash and anoint the opening, so it wouldn't get covered in pus and blood. And they wouldn't walk too much in the wind and sun, so dust and dirt wouldn't infect the wound. And they'd take care of the wound and heal it. Then both because they did what was suitable, and the unclean poison had left no residue, the wound would heal, and no death or deadly pain would result.

In the same way, it's possible that a certain mendicant might think: 'The Ascetic has said that craving is a dart; and that the poison of ignorance is inflicted by desire and ill will. I have given up the dart of craving and expelled the poison of ignorance; I am rightly intent on extinguishment.' Being rightly intent on extinguishment, they wouldn't engage in things unconducive to extinguishment: unsuitable sights, sounds, smells, tastes, touches,

and ideas. Doing so, lust wouldn't infect their mind, so no death or deadly pain would result.

I've made up this simile to make a point. And this is the point: 'Wound' is a term for the six interior sense fields. 'Poison' is a term for ignorance. 'Dart' is a term for craving. 'Probing' is a term for mindfulness. 'Scalpel' is a term for noble wisdom. 'Surgeon' is a term for the Realized One, the perfected one, the fully awakened Buddha.

Truly, Sunakkhatta, that mendicant practices restraint regarding the six fields of contact. Understanding that attachment is the root of suffering, they are freed with the ending of attachments. It's not possible that they would apply their body or interest their mind in any attachment.

Suppose there was a bronze goblet of beverage that had a nice color, aroma, and flavor. But it was mixed with poison. Then a person would come along who wants to live and doesn't want to die, who wants to be happy and recoils from pain. What do you think, Sunakkhatta? Would that person drink that beverage if they knew that it would result in death or deadly suffering?"

"No, sir."

"In the same way, Sunakkhatta, that mendicant practices restraint regarding the six fields of contact. Understanding that attachment is the root of suffering, they are freed with the ending of attachments. It's not possible that they would apply their body or interest their mind in any attachment.

Suppose there was a lethal viper. Then a person would come along who wants to live and doesn't want to die, who wants to be happy and recoils from pain. What do you think, Sunakkhatta? Would that person give that lethal viper their hand or finger if they knew that it would result in death or deadly suffering?"

"No, sir."

"In the same way, Sunakkhatta, that mendicant practices restraint regarding the six fields of contact. Understanding that attachment is the root of suffering, they are freed with the ending of attachments. It's not possible that they would apply their body or interest their mind in any attachment."

That is what the Buddha said. Satisfied, Sunakkhatta of the Licchavi clan approved what the Buddha said.