

MN 126

Majjhima Nikāya The Middle Length Discourses

Suññata Vagga The Section Starting with Emptiness

Bhūmija Sutta “Discourse to Bhūmija”

Translated by Bhikkhu Candana

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I have personally heard this.

Once, The Blessed One was residing at the Squirrel’s Sanctuary Monastery in Rājagaha’s Bamboo Park, when one morning, the Venerable Bhūmija put on his robes and by taking his outer robe and alms bowl along with him, he went and approached Prince Jayasena’s home, to receive his meal.

Then, on seeing the Venerable Bhūmija approach, Prince Jayasena went to greet the Venerable and began exchanging friendly greetings with him.

Once inside, the Venerable Bhūmija sat on the seat that was prepared for him. Then, as the exchange of courtesies came to a close, Prince Jayasena went and sat to one side, after which he addressed the Venerable Bhūmija by saying:

“Master Bhūmija, there happen to be certain recluses, religious practitioners, and brahmins, holding on to various beliefs, who go on practicing according to different teachings, each with its own diverse views and perspectives, such as:

‘Even if one commits to living the holy life, having already made a vow or determined to reach its highest fruits, still that is no guarantee that they will, in fact, be successful in doing so.’

‘While living the holy life, if one has not made a vow or determined to reach its highest fruits, still that is no guarantee that they will, in fact, be successful in attaining them.’

‘While living the holy life, whether one has made a vow and determined to reach its highest fruits, or not, really it makes no difference, because either of those are no guarantees that one will indeed attain the highest fruits of the holy life.’

‘While living the holy life, neither the making of a vow or determining to attain its highest fruits, nor by not making any such vows or determinations, could serve as a guarantee that the person will, in fact, be successful in attaining the fruits of the holy life.’

“Therefore, we are curious to know what Master Bhūmija’s own Teacher has to say about these proclamations just mentioned. What would be His response, Sir? How, would you say, He would explain or clarify these points of view?”

Then, the Venerable Bhūmija replied by saying:

“O Prince, I cannot say that I have ever heard of such viewpoints being discussed in the presence of The Blessed One in regard to living The Holy Life, nor of such ways of approaching it.

“However, it may be possible that The Blessed One would explain and clarify such points of view in this manner:

‘Even if one commits to living The Holy Life but does so in a radically unwise and therefore erroneous and crooked way, then, it is impossible for such a person to attain its highest fruits.’

‘Similarly, if one goes on trying to live The Holy Life, without having vowed or determined to do so, but in a radically unwise and therefore erroneous and crooked way, then again, it is impossible for such a person to attain its highest fruits.’

‘Whether one is committed and indeed tries to live The Holy Life, or not, really makes no difference, at all, because so long as they approach it with a radically unwise and therefore erroneous and crooked understanding, then again, it will be impossible for such a person to attain its highest fruits.’

‘While living The Holy Life, neither through making a vow, by determining to attain its highest fruits, nor by not making any such vows or determinations, so long as their understanding is unwise and therefor erroneous and crooked, then again, it will be impossible for such a person to attain its highest fruits.’

‘However, if one approaches living The Holy Life with an approach that is radically wise, and therefore genuinely noble and correct in its motive, then, regardless of whether one has indeed made a vow to do so or not, makes no difference, for, they will attain its highest fruits.’

‘Similarly, even if one has not made a vow to live The Holy Life, that makes no difference, for, so long as one possesses in his heart the approach that is radically wise, and therefore genuinely noble and correct in its motive, then, that person will attain its highest fruits.’

‘Similarly, whether one does make a vow or not to live the Holy Life, if their approach is radically wise, and therefore genuinely noble and correct in its motive, then, it is only a matter of time for that person to indeed attain its highest fruits.

“And also, if one’s approach is radically wise, and therefore genuinely noble and correct in its motive, then, whether they neither make a vow to live the Holy Life or not, that person will be successful in attaining its highest fruits.’

“Now, O Prince, as mentioned earlier, I have not heard these particular responses from The Blessed One Himself, nor do I know if He has indeed made these statements which I just stated to you. Yet, given your original question, I infer that these would be plausible replies The Blessed One might in fact provide to listeners, if and when such questions are asked of Him.”

Then, Prince Jayasena replied by saying:

“If this is how Master Bhūmija’s own Teacher would respond, while addressing and clarifying those points which I inquired of you, then clearly, He has indeed left *all* those so-called religious practitioners and brahmins in the dust of His trail! For, surely, Master Bhūmija’s Teacher stands high and above in His depth of understanding, when compared to such fools in their deluded thinking.”

Then, Prince Jayasena began serving the Venerable Bhūmija, with his own hands, by filling up his alms bowl with sumptuous food.

Later, after leaving Prince Jayasena’s home, once the meal offering had finished, the Venerable Bhūmija went and approached The Blessed One, as he offered his respects by paying homage to The Teacher. Then, he went and sat to one side, as he began addressing The Blessed One while recounting what had taken place earlier, and in particular, the conversation between himself and Prince Jayasena.

Once he had done so, the Venerable Bhūmija asked the following question to The Teacher:

“Blessed Lord, I hope and trust that in answering in such a manner while providing those answers to the householder’s questions, I did not misspeak nor misrepresent The Blessed One in any way, shape, or form, by speaking what might have been false and baseless.

“Therefore, Bhante, did I speak statements that were accurate and true in relation to The Dhamma?

“Because, Bhante, my wish is that in explaining and providing a clarifying response to Prince Jayasena, my replies were according to and in line with The Dhamma, and not statements that go against The Dhamma, hence they would not place either myself or the statements I made in a position that is open to being refuted or criticized.”

And The Blessed One replied by saying to the Venerable Bhūmija:

“Truly, Bhūmija, in providing your answers, you did *not* misspeak nor misrepresent The Tathāgata in any way, shape, or form, nor you spoke what might have been false and baseless. Therefore, the words you spoke by providing your answer and explanation are surely in line with what I teach, hence what you said is certainly in line with The Dhamma, and not against The Dhamma. And as such, there are no grounds here for either you or your statements to be refuted or criticized, at all.

“For, truly, Bhūmija, there are many recluses, religious practitioners, and brahmins who live and practice, regardless of the fact that they did make a vow or determination to live the Holy Life; yet so long as they are driven and motivated by wrong view, wrong intentions, wrong communication, wrong action, wrong livelihood, wrong effort, wrong mindfulness, and wrong concentration, they will keep failing in attaining its highest fruits.

“Similarly, if one tries to live and practice The Holy Life, regardless of the fact that they did not make a vow or determination to do so, if they are still driven and motivated by wrong view, wrong intentions, wrong communication, wrong action, wrong livelihood, wrong effort, wrong mindfulness, and wrong concentration, then they will keep failing in attaining its highest fruits.

“Also, whether one has made a vow and is determined to live The Holy Life, or not, really makes no difference at all, because, so long as they are still driven and motivated by wrong view, wrong intentions, wrong communication, wrong action, wrong livelihood, wrong effort, wrong mindfulness, and wrong concentration, they will keep failing in attaining its highest fruits.

“And, when trying to live The Holy Life, regardless if one has neither made a vow by determining to attain its highest fruits, nor has not made any such vows or determinations, so long as they are driven and motivated by wrong views, wrong intentions, wrong communication, wrong actions, wrong livelihood, wrong effort, wrong mindfulness, and wrong concentration, they will keep failing in attaining its highest fruits.

“And what is the reason for this?

“It is because, Bhūmija, their approach to living and practicing The Holy Life is radically unwise, for they are possessed and led by their erroneous and crooked understanding, which makes it impossible for them to attain any fruits, let alone the highest fruits, of The Holy Life.

AI. “Here, Bhūmija, imagine there was a person in need of some sesame oil, and so he decides to go looking for it, but during his search to obtain some sesame oil, he collects a bucketful of sand, and after drizzling it with water, he starts squeezing those grains of sand together by applying pressure on them, in the hopes of extracting some sesame oil.

“However, despite his best efforts and no matter how exhausted he becomes from his futile efforts, he still will fail in extracting even a single drop of sesame oil from pressing and grinding those sand grains together, regardless of having made a vow or determination to attain his goal.

“Similarly, despite his best efforts and no matter how exhausted he becomes from his futile efforts, he still will fail in extracting even a single drop of sesame oil from pressing and grinding those sand grains together, regardless of not having made a vow or determination to attain his goal.

“Also, despite his best efforts and no matter how exhausted he becomes from his futile efforts, he still will fail in extracting even a single drop of oil from pressing and grinding those sand grains together, regardless of having made a vow or determination to attain his goal, or not.

“And, despite his best efforts and no matter how exhausted he becomes from his futile efforts, he still will fail in extracting even a single drop of oil from pressing and grinding those sand grains together, regardless of having made a vow or determination to attain his goal nor not having made such a vow.

“And what is the reason for this?

“It is because, Bhūmija, his approach is radically unwise, for he is possessed and led by his erroneous and crooked understanding, which makes it impossible for him to extract a single drop of sesame oil, in that manner.

And so it is, Bhūmija, with those recluses, religious practitioners, and brahmins who live and practice The Holy Life, regardless if they have indeed vowed and are determined to live The Holy Life or not, so long as they are driven and motivated by wrong views, wrong intentions, wrong communication, wrong actions, wrong livelihood, wrong effort, wrong mindfulness, and wrong concentration, they will continue to fail in ever attaining the highest fruits of The Holy Life.

42. “Also, Bhūmija, imagine there was a person in need of some milk, so he decides to go looking for it, but during his search to obtain some milk, he grabs hold of the horns of a cow that has recently given birth, and starts twisting and squeezing them, in the hopes of extracting milk from those horns.

“However, despite his best efforts and no matter how exhausted he becomes from his futile efforts, he still will fail in extracting even a single drop of milk from squeezing and twisting the cow’s horns, regardless of having made a vow or determination to attain his goal.

“Similarly, despite his best efforts and no matter how exhausted he becomes from his futile efforts, he still will fail in extracting even a single drop of milk from squeezing and twisting the cow’s horns, regardless of not having made a vow or determination to attain his goal.

“Also, despite his best efforts and no matter how exhausted he becomes from his futile efforts, he still will fail in extracting even a single drop of milk from squeezing and twisting the cow’s horns, regardless of having made a vow or determination to attain his goal, or not.

“And, despite his best efforts and no matter how exhausted he becomes from his futile efforts, he still will fail in extracting even a single drop of milk from squeezing and twisting the cow’s

horns, regardless of neither having made a vow or determination to attain his goal, nor not having made such a vow.

“And what is the reason for this?

“It is because, Bhūmija, his approach is radically unwise, for he is possessed and led by his erroneous and crooked understanding, which makes it impossible for him to extract a single drop of milk from the cow, in that manner.

“And so it is, Bhūmija, with those recluses, religious practitioners, and brahmins who live and practice The Holy Life, regardless if they have indeed vowed and are determined to live The Holy Life, or not; so long as they are driven and motivated by wrong views, wrong intentions, wrong communication, wrong actions, wrong livelihood, wrong effort, wrong mindfulness, and wrong concentration, they will continue to fail in ever attaining the highest fruits of The Holy Life.

A3. “Furthermore, Bhūmija, imagine there was a person in need of some freshly made butter, and thus, he decides to make some, so he pours some water into a container and starts churning it non-stop with a stick, in the hopes of making fresh butter for himself.

“However, despite his best efforts and no matter how exhausted he becomes from his futile efforts, he still will fail in making a single dollop of freshly made butter, regardless of having made a vow or determination to attain his goal.

“Similarly, despite his best efforts and no matter how exhausted he becomes from his futile efforts, he still will fail in extracting even a single dollop of freshly made butter, regardless of not having made a vow or determination to attain his goal.

“Also, despite his best efforts and no matter how exhausted he becomes from his futile efforts, he still will fail in extracting even a single dollop of freshly made butter, regardless of having made a vow or determination to attain his goal, or not.

“And, despite his best efforts and no matter how exhausted he becomes from his futile efforts, he still will fail in extracting even a single dollop of freshly made butter, regardless of neither having made a vow or determination to attain his goal, nor not having made such a vow.

“And what is the reason for this?

“It is because, Bhūmija, his approach is radically unwise, for he is possessed and led by his erroneous and crooked understanding, which makes it impossible for him to make a single dollop of fresh butter, in that manner.

“And so it is, Bhūmija, with those recluses, religious practitioners, and brahmins who live and practice The Holy Life, regardless if they have indeed vowed and are determined to live The Holy Life, or not; so long as they are driven and motivated by wrong views, wrong intentions, wrong communication, wrong actions, wrong livelihood, wrong effort, wrong mindfulness, and

wrong concentration, they will continue to fail in ever attaining the highest fruits of The Holy Life.

A4. “Furthermore, Bhūmija, imagine there was a person in need of fire, so he decides to go looking for it, but on his quest to obtain fire, he grabs a fire stick used for starting a fire, yet he rubs it against a damp piece of wood, that is still green and wet from having been drenched in water, while rubbing the two together, with a fervently resolute consistency.

“However, despite his best efforts and no matter how exhausted he becomes from his futile efforts, he will fail in starting even a spark, let alone a fire, regardless of having made a vow or determination to attain his goal.

“Similarly, despite his best efforts and no matter how exhausted he becomes from his futile efforts, he will fail in starting even a spark, let alone a fire, regardless of not having made a vow or determination to attain his goal.

“Also, despite his best efforts and no matter how exhausted he becomes from his futile efforts, he will fail in starting even a spark, let alone a fire, regardless of having made a vow or determination to attain his goal, or not.

“And, despite his best efforts and no matter how exhausted he becomes from his futile efforts, he will fail in starting even a spark, let alone a fire, regardless of neither having made a vow or determination to attain his goal, nor not having made such a vow.

“And what is the reason for this?

“It is because, Bhūmija, his approach is radically unwise, for he is possessed and led by his erroneous and crooked understanding, which makes it impossible for him to make even a spark, let alone a fire, in that manner.

“And so it is, Bhūmija, with those recluses, religious practitioners, and brahmins who live and practice The Holy Life, regardless if they have indeed vowed and are determined to live The Holy Life, or not; so long as they are driven and motivated by wrong views, wrong intentions, wrong communication, wrong actions, wrong livelihood, wrong effort, wrong mindfulness, and wrong concentration, they will continue to fail in ever attaining the highest fruits of The Holy Life.

B. “On the other hand, Bhūmija, there are many other recluses, religious practitioners, and brahmins who live and practice, whereby regardless if they did make a vow or determination to live the Holy Life, so long as they are driven and motivated by Right View, Right intentions, Right communication, Right actions, Right livelihood, Right effort, Right mindfulness, and Right concentration, they certainly will attain the highest fruits of The Holy Life.

“Similarly, if one lives and practices The Holy Life, regardless if they did not make a vow or determination to do so, as long as they are driven and motivated by Right View, Right intentions,

Right communication, Right actions, Right livelihood, Right effort, Right mindfulness, and Right concentration, they certainly will attain its highest fruits.

“Also, whether one has made a vow and is determined to live The Holy Life, or not, really makes no difference at all, because so long as they are driven and motivated by Right View, Right intentions, Right communication, Right actions, Right livelihood, Right effort, Right mindfulness, and Right concentration, they certainly will attain its highest fruits.

“And, when trying to live The Holy Life, regardless if one has neither made a vow by determining to attain its highest fruits, nor has not made any such vows or determinations, so long as they are driven and motivated by Right View, Right intentions, Right communication, Right actions, Right livelihood, Right effort, Right mindfulness, and Right concentration, they certainly will attain its highest fruits.

“And what is the reason for this?

“It is because, Bhūmija, their approach to living and practicing The Holy Life is radically wise, for they are possessed and led by an understanding that is genuinely noble and correct in its motive, which surely makes it possible for them to attain fruits, but especially the highest fruits of The Holy Life.

BI. “Here, Bhūmija, imagine there was a person in need of some sesame oil, and so he decides to go looking for it, but during his search to obtain some sesame oil, he collects a bucketful of sesame seeds, and after drizzling it with water, he starts squeezing those sesame seeds together by applying pressure on them, in the hopes of extracting some sesame oil.

“Thus, by applying himself correctly and through his strong efforts, he does succeed in extracting sesame oil by pressing and grinding those sesame seeds together, regardless of having made a vow or determination to attain his goal.

“Similarly, by applying himself correctly and through his strong efforts, he does succeed in extracting sesame oil by pressing and grinding those sesame seeds together, regardless of not having made a vow or determination to attain his goal.

“Also, by applying himself correctly and through his strong efforts, he does succeed in extracting sesame oil by pressing and grinding those sesame seeds together, regardless of having made a vow or determination to attain his goal, or not.

“And, by applying himself correctly and through his strong efforts, he does succeed in extracting sesame oil by pressing and grinding those sesame seeds together, regardless of neither having made a vow or determination to attain his goal, nor not having made such a vow.

“And what is the reason for this?

“It is because, Bhūmija, his approach is radically wise, for he is possessed and led by an understanding that is genuinely noble and correct in its motive, which makes it possible for him to extract sesame oil, in that manner.

“And so it is, Bhūmija, with those recluses, religious practitioners, and brahmins who live and practice The Holy Life, regardless if they have indeed vowed and are determined to live The Holy Life, or not, so long as they are driven and motivated by Right View, Right intentions, Right communication, Right actions, Right livelihood, Right effort, Right mindfulness, and Right concentration, they certainly will attain its highest fruits.

B2. “Also, Bhūmija, imagine there was a person in need of some milk, so he decides to go looking for it, and so during his search to obtain some milk, he approaches a cow that has recently given birth, and starts to gently pull and squeeze her udder, in the hopes of extracting milk.

“Thus, by applying himself correctly and through his strong efforts, he surely succeeds in extracting milk by gently pulling and squeezing the cow’s udder, regardless of having made a vow or determination to attain his goal.

“Similarly, by applying himself correctly and through his strong efforts, he surely succeeds in extracting milk by gently pulling and squeezing the cow’s udder, regardless of not having made a vow or determination to attain his goal.

“Also, by applying himself correctly and through his strong efforts, he surely succeeds in extracting milk by gently pulling and squeezing the cow’s udder, regardless of having made a vow or determination to attain his goal, or not.

“And, by applying himself correctly and through his strong efforts, he surely succeeds in extracting milk by gently pulling and squeezing the cow’s udder, regardless of neither having made a vow or determination to attain his goal, nor not having made such a vow.

“And what is the reason for this?

“It is because, Bhūmija, his approach is radically wise, for he is possessed and led by an understanding that is genuinely noble and correct in its motive, which makes it possible for him to extract milk from the cow, in that manner.

“And so it is, Bhūmija, with those recluses, religious practitioners, and brahmins who live and practice The Holy Life, regardless if they have indeed vowed and are determined to live The Holy Life, or not, so long as they are driven and motivated by Right View, Right intentions, Right communication, Right actions, Right livelihood, Right effort, Right mindfulness, and Right concentration, they certainly will attain its highest fruits.

B3. “Furthermore, Bhūmija, imagine there was a person in need of some freshly made butter, and thus, he decides to make some, so he pours some milk curd into a container and starts churning it non-stop with a stick, in the hopes of making fresh butter for himself.

“Thus, by applying himself correctly and through his strong efforts, he surely succeeds in extracting some freshly made butter, regardless of having made a vow or determination to attain his goal.

“Similarly, by applying himself correctly and through his strong efforts, he surely succeeds in extracting some freshly made butter, regardless of not having made a vow or determination to attain his goal.

“Also, by applying himself correctly and through his strong efforts, he surely succeeds in extracting some freshly made butter, regardless of having made a vow or determination to attain his goal, or not.

“And, by applying himself correctly and through his strong efforts, he surely succeeds in extracting some freshly made butter, regardless of neither having made a vow or determination to attain his goal, nor not having made such a vow.

“And what is the reason for this?

“It is because, Bhūmija, his approach is radically wise, for he is possessed and led by an understanding that is genuinely noble and correct in its motive, which makes it possible for him to extract some fresh butter, in that manner.

“And so it is, Bhūmija, with those recluses, religious practitioners, and brahmins who live and practice The Holy Life, regardless if they have indeed vowed and are determined to live The Holy Life, or not, so long as they are driven and motivated by Right View, Right intentions, Right communication, Right actions, Right livelihood, Right effort, Right mindfulness, and Right concentration, they certainly will attain its highest fruits.

B4. “Furthermore, Bhūmija, imagine there was a person in need of fire, and thus, he decides to go looking for it. While on his quest to obtain fire, he grabs a fire stick used for starting a fire, and rubs it against a dry and flammable piece of wood, that has not seen the rain for ages, as he begins rubbing the two together, with a fervently resolute consistency.

“Thus, by applying himself correctly and through his strong efforts, he surely succeeds in starting and building a fire for himself, regardless of having made a vow or determination to attain his goal.

“Similarly, by applying himself correctly and through his strong efforts, he surely succeeds in starting and building a fire for himself, regardless of not having made a vow or determination to attain his goal.

“Also, by applying himself correctly and through his strong efforts, he surely succeeds in starting and building a fire for himself, regardless of having made a vow or determination to attain his goal, or not.

“And, by applying himself correctly and through his strong efforts, he surely succeeds in starting and building a fire for himself, regardless of neither having made a vow or determination to attain his goal, nor not having made such a vow.

“And what is the reason for this?

“It is because, Bhūmija, his approach is radically wise, for he is possessed and led by an understanding that is genuinely noble and correct in its motive, which makes it possible for him to start and build a fire, in that manner.

“And so it is, Bhūmija, with such recluses, religious practitioners, and brahmins who live and practice The Holy Life, regardless if they have indeed vowed and are determined to live The Holy Life, or not, so long as they are driven and motivated by Right View, Right intentions, Right communication, Right actions, Right livelihood, Right effort, Right mindfulness, and Right concentration, they certainly will attain its highest fruits.

“Therefore, Bhūmija, had you been able to offer these four similes to Prince Jayasena yourself, he would have not only gained confidence in The Tathāgata, as he did, but also in you, Bhūmija!”

“Indeed, Blessed Lord! But, how could it have been possible for me to offer these four excellent similes to Prince Jayasena myself, since they were just now uttered, and for the first time, by The Blessed One, who spoke these words that were neither spoken before, nor passed on from some other source; words that were truly inspired in the spur of the moment, which we all enjoyed listening to and have now learned here, from The Blessed One’s own lips!”

This is what the Blessed One said.

And the Venerable Bhūmija was satisfied in the words spoken to him by The Blessed One Himself, as he listened with delight.

Sādhū Sādhū Sādhū