MN 143 — Advice to Anāthapiṇḍika

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Text

Middle Discourses 143

Advice to Anāthapiṇḍika

So I have heard. At one time the Buddha was staying near Sāvatthī in Jeta's Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika's monastery.

Now at that time the householder Anāthapiṇḍika was sick, suffering, gravely ill. Then he addressed a man, "Please, my man, go to the Buddha, and in my name bow with your head to his feet. Say to him: 'Sir, the householder Anāthapiṇḍika is sick, suffering, gravely ill. He bows with his head to your feet.' Then go to Venerable Sāriputta, and in my name bow with your head to his feet. Say to him: 'Sir, the householder Anāthapiṇḍika is sick, suffering, gravely ill. He bows with his head to your feet.' And then say: 'Sir, please visit him at his home out of sympathy.'"

"Yes, sir," that man replied. He did as Anāthapiṇḍika asked. Sāriputta consented with silence.

Then Venerable Sāriputta robed up and, taking his bowl and robe, went with Venerable Ānanda as his second monk to Anāthapiṇḍika's home. He sat down on the seat spread out and said to Anāthapiṇḍika, "I hope you're keeping well, householder, I hope you're all right. I hope your pain is fading, not growing; that its fading is evident, not its growing."

"I'm not keeping well, Honorable Sāriputta, I'm not getting by. My pain is terrible and growing, not fading; its growing is evident, not its fading. The winds piercing my head are so severe, it feels like a strong man drilling into my head with a sharp point. The pain in my head is so severe, it feels like a strong man tightening a strong leather strap around my head. The winds slicing my belly are so severe, like a deft butcher or their apprentice were slicing open a cow's belly with a sharp meat cleaver. The burning in my body is so severe, it feels like two strong men grabbing a weaker man by the arms to burn and scorch him on a pit of glowing coals. That's how severe the burning is in my body. I'm not keeping well, Honorable Sāriputta, I'm not getting by. My pain is terrible and growing, not fading; its growing is evident, not its fading."

"That's why, householder, you should train like this: 'I shall not grasp the eye, and there shall be no consciousness of mine dependent on the eye.' That's how you should train.

You should train like this: 'I shall not grasp the ear, and there shall be no consciousness of mine dependent on the ear.' …

‘I shall not grasp the nose, and there shall be no consciousness of mine dependent on the nose.’ …

‘I shall not grasp the tongue, and there shall be no consciousness of mine dependent on the tongue.’ …

‘I shall not grasp the body, and there shall be no consciousness of mine dependent on the body.’ …

‘I shall not grasp the mind, and there shall be no consciousness of mine dependent on the mind.’ That’s how you should train.

You should train like this: ‘I shall not grasp sight, and there shall be no consciousness of mine dependent on sight.’ … ‘I shall not grasp sound … smell … taste … touch … idea, and there shall be no consciousness of mine dependent on idea.’ That’s how you should train.

You should train like this: ‘I shall not grasp eye consciousness, and there shall be no consciousness of mine dependent on eye consciousness.’ … ‘I shall not grasp ear consciousness … nose consciousness … tongue consciousness … body consciousness … mind consciousness, and there shall be no consciousness of mine dependent on mind consciousness.’ That’s how you should train.

You should train like this: ‘I shall not grasp eye contact … ear contact … nose contact … tongue contact … body contact … mind contact, and there shall be no consciousness of mine dependent on mind contact.’ That’s how you should train.

You should train like this: ‘I shall not grasp feeling born of eye contact … feeling born of ear contact … feeling born of nose contact … feeling born of tongue contact … feeling born of body contact … feeling born of mind contact, and there shall be no consciousness of mine dependent on the feeling born of mind contact.’ That’s how you should train.

You should train like this: ‘I shall not grasp the earth element … water element … fire element … air element … space element … consciousness element, and there shall be no consciousness of mine dependent on the consciousness element.’ That’s how you should train.

You should train like this: ‘I shall not grasp form … feeling … perception … choices … consciousness, and there shall be no consciousness of mine dependent on consciousness.’ That’s how you should train.

You should train like this: ‘I shall not grasp the dimension of infinite space … the dimension of infinite consciousness … the dimension of nothingness … the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception, and there shall be no consciousness of mine dependent on the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception.’ That’s how you should train.

You should train like this: ‘I shall not grasp this world, and there shall be no consciousness of mine dependent on this world.’ That’s how you should train.

You should train like this: ‘I shall not grasp the other world, and there shall be no consciousness of mine dependent on the other world.’ That’s how you should train. You

should train like this: ‘I shall not grasp whatever is seen, heard, thought, known, attained, sought, and explored by my mind, and my consciousness will not have that as support.’ That’s how you should train.”

When he said this, Anāthapiṇḍika cried and burst out in tears. Venerable Ānanda said to him, “Are you failing, householder? Are you fading, householder?”

“No, Honorable Ānanda. But for a long time I have paid homage to the Buddha and the esteemed mendicants. Yet I have never before heard such a Dhamma talk.”

“Householder, such Dhamma talk does not strike when teaching white-clothed laypeople. Rather, it strikes when teaching those gone forth.”

“Well then, Honorable Sāriputta, let such Dhamma talk strike when teaching white-clothed laypeople as well! There are gentlemen with little dust in their eyes. They’re in decline because they haven’t heard the teaching. There will be those who understand the teaching!”

And when the venerables Sāriputta and Ānanda had given the householder Anāthapiṇḍika this advice they rose from their seats and left. Not long after they had left, Anāthapiṇḍika passed away and was reborn in the host of joyful gods.

Then, late at night, the glorious godling Anāthapiṇḍika, lighting up the entire Jeta’s Grove, went up to the Buddha, bowed, stood to one side, and addressed the Buddha in verse:

“This is indeed that Jeta’s Grove,

frequented by the Saṅgha of seers,

where the King of Dhamma stayed:

it brings me joy!

Deeds, knowledge, and principle;

ethical conduct, an excellent livelihood;

by these are mortals purified,

not by clan or wealth.

That’s why an astute person,

seeing what’s good for themselves,

would examine the teaching rationally,

that’s how they become purified in that.

Sāriputta is full of wisdom,

ethics, and peace.

Even a mendicant who has crossed over

might at best equal him.”

That is what the godling Anāthapiṇḍika said, and the Teacher concurred. Then the godling Anāthapiṇḍika, knowing that the Teacher concurred, bowed and respectfully circled the Buddha, keeping him on his right, before vanishing right there.

Then, when the night had passed, the Buddha told the mendicants all that had happened.

When he had spoken, Venerable Ānanda said to the Buddha:

“Sir, that godling must surely have been Anāthapiṇḍika. For the householder Anāthapiṇḍika was devoted to Venerable Sāriputta.”

“Good, good, Ānanda. You’ve reached the logical conclusion, as far as logic goes. For that was indeed the godling Anāthapiṇḍika.”

That is what the Buddha said. Satisfied, Venerable Ānanda approved what the Buddha said.