MN 144 — Advice to Channa

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Text

Middle Discourses 144

Advice to Channa

So I have heard. At one time the Buddha was staying near Rājagaha in the Bamboo Grove, the squirrels' feeding ground.

Now at that time the venerables Sāriputta, Mahācunda, and Channa were staying on the Vulture's Peak Mountain.

Now at that time Venerable Channa was sick, suffering, gravely ill.

Then in the late afternoon, Venerable Sāriputta came out of retreat, went to Venerable Mahācunda and said to him, "Come, Reverend Cunda, let's go to see Venerable Channa and ask about his illness."

"Yes, reverend," replied Mahācunda.

And then Sāriputta and Mahācunda went to see Channa and exchanged greetings with him. When the greetings and polite conversation were over, they sat down to one side. Then Sāriputta said to Channa, "I hope you're keeping well, Reverend Channa, I hope you're all right. I hope your pain is fading, not growing; that its fading is evident, not its growing."

"Reverend Sāriputta, I'm not keeping well, 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. I'm not keeping well, I'm not getting by. My pain is terrible and growing, not fading; its growing is evident, not its fading. Reverend Sāriputta, I shall commit suicide. I don't wish to live."

"Please don't commit suicide! Venerable Channa, keep going! We want you to keep going. If you don't have any suitable food, we'll find it for you. If you don't have suitable medicine, we'll find it for you. If you don't have a capable carer, we'll find one for you. Please don't commit suicide! Venerable Channa, keep going! We want you to keep going."

“Reverend Sāriputta, it’s not that I don’t have suitable food, or suitable medicine, or a capable carer. Moreover, for a long time now I have served the Teacher with love, not without love. For it is proper for a disciple to serve the Teacher with love, not without love. You should remember this: ‘The mendicant Channa will commit suicide blamelessly.’”

“I’d like to ask Venerable Channa about a certain point, if you’d take the time to answer.”

“Ask, Reverend Sāriputta. When I’ve heard it I’ll know.”

“Reverend Channa, do you regard the eye, eye consciousness, and things knowable by eye consciousness in this way: ‘This is mine, I am this, this is my self’? Do you regard the ear … nose … tongue … body … mind, mind consciousness, and things knowable by mind consciousness in this way: ‘This is mine, I am this, this is my self’?”

“Reverend Sāriputta, I regard the eye, eye consciousness, and things knowable by eye consciousness in this way: ‘This is not mine, I am not this, this is not my self.’ I regard the ear … nose … tongue … body … mind, mind consciousness, and things knowable by mind consciousness in this way: ‘This is not mine, I am not this, this is not my self’.”

“Reverend Channa, what have you seen, what have you directly known in these things that you regard them in this way: ‘This is not mine, I am not this, this is not my self’?”

“Reverend Sāriputta, after seeing cessation, after directly knowing cessation in these things I regard them in this way: ‘This is not mine, I am not this, this is not my self’.”

When he said this, Venerable Mahācunda said to Venerable Channa:

“So, Reverend Channa, you should regularly apply your mind to this instruction of the Buddha: ‘For the dependent there is quivering. For the independent there’s no quivering. When there’s no quivering, there is tranquility. When there is tranquility, there’s no inclination. When there’s no inclination, there’s no coming and going. When there’s no coming and going, there’s no passing away and reappearing. When there’s no passing away and reappearing, there’s no this life or the next or between the two. Just this is the end of suffering.’” And when the venerables Sāriputta and Mahācunda had given Venerable Channa this advice they rose from their seats and left.

Not long after those venerables had left, Venerable Channa committed suicide.

Then Sāriputta went up to the Buddha, bowed, sat down to one side, and said to him, “Sir, Venerable Channa has committed suicide. Where has he been reborn in his next life?”

“Sāriputta, didn’t the mendicant Channa declare his blamelessness to you personally?”

“Sir, there is a Vajjian village named Pubbajira. There Channa had families who were friendly, intimate, and hospitable.”

“The mendicant Channa did indeed have such families. But, Sāriputta, this is not enough for me to call someone ‘blameworthy’. When someone lays down this body and takes up another body, I call them ‘blameworthy’. But the mendicant Channa did no such thing. You should remember this: ‘The mendicant Channa committed suicide blamelessly.’”

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