MN 70 — MN 70 At Kīṭāgiri | Kīṭāgiri Sutta

English translation by Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu.

Source: https://www.dhammatalks.org/suttas/MN/MN70.html

Source revision: sha256:06db98f11dbe5b66e3b290b0f8bcaa44ec5f2fe3d1e1b74062fcf0baea044036

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Text

At Kīṭāgiri

Kīṭāgiri Sutta (MN 70)

I have heard that on one occasion the Blessed One was wandering on a tour of Kāsi with a large Saṅgha of monks. There he addressed the monks: “I abstain from the nighttime meal.1 As I am abstaining from the nighttime meal, I sense next-to-no illness, next-to-no affliction, lightness, strength, & comfortable abiding. Come, now. You, too, abstain from the nighttime meal. As you are abstaining from the nighttime meal, you, too, will sense next-to-no illness, next-to-no affliction, lightness, strength, & comfortable abiding.”

“As you say, lord,” the monks responded to him.

Then, as he was wandering by stages in Kāsi, the Blessed One eventually arrived at a Kāsi town called Kīṭāgiri. And there he stayed in the Kāsi town, Kīṭāgiri.

Now at that time the monks led by Assaji & Punabbasu2 were residing in Kīṭāgiri. Then a large number of monks went to them and, on arrival, said to them, "The Blessed One and the Saṅgha of monks abstain from the nighttime meal. As they are abstaining from the nighttime meal, they sense next-to-no illness, next-to-no affliction, lightness, strength, & comfortable abiding. Come now, friends. You, too, abstain from the nighttime meal. As you are abstaining from the nighttime meal, you, too, will sense next-to-no illness, next-to-no affliction, lightness, strength, & comfortable abiding."

When this was said, the monks led by Assaji & Punabbasu said to those monks, "Friends, we eat in the evening, in the morning, & in the wrong-time during the day. As we are eating in the evening, and in the morning, & in the wrong-time during the day, we sense next-to-no illness, next-to-no affliction, lightness, strength, & comfortable abiding. Why should we, abandoning what is immediately visible, chase after something subject to time? We will eat in the evening, in the morning, & in the wrong-time during the day."

When they were unable to convince the monks led by Assaji & Punabbasu, those monks went to the Blessed One [and told him what had happened].

Then the Blessed One told a certain monk, "Come, monk. In my name, call the monks led by Assaji & Punabbasu, saying, 'The Teacher calls you, friends.'"

"As you say, lord," the monk answered and, having gone to the monks led by Assaji & Punabbasu, on arrival he said, "The Teacher calls you, friends."

"As you say, friend," the monks led by Assaji & Punabbasu replied. Then they went to the Blessed One and, on arrival, having bowed down to him, sat to one side. As they were sitting there, the Blessed One said to him, "Is it true, monks, that a large number of monks went to you… and you said, '…Why should we, abandoning what is immediately visible, chase after something subject to time? We will eat in the evening, in the morning, & in the wrong-time during the day.'"

"Yes, lord."

"Monks, have you ever understood me to teach the Dhamma in this way: 'Whatever a person experiences—pleasant, painful, or neither-pleasant-nor-painful—his unskillful qualities decrease and his skillful qualities grow'?"

"No, lord."

"And haven't you understood me to teach the Dhamma in this way: 'For someone feeling a pleasant feeling of this sort, unskillful qualities grow and skillful qualities decrease. But there is the case where, for someone feeling a pleasant feeling of that sort, unskillful qualities decrease and skillful qualities grow. For someone feeling a painful feeling of this

sort, unskillful qualities grow and skillful qualities decrease. But there is the case where, for someone feeling a painful feeling of that sort, unskillful qualities decrease and skillful qualities grow. For someone feeling a neither-pleasant-nor-painful feeling of this sort, unskillful qualities grow and skillful qualities decrease. But there is the case where, for someone feeling a neither-pleasant-nor-painful feeling of that sort, unskillful qualities decrease and skillful qualities grow.'"

"Yes, lord."

"Good, monks. And if it were not known by me—not seen, not observed, not realized, not touched through discernment—that 'For someone feeling a pleasant feeling of this sort, unskillful qualities grow and skillful qualities decrease,' then would it be fitting for me, not knowing that, to say, 'Abandon that sort of pleasant feeling'?"

"No, lord."

"But because it is known by me—seen, observed, realized, touched through discernment—that 'For someone feeling a pleasant feeling of this sort, unskillful qualities grow and skillful qualities decrease,' I therefore say, 'Abandon that sort of pleasant feeling.'

"If it were not known by me—not seen, not observed, not realized, not touched through discernment—that 'For someone feeling a pleasant feeling of this sort, unskillful qualities decrease and skillful qualities grow,' then would it be fitting for me, not knowing that, to say, 'Enter & remain in that sort of pleasant feeling'?"

"No, lord."

"But because it is known by me—seen, observed, realized, touched through discernment—that 'For someone feeling a pleasant feeling of this sort, unskillful qualities decrease and skillful qualities grow,' I therefore say, 'Enter & remain in that sort of pleasant feeling.'

[Similarly for painful feelings and neither-pleasant-nor-painful feelings.]

"Monks, I don't say of all monks that they have a task to do with heedfulness; nor do I say of all monks that they have no task to do with heedfulness.

"Monks who are arahants, whose mental effluents are ended, who have reached fulfillment, done the task, laid down the burden, attained the true goal, totally destroyed the fetter of becoming, and who are released through right gnosis: I don't say of them that they have a task to do with heedfulness. Why is that? They have done their task with heedfulness. They are incapable of being heedless. But as for monks in higher training, who have not yet reached their hearts' goal, who still aspire for the unexcelled freedom from bondage: I say of them that they have a task to do with heedfulness. Why is that? (I think:) 'Perhaps these venerable ones, when making use of suitable resting places,

associating with admirable friends, balancing their (mental) faculties,3 will reach & remain in the supreme goal of the holy life for which clansmen rightly go forth from home into homelessness, knowing & realizing it for themselves in the here & now.' Envisioning this fruit of heedfulness for these monks, I say that they have a task to do with heedfulness.

"Monks, there are these seven individuals to be found in the world. Which seven? One (released) both ways, one released through discernment, a bodily witness, one attained to view, one released through conviction, a Dhamma-follower, and a conviction-follower.

"And what is the individual (released) both ways? There is the case where a certain individual remains touching with his body those peaceful liberations that transcend form, that are formless, and—having seen with discernment—his effluents are ended. This is called an individual (released) both ways.4 Regarding this monk, I do not say that he has a task to do with heedfulness. Why is that? He has done his task with heedfulness. He is incapable of being heedless.

"And what is the individual released through discernment? There is the case where a certain individual does not remain touching with his body those peaceful liberations that transcend form, that are formless, but—having seen with discernment—his effluents are ended. This is called an individual who is released through discernment.5 Regarding this monk, I do not say that he has a task to do with heedfulness. Why is that? He has done his task with heedfulness. He is incapable of being heedless.

"And what is the individual who is a bodily witness? There is the case where a certain individual remains touching with his body those peaceful liberations that transcend form, that are formless, and—having seen with discernment—some of his effluents are ended. This is called an individual who is a bodily witness.6 Regarding this monk, I say that he has a task to do with heedfulness. Why is that? (I think:) 'Perhaps this venerable one, when making use of suitable resting places, associating with admirable friends, balancing his (mental) faculties, will reach & remain in the supreme goal of the holy life for which clansmen rightly go forth from home into homelessness, knowing & realizing it for himself in the here & now.' Envisioning this fruit of heedfulness for this monk, I say that he has a task to do with heedfulness.

"And what is the individual attained to view? There is the case where a certain individual does not remain touching with his body those peaceful liberations that transcend form, that are formless, but—having seen with discernment—some of his effluents are ended, and he has reviewed & examined with discernment the qualities (or: teachings) proclaimed by the Tathāgata. This is called an individual who is attained to view.7 Regarding this monk, I say that he has a task to do with heedfulness. Why is that? (I think:) 'Perhaps this venerable one, when making use of suitable resting places, associating with admirable friends, balancing his (mental) faculties, will reach & remain in the supreme goal of the holy life for which clansmen rightly go forth from home into homelessness, knowing & realizing it for himself in the here & now.' Envisioning this fruit of heedfulness for this monk, I say that he has a task to do with heedfulness.

“And what is the individual released through conviction? There is the case where a certain individual does not remain touching with his body those peaceful liberations that transcend form, that are formless, but—having seen with discernment—some of his effluents are ended, and his conviction in the Tathāgata is settled, rooted, and established. This is called an individual who is released through conviction. Regarding this monk, I say that he has a task to do with heedfulness. Why is that? (I think:) ‘Perhaps this venerable one, when making use of suitable resting places, associating with admirable friends, balancing his (mental) faculties, will reach & remain in the supreme goal of the holy life for which clansmen rightly go forth from home into homelessness, knowing & realizing it for himself in the here & now.’ Envisioning this fruit of heedfulness for this monk, I say that he has a task to do with heedfulness.

“And what is the individual who is a Dhamma-follower? There is the case where a certain individual does not remain touching with his body those peaceful liberations that transcend form, that are formless, nor—having seen with discernment—are his effluents ended. But with a (sufficient) measure of reflection through discernment he has come to an agreement with the teachings proclaimed by the Tathāgata. And he has these qualities: the faculty of conviction, the faculty of persistence, the faculty of mindfulness, the faculty of concentration, & the faculty of discernment. This is called an individual who is a Dhamma-follower.8 Regarding this monk, I say that he has a task to do with heedfulness. Why is that? (I think:) ‘Perhaps this venerable one, when making use of suitable resting places, associating with admirable friends, balancing his (mental) faculties, will reach & remain in the supreme goal of the holy life for which clansmen rightly go forth from home into homelessness, knowing & realizing it for himself in the here & now.’ Envisioning this fruit of heedfulness for this monk, I say that he has a task to do with heedfulness.

“And what is the individual who is a conviction-follower? There is the case where a certain individual does not remain touching with his body those peaceful liberations that transcend form, that are formless, nor—having seen with discernment—are his effluents ended. But he has a (sufficient) measure of conviction in & love for the Tathāgata. And he has these qualities: the faculty of conviction, the faculty of persistence, the faculty of mindfulness, the faculty of concentration, & the faculty of discernment. This is called an individual who is a conviction-follower. Regarding this monk, I say that he has a task to do with heedfulness. Why is that? (I think:) ‘Perhaps this venerable one, when making use of suitable resting places, associating with admirable friends, balancing his (mental) faculties, will reach & remain in the supreme goal of the holy life for which clansmen rightly go forth from home into homelessness, knowing & realizing it for himself in the here & now.’ Envisioning this fruit of heedfulness for this monk, I say that he has a task to do with heedfulness.

“Monks, I do not say that the attainment of gnosis is all at once. Rather, the attainment of gnosis is after gradual training, gradual action, gradual practice. And how is there the attainment of gnosis after gradual training, gradual action, gradual practice? There is the case where, when conviction has arisen, one visits (a teacher). Having visited, one grows close. Having grown close, one lends ear. Having lent ear, one hears the Dhamma. Having heard the Dhamma, one remembers it. Remembering, one penetrates the meaning of the

teachings. Penetrating the meaning, one comes to an agreement through pondering the teachings. There being an agreement through pondering the teachings, desire arises. When desire has arisen, one is willing. When one is willing, one contemplates. Having contemplated, one makes an exertion. Having made an exertion, one realizes with the body the ultimate truth and, having penetrated it with discernment, sees it.9

“Now, monks, there hasn’t been that conviction, there hasn’t been that visiting, there hasn’t been that growing close… that lending ear… that hearing of the Dhamma… that remembering… that penetration of the meaning of the teachings… that agreement through pondering the teachings… that desire… that willingness… that contemplation… that exertion. You have lost the way, monks. You have gone the wrong way, monks. How far have you strayed, foolish men, from this Dhamma & Discipline!

“Monks, there is a four-phrased statement that, when it is recited, an observant man will in no long time learn the meaning through discernment. I will recite it, and you learn it from me.”

“But, lord, who are we to be learners of the Dhamma?”

“Monks, even with a teacher devoted to material things, an heir of material things, who lives attached to material things, this sort of haggling (by his students) wouldn’t be proper: ‘If we get this, we’ll do it; if we don’t, we won’t.’ So how could it be with regard to the Tathāgata, who dwells entirely detached from material things?

“For a disciple who has conviction in the Teacher’s message & lives to penetrate it, what accords with the Dhamma is this: ‘The Blessed One is the Teacher, I am a disciple. He is the one who knows, not I.’ For a disciple who has conviction in the Teacher’s message & lives to penetrate it, the Teacher’s message is healing & nourishing. For a disciple who has conviction in the Teacher’s message & lives to penetrate it, what accords with the Dhamma is this: ‘Gladly would I let the flesh & blood in my body dry up, leaving just the skin, tendons, & bones, but if I have not attained what can be reached through manly firmness, manly persistence, manly striving, there will be no relaxing my persistence.’ For a disciple who has conviction in the Teacher’s message & lives to penetrate it, one of two fruits can be expected: either gnosis here & now, or—if there be any remnant of clinging-sustenance—non-return.”

That is what the Blessed One said. Gratified, the monks delighted in the Blessed One’s words.

Notes

1. Pācittiya 37 forbids monks from eating during the period from noon until the following dawn. According to MN 66, the Buddha introduced this restriction in stages, first forbidding the afternoon meal, and then the nighttime meal.

2. Assaji and Punabbasu were two of the six ringleaders of the notorious “group-of-six” monks, whose misbehavior led to the formulation of many rules in the Vinaya. (The group is named after the number of ringleaders, not the number of members, which—according to the Commentary—reached more than one thousand.) In the origin story to Saṅghādisesa 13, the monks led by Assaji and Punabbasu behaved in many inappropriate ways to please the lay families of Kīṭāgiri, to the point where the Kīṭāgiri laypeople ridiculed well-behaved monks and refused to give them alms.

The Pali phrase for “monks led by Assaji and Punabbasu” is assaji-punabbasukā bhikkhū. Both MLS and MLDB mistakenly treat this phrase as the names of two monks, Assaji and Punabbasuka. Actually, the –kā at the end of the compound name is a suffix that converts it into an adjective, describing a group following Assaji and Punabbasu.

3. On the mental faculties, see SN 48:10. On heedfulness, see SN 48:56 and SN 55:40.

4. See DN 15 and AN 9:45.

5. See AN 9:44.

6. See AN 9:43. According to the Commentary, this category includes all noble ones (except for those who have reached the fruit of arahantship) who have also attained any of the formless dimensions.

7. According to the Commentary, this category and the following one include all noble ones (except for those who have reached the fruit of arahantship) who have not attained any of the formless dimensions.

8. According to the Commentary, this category and the following one include those who have reached the path to stream-entry, but not yet the fruit of stream-entry.

9. The steps of the practice, as presented here, follow the same sequence as that discussed in MN 95. However, in that sutta, the sequence is prefaced by instructions on how to determine whether a teacher is worthy of conviction.

Publisher references (not part of the sutta)

See also: MN 22; MN 27; MN 95; SN 25:1–10; SN 48:44; SN 55:25, AN 3:66; AN 3:87–88; AN 4:131