# SN 16.11 — SN 16:11 The Robe | Cīvara Sutta

English translation by Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu.

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## Text

The Robe

Cīvara Sutta (SN 16:11)

On one occasion Ven. Mahā Kassapa was staying near Rājagaha in the Bamboo Forest, the Squirrels’ Sanctuary. And on that occasion Ven. Ānanda was wandering on a wandering tour of the Southern Mountains with a large Saṅgha of monks. And at that time approximately thirty of his student monks—mainly youngsters—renounced the training and returned to the lower life.

Then Ven. Ānanda, having wandered on his wandering tour of the Southern Mountains as long as he wanted, went to the Bamboo Forest, the Squirrels’ Sanctuary near Rājagaha, and went to Ven. Mahā Kassapa. On arrival, having bowed down to Ven. Mahā Kassapa, he

sat to one side. As he was sitting there, Ven. Mahā Kassapa said to him, "Ānanda my friend, how many motive reasons did the Blessed One have for formulating (the training rule on) three-monk meals among families?"1

"Venerable Kassapa,2 the Blessed One had three motive reasons for formulating (the training rule on) three-monk meals among families: for restraining ill-behaved people and for the comfortable abiding of well-behaved monks; 'may those of evil wishes, relying on factions, not create a schism in the Saṅgha'; and out of sympathy for families. It was for these three motive reasons that the Blessed One formulated (the training rule on) three-monk meals among families."

"Then why, Ānanda my friend, are you wandering around with these new monks unguarded in their sense faculties, not knowing moderation in food, and not devoted to wakefulness? You wander around destroying crops, as it were. You wander around destroying families, as it were. Your assembly is falling apart, Ānanda my friend. Your following is slipping away, and this youngster doesn't know his measure."

"But, Venerable Kassapa, gray hairs are growing on my head. Can't we escape even today being called a youngster by Venerable Mahā Kassapa?"

"Ānanda my friend, it's precisely because you are wandering around with these new monks unguarded in their sense faculties, not knowing moderation in food, and not devoted to wakefulness. You wander around destroying crops, as it were. You wander around destroying families, as it were. Your assembly is falling apart, Ānanda my friend. Your following is slipping away, and this youngster doesn't know his measure."

Thullanandā the nun3 heard, "Master Mahā Kassapa has disparaged Master Ānanda, the Vedeha sage, calling him a youngster!" Displeased, she expressed her displeasure: "How can Master Mahā Kassapa, formerly the member of another sect, suppose that he can disparage Master Ānanda, the Vedeha sage, calling him a youngster?"

Ven. Mahā Kassapa heard Thullanandā the nun making this statement, so he said to Ven. Ānanda, "Surely, Ānanda my friend, Thullanandā the nun made that statement hastily & without reflecting. Ever since shaving off my hair & beard, putting on the ochre robe, and going forth from the household life into homelessness, I don't recall dedicating myself to any other teacher aside from the Blessed One, the Worthy One, the Rightly Self-awakened One.

"Before, when I was still a householder, the thought occurred to me: 'Household life is confining, a dusty path. Life gone forth is the open air. It isn't easy, living at home, to practice the holy life totally perfect, totally pure, a polished shell. What if I, having shaved off my hair & beard and putting on the ochre robe, were to go forth from the household life into homelessness?'

"So at a later time, having made4 an outer cloak of patches, having dedicated myself to those who were Worthy Ones in the world, I shaved off my hair & beard, put on the ochre

robe, and went forth from the household life into homelessness.

“Having thus gone forth, I was traveling along a road when I saw the Blessed One sitting by the Bahuputta (ManySon) Shrine between Rājagaha & Nālandā. On seeing him, the thought occurred to me, ‘If I would see my Teacher, it is this Blessed One I would see! If I would see One Well-gone, it is this Blessed One I would see! If I would see a Rightly Self-awakened One, it is this Blessed One I would see!’ So prostrating myself right there at the Blessed One’s feet, I said, ‘The Blessed One is my teacher! I am the Blessed One’s disciple! The Blessed One is my teacher! I am the Blessed One’s disciple!’

“When this was said, the Blessed One said to me, ‘Kassapa, if anyone not knowing were to say, “I know,” or not seeing were to say, “I see,” to a disciple who is so focused with his entire awareness [as you],5 his head would split open. But it’s truly knowing that I say, “I know,” truly seeing that I say, “I see.”

“‘Therefore, Kassapa, you should train yourself: “A fierce sense of shame & compunction will be established in me with regard to the elders, those newly ordained, and those of middling standing.” That’s how you should train yourself.

“‘And you should train yourself, “Whatever Dhamma I hear that is connected with what is skillful, I will listen to the Dhamma receptive, attentive, focusing my entire awareness, lending ear.” That’s how you should train yourself.

“‘And you should train yourself, “I will never forsake my mindfulness immersed in the body connected with joy.”6 That’s how you should train yourself.”

“Then, having exhorted me with this exhortation, the Blessed One got up from his seat and left. For just seven days I ate the almsfood of the countryside as a debtor,7 but on the eighth day gnosis [the knowledge of arahantship] arose.

“Then the Blessed One went down from the road and sat at the root of a tree. So, having set out my outer robe of patches folded into four, I said to the Blessed One, ‘Lord, may the Blessed One sit here. That would be for my long-term welfare & happiness.’ The Blessed One sat down on the seat laid out.

“Seated, he said to me, ‘It’s soft, Kassapa, your outer robe of patches.’

“‘May the Blessed One take my outer robe of patches, out of sympathy.’

“‘But will you wear my robe of cast-off hempen rags?’

“‘Lord, I will wear the Blessed One’s robe of cast-off hempen rags.’

“So I offered the Blessed One my outer robe of patches and received from him his robe of cast-off hempen rags.

“Ānanda, my friend, if one were to rightly say, ‘a child, a son of the Blessed One, born of his mouth, born of the Dhamma, created by the Dhamma, an heir to the Dhamma, a receiver of his robe of cast-off hempen rags,’ one would be rightly saying it of me: ‘a child, a son of the Blessed One, born of his mouth, born of the Dhamma, created by the Dhamma, an heir to the Dhamma, a receiver of his robe of cast-off hempen rags.’

“Ānanda, my friend, to whatever extent I wish, quite secluded from sensuality, secluded from unskillful qualities, I enter & remain in the first jhāna: rapture & pleasure born of seclusion, accompanied by directed thought & evaluation.

“To whatever extent I wish, with the stilling of directed thoughts & evaluations, I enter & remain in the second jhāna: rapture & pleasure born of concentration, unification of awareness free from directed thought & evaluation—internal assurance.

“To whatever extent I wish, with the fading of rapture I remain equanimous, mindful, & alert, and sense pleasure with the body. I enter & remain in the third jhāna, of which the noble ones declare, ‘Equanimous & mindful, one has a pleasant abiding.’

“To whatever extent I wish, with the abandoning of pleasure & pain—as with the earlier disappearance of elation & distress—I enter & remain in the fourth jhāna: purity of equanimity & mindfulness, neither pleasure nor pain.

“To whatever extent I wish, with the complete transcending of perceptions of (physical) form, with the disappearance of perceptions of resistance, and not attending to perceptions of multiplicity, (perceiving,) ‘Infinite space,’ I enter & remain in the dimension of the infinitude of space.

“To whatever extent I wish, with the complete transcending of the dimension of the infinitude of space, (perceiving,) ‘Infinite consciousness,’ I enter & remain in the dimension of the infinitude of consciousness.

“To whatever extent I wish, with the complete transcending of the dimension of the infinitude of consciousness, (perceiving,) ‘There is nothing,’ I enter & remain in the dimension of nothingness.

“To whatever extent I wish, with the complete transcending of the dimension of nothingness, I enter & remain in the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception.

“To whatever extent I wish, with the complete transcending of the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception, I enter & remain in the cessation of perception & feeling.

“To whatever extent I wish, I experience manifold supranormal powers. Having been one I become many; having been many I become one. I appear. I vanish. I go unimpeded through walls, ramparts, & mountains as if through space. I dive in & out of the earth as if it were water. I walk on water without sinking as if it were dry land. Sitting cross-legged, I fly through the air like a winged bird. With my hand I touch & stroke even the sun & moon,

so mighty & powerful. I exercise influence with my body even as far as the Brahmā worlds.

"To whatever extent I wish, I hear—by means of the divine ear-element, purified & surpassing the human—both kinds of sounds: divine & human, whether near or far.

"To whatever extent I wish, I know the awareness of other beings, other individuals, having encompassed it with my own awareness. I discern a mind with passion as 'a mind with passion,' and a mind without passion as 'a mind without passion.' I discern a mind with aversion as 'a mind with aversion,' and a mind without aversion as 'a mind without aversion.' I discern a mind with delusion as 'a mind with delusion,' and a mind without delusion as 'a mind without delusion.' I discern a restricted mind as 'a restricted mind,' and a scattered mind as 'a scattered mind.' I discern an enlarged mind as 'an enlarged mind,' and an unenlarged mind as 'an unenlarged mind.' I discern a surpassed mind [one that is not at the most excellent level] as 'a surpassed mind,' and an unsurpassed mind as 'an unsurpassed mind.' I discern a concentrated mind as 'a concentrated mind,' and an unconcentrated mind as 'an unconcentrated mind.' I discern a released mind as 'a released mind,' and an unreleased mind as 'an unreleased mind.'

"To whatever extent I wish, I recollect my manifold past lives [lit: previous homes], i.e., one birth, two births, three births, four, five, ten, twenty, thirty, forty, fifty, one hundred, one thousand, one hundred thousand, many eons of cosmic contraction, many eons of cosmic expansion, many eons of cosmic contraction & expansion, (recollecting,) 'There I had such a name, belonged to such a clan, had such an appearance. Such was my food, such my experience of pleasure & pain, such the end of my life. Passing away from that state, I re-arose there. There too I had such a name, belonged to such a clan, had such an appearance. Such was my food, such my experience of pleasure & pain, such the end of my life. Passing away from that state, I re-arose here.' Thus I remember my manifold past lives in their modes & details.

"To whatever extent I wish, I see—by means of the divine eye, purified & surpassing the human—beings passing away & re-appearing, and I discern how they are inferior & superior, beautiful & ugly, fortunate & unfortunate in accordance with their kamma: 'These beings—who were endowed with bad conduct of body, speech, & mind, who reviled the noble ones, held wrong views and undertook actions under the influence of wrong views—with the break-up of the body, after death, have re-appeared in a plane of deprivation, a bad destination, a lower realm, hell. But these beings—who were endowed with good conduct of body, speech, & mind, who did not revile the noble ones, who held right views and undertook actions under the influence of right views—with the break-up of the body, after death, have re-appeared in a good destination, a heavenly world.' Thus—by means of the divine eye, purified & surpassing the human—I see beings passing away & re-appearing, and I discern how they are inferior & superior, beautiful & ugly, fortunate & unfortunate in accordance with their kamma.

"Through the ending of the effluents—I enter & remain in the effluent-free awareness-release & discernment-release, having directly known & realized them for myself right in the here & now.

“Ānanda, my friend, one might as well suppose that an elephant seven or seven and a half cubits tall could be concealed with a palm leaf as that my six higher knowledges could be concealed.”

But Thullanandā the nun fell away from the holy life.

Notes

1. This is a reference to Pācittiya 32, the rule that forbids groups of more than three monks from receiving personal invitations to meals, except on certain occasions. See The Buddhist Monastic Code, Volume I, Chapter Eight.

2. The fact that Ven. Ānanda addressed Ven. Mahā Kassapa as “venerable” (bhante) indicates that this conversation took place after the Buddha’s parinibbāna. See DN 16.

3. A nun who made life difficult for her fellow nuns and for the monks, Thullanandā was the instigator of many situations that the led the Buddha to lay down rules for the nuns.

4. Reading karitvā with the Thai and Sri Lankan editions. The Burmese edition has karetvā, “having had made.”

5. Reading sabbacetaso samannāhataṁ with the Thai edition. The Burmese and Sri Lankan editions read, sabbecetasā samanāgataṁ, “endowed with entire awareness.”

6. According to the Commentary, this refers to contemplation of the unattractiveness of the body and mindfulness of breathing, in that these are the two forms of mindfulness immersed in the body that can lead at least to the first jhāna. However, AN 4:163 lists contemplation of the unattractiveness of the body as a painful practice, so it’s more likely that the Buddha here is referring primarily to mindfulness of breathing and to any of the more pleasant forms of mindfulness immersed in the body. See MN 118 and MN 119.

7. Only arahants eat almsfood without incurring a debt to the donors. See MN 86, SN 6:1, and AN 6:45.

## Publisher references (not part of the sutta)

See also: DN 16