SN 55.54 — SN 55:54 Ill | Gilāna Sutta

English translation by Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu.

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Text

Ill

Gilāna Sutta (SN 55:54)

On one occasion the Blessed One was staying among the Sakyans at Kapilavatthu in the Banyan Park. Now at that time many monks were at work making robes for the Blessed One, (thinking,) “When the robes are finished, at the end of the three months, the Blessed One will set out wandering.”

Mahānāma the Sakyan heard that many monks were at work making robes for the Blessed One, (thinking,) “When the robes are finished, at the end of the three months, the Blessed One will set out wandering.” So he approached the Blessed One and, on arrival, having bowed down, sat to one side. As he was sitting there he said to the Blessed One: “I have

heard that many monks are at work making robes for the Blessed One, (thinking,) 'When the robes are finished, at the end of the three months, the Blessed One will set out wandering.' But I haven't heard in the Blessed One's presence, haven't learned in the Blessed One's presence, how a discerning lay follower who is diseased, in pain, severely ill should be instructed by (another) discerning lay follower."

"Mahānāma, a discerning lay follower1 who is diseased, in pain, severely ill should be reassured by another discerning lay follower with four reassurances: 'Be reassured, friend, that you are endowed with verified confidence in the Awakened One: "Indeed, the Blessed One is worthy & rightly self-awakened, consummate in clear-knowing & conduct, well-gone, an expert with regard to the cosmos, unexcelled trainer of people fit to be tamed, teacher of devas & human beings, awakened, blessed."

"'Be reassured, friend, that you have verified confidence in the Dhamma: "The Dhamma is well taught by the Blessed One, to be seen here & now, timeless, inviting verification, pertinent, to be experienced by the observant for themselves."

"'Be reassured, friend, that you have verified confidence in the Saṅgha: "The Saṅgha of the Blessed One's disciples who have practiced well... who have practiced straight-forwardly... who have practiced methodically... who have practiced masterfully—in other words, the four pairs, the eight individuals—they are the Saṅgha of the Blessed One's disciples: deserving of gifts, deserving of hospitality, deserving of offerings, deserving of respect, the incomparable field of merit for the world."

"'Be reassured, friend, that you have virtues that are appealing to the noble ones: untorn, unbroken, unspotted, unsplattered, liberating, praised by the observant, ungrasped at, leading to concentration.'

"Mahānāma, when a discerning lay follower who is diseased, in pain, severely ill has been reassured by another discerning lay follower with these four reassurances, he should be asked: 'Friend, are you concerned for your mother & father?' If he should say, 'I am concerned for my mother & father,' he should be told, 'You, my dear friend, are subject to death. If you feel concern for your mother & father, you're still going to die. If you don't feel concern for your mother & father, you're still going to die. It would be good if you abandoned concern for your mother & father.'

"If he should say, 'My concern for my mother & father has been abandoned,' he should be asked, 'Friend, are you concerned for your wife & children?' If he should say, 'I am concerned for my wife & children,' he should be told, 'You, my dear friend, are subject to death. If you feel concern for your wife & children, you're still going to die. If you don't feel concern for your wife & children, you're still going to die. It would be good if you abandoned concern for your wife & children.'

"If he should say, 'My concern for my wife & children has been abandoned,' he should be asked, 'Friend, are you concerned for the five strings of human sensuality?' If he should say, 'I am concerned for the five strings of human sensuality,' he should be told, 'Friend,

divine sensual pleasures are more splendid & more refined than human sensual pleasures. It would be good if, having raised your mind above human sensual pleasures, you set it on the Devas of the Four Great Kings.'

"If he should say, 'My mind is raised above human sensual pleasures and is set on the Devas of the Four Great Kings,' he should be told, 'Friend, the Devas of the Thirty-three are more splendid & more refined than the Devas of the Four Great Kings. It would be good if, having raised your mind above the Devas of the Four Great Kings, you set it on the Devas of the Thirty-three.'

"If he should say, 'My mind is raised above the Devas of the Four Great Kings and is set on the Devas of the Thirty-three,' he should be told, 'Friend, the Devas of the Hours are more splendid & more refined than the Devas of the Thirty-three. It would be good if, having raised your mind above the Devas of the Thirty-three, you set it on the Devas of the Hours.'

"If he should say, 'My mind is raised above the Devas of the Thirty-three and is set on the Devas of the Hours,' he should be told, 'Friend, the Contented Devas are more splendid & more refined than the Devas of the Hours... the Devas Delighting in Creation are more splendid & more refined than the Contented Devas... the Devas [Muses?] Wielding Power over the Creations of Others are more splendid & more refined than the Devas Delighting in Creation... the Brahmā world is more splendid and more refined than the Devas Wielding Power over the Creations of Others. It would be good if, having raised your mind above the Devas Wielding Power over the Creations of Others, you set it on the Brahmā world.'

"If he should say, 'My mind is raised above the Devas Wielding Power over the Creations of Others and is set on the Brahmā world,' he should be told, 'Friend, even the Brahmā world is inconstant, impermanent, included in self-identity. It would be good if, having raised your mind above the Brahmā world, you brought it to the cessation of self-identity.'

"If he should say, 'My mind is raised above the Brahmā world and is brought to the cessation of self-identity,' then, I tell you, Mahānāma, there is no difference—in terms of release—between the release of that lay follower whose mind is released and the release of a monk whose mind is released."

Note

1. These four reassurances indicate that the "discerning lay follower" is at least a stream-enterer.

Publisher references (not part of the sutta)

See also: MN 97; MN 143; SN 22:88; AN 4:123; AN 4:125; AN 6:16