DN 25 — The Lion’s Roar at the Monastery of Lady Udumbarikā

English translation by Bhikkhu Sujato.
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Text

Long Discourses 25

The Lion’s Roar at the Monastery of Lady Udumbarikā

1. The Story of the Wanderer Nigrodha

So I have heard. At one time the Buddha was staying near Rājagaha, on the Vulture’s Peak Mountain.

Now at that time the wanderer Nigrodha was residing in the lady Udumbarikā’s monastery for wanderers, together with a large assembly of three thousand wanderers. Then the householder Sandhāna left Rājagaha in the middle of the day to see the Buddha.

Then it occurred to him, “It’s the wrong time to see the Buddha, as he’s in retreat. And it’s the wrong time to see the esteemed mendicants, as they’re in retreat. Why don’t I visit the wanderer Nigrodha at the lady Udumbarikā’s monastery for wanderers?” So he went to the monastery for the wanderers.

Now at that time, Nigrodha was sitting together with a large assembly of wanderers making an uproar, a colossal racket. They engaged in all kinds of low talk, such as talk about kings, bandits, and chief ministers; talk about armies, threats, and wars; talk about food, drink, clothes, and beds; talk about garlands and fragrances; talk about family, vehicles, villages, towns, cities, and countries; talk about women and heroes; talk at the street market and the place for water pots; talk about the departed; motley talk; tales of land and sea; and talk about being reborn in this or that place.

Nigrodha saw Sandhāna coming off in the distance, and hushed his own assembly: “Be quiet, good fellows, don’t make a sound. The householder Sandhāna, a disciple of the ascetic Gotama, is coming. He is included among the white-clothed lay disciples of the ascetic Gotama, who is residing near Rājagaha. Such venerables like the quiet, are educated to be quiet, and praise the quiet. Hopefully if he sees that our assembly is quiet he’ll see fit to approach.” Then those wanderers fell silent.

Then Sandhāna went up to the wanderer Nigrodha, and exchanged greetings with him. When the greetings and polite conversation were over, he sat down to one side and said to Nigrodha, “The way the wanderers make an uproar as they sit together and talk about all kinds of low topics is one thing. It’s quite different to the way the Buddha frequents remote lodgings in the wilderness and the forest that are quiet and still, far from the madding crowd, remote from human settlements, and fit for retreat.”

When Sandhāna said this, Nigrodha said to him, “Surely, householder, you should know better! With whom does the ascetic Gotama converse? With whom does he engage in discussion? With whom does he achieve lucidity of wisdom? Staying in empty huts has destroyed the ascetic Gotama’s wisdom. Not frequenting assemblies, he is unable to hold a discussion. He just lurks on the periphery. He’s just like a one-eyed cow, circling around and lurking on the periphery. Go on, householder! Were the ascetic Gotama to come to this assembly, I’d sink him with just one question! I’d tie him up like a hollow pot!”

With clairaudience that is purified and superhuman, the Buddha heard this discussion between the householder Sandhāna and the wanderer Nigrodha. Then the Buddha descended from Vulture’s Peak Mountain and went to the peacocks’ feeding ground on the bank of the Sumāgadhā, where he walked mindfully in the open air.

Nigrodha saw him, and hushed his own assembly: “Be quiet, good fellows, don’t make a sound. Here, the ascetic Gotama is walking mindfully on the bank of the Sumāgadhā. The venerable likes quiet and praises quiet. Hopefully if he sees that our assembly is quiet he’ll see fit to approach. If he comes, I’ll ask him this question: ‘Sir, what teaching do you use to guide your disciples, through which they claim solace in the fundamental goal of the spiritual life?’” Then those wanderers fell silent.

2. Mortification in Disgust of Sin

Then the Buddha went up to the wanderer Nigrodha, who said to him, “Let the Blessed One come, sir! Welcome to the Blessed One, sir! It’s been a long time since you took the opportunity to come here. Please, sir, sit down, here, a seat is ready.” The Buddha sat down on the seat spread out, while Nigrodha took a low seat and sat to one side. The Buddha said to him, “Nigrodha, what were you sitting talking about just now? What conversation was left unfinished?”

Nigrodha said, “Well, sir, I saw you walking mindfully and said: ‘If the ascetic Gotama comes, I’ll ask him this question: “Sir, what teaching do you use to guide your disciples, through which they claim solace in the fundamental goal of the spiritual life?”’ This is the conversation that was unfinished when the Buddha arrived.”

“It’s hard for you to understand this, Nigrodha, since you have a different view, creed, and belief, and another discipline and denomination. Please ask me a question about the higher disgust of sin in your own denomination: ‘How are the conditions for the fervent mortification in disgust of sin completed, and how are they incomplete?’”

When he said this, those wanderers made an uproar, “Oh lord, how incredible, how amazing! The ascetic Gotama has such power and might! For he sets aside his own doctrine and invites discussion on the doctrine of others!”

Then Nigrodha, having quieted those wanderers, said to the Buddha, “Sir, we teach fervent mortification in disgust of sin, regarding it as essential and sticking to it. How are the conditions for the fervent mortification in disgust of sin completed, and how are they incomplete?”

“Nigrodha, it’s when a mortifier goes naked, ignoring conventions. They lick their hands, and don’t come or wait when called. They don’t consent to food brought to them, or food

prepared on their behalf, or an invitation for a meal. They don't receive anything from a pot or bowl; or from someone who keeps sheep, or who has a weapon or a shovel in their home; or where a couple is eating; or where there is a woman who is pregnant, breast-feeding, or who lives with a man; or where there's a hound waiting or flies buzzing. They accept no fish or meat or beer or wine, and drink no fermented gruel. They go to just one house for alms, taking just one mouthful, or two houses and two mouthfuls, up to seven houses and seven mouthfuls. They feed on one saucer a day, two saucers a day, up to seven saucers a day. They eat once a day, once every second day, up to once a week, and so on, even up to once a fortnight. They live committed to the practice of eating food at set intervals. They eat herbs, millet, wild rice, poor rice, water lettuce, rice bran, scum from boiling rice, sesame flour, grass, or cow dung. They survive on forest roots and fruits, or eating fallen fruit. They wear robes of sunn hemp, mixed hemp, corpse-wrapping cloth, rags, lodh tree bark, antelope hide (whole or in strips), kusa grass, bark, wood-chips, human hair, horse-tail hair, or owls' wings. They tear out their hair and beard, committed to this practice. They constantly stand, turning down seats. They squat, committed to the endeavor of squatting. They lie on a mat of thorns, making a mat of thorns their bed. They make their bed on a plank, or the bare ground. They lie only on one side. They wear dust and dirt. They stay in the open air. They sleep wherever they lay their mat. They eat unnatural things, committed to the practice of eating unnatural foods. They don't drink, committed to the practice of not drinking liquids. They're devoted to ritual bathing three times a day, including at dusk.

What do you think, Nigrodha? If this is so, is the fervent mortification in disgust of sin complete, or incomplete?"

"Clearly, sir, if that is so the fervent mortification in disgust of sin is complete, not incomplete."

"But even such a completed mortification has many defects, I say."

2.1. Defects

"But how does the Buddha say that even such a completed mortification has many defects?"

"Firstly, a mortifier undertakes a practice of mortification. They're happy with that, as they've got all they wished for. This is a defect in that mortifier.

Furthermore, a mortifier undertakes a practice of mortification. They glorify themselves and put others down on account of that. This too is a defect in that mortifier.

Furthermore, a mortifier undertakes a practice of mortification. They become indulgent and infatuated and fall into negligence on account of that. This too is a defect in that mortifier.

Furthermore, a mortifier undertakes a practice of mortification. They generate possessions, honor, and popularity through that mortification. They're happy with that, as they've got all they wished for. This too is a defect in that mortifier.

Furthermore, a mortifier undertakes a practice of mortification. They generate possessions, honor, and popularity through that mortification. They glorify themselves and put others down on account of that. This too is a defect in that mortifier.

Furthermore, a mortifier undertakes a practice of mortification. They generate possessions, honor, and popularity through that mortification. They become indulgent and infatuated and fall into negligence on account of that. This too is a defect in that mortifier.

Furthermore, a mortifier becomes fussy about food, saying, 'This is acceptable to me, this is not acceptable to me.' What is not acceptable they give up in expectation. But what is acceptable they eat tied, infatuated, attached, blind to the drawbacks, and not understanding the escape. This too is a defect in that mortifier.

Furthermore, a mortifier undertakes a practice of mortification out of longing for possessions, honor, and popularity, thinking, 'Kings, royal ministers, aristocrats, brahmins, householders, and sectarians will honor me!' This too is a defect in that mortifier.

Furthermore, a mortifier rebukes a certain ascetic or brahmin, 'What is it with this one living in abundance, devouring everything— plants propagated from roots, trunks, cuttings, or joints; and those from regular seeds as the fifth. According to this ascetic's doctrine, the crown of the tooth is forked lightning!' This too is a defect in that mortifier.

Furthermore, a mortifier sees a certain ascetic or brahmin being honored, respected, esteemed, and venerated among good families. They think, 'This one, who lives in abundance, is honored, respected, esteemed, and venerated among good families. But I, a fervent mortifier who lives rough, am not honored, respected, esteemed, and venerated among good families.' Thus they give rise to jealousy and stinginess regarding families. This too is a defect in that mortifier.

Furthermore, a mortifier sits meditation only when people can see them. This too is a defect in that mortifier.

Furthermore, a mortifier sneaks about among families, thinking, 'This is part of my mortification; this is part of my mortification.' This too is a defect in that mortifier.

Furthermore, a mortifier sometimes behaves in an underhand manner. When asked whether something is acceptable to them, they say it is, even though it isn't. Or they say it isn't, even though it is. Thus they tell a deliberate lie. This too is a defect in that mortifier.

Furthermore, a mortifier disagrees with the way that the Realized One or their disciple teaches Dhamma, even when they make a valid point. This too is a defect in that mortifier.

Furthermore, a mortifier is irritable and acrimonious … offensive and contemptuous … jealous and stingy … devious and deceitful … obstinate and arrogant … they have corrupt wishes, falling under the sway of corrupt wishes … they have wrong view, being attached to an extremist view … they're attached to their own views, holding them tight, and refusing to let go. This too is a defect in that mortifier.

What do you think, Nigrodha? Are such mortifications defective or not?"

“Clearly, sir, they’re defective. It’s possible that a mortifier might have all of these defects, let alone one or other of them.”

2.2. On Reaching the Shoots

“Firstly, Nigrodha, a mortifier undertakes a practice of mortification. But they’re not happy with that, as they still haven’t got all they wished for. So they’re pure on that point.

Furthermore, a mortifier undertakes a practice of mortification. They don’t glorify themselves or put others down on account of that. So they’re pure on that point.

They don’t become indulgent …

Furthermore, a mortifier undertakes a practice of mortification. They generate possessions, honor, and popularity through that mortification. They’re not happy with that, as they still haven’t got all they wished for …

They don’t glorify themselves and put others down on account of possessions, honor, and popularity …

They don’t become indulgent because of it … So they’re pure on that point.

Furthermore, a mortifier doesn’t become fussy about food, saying, ‘This is acceptable to me, this is not acceptable to me.’ What is not acceptable they give up without concern. But what is acceptable they eat without being tied, infatuated, attached, seeing the drawbacks, and understanding the escape. So they’re pure on that point.

Furthermore, a mortifier doesn’t undertake a practice of mortification out of longing for possessions, honor, and popularity … ‘Kings, royal ministers, aristocrats, brahmins, householders, and sectarians will honor me!’ So they’re pure on that point.

Furthermore, a mortifier doesn’t rebuke a certain ascetic or brahmin, ‘What is it with this one living in abundance, devouring everything— plants propagated from roots, trunks, cuttings, or joints; and those from regular seeds as the fifth. According to this ascetic’s doctrine, the crown of the tooth is like forked lightning!’ So they’re pure on that point.

Furthermore, a mortifier sees a certain ascetic or brahmin being honored, respected, esteemed, and venerated among good families. It never occurs to them, ‘This one, who lives in abundance, is honored, respected, esteemed, and venerated among good families. But I, a fervent mortifier who lives rough, am not honored, respected, esteemed, and venerated among good families.’ Thus they don’t give rise to jealousy and stinginess regarding families. So they’re pure on that point.

Furthermore, a mortifier doesn’t sit meditation only when people can see them. So they’re pure on that point.

Furthermore, a mortifier doesn’t sneak about among families, thinking, ‘This is part of my mortification; this is part of my mortification.’ So they’re pure on that point.

Furthermore, a mortifier never behaves in an underhand manner. When asked whether something is acceptable to them, they say it isn’t when it isn’t. Or they say it is when it is. Thus they don’t tell a deliberate lie. So they’re pure on that point.

Furthermore, a mortifier agrees with the way that the Realized One or their disciple teaches Dhamma when they make a valid point. So they're pure on that point.

Furthermore, a mortifier is not irritable and acrimonious … offensive and contemptuous … jealous and stingy … devious and deceitful … obstinate and arrogant … they don't have corrupt wishes … and wrong view … they're not attached to their own views, holding them tight, and refusing to let go. So they're pure on that point.

What do you think, Nigrodha? If this is so, is the fervent mortification in disgust of sin purified or not?"

"Clearly, sir, it is purified. It has reached the peak and the pith."

"No, Nigrodha, at this point the fervent mortification in disgust of sin has not yet reached the peak and the pith. Rather, it has only reached the shoots."

2.3. On Reaching the Bark

"But at what point, sir, does the fervent mortification in disgust of sin reach the peak and the pith? Please help me reach the peak and the pith!"

"Nigrodha, take a mortifier who is restrained in the fourfold constraint. And how is a mortifier restrained in the fourfold constraint? It's when a mortifier doesn't kill living creatures, doesn't get others to kill, and doesn't approve of killing. They don't steal, get others to steal, or approve of stealing. They don't lie, get others to lie, or approve of lying. They don't expect rewards from their practice, they don't lead others to expect rewards, and they don't approve of expecting rewards. That's how a mortifier is restrained in the fourfold constraint.

When a mortifier is restrained in the fourfold constraint, that is their mortification. They step forward, not falling back. They frequent a secluded lodging—a wilderness, the root of a tree, a hill, a ravine, a mountain cave, a charnel ground, a forest, the open air, a heap of straw. After the meal, they return from almsround, sit down cross-legged, set their body straight, and bring mindfulness to the present. Giving up covetousness for the world, they meditate with a heart rid of covetousness, cleansing the mind of covetousness. Giving up ill will and malevolence, they meditate with a mind rid of ill will, full of sympathy for all living beings, cleansing the mind of ill will. Giving up dullness and drowsiness, they meditate with a mind rid of dullness and drowsiness, perceiving light, mindful and aware, cleansing the mind of dullness and drowsiness. Giving up restlessness and remorse, they meditate without restlessness, their mind settled internally, cleansing the mind of restlessness and remorse. Giving up doubt, they meditate having gone beyond doubt, not undecided about skillful qualities, cleansing the mind of doubt.

They give up these five hindrances, corruptions of the heart that weaken wisdom. Then they meditate spreading a heart full of love to one direction, and to the second, and to the third, and to the fourth. In the same way above, below, across, everywhere, all around, they spread a heart full of love to the whole world—abundant, expansive, limitless, free of enmity and ill will. They meditate spreading a heart full of compassion … They meditate spreading a heart full of rejoicing … They meditate spreading a heart full of equanimity to one direction, and to the second, and to the third, and to the fourth. In the same way

above, below, across, everywhere, all around, they spread a heart full of equanimity to the whole world—abundant, expansive, limitless, free of enmity and ill will.

What do you think, Nigrodha? If this is so, is the fervent mortification in disgust of sin purified or not?"

"Clearly, sir, it is purified. It has reached the peak and the pith."

"No, Nigrodha, at this point the fervent mortification in disgust of sin has not yet reached the peak and the pith. Rather, it has only reached the bark."

2.4. On Reaching the Softwood

"But at what point, sir, does the fervent mortification in disgust of sin reach the peak and the pith? Please help me reach the peak and the pith!"

"Nigrodha, take a mortifier who is restrained in the fourfold constraint. They give up these five hindrances, corruptions of the heart that weaken wisdom. Then they meditate spreading a heart full of love … compassion … rejoicing … equanimity.

They recollect many kinds of past lives, that is, one, two, three, four, five, ten, twenty, thirty, forty, fifty, a hundred, a thousand, a hundred thousand rebirths; many eons of the world contracting, many eons of the world expanding, many eons of the world contracting and expanding. They remember: 'There, I was named this, my clan was that, I looked like this, and that was my food. This was how I felt pleasure and pain, and that was how my life ended. When I passed away from that place I was reborn somewhere else. There, too, I was named this, my clan was that, I looked like this, and that was my food. This was how I felt pleasure and pain, and that was how my life ended. When I passed away from that place I was reborn here.' And so they recollect their many kinds of past lives, with features and details.

What do you think, Nigrodha? If this is so, is the fervent mortification in disgust of sin purified or not?"

"Clearly, sir, it is purified. It has reached the peak and the pith."

"No, Nigrodha, at this point the fervent mortification in disgust of sin has not yet reached the peak and the pith. Rather, it has only reached the softwood."

3. On Reaching the Heartwood

"But at what point, sir, does the fervent mortification in disgust of sin reach the peak and the pith? Please help me reach the peak and the pith!"

"Nigrodha, take a mortifier who is restrained in the fourfold constraint. They give up these five hindrances, corruptions of the heart that weaken wisdom. Then they meditate spreading a heart full of love … equanimity … They recollect many kinds of past lives, with features and details.

With clairvoyance that is purified and superhuman, they see sentient beings passing away and being reborn—inferior and superior, beautiful and ugly, in a good place or a bad place. They understand how sentient beings pass on according to their deeds: 'These dear

beings did bad things by way of body, speech, and mind. They denounced the noble ones; they had wrong view; and they chose to act out of that wrong view. When their body broke up, after death, they were reborn in a place of loss, a bad place, the underworld, hell. These dear beings, however, did good things by way of body, speech, and mind. They never denounced the noble ones; they had right view; and they chose to act out of that right view. When their body broke up, after death, they were reborn in a good place, a heavenly realm.' And so, with clairvoyance that is purified and superhuman, they see sentient beings passing away and being reborn—inferior and superior, beautiful and ugly, in a good place or a bad place. They understand how sentient beings pass on according to their deeds.

What do you think, Nigrodha? If this is so, is the fervent mortification in disgust of sin purified or not?"

"Clearly, sir, it is purified. It has reached the peak and the pith."

"Nigrodha, at this point the fervent mortification in disgust of sin has reached the peak and the pith. Nigrodha, remember you said this to me: 'Sir, what teaching do you use to guide your disciples, through which they claim solace in the fundamental goal of the spiritual life?' Well, there is something better and finer than this. That's what I use to guide my disciples, through which they claim solace in the fundamental goal of the spiritual life."

When he said this, those wanderers made an uproar, "In that case, we're lost, and so is our denomination! We don't know anything better or finer than that!"

4. Nigrodha Feels Depressed

Then the householder Sandhāna realized, "Obviously, now these wanderers want to listen to what the Buddha says. They're actively listening and trying to understand!"

So he said to the wanderer Nigrodha, "Honorable Nigrodha, remember you said this to me: 'Surely, householder, you should know better! With whom does the ascetic Gotama converse? With whom does he engage in discussion? With whom does he achieve lucidity of wisdom? Staying in empty huts has destroyed the ascetic Gotama's wisdom. Not frequenting assemblies, he is unable to hold a discussion. He just lurks on the periphery. He's just like a one-eyed cow, circling around and lurking on the periphery. Please, householder, let the ascetic Gotama come to this assembly. I'll sink him with just one question! I'll roll him over and wrap him up like a hollow pot!' Now the Blessed One, perfected and fully awakened, has arrived here. Why don't you send him out of the assembly to the periphery like a one-eyed cow? Why don't you sink him with just one question? Why don't you roll him over and wrap him up like a hollow pot?" When he said this, Nigrodha sat silent, dismayed, shoulders drooping, downcast, depressed, with nothing to say.

Knowing this, the Buddha said to him, "Is it really true, Nigrodha—are those your words?"

"It's true, sir, those are my words. It was foolish, stupid, and unskillful of me."

"What do you think, Nigrodha? Have you heard that wanderers of the past who were elderly and senior, the tutors of tutors, said that when the perfected ones, the fully

awakened Buddhas of the past came together, they made an uproar, a colossal racket as they sat and talked about all kinds of low topics, like you do in your denomination these days? Or did they say that the Buddhas frequented remote lodgings in the wilderness and the forest that are quiet and still, far from the madding crowd, remote from human settlements, and fit for retreat, like I do these days?"

"I have heard that wanderers of the past who were elderly and senior, said that when the perfected ones, the fully awakened Buddhas of the past came together, they didn't make an uproar, like I do in my denomination these days. They said that the Buddhas of the past frequented remote lodgings in the wilderness, like the Buddha does these days."

"Nigrodha, you are a sensible and mature man. Did it not occur to you: 'The Blessed One is awakened, tamed, serene, crossed over, and quenched. And he teaches Dhamma for awakening, taming, serenity, crossing over, and extinguishment'?"

5. The Culmination of the Spiritual Path

Nigrodha said, "I made a mistake, sir. It was foolish, stupid, and unskillful of me to speak in that way. Please, sir, accept my mistake for what it is, so I will restrain myself in future."

"Indeed, Nigrodha, you made a mistake. It was foolish, stupid, and unskillful of you to speak in that way. But since you have recognized your mistake for what it is, and have dealt with it properly, I accept it. For it is growth in the training of the Noble One to recognize a mistake for what it is, deal with it properly, and commit to restraint in the future. Nigrodha, this is what I say:

Let a sensible person come—neither devious nor deceitful, a person of integrity. I teach and instruct them. By practicing as instructed they will realize the supreme culmination of the spiritual path in this very life, in seven years. They will live having achieved with their own insight the goal for which gentlemen rightly go forth from the lay life to homelessness. Let alone seven years. Let a sensible person come—neither devious nor deceitful, a person of integrity. I teach and instruct them. By practicing as instructed they will realize the supreme culmination of the spiritual path in this very life, in six years … five years … four years … three years … two years … one year … seven months … six months … five months … four months … three months … two months … one month … a fortnight. Let alone a fortnight. Let a sensible person come—neither devious nor deceitful, a person of integrity. I teach and instruct them. By practicing as instructed they will realize the supreme culmination of the spiritual path in this very life, in seven days.

6. The Wanderers Feel Depressed

Nigrodha, you might think, 'The ascetic Gotama speaks like this because he wants pupils.' But you should not see it like this. Let your tutor remain your tutor.

You might think, 'The ascetic Gotama speaks like this because he wants us to give up our recitation.' But you should not see it like this. Let your recitation remain as it is.

You might think, 'The ascetic Gotama speaks like this because he wants us to give up our livelihood.' But you should not see it like this. Let your livelihood remain as it is.

You might think, ‘The ascetic Gotama speaks like this because he wants us to start doing things that are unskillful and considered unskillful in our denomination.’ But you should not see it like this. Let those things that are unskillful and considered unskillful in your denomination remain as they are.

You might think, ‘The ascetic Gotama speaks like this because he wants us to stop doing things that are skillful and considered skillful in our denomination.’ But you should not see it like this. Let those things that are skillful and considered skillful in your denomination remain as they are.

I do not speak for any of these reasons. Nigrodha, there are things that are unskillful, corrupting, leading to future lives, hurtful, resulting in suffering and future rebirth, old age, and death. I teach Dhamma so that those things may be given up. When you practice accordingly, corrupting qualities will be given up in you and cleansing qualities will grow. You’ll enter and remain in the fullness and abundance of wisdom, having realized it with your own insight in this very life.”

When this was said, those wanderers sat silent, dismayed, shoulders drooping, downcast, depressed, with nothing to say, as if their minds were possessed by Māra. Then it occurred to the Buddha, “All these silly people have been touched by the Wicked One! For not even a single one thinks, ‘Come, let us lead the spiritual life under the ascetic Gotama for the sake of enlightenment—for what do seven days matter?’”

Then the Buddha, having roared his lion’s roar in the lady Udumbarikā’s monastery for wanderers, rose into the air and landed on Vulture’s Peak. Meanwhile, the householder Sandhāna went right back to Rājagaha.