Thag 21.1 — Vaṅgīsa

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Text

Verses of the Senior Monks 21.1

The Great Book

Chapter One

Vaṅgīsa

“Now that I’ve renounced

the lay life for homelessness,

I’m overrun

by the rude thoughts of the Dark One.

Even if a thousand warrior chiefs and great archers,

well trained, with strong bows,

were to completely surround me;

I would never flee.

And even if women come,

many more than that,

they won’t bother me,

for I stand firm in the teaching.

I heard with my own ears

from the Buddha, Kinsman of the Sun,

about the path going to extinguishment;

that’s what delights my mind.

Wicked One, if you come near me

as I meditate like this,

I’ll make sure that you, Death,

won’t even see the path I take.”

“Giving up desire and discontent,

along with all thought of domestic life,

they wouldn’t get snarled in anything;

unsnarled, free of snarls: that’s a real mendicant.

Whatever here is included in form—

on earth, in the sky, or in planet’s deep—

wears out, it is all impermanent:

the self-examined live having comprehended this.

People are bound to their attachments,

to impingement of the seen and heard, and to what is thought.

Unstirred, dispel desire for these things;

for one called ‘a sage’ does not cling to them.

Trapped in the sixty wrong views, full of their own opinions,

ordinary people are fixed in wrong principles.

But that mendicant wouldn’t join a sect,

still less would they utter lewd speech.

Proficient, long serene,

free of deceit, alert, without envy,

the sage has reached the state of peace;

quenched, he awaits his time.”

“Give up conceit, Gotama!

Completely abandon the different kinds of conceit!

Besotted with the different kinds of conceit,

you’ve had regrets for a long time.

Smeared by smears and slain by conceit,

people fall into hell.

When people slain by conceit are reborn in hell,

they grieve for a long time.

But a mendicant who practices rightly,
a path-victor, never grieves.
They enjoy happiness and a good reputation,
and they rightly call him a ‘Seer of Truth’.
So being not hard-hearted, but energetic,
with hindrances given up, pure;
and having completely given up conceit,
the one who makes an end with knowledge is assuaged.”
“I’ve got a burning desire for pleasure;
my mind is on fire!
Please, out of compassion, Gotama,
tell me how to quench the flames.”
“Your mind is on fire
because of a perversion of perception.
Turn away from the sign
that’s attractive, provoking lust.
With your mind unified and serene,
meditate on the ugly aspects of the body.
With mindfulness immersed in the body,
be full of disillusionment.
Meditate on the signless,
give up the tendency to conceit;
and when you comprehend conceit,
you will live at peace.”
“Speak only those words
that do not hurt yourself
nor harm others;
such speech is truly well spoken.
Speak only pleasing words,

words gladly welcomed.
Pleasing words are those
that bring nothing bad to others.
Truth itself is undying speech:
this is an ancient teaching.
Good people say the teaching and meaning
are grounded in truth.
The words spoken by the Buddha
for finding the sanctuary, extinguishment,
for making an end of suffering:
this really is the best kind of speech."
"Deep in wisdom, intelligent,
expert in the path and what is not the path;
Sāriputta, so greatly wise,
teaches Dhamma to the mendicants.
He teaches in brief,
or he speaks at length.
His call, like a myna bird,
overflows with inspiration.
While he teaches
the mendicants listen to his sweet voice,
sounding attractive,
clear and graceful.
They listen joyfully,
their hearts elated."
"Today, on the fifteenth day sabbath,
five hundred monks have gathered together to purify their precepts.
These untroubled sages have cut off their fetters and bonds,
they will not be reborn again.

Just as a wheel-rolling monarch
surrounded by ministers
travels all around this
land that's girt by sea.
So disciples with the three knowledges,
conquerors of death,
revere the winner of the battle,
the unsurpassed caravan leader.
All are sons of the Blessed One—
there is no rubbish here.
I bow to the Kinsman of the Sun,
destroyer of the dart of craving."
"Over a thousand mendicants
revere the Holy One
as he teaches the immaculate Dhamma,
extinguishment, fearing nothing from any quarter.
They listen to the immaculate Dhamma
taught by the fully awakened Buddha;
the Buddha shines
at the fore of the mendicant Saṅgha.
Blessed One, your name is 'Giant',
seventh of the seers.
You are like a great cloud
that rains on your disciples.
I've left my day's meditation,
out of desire to see the Teacher.
Great hero, your disciple Vaṅgīsa
bows at your feet."
"Having overcome Māra's wrong path,

you wander with hard-heartedness dissolved.
See him, the liberator from bonds,
dissecting the unattached section by section.
You have explained in many ways
the path to cross the flood.
The Seers of Truth stand unfaltering
in the freedom from death explained by you.
As the bringer of light who has pierced the truth,
you've seen what lies beyond all planes.
When you saw and realized this for yourself,
you taught it first to the group of five.
When the Dhamma has been so well taught,
how could those who know it be negligent?
That's why, being diligent, we should always train
respectfully in the Buddha's teaching."
"The senior monk awakened after the Buddha,
Koṇḍañña, is keenly energetic.
He regularly gains
the blissful meditations of seclusion.
Whatever can be attained by a disciple
who does the Teacher's bidding,
he has attained it all,
through diligently training himself.
With great power and the three knowledges,
expert in encompassing the minds of others,
Koṇḍañña, the heir to the Buddha,
bows at the Teacher's feet."
"As the sage, who has gone beyond suffering,
sits upon the mountain slope,

he is revered by disciples with the three knowledges,
conquerors of death.
Moggallāna, of great psychic power,
encompasses with his mind,
scrutinizing their minds,
liberated, free of attachments.
That is how those endowed with many fine qualities
revere Gotama,
the sage gone beyond suffering,
perfect in every respect."
"Like the moon on a cloudless night,
like the shining immaculate sun,
so too Aṅgīrasa, O great sage,
your glory outshines the entire world."
"We used to wander, drunk on poetry,
from village to village, town to town.
Then we saw the Buddha,
who has gone beyond all things.
He, the sage gone beyond suffering,
taught me the Dhamma.
When we heard the Dhamma, we became confident—
faith arose in us.
Hearing him speak of
the aggregates, the sense-fields,
and the elements, I understood;
and then I went forth to homelessness.
It is for the benefit of many
that the Realized Ones arise—
the men and women

who follow their instructions.
It is truly for their benefit
that the sage realized awakening—
for the monks and for the nuns
who see that they've reached certainty.
The Clear-eyed One, the Buddha,
the Kinsman of the Sun,
has well taught the four noble truths
out of sympathy for living creatures.
Suffering, suffering's origin,
suffering's transcendence,
and the noble eightfold path
that leads to the stilling of suffering.
As these things were taught,
so I have seen them.
I've realized my heart's goal,
and fulfilled the Buddha's instructions.
It was so welcome for me
to be in the presence of the Buddha.
Of the well-explained teachings,
I arrived at the best.
I've realized the perfection of direct knowledge;
my clairaudience is purified;
I am master of three knowledges, attained in psychic power,
I'm expert at reading the minds of others."
"I ask the Teacher unrivaled in wisdom,
who has cut off all doubts in this very life:
a monk has died at Āḷavī's premier shrine,
who was well-known, famous, and quenched.

Nigrodhakappa was his name;
it was given to that brahmin by you, Blessed One.
He wandered in your honor, yearning for freedom,
energetic, a resolute Seer of Truth.
O Sakyan, All-seer,
we all wish to know about that disciple.
Our ears are eager to hear,
for you are the most excellent teacher.
Cut off our doubt, declare this to us;
your wisdom is vast, tell us of his quenching!
All-seer, speak among us,
like the thousand-eyed Sakka in the midst of the gods!
Whatever ties there are, or paths to delusion,
or things on the side of unknowing, or that are bases of doubt
vanish on reaching a Realized One,
for his eye is the best of all people's.
If no man were ever to disperse corruptions,
like the wind dispersing the stormclouds,
darkness would shroud the whole world;
not even brilliant men would shine.
The attentive are bringers of light;
my hero, that is what I think of you.
We've come for your discernment and knowledge:
here in this assembly, declare to us about Kappāyana.
Swiftly send forth your sweet, sweet voice,
like a goose stretching its neck, gently honking,
lucid-flowing, with lovely tone:
alert, we all listen to you.
You have entirely abandoned birth and death;

curbed and pure, I urge you, speak the Dhamma!
For ordinary people have no wish-granter,
but Realized Ones have a comprehensibility-granter.
Your answer is definitive, and we will adopt it,
for you have perfect understanding.
We raise our cupped palms one last time,
one of unrivaled wisdom, don't deliberately confuse us.
Knowing the teaching of the noble ones from top to bottom,
one of unrivaled energy, don't deliberately confuse us.
Like a man baking in the summer sun would long for water,
I long for your voice, so let the sound rain forth.
Surely Kappāyana did not lead the spiritual life in vain?
Did he realize quenching,
or did he still have a residue?
Let us hear what kind of liberation he had!"
"He cut off craving for name and form right here,"
said the Buddha,
"the river of darkness that had long lain within him.
He has entirely crossed over birth and death."
So declared the Blessed One, the leader of the five.
"Now that I have heard your words,
seventh of seers, I am confident.
My question, it seems, was not in vain,
the brahmin did not deceive me.
As he said, so he did—
he was a disciple of the Buddha.
He cut the net of death the deceiver,
so extended and strong.
Blessed One, Kappāyana saw

the starting point of grasping.

He has indeed gone far beyond

Death's dominion so hard to pass.

God of gods, best of men, I bow to you,

and to your son,

who followed your example, a great hero;

a giant, bosom son of a giant."

That is how these verses were recited by the senior venerable Vaṅgīsa.

The Great Book is Finished

The Verses of the Senior Monks are finished.