Thig 12.1 — Puṇṇikā

English translation by Bhikkhu Sujato.
Source: https://suttacentral.net/thig12.1/en/sujato
Source revision: 3bc8665e0e28e70518eba94304a2fafcab80f933
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Text

Verses of the Senior Nuns 12.1

The Book of the Sixteens

Puṇṇikā

“I used to be a water-carrier. Even when it was cold,

I would always plunge into the water,

afraid of my masters’ beatings,

harassed by fear of abuse and anger.

Brahmin, what are you afraid of,

that you always plunge into the water,

your limbs trembling

in the freezing cold?”

“Oh, but you already know,

Madam Puṇṇikā, when you ask me:

I am doing good deeds,

to ward off the wickedness I have done.

Whosoever young or old

performs a wicked deed,

by ablution in water they are

released from their wicked deed.”

“Who on earth told you this,

one ignoramus to another:

‘Actually, by ablution in water one is

released from a wicked deed.’

Would not they all go to heaven, then:
all the frogs and the turtles,
dragons, dolphins,
and other water-dwellers too?
Butchers of sheep and pigs,
fishermen, animal trappers,
bandits, executioners,
and others of evil deeds:
by ablution in water they too would be
released from their wicked deeds.
If these rivers had carried away
your bad deeds in the past,
they would also carry away your good deeds,
from which you'd be prevented.
Brahmin, the thing that you are afraid of,
when you always plunge into the water,
do not do that very thing,
don't let the cold harm your skin."
"I have been on the wrong path,
and you've guided me to the noble path.
Madam, I give to you
this ablution cloth."
"Keep the cloth for yourself,
I do not want it.
If you fear suffering,
if you don't like suffering,
then don't do bad deeds
either openly or in secret.
If you should do a bad deed,

or you’re doing one now,

you won’t be freed from suffering,

though you fly away and flee.

If you fear suffering,

if you don’t like suffering,

go for refuge to the Buddha, the unaffected,

to his teaching and to the Saṅgha.

Undertake the precepts,

that will be good for you.”

“I go for refuge to the Buddha, the unaffected,

to his teaching and to the Saṅgha.

I undertake the precepts,

that will be good for me.

I used to be brahmin only by kin,

today I truly am a brahmin!

Master of the three knowledges, accomplished in wisdom,

I’m a scholar, a bathed initiate.”