MN 146 — Advice from Nandaka

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Text

Middle Discourses 146

Advice from Nandaka

So I have heard. At one time the Buddha was staying near Sāvatthī in Jeta's Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika's monastery.

Then Mahāpajāpati Gotamī together with around five hundred nuns approached the Buddha, bowed, stood to one side, and said to him, "Sir, may the Buddha please advise and instruct the nuns. Please give the nuns a Dhamma talk."

Now at that time the senior monks were taking turns to advise the nuns. But Venerable Nandaka didn't want to take his turn.

Then the Buddha said to Venerable Ānanda, "Ānanda, whose turn is it to advise the nuns today?"

"It's Nandaka's turn, sir, but he doesn't want to do it."

Then the Buddha said to Nandaka, "Nandaka, please advise and instruct the nuns. Please, brahmin, give the nuns a Dhamma talk."

"Yes, sir," replied Nandaka. Then, in the morning, he robed up and, taking his bowl and robe, entered Sāvatthī for alms. He wandered for alms in Sāvatthī. After the meal, on his return from almsround, he went to the Royal Monastery with a companion. Those nuns saw him coming off in the distance, so they spread out a seat and placed water for washing the feet. Nandaka sat down on the seat spread out, and washed his feet. Those nuns bowed, and sat down to one side.

Nandaka said to them, "Sisters, this talk shall be in the form of questions. When you understand, say so. When you don't understand, say so. If anyone has a doubt or uncertainty, ask me about it: 'Why, sir, does it say this? What does that mean?'"

"We're already delighted and satisfied with Master Nandaka, since he invites us like this."

"What do you think, sisters? Is the eye permanent or impermanent?"

"Impermanent, sir."

"But if it's impermanent, is it suffering or happiness?"

"Suffering, sir."

“But if it’s impermanent, suffering, and perishable, is it fit to be regarded thus: ‘This is mine, I am this, this is my self’?”

“No, sir.”

“What do you think, sisters? Is the ear … nose … tongue … body … mind permanent or impermanent?”

“Impermanent, sir.”

“But if it’s impermanent, is it suffering or happiness?”

“Suffering, sir.”

“But if it’s impermanent, suffering, and perishable, is it fit to be regarded thus: ‘This is mine, I am this, this is my self’?”

“No, sir. Why is that? Because we have already truly seen this with right wisdom: ‘So these six interior sense fields are impermanent.’”

“Good, good, sisters! That’s how it is for a noble disciple who truly sees with right wisdom.

What do you think, sisters? Are sights permanent or impermanent?”

“Impermanent, sir.”

“But if they’re impermanent, are they suffering or happiness?”

“Suffering, sir.”

“But if they’re impermanent, suffering, and perishable, are they fit to be regarded thus: ‘This is mine, I am this, this is my self’?”

“No, sir.”

“What do you think, sisters? Are sounds … smells … tastes … touches … ideas permanent or impermanent?”

“Impermanent, sir.”

“But if they’re impermanent, are they suffering or happiness?”

“Suffering, sir.”

“But if they’re impermanent, suffering, and perishable, are they fit to be regarded thus: ‘This is mine, I am this, this is my self’?”

“No, sir. Why is that? Because we have already truly seen this with right wisdom: ‘So these six exterior sense fields are impermanent.’”

“Good, good, sisters! That’s how it is for a noble disciple who truly sees with right wisdom.

What do you think, sisters? Is eye consciousness … ear consciousness … nose consciousness … tongue consciousness … body consciousness … mind consciousness permanent or impermanent?”

“Impermanent, sir.”

“But if it’s impermanent, is it suffering or happiness?”

“Suffering, sir.”

“But if it’s impermanent, suffering, and perishable, is it fit to be regarded thus: ‘This is mine, I am this, this is my self’?”

“No, sir. Why is that? Because we have already truly seen this with right wisdom: ‘So these six classes of consciousness are impermanent.’”

“Good, good, sisters! That’s how it is for a noble disciple who truly sees with right wisdom.

Suppose there was an oil lamp burning. The oil, wick, flame, and light were all impermanent and perishable. Now, suppose someone was to say: ‘While this oil lamp is burning, the oil, the wick, and the flame are all impermanent and perishable. But the light is permanent, lasting, eternal, and imperishable.’ Would they be speaking rightly?”

“No, sir. Why is that? Because that oil lamp’s oil, wick, and flame are all impermanent and perishable, let alone the light.”

“In the same way, suppose someone was to say: ‘These six interior sense fields are impermanent. But the feeling—whether pleasant, painful, or neutral—that I experience due to these six interior sense fields is permanent, lasting, eternal, and imperishable.’ Would they be speaking rightly?”

“No, sir. Why is that? Because each kind of feeling arises dependent on the corresponding condition. When the corresponding condition ceases, the appropriate feeling ceases.”

“Good, good, sisters! That’s how it is for a noble disciple who truly sees with right wisdom.

Suppose there was a large tree standing with heartwood. The roots, trunk, branches and leaves, and shadow were all impermanent and perishable. Now, suppose someone was to say: ‘There’s a large tree standing with heartwood. The roots, trunk, and branches and leaves are all impermanent and perishable. But the shadow is permanent, lasting, eternal, and imperishable.’ Would they be speaking rightly?”

“No, sir. Why is that? Because that large tree’s roots, trunk, and branches and leaves are all impermanent and perishable, let alone the shadow.”

“In the same way, suppose someone was to say: ‘These six exterior sense fields are impermanent. But the feeling—whether pleasant, painful, or neutral—that I experience due to these six exterior sense fields is permanent, lasting, eternal, and imperishable.’ Would they be speaking rightly?”

“No, sir. Why is that? Because each kind of feeling arises dependent on the corresponding condition. When the corresponding condition ceases, the appropriate feeling ceases.”

“Good, good, sisters! That’s how it is for a noble disciple who truly sees with right wisdom.

Suppose a deft butcher or their apprentice, having killed a cow, were to carve it with a sharp meat cleaver, without damaging the flesh inside or the hide outside. They’d cut,

carve, sever, and slice through each of the connecting tendons, sinews, and ligaments with a sharp meat cleaver, and then peel off the outer hide. Then they'd wrap that cow up in that very same hide and say: 'This cow is joined to its hide just like before.' Would they be speaking rightly?"

"No, sir. Why is that? Because even if they wrap that cow up in that very same hide and say: 'This cow is joined to its hide just like before,' still that cow is not joined to that hide."

"I've made up this simile to make a point. And this is the point. 'The inner flesh' is a term for the six interior sense fields. 'The outer hide' is a term for the six exterior sense fields. 'The connecting tendons, sinews, and ligaments' is a term for greed and relishing. 'A sharp meat cleaver' is a term for noble wisdom. And it is that noble wisdom which cuts, carves, severs, and slices the connecting corruption, fetter, and bond.

Sisters, by developing and cultivating these seven awakening factors, a mendicant realizes the undefiled freedom of heart and freedom by wisdom. And they live having realized it with their own insight in this very life due to the ending of defilements. What seven? It's when a mendicant develops the awakening factors of mindfulness, investigation of principles, energy, rapture, tranquility, immersion, and equanimity, which rely on seclusion, fading away, and cessation, and ripen as letting go. It is by developing and cultivating these seven awakening factors that a mendicant realizes the undefiled freedom of heart and freedom by wisdom. And they live having realized it with their own insight in this very life due to the ending of defilements."

Then after giving this advice to the nuns, Nandaka sent them off, saying, "Go, sisters, it is time."

And then those nuns approved and agreed with what Nandaka had said. They rose from their seats, bowed, and respectfully circled him, keeping him on their right. Then they went up to the Buddha, bowed, and stood to one side. The Buddha said to them, "Go, nuns, it is time."

Then those nuns bowed and respectfully circled the Buddha, keeping him on their right, before leaving.

Soon after those nuns had left, the Buddha addressed the mendicants: "Suppose, mendicants, it was the sabbath of the fourteenth day. You wouldn't get lots of people wondering whether the moon is full or not, since it is obviously not full.

In the same way, those nuns were uplifted by Nandaka's Dhamma teaching, but they still haven't got all they wished for."

Then the Buddha said to Nandaka, "Well then, Nandaka, tomorrow you should give those nuns the same advice again."

"Yes, sir," Nandaka replied. And the next day he went to those nuns, and all unfolded just like the previous day.

Soon after those nuns had left, the Buddha addressed the mendicants: "Suppose, mendicants, it was the sabbath of the fifteenth day. You wouldn't get lots of people wondering whether the moon is full or not, since it is obviously full. In the same way, those

nuns were uplifted by Nandaka's Dhamma teaching, and they got all they wished for. Even the last of these five hundred nuns is a stream-enterer, not liable to be reborn in the underworld, assured, destined for awakening."

That is what the Buddha said. Satisfied, the mendicants approved what the Buddha said.