SN 3.11 — Seven Matted-Hair Ascetics

English translation by Bhikkhu Sujato.
Source: https://suttacentral.net/sn3.11/en/sujato
Source revision: 3bc8665e0e28e70518eba94304a2fafcab80f933
License: CC0-1.0 — https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/zero/1.0/

Text

Linked Discourses 3.11

2. Childless

Seven Matted-Hair Ascetics

At one time the Buddha was staying near Sāvatthī in the stilt longhouse of Migāra's mother in the Eastern Monastery.

Then in the late afternoon, the Buddha came out of retreat and sat outside the gate. Then King Pasenadi of Kosala went up to the Buddha, bowed, and sat down to one side.

Now at that time seven matted-hair ascetics, seven Jain ascetics, seven naked ascetics, seven one-cloth ascetics, and seven wanderers passed by not far from the Buddha. Their armpits and bodies were hairy, and their nails were long; and they carried their pack with shoulder-poles.

Then King Pasenadi got up from his seat, arranged his robe over one shoulder, knelt on his right knee, raised his joined palms toward those various ascetics, and pronounced his name three times: "Sirs, I am Pasenadi, king of Kosala! … I am Pasenadi, king of Kosala!"

Then, not long after those ascetics had left, King Pasenadi went up to the Buddha, bowed, sat down to one side, and said to him, "Sir, these are among those in the world who are perfected or who are on the path to perfection!"

"Great king, as a layman enjoying sensual pleasures, living at home with your children, using sandalwood imported from Kāsi, wearing garlands, fragrance, and makeup, and accepting gold and currency, it's hard for you to know who is perfected or on the path to perfection.

You can get to know a person's ethics by living with them. But only after a long time, not casually; only when attentive, not when inattentive; and only by the wise, not the witless. You can get to know a person's purity by dealing with them. … You can get to know a person's resilience in times of trouble. … You can get to know a person's wisdom by discussion. But only after a long time, not casually; only when attentive, not when inattentive; and only by the wise, not the witless."

"It's incredible, sir, it's amazing, how well said this was by the Buddha. …

Sir, these are my spies, my undercover agents returning after spying on the country. I shall later make use of what they first spied out. Now—when they have rinsed off the dust and

dirt, and are nicely bathed and anointed, with hair and beard dressed, and dressed in white—they will amuse themselves, supplied and provided with the five kinds of sensual stimulation.”

Then, understanding this matter, on that occasion the Buddha recited these verses:

“It’s not easy to know a man by his appearance.

You shouldn’t trust them at first sight.

For undisciplined men live in this world

disguised as the disciplined.

Like a fake earring made of clay,

like a copper halfpenny covered with gold,

they live hidden in the world,

corrupt inside but beautiful outside.”