AN 4.22 — At Uruvelā (2nd)

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Source: https://suttacentral.net/an4.22/en/sujato
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Text

Numbered Discourses 4.22

3. At Uruvelā

At Uruvelā (2nd)

“Mendicants, this one time, when I was first awakened, I was staying in Uruvelā at the goatherd’s banyan tree on the bank of the Nerañjarā River. Then several old brahmins—elderly and senior, who were advanced in years and had reached the final stage of life—came up to me, and exchanged greetings with me.

When the greetings and polite conversation were over, they sat down to one side, and said to me: ‘Worthy Gotama, we have heard this:

“The ascetic Gotama does not bow to old brahmins, elderly and senior, who are advanced in years and have reached the final stage of life; nor does he rise in their presence or offer them a seat.” And this is indeed the case, for the worthy Gotama does not bow to old brahmins, elderly and senior, who are advanced in years and have reached the final stage of life; nor does he rise in their presence or offer them a seat. This is not appropriate, worthy Gotama.’

Then it occurred to me, ‘These venerables don’t know what a senior is, or what qualities make you a senior.’

Mendicants, suppose you’re eighty, ninety, or a hundred years old. But your speech is untimely, false, meaningless, and against the teaching or training. You say things at the wrong time which are worthless, unreasonable, rambling, and unbeneficial. Then you’ll be reckoned a ‘childish senior’.

Now suppose you’re a youth, young, with pristine black hair, blessed with youth, in the prime of life. But your speech is timely, true, meaningful, and in line with the teaching and training. You say things at the right time which are valuable, reasonable, succinct, and beneficial. Then you’ll be reckoned an ‘astute senior’.

There are these four qualities that make a senior. What four? A mendicant is ethical, restrained in the monastic code, conducting themselves well and resorting for alms in suitable places. Seeing danger in the slightest fault, they keep the rules they’ve undertaken.

They’re very learned, remembering and keeping what they’ve learned. These teachings are good in the beginning, good in the middle, and good in the end, meaningful and

well-phrased, describing a spiritual practice that's entirely full and pure. They are very learned in such teachings, remembering them, rehearsing them, mentally scrutinizing them, and penetrating them theoretically.

They get the four absorptions—blissful meditations in this life that belong to the higher mind—when they want, without trouble or difficulty.

They realize 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.

These are the four qualities that make a senior.

The creature with a restless mind

speaks a lot of nonsense.

Their thoughts are unsettled,

and they don't like the true teaching.

They're far from seniority, with their bad views

and their lack of regard for others.

But one accomplished in ethics,

learned and eloquent, that attentive one

is restrained when experiencing phenomena,

discerning the meaning with wisdom.

Gone beyond all things,

kind, eloquent,

they've given up birth and death,

and have completed the spiritual journey.

That's who I call a senior,

who has no defilements.

With the ending of defilements, a mendicant

is declared a 'senior'."