



2019-10-26 Understanding the Buddhist Suttas Session 3

Sujato Bhikkhu

Nice suggestion from this gentleman here: let's start again. We need to reboot the world.

I promised something about keeping a vow of silence. Just to recap, we have the Vinaya, which is the code of conduct for monks and nuns. Usually, when you... I'm sure when you've learned about the Dhamma, and so on, you most of the time would have learned through the suttas. And of course, that's appropriate. That's how it should be. But I think it's also worth just having some idea of what's encountered in the Vinaya.

This comes back to what I was saying earlier. I was saying this morning that we're living in these times where we are so threatened, so uncertain – from the threats posed to us by the climate crisis, and by the various other apocalypses that seem to roll down upon us on a daily basis – that Vinaya gives us an example of how the Buddha used the Dhamma to create an intentional community. And it shows us a lot of those very specific and very practical things that maybe we can overlook if we're just reading the suttas.

When Buddhists and when monks and nuns argue about the suttas, they argue about jhānas and nibbāna and dependent origination, but in the Vinaya we argue about, like, "can you leave the water in the water dipper? Is that allowable?" Or we argue about... what else do we argue about in the Vinaya? We argue about... Well, here we go. We'll have an example of something here that we can argue about. So before I somewhat embarrassingly try to find this chapter and fail now... Of course, I realize why. I was looking in the wrong place, of course. So this is the chapter on the pavāraṇā. Can anybody here tell us what is the pavāraṇā in brief?

Audience

It's an opportunity at the end of the Rains Retreat to invite...

Sujato Bhikkhu

An invitation for feedback. Done as an annual practice at the end of the three month Rains Retreat. We just finished the Rains Retreat. Did you guys do pavāraṇā in your monastery?

Audience

It's coming; we haven't yet.

Sujato Bhikkhu

Okay, coming up, right.

This is from the translation – at the moment the Vinaya translation on Sutta Central is a bit of a hybrid. The traditional translation is by I.B. Horner. Venerable Brahmali is doing a new



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translation. The one on Sutta Central is mostly I.B. Horner's one, but some bits by Brahmali are in there. Venerable Bhahmali is working hard to finish his translation, so probably sometime next year, we'll have an entirely new Vinaya translation by Ajahn Brahmali.

"One time the Enlightened One, the Lord, was staying at Sāvattḥī in Jeta's Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika's monastery. Now at that time several monks, friends and associates, entered on the Rains in a certain residence in the Kosala country." (Kosala being the region around Sāvattḥī.) "Then it occurred to these monks, 'now by what means can we all together, on friendly terms and harmonious, spend a comfortable rainy season and not go short of alms food?' It occurred to them, 'well, we should neither address each other nor converse, but whoever should return first from the village for alms food should make ready a seat, should put out water for washing the feet, a footstool, a foot stand. Having washed the refuse bowl, should set it out and should set out a water and water for washing. And then whoever comes last from the village for alms food...'"

Do you understand what this is talking about? It's talking about going to the village for alms. You know what that means? Someone tell me what it means. Taking the bowl, going around, and invoking the magic powers of the bowl. In Australia – we have this children's story in Australia called "The Magic Pudding". Because no matter how much of the pudding that you eat from, there's always more. So the bowl is like our Magic Pudding. We go around, and very nice.

Yesterday we did the alms round with the bhikkhunis in – where was it again? Sebastopol? Yeah. And got lots of food. Right? Very kind people, and they were so happy to see us. So many people coming up, "wow! it's lovely to see you. What are you doing?"

When I'm staying in Sydney – you know, this is one of the great traditional practices of saṅgha. My current residence in Sydney, unlike most places I've stayed in since I've been a monk, is in the city. And when we moved there, one of the things that I discussed with my friends in Sydney, I said, "look, can we get a place that's near somewhere that I can go for alms round?" If we can go for alms round every day, we can keep up the good monastic practice. And it's just a beautiful way to live. So we live in Sydney near Harris Park, around the corner from Wigram Street, which they call the Little India of Sydney. So we go there every day, and they give us some chapatis and curry and that keeps me happy. Okay.

"Whoever comes back last in the village for alms food, if there's any remnants of a meal, and if he so desires, he can eat them.' (So if any of the monks got too much food, the last one in can eat the remnants.) 'But if he doesn't want it, he can throw it away where there is but little grass, or drop them into water where there are no living creatures.'" So the idea here is that you don't soil or don't pollute. And it's interesting to see how, even in those days, they were so very careful about disposing of the rubbish in a way that it wouldn't cause any harm.

"He should put up the seat or put away the water for washing the feet, the footstool, and the footsand, wash the refuse bowl after, and put it away, and put away the drinking water and water for washing, and then sweep the refectory. Now whoever should see a vessel for drinking water or a vessel for washing water or one for rinsing in the toilet that's empty, then he should



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set up water. If it's impossible,' (That means if it's like a water jug, which is too big.) 'then you should do it by signaling your hand and invite your companion by movement of the hand,' (But you don't have to speak for that reason. All right? So if you see this empty water bottle, you need a hand, just say...) 'thus may we, on friendly terms and harmonious, spend a comfortable rainy season and not go short of alms food.' And these monks neither addressed one another nor conversed," and it goes on, repeats that, and says what they did.

"Now, it was the custom for monks who kept the Rains to go and see the Lord. Then these monks, having kept the Rains, at the end of three months packed away their lodgings and, taking their bowls and robes, set out for Sāvattihī. In due course, they arrived, they approach Sāvattihī, and approach the Buddha, and they bowed down, and it is the custom for the Buddhas to exchange friendly greetings with incoming monks. The Buddha said this to the monks, 'I hope that you are well. I hope that you kept going. I hope that all together, on friendly terms and harmonious, you passed a comfortable rainy season and did not go short of alms food.'"

"We were well, Lord. We kept going and we, Lord, altogether on friendly terms past a comfortable rainy season and did not go short of alms food."

"Now, the Tathāgatas," (the realized ones, here translated as 'truth finders') "ask knowing, and knowing sometimes do not ask. They ask knowing the right time to ask, and they do not ask knowing the right time when not to ask. They ask about things that belong to the goal, not about what does not belong to the goal. There is bridge breaking for truth finders." It's kind of a curious bit of an idiom, but it means that they don't do anything that doesn't belong to the point of the Dhamma.

"So when they ask questions, they either ask, 'shall we teach the Dhamma?' or they ask saying, 'shall we lay down a rule of training?'" Now this is a stock passage which is inserted here, which to me seems to be kind of inserted to explain away the fact that the Buddha is asking questions. I tend to think the Buddha was just asking questions, because he wanted to know the answer. But this is kind of wanting to say, "well, you know, of course, he knew the answer already, and this is why he was asking it." But anyway, that's just my interpretation.

"And he said, 'but in what way, on friendly terms and harmonious, did you spend a comfortable rainy season?'"

"They told him, 'we entered the Rains in a monastery in the Kosala country, and we said, "let us neither address each other nor converse," and that's how we did it.'"

"And then the Buddha addressed the monks saying, 'indeed, monks, these foolish men, having spent an uncomfortable time, pretend to have spent a comfortable time. Indeed these foolish men, having spent communion like beasts pretend to have spent an equally comfortable time. Having spent communion like sheep, having claimed to have spent a comfortable time. Having spent communion in indolence pretend to have spent a comfortable time. How can these foolish men of other sects observe the practice of silence or vow of silence? It is not for pleasing those who are not yet pleased,'" (and so on) "'not for the growth of the Sāsana.'"



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"And the Buddha went on to say, 'monks, a vow of silence, a practice of members of other sects, should not be observed. Whoever should observe it is in offence of wrongdoing. I allow monks, monks who have spent the Rains, to invite in regard to three matters: what has been seen or heard or suspected.'" (That means to say you invite and say, "if I've done anything which has been seen or heard or expected to be wrong, or to be harmful or something, then please admonish me.") "'That will be what is suitable for you in regard to one another, a removal of offenses, and an aiming at the Vinaya.'"

So that's what the Buddha said about keeping a vow of silence. Seems kind of harsh, right? Yeah? I mean, imagine what you'd feel like if you were one of those monks. You go there and you think, "oh, we've just done the right thing. We've been practicing together. We've been looking after each other." I mean, they weren't bad, right? They actually did a pretty good job. And they come down and the Buddha's, like, pretty heavy.

Why do you think the Buddha came down so strong on them? What does this tell you about all those silent retreats that you've done? I guess most people here have been on silent retreats? Did you know about this beforehand? Did they tell you? When you did the retreat, did they tell you what the Buddha said about doing silent retreats? No? Usually these days when I teach a retreat, it's the first thing I do is I tell people this story. And then I ask them, "do you want to take a vow of silence?" So what's this about? What's going on?

Questioner

I mean, are all the roots of the silent retreat practice that we commonly do, are they all based in a relationship to the Rains Retreat? Are all retreats...

Sujato Bhikkhu

Don't know. Not really, are they? So it's a different context. So that's one thing, right? So that's true. Yeah. What – how does that matter? How is the different context meaningful?

Questioner

Perhaps the retreats that we go on are not related or informed by this view. Maybe they're completely separate.

Sujato Bhikkhu

Okay, but in what way? Like, how would that not be relevant? Like, if we understand why the Buddha is telling these monks off, then we might understand why, if we're doing a different kind of practice, why that's relevant in that different context.

Questioner

I may be miss reading it. To me, it seems like he's saying, "hey, if you have a problem with something that your compatriot was doing, let them know and not bottle it in." To me, it seems like if a bunch of people are living together in silence, that's ripe for breeding animosity, because you can't address grievances.

Sujato Bhikkhu



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Yep. Absolutely. And that's absolutely what the pavāraṇā is about. And, you know, it's not meant to be something which sort of just happens at the end of the three month Rains, but it's like setting an example of, "this is how you should be behaving." Yeah.

All right. Yep.

Questioner

That's nearly exactly the same passage.

Sujato Bhikkhu

Right. Right.

Questioner

[Inaudible Question]

Sujato Bhikkhu

Yeah, I think it was five days, but every Friday. Yeah, five days. They they didn't talk when it wasn't necessary to talk.

Questioner

[Inaudible Question]

Sujato Bhikkhu

So this is very interesting, right? So there's the same passage – almost the same, right? It's found in other places. So that way that they're living together is actually held up as an ideal of monastic life. And you can see that actually, there's much about it that's very beautiful. Like, it's very inspiring. I mean, you see those very simple things, you know, the way that they looked after each other, and the way that they, you know, took care of each other, and cleaning the things, and just the simple, practical things. And it's very close. What these monks here were doing is very close to that, but they just changed certain things, particularly about that idea about keeping silent.

Questioner

In any place where you have rules, there sometimes gets to be a conflict in the rules. We have freedom of religion and freedom of speech. What happens when they conflict – and you can't, unless you make a determination, which is more primary or more important, then I think I hear you saying, you know, "there are many rules, but you should neglect the rule of silence, avoid someone doing something that's against another rule." And, you know, and any society has those kind of conflicts.

Sujato Bhikkhu

Sure, yeah. Anyone else? Yeah?

Questioner

Maybe he's not grasping on it – on the rule...



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Sujato Bhikkhu

Sorry?

Questioner

Not grasping...

Sujato Bhikkhu

Oh, grasping it. But it doesn't say, "don't grasp on it," it says, "don't do it."

Questioner

Yeah, but the idea is when there's a time to speak.

Sujato Bhikkhu

When there's a time to speak, exactly, yeah.

Questioner

You've got to remember that – 227 rules for male monastics and they've got 300-something for nuns and bhikkhunis. Is there any rule that you're supposed to be silent?

Sujato Bhikkhu

No.

Sujato Bhikkhu

Okay, so yeah, thank you for those thoughts. And I think there's some good, good reflections that have come out of them.

One of the things that's happening here, the Buddha is very concerned about building a community, and about people who can learn to live together. And, you know, traditionally, that's not been something that we have emphasized so much in modern Buddhism, where we have, like, retreat centers and dharma centers, where you sort of come along and sit together. That's all very nice and that, but you're not necessarily building a community in that same kind of strong way. These days I think people talk a lot about that. And I talk a lot about building, saṅgha, and kalyānamitta, and these kinds of things. But sometimes we don't remember that the Buddha actually did this. And that in the Vinaya, there's a lot of information, a lot of guidance, and a lot of precedent for how to do this well.

When we are practicing Dhamma, we are hopefully, practicing the Noble Eightfold Path. One of those factors is Right Speech, sammā-vācā. And sometimes it feels a bit like no speech can be easier than Right Speech. And we think that by keeping a vow of silence, we're going to be keeping Right Speech. But you can see here, the Buddha's saying keeping a vow of silence is like living together like beasts. Again, it's pretty harsh, right? Living together like sheep. In fact, when we recite – how you mentioned just a minute ago, the the 227 rules for monks, the 311 for bhikkhunis – that at the beginning of them, they say, "if you have transgressed any of these rules, then you should confess it. If you don't confess it, then remain silent. If you've broken any of these rules, and you remain silent, then this is a lie. This is false speech in full awareness." So you can actually lie by remaining silent.



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That's a specific, technical, legal context. But if we apply that more generally, I think that it's probably true that we lie by omission. Like, a lot! Like a lot of things that we probably should be saying, and that we're not. We start to think of those things, and there's probably quite a few of them. So this is giving us some of those very practical examples of how to live together and how to build a community.

Now, I wouldn't want to say that that should be directly applied. If you're doing, like, a weekend retreat or a 10-day retreat, and if people want to keep silence for that retreat, I understand. It makes it easier to do your meditation. So I wouldn't say it's right or it's wrong. But I would say that it's worth reflecting on and asking ourselves, "what are our priorities in practicing the Dhamma that we do these things?" Often we take these things on board without even reflecting or understanding the context behind it.

All right. Okay, good. So, we have about – what is it – about half an hour or so left. And so just in the remaining time we have together, are there any questions, any comments? If no questions or comments, anyone know any good jokes you can share with the group? Yes? No jokes.

Questioner

I have a question – no jokes, sorry. So, I'm curious how your own personal meditation practice looks like when you go on retreat.

Sujato Bhikkhu

Sorry, that was a joke. No, anyway. Go on. Go on. And what?

Questioner

No, no, that's it. I just wanted to learn about your own personal meditation practice and your own personal retreat practice and when you go on retreat whether it's silent or not.

Sujato Bhikkhu

Mostly my meditation I do is – I do my lovingkindness meditation and breath meditation, and also vipassanā, contemplation of impermanence, primarily. And other things like contemplation of death or completion of the four elements. So a bit varied. And try to keep – generally I try to structure my day so that I can sort of work during the day and do my practice at nighttime. From time to time, like when we have the Rains Retreat, and so on, then we have a chance to do more intensive practice.

Whether I keep a vow – no, I don't keep, we don't keep... we definitely don't keep vows of silence. It would be too embarrassing for the Rains Retreat. But we do have... if we're living in the monastery – I'm not sure what you're doing at Dhamma Dharani, but when I was in Australia at Santi or at Bodhinyana Monastery, we would have an opportunity to do usually like a few weeks of meditation in our kutis. So we just go to our huts and stay by ourselves. You're not really, you're not technically keeping a vow of silence, but you're also not really seeing anyone, and you just sort of get on and do your practice.



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Before I went to Sydney, I was living in Taiwan. And I stayed on a little island off the coast of Taiwan called Cimei for about two and a half years. And during that time, I was mostly staying by myself, and hardly ever saw anyone or talked to anybody. I just stayed in my room and did my translation. That's where I translated the four Nikāyas. And that was what I did – I did my translation and did my practice. So I was very lucky to have the opportunity to do that. I felt quite, quite sad when it finished. I'm like, "I wish there were more suttas so I could translate them for longer."

Questioner

[inaudible]

Sujato Bhikkhu

It depends on the time – like, probably at least a couple of hours a day, but more than that if there's an opportunity.

Sujato Bhikkhu

Gentleman at the back?

Questioner

Mine was a little bit of a technical question. We were talking about the first council this morning. Is there any, do we have any sense of how close the Canon is today from how it was in the first council, and how much development there has been since that time? Or do we know that? Or is that too big of a question?

Sujato Bhikkhu

Right.

Questioner

Sorry.

Sujato Bhikkhu

No, that's okay, we can dig into it. Okay, so this is a question of how much of what we have here today is similar to what was recited at the first council. Unfortunately, they didn't live stream the first council. So we have a bit of a bummer, right? I mean, no one even tweeted it when they were there. Well, what can I say? So, okay, so we already had a look at the account of the first council and we can see that this, the version we saw is from the Pāli. There's a description of what happened. And the description of what happened, coincidentally, exactly matches what we find in the Pāli Canon. Fair enough.

Now, when we read, for example, the Sarvāstivāda version of events, which is one of the other schools of Buddhism...

Now, Sarvāstivāda is one of the other schools of Buddhism, which was very widespread and very prominent for many hundreds of years after the Buddha passed away. In their Vinaya, they give a description of the first council, which does not begin with the Dīgha Nikāya, which the Pāli version says, but it begins with the Saṃyutta Nikāya. And, lo and behold, the Sarvāstivādin



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suttas also begin with Saṃyutta Nikāya, or the Saṃyukta Āgama. Beginning to see a pattern here? And the Dharmaguptaka Vinaya gives a description of what happened, which matches their suttas, the Dharmaguptaka suttas. Strangely enough, people tend to write these things to say that the ones that they have are the right ones.

Now, of course, all of these things are, you know, on on one level – it doesn't really matter, right? Did they recite the Saṃyutta first, or the Digha first? Doesn't really, you know – who cares? But, you know, it is about coming to some kind of grips with what is the historical reality of what occurred.

In some cases, the differences are greater. For example, in some Vinayas, it says, they recited the suttas and Vinaya, and in other places, it says they recited the suttas, Vinaya, and Abhidhamma. So then that's a more substantial difference.

From a modern critical perspective, we don't take any of those kinds of stories just by faith. We want to look into it and see what is the basis for it, and whether there's any evidence in favor of these things. This is one of the jobs of what's called textual criticism. What textual criticism does is you basically take whole bunches of texts and evidence and whatever you can, and you try to look at all of it, and you try to discern what really kind of went on, and that's kind of a job of scholarship and these kinds of things.

Textual criticism is by its very nature somewhat uncertain. Like any kind of scientific enterprise, it's always changes, it evolves. People argue with each other and write new papers and disagree with the other person's papers and these kinds of things. But over the years, there has been a broadly based consensus about the main outlines of what are considered to be the early texts of Buddhism. And that broadly based consensus is that the early part of the Buddhist scriptures are most of what's found in the four Nikāyas, most of what's found in the six early books of the Khuddaka Nikāya – I'll show you what these things are, they're sort of central.

There's the Long Discourses, Middle Discourses, Linked Discourses, and Numbered Discourses (these are the four main Nikāyas), and the Minor Collection, the Khuddaka Nikāya – the Dhammapada, the Udāna, the Itivuttaka, and the Suttanipāta (not these guys, unfortunately), and then the Theragāthā and the Therīgāthā. And these are the main ones which are regarded as early and part of the shared heritage of the suttas. The other books are written somewhat later.

In addition to that, the suttas, the Vinaya texts on the whole are somewhat later than the suttas. But the Pātimokkha, which is the basic code of conduct for bhikkhus and bhikkhunis, and many of the basic procedures, and so on, of the Vinaya are also regarded as early.

So that's what most people who study Early Buddhist Texts would regard as being the earliest scriptures. Of course, I should say that included in that is not just the things included in the Pāli Canon, but comparable material found in the Chinese, Sanskrit, and Tibetan material as well. So that's what sort of loosely we call the Early Buddhist Texts. So we can't quite write a list that's going to say, "these ones are early and other ones are late." Well, we can, but everyone will disagree with it. So there's not much point.



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I think it's important to recognize on the one hand, it's important to recognize that the fact that something's early doesn't necessarily mean it's right, and something that's late doesn't mean it's wrong. It just means it's different. It's evolved in a different historical context for a different purpose. This is one thing to bear in mind.

However, having said that, it's also true that there is a radical and frankly almost shocking shift in the nature of the teachings from the early to the late period within the Canon I'm talking about here. I'll show you what I mean by that.

Let's have a look at one collection here. Let's take the Therīgāthā. Why not? Right? We love the Therīgāthā. Okay, we'll take the Tikanipāta, the Threes in the Therīgāthā. I don't even know what these things are. I'm just clicking them randomly. Aparā... Uttamā... Dantikā. That sounds like a nice name. Okay, now I just chose this completely randomly. I've translated this; right? But it's not like I can remember all the things I've translated. I've done so many things, I can't remember.

Dantikā Therī. The verses of Dantikā Therī. I'll take the Pāli away from this for a moment. "Leaving my day's meditation on Vulture's Peak Mountain, I saw an elephant on the riverbank having just come up from his bath. A man taking a pole with a hook asked the elephant, 'Give me your foot.' The elephant presented his foot, and the man mounted him. Seeing a wild beast so tamed, submitting to human control, my mind became serene: that is why I've gone to the forest!"

Nice, right? This is all the hallmarks of the early Buddhist literature. And again, just to say, I just randomly chose this verse, and the Therīgāthā and the Theragāthā, the verses of the monks and nuns, is full of this kind of thing. You can see the emphasis on the meditation, for example. "Here I was meditating in seclusion, I come down..." but also the emphasis on something very real and very immediate. To see something, just an ordinary sight in those days – an elephant, an elephant trainer working with the elephant – you see that, and, "ah," – taking a lesson from real life and applying it to the actual work of making your mind serene, and then recognizing, "ah, that's why I'm doing this." It's very human. It's very human. And it sounds like something that you might think if you're walking down the street with a bit of mindfulness. You might see a beautiful tree in blossom, or you might see a mother looking after her child, or you might see many things and then think, "ah, that reminds me of the Dhamma, and this is why I'm meditating." So this is what this is typical of the Thera/Therīgāthā and typical of the Early Buddhist Texts.

The Thera and Therīgāthā, which give the verses of the lives of the monks and nuns, are accompanied by another set of scriptures called the Therāpadāna and Therīpadāna. The Therāpadāna and Therīpadāna give the stories of the past lives, ostensibly, of the monks, and often the same monks. Just wondering if we've got a Dantikā Therīpadāna. We'll see. Let's see whether we can just find that. I'm not sure if Dantikā has the same... Maybe she doesn't have a Therīpadāna. Perhaps not.



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Okay, so let's have a look at random, let's see I'll just close my eyes, random Apadāna. Okay, here we go. "Kaṭacchubhikkhadāyikā Apadāna. Taking a spoonful of begged food, I gave it to the Best Buddha, the Teacher, whose name was Tissa," (so this is a Buddha in a far past life) "who was wondering, begging food. Accepting it, the Sambuddha, Tissa, Chief Leader of the World, the Teacher, standing on the road, uttered this thanksgiving to me: 'Giving this spoonful of begged food, you will go to Tāvātimsa. You'll be fixed in the chief queen's place of thirty-six kings of the gods. You'll be fixed in the chief queen's place of fifty kings who turn the wheel. Everything your mind may wish for, you will receive it every day. Having enjoyed great happiness, you will go forth, possessionless. Destroying all your defilements, you'll reach nirvana, undefiled.' Having said this, the Sambuddha, Tissa, Chief Leader of the World, the Hero, flew into the sky, just like a swan-king in the air. Well-given was my superb gift; well-sacrificed my sacrifice. Giving that spoonful of begged food, I've attained the unshaking state." (Right? Awakening isn't sitting in the forest and meditating; it's giving food.) "In the ninety-two aeons since I gave that almsgiving back then, I've come to know no bad rebirth: that's the fruit of giving begged food. My defilements are now burnt up; all new existence is destroyed. Like elephants with broken chains, I am living without constraint." (Still the elephants.) "Being in Best Buddha's presence was a very good thing for me. The three knowledges are attained; I have done what the Buddha taught! The four analytical modes, and these eight deliverances, six special knowledges mastered, I have done what the Buddha taught! Thus indeed Bhikkhunī Kaṭacchubhikkhadāyikā spoke these verses."

So it's kind of different, isn't it? Yeah? I mean, it's not completely different, right? I mean, obviously there's shared values in there. But still, it's very different. And this is not just one isolated case. Like I said, I just chose that at random. And the verses in the Thera and Therīgāthā all have that quality that we find in those Early Buddhist Texts, and the Therāpadāna, which was maybe a couple of hundred years later, almost all the verses are like this. In fact, these are quite restrained compared to some of the others which go, all the divine celestial mansions you've got with all the flowers adorning them and all of these kinds of things. So you can see that when those of us who are interested to study Buddhism, to study what the Buddha taught, we focus on the Early Buddhist Texts, there are reasons for it. Those things which we find most valuable, most real, most immediate – those are the things we find in the suttas and in what the Buddha actually taught.

Questioner

Sometimes I think, "really? That's original format?" I feel like this is kind of in the hands of translators. That maybe there's kind of...

Sujato Bhikkhu

No, no, no, this is a quite literal, straightforward translation. This is only recently translated by Jonathan Walters. And he did a good job. Yeah.

Questioner

But it was written a couple years later than what he wrote – a couple of hundred years...

Sujato Bhikkhu

A couple hundred years later, yeah. Exactly, yeah.



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Questioner

...than what you just read. So earlier translators would be...

Sujato Bhikkhu

Yeah. No, it's not an earlier translator, this is a new text, it was written a couple of 100 years after the Buddha – after the other text. It was composed, not translated.

Questioner

They had to integrate [inaudible] and having all of the people who directly know the women have passed away.

Sujato Bhikkhu

Right.

Questioner

So they don't have any direct contact...

Sujato Bhikkhu

Yeah, a lot of that literature is really, in a lot of that sort of mid-period literature, especially, it's really kind of informed by that sense of loss, and sort of feeling that we live in failing times.

Questioner

Would you mind sharing a little bit your personal stories of how you got involved in Buddhism and what's your dream?

Sujato Bhikkhu

My personal stories? But I'm very boring.

Questioner

You were a musician, though. Weren't you? Right?

Sujato Bhikkhu

That's true. Yes. Yeah. All right, well, if you insist. Well, so I lived in Australia. I was a musician. And that was fun. Got to travel around the place and take a bunch of drugs and play a bunch of music and it was awesome.

Questioner

Nirvana?

Sujato Bhikkhu

And, well, you kind of... I never felt like I'd reached Nirvana. I did have a friend who was taken out of his body into a council of elders in the sky who reveal the secrets of the universe to him. So that happened. Unfortunately, he woke up three days later, naked, wandering through the forest, having completely forgotten what the lessons of the universe were. But anyway, there you go.



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So, where was I? Oh, yes. Music. And so, you know, it's fun – you go around playing music and things like that. And I don't know, to me it was kind of my life. I mean, I was looking for something. I never really felt like I belonged. I never felt like I wanted to do a career. Like, it's weird, right? Why do people do that? Why do people have careers? I don't know. Anyway, so I did this. And I was very lucky to have that opportunity, I met some good friends, we made some music together. And then of course, it all fell apart, because we were all stupid. We thought we were better than we were or whatever. Anyway, so I was kind of depressed and so on, and my friend, Thisbe, called me from the center of Australia. She was living on an Aboriginal community out in mumper, not far from LuLaRoe. And she called me and she said, "well, look, why don't you come out and stay with me? You can spend a few weeks out in the community to get..."

I thought, "that sounds like a good idea." So of course not having any money, I grabbed my backpack and grabbed my guitar and started hitching down the road. I hitched north from Sydney. Anyone been to Australia here? A few people, I think it's really good. Have you ever driven the highway from Sydney up to Brisbane? No? Okay, anyway, beautiful highway. So I was hitchhiking up, hitchhiked to Brisbane – fine. Playing music along the way, and I would just sort of sleep in the parks and sort of go busking, make a few dollars, buy a falafel roll. And you know, that was good.

Then I headed up to Townsville. Townsville was about another 1000 kilometres north of Brisbane. Once I arrived at Townsville, then, you know, I've got my guitar and I'm standing to hitchhike by the side of the road and – one hour, two hours, three hours – and it got to the end of the day. You know, like, no bastard's given me a lift. What terrible people these are, right? I just want a lift. No one can stop. There's, like, hundreds of cars going past. So I went back into Townsville, played a few songs, got a bit of money, bought a falafel roll, slept in the park. In the morning I woke up, and facing me in the morning, here was a cane toad. Anyone know about cane toads? Yeah, a few people know about cane toads. Cane toads are... well, they're not pretty.

In Australia, I think it was in the 1950s, they had this bug that was eating the sugar cane. So they thought this kind of Toad, which was from South Africa or something, would be good for eating these bugs. So they did this experiment. They fenced off a field of sugarcane, they put the toads in there, and then they observed them. They found out that the bugs live at the top of the sugar cane and the toads live at the bottom of them. So that's not going to work. Unfortunately, there was a hole in the fence. So fast forward, then there are now like millions and millions and millions of these horrifying things, which eat, like, everything else. And they're right across the north of Australia.

Anyway, so this cane toad is staring me in the face. Oh, a cane toad, all right. So I go and stand by the side of the road again for another day – nothing. Third day standing by the side of the road – still nothing. Right? It's bad, isn't it? I mean, this is Townsville. You've got to put it 'relatively speaking.' I mean, this is like, you know, if you've got a hippie going hitchhiking in Alabama, they're probably going to be expecting a few kind of fallow periods, shall we say, between getting a friendly reception. Anyway, so there I was so frustrated and by this time –



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because remember, I already was kind of depressed when I started this journey, and by now I've completely lost faith in humanity. I didn't, you know... what's the point? So what do I do? I said, "buggar it! I'll walk."

So I just started walking out of Townsville. I walked west. And, well, there's not a lot there. When I say not a lot, I mean, like, nothing. And I walked for a few hours and then it got to evening time. I came across this farmhouse, and I asked him, I said, you know, "where's the nearest town?" I thought I was gonna walk to the next town and see if I could get a lift from there. And then they said, "the next town is like 130 kilometers, 100 miles away." So I'm like, "okay, maybe I need to reconsider this plan." So I slept by the side of the road that night, and in the morning started walking back into town.

As I was walking back into Townsville, I walked past a dead kangaroo on the side of the road. If you've ever travelled around Australia, then you know it's very common to see dead kangaroos on the side of the road. Environmentally, what happened in Australia is the the white fella came and chopped down all the trees, and kangaroos are a grassland animal. So, you know, very many of the animals in Australia were very adversely affected by that, but the kangaroo population actually has increased a lot because they love eating the grass. So then they jump in front of the cars, and that's that.

So there's a dead kangaroo on the side of the road and I just walk past it, didn't think too much of it, and then I hear this sound. The sound was going [makes a scratchy rustling noise] like that. "What's that sound? What is that?" I was looking around; I realized that there was a joey in the pouch. And the mother had been killed, hit by this car, was dead on the side of the road, and the poor joey was still alive in the mother's pouch. Right? "Oh my God, what do I do?" I'm, like, I'm a city kid. Right? I mean, I grew up in Australia, but in the city you don't have kangaroos bouncing around your backyard – just FYI. So I sort of bent down and sort of carefully pulled the joey out of the mother's pouch and wrapped him up. I had a sweater and wrapped him up. Just carrying him down the road. "What do I do?" So there I am at dawn in Townsville walking down the road carrying a joey.

First house I got to, I went up and, you know, in the countryside people get up early so they were already up and about, and there was an Anglican pastor's house and his wife was there, and I went and knocked on the door. She answered and I said, "oh, hello. How are you? Um, I've got this joey. What do I do?"

She said, "oh, never mind. We'll take the joey. We'll raise him. I've raised many joeys from that age before." She said, "now the first thing you have to know when a joey is this age is that they don't drink water; they drink tea. So you have to make weak black tea, and then you pour it into the saucer, and you put a little bit on your finger, and put it on the joey's lips." She said, "that's why the joey is making that sound. He's thirsty." So if you've learned nothing else from today you've learned that joeys drink tea. I bet you didn't know that, right?

She was so kind. Here's a woman that I would never have met otherwise. Anglican pastor's wife in the outskirts of Townsville. And she had so much kindness and so much generosity of spirit to just respond in that kind of way. I just felt so deeply moved. And when I left that house,



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I chatted with her a while, left and, standing by the side of the road, I remember I just thought to myself, "I'm gonna go to Thailand."

Why? I don't know. The mysteries of the human mind, I guess. And somehow, I don't know, somehow I felt like, I needed to do something different, I needed to explore something... I don't know why. But just that thought came to my mind, "that's what I'm going to do." So that's what I did. I put together a bit of money, went to Thailand, and the rest is history.

There's a number of lessons that we can draw from that story. Number one is, when young people come to me and they say, "you know, I want to be a monk," or, "I want to be a nun, but my parents don't like it." I say, "well, it's easy. First, grow your hair and join a rock-and-roll band. Then your parents will be thrilled if you do, like, literally anything else."

I guess everyone has their journey, right? I mean, when I put it like that, it sounds very kind of lured, and really kind of exciting, and things like that. But to me, it's just my life. It's just the choices that I made and what I did.

I've always felt very blessed and very privileged to have been supported. When I went to Thailand and there was a monastery there, I could go and stay for free and do meditation, which was great. That's the main reason I went there. "Oh, it's free? Oh great." "And you can do some meditation." "Oh, yeah, sure, whatever." And ever since, when I wanted to practice, I showed up at Wat Nanachat – it's a monastery for Western monks in Thailand – and they just took me in. I wanted to become a monk, and, "sure, he can become a monk". And I had a place to stay, I had teachers, I had books, I had all of the things, I had good spiritual friends, anything that I needed for living the holy life.

So that's one thing that's always been very important for me is to try to remember that, and to extend that to others, and to remember the blessings that the Dhamma has brought to me, and my responsibility to share that with others.

At that time, I didn't really understand these things. You know, why is it that I as a bloke can go there and just ordain and it's not even an issue? But if there were women who wanted to go and ordain, suddenly it became an issue. Why is that? I don't know, I didn't understand. So I had to try to find these things out. I understand also, as a white man, you get those privileges of being able to do these things.

So always something that's been really powerful for me has been to say, "well look, those benefits and those privileges that I've had from the Dhamma, I need to share them with others and try to live in a way that will always share those things." This is part of what's fueling my work with Sutta Central, is just to remember that the Dhamma should not be, you know, it should not be restricted by nationality, or by gender, or by sexuality. It shouldn't be only those who can afford it. It shouldn't be just to the rich who should get access to Dhamma. Everybody should have access to the Dhamma everywhere around the world.

So when I did my translations, all of my translations are done under public domain license. They belong to humanity. They don't belong to me. They're not my translations I mean, I just



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do a bit of work on it, but it's a Buddhist tradition which has maintained these teachings and passed them down for so many years. I just share them. I just do my little bit and pass them on. By doing that, we bring so many people together and can create so many amazing things that there's no way I could even begin to do by myself.

When I began today, we talked about climate change and the climate crisis and the threat that's posing and the difficulties we're all going to be facing. The teachings in the in the suttas do in fact talk about climate change. Of course, impermanence being a central theme. They talk about the changing of the climate; they even talk about anthropogenic climate change – that human activity, especially growing of crops and agriculture, is responsible for changing the way the climate is. Those ideas are explicitly talked about already in the suttas two and a half thousand years ago.

As Buddhist, or as people, whether or not we consider ourselves Buddhists, but as people who are interested in the Buddha's teachings, we draw on that to find that wisdom and that love and that compassion to look after ourselves and to look after each other. We learn from what the Buddha taught us in terms of how we can live together, how we can advance, how we can find freedom. We look at these things, and in situations where hope has gone, we don't fall into despair. And we remember that Dhamma is not lived for any other purpose than to be free, and to do the right thing.

So many people ask you this, and when I talk about these things, I say, "well, personally, I don't know how you feel, but personally, I've given up hope." I don't have any hope. I don't think we're going to fix anything. I may be wrong. Hopefully, but I doubt it.

But what does that mean? I mean, for me, it means I try to live every day as best I can. Whatever happens is beyond my control, but I can live my life and try to be a good person. I can try to do the right thing, not because I expect to get anything out of it, but I try to do the right thing because it's the right thing to do. Hopefully we can learn a way to find and to live together as Dhamma practitioners through these really challenging times.

So it's four o'clock now. We should be wrapping up. I'll leave that dhamma with you for now.