Ānanda

Carol Wilson · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Carol Wilson · 1:05:08

So lately, for some reason, the last weeks or months really, I've been hanging out with Ānanda a lot. He keeps popping up in my mind, in my heart—Ānanda, the Buddha's attendant for the last twenty-five years of his life. And he inspires me a lot. He's an easy way into the human face of the whole period of the Buddha's sāsana.

I keep thinking I want to talk about Ānanda and maybe some of the other people at that time. And I keep not doing it because I think, well, why should I just tell stories? But then I decided, what the heck, I just really want to talk about Ānanda, so I'm going to.

It can happen that we are so seriously practicing in this Buddhist tradition and teaching of the elders, and we hear about the Buddha, we hear about how he gives talks and five hundred people immediately become arahants. It can all seem a little beyond our possibility, or almost enter into the realm of the mythological, even though we're always talking about how Buddha was a human being.

In the suttas and in the commentaries—but more in the suttas—you really can get a sense of the personality of quite a few of the people. And for many, Ānanda is the easiest way into that. He has a very distinctive personality. Quite a lot is known about him comparatively. And to me, he's really quite inspiring.

So I just want to share a few aspects that are probably common knowledge, but they bring me in touch with the human, the alive, the immediacy right now—people just like us. Well, maybe not just like us, but close to being like us, I could imagine.

Ānanda was called the Guardian of the Dhamma, one of the names that the Buddha gave him. He had many wonderful qualities. The one that comes to mind first—when I mentioned that I might talk about Ānanda today, someone immediately said, "Oh great, I love Ānanda." And I asked, "What's the quality you love so much?" The first one she said is the first one for me too: his devotion, his faith.

For the last twenty-five years of the Buddha's life, Ānanda was his attendant day and night, every day for twenty-five years. But his devotion wasn't just to the Buddha as a human being. It was really to the Dhamma. The Buddha made the statement that if you see the Dhamma, you see the Buddha—there's no need to see him as a person. And you really get that from Ānanda: his dedication to the Dhamma played out in his love for the Buddha.

He was also a very kind person. He did many acts of kindness, showed much mettā, much integrity. And he liked people. He was, in relative terms, a very social monk—relative to Mahākassapa or Anuruddha,

who went off and never wanted to talk to anybody. Ānanda was very friendly, very caring to both ordained and lay people, and very helpful. He was much beloved by lay people and monastics alike.

How he became the Buddha's attendant is interesting in itself, because it really shows his personality. When the Buddha was fifty-five years old, he addressed all his senior monks and said, "In my twenty years as the father of the Sangha, I've had many different attendants. None of them was really quite right. Some little sense of willfulness would become apparent after time. So I'm looking now for an attendant for my last years."

Of course, all the noble disciples—when it says noble disciples, it means fully enlightened ones—immediately offered themselves to be the attendant. Only Ānanda modestly held back. And the Buddha didn't pick any of them. The other monks turned to Ānanda and said, "Well, you should offer." So he did, and the Buddha chose him.

When it came out later and they asked, "Why didn't you offer?" Ānanda said—and this is why his faith was so great—"The Blessed One knows what he needs and he knows who would be the best. What is it for me to offer?"

He will choose what he needs.

And he was always like that—just complete faith and no sense of willfulness or putting himself forward in any way.

So he agreed, of course. He wanted to be the attendant, just like all of them did. And he agreed, but he gave eight conditions. He requested eight conditions from the Buddha, conditions under which he would be his attendant. And these really show both his lack of putting himself forward—he just had no pride, no sense of thinking himself special—and also his love for the Dhamma.

So he had eight conditions. The first was that if the Buddha received a gift of robes, he would never pass it on to Ananda. The second was that the Buddha would never give Ananda any of his alms food. The third, that if someone gave the Buddha a special dwelling place, he would not give it to Ananda. And the fourth, whenever the Buddha received a personal invitation to a special meal, that he would not include Ananda in that. Ananda said later this was so no one would think that he was personally profiting by being the Buddha's attendant.

And then he had four other wishes. That if he, Ananda, were invited to a meal, he asked for the right to transfer the invitation to the Buddha. If people came from far away to see the Buddha, he asked the Buddha for the privilege that he could always lead the people to see the Buddha when they came to look for him—which is, I think, a lovely thing. If he, Ananda, had any doubts, any inquiries about the Dhamma, he asked for the right to ask the Buddha at any time. And if the Buddha gave a discourse during Ananda's absence, Ananda asked for the privilege to have the Buddha repeat it to him privately. Since Ananda wasn't going to any of the meals the Buddha was invited to, where he would always give a discourse, the

Buddha must have had to repeat a lot.

But this last one is very significant, because another thing about Ananda was his incredible memory. The reason the Buddha repeated all the discourses is because Ananda remembered them all word for word. So when you read the suttas, how many of them start with "Thus have I heard"? That's Ananda. Every one that begins "Thus have I heard"—that's Ananda after the Buddha died, at the first council, recollecting the sutta, the talk that he heard the Buddha give, and then reciting it. I know we can't even remember the seven factors of enlightenment. He remembered them all.

So the first four conditions were so he wouldn't benefit, but the second four were so that he could truly fulfill the duties of his post in order to serve all beings.

And so for twenty-five years, day and night, he served the Buddha. At the end of the Buddha's life, he said, "For twenty-five years I served the Lord with loving deeds, loving words, and loving thoughts. When the Buddha paced to and fro, I paced along behind."

And it was really like that. His duties as attendant were myriad. Part of it was just being present, taking care of the Buddha's physical needs—washing his feet, helping him get a place to lie down, making sure he had food. He was like a social secretary, organizing all the different things, making sure people could come and see him. He often served as a go-between, when lay people would come to Ananda and ask a question, and he would go to the Buddha.

One of the beautiful things I always think about in reading how he served this role—because he was the gateway to the Buddha for twenty-five years—is that I know in some spiritual scenes nowadays, when there's the big charismatic teacher and hordes of people wanting to get close and come and see, there's often this sense of an in-crowd. And the in-crowd's job, or what usually happens with the in-crowd, is making sure they stay the in-crowd by keeping other people the out-crowd. And Ananda was just the reverse. That condition about if people come from outlying areas, requesting always the privilege that he could bring them to see the Buddha—his goal was to help people hear the Dhamma, not keep them out. He genuinely cared for people, he was really kind, and he served as a bridge rather than a barrier between people and the Buddha. That was really a beautiful quality.

For twenty-five years he was the perfect attendant, meaning that he didn't ever show any aspects of willfulness. Really perfect devotion to the Dhamma in thought, word, and deed.

Another interesting part about Ananda gives us insight into the human element. Besides the fact that he was social—that's kind of why we know more about him, there are more stories about him—he was not a fully awakened arahant. Most of the other monks and nuns that you read about, you read about them because they became fully awakened arahants pretty quickly. And Ananda didn't. He was a stream-enterer. The eye of the Dhamma had awakened in him. But then for the twenty-five years that he was with the Buddha day and night, listening to every sutta, every talk the Buddha gave, and so much

discussion, he never completely awakened until after the Buddha died.

And yet the Buddha himself said, even though Ananda is still on the path of higher training, it would be difficult to find someone who equals him in wisdom. So just to know—you don't have to think, "Oh, only stream entry, not good enough." It's really quite a deep wisdom. There are many suttas where Ananda is shown to be an excellent teacher, partly because of his affinity with people.

He really tuned into people. He could say what was appropriate at the right time. Well, the Buddha could do that too, but that's because he was omniscient—he could read what was in people's minds, like that story about the leper last week. But Ananda, it was more that he just had the human empathy. His heart could tune into people and say what was helpful.

Sometimes the Buddha would ask him to teach. There's one story, and I like this too because it shows even the Buddha is human. The Buddha and Ananda were with a big assembly of the Sakyans, the Buddha's clan. And the Buddha was giving a long talk most of the night—most of the night. I know you guys think an hour is long! And then after a while, the Buddha said, "Ananda, I've been talking a long time. My back is really hurting me, and I need to stretch. So you now give a talk to the Sakyans. Talk to them about the disciple in higher training who is practicing the path. My back is aching, and I will go and stretch."

So he went off, and Ananda then gave a whole talk, at the end of which the Buddha sat back up again from stretching his back and said, "Excellent, Ananda, excellent." There were other times where he said, "If you had come to me with this question, I would have said the same thing." That's called Buddha Vachana, the word of the Buddha. When one of the other monks or nuns gives a talk or answers a question, the people they talk to would always go to the Buddha and say, "This is what they said." You always wonder, why didn't they just ask the Buddha in the first place? But anyway, they'd ask, "This is what he or she said." And the Buddha would say, "Yes, excellent. Had you asked me, I would have said the same thing." So he said that at this point about Ananda.

He also said at the time of his death—well, before he died, at the time when he announced he was going to die—the Buddha said that Ananda has four remarkable and wonderful qualities. This is at the end of the 25 years. What are they? "If a company of monks comes to see Ananda, they are pleased at the sight of him. And when Ananda talks Dhamma to them, they are pleased. And when he is silent, they are disappointed. And so it is too with nuns, with male and female lay followers." So basically, Ananda was well beloved for teaching the Dhamma and for his kindness.

He was a great supporter of the nuns, Ananda. In fact, in the beginning there was no nuns sangha—there was just the sangha of monks, of bhikkhus. I don't want to go into the whole story, but the woman who was Buddha's aunt, who had raised him because his mother died when he was a week old—Mahapajapati Gotami—later in life she wanted to become a nun and begged the Buddha to start a sangha of nuns. And he resisted, which is never really explained why, but he resisted.

At one point, Ananda, again in his role as bridge, not exactly interceded, but he spoke up when the Buddha had three times refused Mahapajapati Gotami. Technically, you could ask the Buddha for something and ask him up to three times, and the third time he would say yes if he could. But this time, he didn't say yes. So it's said Ananda thought, "Hmm, let me ask in another way."

So he came in, speaking on the side of the women, and he asked the Buddha two questions. He said, "Lord, is it true, is it possible that women can awaken to the same wisdom that men can?" And the Buddha said, "Absolutely, no question." So then Ananda said, "Well, looking on…" He then interceded in a personal way, and only he could have done this. He said to the Buddha, "Lord, look how much she has done for you in your life. When you were young, she suckled you, she fed you, she raised you as her own child. She is so sincere. It would be good, Lord, if women could become nuns." And at this point the Buddha agreed.

So there's a way that Ananda, in his kindness, was really—I wouldn't say a protector of the nuns, because they had the Buddha as their protector—but he was a great favorite with the nuns, which once in a while led him into a little bit of trouble. Just because he was so open and friendly, sometimes he would get overenthusiastic, but I'll say more about that in a moment.

In the same way, the nuns and the monks lived in separate communities. The monks would go to the nuns and teach, and later the nuns developed their own teachers. I'll mention some of the women teachers a little later—I won't talk about Ananda the whole time. But he also had this same quality, this ability to connect with laypeople, laymen and laywomen.

And you just get the feeling that women really trusted him in a way—that he was kind to them, not so aloof.

One story about this involves King Pasenadi, who was one of the kings of the area and a great devotee of the Buddha. Apparently the kings at this time had many wives and many consorts, whole harems of them. And these royal women were actually kind of prisoners; they weren't allowed out of the harem. You read in different suttas where the royal women wanted to go to the Buddha and get teachings, and they weren't allowed to. They couldn't wander freely. In fact, slave women had much more freedom of movement than the royal women.

So all the wives of the king begged him to ask one of the Buddha's teachers to come teach them. King Pasenadi, of course, agreed. He said, "Well, who do you want?" And they all conferred and immediately said, "Ananda. We want Ananda." So Pasenadi went to the Buddha and asked him, and the Buddha agreed. And then on a regular basis, Ananda would go and teach the king's wives.

One time when he went—and this is just a story of his willingness to get involved in the lay level of difficulties that happen, and his wisdom in dealing with them—one time he went to teach these wives and they were all upset and couldn't focus because someone had stolen one of the king's really important jewels. Everyone had been searched and they couldn't find it, but everything was in an uproar. Everybody

was mistrusting everyone else, not just the women but in the whole court.

So Ananda came up with this ingenious plan, which King Pasenadi adopted. He said, "Set up a tent in your courtyard that has flaps so no one can see in. And inside, put a big pot of water. Then have everyone who's a suspect go in singly, one at a time. And whoever has the jewel can just drop it in that pot of water." So at the end, after all the suspects had gone in and out, the king went in and there was the jewel.

Ananda accomplished three things. He ended the crisis, so the king got back his property. Nobody was blamed. Nobody was punished. All suspicion was done away with. He was praised by the king and also by the monks for restoring the peace through gentle means. And that was an aspect of his kindness and his wisdom and his ability to tune in—to restore the peace by gentle means.

Another example of his kindness that I've always loved comes from the Agamas, which is a later collection, but it sounds really true. It sounds like Ananda to me. This is from Jack's compilation.

Ananda was being sent somewhere by the Buddha on a mission, so he was on a long walk. He passed a well on the outside of a village and saw Pakati, a young outcast woman, and asked her for water to drink. Mostly monks could not ask for food or anything, but they could ask for water. But she was from the lower caste. And she said, "Oh no, I'm too humbly born. I can't give you water. Do not ask anything of me, lest your holiness be contaminated, for I am of low caste." That's the way it was at that time in India for the so-called low caste, the untouchables. The belief was that if you took anything from them, a higher caste person would be contaminated. And that's how she thought of herself.

Ananda replied, "I'm not asking about your caste, but simply for water."

The woman's heart leapt joyfully, and she gave Ananda water to drink. He thanked her and went away, but she followed him at a distance. She'd heard that he was a disciple of the Buddha. So she went to the Blessed One and said, "Oh Lord, help me. Let me live in the place where your disciple Ananda dwells so that I may see him and minister unto him, for I love Ananda."

And the Blessed One understood the emotions of her heart. He said, "Pakati, your heart is full of love, but you do not understand your own sentiments. It is not Ananda that you love, but his kindness. Accept then the kindness you have seen him practice towards yourself, and practice it towards others."

I love that, because that's the way Ananda seemed to affect people—by his kindness, just by not accepting that she was low caste and would contaminate him. And that was an aspect of the Buddha's radical teachings, actually. When he set up his sangha of both monks and nuns, within the sangha it had nothing to do with caste, which was so rigidly stratified in Indian society at that time.

But in both the monks and the nun Sangha, the hierarchy was dependent on when you ordained. So an outcast person like that woman, Pakati, could have ordained as a nun. And she would have been a nun ahead of the next nun who ordained, even if that next nun had been a wife of the king. That was really

radical. And that's what Ananda was showing just in his sense of accepting someone just as they are and meeting them with kindness. He had no pride.

But sometimes, just as this woman misunderstood his kindness and turned it into a personal love for Ananda, he got into a little bit of trouble with the nuns. It's not that he did anything wrong, but sometimes he was just so kind and so enthusiastic. He was really—I don't know if you could say impulsive about any of these monks, but close to it, as close as you could get to impulsive in that time.

So there's one story when he was admonished by Mahakasyapa. Now, Mahakasyapa is one of the great disciples of the Buddha. He's renowned as the most ascetic of all the Buddha's great disciples. I won't go into his whole story, but he sounds like he was a bit of a rough guy. He didn't really like hanging out with people too much. He loved being extremely ascetic, loved being out in nature. There's actually lots of poems where he's extolling how much he loves nature, which is really nice to hear. But he wasn't perhaps the most personally empathetic, as Ananda was. But he was, again, an arhat.

Once the nuns that Ananda used to visit and teach frequently asked Ananda to have Mahakasyapa come and teach. Kashyapa resisted—he didn't want to go—for a couple of times, but finally he came. And he went, and Mahakasyapa gave a whole discourse to the nuns. He talked the whole time. When he finished, one of the nuns, who clearly really liked Ananda, blamed Mahakasyapa for doing all the talking. This is the quote that comes from this: "It's as if a needle seller was peddling his wares in the presence of the needle maker." She's saying this about Kashyapa—you know, you're doing all the talking and the really good guy is sitting here in silence. And then Ananda immediately jumped in and begged Mahakasyapa, "Oh, please forgive her, please forgive her."

What's interesting is that Mahakasyapa actually admonished Ananda for that. The nun was clearly off—that's obvious. Remember, he's an arhat. In terms of really generating wholesome speech or unwholesome speech, putting down an arhat is not really the greatest thing to do. "Mahakasyapa, oh my God, we have to listen to him when we could have Ananda." And then Ananda's basically jumping in and saying, "Oh, don't be mean to her." He's almost trying to block her learning what she did that was unskillful, which to us often we can hear as being kind. Ananda jumps in and goes, "Oh no, forgive her, forgive her, leave her alone." But that's not really the way the Buddha Sasana works.

We'll learn about and later say how the Buddha admonished Ananda. Admonishment isn't out of anger or saying, "You're bad, you stupid jerk." That's how we hear admonishment. Admonishment is saying, "You know, this isn't so skillful. This would be more skillful. This other way would be for your own well-being and happiness." And so for Ananda to jump in and say, "Oh, no, no, no, forgive her," is actually blocking that.

Kashyapa actually—and he was a little tough—admonished Ananda, saying that in his zeal to teach the nuns, he was overlooking possibly the dangers and the effects of their becoming too attached to him. I think that's just really interesting. He's so wanting to help that he gets a little too close sometimes. And

that's where you can see he's still one on the path of higher training. It's what makes him lovable, of course. And for us, I find that a very delicate and powerful teaching. Kind, generous, almost impulsive.

The one other time that the Buddha actually admonished Ananda again comes out of his really being such a social person. But the Buddha's admonishing I also think is interesting in terms of Dhamma teaching. It's said elsewhere in the suttas that one who is easily admonished is a really beautiful and wholesome quality, because that's how we learn.

That's how we're letting go of our sense of self. And remember, admonishment isn't delivered with anger or blame. Admonishment is simply, "Oh, you know, this isn't so helpful. This would be more in line with wisdom." One who is open to that, who is easily admonished, is free from pride and open to learning, not caught in self-centeredness.

So when we react with, "Oh my god, you're right, I'm so bad, I'm so stupid," that's all about me, me, me. And then you notice, "Oh yes, it is about me, me, me," and that becomes another layer. But to be open enough to think, "Look at that. What I did got in the way. She was too attached to me and I didn't see it. That's interesting. Next time I'll see it, because it will be for her good, it will be for my good, it will be for the good of both." Such an open way.

So one time, the occasion when the Buddha admonished Ananda for an action rather than words—he often admonished him for saying things that weren't completely true. The most famous instance being after Ananda had been meditating on paṭiccasamuppāda, dependent origination, which is a very central and complex teaching. Ananda went to the Buddha and said, "Oh, paṭiccasamuppāda, dependent origination is just so clear, so obvious." And the Buddha replied, "Not so, Ananda, not so. It is very difficult to understand."

But this particular admonishment concerned action. Another thing Ananda was apparently good at was sewing. The monks have to sew their own robes, patch them together, sew the hems—there are different techniques for all of this. Ananda, again, was very skilled at this. He was a man of many talents. The Buddha praised him for how well he could do it and said he should teach the other monks how to sew.

Later, when they were at a certain monastery, the Buddha came and asked Ananda how many monks were living there. He saw that Ananda had set up a huge circle—as if we put all the cushions into a circle—where all the monks would sit. Ananda explained it was time for them to learn how to sew their robes properly. It seemed he'd arranged a kind of evening sewing circle, where the monks would all come together and sit around sewing their robes. And basically, it had turned into a time for indulging in frivolous chatter—just sitting around shooting the breeze, as far as that happened for monks at that time.

Now, this doesn't seem horribly frivolous to us, right? But in terms of that context, the Buddha admonished Ananda quite strongly. I'll shorten it, because the passage is actually quite long, but he says: when a monk enjoys socializing, finds contentment in socializing, is attached to togetherness, finds his

whole happiness in togetherness—he will have no access to the bliss which exists independent of the desire for togetherness.

So the Buddha isn't saying togetherness is bad, but how this evening sewing circle was leading into attachment, into contentment with togetherness. He said that for a bhikkhu to attain the bliss of renunciation at will, the bliss of solitude, the bliss of tranquility, the bliss of awakening, in their totality—while pleased with and finding contentment in togetherness—this is impossible.

He's basically saying, not that we can never be together, but that until we have no attachment at all to the contentment of togetherness, to socializing, only then can we truly, completely taste the bliss of freedom. That's a hard teaching for those of us who enjoy the bliss of togetherness.

And remember, this is why the Buddha was always very direct with Ananda. I know in our culture it's easy to rationalize: "Well, what's wrong with togetherness? We don't all have to go off into the wilderness." He's not saying that. He's simply saying don't indulge in it. Don't set up a situation, Ananda, because you're an important teacher, that feeds people's attachment to togetherness.

He gives a whole long admonishment. Then at the end—what I really love—he speaks directly to Ananda out of his love for him, basically saying, in shorthand, that he is admonishing him so that he can attain the highest peace. "I'm admonishing you because I know you love me, and I know you love the Dhamma, and I want you to be free."

He says, "Therefore, Ananda, have amity, friendship towards me, not hostility. For long will that be for your benefit and happiness." And explaining why he admonishes him, he says, "I shall not treat you, Ananda, as a potter treats his unfired pots."

That analogy—an unfired pot is one that's been formed in clay and dried but not fired. It's very brittle. As Bhikkhu Bodhi notes, saying he won't treat Ananda like an unfired pot means he won't walk on eggshells around him. "You're very sensitive. You're very touchy. If I tap on you too hard, you'll break." But he says, "I'm admonishing you. I'm not treating you like an unfired pot. Repeatedly admonishing, I shall speak to you. Repeatedly testing."

And one who is sound will stand the test. So he's making it clear that he's holding nothing back with Ananda, because he really knows that his love of the Dhamma, his faith in the Dhamma is so pure that he won't be crushed by that.

And it's true—Ananda didn't really have any pride, and he had no enemies, which they point out is actually pretty amazing. To have no enemies! No one was jealous of him because he didn't have pride. And Helmut Hecker in *Disciples of the Buddha* points out, well, it's easy for someone like Ananda's cousin Anuruddha, who was an arahant, to have no enemies because he didn't hang out with people at all. He just stayed out on his own. Ananda was more with people than almost any other monk, and still he had no enemies.

And the other piece of his humanness that I really love is there are two times that he really expresses grief in a way that's so human. The Buddha, when someone dies, always just says, "How many times have I told you? All that comes together has to come apart." But Ananda really expresses grief. To me, he's like our stand-in for how it feels.

The first time, his strongest friend was Sariputta, the Buddha's main disciple. Ananda and Sariputta would often go teaching together or go visiting other disciples together. And Sariputta died a while before the Buddha died. And Ananda, it's said he was just... he felt like he'd fallen into an abyss of depression, of grief. And this is the poem in the Theragatha that he's said to have exclaimed at the time of Sariputta's death:

All the directions are obscure. The teachings are not clear to me. With our benevolent friend gone, it seems as if all is darkness. For one whose friend has passed away, one whose teacher is gone for good, there is no friend that can compare with mindfulness of the body.

Remember that next time you're in grief. There's no friend that can compare with mindfulness of the body.

The old ones have all passed away. I do not fit in with the new. And so today I muse alone like a bird who has gone to roost.

Ananda missing his friend, Sariputta.

At that point, the Buddha consoled Ananda with one of his peppy Dhamma talks. But the point he made was he said, "Did Sariputta's death take away your virtue? Did that take away your wisdom? Does Sariputta's death take away your meditation? Does it take away your liberation?" And Ananda said, "No, of course not." And he said, "So this is where you take your refuge. No friend can ultimately be our refuge."

And of course, preceding his own death, the Buddha said the same thing. That's a very famous scene of grief, when the Buddha announced that he was going to die in three months. He was with a whole group of people, and Ananda kind of disappeared at that point. Later, the Buddha—of course he knew where he went—said, "Okay, where's Ananda? Somebody go find Ananda." And they found Ananda, and he was leaning against a doorpost, weeping.

I read somewhere that there are many pieces of artwork that depict this—this devoted twenty-five-year attendant hearing that the Buddha is going to die in three months, leaning against the doorpost, weeping. And he's saying, "I'm still a learner with much to do, and the teacher is passing away who is so compassionate to me."

So the Buddha calls him, and he says what you'd expect. First he admonishes him. He says, "Enough, Ananda, do not weep and wail. Haven't I told you?" And then it's the usual thing—that all things that are pleasant and delightful are changeable, subject to separation and becoming other. How could it be that I

should not pass away?

But then he really praises him. He says, "For a long time, Ananda, you've been in the Tathagata's presence, showing loving kindness in acts of body, of speech, and mind, beneficially, blessedly, wholeheartedly, and unstintingly. You have achieved much merit, Ananda. Make the effort."

In a short time, you will be free of the corruptions.

And then he turns to all the monks. "Monks, all those who were fully enlightened Buddhas in the past have had just such a chief attendant as Ananda. And so too will those in the future. Monks, Ananda is wise. He knows when it is the right time for monks to come to see the Tathagata, when is the right time for nuns, for male lay followers, for female lay followers, for kings, ministers, leaders, and their pupils." And that's when he goes on to say that Ananda has these four remarkable and wonderful qualities—basically, that all are pleased at the sight of him.

And so that's Ananda, the guardian of the Dhamma, twenty-five years following one step behind the Buddha with thoughts, speech, and action of loving kindness, but without excluding anyone. Loving the Dhamma because he loved the Buddha, and doing everything he could to make it accessible to everyone else. Really, to me, a very inspiring being.

I want to talk about a couple of women disciples. As the nuns' sangha grew more mature, the monks continued to teach, but the nuns also developed their own teachers—their own women who had their own stories and their own wisdom. They were really quite equal in the way of wisdom and freedom to the monks.

Since we got into the women from Ananda, I'll give a short account of a couple of them. The one who was considered the greatest teacher was named Dhammadina. And again, all these are just like regular people that we can in some way relate to—their lives, their stories.

She was the wife of a man named Visakha, middle class and quite well-to-do in Rajagaha. They had a very happy marriage. This is one of the stories where it wasn't enormous suffering that brought the woman to the Dhamma, which is often the case—that women became nuns out of enormous suffering. That's still often the case now in Thailand and Burma. Even when you talk to some of the brightest nuns, you find that when they first became nuns, there was a lot of suffering going on. But not Dhammadina. Her marriage was very happy, and they were very close. They would always eat together.

But one day, her husband came home from the market, and instead of being friendly and talking, he just passed by her, abstracted, and went into the next room. This is so human—she thought, "What did I do? He doesn't love me anymore. What's the problem? What's happening? Our marriage is on the rocks." And she got very upset.

Finally he came to her, and what had happened was that he had heard the Buddha and gotten quite

inspired. He said to her, "Dhammadina, I'm inspired. I want to become a monk. I will give you all my wealth, and you can stay here or go back to your family. I give you everything I have."

She thought about it. She said, "Well, you know what? I want to renounce also. I'd like to become a nun."

He said, "Okay." So before he became a monk, he gave her a big send-off. He arranged for her to go in a grand palanquin with people carrying her, and she went and ordained.

Once she ordained, of course, you don't see your family anymore. She practiced and became completely awakened. She also became one of the women with the highest insight, and she became a great teacher.

Later in her wandering, she came back to Rajagaha where she'd lived, and found out—guess what? Her husband never managed to make it to becoming a monk. He was still hanging out in Rajagaha. But he was still inspired by the Dhamma.

This is what Sayadaw U Pandita often says: "Women make the really good yogis." Nothing personal.

He just says that sometimes.

So he hadn't become a monk, but he was very interested in the Dhamma. So he went to her, but as a seeker, not as her husband, and said, "Sister Dhammadina." And he asked her a whole series of questions. This is actually one of the suttas in the Majjhima Nikaya, the Lesser Series of Questions, that is all about Visakha asking questions to Dhammadina and her answering. There are not that many places in the suttas where a teaching is elevated to the same equality as a teaching of the Buddha. Being in the Majjhima Nikaya, it is elevated to that.

"For what is meditation?" she says. "Meditation is the focusing of the heart." And he keeps going on and on, finally asking her about Nirvana. And finally she says, "Okay, now you should go talk to the Buddha. Go ask him." And again, it's one of those occasions where the Buddha said, "What she said, that's exactly what I would have said. She answered exactly as I would have." So she was considered one of the foremost teachers of the Dhamma among the women, Dhammadina.

One of the other foremost women in the Sangha, one of its two leaders, was Kema. And I just like her story of how she became a nun. Probably not likely to happen to any of us, but it's one I love.

She was the chief consort of one of the kings, Bimbisara, who was sort of a follower of the Buddha—not quite as devoted as Pasenadi, but he was a follower. Kema, however, was extremely beautiful and extremely conceited. She loved pleasure and she loved sensuality. So even when the Buddha would come to the beautiful park nearby, she wouldn't go to hear him, because she said, "I've heard that he talks about the dangers of sense pleasures and he advocates renunciation." And frankly, she didn't want to hear anything about it. She loved her life and her beauty and everything about it.

So Bimbisara, for some reason really wanting her to go hear the Buddha, organized a kind of enticement.

The Buddha was teaching in a particularly beautiful park, so Bimbisara hired a musician to walk around singing a song extolling the beauty of this particular park, knowing that Kema would be seduced because she loved pleasure and she loved beauty.

So she went. And then when she got there, of course, there was the Buddha teaching. She couldn't help but hear it. And there was the Buddha with his all-encompassing mind that could know just whose mind was ripe to hear the Dhamma and just what to say to hook them. As one of my earlier teachers, a character named Robert Hover, used to say: the velvet-gloved iron fist of the Dhamma.

So what he did was create, with his psychic powers, an image of an incredibly beautiful goddess, far more beautiful than Kema. And because she loved beauty, she was completely attracted. "Wow! Oh, that's incredible! What beauty!" And then he had it gradually decay. He had her beauty kind of gradually wither and turn to middle age, and the teeth started to rot, and the skin started to sag, and the hair fell out, and gradually she died.

And Kema got it, right? "Oh, it's going to be the same for me." And then he gave a whole talk about how people devoted to physical beauty and sensual pleasure were bound to the world, while those who renounced were free of attachments, were free. And she is one of the rare laypeople that is recorded as having, on just hearing this one talk, become completely awakened. She became an arahant. That's why I said it's not so likely to happen to us.

What I like about her story is the fact that she was so ready to hear the Dhamma but completely resistant to it. She just needed to hear one teaching. It's sort of like being just on the edge of, "No, I love my pleasures, and I don't want to hear about anything else. Let me hold on." And when it's just on the other side of that, there's this complete freedom. She had what Chögyam Trungpa used to call nostalgia for samsara. We just love it. "No, I want my pleasures. Don't make me give them up"—not imagining the freedom and beauty and peace on the other side.

So she became one of the great teachers. I'll read you part of her poem:

Everywhere the love of pleasure is destroyed,
the great dark is torn apart,
and death, you too are destroyed.
Fools who don't know things as they really are
revere the mansions of the moon
and tend the fire in the wood,
thinking this is purity.

That's talking about some of the Brahminical rituals, thinking that's purity.

But for myself, I honor the enlightened one, the best of all,
and practicing his teaching,

I'm completely freed from suffering.

Okay, one more woman, and then just a little bit about Anathapindika, because I love him too. This other woman, Punika, was a slave. She was actually the slave of Anathapindika, who was the Buddha's most generous supporter, and also partially awakened.

So, who can figure out the society norms of the time? The kings had all these wives and mistresses and slaves. Anyway, Punika was a slave, and she used to have to go down to the water, the stream, in the early cold morning and draw water for the family. She was apparently really clear in her faith, in her understanding of the Dhamma—it's kind of like speaking truth to power. As a slave, she had more ability to get around, and she had heard the Buddha teaching. She had really understood the Dhamma and had great faith in it.

So one day she was down drawing water, and she had such confidence that her poem is really a dialogue. She's talking to a Brahmin man who comes down, a Brahmin of the high caste. He came down because there was the belief at the time—maybe still to some extent—that if you washed yourself off in holy water, it purified you of all your sins. So he was there, washing off all his bad karma in the water. And she basically says, "What do you think you're doing?"

This is her poem talking to him. She says, "I'm a water carrier. Even in the cold, I have always gone down to the water because I'm frightened of punishment or the angry words of high-class women. But what are you afraid of, Brahmin, that makes you go down to the water? Your limbs shake with bitter cold."

And the Brahmin says, "You know why, Punika. I am doing good to prevent evil. Anyone young or old who has done something bad is freed by washing it in the water."

And she says—and this is the sense of the confidence, just the confidence of knowing the Dhamma—she says to him, "Whoever told you that you are freed from evil by washing? The blind leading the blind. In that case, all frogs and turtles would go to heaven, and water snakes and crocodiles and the rest of the water creatures." She goes on and on: "Thieves, executioners, other wrongdoers would be freed from their bad karma by washing in water. If these streams carried away all your old evil, they would carry away your virtue too. You would be separated from both. Rather, just don't do that thing, the fear of which leads you down to the water. Stop now, Brahmin, and save your skin from the cold."

That's kind of tough, huh? Speaking to a high-caste Brahmin. And he hears her, of course, because she's speaking with such confidence. He says, "You're on the right road. You brought me back." Then he says, "I'll give you the robe I bathed in."

She goes, "Keep your robe. I don't want it. If you're afraid of pain, if you don't like it, do nothing evil, either openly or in secret." She just gives him a whole Dhamma teaching.

And then he says, "I take refuge in the Buddha, in the Dharma, in the Sangha. I train in the precepts." This

is good. So she basically turned the man on to the Dhamma.

And then later—she clearly was gutsy—she went to the Buddha and said, "I want to become a nun." But slaves were not allowed to become nuns or monks, and the Buddha was about to leave the area. She goes to him and says, "Well, wait. Would you just go talk to Anathapindika and have him give permission that I could become a nun?"

And the Buddha said, "Okay." He went and talked to Anathapindika, who said, "Never mind. She's freed. I adopt her as my daughter." And she became a nun.

So just know there were all these different ways that women became involved in becoming nuns and powerful teachers, with strong faith in the Dhamma. There are lots of poems by the women. This book, *Th e First Buddhist Women* by Susan Murcott, is really quite inspiring, with a lot of the stories of the nuns and their poems.

So just a few more minutes—I want to tell a couple of stories of Anathapindika. He was the man who was the greatest lay supporter of the Buddha, very rich.

And again, besides his incredible generosity, what's inspiring about him is his enormous faith—just enormous faith. And that faith colored his generosity. There are great lessons on generosity from Anathapindaka.

From the very first time he ever heard about the Buddha, he was visiting his brother-in-law, and the house was in an uproar. He said, "What's going on?" And his brother-in-law said, "Well, the Enlightened One is coming. We are getting ready for him tomorrow." And Anathapindaka said, "The Enlightened One? Is there an Enlightened One?" And he just got so excited. He didn't even know why. He couldn't sleep all night. Then early in the morning, he just had to go running out really early to meet the Buddha.

It's like when you get that intuitive sense of something that's going to change your life and you don't know what it is. I love that. It's so naive, and he just acts on it. And he goes running out, and he gets really afraid on the way to the Buddha, not knowing what's happening. He goes to turn around, and then it says an invisible spirit came and urged him on. Whether the invisible spirits are our own inner intuition—we say, "No, I can't do this. This is too stupid. What am I going to say?" And the intuition says, "No, go. This is far more important."

So finally he went and saw a figure walking in the distance, which was, of course, the Buddha. And he stopped. And the Buddha called, "Kamsudatta," which was a name that no one else called him. He was surprised the Buddha knew it. He went up, but he was so off balance, out of presence, just so excited to be in the presence of the Buddha that he just fell down at his feet. He stammered, "Oh, did you sleep well? Did the Blessed One sleep well?" Just not knowing what to say. And of course the Buddha said he always sleeps well—the Brahmin who is fully quenched—and went on to give him a whole talk.

And for Anathapindaka, the Dhamma eye opened. He understood the Four Noble Truths. It says, "The dust-free, stainless eye of truth opened for Anathapindaka. Whatever has the nature of arising, all that has the nature of cessation"—the beginning of awakening.

From then on, he devoted himself to supporting the Buddha, supporting the Sangha. He went back to Savatthi and asked the Buddha if the Buddha would accept if he bought a park and gave it to him to make a monastery. And the Buddha said yes, he would accept that. So Anathapindaka went back, and at enormous expense—a whole long story—he bought the Jeta Grove from Prince Jeta at a huge amount of money.

Now so many suttas begin, "Thus I have heard"—that's Ananda—"on one occasion, the Blessed One was dwelling at Savatthi in the Jeta Grove, the monastery of Anathapindaka." The Buddha ended up spending nineteen of his forty-five rains retreats there.

Anathapindaka not only bought the monastery and offered it, he had buildings built. He would bring the monks robes every day. He made sure they had food every day. He made sure they had medicine all the time. And he also invited hundreds of monks every day to his mansion to feed them. It just goes on and on, his generosity.

But the important thing about his generosity is that it came from total faith—that real generosity is this open-hearted faith and happiness producing, not about result.

There's a great story about King Pasenadi, who again was a devotee of the Buddha. He heard of Anathapindaka's generosity and how he was having five hundred monks every day. So he said, "I, too, want to do that. I, too, want to imitate."

So he gave orders to his servants: every day I'm inviting 500 monks, cook and serve them. And he started doing that.

But then he was walking in the city and heard from his supporters that the monks would come to his house and be offered the food, but then they would go into the city and each monk would offer his bowl of food to one of their other supporters, who would then offer it back to the monk, and only then would the monk eat it.

King Pasenadi said, "What's that about? This is the best food, the richest food, the most well-prepared food. Why is this happening?"

And the Buddha explained to the king that in his palace, his servants who distributed the food had no inner feeling about it. They were just following orders, as if they were cleaning out a barn or taking a thief to court. They just did whatever the king told them to do. They lacked faith, and they had no love for the monks. Many of them even thought the monks were parasites living by the labor of the working population. Anything given in that spirit, no one could feel comfortable accepting it, even when the meal

was of the most delicious food. So the monks would take the food and give it to one of their devoted lay supporters, who would offer it back again. And then it was really a true dāna.

So Anāthapiṇḍika embodied this spirit of real open-hearted faith and generosity. It's really quite beautiful.

Now, just the last thing—I know we're running a little over, but I have to tell this final story of Anāthapiṇḍika because it inspires me so deeply. When he was dying, it was kind of his last act of generosity, in a different kind of way.

He was ill and dying, and Sāriputta was very close to Anāthapiṇḍika. So Sāriputta and Ānanda together went to visit him. Sāriputta asked, "Are you getting well?"

And he said, "No. My painful feelings are increasing, not subsiding. It is as if my head were being split open with a sharp sword." The man was not feeling too good.

So Sāriputta gave him a very profound teaching. I'm going to extremely shorten it, but he gave him a teaching on not clinging to anything. He said, "You should train thus: I will not cling to the eye, the ear, the nose, the body, the mind, or consciousness. My consciousness will not be dependent on these. Householder, you should train thus: I will not cling to forms, I will not cling to sounds, to mind objects, to tangibles, and my consciousness will not be dependent on mind objects. Householder, you should train thus: I will not cling to eye consciousness or any of the sense door consciousnesses. Householder, you should train thus: I will not cling to contact, I will not cling to feeling born of eye contact, ear contact, or mind contact. My consciousness will not be dependent on feeling. Householder, you should train thus: I will not cling to the earth element, to the water element, the fire element, the air element, the space element, or the consciousness element. My consciousness will not be dependent on the consciousness element. Householder, you should train thus: I will not cling to form, feeling, perception, formations, consciousness—the five aggregates. Householder, you should train thus: I will not cling to the base of infinite space." And he goes through the higher jhānas. "You should train thus: I will not cling to what is seen, heard, sensed, cognized, encountered, sought after, and examined by the mind, and my consciousness will not be dependent on that. Thus you should train."

When this was said, the householder Anāthapiṇḍika wept and shed tears. And Ānanda asked him, "Are you foundering, householder? Are you sinking? Are you dying?"

He said, "I am not dying, Venerable Ānanda. But although I have long waited upon the teachers and the bhikkhus worthy of esteem, never before have I heard such a talk on the Dhamma."

And Ānanda said, "Such talk on the Dhamma, householder, is not given to lay people clothed in white. Such talk on the Dhamma is given only to those who have gone forth, to those who are ordained."

And Anāthapiṇḍika replied, "Well then, Venerable Sāriputta, let such talk on the Dhamma be given to lay people. There are clansmen and women with little dust in their eyes who are wasting away through not

hearing such talk on the Dhamma. There will be those who will understand this Dhamma."

And then, saying that, he died.

So in a way, we have Anathapindika to thank for the subtlety of the Dhamma teachings being available to all of us laypeople—in its depth, in its entirety, in its totality.

So let's just sit quietly for a moment.

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