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## *Chos sbyin gyi mdo* — Bhikṣuṇī Dharmadinnā Proves Her Wisdom

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### **Abstract**

The present article provides an annotated translation of the Tibetan parallel to the *Cūḷavedalla-sutta* of the *Majjhima-nikāya*, preserved in Śamathadeva's commentary on the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*. This is followed by a brief study of the significance of the discourse and the way it presents bhikṣuṇī Dharmadinnā.

### **Keywords:**

Women in Early Buddhism, Comparative Studies, Bhikṣuṇī Dharmadinnā, Śamathadeva, *Cūḷavedalla-sutta*.

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## 法布施的教說 — 比丘尼達摩提那的智慧

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### 摘要

此篇文章提供了保存在三昧天(*Śamathadeva*)《俱舍論疏》中，相當於《中部尼柯耶·小方等經》的藏文翻譯，同時研究其教說的重要性並闡述其詮釋比丘尼達摩提那的方式。

關鍵字：早期佛教的女性、比較研究、比丘尼達摩提那、三昧天、《小方等經》

## Introduction

With the present article I continue exploring the theme of debate in early Buddhist discourse. In the previous two papers, published in the *Chung-Hwa Buddhist Journal*, I covered cases where Buddhist monastics are challenged by other contemporary recluses and where a debater approaches the Buddha with the explicit intention of defeating him.<sup>1</sup>

My present paper explores yet another form of debate, which takes place among Buddhist disciples themselves. In this type of debate, the aim of the discussion is less to gain victory and avoid defeat. Instead, the chief motivation for such ‘debates’ appears to be developing clarity of the teachings, be this for one’s own sake, for the sake of the other, or for the sake of co-disciples who are present on this occasion.<sup>2</sup> At times, such discussions give the impression of being just an amicable exchange between senior disciples, but at other times an underlying testing of the other’s level of realization can be discerned.

An example of this latter type of ‘debate’ among Buddhist disciples can be found in a series of questions and answers that involve the lay follower Viśākha and the bhikṣuṇī Dharmadinnā. This discourse is not only outstanding for the great variety of themes it treats, but also for the fact that its chief protagonist is a bhikṣuṇī.

Bhikṣuṇīs are considerably less prominent in early Buddhist texts than their male counterparts, be this as audience to discourses spoken by the Buddha or as speakers on their own. The reason for this is not far to seek. Several Vinaya rules prohibit the travelling together of monks and nuns, in order to avoid suspicions that they might be having amorous relations.<sup>3</sup> Even the Buddha could apparently become the object of similar suspicions.<sup>4</sup>

1 Cf. Anālayo (2009) and (2010a).

2 Such variety of purpose is reflected in a distinction between different types of questions made at As 55, 17, which indicates that an inquiry need not be motivated by ignorance or by doubt. Instead, a question may also be posed for the sake of discussing what one has already understood, *diṭṭhasaṃsandānā pucchā*, to discover the opinion held by another, *anumatipucchā*, or to explain something to those who are present, *kathetukamyatā pucchā*. A comparable analysis of questions into different types can be found in the Jain *Thāṇaṅga* 6.111.

3 According to these rules, monks and nuns should not travel together or embark in the same boat, nor should monks teach nuns late in the evening, cf. Dharmaguptaka Vinaya, T 1428, 652b26, 652c29 and 650a12, Mahāsāṃghika Vinaya, Tatia (1975, 21), Mahīśāsaka Vinaya, T 1421, 48b18, 48c13 and 46b12, (Mūla-)Sarvāstivāda Vinaya, Banerjee (1977, 34), Sarvāstivāda Vinaya, von Simson (2000, 210), and Theravāda Vinaya, Vin IV 62, 28; 64, 30; 55, 9. For a more detailed discussion cf. Anālayo (2008a, 115f).

4 Cf. e.g. the tale of how the Buddha was accused of having taken his pleasure with the female wanderer Sundarī, who was subsequently killed, reported in Ud 4.8 at Ud 43, 22. A version of this tale is also found in T 198, 176c3, translated in Bapat (1945, 156ff), cf. also T 2085, 860c17 and T 2078, 899c20, for a Tocharian fragment cf. Sieg (1949, 28), for further parallels cf. Deeg

Such instances reflect ancient Indian concerns about relations between celibates and the other sex. These concerns make it only natural for the Buddha to refrain from setting out wandering in the company of nuns. Given his apparent itinerant lifestyle and the concern of the discourses to report what was spoken by or related to the Buddha, those who could accompany him on his travels – male monastics – feature with high frequency in the texts.

Hence a discourse spoken by a bhikṣuṇī deserves all the more attention, giving us a rare glimpse at female monastics in their role as teachers. The discourse in question is extant in three different versions:

- the *Cūḷavedalla-sutta* of the *Majjhima-nikāya*,<sup>5</sup> representative of the Theravāda tradition;
- the 法樂比丘尼經 of the *Madhyama-āgama*,<sup>6</sup> with considerable probability representing the Sarvāstivāda tradition;<sup>7</sup>
- the *Chos sbyin gyi mdo*, which occurs as a sūtra quotation in Śamathadeva's commentary on the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*, preserved in Tibetan, forming part of a work that stems from the (Mūla-)Sarvāstivāda tradition.<sup>8</sup>

Before turning to a translation of the Tibetan text, I briefly summarize the background to the Pāli version of the discourse, as depicted in the Theravāda commentary.<sup>9</sup>

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(2005, 307f) and Lamotte (1981, 507, 1n).

- 5 MN 44 at MN I 299, 1–305, 5, translated in Ñāṇamoli (2005, 396–403), which at MN I 305, 5 give the title of the discourse as “Smaller Discourse of the Question-and-Answer Type”, *Cūḷavedalla-sutta*.
- 6 MĀ 210 at T 1543, 788a16–790b7, translated in Minh Chau (1991, 269–278), which at T 1543, 788a14 give the title of the discourse as “Discourse by the Bhikṣuṇī [called] ‘Delight in the Dharma’”, 法樂比丘尼經. MĀ 210 thereby differs on the name of the speaker of the discourse, where 法樂 might correspond to Dharmanandā, or, as suggested by Minh Chau (1991, 24), to Dharmanandī. A discourse in the *Ekottarika-āgama*, T 125, 803c23, instead renders the name Dharmadinnā more appropriately as 法施比丘尼.
- 7 Cf. e.g. Lü (1963, 242), Waldschmidt (1980, 136), Enomoto (1984), Mayeda (1985, 98), Minh Chau (1991, 27).
- 8 On this work in general cf. Mejer (1991, 63f) and Skilling (2005, 699). The Tibetan version is found in volume 82 of the collated edition of the Tanjur (henceforth referred to as Tc), published by the China Tibetology Research Center in Beijing, ranging from pages 14, 13 to 25, 15. This corresponds to D *mngon pa, ju* 6b2–11a5 or Q *tu* 7a7–12b1, identified by Honjō (1984, 2, §5), cf. also Pāsādika (1989, 20, §1), Krey (2010, 19 5n) mentions the existence of a draft translation of the Tibetan version by Malcolm Smith that was available in 2006 on the internet, but was subsequently withdrawn again.
- 9 Ps II 355, 29. The same tale recurs with some variations in Mp I 360, 17, translated by Bode

The *Papañcasūdanī* reports that the husband of Dharmadinnā, the merchant Viśākha, had as a lay disciple of the Buddha progressed to the level of non-return. Having thereby left behind sensual desires for good, he was unable to continue his marital relationship as before. Hence he offered Dharmadinnā wealth and the freedom to do whatever she felt appropriate, upon which she decided to go forth instead. After having gone forth, she left the monastery in town for seclusion in order to be able to practice intensively and within a short time became an arhat, after which she returned to town. On hearing that she had come back to town so soon from seclusion, her former husband decided to visit her in order to find out the reasons for her return.

According to the commentarial account, then, the questions posed by the non-returner Viśākha to his ex-wife in the *Cūḷavedalla-sutta* have the purpose to test out Dharmadinnā's wisdom. That is, Viśākha wants to discover if she has reached realization, or if she has just been unable to adapt to the living conditions in seclusion.

The (Mūla-)Sarvāstivāda Vinaya differs from this account, as it reports that Dharmadinnā never even got married to Viśākha. Instead, with considerable struggle, she managed to get ordained on the eve of their scheduled wedding.<sup>10</sup>

Whether the setting of the discourse is seen from the perspective of the Pāli commentary or from that of the (Mūla-)Sarvāstivāda Vinaya, some degree of challenge and testing out of Dharmadinnā's understanding and depth of realization during the session of questions and answers with her former or would-be husband is evident in the discourse version of each tradition.

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(1893, 562–566) and summarized by Talim (1972, 117f), as part of a commentary on AN 1.14 at AN I 25, 21, according to which Dharmadinnā was reckoned the foremost nun in regard to teaching the Dharma. Another occurrence is Thī-a 15, 15, translated or summarized by Rhys Davids (1989, 12), Murcott (1991, 62) and Pruitt (1999, 26–30), which comments on her verse at Thī 12, and Dhṛp-a IV 229, 1, translated in Burlingame (1921, 226f). A poetical version of the past experiences of Dharmadinnā and her present encounter with Viśākha can also be found in Ap 23.1–36 at Ap 567–569.

10 For a more detailed study and translated excerpts from the Tibetan (Mūla-)Sarvāstivāda Vinaya cf. Finnegan (2009, 157–160 and 202–207).

## Translation

### The Discourse by [Bhikṣuṇī] Dharmadinnā<sup>11</sup>

The Blessed One was staying at Śrāvastī in Jeta's Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika's Park.<sup>12</sup> At that time, bhikṣuṇī Dharmadinnā was residing in the nunnery Rājakārāma.<sup>13</sup>

At that time, the honourable Viśākha<sup>14</sup> approached bhikṣuṇī Dharmadinnā. Having paid respect with his head at the feet of bhikṣuṇī Dharmadinnā, he sat down to one side. Sitting to one side, the lay follower Viśākha asked bhikṣuṇī [15] Dharmadinnā:

- 11 Tc 82: 14, 14: *Chos sbying gyi mdo*. Śamathadeva's *Upāyikāṭikā* here provides a full version of the discourse from which the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* draws the quotation: *asabhāgo nirodha*, cf. Abhidh-k 1.6 Pradhan (1967, 4), translated in de La Vallée Poussin (1971, 9) or Pruden (1988, 60). The *Abhidharmakośavyākhyā*, Wogihara (1932, 16), translated in de La Vallée Poussin (1930, 255), relates this quote to *grhapati* Viśākha and bhikṣuṇī Dharmadinnā. In Śamathadeva's commentary, Tc 82: 14, 13, this quote then reads: 'gog pa ni 'dra ba ma yin no, whereas the Chinese translations of the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* render this quote as 滅無同類, cf. T 1558, 1c23 (Xuánzàng) and T 1559, 162b21 (Paramārtha). A counterpart to this statement is not found in the Pāli parallel (MN 44). In his comments on the present quote, de La Vallée Poussin (1971, 9, 2n) refers the reader to an inquiry in MN 44 at MN I 304, 19 after the counterpart to Nirvāṇa. This inquiry, however, occurs at the conclusion of the discussion and has counterparts in the Chinese and Tibetan versions. Thus, in spite of thematic similarity, this part of MN 44 does not correspond to the quote given in the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*.
- 12 MN 44 at MN I 299, 1 gives the location as the Squirrel's Feeding Ground in the Bamboo Grove at Rājagaha.
- 13 The other versions do not specify where she was staying at the time of the discourse. According to Jā II 15, 1, the Rājakārāma had been built by King Pasenadi in the vicinity of Jeta's Grove, *Jetavanasamāpe Pasenadiraññā kārite*, cf. in more detail Malalasekera (1998, 720) s.v. Rājakārāma.
- 14 Tc 82, 14 and 19 at this point speaks of *tshe dang ldan pa sa ga*, while the next sentence introduces him as a lay-follower, *dge bsnyen sa ga*, an expression used throughout the remainder of the discourse. The qualification *dge bsnyen* makes it clear that *tshe dang ldan pa*, corresponding to *āyuṣma*, in the present context cannot have the meaning of marking someone off as a monastic. In fact, the use of the corresponding *āyasma* to address laity can also be found in several regulations in the Theravāda Vinaya, cf. Vin III 216, 15, 218, 35. 220, 2 and 259, 11, where the parallel versions preserved in Sanskrit similarly employ *āyuṣma*, cf. the Mahāsāṃghika Vinaya in Tatia (1975, 14 and 18), the (Mūla-)Sarvāstivāda Vinaya in Banerjee (1977, 26, 27, 28 and 30), and the Sarvāstivāda Vinaya in von Simson (2000, 186, 187, 191 and 198). In the case of the (Mūla-)Sarvāstivāda Vinaya, the Tibetan version uses the corresponding *tshe dang ldan pa*, cf. Vidyabhusana (1915, 67, 69 and 73). In such contexts, the translation "venerable" would not

“Noble lady,<sup>15</sup> if you would have the time to explain questions, [I would] inquire about a few subjects.”

“Honourable Viśākha, I shall listen to know [your] questions.”<sup>16</sup>

“Noble lady, identity (*satkāya*) has been expounded, the arising of identity and the cessation of identity. What is identity, what is the arising of identity and what is the cessation of identity?”<sup>17</sup>

“Honourable Viśākha, the five aggregates [affected by] clinging are reckoned as identity in the higher teachings of the noble Dharma. What are the five? The bodily aggregate [affected by] clinging, the feeling ... perception ... formation ... and the consciousness aggregate [affected by] clinging.

The arising of identity ...<sup>18</sup> is [due to] delight and attachment in relation to future becoming, together with <craving> that relishes here and there.<sup>19</sup> The cessation of

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fit and instead another term, like “honourable”, appears to be appropriate. MN 44 at MN I 299, 2 introduces its protagonist as *Viśakho upāsako*, while MĀ 210 at T 1543, 788a17 speaks of the female lay-follower Viśākhā, 毘舍佉優婆夷. Thus though the two parallel versions agree on announcing the lay status of the person visiting Dharmadinnā, they differ on the gender of her visitor, for a more detailed discussion of this difference cf. Anālayo (2007b, 32–34).

- 15 Tc 82, 15, 1: *phags ma*, corresponding to *ayye* in MN 44 at MN I 299, 7 and 賢聖 in MĀ 210 at T 1543, 788a19.
- 16 A similar exchange is also found in MĀ 210 at T 1543, 788a19, but not in MN 44.
- 17 In MN 44 Viśākha also inquires after the way to the cessation of identity, MN I 299, 27: *sakkāyanirodhagāminī paṭipadā*, which Dharmadinnā then explains to be the noble eightfold path. An inquiry regarding the arising and cessation of identity is absent from MĀ 210. However, a similar exchange may have been found earlier in MĀ 210, since its examination of identity view proceeds from inquiring after the non-existence of “identity view”, MĀ 210 at T 1543, 788b4: 云何無身見耶, to inquiring about the cessation of “identity”, MĀ 210 at T 1543, 788b12, 云何滅自身耶. This stands a little out of context and may be a remnant of an earlier examination of the arising and cessation of identity. A discussion of the topic of identity similar to MN 44 can be found in SN 22.105 at SN III 159, 9, in which cases the parallel versions SĀ 71 at T 99, 18c2 and D *mngon pa ju* 268b1 or Q *thu* 11b4 agree with SN 22.105 in taking up the arising, the cessation and the path to the cessation of identity.
- 18 Tc 82, 15, 10 at this point speaks of *'jig tshogs la lta ba*. Since the inquiry was just about *'jig thogs* and afterwards the discussion continues speaking just of *'jig thogs*, the present reference to the corresponding view is probably a transmission error, easily caused by the circumstance that later on the subject of identity view will be broached. Hence in my translation of the present passage I do not render *lta ba*, indicating the elision with “...”.
- 19 Tc 82, 15, 10 reads *srid par dga' ba 'i 'dod chags dang lhan cig pa 'i srid pa ste*, where in my

identity is accomplished through the removal of delight and attachment in relation to future becoming, together with <craving> that relishes here and there; through their complete renunciation, exhaustion, fading away, cessation and pacification."

"Noble lady, how does identity view arise?"

"Honourable Viśākha, an immature ordinary person, who is not learned, regards form as truly being the self, or form as possessing the self, or form as being in the self, or he regards the self as truly abiding in form. Likewise he regards feeling ... perception ... formations ... consciousness as truly being the self, or consciousness as possessing the self, or consciousness as being in the self, or the self as abiding in consciousness. [16] Thus identity view arises."

"Noble lady, how does identity view not arise?"

"Honourable Viśākha, a noble disciple, who is learned, does not regard form as truly the self, or form as possessing the self, or form as being in the self, or the self as abiding in form. He does not regard feeling ... perception ... formations ... consciousness as truly the self, or the self as possessing consciousness, or consciousness as being in the self, or the self as abiding in consciousness. Therefore, identity view does not arise."

"Noble lady, the aggregates and the aggregates [affected by] clinging have been expounded. Noble lady, how is it, are the aggregates the same as the aggregates [affected by] clinging, or else are the aggregates different from the aggregates [affected by] clinging?"<sup>20</sup>

"Honourable Viśākha, the aggregates that are [affected by] clinging are the very aggregates, [yet] the aggregates are not [necessarily] aggregates [affected by] clinging.

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rendering I follow the emendation of the second occurrence of *srid pa* to *sred pa* proposed by Vetter (2000, 122f), marking this emendation with < >. MN 44 at MN I 299, 19 additionally notes that such craving is of three types: *kāmatanḥā*, *bhavatanḥā*, *vibhavatanḥā*, on this difference in general cf. also Choong (2000, 166) and Delhey (2009, 69, 4).

20 MN 44 at MN I 299, 32 tackles this topic earlier (before turning to identity view) and in a slightly different manner, as Viśākha inquires whether clinging is the same as the five aggregates [affected] by clinging. In reply, Dharmadinnā explains that clinging is neither the same as the five aggregates [affected] by clinging nor different from them, but simply stands for desire and lust in regard to them. On this distinction cf. also Bodhi (1976), Boisvert (1997, 20–30) and Anālayo (2008b, 405f). The present instance is not the only sequential variation between the three versions, which for the sake of simplicity I will not note in each case, but only when this seems opportune.



How is it that the aggregates that are [affected by] clinging are the very aggregates, [yet] the aggregates are not [necessarily] aggregates [affected by] clinging?

Honourable Viśākha, form that is with influxes (*sāsrava*) and clinging, feeling ... perception ... formations ... consciousness that is with influxes and clinging, these are aggregates as well as aggregates [affected by] clinging. Form that is without influxes and without clinging, feeling ... perception ... formations ... consciousness that is without influxes and without clinging, these are aggregates, but they are not reckoned aggregates [affected by] clinging.” [17]

“Noble lady, regarding the [relationship between] the three aggregates – the aggregate of morality, the aggregate of concentration and the aggregate of wisdom – and the noble eightfold path; how is it, noble lady, is the noble eightfold path encompassed by the three aggregates, or else are the three aggregates encompassed by the noble eightfold path?”<sup>21</sup>

“Honourable Viśākha, the noble eightfold path is encompassed by the three aggregates, the three aggregates are not encompassed by the noble eightfold path. How is it that the noble eightfold path is encompassed by the three aggregates, [yet] the three aggregates are not encompassed by the noble eightfold path?

Honourable Viśākha, in this regard right speech, right action and right livelihood have been assigned by the Blessed One to the aggregate of morality. Right mindfulness and right concentration have been assigned by the Blessed One to the aggregate of concentration. Right view, right intention and right effort have been assigned by the Blessed One to the aggregate of wisdom.<sup>22</sup>

Honourable Viśākha, therefore it should be understood that the noble eightfold path is encompassed by the three aggregates, whereas the three aggregates are not encompassed by the noble eightfold path.”

“Noble lady, is the path conditioned or unconditioned?”

“Honourable Viśākha, it is conditioned.”

21 MN 44 at MN I 300, 31 and MĀ 210 at T 1543, 788b25 follow a different sequence at this point, as the questioning proceeds by first of all requesting a definition of the noble eightfold path. This is then followed by inquiring about its conditioned nature and asking for a definition of the three aggregates, before coming to the question found at the present point in the Tibetan version.

22 While MĀ 210 at T 1543, 788c12 agrees in this respect, according to MN 44 at MN I 301, 8 right effort belongs to the aggregate of concentration.

“Noble lady, is cessation of the same nature?”<sup>23</sup>

“Honourable Viśākha, it is not of the same nature.”

“Noble lady, how many factors does the first absorption possess?”<sup>24</sup>

“Honourable Viśākha, it possesses five factors: initial and sustained mental application,<sup>25</sup> delight, [18] happiness and unification of the mind.”

“Noble lady, regarding concentration, the cause of concentration, the power of concentration, and the development of concentration – noble lady, what is concentration, what is the cause of concentration, what is the power of concentration and what is the development of concentration?”

“Honourable Viśākha, wholesome unification of the mind is concentration;<sup>26</sup> the four establishments of mindfulness are the cause of concentration; the four right efforts are the power of concentration; the undertaking of these very dharmas, their full undertaking, the abiding in them, practising and applying [oneself] to them is the development of concentration.”

“Noble lady, regarding formations, [what are reckoned to be] formations – noble lady, what are these formations?”

“Honourable Viśākha, there are bodily formations, verbal formations and mental formations – these are the three.”

“Noble lady, what are bodily formations, what are verbal formations and what are mental formations?”<sup>27</sup>

23 Tc 82, 17, 19 *'gog pa 'dra ba yin nam*, cf. above note 11.

24 This inquiry occurs similarly in MĀ 210 at T 1543, 788c19, but is absent from MN 44. A similar inquiry, however, is part of a question and answer exchange in MN 43 at MN I 294, 28 between Mahākauṣṭhila and Śāriputra.

25 Tc 82, 17, 21: *rtog pa* and *dpyod pa*, which in general stand for “comprehension” and “discernment”. In the present context these two function as counterparts to the absorption-factors *vitakka* and *vicāra* in MN 43 at MN I 295, 1 and to 覺 and 觀 in MĀ 210 at T 1543, 788c20.

26 MN 44 at MN I 301, 13 differs in so far as it does not qualify unification of the mind as “wholesome”. MĀ 210 at T 1543, 788c24 agrees with the Tibetan in this respect, though it differs from the other versions in as much as it additionally indicates that the four ways to [psychic] power (*rddhipāda*) are the ‘effect’ of concentration, 四如意足，是謂定功也， T 1543, 788c26.

27 This topic is taken up similarly in MN 44 at MN I 301, 17, while it is absent from MĀ 210.

“Honourable Viśākha, exhalation and inhalation are reckoned as bodily formations; initial and sustained mental application are reckoned as verbal formations; perception and intention are reckoned as mental formations.<sup>28</sup>

“Noble lady, why are exhalation and inhalation reckoned as bodily formations, why are initial and sustained mental application reckoned as verbal formations, why are perception and intention reckoned as mental formations?”

“Honourable Viśākha, exhalation and inhalation are bodily factors, they depend on the body, are related to the body, depending on the body they completely enter its [domain] – therefore exhalation and inhalation are reckoned as bodily formations.

On having examined and discerned with initial and sustained mental application one speaks [19] – therefore initial and sustained mental application are reckoned as verbal formations.

Perception and intention are factors arisen from the mind, go along with the mind, depend on the mind, are related to the mind, depending on the mind they completely enter its [domain] – therefore perception and intention are reckoned as mental formations.”

“Noble lady, at the time when the body has been abandoned by these factors, when it is like a log, bereft of the mind, how many are the [other] factors that have been abandoned at that time?”<sup>29</sup>

“Honourable Viśākha, life [force], heat and consciousness, these are the three. At the time when life [force], heat and consciousness have been abandoned, the body is like a log, bereft of the mind.”

“Noble lady, the occasion of passing away and dying and [the occasion] of entry into the meditative attainment of cessation – are these to be considered as distinct, are they different?

“Honourable Viśākha, the occasion of passing away and dying and [the occasion] of entry into the meditative attainment of cessation – these are considered as distinct, they have a number of differences. Honourable Viśākha, on the occasion of passing away and dying, the bodily formations have ceased, the verbal formations [have ceased]

28 Tc 82, 18, 15: *'du shes dang sems pa*. MN 44 at MN I 301, 21 instead speaks of perception and feeling, *saññā ca vedanā ca*.

29 This topic is also taken up in MĀ 210 at T 1543, 789a1, while it is absent from MN 44. A similar discussion on the difference between a dead body and cessation, preceded by a reference to life force and heat, is part of a question and answer exchange between Mahākauṣṭhila and Śāriputra in MN 43 at MN I 296, 11.

and the mental formations have ceased.<sup>30</sup> Honourable Viśākha, the life [faculty] and heat leave [the body], the faculties become otherwise, and consciousness departs from the body.

On entering the meditative attainment of cessation, the bodily formations have ceased, the verbal formations [have ceased] and the mental formations have ceased. Yet, the life [faculty] and heat do not leave [the body], the faculties [do not]<sup>31</sup> become otherwise and consciousness does not depart from the body.<sup>32</sup> Honourable Viśākha, thus the occasion of passing away and dying and [the occasion] of entry into the meditative attainment of cessation are considered as distinct, they are different.” [20]

“Noble lady, how does the attainment of cessation take place?”

“Honourable Viśākha, a monk who enters the attainment of cessation does not think ‘I enter the attainment of cessation’.<sup>33</sup> His mind has previously been developed in such a way that, having been previously developed in that way, he will fully dwell in [entering] it.

“Noble lady, how does the emergence from cessation take place?”

“Honourable Viśākha, a monk who emerges from the attainment of cessation does not think ‘I emerge from the attainment of cessation’. Yet, his mind has previously

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30 While MĀ 210 at T 1543, 789a8 does not mention the three formations, these are part of the reply given to this question in MN 43 at MN I 296, 13.

31 Tc 82, 19, 19: *dbang po gzhan du 'gyur ba*. Judging from the readings in the parallel versions, this would be a transmission error and should rather read: *dbang po gzhan du mi 'gyur ba*, cf. MN 43 at MN I 296, 21: *indriyāni vipasannāni* in contrast to the earlier *indriyāni viparibhinnāni* (B<sup>e</sup> and S<sup>e</sup> read: *paribhinnāni*) and MĀ 210 at T 1543, 789a10: 諸根不敗壞 in contrast to the earlier 諸根敗壞.

32 Tc 82, 19, 19: *rnam par shes pa lus las 'da' bar mi 'gyur ro*. MN 43 and MĀ 210 differ, as they do not take a position on what happens with consciousness during cessation attainment, cf. also Schmithausen (1987, 339) and (2007, 19f). On the difficulties of explaining the relationship between the attainment of cessation and the continuity or otherwise of the mind cf. Griffiths (1991) and Pieris (2003).

33 Notably, even though in this passage Dharmadinnā appears to be speaking from experience, according to all versions she nevertheless employs the term ‘monk’, Tc 82, 20, 2: *dge slong*, MN 44 at MN I 301, 32: *bhikkhuno*, MĀ 210 at T 1543, 789a28: 比丘. This reflects a recurrent pattern in early Buddhist discourse to use the term ‘monk’ in a general manner, without thereby necessarily intending to restrict a particular statement to male monastic disciples only, cf. also Anālayo (2008a, 117f).

been developed in such a way that, having been previously developed in that way, he will fully dwell in [emerging from] it.”<sup>34</sup>

“Noble lady, when a monk enters the attainment of cessation, which factors will cease first: the bodily formations, the verbal formations or the mental formations?”

“Honourable Viśākha, when a monk enters the attainment of cessation, the verbal formations will cease first, then the bodily and mental formations.”<sup>35</sup>

“Noble lady, when a monk emerges from the attainment of cessation, which factors will arise first: the bodily formations, the verbal formations or the mental formations?”

“Honourable Viśākha, when a monk emerges from the attainment of cessation, the mental formations will arise first, then the bodily and verbal formations.”<sup>36</sup>

“Noble lady, when a monk comes out of the attainment of cessation, to where does his mind incline, to where does it flow, whereto does it move?”

“Honourable Viśākha, when a monk comes out of the attainment of cessation, his mind inclines towards seclusion, flows towards seclusion, moves towards seclusion; [21] it inclines towards liberation, flows towards liberation, moves towards liberation; it inclines towards Nirvāṇa, flows towards Nirvāṇa, moves towards Nirvāṇa.”<sup>37</sup>

“Noble lady, when a monk comes out of the attainment of cessation, what contacts does he contact?”

34 MN 44 at MN I 302, 7 agrees that emergence from cessation occurs due to previous development, whereas according to MĀ 210 at T 1543, 789b6 emergence is due to this body and the six sense-spheres conditioned by the life faculty, 因此身及六處緣命根.

35 While MN 44 at MN I 302, 4 agrees, MĀ 210 does not take up this topic. A similar discussion between Śāriputra and Mahākauṣṭhila in MĀ 211 at T 1543, 792a9 differs in so far as it proposes that the bodily formations cease first, 先滅身行, 次滅口行, 後滅意行, for a more detailed discussion of this difference cf. Anālayo (2007a, 51f). A sūtra quotation corresponding to the present section, found in the \**Mahāvibhāṣā*, T 1545, 780c25, agrees with the Tibetan and Pāli versions on allocating this discussion to a discourse spoken by bhikṣuṇī Dharmadinnā, T 1545, 780c7.

36 Here, too, MN 44 at MN I 302, 16 agrees, MĀ 210 does not take up this topic, and the similar discussion in MĀ 211 at T 1543, 792a14 differs, as it proposes that mental formations are followed by verbal formations and bodily formations arise last, 先生意行, 次生口行, 後生身行.

37 MN 44 at MN I 302, 26 and MĀ 210 at T 1543, 789b11 only mention seclusion.

“Honourable Viśākha, [he contacts] imperturbability, nothingness and signlessness.”<sup>38</sup>

“Noble lady, to enter the attainment of cessation, how many factors does a monk develop?”

“Honourable Viśākha, this question should have been asked at first. I will nevertheless reply to it now. To enter the attainment of cessation, a monk develops two factors: tranquillity and insight.”<sup>39</sup>

“Noble lady, how many [types] of feeling are there?”

“Honourable Viśākha, there are three [types]: pleasant, unpleasant and neutral.”

“Noble lady, what is pleasant feeling, what is unpleasant feeling and what is neutral feeling?”

“Honourable Viśākha, bodily and mental pleasure or happiness that arise from contact felt as pleasant is reckoned as pleasant feeling. Whatever bodily and mental displeasure or pain that arises from contact experienced as unpleasant is reckoned as unpleasant feeling. Whatever bodily and mental neutral or equanimous experience that arises from neutral contact is reckoned as neutral feeling.

Noble lady, what increases with pleasant feelings, [22] what increases with unpleasant feelings, what increases with neutral feelings?”<sup>40</sup>

“Honourable Viśākha, desire increases with pleasant feelings, aversion increases with unpleasant feelings and ignorance increases with neutral feelings.”

“Noble lady, do all pleasant feelings increase desire, do all unpleasant feelings increase aversion and do all neutral feelings increase ignorance?”

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38 MĀ 211 at T 1543, 792a19 (parallel to MN 43) agrees, whereas according to MN 44 at MN I 302, 22 the three contacts are empty, signless and desireless, *suññato phasso*, *animitto phasso* and *appañihito phasso*, on this difference cf. also Choong (1999, 62f). A sūtra quotation corresponding to the present section in the *Karmasiddhi-prakarāṇa*, cf. also Anacker (1998, 110), quotes as its source the *Mahākauṣṭhila-sūtra*, T 1609, 784b4: 摩訶俱瑟社羅契經, thereby agreeing with MĀ 211 that the present topic was part of a discussion between Śāriputra and Mahākauṣṭhila.

39 This exchange is not found in MN 44 or MĀ 210.

40 Tc 82, 22, 1: *rgyas par 'gyur*, while the parallel versions, MN 44 at MN I 303, 7 and MĀ 210 at T 1543, 789c7, instead speak of the respective “underlying tendency”, *anusaya* 使.

“Honourable Viśākha, not all pleasant feelings increase desire, not all unpleasant feelings increase aversion and not all neutral feelings increase ignorance. There are pleasant feelings that do not increase desire, but [instead] abandon it; there are unpleasant feelings that do not increase aversion, but [instead] abandon it; and there are neutral feelings that do not increase ignorance, but [instead] abandon it.”

“Noble lady, what pleasant feelings do not increase desire, but [instead] abandon it?”

“Honourable Viśākha, here a noble disciple, being free from sensual desire and free from evil and unwholesome states, with initial and sustained mental application, and with happiness and rapture arisen from seclusion, dwells having fully attained the first absorption.

With the stilling of initial and sustained mental application, with complete inner confidence and unification of the mind, [23] free from initial and sustained mental application, with happiness and rapture arisen from concentration, he dwells having fully attained the second absorption.

With the fading away of rapture, dwelling equanimous with mindfulness and comprehension, experiencing just happiness with the body, what the noble ones reckon an equanimous and mindful dwelling in happiness, he dwells having fully attained the third absorption. Such pleasant feelings do not increase desire, but [instead] abandon it.”<sup>41</sup>

“Noble lady, what unpleasant feelings do not increase aversion, but [instead] abandon it?”

“Honourable Viśākha, here a noble disciple generates an aspiration for supreme liberation: ‘When shall I dwell fully realizing that sphere, which the noble ones dwell having fully realized?’ The mental displeasure and painful feeling [due to] that aspiration, that pursuit and that longing do not increase aversion, but [instead] abandon it.”

“Noble lady, what neutral feelings do not increase ignorance, but [instead] abandon it?”

“Honourable Viśākha, here a noble disciple, leaving behind happiness and leaving behind pain, with the earlier disappearance of mental pleasure and displeasure, with neither happiness nor pain and with completely pure equanimity and mindfulness, dwells having fully attained the fourth absorption. Such neutral feelings do not increase ignorance, but [instead] abandon it.”

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41 MN 44 at MN I 303, 30 and MĀ 210 at T 1543, 789c11 mention only the first absorption, not the second or third absorption.



“Noble lady, what is pleasant, [24] what is unpleasant and what is the real danger in regard to pleasant feeling? What is pleasant, what is unpleasant and what is the real danger in regard to unpleasant feeling? What is pleasant, what is unpleasant and what is the real danger in regard to neutral feeling?”<sup>42</sup>

“Honourable Viśākha, the arising of pleasant feeling and its abiding is pleasant, its transformation [into another feeling] is unpleasant.<sup>43</sup> Upon [manifesting] its impermanence, because of that, [there] is real danger in regard to it.

The arising of unpleasant feeling and its abiding is unpleasant, its transformation [into another feeling] is pleasant. At the time when it [manifests] its impermanence, then the real danger in regard to it [manifests].

Being unaware of neutral feeling is unpleasant, the arising of awareness of it is pleasant. Whenever it [manifests] its impermanence, [then] the real danger in regard to it [manifests].”

“Noble lady, what is the counterpart to pleasant feeling?”

“Unpleasant feeling.”

“What is the counterpart to unpleasant feeling?”

“Pleasant feeling.”

“What is the counterpart to pleasant and unpleasant feeling?”<sup>44</sup>

“Neutral feeling.”

“What is the counterpart to neutral feeling?”

“Ignorance.”

42 MN 44 at MN I 303, 1 only inquires after what is pleasant and unpleasant in relation to the three types of feeling. MĀ 210 at T 1543, 789b25 reads 云何樂？云何苦？云何無常？云何災患？ (followed by further inquiring about the underlying tendency, 云何使耶). Thus, in addition to investigating what is pleasant and unpleasant, MĀ 210 precedes its inquiry after the danger in regard to feelings with the question "what is its impermanence?" This appears to be a transmission error, in fact the reply given to this series of queries treats 云何無常 and 云何災患 as a single question, T 1543, 789c1: 無常者即是災患, indicating that impermanence is the danger.

43 MN 44 at MN I 303, 4 differs in so far as it only distinguishes between two phases, the persistence of a feeling and its change, whereas MĀ 210 at T 1543, 789c1 agrees with the Tibetan version in also taking into account the arising of feeling. Another transmission error appears to occur in MĀ 210 at T 1543, 789c4, which indicates that neutral feeling is unpleasant when not known and pleasant when not known, 不知苦，不知樂, which should probably be emended to 不知苦，知樂, in accordance with the reading in the parallel versions that being aware of neutral feeling can be reckoned as pleasant, only ignoring them is unpleasant.

44 This query is not found in MN 44.



“What is the counterpart to ignorance?”

“Knowledge.”

“What is the counterpart to knowledge?”<sup>45</sup>

“Nirvāṇa.”

“Noble lady, what is the counterpart to Nirvāṇa?”

“Honourable Viśākha, you are going too far, you are really going too far, this is the end of it, it is not possible [to go further]. Following the Blessed One is for [the sake of] Nirvāṇa, the final goal of the pure holy life is Nirvāṇa, [25] the eradication of *duḥkha*.”

At that time the lay follower Viśākha rejoiced in the exposition given by bhikṣuṇī Dharmadinnā. He paid respect to bhikṣuṇī Dharmadinnā by prostrating and left.

Not long after the lay follower Viśākha had left, bhikṣuṇī Dharmadinnā approached the Blessed One. Having approached him she paid respect with her head at the feet of the Blessed One and sat down to one side. Sitting to one side, bhikṣuṇī Dharmadinnā reported to the Blessed One the whole conversation she had been having with the lay follower Viśākha.<sup>46</sup>

The Blessed One said to bhikṣuṇī Dharmadinnā: “Well done, Dharmadinnā, well done!<sup>47</sup> If the lay follower Viśākha had asked me these matters in such words and with such expressions, I would have answered on these matters in just such words and expressions as you did, explaining it just like this.”

Bhikṣuṇī Dharmadinnā fully rejoiced and delighted in what the Buddha had said.

45 MN 44 at MN I 304, 16 at this point first indicates that liberation is the counterpart to knowledge, and then mentions that Nirvāṇa is the counterpart to liberation.

46 While MĀ 210 agrees with the Tibetan version, in MN 44 at MN I 304, 26 it is Viśākha who reports the conversation to the Buddha. Approaching the Buddha for confirmation in this way is a standard procedure in the discourses when expositions have been given by a disciple in the absence of the Buddha.

47 In MN 44 at MN I 304, 33 the Buddha lauds Dharmadinnā as wise and of great wisdom, *pañḍitā* and *mahāpañṇā*. The Buddha’s praise in the Tibetan version has already been translated by Skilling (2001, 148).

## Study

In spite of several differences, a comparative survey shows that the three versions share a fair amount of topics. Behind these topics, a recurrent pattern can be discerned which proceeds from relatively simple and innocuous questions to intricate and profound matters.<sup>48</sup>

Thus, for example, a question on the nature of identity (*satkāya*) leads up to an inquiry about the precise relationship between clinging and the aggregates, a matter not easily explained unless the respondent has attained a good level of understanding. Again, a query after the noble eightfold path – easily replied to with a listing of its eight factors – is followed by a rather probing question about its conditioned nature. Behind this query stands the problem of how far the path to the unconditioned shares the nature of the goal to which it leads. Another thorny question on the same topic concerns the relationship between this noble eightfold path and the three aggregates of morality, concentration and wisdom – which of these is the overarching category?<sup>49</sup>

Once bhikṣuṇī Dharmadinnā has settled each of these points, Viśākha tests out her familiarity with mental tranquillity as well, inquiring in a succinct manner after the mental qualities and practices that are required to deepen concentration. This much ascertained, he proceeds further by tackling the attainment of cessation, an experience that would require a high level of proficiency in insight and tranquillity. Here, too, bhikṣuṇī Dharmadinnā is depicted as being able to prove her worth, in fact in the Tibetan version this exchange ends with a little quip at Viśākha for having asked a question out of the proper order, presumably showing her self-confidence at this point of their discussion.

Viśākha continues further, after having already ascertained Dharmadinnā's accomplishment in insight and tranquillity, by taking up the issue of feelings. This takes the course of their discussion from high meditative attainments back to the common world of experience. In line with the above-mentioned pattern, after the innocuous and easily answered query about the tree types of feelings the discussion quickly moves into deep waters, yielding the clarification that certain feelings are not necessarily related to defilements or underlying tendencies.

The final part of their discussion then proceeds through a series of terms that form counterparts to each other, until their exchange reaches the topic of Nirvāṇa. Viśākha tries to push beyond this point, but bhikṣuṇī Dharmadinnā makes it clear that he has gone too far. In

48 This pattern has already been noticed by Foley (1894, 323–325) in a study of MN 44 she wrote before she married T.W. Rhys Davids.

49 Mahāsi (2006, 98) comments that “it is hard to answer that question ... however ... Dhammadinnā *therī* being an Arahāt ... easily tackled the question”. Regarding her subsequent exposition of the three formations, *ibid.* (118) points out that her “ability to clarify those three kinds of *sankhāras* ... is immensely praiseworthy. Even nowadays, there will be only a few ... who may be able to tackle these difficult questions ... such being the case, the answer rendered by Dhammadinnā *therī* is, no doubt, extremely profound”.

this way, the discourse presents her as remaining master of the situation even when she is not able to give a reply to a question. Facing what in a normal debate setting would spell defeat, she asserts that the debate has moved beyond issues that can be discussed. This assertion, presumably reflecting her own firm establishment in the realization of the final goal, thus can be seen to form a fitting conclusion to her exposition.

All versions report that the Buddha approves of bhikṣuṇī Dharmadinnā's explanations, indicating that he would have given precisely the same replies himself. In other words, even approaching the Buddha himself Viśākha would not have been able to get better replies. In the thought world of the early discourses, this is the highest praise a disciple can earn herself. The listing of eminent disciples in the *Āṅguttara-nikāya* and the *Ekottarika-āgama* in fact reckon Dharmadinnā an outstanding teacher,<sup>50</sup> a qualification she apparently earned herself through the delivery of the present discourse.<sup>51</sup>

Her exposition seems to have been also held in high esteem among the ancient monks responsible for assembling the discourses into collections for the purpose of oral transmission. They decided to place the discourse spoken by Bhikṣuṇī Dharmadinnā next to a discussion on various aspects of the Dharma between Mahākauṣṭhila and Śāriputra.<sup>52</sup> The Pāli versions of these two discourses stand out in the Pāli canon for carrying the term *vedalla* in their titles,<sup>53</sup> which in the listing of textual *aṅgas* forms a distinct category, presumably referring to a question and answer exchange that involves subtle analysis.<sup>54</sup> The pair of *vedalla-suttas* in the Pāli canon thus places Dharmadinnā on a par with Śāriputta, who according to the listing of

50 AN 1.14 at AN I 25, 21 qualifies her as foremost among those who are able to teach the Dharma, *dhammakathikā*, while EĀ 5.2 at T 125, 559a13 highlights her as foremost in the ability to “discriminate the meaning” and to “widely discourse on divisions and parts” [of the teaching], 分別義趣，廣說分部. This listing is one of those Buddhist texts which, in the words of Falk (1989, 161), “unquestionably carries a strong positive image of the nun”. For a more detailed study of such positive images of nuns in the early text cf. Anālayo (2010b, 72–76).

51 Cf. Mp I 363, 13 and Ap 23.28 at Ap 569, 11.

52 The two discourses are found side by side in the Theravāda and the Sarvāstivāda collections of middle length discourses: MN 43 has its parallel in MĀ 211, MN 44 has its parallel in MĀ 210. Otherwise these two collections disagree considerably in the order of their discourses, cf. Anālayo (2007a, 36).

53 The slightly longer MN 43 has the title *Mahāvedalla-sutta*, whereas MN 44 carries the complementary title *Cūḷavedalla-sutta*. According to Horner (1980, 194), length is one of the possible determinants for applying the qualification *mahā-* and *cūḷa-* respectively.

54 According to Jayawickrama (1959, 14) the word *vedalla* “comes from an older *vaidārya* form, *vi + √dṛ* to tear apart, hence analyse or break down into fundamentals”. Ibid. concludes that *vedalla* probably means “subtle analysis”. Kalupahana (1965, 618) similarly takes *vedalla* to refer in particular to “subtle analyses, unintelligible to the ordinary man”. For the present instance, this nuance finds confirmation in Ap 23.27 at Ap 569, 10, according to which the questions that Dharmadinnā replied to were deep and subtle, *gambhīre nipuṇe pañhe*.

eminent disciples in the *Aṅguttara-nikāya* and the *Ekottarika-āgama* was foremost among the monks in regard to wisdom.<sup>55</sup>

The insightful explanations offered in the present discourse appear to have functioned as a continuous source of inspiration in the history of Theravāda Buddhism, as can be seen from recurrent references to this exposition in the Pāli commentaries.<sup>56</sup>

Here it is perhaps also noteworthy that, according to the Pāli commentary, before going forth Dharmadinnā had asked her husband if the awakening he had reached could also be attained by women. In reply, her husband was quick to dismiss such doubts, making it clear that gender is irrelevant in such matters.<sup>57</sup> Thus, from the perspective of the tale presented in the commentarial tradition, the present discourse is a vindication of women's spiritual abilities being in principle not different from those of a man. The opinion the commentary in this way attributes to the non-returner Viśākha stands in explicit contrast to a presumably prevalent opinion in ancient India – reflected in the question asked by Dharmadinnā before her decision to go forth – according to which women cannot attain spiritual perfection.

The continuity of the tale not only shows her being able to equal her husband, but even surpassing his attainments. This constitutes a noteworthy turn of events, since in this way a woman becomes the teacher of her ex-husband.

55 AN 1.14 at AN I 23, 17 and EĀ 4.2 at T 125, 557b5. For a string of praises of Śāriputra's wisdom cf. also e.g. SN 2.29 at SN I 64, 3 and its parallel SĀ 1306 at T 100, 358c25.

56 References in commentarial literature to the *Cūlavedalla* (except for passages already mentioned above in note 9 and below in notes 63–65, and without taking into account references in the sub-commentaries), occur often in the context of definitions of the *vedalla* category or in listings of important texts, cf. e.g. Sp I 28, 27, Sv I 24, 14, Sv III 724, 11, Ps I 278, 5, Ps II 106, 25, Spk II 4, 16, Mp III 6, 11, As 26, 31, and Vibh-a 267, 2, which thus can be seen to occur in the commentaries to each of the three *piṭakas*. References in commentarial literature to Dharmadinnā can be found e.g. in Mp I 405, 5, Pj I 204, 13, Thī-a 5, 27, Thī-a 101, 26, Thī-a 111, 14, Thī-a 126, 2, Thī-a 175, 2, Thī-a 185, 20, and Jā VI 481, 16. On quotes from the present discourse in the *Visuddhimagga* cf. Krey (2010, 35 82n), for quotations in the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* etc. cf. Pāsādika (1989, 20 §1, 28 §45, 33 §67, and 101 §395f) and the appendix in Anālayo 2011. A high regard for the teachings given by Dharmadinnā can also be seen in the circumstance that Mahāsi (2006, 127), an eminent scholar-monk and meditation master of the Theravāda tradition in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, recommends the developing of inspiration by “bearing in mind the rare ability and gifted wisdom of Dhammadinnā in being able to elucidate with precision” the questions posed to her, cf. also above note 49.

57 Ps II 357, 15 reports her querying Viśākha: “how is it, will this dharma be attained just by men or is a woman also able to attain it?”, *kiṃ nu kho eso dhammo puriseh 'eva labhitabbo, mātuḡāmena pi sakkā laddun ti?* Viśākha replies: “what are you saying, Dharmadinnā, ... whoever has the required qualities will obtain it”, *kiṃ vadesi, Dhammadinne ... yassa yassa upanissayo atthi, so so etaṃ paṭilabhati*.

In the ancient Indian setting, a wife had to go to live in the house of her husband's family, where she was in a position subservient not only to her husband, but also to his parents.<sup>58</sup> Against this background, the present discourse throws into relief the degree to which, by dint of going forth as a bhikṣuṇī and developing the path to liberation, a woman could completely revert the situation in which she had been before.<sup>59</sup>

In sum, the present discourse in its three extant versions shows bhikṣuṇī Dharmadinnā self-confidently dealing with intricate aspects of the Dharma in a situation where her understanding is being challenged. It thus sets a clear antecedent, found within the textual corpus of the early Buddhist discourses, for the practice of debate among Buddhist disciples in later times.<sup>60</sup> Particularly noteworthy in this respect is the underlying pattern, observed above, of proceeding from relatively simple and innocuous questions to intricate and profound matters, thereby giving the impression as if the discourse is indeed recording an actual debate.

Bhikṣuṇī Dharmadinnā replies to the challenges she is shown to be facing make it clear that, from the viewpoint of early Buddhism, her gender had no bearing on her ability to reach realization and eloquently expound her understanding to others.<sup>61</sup> Such testimony is independent of the historical value one may be willing to accord to the information that can be gathered from the early discourses. Though other canonical passages at times present women

58 Horner (1990, 1) explains that a man “regarded his wife simply as a child-bearer”, as a consequence of which “her life was spent in complete subservience to her husband and his parents. She was allowed little authority at home and no part in public activities”. Von Hinüber (1993, 102) draws attention to an instance that reflects the low position of a wife in the household of her husband, found in Vin IV 21, 3, where a mother-in-law addresses her daughter-in-law with *je*, an address elsewhere used to address a female slave (or a courtesan, cf. Norman (1996, 58)), cf. also Wagle (1966, 94) who in regard to the low position of a wife in the household of her husband comments that “it is not, therefore, surprising that the daughter-in-law is sometimes treated as a slave”.

59 The present instance is thus more remarkable than Gārgī's challenge to Yajñavalkya in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 3.6 and 3.8, on which cf. e.g. Findly (1985), or the dialogue between Yajñavalkya and his wife Maitreyī in the same work at 4.5, since Dharmadinnā gives a series of teachings to her ex-husband, of which at least the last is clearly beyond his ken.

60 Debate among Buddhist disciples as a means of clarifying aspects of the Dharma has become a particularly prominent form of practice in the *dge lugs pa* tradition, cf. e.g. Sierksma (1964), Goldberg (1985), Tillemans (1989), Onoda (1992, 37–48), Perdue (1992), Newland (1996), Dreyfus (2003, 195–291), and Perdue (2008).

61 Mahāsi (2006, 127) points out that “at the time when Dhammadinnā *therī* answered these ... difficult questions, she has not been long enough ... an ordained ... *bhikkhuni*”, too short a time for her to become conversant with theoretical knowledge of the Dharma. Hence it clearly is “from her own insight knowledge personally acquired through practical exercise [that] she was able to answer clearly and precisely all the questions put forward by Visākha”.

in general and bhikṣuṇīs in particular in an unfavourable light,<sup>62</sup> there can be little doubt that the depiction of bhikṣuṇī Dharmadinnā in all versions of the present discourse conveys a remarkably positive image, whether it be reflecting a historical event or the opinion of the reciters of the text.

The same holds for her depiction in the Pāli commentaries, which report that bhikṣuṇī Dharmadinnā served as an inspiring model for other women who had chosen to follow her example by going forth in quest for awakening. The commentaries record that a woman who had gone forth under Dharmadinnā and learnt meditation from her became an arhat herself, after which this bhikṣuṇī also became an outstanding teacher.<sup>63</sup> Another bhikṣuṇī, who had been incapable of gaining concentration for twenty-five years, was according to the commentarial account able to develop her practice and eventually attained the six supernormal knowledges after hearing a teaching delivered by Dharmadinnā.<sup>64</sup>

In addition to the detailed teaching preserved in the *Chos sbyin gyi mdo* and its parallels, a succinct teaching attributed to bhikṣuṇī Dharmadinnā can be found in a single verse in the *Therīgāthā*, a collection of verses that often, similar to the present discourse, presents remarkably positive images of nuns. The verse associated with bhikṣuṇī Dharmadinnā in this collection can be seen to summarize key elements of what, according to tradition, had been her own development. This verse emphasizes having a strong aspiration for liberation,<sup>65</sup> an element evident in Dharmadinnā's decision to go forth and in her withdrawing into seclusion in order to be able to practice. These two decisions go hand in hand with a renunciation of the attractions of sensuality in its grosser and finer forms, and in combination with such renunciation lead to progress that takes place 'upstream', against the current of *samsāric* involvement. The verse runs:

62 This topic has received attention by a broad range of scholars, cf. e.g. Falk (1974, 106f), Church (1975, 54f), Paul (1985, 5–8), Willis (1985, 65), Lang (1986), Bancroft (1987, 81–93), Barnes (1987, 114), Falk (1989), Sumala (1991, 114–116), Rajapakse (1992, 70–75), Sponberg (1992), Gross (1993, 32–48), Wilson (1995), Harris (1999, 50f), Hüsken (2000, 59), Nagata (2002), Williams (2002), Ohnuma (2004, 303f), Hüsken (2006, 213), Bentor (2008, 126). Without in any way intending to turn a blind eye on such passages, I believe that Collett (2009, 112) is quite right when she emphasizes that more studies of female figures like Dharmadinnā are required in order to arrive at a more comprehensive and balanced understanding of the position of women as reflected in early Buddhist texts.

63 Thī-a 55, 25. Krey (2010, 20) notes that Dharmadinnā's role as a teacher is also documented in the Mahāsāṃghika Vinaya, cf. Roth (1970, 52).

64 Thī-a 74, 27.

65 Thī-a 19,6 glosses the expression *chandajātā* found in Dharmadinnā's verse as *aggaphalattam jātacchandā*, the arousing of desire for the highest fruit, spoken by her according to the commentarial explanation when she had already reached the lowest level of awakening and was striving to progress to full liberation.

*Chandajātā avasāye  
manasā ca phuṭā siyā  
kāmesu appaṭibaddhacittā  
uddhaṃsotā ti vuccati.*<sup>66</sup>

“With desire for the final end aroused  
Let her mind be pervaded by it;  
With her heart no [longer] bound to sensuality  
She is reckoned one who moves upstream.”

66 Thī 12; B<sup>c</sup>, C<sup>c</sup> and S<sup>c</sup> read: *avasāyī*, C<sup>c</sup>: *phuṭhā*, S<sup>c</sup>: *phuṭṭhā*. According to Blackstone (2000, 28), the sentiment conveyed by this verse is exceptional in the *Therīgāthā*. A similar verse, though couched in masculine forms, can be found in Dhṃ 218: *chandajāto anakkhāte, manasā ca phuṭo siyā, kāmesu ca appaṭibaddhacitto, uddhaṃsoto 'ti vuccati* (S<sup>c</sup>: *phuṭho, kāme* and *appaṭibaddha*<sup>9</sup>). A counterpart in *Udāna(-varga)* 2.9, Bernhard (1965, 114), reads: *chandajāto hy avasrāvī, manasānāvilo bhavet, kāmeṣu tv apraṭibaddhacitta, ūrdhvasroto nirucyate*. The Tibetan counterpart in Beckh (1911, 9) reads: *'dun pa skyes shing zag pa mi byed dang* (Z: *par mi byed dam*), *sems la skyon med pa dang dran pa dang, 'dod pa rnams la so sor ma chags gang, de ni 'pho ba 'i gong du yin zhes* (Z: *de ni gong du 'pho ba yin zhes gsungs*), Z = Zongtse (1990, 46). For a Chinese parallel cf. T 212, 629b13: 欲生無漏行，意願常充滿，於欲心不縛，上流一究竟。



## Abbreviations

Abhidh-k	<i>Abhidharmakośabhāṣya</i>
AN	<i>Aṅguttara-nikāya</i>
Ap	<i>Apadāna</i>
As	<i>Atthasālinī</i>
B <sup>e</sup>	Burmese edition
C <sup>e</sup>	Ceylonese edition
D	Derge edition
Dhp	<i>Dhammapada</i>
E <sup>e</sup>	PTS edition
EĀ	<i>Ekottarika-āgama</i> (T 125)
Jā	<i>Jātaka</i>
MĀ	<i>Madhyama-āgama</i> (T 1543)
MN	<i>Majjhima-nikāya</i>
Mp	<i>Manorathapūraṇī</i>
Pj	<i>Paramatthajotikā</i>
Ps	<i>Papañcasūdanī</i>
Q	Peking edition
S <sup>e</sup>	Siamese edition
SĀ	<i>Saṃyukta-āgama</i> (T 99)
SN	<i>Saṃyutta-nikāya</i>
Sp	<i>Samantapāsādikā</i>
Spk	<i>Sāratthappakāsinī</i>
Sv	<i>Sumaṅgalavilāsinī</i>
T	Taishō edition (CBETA)
Tc	Tanjur, collated edition
Thī	<i>Therīgāthā</i>
Thī-a	<i>Therīgāthā-aṭṭhakathā</i>
Ud	<i>Udāna</i>
Vibh-a	<i>Sammohavinodanī</i>
Vin	<i>Vinaya</i>



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