

THE PERFECTION OF RENUNCIATION

Quotes from the Theravada Tradition

Nekkhamma is the Pali word translated as renunciation. The prefix *ne* means out; sometimes the verbal root *kram* is taken to mean ‘to walk’ or ‘to travel’. *Nekkhamma* can thus mean to go forth or to go out and the word is sometimes used to describe a person’s ‘going forth’ into the monastic life. The Pali word seems to emphasize more what is gained in “going forth” rather than what is left behind as the English “renunciation” does.

1) The household life is confined and dusty; life gone forth is the open air. It is not easy, living at home, to live the holy life in all its fullness, in all its purity..

Long Discourses of the Buddha, I.63

2) A lay follower is accomplished in generosity by dwelling at home with a mind devoid of stinginess, and by being freely generous, open-handed, delighting in renunciation, devoted to charity, delighting in giving and sharing.

Samyutta Nikaya V.395

3) Even the gods envy
 The awakened ones,
 The mindful ones,
 The wise ones
 Who are intent on meditation
 And delight in the peace of renunciation.

(Dhammapada 181)

4) Ah, so happily we live,
 We who have no attachments.
 We shall feast on joy,
 As do the Radiant Gods.

(Dhammapada 200)

5) If, by giving up a lesser happiness,
 One could experience greater happiness,
 A wise person would renounce the lesser
 To behold the greater.

(Dhammapada 290)

6) Whatever happiness is found in sensual pleasures,
 And whatever there is of heavenly bliss –
 These are not worth one sixteenth part
 Of the happiness that comes with craving’s end.

(Udana 2.2)

7) Who so has turned to renunciation,
Turned to non-attachment of the mind,
Is filled with all-embracing love
And freed from thirsting after life. (Anguttara Nikaya 5.55)

8) As a bee gathers nectar
And moves on without harming
The flower, its color, or its fragrance,
Just so should a sage walk through a village. (Dhammapada 49)

9) Now at that time, Ven. Bhaddiya Kaligodha, on going to a forest, to the foot of a tree, or to an empty dwelling, would repeatedly exclaim, "What bliss! What bliss!" A large number of monks heard Ven. Bhaddiya Kaligodha, on going to a forest, to the foot of a tree, or to an empty dwelling, repeatedly exclaim, "What bliss! What bliss!" and on hearing him, the thought occurred to them, "There's no doubt but that Ven. Bhaddiya Kaligodha doesn't enjoy leading the holy life, for when he was a householder he knew the bliss of kingship, so that now, on recollecting that, he is repeatedly exclaiming, 'What bliss! What bliss!'" They went to the Blessed One and, on arrival, having bowed down to him, sat to one side. As they were sitting there, they told him: "Ven. Bhaddiya Kaligodha, lord, on going to a forest, to the foot of a tree, or to an empty dwelling, repeatedly exclaims, 'What bliss! What bliss!' There's no doubt but that Ven. Bhaddiya Kaligodha doesn't enjoy leading the holy life, for when he was a householder he knew the bliss of kingship, so that now, on recollecting that, he is repeatedly exclaiming, 'What bliss! What bliss!'"

Then the Blessed One told a certain monk, "Come, monk. In my name, call Bhaddiya, saying, 'The Teacher calls you, my friend.'"

"As you say, lord," the monk answered and, having gone to Ven. Bhaddiya, on arrival he said, "The Teacher calls you, my friend."

"As you say, my friend," Ven. Bhaddiya replied. Then he went to the Blessed One and, on arrival, having bowed down to him, sat to one side. As he was sitting there, the Blessed One said to him, "Is it true, Bhaddiya that, on going to a forest, to the foot of a tree, or to an empty dwelling, you repeatedly exclaim, 'What bliss! What bliss!'"

"Yes, lord."

"What meaning do you have in mind that you repeatedly exclaim, 'What bliss! What bliss!'"

"Before, when I was a householder, maintaining the bliss of kingship, I had guards posted within and without the royal apartments, within and without the city, within and without the countryside. But even though I was thus guarded, thus protected, I dwelled in fear -- agitated, distrustful, and afraid. But now, on going alone to a forest, to the foot of a tree, or to an empty dwelling, I dwell without fear, unagitated, confident, and unafraid -- unconcerned, unruffled, my wants satisfied, with my mind like a wild deer. This is the meaning I have in mind that I repeatedly exclaim, 'What bliss! What bliss!'"