

Appearance of the Morning Star

One day the Buddha and Ananda visited a small monastery located just outside the city. They arrived when most of the bhikkhus were out begging. As they strolled around the monastery grounds, they suddenly heard a pitiful groan coming from one of the huts. The Buddha entered the hut and found an emaciated bhikkhu curled up in one corner. A terrible stench filled the air.

The Buddha knelt beside him and asked, "Brother, are you ill?"

The bhikkhu answered, "Lord, I have dysentery."

"Isn't anyone looking after you?"

"Lord, the other brothers have gone out begging.

There is no one here but me. When I first fell ill, several of the brothers did try to care for me, but when I saw I was of no use to anyone, I told them not to bother with me anymore."

The Buddha told Ananda, "Go fetch some water. We will bathe our brother."

Ananda brought a bucket of water and helped the Buddha bathe the sick bhikkhu. They changed his robe and lifted him back onto his bed. The Buddha and Ananda then scrubbed the floor and washed the bhikkhu's soiled robes. They were hanging the robes out to dry when the other bhikkhus returned. Venerable Ananda asked them to boil some water and prepare medicine for their brother.

The community invited the Buddha and Ananda to eat with them.

After the meal, the Buddha asked them, "From what illness is the bhikkhu in that hut suffering?"

"Lord Buddha, he has dysentery."

"Has anyone been caring for him?"

"Lord Buddha, at first we tried to look after him but then he asked us not to."

"Bhikkhus, when we leave our homes to follow the Way, we leave parents and family behind. If we don't look after each other when we are sick, who will? We must care for one another. Whether the ill person is a teacher, a student, or a friend, we must tend to him until he has regained his health. Bhikkhus, if I were sick, would you tend to my needs?"

"Yes, certainly, Lord Buddha."

"Then you must tend to the needs of any bhikkhu who falls ill. Caring for any bhikkhu is the same as caring for the Buddha."

The bhikkhus joined their palms and bowed.

Quote: OLD PATH WHITE CLOUD - Chapter Fifty-Five