

POSTSCRIPT

An article recently published by Bhikkhu Anālayo, "[The Cullavagga on Bhikkhuni Ordination](#)" (CBO), comments on my recent paper on [ordaining bhikkhunis unilaterally](#) (OBU), in which I had criticized his earlier article, "[On the Bhikkhuni Ordination Controversy](#)" (BOC). The comments in CBO do not answer the main criticisms I raised in OBU. In some cases they misrepresent what Bhikkhu Anālayo himself wrote in BOC, and in one case in particular (point 2 below), they actually weaken his argument. So I thought it would be useful to assess his comments in detail, to show exactly why they are not an adequate response to OBU.

The criticisms of OBU appear in four footnotes in CBO. I will take them up in order.

1) First, in footnote 4, Bhikkhu Anālayo claims that I misrepresent his discussion of SN 16:3 in BOC, taking it out of context, when I say that he is trying to prove that the mere existence of an order of bhikkhunis would help prevent the decline of the Buddha's teaching. Actually, I'm not taking it out of context at all. His discussion of SN 16:3 in BOC leads directly to the final conclusion that "In sum, following the principle of the four *mahāpadesas* it seems clear that an order of *bhikkhunis* is desirable and an important asset in order to prevent the decline of the Buddha's teaching." This is the conclusion that provides the context for his discussion of SN 16:3. My argument was simply to point out that when we read the whole passage in SN 16:3, it does not support this conclusion. And because SN 16:3 is the prime piece of evidence he quotes to support his conclusion, that means that his conclusion is unfounded.

Ironically, in the sentence in CBO to which this footnote is attached, Anālayo intensifies that very conclusion, stating that in BOC, "I came to the conclusion that for the flourishing of the Buddha's dispensation, the *sāsana*, it is an *indispensable requirement* to have all four assemblies of disciples, one of which is an order of *bhikkhunis*." (*italics added*) To say that existence of something is an indispensable requirement (i.e., a necessary condition) to the flourishing of the dispensation is the same thing as saying that the mere existence of an order of bhikkhunis would help prevent the decline of the Buddha's teaching. I'm not accusing Anālayo of stating that the existence of a bhikkhuni order would be a *sufficient* cause for preventing decline, but when he is saying that it's an indispensable requirement, he is saying precisely what I said he was saying.

2) In footnote 5, Anālayo claims that when I point out the contradictory assumptions he assumes in different articles concerning the historical reliability of the origin story to the garudhammas, it is because I seem "to have difficulties to appreciate (*sic*) that a text can be read in different ways." Actually, I have no difficulties appreciating that a text can be read in different and even

contradictory ways *in an academic setting*, where people are not held responsible for the consequences of their interpretations. But in the context of the Saṅgha, when we are interpreting the Dhamma and Vinaya to understand how best to apply their teachings *in practice*, we have to be held responsible for what we say. In this context, being consistent in one's approach is an indispensable prerequisite. When a person takes one position on the reliability of a text to make one point in one context (i.e., arguing that the garudhammas come in an unreliable report, and thus insinuating that bhikkhunis should not regard them as binding) and then a contradictory position on the reliability of the same text to make another point in another context (stating that the garudhammas are reliable, and arguing from there that unilateral bhikkhuni ordination has to be accepted as a valid procedure) one has to question that person's honesty, and, frankly, whether he is fit to take part in Vinaya discussions.

As I asked in OBU, given that Anālayo claims to be using two different approaches to achieve particular aims, what are those aims? And how can an aim that is served by assuming a text to be reliable be compatible in practice with another aim served by assuming that it's not?

When we are discussing Vinaya issues in the Saṅgha, we have to start with the assumption, stated in DN 16, that the Vinaya is, together with the Dhamma, our teacher in the Buddha's stead. This means that we also have to start with the assumption that, in interpreting a Vinaya text, there is a meaning in the text that we are trying to extract—not, as is the current fashion in academia, that the text is free of meaning and that we can read anything we like into it. This also means that there are ground rules, often exemplified in the texts themselves, for how to extract that meaning. We also have to think of the long-term consequences of our attempts at finding the meaning in the text: both in terms of the conclusions at which we arrive and in terms of how we arrive at them. If we allow dubious and contradictory lines of reasoning to carry the day in an argument, we are setting a bad precedent for the generations to come.

In the same footnote, Anālayo goes on to state that my inability to appreciate the subtleties of his approaches is due to a lack of hermeneutical sophistication:

Ṭhānissaro's inability to see the difference between an evaluation of historical plausibility and an interpretation of legal implications confirms an assessment by Singsuriya (262) that (at times) "Thai Sangha and monks in general lack hermeneutical consciousness. The reason is their advocacy of 'naive realism', the belief that meanings of texts are something given ... they do not seem to have an inkling idea that textual meaning comes through mediation of an interpretative stance taken by the reader.

Anālayo is here supporting the old postmodern position that a text has no meaning of its own apart from the interpretative stance that the reader takes toward the text. In other words, interpretation is not a matter of finding the author's intended meaning in the text. It is a matter of the reader's choice of stance in reading a meaning into the text.

But there is so much in the Canon to indicate that, for anyone attempting to live by the True Dhamma, this is a grossly inappropriate way to approach it. When the Buddha said to take the Dhamma and Vinaya as our teacher in his stead, he surely didn't mean that the Dhamma and Vinaya had no inherent meaning. When he spent so much time clarifying the meaning of his words throughout the Canon, he obviously didn't think that the meaning he wanted to give those words should carry no weight. And when he set up the tradition of "training in cross-questioning" (AN 2:46) so that new bhikkhus could learn from older bhikkhus what the teachings meant, he wasn't implying that the new bhikkhus would be wise to adopt whatever interpretive stance was currently in fashion.

If we were to admit the postmodern stance into practical Vinaya discussions, what would be the purpose of having such discussions? Postmodernism is entirely antithetical to the principles of True Dhamma. By asserting that texts such as the Canon have no inherent meaning, and that therefore no interpretation of the Canon could be wrong, it denies that there really could be such a thing as a distinction between True Dhamma and counterfeit Dhamma. This only goes to support my statement in OBU that we are living in an era where even the idea of True Dhamma is discredited, and so this is not a propitious time to try to revive a bhikkhuni order.

3) In footnote 6, Anālayo takes issue with my statement that "it would not be in line with the Vinaya's own principles to make the narrative context of the origin stories determine how the rules are to be interpreted." He accuses me of inconsistency here, pointing out that in BMC I use information from the origin stories to help explain the rules. He then gives an example from my discussion of Pārājika 1, in which I comment on the motivations of the protagonists in two of the stories leading up to the final formulation of the rule.

However, the passage he quotes was not an argument for how the rule should be interpreted. In fact, I didn't draw any conclusions concerning the interpretation of the rule from the quoted passage at all.

It's one thing to use the origin stories for explanatory purposes. To claim that they play the *determining* role in how the rules are to be interpreted and applied is something else entirely.

4) In footnote 17, Anālayo states that to assume that the Buddha would formulate a rule for a one-time purpose only would be to accuse him of being thoughtless and careless in his formulation of the rules. Thus we have to assume that he meant his rule on unilateral ordination to be valid for all time.

But there is nothing inherently careless in formulating temporary rules for temporary circumstances.

In fact, there are many cases in the Vinaya where the Buddha formulated rules that seem clearly intended only for temporary situations: The original rule against bathing more than once every two weeks (Pacittiya 57), the original rule against eating mangoes (Cv.V.5.1), the rules for bhikkhus to acknowledge bhikkhunis' confessions (Cv.X.6.2), and the rules for the famine allowances

(Mv.VI.17.7; Mv.VI.17.9; Mv.VI.18.4; Mv.VI.19.2; Mv.VI.20.4) are just a few examples that spring immediately to mind. It was a standard feature of the Buddha's repertoire as a rule-giver to see that, as the Saṅgha was just getting established, certain temporary situations required temporary rules that he would rescind when the situations had passed. So it would hardly be inconsistent for him to formulate, as a temporary measure, an allowance for the bhikkhus unilaterally to give ordination to bhikkhunis as the Bhikkhuni Saṅgha was just getting started; and then, as the Bhikkhuni Saṅgha became more established, to rescind it with a later reformulation.

As I pointed out in OBU, the general pattern in the Vinaya is that when a rule was altered, the original formulation was automatically rescinded. In special cases where the Buddha meant for both versions to remain valid, for differing situations, he spelled out the situations under which each version was in force. Those are the two general patterns that the Buddha followed throughout the rest of the Vinaya, so those are the patterns to be applied in deciding whether the allowance for unilateral ordination is valid at present. Because the rules for bhikkhuni ordination clearly don't follow the second pattern, we have to assume that the Buddha meant them to be interpreted in line with the first. In other words, when he gave permission in Cv.X.17.2 for bhikkhus to ordain bhikkhunis after they had been purified in the Bhikkhuni Saṅgha, he automatically rescinded, once and for all, his earlier permission for bhikkhus to ordain bhikkhunis unilaterally.

And he had good reason for rescinding the earlier permission. If there is no Bhikkhuni Saṅgha to purify the candidate for bhikkhuni ordination, that means there is no community of bhikkhunis trained in the apprenticeship lineage established by the Buddha to train the candidate if she were to be ordained. If ordinations such as this were to proceed after the Buddha had passed away, it would result in a bhikkhuni order composed of the untrained leading the untrained. This, as I pointed out in OBU, would not be an act of compassion to the senior bhikkhunis, who would be creating the bad kamma of teaching without being qualified to do so; nor would it be an act of compassion to the junior bhikkhunis, who would be absorbing the examples set by unqualified teachers; nor would it be an act of compassion to the world at large, subjecting it to teachers who create a false impression of how a true bhikkhuni should embody the Dhamma in word and deed. Instead of opening the way to the noble paths and attainments, such a situation would act to close it off.

Thus bhikkhus at present, if they abide by the Vinaya, cannot ordain bhikkhunis. And anyone who has respect for the Dhamma and Vinaya should not try to force them to do so.

Thānissaro Bhikkhu