AN 3.64 — Sarabha Sutta (Discourse to Sarabha)

English translation by Bhikkhu Candana.

Source: https://www.mindreleased.com/s/Book-3_Anguttara-Nikya-A-New-Translation.pdf#page=130

Source revision: ee5230c458ad6c1566f518d5909916ad92d12aebf1240750c5357dd9b5699f30

License: Candana — free distribution, unaltered contents — https://www.mindreleased.com/s/Book-3_Anguttara-Nikya-A-New-Translation.pdf

Copyright © Bhikkhu Candana, 2020, 2026. Free distribution only; do not alter the contents. The original book, including its complete permission notice, accompanies this text.

Candana source labels: 64. Site text ID: AN 3.64.

Text

64. Sarabha Sutta (Discourse to Sarabha) At one time, while The Blessed One was staying at the Vultures' Peak in Rājagaha, a wandering ascetic by the name of Sarabha, who had recently left The Teacher's Dispensation, was going about in Rājagaha, making the following statement:

'I know The Dhamma of the Recluse Gautama, the Son of the Sakyans, whose Dhamma and Discipline I left, having already fully mastered it!'

Then, after putting on their robes one morning and taking their alms bowls and outer robes, a group of Bhikkhus entered Rājagaha for their daily alms and heard the ascetic Sarabha saying these words to the people of Rājagaha:

'I know The Dhamma of the Recluse Gautama, the Son of the Sakyans, whose Dhamma and Discipline I left, having already fully mastered it!'

"Later that day, after having eaten their meal, those Bhikkhus returned to the monastery and approached The Blessed One, and after paying homage to The Teacher, they sat down to one side and said:

"Venerable sir, the wandering ascetic named Sarabha, who had recently left the Teacher's Dhamma and Discipline, is going about in Rājagaha making these statements:

'I know The Dhamma of the Recluse Gautama, the Son of the Sakyans, whose Dhamma and Discipline I left, having already fully mastered it!'

"Blessed Lord, it would be good if The Blessed One could go to the monastery of the wandering ascetics on the bank of the River Sappinika and, out of Universal Compassion, perhaps see the wandering ascetic Sarabha."

And The Blessed One consented with His silence.

Then, in the afternoon, having come out of His seclusion, The Blessed One went and approached the wandering ascetic Sarabha at the monastery of the wandering ascetics, on

the bank of the River Sappinika.

The Blessed One then sat down on the prepared seat and said:

“Sarabha, is it true that you have been saying these words:

‘I know The Dhamma of the Recluse Gautama, the Son of the Sakyans, whose Dhamma and Discipline I left, having already fully mastered it!’

When this was said, the wandering ascetic Sarabha became silent.

For the second time, The Blessed addressed the ascetic Sarabha:

“Sarabha, tell us what you have learned and know of The Dhamma of the Recluse Gautama, the Son of the Sakyans. And if you have not learned it completely, then I will help you complete it. But, if you are truly complete in your learning, then I will be content and happy for you.”

Yet for the second time, the wandering ascetic Sarabha became silent.

And for the third time, The Blessed One said to the ascetic Sarabha: “

“Sarabha, tell us what you have learned and know of The Dhamma of the Recluse Gautama, the Son of the Sakyans. And if you have not learned it completely, then I will help you complete it. But, if you are truly complete in your learning, then I will be content and happy for you.”

But for the third time, the wandering ascetic Sarabha became silent.

Then, the wandering ascetics of Rājagaha turned to Sarabha and said:

“Friend, whatever you have to confess to the Recluse Gotama, do it, for He has just informed you that He will help you complete it, in the case that your learning of The Dhamma is not complete.

“Sarabha, tell us what you say you already know of The Dhamma of the Recluse Gautama, Son of the Sakyans. And if you have not learned it completely, then He will help you complete it. And, if you are indeed complete in your learning as you claim, then He will be content and happy for you!”

When this was said, the wandering ascetic Sarabha still remained silent, confused, with his head drooping, hunched over, overcome with grief, as he sat there unable to reply.

Then, seeing that the wandering ascetic Sarabha was thus sitting quietly, defeated, and unable to defend himself, The Blessed One addressed the other wandering ascetics:

“Know this, O wandering ascetics, whoever approaches to tell Me:

‘Although you claim to be Fully Awakened, you are still not Fully Awakened.’

“Then, I will carefully cross-question him, examining closely by asking for his reasons in saying so, while openly conversing together. But, when thus cross-questioned and asked for his reasons while conversing together, it is impossible that he should not find himself cornered into one of these three consequential positions, and not another. What three?

“He would either evade the question entirely by changing the topic of our conversation; or show bitter resentment, hatred, and anger; or sit silently and confused, with his head drooping; hunched over and overcome with grief, as he sits there unable to reply, just like this wandering ascetic Sarabha is now doing!

“Furthermore, O wandering ascetics, whoever approaches to tell Me:

‘Although you claim to have destroyed all your contaminants, you are still not free from the contaminants.’

“Then, I will carefully cross-question him, examining closely by asking for his reasons in saying so, while openly conversing together. But, when thus cross-questioned and asked for his reasons while conversing together, it is impossible that he should not find himself cornered into one of these three consequential positions, and not another. What three?

“He would either evade the question entirely by changing the topic of our conversation; or show bitter resentment, hatred, and anger; or sit silently and confused, with his head drooping; hunched over and overcome with grief, as he sits there unable to reply, just like this wandering ascetic Sarabha is now doing!

“And furthermore, wandering ascetics, whoever was to tell Me:

‘If one were to seriously and diligently practice The Dhamma that You teach, they would find out that it still does not lead to the ending of all suffering. ’

“Then, I will carefully cross-question him, examining closely by asking for his reasons in saying so, while openly conversing together. But, when thus cross-questioned and asked for the reasons while conversing together, it is impossible that he should not find himself cornered into one of these three consequential positions, and not another. What three?

“He would either evade the question entirely by changing the topic of our conversation; or show bitter resentment, hatred, and anger; or sit silently and confused, with his head drooping; hunched over and overcome with grief, as he sits there unable to reply, just like this wandering ascetic Sarabha is now doing!”

Then, soon after The Blessed One had left that gathering of wandering ascetics, having thus roared His lion’s roar three times, the wandering ascetics themselves surrounded the wandering ascetic Sarabha and began rebuking and chastising him with verbal assaults, as they exclaimed:

“Sarabha, you foolish idiot, you are like a jackal aimlessly roaming in a vast woodland, thinking ‘I will roar the lion’s roar,’ but instead, you have simply been howling and barking like a puny jackal! Now it is quite clear for us what you were trying to do, Sarabha!

“For, in the absence of the Recluse Gautama, you tried to roar like a lion, pretending to outdo the Recluse Gotama. Yet, you only ended up barking and screeching as you howled like a jackal, in the absence of the Recluse Gautama.

“You are just like that crow wanting to sing the cuckoo’s song, but you only squealed and shrieked like a parrot, Sarabha! You wanted to outdo the Recluse Gotama, but in fact, you mooed like a useless bull in a deserted cattle barn, when no one was around, while pretending you were somehow ‘the alpha!’”

In just this manner, those other wandering ascetics mocked him tauntingly, as they teased and laughed at their fellow wandering ascetic, Sarabha.