AN 8.11 — At Verañjā

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Text

Numbered Discourses 8.11

2. The Great Chapter

At Verañjā

So I have heard. At one time the Buddha was staying in Verañjā at the root of a neem tree dedicated to Naḷeru. Then the brahmin Verañja went up to the Buddha, and exchanged greetings with him. When the greetings and polite conversation were over, he sat down to one side and said to the Buddha:

“Worthy Gotama, I have heard that the ascetic Gotama doesn’t bow to old brahmins, the elderly and senior, who are advanced in years and have reached the final stage of life; nor does he rise in their presence or offer them a seat. And this is indeed the case, for the worthy Gotama does not bow to old brahmins, elderly and senior, who are advanced in years and have reached the final stage of life; nor does he rise in their presence or offer them a seat. This is not appropriate, worthy Gotama.”

“Brahmin, I don’t see anyone in this world—with its gods, Māras, and divinities, this population with its ascetics and brahmins, its gods and humans—for whom I should bow down or rise up or offer a seat. If the Realized One bowed down or rose up or offered a seat to anyone, their head would explode!”

“Worthy Gotama lacks taste.”

“There is, brahmin, a sense in which you could rightly say that I lack taste. For the Realized One has given up taste for sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and touches. It’s cut off at the root, made like a palm stump, obliterated, and unable to arise in the future. In this sense you could rightly say that I lack taste. But that’s not what you’re talking about.”

“Worthy Gotama is indelicate.”

“There is, brahmin, a sense in which you could rightly say that I’m indelicate. For the Realized One has given up delight in sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and touches. It’s cut off at the root, made like a palm stump, obliterated, and unable to arise in the future. In this sense you could rightly say that I’m indelicate. But that’s not what you’re talking about.”

“Worthy Gotama is a teacher of inaction.”

“There is, brahmin, a sense in which you could rightly say that I’m a teacher of inaction. For I teach inaction regarding bad bodily, verbal, and mental conduct, and the many kinds of

unskillful things. In this sense you could rightly say that I'm a teacher of inaction. But that's not what you're talking about."

"Worthy Gotama is a teacher of annihilationism."

"There is, brahmin, a sense in which you could rightly say that I'm a teacher of annihilationism. For I teach the annihilation of greed, hate, and delusion, and the many kinds of unskillful things. In this sense you could rightly say that I'm a teacher of annihilationism. But that's not what you're talking about."

"Worthy Gotama is disgusted."

"There is, brahmin, a sense in which you could rightly say that I'm disgusted. For I'm disgusted by bad conduct by way of body, speech, and mind, and by attainment of the many kinds of unskillful things. In this sense you could rightly say that I'm disgusted. But that's not what you're talking about."

"Worthy Gotama is an exterminator."

"There is, brahmin, a sense in which you could rightly say that I'm an exterminator. For I teach the extermination of greed, hate, and delusion, and the many kinds of unskillful things. In this sense you could rightly say that I'm an exterminator. But that's not what you're talking about."

"Worthy Gotama is a mortifier."

"There is, brahmin, a sense in which you could rightly say that I'm a mortifier. For I say that bad conduct by way of body, speech, and mind should be mortified. I say that a mortifier is someone who has given up unskillful qualities that should be mortified. They've cut them off at the root, made them like a palm stump, obliterated them, so that they're unable to arise in the future. The Realized One is someone who has given up unskillful qualities that should be mortified. He has cut them off at the root, made them like a palm stump, obliterated them, so that they're unable to arise in the future. In this sense you could rightly say that I'm a mortifier. But that's not what you're talking about."

"Worthy Gotama is gutless."

"There is, brahmin, a sense in which you could rightly say that I am gutless. I say that a gutless person is someone who has given up future wombs and regeneration into a new state of existence. They've cut them off at the root, made them like a palm stump, obliterated them, so that they're unable to arise in the future. The Realized One has given up future wombs and regeneration into a new state of existence. He has cut them off at the root, made them like a palm stump, obliterated them, so that they're unable to arise in the future. In this sense you could rightly say that I am gutless. But that's not what you're talking about.

Suppose, brahmin, there was a chicken with eight or ten or twelve eggs. And she properly sat on them to keep them warm and incubated. Now, the chick that is first to break out of the eggshell with its claws and beak and hatch safely: should that be called the eldest or the youngest?"

“Worthy Gotama, that should be called the eldest. For it is the eldest among them.”

“In the same way, in this population lost in ignorance, swaddled in their shells, I alone have broken open the egg of ignorance and realized the supreme perfect awakening. So, brahmin, I am the eldest and the first in the world.

My energy was roused up and unflagging, my mindfulness was established and lucid, my body was tranquil and undisturbed, and my mind was immersed and unified in samādhi. Quite secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unskillful qualities, I entered and remained in the first absorption, which has the rapture and bliss born of seclusion, while placing the mind and keeping it connected. As the placing of the mind and keeping it connected were stilled, I entered and remained in the second absorption, which has the rapture and bliss born of immersion, with internal clarity and mind at one, without placing the mind and keeping it connected. And with the fading away of rapture, I entered and remained in the third absorption, where I meditated with equanimity, mindful and aware, experiencing for themselves the bliss of which the noble ones declare, ‘Equanimous and mindful, one meditates in bliss.’ With the giving up of pleasure and pain, and the disappearance of former happiness and sadness, I entered and remained in the fourth absorption, without pleasure or pain, with pure equanimity and mindfulness.

When my mind had immersed in samādhi like this—purified, bright, flawless, rid of corruptions, pliable, workable, steady, and imperturbable—I extended it toward recollection of past lives. I recollected many kinds of past lives. That is: one, two, three, four, five, ten, twenty, thirty, forty, fifty, a hundred, a thousand, a hundred thousand rebirths; many eons of the world contracting, many eons of the world expanding, many eons of the world contracting and expanding. I remembered: ‘There, I was named this, my clan was that, I looked like this, and that was my food. This was how I felt pleasure and pain, and that was how my life ended. When I passed away from that place I was reborn somewhere else. There, too, I was named this, my clan was that, I looked like this, and that was my food. This was how I felt pleasure and pain, and that was how my life ended. When I passed away from that place I was reborn here.’ And so I recollected my many kinds of past lives, with features and details.

This was the first knowledge, which I achieved in the first watch of the night. Ignorance was banished and knowledge arose; darkness was banished and light arose, as happens for a meditator who is diligent, keen, and resolute. This was my first breaking out, like a chick breaking out of the eggshell.

When my mind had immersed in samādhi like this—purified, bright, flawless, rid of corruptions, pliable, workable, steady, and imperturbable—I extended it toward knowledge of the death and rebirth of sentient beings. With clairvoyance that is purified and superhuman, I saw sentient beings passing away and being reborn—inferior and superior, beautiful and ugly, in a good place or a bad place. I understood how sentient beings pass on according to their deeds: ‘These dear beings did bad things by way of body, speech, and mind. They denounced the noble ones; they had wrong view; and they chose to act out of that wrong view. When their body broke up, after death, they were reborn in a place of loss, a bad place, the underworld, hell. These dear beings, however, did good things by way of body, speech, and mind. They never denounced the noble ones;

they had right view; and they chose to act out of that right view. When their body broke up, after death, they were reborn in a good place, a heavenly realm.' And so, with clairvoyance that is purified and superhuman, I saw sentient beings passing away and being reborn—inferior and superior, beautiful and ugly, in a good place or a bad place. I understood how sentient beings pass on according to their deeds.

This was the second knowledge, which I achieved in the middle watch of the night. Ignorance was banished and knowledge arose; darkness was banished and light arose, as happens for a meditator who is diligent, keen, and resolute. This was my second breaking out, like a chick breaking out of the eggshell.

When my mind had immersed in samādhi like this—purified, bright, flawless, rid of corruptions, pliable, workable, steady, and imperturbable—I extended it toward knowledge of the ending of defilements. I truly understood: 'This is suffering' … 'This is the origin of suffering' … 'This is the cessation of suffering' … 'This is the practice that leads to the cessation of suffering'. I truly understood: 'These are defilements' … 'This is the origin of defilements' … 'This is the cessation of defilements' … 'This is the practice that leads to the cessation of defilements'. Knowing and seeing like this, my mind was freed from the defilements of sensuality, desire to be reborn, and ignorance. When it was freed, I knew it was freed.

I understood: 'Rebirth is ended; the spiritual journey has been completed; what had to be done has been done; there is nothing further for this place.'

This was the third knowledge, which I achieved in the last watch of the night. Ignorance was banished and knowledge arose; darkness was banished and light arose, as happens for a meditator who is diligent, keen, and resolute. This was my third breaking out, like a chick breaking out of the eggshell."

When he said this, the brahmin Verañja said to the Buddha:

"The worthy Gotama is the eldest! The worthy Gotama is the best! Excellent, worthy Gotama! Excellent! As if he were righting the overturned, or revealing the hidden, or pointing out the path to the lost, or lighting a lamp in the dark so people with clear eyes can see what's there, worthy Gotama has made the teaching clear in many ways. I go for refuge to the worthy Gotama, to the teaching, and to the mendicant Saṅgha. From this day forth, may the worthy Gotama remember me as a lay follower who has gone for refuge for life."