

Anguttara Nikāya

The Numerical Discourses

Atthakanipāta
(Book of the Eights)

AN 8.12

Sīha Sutta
“*To General Sīha*”

Translated by Bhikkhu Candana

Copyright © Bhikkhu Candana 2023

At one time, The Blessed One was living in the gabled hall with a peaked roof, in the Great Forest in the Princely City of Vesālī. It was during that time that many well-known Licchavis had assembled together, who while seated in their assembly hall, kept talking in praise of The Blessed One, the Dhamma, and the Sangha of Bhikkhus.

Meanwhile, seated among them, General Sīha, who was a devout follower of Nigaṇṭha Nāṭaputta, began reflecting:

‘Well, surely, The Blessed One must indeed be an Arahant, a Perfectly Awakened One for all these well-known Licchavi princes to come and assemble here together and talk in such continuous praise of The Blessed One, the Dhamma, and the Sangha of Bhikkhus! Now, I am truly eager to go and see The Blessed One, the Arahant, the Perfectly Awakened One, myself!’

So, General Sīha went and approached Nigaṇṭha Nāṭaputta (Mahāvīra) and said to him:

“Bhante, I desire to go and approach the recluse Gautama.”

And Nigaṇṭha Nāṭaputta said:

“Sīha, you being a man of action, why would you even want to go and see the recluse Gautama, who is all about inaction, teaching indifference and impassivity to his students?

“Sīha, the recluse Gautama teaches inaction, instructing indifference to his disciples, encouraging inaction and passivity.”

In hearing these words, General Sīha’s intentions of going to see The Blessed One subsided.

Then, for the second time, many well-known Licchavis again assembled together, who while seated in their assembly hall, kept talking in praise of The Blessed One, the Dhamma, and the Sangha of Bhikkhus.

Meanwhile, seated among them, General Sīha, who was a devout Jain, a follower of Nigaṇṭha Nāṭaputta, began reflecting:

‘Well, surely, The Blessed One must indeed be an Arahant, a Perfectly Awakened One for all these well-known Licchavi princes to come and assemble here together and talk in such continuous praise of The Blessed One, the Dhamma, and the Sangha of Bhikkhus! Now, I am truly eager to go and see The Blessed One, the Arahant, the Perfectly Awakened One, myself!’

And again, General Sīha went and approached Nigaṇṭha Nāṭaputta and said to him:

“Bhante, I desire to go and approach the recluse Gautama.”

And Nigaṇṭha Nāṭaputta again said:

“Sīha, you being a man of action, why would you even want to go and see the recluse Gautama, who is all about inaction, teaching indifference and impassivity to his students?

“Sīha, the recluse Gautama teaches inaction, instructing indifference to his disciples, encouraging inaction and passivity.”

In hearing these words, General Sīha’s intentions of going to see The Blessed One subsided for a second time.

Then, for a third time, many well-known Licchavis assembled together, and while seated in their great assembly hall, they were talking in praise of The Blessed One, the Dhamma, and the Sangha of Bhikkhus. Yet again, seated among them, General Sīha began reflecting:

‘Well, surely, The Blessed One must indeed be an Arahant, a Perfectly Awakened One for all these well-known Licchavi princes to come and assemble here together and talk in such continuous praise of The Blessed One, the Dhamma, and the Sangha of Bhikkhus! Now, I am truly eager to go and see The Blessed One, the Arahant, the Perfectly Awakened One, myself! What am I concerned about, or why do I even need to obtain the permission or consent of the Jains, in order to go and see The Blessed One, the Arahant, the Perfectly Awakened One?’

So, at midday, while accompanied by five hundred of his military chariots, General Sīha set off from Vesālī and went to see The Blessed One.

Later, having gone as far as the chariots would carry them, given the terrain, Sīha and his officers dismounted and began approaching the monastery on foot. Once there, General Sīha approached The Blessed One, and after paying homage to Him, sat down to one side and addressed The Blessed One by saying:

“Bhante, I have heard this being reported about The Blessed One, by some: *‘The Recluse Gautama teaches indifference, encouraging inaction and passivity while instructing his disciples!’*

“Now, Bhante, I would like to know whether this statement I have heard about The Blessed One from others is indeed true. Or are those individuals who are spreading such a report about The Blessed One simply misrepresenting Him, by stating what is untrue and completely false, thereby accusing The Blessed One wrongly, while saying things that have nothing to do with what You have said or do teach?

“Therefore, are such people’s descriptions accurate and in line with the Dhamma, or are they simply bringing onto themselves much criticism and blame, given any erroneous and unwholesome representation on their part regarding The Blessed One Himself? After all, Bhante, we do not want to be misspeaking the words of the Tathāgata, nor misrepresent Him by basing what we know on the false statements of others.”

1. “Sīha, there might be a situation according to which, it may be possible to rightfully claim that the Recluse Gautama does not take action, while encouraging inaction and passivity when teaching the Dhamma to His disciples.
2. “Sīha, there might be a situation according to which, it may be possible to rightfully claim that the Recluse Gautama only talks about actions, while encouraging the engagement in deeds, when teaching the Dhamma to His disciples.
3. “Sīha, there might be a situation according to which, it may be possible to rightfully claim that the Recluse Gautama is an annihilationist, while teaching the Dhamma to His disciples for the sake of annihilation.
4. “Sīha, there might be a situation according to which, it may be possible to rightfully claim that the Recluse Gautama lives with disgust, while teaching the Dhamma to His disciples for the sake of becoming disgusted.
5. “Sīha, there might be a situation according to which, it may be possible to rightfully claim that the Recluse Gautama is a destroyer, while teaching the Dhamma to His disciples for the sake of destruction.
6. “Sīha, there might be a situation according to which, it may be possible to rightfully claim that the Recluse Gautama is a crusher, promoting self-burnout, while teaching the Dhamma to His disciples for the sake of crushing, through self-burnout.
7. “Sīha, there might be a situation according to which, it may be possible to rightfully claim that the Recluse Gautama is a promoter of ending life, while teaching the Dhamma to His disciples for the sake of abandoning and putting an end.
8. “Sīha, there might be a situation according to which, it may be possible to rightfully claim that the Recluse Gautama is a provider of relief, while teaching the Dhamma to His disciples for the sake of relief, offering consolation and support.

a) And what, Sīha, would be a situation according to which, it may be possible to rightfully claim that the Recluse Gautama does not take action, while encouraging inaction and passivity when teaching the Dhamma to His disciples?

“Here, it must be known, Sīha, that I do *not*, in fact, take action while also encouraging inaction and passivity when teaching the Dhamma to my disciples; that is, encouraging inaction and passivity towards all evil and unwholesome bodily misbehavior; towards all evil and unwholesome verbal misbehavior; and towards all evil and unwholesome mental misbehavior, in addition to any and all kinds of harmful and bad actions.

“Therefore, Sīha, that might be a situation according to which, it may be possible to rightfully claim that the Recluse Gautama does not take action, while encouraging inaction and passivity when teaching the Dhamma to His disciples.”

b) And what, Sīha, would be a situation according to which, it may be possible to rightfully claim that the Recluse Gautama only talks about actions, while encouraging the engagement in deeds, when teaching the Dhamma to His disciples?

“Here, it must be known, Sīha, that I *do* in fact, talk about actions while also encouraging the importance of engaging in good and wholesome bodily deeds and behavior; engaging in good and wholesome verbal deeds and behavior; and engaging in good and wholesome mental deeds and behavior.

“Therefore, Sīha, that might be a situation according to which, it may be possible to rightfully claim that the Recluse Gautama only talks about actions, while encouraging the engagement in deeds, when teaching the Dhamma to His disciples.”

c) And what, Sīha, would be a situation according to which, it may be possible to rightfully claim that the Recluse Gautama is an annihilationist, while teaching the Dhamma to His disciples for the sake of annihilation?

“Here, it must be known, Sīha, that I *am* in fact, an annihilationist, while teaching the Dhamma to my disciples for the sake of annihilation; that is, the annihilation of lust, of hatred and delusion, and the annihilation of any and all kinds of harmful and bad actions.

“Therefore, Sīha, that might be a situation according to which, it may be possible to rightfully claim that the Recluse Gautama is an annihilationist, while teaching the Dhamma to His disciples for the sake of annihilation.”

d) And what, Sīha, would be a situation according to which, it may be possible to rightfully claim that the Recluse Gautama lives with disgust, while teaching the Dhamma to His disciples for the sake of becoming disgusted?

“Here, it must be known, Sīha, that I *do* in fact, live with disgust towards all types of bodily misconduct, verbal misconduct, and mental misconduct, in addition to any and all kinds of harmful and evil actions.

“Therefore, Sīha, that might be a situation according to which, it may be possible to claim that the Recluse Gautama lives with disgust, while teaching the Dhamma to His disciples for the sake of becoming disgusted.”

e) And what, Sīha, would be a situation according to which, it may be possible to rightfully claim that the Recluse Gautama is a destroyer, while teaching the Dhamma to His disciples for the sake of destruction?

“Well, here also, it must be known, Sīha, that I *am* in fact, a destroyer, for I do teach individuals and their families the Dhamma that dismantles and drives out lust, hatred, and delusion from people’s hearts, in addition to any and all kinds of harmful and evil qualities that are driven out from them.

“Therefore, Sīha, that might be a situation according to which, it may be possible to claim that the Recluse Gautama is a destroyer, while teaching the Dhamma to His disciples for the sake of destruction.”

f) And what, Sīha, would be a situation according to which, it may be possible to rightfully claim that the Recluse Gautama is a crusher, promoting self-burnout, while teaching the Dhamma to His disciples for the sake of crushing through self-burnout?

“In that case, Sīha it must be known that I *am* in fact, a crusher, for I do teach and emphasize the crushing and burning out of evil and unwholesome bodily conduct, verbal unwholesome conduct, and mental unwholesome conduct. This, because I declare that the one who has indeed removed completely the unwholesome and evil qualities from one’s heart, *is* in fact ‘a crusher,’ someone who has burned out and cut off all evil and harmful qualities from their very roots, just like a palm tree, turning it into a dead stump, having obliterated it from ever growing any shoots again.

“For you see, Sīha, The Tathāgata has indeed destroyed and eliminated all manner of evil and unwholesome qualities from His heart, by crushing, burning out and cutting off all evil and harmful qualities from their very roots, just like a palm tree, turning it into a dead stump, having obliterated it from ever growing any shoots again.

“Therefore, Sīha, that might be a situation according to which, it may be possible to rightfully claim that the Recluse Gautama is a crusher, promoting self-burnout, while teaching the Dhamma to His disciples for the sake of crushing through self-burnout.”

g) And what, Sīha, would be a situation according to which, it may be possible to rightfully claim that the Recluse Gautama promotes the ending of life, while teaching the Dhamma to His disciples for the sake of abandoning and putting an end?

“It must be known, Sīha, that I *do* teach the ending of perpetually existing, giving up the desire to keep going from womb to womb in the endless cycles of rebecoming, putting a final stop to *all* future rebirths from taking place again. This, because I declare that the one who has indeed eradicated and removed completely the desire for rebecoming from one’s heart, *is* in fact, ‘an ender,’ someone who has given up and cut off any chances for a future rebirth from ever taking

place; having cut it off just like a palm tree, turning it into a dead stump, obliterating it from ever growing any shoots again.

“So, you see, Sīha, The Tathāgata has therefore completely given up and thus ended all perpetual future existences, putting a final stop to *all* future rebirths from ever taking place again. This, because He has eradicated and removed from His heart completely the desire for rebecoming, and *is* in fact, ‘an ender,’ the One who has given up and cut off any chances for a future rebirth from taking place; having cut it off just like a palm tree, turning it into a dead stump, obliterating it from ever growing any shoots again.

“Therefore, Sīha, that might be a situation according to which, it may be possible to rightfully claim that the Recluse Gautama promotes the ending of life, while teaching the Dhamma to His disciples for the sake of abandoning and putting an end.”

h) And what, Sīha, would be a situation according to which, it may be possible to rightfully claim that the Recluse Gautama is a provider of relief, giving comfort, while teaching the Dhamma to His disciples for the sake of relief, offering consolation and support?

“It must be known, Sīha, that I *am* indeed the provider of supreme relief, the highest comfort and solace to ever be experienced; the safety and consolation that only could come through training in and practicing this Dhamma.

“Therefore, Sīha, that might be a situation according to which, it may be possible to rightfully claim that the Recluse Gautama is a provider of relief, giving comfort, while teaching the Dhamma to His disciples for the sake of relief, offering consolation and support.”

Now, once these words had been spoken, General Sīha addressed The Blessed One and said:

“It is excellent O Lord! It is marvelous, Bhante!

“The Blessed One has made the Dhamma clear to me in many ways. I feel as though the Tathagata has turned upright what was overturned, revealing what was hidden, showing the correct path to someone who was lost, as though one were to bring a lamp into the darkness, for all those with eyesight to see.

“Bhante, I do go for refuge to The Blessed One, to the Dhamma, and to the Sangha of Bhikkhus. May The Blessed One accept me as His lay disciple who has taken refuge in Him, from today until the end of life.”

And The Blessed One said to General Sīha:

“Sīha, please! You must first consider thoroughly, thinking carefully before you act. Because it is only appropriate for well-known and prominent individuals in society like yourself to think about your role in the community first, and *only* afterwards declare your faith in the Tathagata, by making such a bold declaration!”

And General Sīha exclaimed:

“Bhante, now I am *even more* impressed, touched, and fully certain in my heart, so utterly delighted to hear these words of The Blessed One:

‘Sīha, please! You must first consider thoroughly, thinking carefully before you act. Because it is only appropriate for well-known and prominent individuals in society like yourself to think about your role in the community first, and only afterwards declare your faith in the Tathagata, by making such a bold declaration!’

“For, if it were any of the leaders of some other faith or sect, hearing that they were about to acquire me as their disciple and supporter, they would immediately carry me about like a banner through the streets of Vesālī, announcing to everyone, “*General Sīha has now become my disciple and supporter!*” Yet here, not only do I not see The Blessed One doing such a thing, but He is *even* cautioning me with His words of advice, by saying:

‘Sīha, think carefully before you act. Because it is only appropriate for well-known and prominent individuals in society like yourself to think about your role in the community first, and only afterwards declare your faith in the Tathagata, by making such a bold declaration!’

“Therefore, Bhante, for the second time, I go for refuge to The Blessed One, to the Dhamma, and to the Sangha of Bhikkhus. May The Blessed One accept and remember me as one of His lay followers, who has gone to Him as his refuge, for life.”

“But *Sīha*, remember that for a long time, your family and relations have been avid supporters of the naked Jains Nigaṇṭhas, and to this end, you should consider that alms food continue to be offered to them when they come to your home for alms.”

“Bhante, now I am *even more* impressed, touched, and joyful in my heart; so utterly delighted to hear these words of The Blessed One. For, I have often heard the Jain Nigaṇṭhas claim that the recluse Gautama declares the following:

‘Offerings should only be made to me, not to other leaders of sects. Offerings should be made only to my disciples, and not to the disciples of other sects. Offerings made to my disciples are of great fruit, but not the offerings made to others.’

“But here, on the contrary, The Blessed One yet again caringly advises me to continue making offerings to those naked Jain Nigaṇṭhas! Therefore, Lord, when the time is appropriate, we shall provide meal offerings to them, as necessary.

“Bhante, for the third time, I go for refuge to The Blessed One, to the Dhamma, and to the Sangha of Bhikkhus. May The Blessed One accept and remember me as one of His lay followers, who has gone to Him for refuge, for life.”

Then, The Blessed One taught General *Sīha* the Dhamma, as He gradually unraveled it for him – beginning with a discourse on being generous and the benefits of making offerings, then a discourse on the benefits of developing a virtuous character through one’s behavior with mental, verbal, and bodily actions, followed by a discourse on the heavenly realms.

The Blessed One then explained the dangers that come through the pursuit of sensual desires; the depraved consequences of living such a vane life; the vileness of defiling pursuits in life, and the wonderful benefits of giving all that up.

Then, when it was time, while observing that the mind of General *Sīha* was ready, malleable, free from hindrances, elevated and contented, The Blessed One expounded to him the exalted Dhamma of the Buddhas, that is: The Truth of suffering, the Truth of the arising and origin of suffering, the Truth of the cessation of suffering, and the Truth of the Path that leads one to the cessation of suffering.

Then, suddenly, just like a pure, clean cloth with all its impurities removed, would take on dye evenly, in the same manner, the spotless, stainless Vision of the Dhamma arose in the heart of General *Sīha*, just as he kept sitting there, listening attentively to his Teacher, with his hands gently clasped together. And he knew in his heart with unshakeable certainty:

‘Whatever arises from causes, is also of the very nature to cease.’

Thus, General *Sīha*, then and there, tasted the Dhamma, as he came to know the Dhamma by penetrating it, whereby his doubts were dispelled and through the unprecedented confidence gained from this experience, he realized that he no longer needed another teacher in the Dispensation, as he said to The Blessed One:

“Bhante, please accept tomorrow’s meal from me, together with the Sangha of Bhikkhus.”

And The Blessed One accepted the invitation, with His silence.

Then, General *Sīha*, understanding that The Blessed One had accepted his invitation for the next day’s meal *dāna*, approached and paid his respect, and after circumambulating The Blessed One, went away.

Later, while addressing one of his servants, General *Sīha* instructed him by saying:

“Friend, go to the market and find someone who is selling already cut meat, that is ready for sale and bring some for us to prepare tomorrow’s lunch.”

“Yes, Master!” The man replied, as he went off to fetch some meat from the market.

Then, throughout the night, General *Sīha* kept supervising his servants and workers up until the early morning hours, as they all prepared a variety of nourishing foods and healthy drinks at his home, for the lunch *dāna*. And once everything was ready, he sent word to The Blessed One:

“Bhante, it is time. The meal is ready.”

Then, in the morning, The Blessed One put on His robes, and by taking His alms bowl and outer robe, He went and approached General *Sīha*’s home, along with the Sangha of Bhikkhus. Once there, The Blessed One and the rest of the monks all sat on the prepared seats.

Meanwhile, many Jains (Nigaṇṭhas) had already begun marching from street to street, from district to district, while shouting with their raised arms in protest:

“Today, General Sīha, in his desire to offer a meal for the recluse Gautama, has slaughtered a strong bull. And the recluse Gautama, who is responsible for this atrocious action, sits and eats that very meat with his monks, knowing full well that the animal was slaughtered for him!”

Then, a certain man quickly ran back to General Sīha to report what was happening, as he whispered in his ear:

“My lord, please be informed that many Jains (Nigaṇṭhas) have begun marching from street to street, from district to district, while shouting with their raised arms in protest:

‘Today, General Sīha, in his desire to offer a meal for the recluse Gautama, has slaughtered a strong bull. And the recluse Gautama, who is responsible for this atrocious action, sits and eats that very meat with his monks, knowing full well that the animal was slaughtered for him!’

And General Sīha replied by saying:

“Enough! Those marching fools who call themselves ‘teachers’ and ‘religious practitioners’ have been trying, for a long time now, to sully and dishonor the reputation of The Blessed One, as they slander and, with their malicious lies, attempt to discredit the Tathāgata, the Dhamma, and the Sangha of Bhikkhus!

“Those putujjanas, by making these false accusations and baseless assumptions against The Blessed One, cannot destroy the reputation and fame of The Blessed One.

“Those idiots cannot understand that it is simply impossible for us to knowingly destroy life, or intentionally slaughter a living being, not even to save our own life!”

Then, General Sīha went on offering the nourishing foods and healthy drinks he had prepared, as he continued serving them to the Sangha of Bhikkhus, headed by The Blessed One, doing so with his own hands until every single one of them were fully satiated.

Seeing that The Blessed One had finished taking the meal, the General Sīha sat on a low seat, placed to one side.

Then, The Blessed One, having instructed General Sīha further, by encouraging and inspiring him with a delightful talk on the Dhamma, which made everyone’s heart become lighter and fully gladdened, He got up from His seat and left.

Sādhū

Sādhū

Sādhū