DN 11 — With Kevaḍḍha

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Text

Long Discourses 11

With Kevaḍḍha

So I have heard. At one time the Buddha was staying near Nāḷandā in Pāvārika's Mango Grove.

Then the householder Kevaḍḍha went up to the Buddha, bowed, sat down to one side, and said to him, "Sir, this Nāḷandā is successful and prosperous, populous and full of people. Please direct a mendicant to perform a superhuman demonstration of psychic power. Then Nāḷandā will become even more devoted to the Buddha!"

When he said this, the Buddha said, "Kevaḍḍha, I do not teach Dhamma to the mendicants like this: 'Come now, mendicants, perform a superhuman demonstration of psychic power for the white-clothed laypeople.'"

For a second time, Kevaḍḍha made the same request, "Sir, I am not teaching you the Dhamma, but nonetheless I say: 'Sir, this Nāḷandā is successful and prosperous, populous and full of people. Please direct a mendicant to perform a superhuman demonstration of psychic power. Then Nāḷandā will become even more devoted to the Buddha!'" But for a second time, the Buddha gave the same answer.

For a third time, Kevaḍḍha made the same request, at which the Buddha said the following.

1. The Demonstration of Psychic Power

"Kevaḍḍha, there are three kinds of demonstration, which I declare having realized them with my own insight. What three? The demonstration of psychic power, the demonstration of revealing, and the demonstration of instruction.

And what is the demonstration of psychic power? It's a mendicant who wields the many kinds of psychic power: multiplying themselves and becoming one again; materializing and dematerializing; going unobstructed through a wall, a rampart, or a mountain as if through space; diving in and out of the earth as if it were water; walking on water as if it were earth; flying cross-legged through the sky like a bird; touching and stroking with the hand the sun and moon, so mighty and powerful; controlling the body as far as the realm of divinity.

Someone with faith and confidence sees that mendicant performing those superhuman feats.

They tell someone else who lacks faith and confidence: ‘Oh lord, how incredible, how amazing! The ascetic has such psychic power and might! I saw him myself, performing all these superhuman feats!’

But the one lacking faith and confidence would say to them: ‘There’s a spell named Gandhārī. Using that a mendicant can perform such superhuman feats.’

What do you think, Kevaḍḍha? Wouldn’t someone lacking faith speak like that?”

“They would, sir.”

“Seeing this drawback in psychic power, I’m horrified, repelled, and disgusted by demonstrations of psychic power.

2. The Demonstration of Revealing

And what is the demonstration of revealing? It’s when a mendicant reveals the mind, mentality, thoughts, and reflections of other beings and individuals: ‘This is what you’re thinking, such is your thought, and thus is your state of mind.’

Someone with faith and confidence sees that mendicant revealing another individual’s thoughts. They tell someone else who lacks faith and confidence: ‘Oh lord, how incredible, how amazing! The ascetic has such psychic power and might! I saw him myself, revealing the thoughts of another individual!’

But the one lacking faith and confidence would say to them: ‘There’s a spell named Māṇikā. Using that a mendicant can reveal another individual’s thoughts.’

What do you think, Kevaḍḍha? Wouldn’t someone lacking faith speak like that?”

“They would, sir.”

“Seeing this drawback in revealing, I’m horrified, repelled, and disgusted by demonstrations of revealing.

3. The Demonstration of Instruction

And what is the demonstration of instruction? It’s when a mendicant instructs others like this: ‘Think like this, not like that. Focus your mind like this, not like that. Give up this, and live having achieved that.’ This is called the demonstration of instruction.

Furthermore, a Realized One arises in the world … That’s how a mendicant is accomplished in ethics. … They enter and remain in the first absorption … This is called the demonstration of instruction.

They enter and remain in the second absorption … third absorption … fourth absorption. This too is called the demonstration of instruction.

They project and extend the mind toward knowledge and vision … This too is called the demonstration of instruction.

They understand: ‘… there is nothing further for this place.’ This too is called the demonstration of instruction.

These, Kevaḍḍha, are the three kinds of demonstration, which I declare having realized them with my own insight.

4. On the Mendicant in Search of the Cessation of Being

Once upon a time, Kevaḍḍha, a mendicant in this very Saṅgha had the following thought, ‘Where do these four principal states cease without remainder, namely, the elements of earth, water, fire, and air?’

Then that mendicant attained a state of immersion such that a path to the gods appeared. Then he approached the gods of the four great kings and said, ‘Respectable sirs, where do these four principal states cease without remainder, namely, the elements of earth, water, fire, and air?’

When he said this, those gods said to him, ‘Mendicant, we too do not know this. But the four great kings are our superiors. They might know.’

Then he approached the four great kings and asked the same question. But they also said to him, ‘Mendicant, we too do not know this. But the gods of the thirty-three … Sakka, lord of gods … the gods of Yama … the godling named Suyāma … the Joyful gods … the godling named Santussita … the gods who love to create … the godling named Sunimmita … the gods who control the creation of others … the godling named Vasavattī … the gods of the Divinity’s host are our superiors. They might know.’

Then that mendicant attained a state of immersion such that a path to divinity appeared. Then he approached the gods of the Divinity’s host and said, ‘Respectable sirs, where do these four principal states cease without remainder, namely, the elements of earth, water, fire, and air?’ But they also said to him, ‘Mendicant, we too do not know this. But there is the Divinity, the Great Divinity, the Vanquisher, the Unvanquished, the Universal Seer, the Wielder of Power, God Almighty, the Maker, the Creator, the First, the Begetter, the Controller, the Father of those who have been born and those yet to be born. He is our superior. He might know.’

‘But respectable sirs, where is that divinity now?’ ‘We also don’t know where he is or what way he lies. But by the signs that are seen—light arising and radiance appearing—we know that divinity will appear. For this is the harbinger for the appearance of the Divinity, namely light arising and radiance appearing.’ Not long afterwards, the Great Divinity appeared.

Then that mendicant approached the Great Divinity and said to him, ‘Respectable sir, where do these four principal states cease without remainder, namely, the elements of earth, water, fire, and air?’ The Great Divinity said to him, ‘I am the Divinity, the Great Divinity, the Vanquisher, the Unvanquished, the Universal Seer, the Wielder of Power, God Almighty, the Maker, the Creator, the First, the Begetter, the Controller, the Father of those who have been born and those yet to be born.’

For a second time, that mendicant said to the Great Divinity, ‘Respectable sir, I am not asking you whether you are the Divinity, the Great Divinity, the Vanquisher, the Unvanquished, the Universal Seer, the Wielder of Power, God Almighty, the Maker, the Creator, the First, the Begetter, the Controller, the Father of those who have been born

and those yet to be born. I am asking where these four principal states cease without remainder.'

For a second time, the Great Divinity said to him, 'I am the Divinity, the Great Divinity, the Vanquisher, the Unvanquished, the Universal Seer, the Wielder of Power, God Almighty, the Maker, the Creator, the First, the Begetter, the Controller, the Father of those who have been born and those yet to be born.' For a third time, that mendicant said to the Great Divinity, 'Respectable sir, I am not asking you whether you are the Divinity, the Great Divinity, the Vanquisher, the Unvanquished, the Universal Seer, the Wielder of Power, God Almighty, the Maker, the Creator, the First, the Begetter, the Controller, the Father of those who have been born and those yet to be born. I am asking where these four principal states cease without remainder.'

Then the Great Divinity took that mendicant by the arm, led him off to one side, and said to him, 'Mendicant, these gods think that there is nothing at all that I don't know and see and understand and realize. That's why I didn't answer in front of them. But I too do not know where these four principal states cease with no residue left behind. Therefore, mendicant, the misdeed is yours alone, the mistake is yours alone, in that you passed over the Buddha and searched elsewhere for an answer to this question. Mendicant, go to the Buddha and ask him this question. You should remember it in line with his answer.'

Then that mendicant, as easily as a strong person would extend or contract their arm, vanished from the realm of divinity and reappeared in front of me. Then he bowed, sat down to one side, and said to me, 'Sir, where do these four principal states cease without remainder, namely, the elements of earth, water, fire, and air?'

4.1. The Simile of the Land-Spotting Bird

When he said this, I said to him:

'Once upon a time, mendicant, some sea-merchants set sail for the ocean deeps, taking with them a land-spotting bird. When their ship was out of sight of land, they released the bird. It flew right away to the east, the west, the north, the south, upwards, and in-between. If it saw land on any side, it went there and stayed. But if it saw no land on any side it returned to the ship.

In the same way, after failing to get an answer to this question even after searching as far as the realm of divinity, you've returned to me. Mendicant, this is not how the question should be asked: "Sir, where do these four principal states cease without remainder, namely, the elements of earth, water, fire, and air?"

This is how the question should be asked:

"Where do water and earth,

fire and air have no footing;

where long and short,

tiny and huge, beautiful and ugly?

Where do name and form

cease no residue left behind?”

And the answer to that is:

“‘Consciousness where no form appears,

infinite, radiant all-round.’

Here water and earth,

fire and air have no footing;

here long and short,

tiny and huge, beautiful and ugly.

Here name and form

cease with no residue left behind—

with the cessation of consciousness,

here they cease.’”’”

That is what the Buddha said. Satisfied, the householder Kevaḍḍha approved what the Buddha said.