Snp 1.7 — Vasala Sutta: Discourse on Outcasts

English translation by Piyadassi Thera.

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Text

Thus have I heard:

On one occasion the Blessed One was living near Savatthi at Jetavana at Anathapindika's monastery. Then in the forenoon the Blessed One having dressed himself, took bowl and (double) robe, and entered the city of Savatthi for alms. Now at that time a fire was burning, and an offering was being prepared in the house of the brahman Aggikabharadvaja. Then the Blessed One, while on his alms round, came to the brahman's residence. The brahman seeing the Blessed One some way off, said this: "Stay there, you shaveling, stay there you wretched monk, stay there you outcast." When he spoke thus the Blessed One said to the brahman: "Do you know, brahman, who an outcast is and what the conditions are that make an outcast?" "No, indeed, Venerable Gotama, I do not know who an outcast is nor the conditions that make an outcast. It is good if Venerable Gotama were to explain the Dhamma to me so that I may know who an outcast is and what the conditions are that make an outcast."[1]

"Listen then, brahman, and pay attention, I will speak."

"Yes, Venerable Sir," replied the brahman.

1. "Whosoever is angry, harbors hatred, and is reluctant to speak well of others (discredits the good of others), perverted in views, deceitful — know him as an outcast.

2. "Whosoever in this world kills living beings, once born or twice born,[2] in whom there is no sympathy for living beings — know him as an outcast.

3. "Whosoever destroys and besieges villages and hamlets and becomes notorious as an oppressor — know him as an outcast.

4. "Be it in the village, or in the forest, whosoever steals what belongs to others, what is not given to him — know him as an outcast.

5. "Whosoever having actually incurred a debt runs away when he is pressed to pay, saying, 'I owe no debt to you' — know him as an outcast.

6. "Whosoever coveting anything, kills a person going along the road, and grabs whatever that person has — know him as an outcast.

7. "He who for his own sake or for the sake of others or for the sake of wealth, utters lies when questioned as a witness — know him as an outcast.

8. "Whosoever by force or with consent associates with the wives of relatives or friends — know him as an outcast.

9. "Whosoever being wealthy supports not his mother and father who have grown old — know him as an outcast.

10. "Whosoever strikes and annoys by (harsh) speech, mother, father, brother, sister or mother-in-law or father-in-law — know him as an outcast.

11. "Whosoever when questioned about what is good, says what is detrimental, and talks in an evasive manner- know him as an outcast.

12. "Whosoever having committed an evil deed, wishes that it may not be known to others, and commits evil in secret — know him as an outcast.

13. "Whosoever having gone to another's house, and partaken of choice food, does not honor that host by offering food when he repays the visit — know him as an outcast.

14. "Whosoever deceives by uttering lies, a brahman or an ascetic, or any other mendicant — know him as an outcast.

15. "Whosoever when a brahman or ascetic appears during mealtime angers him by harsh speech, and does not offer him (any alms) — know him as an outcast.

16. "Whosoever in this world, shrouded in ignorance, speaks harsh words (asatam) or falsehood[3] expecting to gain something — know him as an outcast.

17. "Whosoever debased by his pride, exalts himself and belittles other — know him as an outcast.

18. "Whosoever is given to anger, is miserly, has base desires, and is selfish, deceitful, shameless and fearless (in doing evil) — know him as an outcast.

19. "Whosoever reviles the Enlightened One (the Buddha), or a disciple of the Buddha, recluse or a householder — know him as an outcast.

20. "Whosoever not being an arahant, a Consummate One, pretends to be so, is a thief in the whole universe — he is the lowest of outcasts.

21. "Not by birth is one an outcast; not by birth is one a brahman. By deed one becomes an outcast, by deed one becomes a brahman.

22. "Know ye by the example I now cite (the fact that by birth one is not an outcast). There was an outcast's son, Sopaka, who became known as Matanga.

23. "This Matanga attained the highest fame so difficult to gain. Many were the warriors (kshatriyas) and brahmans who went to attend on him.

24. "Mounting the celestial chariot (the Noble Eightfold path, and driving) along the passion-free high road, (Sopaka, now a monk), reached the Brahma realm having given up sense desires.

25. "His (lowly) birth did not prevent him from being reborn in the Brahma realm. There are brahmans born in the family of preceptors, kinsmen of (veda) hymns.

26. "They are often seen committing evil deeds. In this life itself they are despised, in the next they are born in an evil state of existence. High birth does not prevent them from falling into a woeful state, or from censure.

27. "Not by birth is one an outcast; not by birth is one a brahman. By deed one becomes an outcast, by deed one becomes an brahman."

When the Buddha had thus spoken, the Brahman Aggikabharadvaja said to the Blessed One: "Excellent, O Venerable Gotama, excellent! Just as, O Venerable Gotama, a man were to set upright what had been overturned, or were to reveal what had been hidden, or were to point the way to one who had gone astray, or were to hold an oil lamp in the dark so that those with eyes may see things, even so in many ways has the Venerable Gotama

expounded the Dhamma, the doctrine. I take refuge in the Venerable Gotama, the Dhamma, and the Sangha, the Order. May the Venerable Gotama accept me as a lay follower who has taken refuge from this day onwards while life lasts."

Notes

1.

The abusive terms used by the brahman and the respectful address that follows need a word of explanation. The brahman had just prepared his offering to the great Brahma, his God, when his eyes fell on Buddha. To the brahman the sight of a samana, a shaven-headed recluse, was an unlucky sign. Hence he burst into angry words. The Buddha, however, was unruffled and spoke to him quietly in words of soft cadence. The brahman apparently was ashamed, and repenting of his folly, addressed the Buddha courteously. Comy. It is interesting to note the Buddha's stress on anger and hatred in his very first stanza.

2.

dvijam, birds. Twice-born is a reference to birds since they first come out as an egg, and when hatched a complete bird is born.

3.

asantamtipi patho, SnA.