Snp 2.7 — Brāhmaṇa Dhammika Sutta — Brahmanical Beliefs & Customs

English translation by Bhikkhu Candana.
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Text

Snp. 2.7

Brāhmaṇa Dhammika Sutta

“Brahmanical Beliefs & Customs”

This is what I personally heard:

At one time, The Blessed One was living at the monastery offered by Anāthapiṇḍika in Jeta’s Park, in Sāvatthī.

It was then that a large group of wealthy brahmin householders from Kosala, who were quite old and advanced in years, with ailing bodies, as they were close upon death, approached The Blessed One, and after exchanging friendly greetings with Him, sat to one side, and asked The Blessed One:

“Dear Gautama, we would like to ask You, whether the Brahmanical Beliefs and Customs in practice today are holding true to the tradition that was in practice in ancient times?”

The Blessed One replied:

“No, brahmins, the Brahmanical Beliefs and Customs that are in practice today, are not holding true to the tradition that was in practice in ancient times.”

Then, the brahmin elders said:

“In that case, Dear Gautama, could you please teach us, for we would very much like to learn the Brahmanical Beliefs and Customs that were in practice in ancient times? May The Blessed Gautama kindly explain them to us, if it is not too much trouble.”

And The Blessed One said:

“Then listen brahmins, and pay careful attention, and I will explain them to you.”

“Yes, Master Gautama,” those brahmin elders replied, while paying close attention.

284. “In ancient times, sages lived restrained, behaving responsibly, having seen through and abandoned their reliance upon the five branches of sense pleasures. Thus, they practiced by conducting themselves properly, in order to experience their highest potential.

285. “The brahmins of old did not possess any cattle or grains, nor kept any gold. But what those ancients treasured in those days was living the noble life, and doing so with strong faith.

286. “Whatever food they prepared for themselves, they did so at their door, openly available for all those in need, as they gave it away generously, with faith in their hearts; sharing the meal that was cooked with anyone and whoever came hungry, to their doorstep.

287. “Wherever they went, the brahmins of old were offered the very best of carriages, clothes, beds, and dwellings by wealthy supporters in the various provinces and countries, who were touched by their nobility.

288. “The ancient brahmins were never rebuked, because they never engaged in wrong conduct. Thus, they were always protected by the Dhamma. It was a blessing to have them visit one’s home, and for this, no doors were kept closed to them, as no one turned them away nor stopped them from entering their house.

289. “Aside from their responsibility to father children with their one and only wife, each of these ancient brahmins remained celibate for forty-eight years, protecting the vow of chastity, while pursuing their quest for higher knowledge and conduct.

290. “Those brahmins neither coveted nor went to another’s wife, nor did they buy themselves a wife. Instead, their union of living together was based on love and respect, with mutual agreement.

291. “And when those ancient brahmins engaged in sexual acts with their mate, they only did so during the appropriate time, and abstained from sex altogether, outside the fertility phase, during the wife’s menstrual cycle.

292. “They always honored and praised the Holy Life, m a i n t a i n i n g v i r t u o u s b e h a v i o r, h o n e s t y, a n d straightforwardness; being kind and gentle, as well as sharp and deliberate when engaging in austerities, while living a life of harmlessness, along with persevering patience.

293. “Yet, the one among those ancients who was esteemed as the highest and most dedicated, was considered as if Mahā Brahmā himself, for he never engaged in sexual

intercourse, not even in his sleep.

294. “Being inspired by his example, many of those wise ones revered him, impressed by his level of dedication to observing the holy practice of chastity, of virtuous conduct, and of patience too.

295. “They made their sacrifices not by the killing of cattle and other animals, but from the very offerings they had received, be it grains, beddings, clothes, purified ghee, or oil, all of which they had collected rightfully.

296. “Thus, by treating the cows with loving respect, they looked upon them as if looking at their mother, father, brother or any other dear relative; realizing their important role, including that of being the source of healing medicines.

297. “They realized how cows are a source of nourishing food, health, and vitality, along with happiness and wellbeing. Knowing this to be true, through experience, they did not kill any cows.

298. “Brahmins of old were both delicate and tall, handsome, and attractive, always dedicated, and responsible in performing their duties. As such, they all prospered in happiness, as long as the forward world cycle rolled on.

299. “But slowly, they began changing, little by little, as perversions crept in, as they began admiring the splendor of

warrior kings, as well as the gold ornaments and jewelry they saw on the royal women.

300. “Also, seeing thoroughbred stallions pulling their lavish chariots that were beautifully made with elaborate embroidery and decorations everywhere, as well as their opulent living quarters and various houses they owned, all laid out side by side with sufficient spaces in between;

301. “All this, in addition to the enormous wealth that the rich and ruling class of society possessed, not to mention their countless herds of cattle, and the endless stream of beautiful and attractive women they were surrounded by, the brahmins in time, began to covet these as well.

302. “And while being driven by that very lust, they began composing mantras and special chants as they approached King Okkāka, whom they convinced by saying:

‘You now have much wealth, and for this reason, you must make sacrifices! If you want to keep having such wealth and treasures, then you must make sacrifices! After all, it is only due to the sacrifices you make that wealth, treasures, resources, and all your possessions come to you and will continue to do so, in the future!’”

303. “Then, the king, the lord of all warriors, now being convinced of this lie and persuaded by the encouragement of those brahmins, began making various sacrifices, including the slaughter of humans and horses, while also giving the brahmins the authority to sacrifice anything they asked for, in addition to opening the royal treasure houses to them; giving them great wealth and entire districts in the kingdom,

along with their inhabitants, thus offering them all to the brahmins.

304. “There were cattle, the finest of bedding, clothes, attractive and finely adorned women, as well as many beautifully decorated chariots, yoked to thoroughbred stallions.

305. “There were many beautiful mansions, palaces, and houses offered to the brahmins now, opulent living quarters and various houses, all laid out side by side, with sufficient space in between. In this way, the king kept making sacrifices, by offering all these to the brahmins.

306. “In receiving so much wealth, they began delighting and indulging in accumulating even more riches, hoarding all that wealth they received. Thus, overcome by their lust for more, craving continued to grow its roots deeper in their hearts. To this end, they composed new mantras and chants, as they again approached King Okkāka and exclaimed:

307. ‘As water, earth, gold, wealth, and grains, so the lives of cattle are essential for humans to make use of.’

“So, they convinced the king to sacrifice cows, in order to gain much more resources and wealth, while instructing him:

‘You now have much wealth, and for this reason, you must make sacrifices! If you want to keep having such wealth and treasures, then you must make sacrifices! It is only due to the sacrifices you make that wealth, treasures, resources, and all your possessions come to you and will continue to do so, in the future!’

308. “Then, the king, the lord of all warriors, again being convinced of this lie and persuaded by the encouragement of those brahmins, began killing hundreds of thousands of cows, offering them all as sacrifice, according to what he was advised to do by those brahmins.

309. “Not by their hooves or legs, nor by their horns had those cattle harmed or hurt anyone at all; instead, just like innocent sheep, they always trustingly offered their milk to mankind in buckets, daily. But the king, grabbing them by their horns, put them all through the knife, in the name of sacrificial offering.

310. “In witnessing this, the Devas, headed by their King, Lord Indra, the asura demons, as well as the yakkhas, cried out together in shock of the injustice they witnessed, in seeing how man put the knife to the necks of those cows, all in the name of so-called ‘sacrifice.’

311. “In the past, there were only three diseases to be found: greed, hunger, and old age. But now, with the slaughtering of cows, ninety-eight new diseases arose.

312. “This injustice, predicated by violence in people’s hearts, now has come down the ages, deviating completely from the noble practice of the ancient ones. And while they killed and slaughtered those who have done no wrong, those making the sacrifices have fallen out of the Dhamma, and all that is holy and noble.

313. “For this reason, such an inhumane and utterly foolish practice has been looked down upon and severely criticized by the ancient wise ones, as a completely blamable action.

For, wherever such insanity is witnessed by beings, it is always those who are sacrificing and those priests officiating them, who are to carry the blame.

314. “And with innocence and justice gone, along with these corruptions, there came about the divisions within the once healthy society, where now there was a split between slaves, householders, merchants, and kingly warriors; quarrels became commonplace too, even between a husband and his wife.

315. “In this way, warrior kings, brahmins, and all others of so-called higher birth status in society, continued segregating against those of a lesser status than theirs, abusing their position, as well as others’ while being led throughout by their lust, for more sensual pleasures.”

When this was said, the wealthy brahmin householders of Kosala who had gathered there listening to The Blessed One, exclaimed together:

“Magnificent, Master Guatama! Excellent, Master Guatama! The Blessed One has made the Dhamma clear for us in many ways, as though He were turning upright what had been turned upside-down, revealing what was hidden, showing the way to one who was lost, holding up a lamp in the dark for those with eyesight to see. We go to The Blessed One for refuge, and to the Dhamma and to the Sangha of Bhikkhus. From this day forward, may The Blessed One remember us as His lay disciples, who have taken refuge in Him, until the end of life.”