Snp 2.12 — Vaṅgīsa and His Mentor Nigrodhakappa

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Text

Anthology of Discourses 2.12

Vaṅgīsa and His Mentor Nigrodhakappa

So I have heard. At one time the Buddha was staying near Āḷavī, at Āḷavī's premier shrine. Now at that time it was not long after Venerable Vaṅgīsa's mentor, the senior monk named Nigrodhakappa, had become fully quenched. Then as Vaṅgīsa was in private retreat this thought came to his mind: "Has my mentor become quenched or not?" Then in the late afternoon, Venerable Vaṅgīsa came out of retreat and went to the Buddha. He bowed, sat down to one side, and said to him: "Just now, sir, as I was in private retreat this thought came to mind. 'Has my mentor become quenched or not?'" Then Venerable Vaṅgīsa rose from his seat, arranged his robe over one shoulder, raised his cupped palms toward the Buddha, and addressed him in verse:

"I ask the Teacher unrivaled in wisdom,

who has cut off all doubts in this very life:

a monk has died at Āḷavī's premier shrine,

who was well-known, famous, and quenched.

Nigrodhakappa was his name;

it was given to that brahmin by you, Blessed One.

He wandered in your honor, yearning for freedom,

energetic, a resolute Seer of Truth.

O Sakyan, All-seer,

we all wish to know about that disciple.

Our ears are eager to hear,

for you are the most excellent teacher.

Cut off our doubt, declare this to us;

your wisdom is vast, tell us of his quenching!

All-seer, speak among us,

like the thousand-eyed Sakka in the midst of the gods!
Whatever ties there are, or paths to delusion,
or things on the side of unknowing, or that are bases of doubt
vanish on reaching a Realized One,
for his eye is the best of all people's.
If no man were ever to disperse corruptions,
like the wind dispersing the stormclouds,
darkness would shroud the whole world;
not even brilliant men would shine.
The attentive are bringers of light;
my hero, that is what I think of you.
We've come for your discernment and knowledge:
here in this assembly, declare to us about Kappāyana.
Swiftly send forth your sweet, sweet voice,
like a goose stretching its neck, gently honking,
lucid-flowing, with lovely tone:
alert, we all listen to you.
You have entirely abandoned birth and death;
curbed and pure, I urge you, speak the Dhamma!
For ordinary people have no wish-granter,
but Realized Ones have a comprehensibility-granter.
Your answer is definitive, and we will adopt it,
for you have perfect understanding.
We raise our cupped palms one last time,
one of unrivaled wisdom, don't deliberately confuse us.
Knowing the teaching of the noble ones from top to bottom,
one of unrivaled energy, don't deliberately confuse us.
As a man baking in the summer sun would long for water,
I long for your voice, so let the sound rain forth.

Surely Kappāyana did not lead the spiritual life in vain?
Did he realize quenching,
or did he still have a residue?
Let us hear what kind of liberation he had!”
“He cut off craving for name and form right here,”
said the Buddha,
“the river of darkness that had long lain within him.
He has entirely crossed over birth and death.”
So declared the Blessed One, the leader of the five.
“Now that I have heard your words,
seventh of seers, I am confident.
My question, it seems, was not in vain,
the brahmin did not deceive me.
As he said, so he did—
he was a disciple of the Buddha.
He cut the net of death the deceiver,
so extended and strong.
Blessed One, Kappāyana saw
the starting point of grasping.
He has indeed gone far beyond
Death’s dominion so hard to pass.”