Snp 2.12 — Sn 2:12 Vaṅgīsa

English translation by Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu.

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Changes: Presentation only: original HTML markup reflowed into plain text; wording, numbering and source repetitions retained. No repetitions expanded.

Completeness: ABBREVIATED. Every source-unit character is preserved, including introductions, notes and verse structure. Thanissaro's collection-level note explicitly states that repetitions were cut: https://www.dhammatalks.org/suttas/about.html. This is evidence about the translation method, not an assertion that every individual unit contains an omission; no repetitions reconstructed.

Text

2:12 Vaṅgīsa

I have heard that on one occasion the Blessed One was staying near Āḷavī at the Aggāḷava shrine. And on that occasion Ven. Vaṅgīsa’s1 preceptor, an elder named Nigrodha Kappa, had recently totally unbound at the Aggāḷava shrine. Then as Ven. Vaṅgīsa was alone in seclusion, this train of thought arose in his awareness: “Has my preceptor totally unbound, or has he not totally unbound?”

Then, emerging from his seclusion in the late afternoon, Ven. Vaṅgīsa went to the Blessed One and, on arrival, having bowed down to him, sat to one side. As he was sitting there, he said to the Blessed One, “Just now, as I was alone in seclusion, this train of thought arose in my awareness: ‘Has my preceptor totally unbound, or has he not totally unbound?’”

Then, arranging his robe over one shoulder and placing his hands palm-to-palm over his heart toward the Blessed One, Ven. Vaṅgīsa addressed the Blessed One in verses:

“We ask the Teacher of supreme discernment,

who has cut off uncertainty in the here-&-now:

A monk has died at the Aggāḷava shrine—

well-known, prestigious, with mind fully unbound.

Nigrodha Kappa was his name,

given by you, Blessed One, to that brahman.

He went about revering you—

who sees the firm Dhamma—

intent on release, with persistence aroused.

Sakyan, All-around Eye,2

we all, too, want to know of that disciple:

Ready to hear are our ears.

You, our teacher: You are unexcelled.

Cut through our uncertainty. Tell me this,

make known, One of discernment deep,

that he was totally unbound.

Like Thousand-eyed Sakka, in the midst of the devas,3

speak, All-around Eye, in ours.

Here, whatever snares there are, paths

of delusion, siding

with not-knowing, bases

of uncertainty:

On reaching the Tathāgata, they don’t exist,

as that Eye is the foremost of men.

For if no man were ever to disperse defilements—

as the wind, a dark mass of clouds—

the whole world would be enveloped in darkness.
Even brilliant people wouldn't shine bright.

But the enlightened are makers of light.
Thus I think you're that, enlightened one.
We have come to one who knows through clear-seeing.
Make Kappa shine in our assembly.

Quickly, handsome one, stir your handsome voice.
Like a swan,4 stretching out (its neck), call gently
with rounded tones, well-modulated.
We all listen to you, sitting upright.

Pleading, I shall get the pure one to speak,
he whose birth & death are abandoned.
For people run-of-the-mill haven't the power
to bring about what they desire,
but Tathāgatas do have the power
to bring about what they have pondered.

This, your consummate explanation,
is rightly-grasped, you of discernment
rightly straight.
This last salutation is offered:
Knowing, don't delude us,
one of discernment supreme.

Understanding the noble Dhamma
from high to low,
knowing, don't delude us,
hero supreme.
I long for the water of your speech
as if distressed in mind by the heat in the summer.

Rain down a torrent.5

Was the holy life, as led by Kappa
in line with his aim? Was it not in any way in vain?
Did he unbind with no fuel remaining?6
Let us hear how he was released."

"Here he cut off craving for name-&-form,
the current of the Dark One, the long-time obsession.
He has crossed over birth & death."
So spoke the Blessed One, excelling in five.7

"Hearing this, your word,
highest of seers,
I am brightened & calmed.
Surely, my question was not in vain,
nor was I deceived by the brahman.
As he spoke, so he acted:
He was a disciple
of the One Awakened.
He has cut through
the tough, stretched-out net
of deceitful Death.
He, Kappiya, saw, Blessed One,
the beginning of clinging.
He, Kappayāna,8 has gone beyond
the realm of Death
so very hard to cross."

vv. 343–358

Notes

1. Cited in AN 1:148 (1:212) as foremost among the monks in having extemporaneous inspiration. His verses are collected in SN 8 and in Thag 21. He appears in Sn both here and at Sn 3:3.

2. From Vedic times it was customary to believe that divine beings had total vision of reality because they could see with all parts of their bodies—thus they were "all-around eyes." At the same time, there was a belief that it was auspicious to gaze into a divine being's eye, which meant that worshippers were content to see any part of the divine being's body. Both of these beliefs carried over into Buddhist devotional practice. For more on this point, see DN 16, note 44. See also, Jan Gonda, Eye and Gaze in the Veda.

3. The word majjhe—"in the midst"—functions as a lamp here.

4. Reading haṁso'va with the Burmese edition.

5. Reading sutaṁ pavassa, interpreting the "u" as an "o" shortened to fit the meter.

6. The unbinding element of the arahant who has passed away. See Iti 44.

7. According to SnA, "five" here stands for the five faculties and other sets of five qualities that led to the Buddha's awakening.

8. Kappiya, Kappayāna: Honorific forms of Kappa.

Publisher references (not part of the sutta)

See also: DN 16; AN 6:43