Snp 3.4 — Sn 3:4 Sundarika Bhāradvāja

English translation by Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu.

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Text

3:4 Sundarika Bhāradvāja

Another version of this encounter is recorded in SN 7:9.

I have heard that on one occasion the Blessed One was staying among the Kosalans on the bank of the River Sundarika. And on that occasion, the brahman Sundarika Bhāradvāja was offering a fire sacrifice and performing a fire oblation on the bank of the River Sundarika. Then, having offered the fire sacrifice and performed the fire oblation, he got up from his seat and looked around to the four directions, (thinking,) “Who should eat the remains of the offering?” He saw the Blessed One sitting not far away at the root of a tree with his head covered. On seeing him, he took the remains of the offering in his left hand and his water-pot in his right, and went to the Blessed One. Then the Blessed One, at the sound of the brahman Sundarika Bhāradvāja’s footsteps, uncovered his head. The brahman

Sundarika Bhāradvāja (thinking,) "This venerable one is shaven. This venerable one is a shaveling," wanted to turn back. But then the thought occurred to him, "Still, there are some brahmans who are shaven. What if, having approached him, I were to ask his caste?"

So he went to the Blessed One and, on arrival, asked: "What is the venerable one's birth-caste?"1

Then the Blessed One addressed the brahman Sundarika Bhāradvāja in verse:

"I'm not a brahman or king's son,

not a merchant, or anyone at all.2

Comprehending the clan

of the run-of-the-mill,3

having nothing,

I wander by means of wisdom

in the world.

Wearing my outer robe,

I wander without home,

my hair shaven off,

my mind entirely unbound,

not adhering to people here.

You ask me

an inappropriate question

about clan."

Sundarika:

"But, sir, brahmans surely inquire of brahmans,

'Are you among the brahmans?'"

The Buddha:

"If you say you're a brahman

and I'm not a brahman,

I ask you the three lines of the Sāvitti

and its twenty-four syllables."4

Sundarika:

“Because of what

did seers, men, noble warriors, & brahmans

—many of them here in the world—

(first) arrange sacrifices to devas?”

The Buddha:

“Whoever has attained the end,

an attainer-of-knowledge,

should receive an oblation

at the time of a sacrifice,

his (sacrifice), I say, would succeed.”5

Sundarika:

“So yes, our sacrifice will succeed

for we have seen an attainer-of-knowledge like you.

It’s from not seeing those like you

that someone else eats the sacrificial cake.”

The Buddha:

“Therefore, brahman,

as you are seeking your benefit,

approach and ask.

Perhaps you may find here

one at peace, with no anger,

no desire, no affliction:

one with good wisdom.”

Sundarika:

“I delight in sacrifice,

I desire to sacrifice,

but I don’t understand

where a sacrifice succeeds.
Teach me, sir. Tell me that."

The Buddha:
"In that case, brahman, lend ear.
I will teach you the Dhamma.
Don't inquire about birth.6
Inquire about conduct.
As from wood, a fire is born,7
so a sage, even from lowly birth
—steadfast, restrained
through a sense of shame—
becomes a thoroughbred.

One tamed by truth,
endowed with self-control,
attained to the end of knowledge,
having fulfilled the holy life:
To him, at the right time,
you should bestow an offering,8
to him a brahman aiming at merit
should sacrifice.

Those with well-restrained minds,
straight as a shuttle:
To them, at the right time,
you should bestow an offering,
to them a brahman aiming at merit
should sacrifice.

Those devoid of passion,
their faculties well-centered,

released like the moon
from the grasp of an eclipse:
To them, at the right time,
you should bestow an offering,
to them a brahman aiming at merit
should sacrifice.

Unattached, they wander in the world,
always mindful,
abandoning possessiveness:
To them, at the right time,
you should bestow an offering,
to them a brahman aiming at merit
should sacrifice.

Who, abandoning sensuality,
wanders victorious,
who knows the end
of birth & death,
totally unbound, cool
as a pool of water:
The Tathāgata deserves9
the sacrificial cake.

Consonant among the consonant,
far from the discordant,
the Tathāgata of infinite discernment,
not smeared here or beyond:
The Tathāgata deserves
the sacrificial cake.

In whom no deceptiveness dwells,

no conceit,
devoid of greed, un-
possessive, un-
desiring,
his anger dispelled,
his mind entirely unbound,
a brahman who has abandoned
the stain of grief:
The Tathāgata deserves
the sacrificial cake.

He has abandoned the homes of the mind,
has
no possessions at all,
no clinging here or beyond:
The Tathāgata deserves
the sacrificial cake.

Centered, he's crossed
over the flood,
he knows the Dhamma
through the highest view,
effluents ended, bearing his last body:
The Tathāgata deserves
the sacrificial cake.

Whose effluent of becoming
and harsh speech
are destroyed, finished, do not exist—
he, an attainer-of-knowledge,
everywhere totally released10:
The Tathāgata deserves

the sacrificial cake.

Gone beyond snares,
for whom there are no snares,
who, among those attached to conceit,
is unattached to conceit,
comprehending stress
along with its field & its site11:
The Tathāgata deserves
the sacrificial cake.

Independent of desire,
seeing seclusion,12
gone beyond the views known by others,
who has
no supports
no mental objects13
at all:
The Tathāgata deserves
the sacrificial cake.

In whom, having understood them,
phenomena from high to low
are destroyed, finished, do not exist14—
at peace, released in the ending of clinging:
The Tathāgata deserves
the sacrificial cake.

Seeing the end & ending
of fetters & birth,
having dispelled the path of passion
without trace,

pure, faultless, stainless, clear:
The Tathāgata deserves
the sacrificial cake.

Who doesn't contemplate
self by means of self,15
centered, straightened,
steadfast in mind,16
truly unperturbed,
free from rigidity, free
from doubt:
The Tathāgata deserves
the sacrificial cake.

Who has no conditions for delusion,
with knowledge & vision of all phenomena
he carries his last body,
having attained the unexcelled
self-awakening, auspicious—
to that extent is the purity of a spirit17:
The Tathāgata deserves
the sacrificial cake."

Sundarika:
"And may my offering
be a true offering
from having obtained
an attainer-of-knowledge like you.
As Brahmā is my witness,
may the Blessed One accept,
may the Blessed One eat,
my sacrificial cake."

The Buddha:

“What’s been chanted over with verses18

shouldn’t be eaten by me.

That’s not the nature, brahman,

of one who’s seen rightly.

What’s been chanted over with verses

Awakened Ones reject.

That being their Dhamma, brahman,

this is their way of life.

Serve with other food & drink

a fully-perfected great seer,

his effluents ended,

his anxiety stilled,

for that is the field

for one looking for merit.”

Sundarika:

“It’s well, Blessed One, how I understand

who should eat the offering of one like me,

whom I should seek at the time of sacrifice

having received your advice.”

The Buddha:

“Whose violence is fully gone,

whose mind is limpid,

whose sloth is dispelled

—fully released from sensuality—

one who has subdued boundaries,19

a master of birth & death,

a sage consummate in sagacity20:

When one like this has come to the sacrifice,

then, subduing scorn, with hands palm-to-palm

over the heart,

do homage.

Worship him with food & drink.

In this way the offerings will succeed."

Sundarika:

"Master, the Awakened One,

field of merit

unexcelled in all the world,

recipient for all the world21

deserves the sacrificial cake.

A gift given to you, master,

bears great fruit.

Then the brahman Sundarika Bhāradvāja said to the Blessed One, "Magnificent, Master Gotama! Magnificent! Just as if he were to place upright what was overturned, to reveal what was hidden, to show the way to one who was lost, or to carry a lamp into the dark so that those with eyes could see forms, in the same way has Master Gotama—through many lines of reasoning—made the Dhamma clear. I go to Master Gotama for refuge, to the Dhamma, & to the Saṅgha of monks. Let me obtain the Going-forth in Master Gotama's presence, let me obtain Acceptance (into the Bhikkhu Saṅgha)."

Then the brahman Sundarika Bhāradvāja obtained the Going-forth in the Blessed One's presence, he obtained Acceptance. And not long after his Acceptance—dwelling alone, secluded, heedful, ardent, & resolute—he in no long time reached & remained in the supreme goal of the holy life, for which clansmen rightly go forth from home into homelessness, knowing & realizing it for himself in the here-&-now. He knew: "Birth is ended, the holy life fulfilled, the task done. There is nothing further for the sake of this world." And so Ven. Sundarika Bhāradvāja became another one of the arahants.

vv. 456–486

Notes

1. The account in SN 7:9 goes immediately from this question to the Buddha's response marked by footnote 6.

2. See AN 4:36.

3. According to SnA, the “clan” of the run-of-the-mill is the five aggregates. However, the clan of run-of-the-mill people might also refer to the customs of all lineages that don’t follow the customs of the noble lineage set out in AN 4:28.

4. This is apparently a reference to Ṛgveda iii, 62, 10, an invocation addressed to Sāvitrī, or the Sun:

tat savitur vareṇ(i)yaṁ

bhargo devasya dhīmahi

dhiyo yo nah pracodayāt

“Let us meditate on the glory

of the excellent deva Sāvitrī,

that he may inspire our thoughts.”

This verse, in the Gāvitrī meter, is recited during the upanayana ceremony, when a young brahman is invested with the sacred thread that initiates him into the status of a “twice-born” brahman and he begins his study of the Vedas. Although similar passages were recited when young men of other castes began their education, Ṛgveda iii, 62, 10 was reserved exclusively for brahmans. It was also the subject of many meditations on its esoteric meaning, some of which can be found in the major Upaniṣads: Bṛhad-āraṇyaka 6.3.6; śvetāśvatara 4.18; and Maitrī 6.7 and 6.34.

SnA suggests that the Buddha’s question about this verse surprises Sundarika, making him suspect that the Buddha knows more about brahmanical lore than he does, which is why he changes his tone with the following question. SnA also asserts that the Buddhist equivalent to the Sāvitti—three lines, 24 syllables—is the expression of homage to the Triple Gem: Buddhaṁ saraṇaṁ gacchāmi, Dhammaṁ saraṇaṁ gacchāmi, Saṅghaṁ saraṇaṁ gacchāmi.

5. In other words, the original motivation for performing sacrifices was that the recipient of the oblation would be a pure person. The Buddha gives another answer to a very similar question in Sn 5:3.

6. In SN 7:9, the Buddha’s initial response to Sundarika begins here.

7. SnA explains this analogy by saying that it doesn’t matter what kind of wood is used to make a fire, for in each case the fire is equally hot and bright. See MN 93.

8. In SN 7:9, the initial exchange between the Buddha and Sundarika ends here. Sundarika then offers the sacrificial cake to the Buddha, who refuses it with the passage beginning with the line marked by footnote 18. Then, as in Sn 1:4, he tells Sundarika to throw away the offering, which sizzles in the water into which it is thrown. Shocked, Sundarika returns to the Buddha, who teaches him five more verses of Dhamma.

Don’t, brahman, when lighting kindling,
imagine that purity comes from that outside,
for the skilled say that purity doesn’t come through that:
whoever searches outside for purity.
Having abandoned the lighting of kindling, I,
brahman, ignite just the inner fire.
Constantly afire,
constantly centered in mind,
I am a worthy one, living the holy life.
Conceit, brahman, is the burden on your shoulder,
anger your smoke, false speech your ashes.
The tongue is the ladle;
the heart, the fire-altar;
the well-tamed self
is the fire of a man.
The Dhamma is a lake
whose ford is virtue
—limpid, praised by the good
to the good—
where attainers-of-knowledge, having bathed
cross, dry-limbed,
to the further shore.
Truth, Dhamma, restraint, the holy life,
attainment of Brahmā dependent on the middle:
Pay homage to those who’ve become
truly straightened:
That, I call a man
in the flow of the Dhamma.

After hearing these verses, Sundarika asks for Acceptance into the Saṅgha, and the sutta concludes in the same way as the account given here.

9. This is a play on words: arahati, "deserves," is related to arahant.

10. On the implications of being "everywhere released," see The Paradox of Becoming, chapter 7.

11. According to SnA, the field and site of stress is a reference to defilements. It could also be a reference to the objects of clinging that can form a basis for stress: such things as the aggregates, sense media, and properties (dhātu).

12. According to SnA, "seclusion" here means unbinding. See SN 21:10 and SN 35:63.

13. Supports/mental objects = ārammaṇā. See Ud 8:1, SN 12:64, and SN 22:53.

14. On unbinding as the end of phenomena, see AN 10:58 and Sn 5:6.

15. For examples of seeing self by means of self (or self by means of not-self, or not-self by means of self), see MN 2.

16. This verse contains a play on words, in that attā can mean both "self" and "mind," and it is used in both senses here.

17. Spirit = yakkha. According to SnA, the word yakkha in this context means "person." See Sn 4:11, note 4.

18. See Sn 1:4.

19. Boundaries = sīmantā. According to SnA, this is an epithet for defilement, in that the territory (sīmā) stands for good manners, and the end of the territory, or boundary, (sīmanta) stands for the defilements that lie outside of the realm of good manners. For a very different meaning for "territory," see Sn 4:4, note 12.

20. See AN 3:123 and Sn 1:12.

21. The word, sabba-lokasmiṁ—"in all the world," "with regard to all the world"—apparently functions as a lamp in this verse.

Publisher references (not part of the sutta)

See also: SN 3:24; AN 6:37; AN 9:20