Snp 3.6 — Sabhiya Sutta — To Sabhiya

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Text

Snp. 3.6

Sabhiya Sutta

“To Sabhiya”

I have personally heard this.

At one time, The Blessed One was living in the squirrels' sanctuary in the Bamboo Park, in the Royal City of Rājagaha. It was during that time, that a certain Deva appeared in front of Sabhiya, the wandering ascetic.

The Deva, who during an earlier lifetime was a former companion of Sabhiya in the Holy Life, posed a riddle to him, by adding the following instruction:

“Sabhiya, you must go and lead the Holy Life under that Teacher, who happens to be the only one capable of answering this riddle.”

Then, the wandering ascetic Sabhiya, having learned the riddle given to him by the Deva, went to recluse after recluse, brahmin after brahmin; meeting them in gatherings large and small, to the respective teachers presiding over these assemblies and gatherings, to his contemporary and famous founders of the prominent sects at that time, as he spoke with those who were recognized and accepted as wise, such as: Purāṇa Kassapa, Makkhali Gosāla, Ajita

Kesakambali, Pakudha Kaccāyana, Sañjaya Belaṭṭhiputta, and Nigaṇṭha Nāṭaputta.

However, when Sabhiya, the wandering ascetic, would approach and ask them the riddle, they not only were unable to answer the question, but would openly get angry at him as they were annoyed and frustrated by his question. In addition, they would engage in arguments with him, while cross questioning and debating with Sabhiya over the riddle, for which he genuinely sought an answer.

Then it occurred to Sabhiya, ‘these recluses and brahmins, whether in large or small gatherings, the respective teachers presiding over these assemblies and gatherings, my contemporary and famous founders of prominent sects, such as: Purāṇa Kassapa, Makkhali Gosāla, Ajita Kesakambali, Pakudha Kaccāyana, Sañjaya Belaṭṭhiputta, and Nigaṇṭha Nāṭaputta, when questioned about this riddle, have not been able to give me an answer, and as a result openly express anger towards me and often are annoyed by my question. Not only that, but they also engage in arguments with me, while cross questioning and debating with me over the riddle, for which I seek an answer.’

Then, being alone and discouraged thus, Sabhiya reflected to himself while considering: ‘Why don’t I just give up this Holy Life and return back to living the lowly life of pursuing sensual enjoyments?’

Right at that moment, the thought occurred to him:

‘But wait, the recluse Gautama also has a large group of disciples; He too is a Teacher presiding over many assemblies and gatherings;

He is well-known and famed for having crossed over to the other shore.’ So, he thought to himself: ‘What if I went and approached the recluse Gautama and asked Him about the answer to this riddle?’

But then, it occurred to Sabhiya again how the recluses and brahmins he had gone to are old and advanced in years; as he reflected:

‘These elders have led the Holy Life for a long time, yet when I asked for an answer to this riddle, they were all unable to give me an answer, as well as becoming angry and annoyed with me, where they even cross questioned me argumentatively. Now, if that is the case, then how could the recluse Gautama, who happens to be much younger than these elderly teachers, give me the answer to this riddle? After all, the recluse Gautama is young, and has only recently gone forth.’

But then he pondered on the matter further and considered,

‘Even though many recluses may be young in age, however, recluses should neither be looked at with contempt, nor their level of knowledge be undermined. For it is a fact that there are young recluses who are both powerful in their psychic abilities, as well as in being wise. What if I approach the recluse Gautama and ask Him for the answer to my riddle?’

Having made up his mind, the wandering ascetic Sabhiya set off on his journey by walking in stages, in the direction of the Blessed One, knowing that at the time He was staying within the squirrels' sanctuary, in the Royal City of Rājagaha, at the Bamboo Park.

Once having reached the Blessed One, Sabhiya, the wandering ascetic, exchanged friendly greetings with the Teacher and then sat to one side, and said:

510. “I have come to you with many doubts, and with much trepidation, desiring to ask my questions. Please put them to rest and may my doubts be dispelled by receiving my answers, one by one, according to the Dhamma.”

511. In reply, The Blessed One said:

“Sabhiya, you come from afar indeed, desiring to ask your questions. I will put your doubts to rest, dispelling them all, as I answer your questions, one by one, according to the Dhamma.

512. “Ask now your questions, Sabhiya, however you wish, and I will put to rest each and every one of your questions, along with your doubts, one by one.”

Then it occurred to the wandering ascetic Sabhiya,

‘This is quite amazing! This is wonderful! While other recluses and brahmins did not even give me a chance to speak or ask my questions fully, here however, the recluse Gautama not only is giving me His consent but is even encouraging me to ask my questions!’

In being thus inspired and thoroughly pleased, Sabhiya, the wandering ascetic began asking the Blessed One:

513. “By acquiring what can one be truly called a “Bhikkhu? What is ‘self-restraint,’ and the meaning of being ‘tamed?’

What is meant by ‘Awakening?’ May the Blessed One, please, explain these to me.”

514. The Blessed One replied, by saying:

“Sabhiya, when he walks on the path that leads to release, when Nibbāna is known for oneself and all doubts are finally removed; giving up both becoming and non- becoming, with no more rebirth waiting for him, one lives out the very last of countless rebirths, completing the Goal of the Holy Life; it is this person who is to be called a ‘Bhikkhu.’

515. “Mindful and equanimous everywhere he goes, intending no harm to anyone in the world. Never conceited, the recluse is one who has crossed over, unperturbed. This is his self-restraint.

516. “Living in the world, he is supported by faculties that are developed both internally and externally, as he piercingly sees through this and the other world; having already made good use of his time. This is the meaning of being “tamed.”

517. “Thoroughly discerning the residues of ages past, together with their constant arisings and vanishings; pure, without any defilements or passions left in him, he arrives at the end of rebirth. This is the meaning of Awakening.”

Then, the wandering ascetic Sabhiya, rejoicing and being utterly pleased in hearing the Blessed One's response, asked a further question.

518. "By acquiring what can one be truly called a 'Brahmin?' Who is a 'recluse,' and by doing what can one be 'washed?' "How can one become a 'Nāga'? May the Blessed One, please, explain these to me."

519. Then, The Blessed One replied:

"Sabhiya, in being cleansed of all that is unwholesome and shaken off the impure; with a thoroughly collected mind that is stainless, he looks on, having completely overcome the cycles of rebirth and no longer being stained by them. This is the meaning of being a 'True Brahmin.'

520. "Giving up both good and bad, the calmed one, no more gathers any dust. He knows this world and the other, while overcoming birth and death altogether. It is he who is called a 'Recluse.'

521. "Having cleansed oneself of all wrong actions, whether in thought, words or in bodily behavior in the world. There is no more desire left in him for either celestial or human birth. In this manner, he is considered to be 'washed.'

522. "Doing no wrong in the world, he cuts off all fetters that bind. Released, he goes freely everywhere, unattached and stainless. This is the meaning of being a true 'Nāga."

In being given these explanations, the wandering ascetic Sabhiya rejoiced, as he was now inspired and grateful in hearing the Blessed One's response, and with joy swelling in his heart, he asked a further question.

523. "How is the field won by the victor, according to the Buddhas? In what way is one 'cleverly skilled?' Who is the 'wise one?' And how can the 'Sage' be recognized? May the Blessed One, please, explain these things to me."

524. Then, The Blessed One replied:

"Sabhiya, by having thoroughly considered all fields of existence, be they heavenly, human or Brahmā, while becoming disenchanted by all of them, one is released from the roots that bind a person to these realms. This is how the field is won by the victor, according to the Buddhas.

525. "Having thoroughly considered all the treasure houses, whether found in the heavenly, human or Brahmā realms, while becoming disenchanted by all of them, one is released from the roots that bind a person to these treasure houses. This is the way in which one can become 'cleverly skilled.'

526. “Having fully examined the mind’s purity, as well as the purity found in the external world, he becomes disenchanted by what they offer, looking upon them with wisdom that is truly pure, as he overcomes both the dark and the white, while transcending both. It is by possessing this discernment that one is called ‘wise.’

527. “Whether internally or externally, clearly distinguishing the genuine Dhamma from that which is adhamma, he is one who is worthy of the veneration and love of both Devas and humans alike. Having transcended both the shackles and the trap, he is the one recognized as the ‘Sage.’”

In hearing this reply, the wandering ascetic Sabhiya again rejoiced, while being inspired and grateful listening as he did to the Blessed One’s response, and with his heart and mind full of joy, he asked his next question.

528. “By acquiring what can one ‘Attain to Perfect Knowledge?’ How is one ‘meticulously examined?’ In what way can one become ‘full of effort?’ And for what reason is one called a ‘Thoroughbred?’ May the Blessed One, please, explain these to me.”

529. And The Blessed One replied in the following manner:

“Sabhiya, by examining all the knowledges available, whether those of recluses or brahmins, one dismisses all feelings attached to them, remaining unblemished by the passions, as he goes beyond all knowledge. Thus, he becomes the one who ‘attains to Perfect Knowledge.’

530. “Having understood both internally and externally the proliferation of materiality and mentality: the root cause of disease, one is then released from all the roots that pervasively tie one up to suffering. In this way, one becomes ‘meticulously examined?’

531. “Refraining from all evil actions, exerting oneself with persistence and leaving behind all hellish misery; his perseverance is relentless, always arousing himself with renewed effort to steadily endeavor with resoluteness, despite everything. It is in such a way that one becomes ‘full of effort.’

532. “Having severed the fetters both internally and externally, cut loose from their roots and sticky snares; being finally fully released from all entanglements that bind, he is the one recognized as the ‘Thoroughbred.’”

Hearing these words, the wandering ascetic Sabhiya felt his heart gladden and rejoice even more, while being thankful for the Blessed One’s words, as he continued to ask his next question.

533. “By acquiring what can one be said to be ‘wisely- learned?’ In what way can one be called ‘Noble One?’ How can one be developed in ‘good conduct?’ And how does one become a ‘wandering ascetic?’ May the Blessed One, please, explain these to me.”

534. And The Blessed One replied, by saying:

“Sabhiya, by seeing the true essence behind all phenomena; directly knowing the Dhamma wherever one looks in the world, for he has conquered both the faulty and the faultless. With unprecedented certainty in his heart, wherever he is to be, he remains untroubled and released. This is the one said to be ‘wisely learned.’

535. “Having cut himself free from the contaminants, he no longer settles anywhere. Directly knowing this for oneself, he does not come to any womb again. Uprooting the threefold saññās that defile, with no further substrates to seek out further or rely upon, he indeed, is the one known as a ‘Noble One.’

536. “The one living the Holy Life, having seen the Dhamma, is established in higher virtuous behavior while understanding the Teachings; living with versatility while freed from all inner agitation; with his heart thus liberated from both attachment and revulsion, it is he who is considered one of ‘good conduct.’

537. “Whatever intended actions that ripen into suffering and distress, whether above, below, all around and in between, he completely gives them all up; dropping conceit, craftiness, greed, and anger, as he puts an end to nāmarupa, which makes him the one, to be called the ‘wandering ascetic,’ the one accomplished, indeed.”

Then, in hearing these long awaited responses spoken by the Blessed One, the wandering ascetic Sabhiya, feeling grateful, inspired and utterly pleased, quietly and with utmost care, arose from his seat and by arranging his upper robe on one shoulder, and with his palms gently joined in front of his heart, came closer, and began venerating the Blessed One, while speaking these heartfelt verses:

538. “O! Great Teacher of Vast Wisdom, “You, who have transcended the dark flood, crossing over the sixty-three wrong views of the wandering ascetics; doctrines that are false refuge, each and every one, depending on nothing more than hearsay, baseless concepts, conclusions about others’ statements, and empty words.

539. “You have gone to the very end, the further shore; existing beyond suffering. You are the Arahant, Rightfully Self-Awakened, and I have firm faith that the Blessed One has destroyed all the contaminants. You are resplendent,

wise beyond any measure, O! Finisher of dukkha, you have delivered me from suffering!

540. “Whatever doubts I had, you dispelled them by carrying me over to the other shore. I pay Homage to You, O! Unequaled Sage. You who dwell in the attainment of deep understanding, You are gentle and kind, O! Kinsman of the Sun.

541. “Whatever uncertainties I had earlier, the Wise One dispelled them for me; Being the One who sees in the pitch blackness of ignorance; You indeed are the All-Knowing Sage with no hindrances left.

542. “All your troubles are cut at their roots and made useless. You are a result of the Dhamma, self-tamed, cooled and the essence of Truth.

543. “O! Best of men, Great Hero, the Greatest of Nāgas, all gods rejoice in listening to your words, including the Nāradas and Pabbatas.

544. “Homage to you, O! Thoroughbred, Homage to you, O! Greatest of men. In the vastness of world systems whether of gods or humans, there is none to compare to you!

545. “You are the Awakened One, You are the Generous Teacher. You are the Sage who has conquered Māra! You have removed all the underlying corruptions (anusayas) from the heart, and having crossed over, you guide the rest of us, so we too could transcend, and go to the other shore.

546. “You have gone beyond all endearments, with contaminants completely torn apart. You are a Lion, free of grasping, having abandoned all fears, big or small.

547. “As a graceful lotus stands stainless above the surface, unsmeared whether by mud or water, You are unblemished whether by good or evil. Kindly stretch your feet, O! Hero, so I may touch it with my head, for Sabhiya has found his Teacher!”

Then, Sabhiya the wandering ascetic, by gently placing his head at the feet of The Blessed One, said:

“It is excellent, Lord! It is marvelous, Bhante! The Blessed One has made the Dhamma clear to me in many ways. I feel as though the Tathāgata has turned upright what was overturned, revealing what was hidden, showing the correct path to someone who was lost; as though one were to bring a lamp into the darkness, for all those with eyesight to see.

“Bhante, I go for refuge to the Blessed One, to the Dhamma, and to the Sangha of Bhikkhus. May I be given the Going Forth and the Higher Ordination, in the Blessed One’s presence.”

And The Blessed One said: “Sabhiya, anyone who has belonged earlier to another sect or belief system, who desires the Going Forth and the Higher Ordination in this Dispensation, should stay under probation for four months. And only at the end of that four months’ period, if the Bhikkhus are satisfied, they would give him the Going Forth and Higher Ordination.

Although this is put in place, I, nevertheless do recognize individual differences, in this matter.”

“Bhante, if it is so, that anyone who has belonged earlier to another sect or belief system, who desires the Going Forth and the Higher Ordination in the Blessed One’s Dispensation, should stay under probation for four months. And only at the end of that four months’

period, if the Bhikkhus are satisfied, they would give him the Going Forth and Higher Ordination, then, I am willing to be under probation for four years, at the end which, may the Bhikkhus be satisfied and give me the Going Forth and the Higher Ordination."

Then, the wandering ascetic Sabhiya obtained the Going Forth and the Higher Ordination, in the Dispensation of the Blessed One, in His Presence.

Soon after his Higher Ordination, the Venerable Sabhiya, while living on his own, ardent, secluded, withdrawn from the crowd, diligently striving in his practice and with resoluteness, soon realized for himself with direct knowledge and in this very life, the Highest Goal of the Holy Life, for the sake of which good sons of families rightly Go Forth from the lay life into homelessness. And he personally knew and understood with absolute certainty: 'Now, birth is destroyed; the Holy Life has been fully lived, what had to be completed has now been completed. There is no more rebirth into any state of becoming, with nothing more to wish for.'

And the Venerable Sabhiya became one of the Arahants.