Snp 3.6 — Sn 3:6 Sabhiya

English translation by Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu.

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Text

3:6 Sabhiya

I have heard that on one occasion the Blessed One was staying near Rājagaha in the Bamboo Forest, the Squirrels’ Sanctuary. Now on that occasion, questions had been assigned to Sabhiya the wanderer by a devatā who was a former relative of his: “Sabhiya, if any contemplative or brahman, when asked these questions, answers them, live the holy life in his presence.” Then Sabhiya the wanderer, having learned these questions in the presence of that devatā, went to those who had communities & groups, who were the teachers of groups, well-known, prestigious, founders of sects, well-regarded by people at large—i.e., Pūraṇa Kassapa, Makkhali Gosāla, Ajita Kesakambalin, Pakudha Kaccāyana, Sañjaya Velaṭṭhaputta, & the Nigaṇṭha Nāṭaputta—and asked them the questions. But they, being asked the questions by Sabhiya the wanderer, were unable to answer. Unable to answer, they showed anger, aversion, & displeasure, and even turned the questions

back on Sabhiya the wanderer.

The thought occurred to Sabhiya the wanderer, "These venerable contemplatives & brahmans with communities & groups, who are the teachers of groups, well-known, prestigious, founders of sects, well-regarded by people at large—i.e., Pūraṇa Kassapa … & the Nigaṇṭha Nāṭaputta—when asked these questions by me are unable to answer. Unable to answer, they show anger, aversion, & displeasure, and even turn the questions back on me. What if I were to revert to the lower life and partake of sensual pleasures?"

But then the thought occurred to him, "There is still this Gotama the contemplative. He has a community & group, he is the teacher of a group, well-known, prestigious, founder of a sect, well-regarded by people at large. What if I, having gone to him, were to ask him these questions?"

Then the thought occurred to Sabhiya the wanderer, "Now, those venerable contemplatives & brahmans—Pūraṇa Kassapa … & the Nigaṇṭha Nāṭaputta—are old, elderly, aged, along in their years, at an advanced stage of life, elders, senior, long gone forth, with communities & groups, teachers of groups, well-known, prestigious, founders of sects, well-regarded by people at large: Even they, when asked these questions by me, were unable to answer. Unable to answer, they showed anger, aversion, & displeasure, and even turned the questions back on me. So how could this Gotama the contemplative answer when asked these questions? He is both young in age and newly gone forth."

But then the thought occurred to him, "Gotama the contemplative is not to be despised as 'young' or treated with contempt. Even though young, he is of great power & great might.1 What if I, having gone to him, were to ask him these questions?"

So Sabhiya the wanderer set out, headed for Rājagaha. Wandering by stages, he arrived at where the Blessed One was staying near Rājagaha in the Bamboo Forest, the Squirrels' Sanctuary. On arrival, he exchanged courteous greetings with the Blessed One. After an exchange of friendly greetings & courtesies, he sat to one side. As he was sitting there, he addressed the Blessed One in verse:

"Doubtful & uncertain, I have come

desiring to ask questions.

Put an end to them,

when asked them by me.

Answer me one-by-one,

in line with the Dhamma."

"Sabhiya," said the Blessed One,

"you have come from afar,

desiring to ask questions.

I will put an end to them,

when asked them by you.

I will answer you one-by-one,

in line with the Dhamma."

Then the thought occurred to Sabhiya the wanderer, "Isn't it amazing? Isn't it astounding?—how even the leave, of which I didn't receive even a little bit from other contemplatives & brahmans, has been granted to me by Gotama the contemplative." Gratified, joyful, exultant, enraptured, & happy, he asked the Blessed One a question:

"Having attained what

is one said to be a monk?

In what way is one composed?

And how is one said to be tamed?

How is one called 'awakened'?

Answer, Blessed One, when I've asked you."

The Buddha:

"Having gone to total unbinding,

having crossed over doubt,

by means of the path accomplished by himself,

having abandoned becoming & non-becoming,

having fulfilled [the task],

further-becoming ended:

He is a monk.2

Everywhere equanimous, mindful,

he harms no one in all the world.

A contemplative crossed over, limpid,

he has no swellings3: He is composed.

Whose faculties are developed,

within & without,

with regard to all the world,4

disenchanted with this world & the next,

he awaits his time,5 developed: He's tamed.

Having evaluated all theories,

the wandering-on,

dying & reappearing,

having done away with dust & blemish

—pure—

he has attained the ending of birth:

He is called awakened."6

Then Sabhiya the wanderer—delighting in and approving of the Blessed One's words—gratified, joyful, exultant, enraptured & happy, asked the Blessed One a further question:

"Having attained what

is one said to be a brahman?

In what way is one a contemplative,

and how is one 'washed'?

How is one called a nāga?

Answer, Blessed One, when I've asked you."

The Buddha:

"Having banished all evils,7

well-centered, stainless,

firm in mind,

gone entirely beyond

the wandering-on,

independent, Such:

He's called a brahman.

Calmed, having abandoned

good & evil,

dustless, having known

this world & the next,

gone beyond birth & death,

he is truly called a contemplative[8]—

Such.

Having washed off all evils

within & without, in all the world,

with regard to the theories

of beings human & divine,

he goes to no theory:

He's said to be 'washed.'[9]

He does no misdeed[10]

at all in the world.

Having escaped all fetters & bonds,

freed, he's everywhere un-

attached,

truly he's called a nāga—

Such."

Then Sabhiya the wanderer—delighting in and approving of the Blessed One's words—gratified, joyful, exultant, enraptured, & happy, asked the Blessed One a further question:

"Whom do the awakened

call a field-victor?

In what way is one skilled

and how is one wise?

And how is one called

by the name of 'sage'?

Answer, Blessed One, when I've asked you."

The Buddha:

“Having examined all fields11—

heavenly, human, and fields of the Brahmās—

freed from the root bonds of all fields,

he’s truly called a field-victor—

Such.

Having examined all storehouses12—

heavenly, human, storehouses of Brahmās—

freed from the root bonds of all storehouses,

he’s truly called skillful—

Such.

Having examined all white flowers13

within & without,

one of pure discernment

gone beyond dark & bright,

he’s truly called wise—

Such.

Knowing false & true Dhamma

within & without, in all the world,

he is worshipped by beings

human & divine.

Having transcended snares & nets,

he is a sage.”

Then Sabhiya the wanderer—delighting in and approving of the Blessed One’s words—gratified, joyful, exultant, enraptured & happy, asked the Blessed One a further question:

“Having attained what

is one said to be

an attainer-of-knowledge?

In what way is one well-tested,

and how is one persistent?

Why is one named a thoroughbred?

Answer, Blessed One, when I've asked you."

The Buddha:

"Having examined all knowledges—

those of brahmans, those of contemplatives—

devoid of passion for all feelings,14

gone beyond knowledge:

He's an attainer-of-knowledge.

Having tested objectification15

& name-&-form,

within & without, the root of disease,

freed from the root bond of disease,

he's truly called well-tested—

Such.

Abstaining from all evils,

gone beyond the suffering of hell,

he's one with persistence.

He, with persistence, exertion,

is rightly called a hero16—

Such.

One truly whose bonds are cut

within & without,

freed from all the root bonds of snares,

truly he's called a thoroughbred—

Such."

Then Sabhiya the wanderer—delighting in and approving of the Blessed One's words—gratified, joyful, exultant, enraptured & happy, asked the Blessed One a further question:

“Having attained what
is one said to be learned?
In what way is one noble,
and how is one a person of good conduct?
Why is one named a wanderer?
Answer, Blessed One, when I’ve asked you.”

The Buddha:
“Having heard, having directly known
every Dhamma
for the sake of direct knowing17
in the world,
whatever is blameworthy or blameless,
having conquered, free of doubt,
released
everywhere, everywhere
without trouble,
one is said to be learned.18

Having cut attachments & effluents,
knowing, he does not come to lie in the womb,
dispelling mud
and the three types of perception,19
he goes to no theory:
He is called noble.

Whoever here has attained attainment
with regard to good conduct,
all-skillful, who has learned the Dhamma,
unattached
everywhere,

everywhere his mind released,

he has no irritation:

He is one of good conduct.

Avoiding whatever action there is

that ripens in suffering & stress

—above, below, and even all around

in the middle—

one who goes about, comprehending,

he has put an all-around end to

deceptiveness, conceit,

greed, anger,

name-&-form:

He's called a wanderer,

attained to attainment."20

Then Sabhiya the wanderer—delighting in and approving of the Blessed One's words—gratified, joyful, exultant, enraptured & happy—got up from his seat and, arranging his upper robe over his shoulder and placing his hands palm-to-palm over his heart toward the Blessed One, praised the Blessed One face-to-face with fitting verses:

"One Deeply Discerning,

you have crossed over the flood of darkness

of the three & sixty views leading downward,21

dependent on the teachings of contemplatives,

dependent on perceptions

& words of perceptions.

You have gone to the end,

you have gone to the further shore

of suffering & stress.

You are a noble one,

rightly self-awakened.

I would imagine that you

have ended the effluents.
Brilliant, thoughtful,
of abundant discernment,
ender of suffering,
you have brought me across.

When you learned of my doubt,
you brought me across my uncertainty.
Homage to you, sage attained
to the attainment of sagacity's ways.
Free from rigidity, Kinsman of the Sun,
you're composed.

The doubt I had before,
you have answered, One with Eyes.
Yes, you are a sage, rightly
self-awakened. You have
no hindrances. Your despairs
are fallen down, cut from the stem.
Cooled, attained to self-control,
steadfast, enduring in truth:
In your words, Nāga of nāgas, great hero,
all devas—including Nāradas and Pabbatas22—
delight.
Homage to you, O thoroughbred man,
Homage to you, O superlative man,23
in the world with its devas
there's no one to compare with you.24
You : Awakened.
You : Teacher.
You : Sage who has conquered Māra.

You : Having cut obsessions,

having crossed over,

bring this generation across.

Your acquisitions transcended,

your effluents torn apart,

you are a lion

free of clinging,

your fear & terror abandoned.

As a lovely lotus

is not smeared by water,

you are not smeared

by good or evil.

Extend your feet, hero:

Sabhiya venerates them,

the feet of the Teacher.25

Then Sabhiya the wanderer, bending his head to the Blessed One's feet, said, "Magnificent, lord! 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 set out a lamp in the darkness so that those with eyes could see forms, in the same way has the Blessed One—through many lines of reasoning—made the Dhamma clear. I go to the Blessed One for refuge, to the Dhamma, & to the Saṅgha of monks. Let me obtain the Going-forth in the Blessed One's presence, let me obtain Acceptance."

"Anyone, Sabhiya, who has previously belonged to another sect and who desires the Going-forth & Acceptance into this Dhamma & Vinaya, must first undergo probation for four months. If, at the end of four months, the monks feel so moved, they give him the Going-forth & accept him into the monk's state. But I know distinctions among individuals in this matter."

"Lord, if that is so, I am willing to undergo probation for four years. If, at the end of four years, the monks feel so moved, let them give me the Going-forth & accept me into the monk's state."

Then Sabhiya the wanderer 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. Sabhiya became another one of the arahants.

vv. 510–547

Notes

1. Reading Daharo’pi c’esa samaṇo Gotamo mahiddhiko hoti mahānbhavo, with the Burmese edition.

2. Many of the Buddha’s answers to Sabhiya’s questions involve verbal effects such as alliteration and rhyme. This verse contains a play on words, relating bhikkhu (monk) to bhavaṁ (becoming) and khīṇa- (ended).

3. Ussada: According to SnA, this means such forms of defilement as passion, aversion, delusion, pride, and conceit. See Sn 4:14.

4. In other words, one who is dispassionate to the sense faculties and their objects. See SN 35:153.

5. This is a reference to an image more fully elaborated in Thag 11 and Thag 14:1:

I don’t delight in death,

don’t delight in living.

I await my time

as a worker his wage.

I don’t delight in death,

don’t delight in living.

I await my time,

mindful, alert.

6. This verse contains an end-rhyme—visuddhaṁ/Buddhaṁ—which is rare in Pali poetry.

7. Here there is alliteration between bāhetvā (banished) and brahmā (brahman, shortened to fit the meter). A similar alliteration is found in Dhp 388 and Ud 1:4–5.

8. Here there is alliteration between samitāvi (calmed) and samaṇo (contemplative).

9. Here there is alliteration between n’eti, “doesn’t come/go” and nhātako, “washed.” This verse also contains a play on words. Normally, one would say that a person is washed of dirt (uklāpa); here the arahant is said to be washed of theory (kappa).

10. The Pali phrase here is āguṁ na karoti, which could be rephrased as na āguṁ karoti, yielding a play on the word nāga. The same play on words is found in AN 6:43. Given that one of the meanings of nāga is "large elephant," the verse here further elaborates on the image evoked by the word by depicting the nāga as freed from all fetters and bonds.

11. SnA cites this passage from AN 3:77 to identify "field," here, with kamma: "Kamma is the field, consciousness the seed, and craving the moisture." In the context of that sutta, this analogy is used to explain the way different levels of becoming are produced.

12. As with "field," SnA identifies "storehouses" as storehouses of kamma. Here there is alliteration between kosāni (storehouses) and kusalo (skillful).

13. Paṇḍara = Pāṇḍura (Skt.): Anogeissus Latifolia. According to SnA, "white flowers" stands for the six sense media, in that they are normally pure and yet can grow (see SN 22:54). An alternative possibility is that "white flowers" stands for states of mind marked by a perception of whiteness—such as the white-totality, and the mastery described in AN 10:29 as follows:

"One percipient of the formless internally sees forms externally as white, white in their color, white in their features, white in their glow. Just as the morning star is white, white in its color, white in its features, white in its glow, or just as Vārāṇasī muslin, smooth on both sides, is white, white in its color, white in its features, white in its glow, in the same way one percipient of the formless internally sees forms externally as white, white in their color, white in their features, white in their glow. Mastering them, he is percipient of 'I know; I see.'"

As AN 10:29 further notes, this is the highest state of mastery, "yet even in the beings who are percipient in this way there is still aberration, there is change. Seeing this, the instructed disciple of the noble ones grows disenchanted with that. Being disenchanted with that, he becomes dispassionate toward what is supreme, and even more so toward what is inferior." As the verse here notes, a person going beyond this state would have to go beyond all states of darkness and brightness to attain release.

This verse contains an alliteration that can, without force, be replicated in English: white flowers (paṇḍarāni) and wise (paṇḍito).

14. Here there is a play on words with vedāni (knowledges) and vedanā (feelings).

15. See MN 18, introduction.

16. Reading vīro with GD, rather than dhīro, which is found in the printed editions but doesn't seem to fit the context. (See the note in GD to verse 44 in Sn 1:3, which comments on the tendency of the textual tradition to confuse these two words.) This reading would give the verse three alliterated words: virato (abstaining), viriyavā (one with persistence), and vīro (hero).

17. “Having directly known, for the sake of direct knowing”: Two meanings of the word abhiññāya.

18. Here there is an alliteration between sutavā (having heard) and sottiyo (learned).

19. SnA identifies “mud” as the strings of sensuality, and the three types of perception as the three beginning with the perception of sensuality. These could be either the perceptions of sensuality, ill-will, and harmfulness, or the perceptions of sensuality, form, and formlessness.

The alliteration in this verse is between ālayāni (attachments) and ariyo (noble).

20. This verse contains an alliteration between paribbājayitvā (avoiding) and paribbājaka (wanderer).

21. According to SnA, the 63 wrong views comprise the 62 wrong views mentioned in DN 1 along with the wrong view of self-identity (sakkāya-diṭṭhi).

22. According to SnA, these are classes of devas noted for their discernment.

23. See AN 11:10.

24. See Iti 112.

25. The word “feet”—pāde—functions as a lamp here.

Publisher references (not part of the sutta)

See also: DN 2; Ud 1:9; Thag 6:9