Snp 3.7 — Sela Sutta — To Sela, the Brahmin

English translation by Bhikkhu Candana.
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Text

Snp. 3.7

Sela Sutta

“To Sela, the Brahmin”

I have personally heard this.

At one time, The Blessed One was journeying through the country of Āpaṇas accompanied by a large Sangha of Bhikkhus, who were closely following Him, one by one, all one thousand two hundred and fifty of them, when He entered the town named Āpaṇa.

Then, the matted-hair ascetic Keṇiya heard:

‘The well-known recluse Gautama, Son of the Royal Sākyans, is now journeying through the country of Āpaṇas accompanied by a large Sangha of Bhikkhus, who are closely following Him, one by one, all one thousand, two hundred and fifty of them, and they have now all entered our town of Āpaṇa.’

He then reflected on the fact that The Blessed One had, at that time, already gained the delightful reputation of:

‘Being an Arahant, The Perfectly Awakened One, endowed with Sublime Knowledge and Supremely Pure Conduct, the Well-Gone, the Knower of worlds, the Incomparable Tamer of those to be tamed, the Teacher of gods and humans, Enlightened and Blessed.

And having realized and understood this world with direct knowledge, together with its gods and humans, Māras, Brahmās, as well as the community of recluses and brahmins, He reveals it, making it known for everyone. He teaches the Dhamma that is beautiful in its beginning, beautiful in its middle, and beautiful in its end. He does this while giving its full and correct meaning and phrasing, clearly revealing thus, the spiritual life that is utterly perfect and pure. Therefore, it would be wonderful indeed, to be able to see such Arahants.’

Then, the matted hair ascetic Keṇiya went and approached The Blessed One, and after exchanging friendly greetings with Him, sat to one side.

And The Blessed One encouragingly spoke, as he inspired, instructed, roused, and gladdened the matted hair ascetic Keṇiya's heart, with an enlivening Talk on the Dhamma.

Afterwards Keṇiya, the matted hair ascetic, addressed The Blessed One and said:

"May the Blessed One, please, accept my dāna offering for tomorrow's meal, accompanied together with the Sangha of Bhikkhus."

When this was said, The Blessed One said:

"Keṇiya, the Sangha of Bhikkhus is too large for a meal dāna, as they are one thousand two hundred and fifty in number! In addition, offering this meal to the Sangha of Bhikkhus headed by the Tathāgata, given that you are a devout brahmin, might provoke and displease your fellow brahmins."

For the second time, Keṇiya invited The Blessed One to accept his meal offering, by stating:

"Master Gautama, however big in number the Sangha of Bhikkhus might be, even one thousand two hundred and fifty in quantity, the brahmins will remain quite pleased, for they know I am favorably disposed to them. Therefore, may The Blessed One please accept tomorrow's meal from me, together with the entire Sangha of Bhikkhus."

And for the second time, The Blessed One said:

"Keṇiya, the Sangha of Bhikkhus is too large for a meal dāna, as they are one thousand two hundred and fifty in number! In addition, offering this meal to the Sangha of Bhikkhus headed by the Tathāgata, given that you are a devout brahmin, might provoke and displease your fellow brahmins."

And for the third time, Keṇiya replied:

"Master Gautama, however big in number the Sangha of Bhikkhus might be, even one thousand two hundred and fifty in quantity, the brahmins will remain quite pleased, for they know I am favorably disposed to them. Therefore, may The Blessed One please accept tomorrow's meal from me, together with the entire Sangha of Bhikkhus."

Then, The Blessed One accepted the invitation in silence. Understanding that The Blessed One accepted his offer for a meal for the Sangha, Keṇiya arose from his seat and went to his hermitage, as he addressed his friends and blood relatives by saying:

"Good sirs, please listen up, I have invited the recluse Gautama, together with His Sangha of Bhikkhus for tomorrow's meal. I ask that you help me with the necessary preparations, by doing whatever needs to be done to make everything ready for tomorrow's meal."

By saying: “Very well, Sir,” his audience accepted his request, and went straight to work. Some began digging out ovens in the ground, others went and chopped wood for firing up the furnaces, some began cleaning up and preparing the water jars for washing, while others spread out the carpeting and cushions for seating.

Meanwhile, the matted hair ascetic Keṇiya himself worked on preparing the great assembly hall, setting up where the meal was to be hosted.

It was during that time that the brahmin Sela was living in Āpaṇa. He was known as an expert, a ‘master of the Vedic threefold knowledge;’ a learned preserver and reciter, able to repeat the sequence of words and sounds, the hymns of the Vedas, together with the rites and rituals, with their vocabularies, etymology, phonology, and histories. He was also skilled in their philosophy and grammar. He knew how to interpret the marks of a Great Man. And all this along with the various mantras Sela was teaching to three hundred young brahmin men, as he passed them down through the oral tradition. Now, Keṇiya, the matted hair ascetic used to admire Sela, and was a devout follower of his.

So, it was on that day of preparations for the meal dāna when Sela, the brahmin, who had been strolling back and forth for

some exercise through the town, accompanied by his three hundred students, decided to visit his friend’s, the matted hair ascetic Keṇiya’s hermitage.

On meeting his friend, the matted hair ascetic Keṇiya, and once their friendly greetings were over, seeing him busy at work with preparations at the hermitage, while others were digging out ovens in the ground, chopping wood for firing up the furnaces, others cleaning up and preparing the water jars for washing, while still others were spreading out carpeting and cushions for seating, as well as Keṇiya himself, who was engaged in arranging the great assembly hall, Sela, out of curiosity asked his friend, Keṇiya, the matted hair ascetic:

“Well there, my dear Keṇiya! What is all this arrangement for? Is it your son’s or daughter’s wedding ceremony you are preparing for? Or is there a grand sacrifice about to be made for which you are preparing? Or is it King Bimbisāra of Magadha himself who has been invited to attend tomorrow, along with his entire army?”

“No, dear Sela,” responded Keṇiya, the matted hair ascetic, as he continued:

“It is not my son’s or daughter’s wedding ceremony I am preparing for, nor is King Bimbisāra of Magadha attending tomorrow, along with his entire army. However, I am indeed preparing a grand sacrifice for tomorrow!

“You see, I have invited the recluse Gautama from the Sākyan Khattiya Royal family, who has gone forth from the security of home life into homelessness. The well-known

recluse Gautama, Son of the Royal Sākyans, has been journeying through our country of Āpaṇas accompanied by a large Sangha of Bhikkhus, all one thousand two hundred and fifty of them. He has now, along with His Bhikkhus, entered Āpaṇa. The Blessed One has gained the delightful reputation of:

'Being an Arahant, The Perfectly Awakened One, endowed with Sublime Knowledge and Supremely Pure Conduct, the Well-Gone, the Knower of worlds, the Incomparable Tamer of those to be tamed, the Teacher of gods and humans; The Buddha, and Most Blessed.'

"And today I have invited Him for tomorrow's meal, together with the large Sangha of Bhikkhus."

"Did you say, Buddha, my dear Keṇiya?" interjected Sela, the brahmin.

"Yes, dear Sela, I said 'Buddha!'" replied Keṇiya, the matted hair ascetic.

"Did you say, 'Buddha,' my dear Keṇiya?" again asked Sela, the brahmin.

"Yes, dear Sela, I said 'Buddha!'" replied Keṇiya again, the matted hair ascetic.

Then, the brahmin Sela began thinking:

'Even hearing the utterance of the sound 'Buddha' is so rare in the world! The sacred hymns we have today that are handed down to us, speak distinctly about the thirty-two marks of a Great Man, the

possessor of which could only have one of two possible options in the manner of life one is to have, and not another. We, therefore, know that if the possessor of these marks chooses to lead the life of a householder, then inevitably, he becomes a Universal Wheel-Turning Monarch: a just and virtuous king who would rule the country with all its vast four quarters, as he comes to possess the Seven Treasures, which are the Treasure of the Wheel, the Treasure of the Elephant, the Treasure of the Horse, the Treasure of all Jewels, the Treasure of the Wife, the Treasure of all Treasurers, and the Treasure of all Advisors. He would have more than one thousand sons, all wise, courageous, and virtuous heroic figures themselves, who defeat all threats by crushing any enemies that come challenging them. Thus, as the Universal Wheel-Turning Monarch, he would rule the country peacefully, surrounded by the ocean, without the use of violence, swords or weapons, or punishments.

'But, if he were to leave the household life and go forth, He most certainly would become an Arahant, the Fully Self-Awakened One, who would pull away the veil of ignorance from the eyes of all beings in the world!'

"Now, please tell me, Good Keṇiya, where is The Blessed One, the Arahant, the Fully Self-Awakened One now? Where is He staying?"

And Keṇiya, the matted hair ascetic, stretched out his right hand and pointed in a certain direction, exclaiming:

“There, my dear Sela! You will find Him in that deep, dark- blue forest.”

Then the brahmin Sela, along with his three hundred young brahmins, quickly went in the direction of The Blessed One, but while on his way, he addressed the young brahmins by saying:

“Now, good sirs, please approach very quietly, by making as little noise as possible, while you raise one foot and place it down after the other, for The Blessed Ones prefer living alone and far from noise; they live in seclusion like lions.

“And when you see me conversing with the recluse Gautama, do not move or budge, nor make any conversation among yourselves, and only speak when our conversation has ended.”

Then, the brahmin Sela approached The Blessed One, and after exchanging friendly greetings, he sat to one side, and quietly began examining the thirty-two marks of a Great Man. Once he had carefully observed all of the marks of a Great Man, except for the last two, he became unsure and perplexed as a result, unable to reach a conclusion. Thus, he began having doubts, for he had no way of examining them to see if The Blessed One had his genital area sheathed, and whether His tongue was long enough to cover His entire face.

Meanwhile, The Blessed One knew what the confused brahmin Sela was thinking, and how after having scrutinized most of the marks of a Great Man on The Blessed One, he was unable to examine the presence of the last two marks, and because of that he was now having doubts.

So, The Blessed One psychically willed it for the brahmin Sela to personally see His sheathed genital area, as well as His tongue that was long enough to cover His entire face.

Thus, The Blessed One extended his tongue out and with it touched both ear lobes, nostrils, and the whole forehead, and even covered up the entire face with it. This He revealed only to the brahmin Sela.

Then, the thought occurred to the brahmin Sela:

‘How wonderful, indeed! The recluse Gautama is most definitely endowed with all the thirty-two marks of a Great Man! ‘However, we do not yet know whether He is awakened or not. I have heard it being said by the learned and wise elder brahmins of the past, who were considered to be the teachers of teachers, how with the Arahants, the Fully Self-Awakened Buddhas, when others speak genuinely in praise of them, they would reveal themselves in glorious ways. ‘Now, what if I were to speak heartfelt praises to the recluse Gautama, with meaningful and inspired verses?’

Thus, the brahmin Sela began addressing The Blessed One in verses of praise:

548. “O! Blessed One, having the most perfect of features, truly you are handsome, possessing such lovely and excellent features, for which you are so beautiful to behold! With Your golden hued skin, so vibrantly full of energy and alive you are, with your brilliantly white teeth.

549. “Being well-born, with Your glowing skin and perfect body, truly You possess, indeed, all of the marks that a Great

Man is supposed to have; all of which I see now with my own eyes, so evidently displayed as I gaze upon You!

550. “Your eyes are so clear and bright, with such a beautiful and perfect mouth; a straight and majestic body and strong presence, sitting splendidly as You are in the middle of the Sangha of recluses; You shine brilliantly like the Sun!

551. “For a Bhikkhu to have skin that glistens like gold is so wonderful to behold, but when one possesses the most excellent of features and such a handsome appearance, why would anyone give up everything and become a recluse?

552. “You should become a Universal Wheel-Turning Monarch, the Chief among the best of charioteers, conquering and dominating the four quarters; the Supreme Lord of India, the Land of Jambudīpa!

553. “You ought to have powerful Kings as your faithful subjects, along with all other Khattiya warrior kings and their princes; all following Your Supreme rule, as Your loyal subordinates! O! Gautama, You should be The King among all kings, winning and ruling over all mankind!”

554. And The Blessed One said:

“I am the King, Sela, The Incomparable and Supreme King of Dhamma! With my teaching, I set forth the Wheel of Dhamma rolling, which can never be stopped nor rolled back.”

555. Then, the brahmin Sela said:

“You declare yourself as Fully Self-Awakened; ‘The Incomparable and Supreme King of Dhamma!’ ‘With my teaching, I set forth the Wheel of Dhamma rolling,’ these You state O! Gautama.

556. “If You are the King, then who is Your close disciple, Your true general, the grand marshal of the Dhamma, You set rolling? The one, who closely follows in your footsteps, who would keep the Wheel of Dhamma continuing to roll after You?”

557. And The Blessed One said:

“Sela, this Incomparable Wheel of Dhamma which I have set rolling, is kept in motion by my Disciple Sāriputta, who continues its momentum, after the Tathāgata.

558. “Whatever should be realized, I have realized. What should be cultivated and developed, I have cultivated and developed. What should be relinquished and eliminated, I have relinquished and eliminated. Therefore, brahmin, I am the Buddha!

559. “So, just let go of your doubts and perplexity, O! brahmin, and simply trust. After all, it is so difficult to have this opportunity, indeed, to look upon a living Buddha, and be in His presence!

560. “I am the Buddha! That which is so rare to occur in existence, has finally taken place! The Unsurpassable Surgeon has finally appeared in the world!

561. “Having become The Holy One, I have destroyed and crushed the armies of Māra. I have vanquished and silenced all enemies, and now, I live happily, secure, and with no fear in my heart from any quarter.”

562. Then, Sela the brahmin, turning to his students exclaimed:

“Pay close attention now, Good Sirs, and listen carefully to what is spoken by The One possessing the Eye of Wisdom, The Surgeon, the Great Hero, who roars like a mighty lion in the jungle!

563. “Behold The Holy One Himself, The One who has destroyed the armies of Māra! How could anyone who lays eyes on Him still have doubts? How could anyone not be immediately inspired with intense faith? Even if one were to be a low-born, with a dark heart?

564. “And now, those among you who wish to continue following me, you may stay, and those of you who do not, you are free to go. I have finally found my true Teacher! A Buddha, in the flesh! Therefore, I, here and now, am going forth in His Presence, in the very Dispensation of The One possessing the Eye of Wisdom!”

565. Then, the three hundred young brahmin students turned to their teacher Sela and spoke:

“If you, Sir, being pleased as you are and moved so deeply by the Dispensation of the Fully Self-Awakened One to decide to go forth, then we also will go forth alongside you,

in His presence, in the very Dispensation of The One possessing the Eye of Wisdom.”

566. And by turning to The Blessed One, the brahmin Sela spoke the following words:

“O! Blessed One, I, along with these three hundred brahmin students of mine, with our hands at our hearts in respectful anjalī, now ask for your permission to Go Forth in Your

Presence, so that we may lead the Holy Life."

567. The Blessed One said:

"Sela, the Holy Life is well-proclaimed, indeed! It truly is to be seen and lived by oneself here and now, for it is immediately effective, and not to be postponed nor delayed! The truth of this is experienced personally, by all those who meaningfully go forth, and train with diligent effort."

And there, in the Presence of the Buddha, the brahmin Sela, together with his three hundred students, obtained the Going Forth and the Higher Ordination, in the Dispensation of The Blessed One.

Meanwhile, Keṇiya, the matted hair ascetic, worked throughout the night along with his assembly of helpers, as they prepared a variety of healthy and delicious foods and drinks in his hermitage. And once everything was ready, he sent someone to go and inform The Blessed One:

"It is time, Bhante, the food is now ready."

Thereupon, early in the morning, having put on His robes and by taking His outer robe and alms bowl, together with the Sangha of Bhikkhus, The Blessed One went to Keṇiya's hermitage, as He sat on the prepared seat, followed by the other Bhikkhus.

Then Keṇiya, the matted hair ascetic, began serving with his own hands the Sangha of Bhikkhus headed by the Buddha, a variety of sumptuous and delicious foods, with both the hard and soft kinds, as well as healthy and nutritious drinks.

Later, when The Blessed One had finished His meal and had removed His hand from the bowl, Keṇiya took a low seat, as he sat to one side, and The Blessed One expressed His appreciation for the generosity of the host, by uttering the following verses:

568. "Among sacrifices that people make, the fire sacrifice is considered to be the chief. The ancient sāvittī is considered to be the chief among poetic hymns. Among human beings, the King is considered to be the chief. And among all rivers, the ocean is considered to be their chief.

569. "Among all celestial bodies in the night sky, the Moon is considered to be the chief. Among the brightest of stars, the Sun is considered to be their chief. And among those who receive offerings from those seeking the greatest of merits, the Sangha of Bhikkhus is their chief."

And once having spoken these words, The Blessed One arose from His seat and departed.

Then the Venerable Sela, along with his companions, living alone and secluded from the crowd, striving heedfully and with resolution, while practicing diligently, before long, he

here and now realized for himself the noble end of the Holy Life, as he himself experienced that Unsurpassed Understanding for which sons of good families rightfully leave the household life with its burdensome troubles, by choosing to become homeless. And the Venerable Sela, together with his three hundred students, came to know with direct knowledge and certainty unparalleled that:

'Birth is finally destroyed. Now the Holy Life is fully lived; what should have been done is finally done. There is no more coming back to any state of becoming, ever again.'

Thus, the Venerable Sela along with his three hundred students, all became Arahants.

Then, the Venerable Sela went and approached The Blessed One, while being accompanied by his companions. And by arranging his upper robe over one shoulder, with hands over his heart, he directed them towards The Blessed One, as he spoke these verses:

570. "It has been eight days since we all came to You and took You as Our Refuge, O! Blessed Lord! For seven days, we have trained and become tamed in your Dispensation.

571. "You are the Buddha! You are the Teacher; The Sage who has vanquished and overcome Māra! You are the One, who by having Himself completely cut off all the underlying tendencies and crossed over, You have helped us all to cross over too!

572. "All things that people cherish and hold on to, You have dodged altogether, and by shattering and tearing into pieces the contaminants that defile the heart, You grasp at nothing anymore. With no fear whatsoever, no dread left in You, You indeed, are a Lion!

573. "And now, here, in Your presence have come these three hundred Bhikkhus with their pressed hands over their hearts, full of tearful gratitude!

"O! Great Hero, kindly stretch out your feet, and let these Nāgas pay homage by bowing at Their Teacher's feet!"