Snp 5.1 — Vatthugāthā Sutta — The Beginning Verses

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Text

Snp. 5.1

Vatthugāthā Sutta

“The Beginning Verses”

976. A brahmin from a lovely city of the Kosalan region, a master of the Vedic mantras, desiring to reach the highest, left all things behind in search of attaining nothingness, as he came down to the South.

977. Thus, it was during the reign of Aḷaka, that he found his way to the township of Assaka, and there he settled along the bank of the river Godhāvarī, sustaining himself on the fruits and fresh leaves he could obtain from trees.

978. Being a brahmin, he found support from the large village that was close to where he stayed. With the donations received from the public, he performed a great ritual sacrifice.

979. After completing the great sacrifice, on his return back to his dwelling, he saw another brahmin approaching and entering his hermitage.

980. Looking exhausted, thirsty, with swollen and sore feet, unbrushed teeth and dust covering his hair, the man stood there asking for five hundred coins from him.

981. Bāvari, on seeing the man in such a state, invited him to sit down as he prepared a seat for him, meanwhile inquiring about the stranger’s wellbeing and health, by saying:

982. “Whatever I had that I could have offered you, all that is now fully spent. Forgive me my dear brahmin, I no longer have the five hundred coins you seek.”

983. “If this offering is not made in time, by giving me what I ask of you,” the brahmin threatened, as he continued: “then on the seventh day from now, your head will crack and split open into seven pieces!”

984. Speaking in this manner, the charlatan put on a show as he performed some rituals, and chanted some mantras meant to frighten and cause distress in the heart of his listener. Thus, Bāvari the brahmin became worried.

985. Then, being suddenly struck by the arrow of grief, Bāvari lost his appetite and refused to take food, so much so that he became severely emaciated. But even worse, as he was getting agitated and worried, his heart could not settle into meditation.

986. It was then, that a Deva, on seeing him frightened and in disarray, took pity on him and decided to approach Bāvari, and addressed him in verse:

987. “That cunning and deceitful man, desiring to profit from others, is simply doing one of his tricks again. He is the last person to know anything about what is in a person’s head, let alone in cracking them open or splitting them. He is simply trying to extort money from you.”

988. “O! Kind and Generous Being! If you could please, do tell me more on what is in a person’s head, and on cracking them open and splitting them.”

989. “Well, I too, do not know much about what is in a person’s head, nor about cracking them open and splitting them. But I do know this: when it comes to knowing what is in a person’s head, and on cracking them open and splitting them, that insight, with which one might have the vision to truly see, belongs only to the Conquerors.”

990. “In that case, O! Kind Deva, please tell me, who in this vast world might have that vision, a true Conqueror, who could tell me what I need to know about what is in a person’s head, and on cracking them open and splitting them.”

991. “There is indeed One such Conqueror, living in this vast world today, the brilliant Son of the Sākyan Warriors; a descendent of the lineage of King Okkāka. Being the World Leader from the Kingdom of Kapilavatthu, He has recently gone forth; a True Beacon for the World.

992. “He is, indeed, brahmin, The Fully Self-Awakened Buddha! Having overcome with His Supreme Wisdom, and gone across to the farthest shore; beyond all the things offered by the world, for He certainly is the One who, by attaining to the Highest Knowledges and powers, sees with clear vision all that is hidden. He is the One truly released, having liberated Himself with the destruction of all acquisitions and assets.

993. “He is The Buddha Himself, The Truly Blessed One in the world, The One with Pure Vision who now teaches the Dhamma that is beautiful, to a multitude of beings. You must go and approach Him and ask your question. He is the only one who can answer and explain it to you!”

994. In hearing the words: ‘Fully Self-Awakened Buddha,’ Bāvari became exceedingly happy, and his grief completely and suddenly disappeared, and instead, his heart was now

overflooding with joy.

995. Then, Bāvari, the overjoyed brahmin, being elated and especially pleased, asked that Deva:

“Where, in which state, village, or town is This Protector of the world currently? Where might we find Him, as we go to pay homage at the feet of the Fully Self-Awakened One, this Giant among all men?”

996. “The Hero among men, the Possessor of vast wisdom and understanding is currently living in the Kosalan country, in the city of Sāvatthi. That hungerless and relentless Son of the Sākyans dwells appeased, having fully released Himself from the āsavas that contaminate the hearts of beings everywhere. He, the Chief among men, will explain to you what you need to know about what is in a person’s head, and on cracking them open and splitting them.”

997. Then, the brahmin Bāvari called to him all those who had taken him as their teacher; brahmin pupils of his, who had mastered the Vedic mantras, and announced to them:

“Come, my young pupils! Pay close attention to my words:

998. “That which is so incredibly rare has now finally taken place! The Fully Self-Awakened One has now arisen and is living among us, in our world!

“Quickly now! With this event being exceptionally unique, I now instruct you to go to the city of Sāvatthi, and see the Noblest of all two-footed beings!”

999. “But brahmin, how are we to recognize and know Him to be truly the Buddha, when we do get to see him? Kindly tell us how, teacher, because we do not know, so that we may indeed recognize Him.”

1000. “Fortunately, we have been handed down our ancient Vedic mantras, which tell us about the signs and marks with which we are to recognize Him. These are marks of the Great Man; the thirty-two marks that are listed for us in order.

1001. “He who bears these marks on his body can have only two possible alternatives in the direction and choice of living his life, and not a third.

1002. “If he were to lead a household life, he inevitably would become a true world conquering, Wheel-Turning Universal Monarch, a Cakkavattin. Living according to the Dhamma Himself; he would rule without the use of swords or weapons, but only through the True Dhamma, as he brings harmonious order into the world.

1003. “But, if He were to go forth by leaving the household life and thus become homeless, He would then become a Fully Self-Awakened Buddha, the Supreme Arahant who sets the Wheel of Dhamma in motion. He would finally

dispel the darkness, by removing the shroud of ignorance from the world.

1004. “Now, here is my instruction to you. So, pay close attention:

“First, approach him respectfully and with only your mind, ask Him about my birth, clan, and about the marks I bear on my body. Then, ask Him about the mantras I know, and the number of my students, and finally ask Him about what’s in a person’s head, and on cracking them open and splitting them.

1005. “If He is, indeed, the Buddha, then all things are revealed to Him! Therefore, He sees without any obstructions. Thus, although your questions would remain unspoken, He would reveal to you their answers, as He explains them to you, verbally.”

1006. Then, having been instructed thus by their teacher, the sixteen brahmin pupils of Bāvari, including Ajita, Tissametteyya, Puṇṇaka, Mettagū,

1007. “Dhotaka, Upasīva, Nanda, Hemaka, along with Todeyya and Kappa, and Jatukaṇṇī, the wise,

1008. “Bhadrāvudha, Udaya, Posāla, the wise Mogharājā, as well as the great sage Piṅgiya,

1009. “Each of these students, along with their own following and groups, who were already renowned and well-known as dedicated meditators, proficient with the

jhāna practices, as well as able to know and see their past lives,

1010. They all paid homage to their teacher Bāvari, and after circumambulating him with their matted hair and antelope hide over their shoulders, together they all went in the direction of the north.

1011. Thus, they went first from Patiṭṭhāna in the region of Aḷaka to Māhissatī, then Ujjenī, afterwards to Gonaddhā, Vedisā, which is sometimes called Vanasa.

1012. Going further, they reached Kosambi, Sāketa, and then came upon the noble and fairest city of all, Sāvatthi. Continuing on, they got to Setavyā, Kapilavatthu and Kusinārā.

1013. Traveling on further, they went to Pāvā, Bhoganagara, then to Vesāli and Magadha, until they finally reached the lovely Pāsāṇaka shrine.

1014. And as they grew near, their steps quickened even more, just like that thirsty and parched man who hears the sound of flowing, cool, and refreshing water, or like a merchant who is about to make the deal of a lifetime, having found guaranteed success and gain; and like those left out under the sun for a long time, burned by the heat, eagerly hastening towards a large shady tree. Thus, those brahmins all rushed quickly and climbed up the mountain.

1015. And it so happened that right at that moment, The Blessed One, seated in front of the Sangha of Bhikkhus, was

teaching the Dhamma to them, like a lion roaring in the jungle.

1016. Just then, Ajita saw The Blessed One, glistening like the Sun, serenely radiating his light towards everyone, much like the Full Moon does on the fifteenth day of the month.

1017. Quietly he watched, as he carefully investigated and saw all the observable marks on His body, while he stood to one side with a joyful heart. And then, he began mentally asking the questions he received from his teacher, addressing them to The Blessed One.

1018. “Sir, kindly tell us about our teacher; his age; the clan he comes from and the marks of a Great Man which he bears. Do speak to us about his level of learning in the Vedas, and how many brahmins he teaches.”

1019. And The Blessed One, turning to Ajita, began to speak by saying:

“The age of your teacher is one hundred and twenty years, and Bāvari is the clan to which he belongs. He has on his body three of the marks of a Great Man, and he has completely mastered the three Vedas.

1020. “He has full understanding of how to identify the marks, and is knowledgeable of the oral tradition, along with their grammar, history, and the roots and meanings of words, as well as their rituals. He has under him five hundred brahmins, who call him their teacher.”

1021. “O! Chief among men! Destroyer of Craving! Please, kindly also tell us in detail about the marks on our noble Bāvari’s body, so that all our doubts and uncertainties may once and for all vanish and fade away!”

1022. “Now brahmin, know this! Your teacher can cover his face with the tongue if he wants to; he has a clump of hair grown between the eyebrows; and his genitals are encased, being covered within the body as though in a pouch.”

1023. Meanwhile, others who were present, in hearing these replies from the Blessed One to the unspoken questions, sat there in reverence with their hands in anjalī, completely in awe, as a result of what they just witnessed, and they began to reflect:

1024. “‘Who is it, that is asking these questions from The Blessed One? Could it have been Brahmā himself, or Indra or Sujampati; posing these questions silently through their mind, to which The Blessed One gave His replies?’

1025. It was then, that Ajita asked a further question:

“Bāvari would like to know what is in a person’s head, and on cracking them open and splitting them. May The Blessed One please help us, by explaining the answer to these, so

that our confusion may be dispelled.”

1026. “You must know and understand that ignorance itself is what’s in the head. Whereas knowledge and understanding are what crack open and split the head! But this must be supported by the faith you possess in your

heart, along with mindfulness, collectedness of mind, fervent desire for practice, and persevering effort.”

1027. Then, in hearing all his questions being fully answered, the young man, now thoroughly moved and delighted and with utter confidence in his heart, arranged his antelope- hide robe on one shoulder, and bowed down by placing his head at the feet of The Blessed One, while respectfully addressing Him:

1028. “O! Good Gautama! The brahmin Bāvari and all his pupils are now utterly delighted and exceedingly happy, with gladdened hearts, as we all together bow and pay homage to The Blessed One by placing our head at Your feet, the One with Perfect Vision.”

1029. “May Bāvari, together with all his pupils, including yourself, be gladdened with appeased minds. May you all live long and happily.

1030. “And now that Bāvari’s questions have been answered, if you feel you have any questions to ask yourselves, now is the time for you all to ask whatever queries you may have, so you may receive their explanations.”

1031. Then, having been granted the permission and precious opportunity by the Fully Self-Awakened One to ask questions, they all sat to one side with their hands in worshipful anjalī, as Ajita began asking the first question.