MN 108 — Gopaka Moggallana Sutta: Moggallana the Guardsman

English translation by Thanissaro Bhikkhu.

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Changes: Presentation only: original HTML markup reflowed into plain text; wording, numbering and source repetitions retained. No repetitions expanded.

Completeness: ABBREVIATED. Every source-unit character is preserved, including introductions, notes and verse structure. Thanissaro's collection-level note explicitly states that repetitions were cut: https://www.dhammatalks.org/suttas/about.html. This is evidence about the translation method, not an assertion that every individual unit contains an omission; no repetitions reconstructed.

Text

Translator's note: This discourse presents a picture of life in the early Buddhist community shortly after the Buddha's passing away. On the one hand, it shows the relationship between the monastic community and the political powers that be: the monks are polite and courteous to political functionaries, but the existence of this discourse shows that they had no qualms about depicting those functionaries as a little dense. On the other hand, it shows that early Buddhist practice had no room for many practices that developed in later Buddhist traditions, such as appointed lineage holders, elected ecclesiastical heads, or the use of mental defilements as a basis for concentration practice.

I have heard that on one occasion Ven. Ananda was staying near Rajagaha in the Bamboo Grove, the Squirrels' Sanctuary, not long after the Blessed One's total Unbinding.

Now at that time King Ajatasattu Vedehiputta of Magadha, suspicious of King Pajjota, was having Rajagaha fortified.

Then in the early morning, Ven. Ananda, having put on his robes and carrying his bowl and outer robe, went into Rajagaha for alms. The thought occurred to him, "It's too early to go

for alms in Rajagaha. What if I were to go to the brahman Moggallana the Guardsman at his construction site?" So he went to Moggallana the Guardsman at his construction site. Moggallana the Guardsman saw him coming from afar, and on seeing him said to him, "Come, Master Ananda. Welcome, Master Ananda. It has been a long time since Master Ananda has found the time to come here. Sit down, Master Ananda. Here is a seat made ready for you."

So Ven. Ananda sat down on the seat made ready. Moggallana the Guardsman, taking a lower seat, sat to one side.

As he was sitting there, he said to Ven. Ananda: "Master Ananda, is there any one monk endowed in each & every way with the qualities with which Master Gotama — worthy & rightly self-awakened — was endowed?"

"No, brahman, there isn't any one monk endowed in each & every way with the qualities with which the Blessed One — worthy & rightly self-awakened — was endowed. For the Blessed One was the arouser of the unarisen path, the begetter of the unbegotten path, the expounder of the unexpounded path, the knower of the path, the expert with regard to the path, adept at the path. And now his disciples follow the path and become endowed with it after him."

And then Ven. Ananda's discussion with Moggallana the Guardsman was interrupted in mid-course, for the brahman Vassakara, the Magadhan administrator, on an inspection tour of the construction sites in Rajagaha, went to Ven. Ananda at Moggallana the Guardsman's construction site. On arrival, he exchanged courteous greetings with Ven. Ananda. After an exchange of friendly greetings & courtesies, he sat to one side. As he was sitting there, he said to Ven. Ananda, "Just now, for what discussion were you sitting together when you were interrupted in mid-course?"

"Just now, brahman, Moggallana the Guardsman said to me, 'Master Ananda, is there any one monk endowed in each & every way with the qualities with which Master Gotama — worthy & rightly self-awakened — was endowed?' And when this was said, I said to him, 'No, brahman, there isn't any one monk endowed in each & every way with the qualities with which the Blessed One — worthy & rightly self-awakened — was endowed. For the Blessed One was the arouser of the unarisen path, the begetter of the unbegotten path, the expounder of the unexpounded path, the knower of the path, the expert with regard to the path, adept at the path. And now his disciples follow the path and become endowed with it after him.' This was my discussion with the brahman Moggallana the Guardsman that was interrupted in mid-course when you arrived."

"Master Ananda, is there any one monk appointed by Master Gotama [with the words], 'He will be your arbitrator after I am gone,' to whom you now turn?"

"No, brahman. There isn't any one monk appointed by the Blessed One — the one who knows, the one who sees, worthy & rightly self-awakened — [with the words] 'He will be your arbitrator after I am gone,' to whom we now turn."

"Then is there any one monk authorized by the Sangha and appointed by a large body of elder monks [with the words], 'He will be our arbitrator after the Blessed One is gone,' to whom you now turn?"

"No, brahman. There isn't any one monk authorized by the Sangha and appointed by a large body of elder monks [with the words] 'He will be our arbitrator after the Blessed One is gone,' to whom we now turn."

"Being thus without an arbitrator, Master Ananda, what is the reason for your concord?"

"It's not the case, brahman, that we're without an arbitrator. We have an arbitrator. The Dhamma is our arbitrator."

"When asked, 'Master Ananda, is there any one monk appointed by Master Gotama [with the words], "He will be your arbitrator after I am gone," to whom you now turn?' you said, 'No, brahman. There isn't any one monk appointed by the Blessed One... to whom we now turn.'

"When asked, 'Then is there any one monk authorized by the Sangha... to whom you now turn?' you said, 'No, brahman. There isn't any one monk authorized by the Sangha... to whom we now turn.'

"When asked, 'Being thus without an arbitrator, Master Ananda, what is the reason for your concord?' you said, 'It's not the case, brahman, that we're without an arbitrator. We have an arbitrator. The Dhamma is our arbitrator.' Now how is the meaning of what you have said to be understood?"

"Brahman, there is a training rule laid down by the Blessed One — the one who knows, the one who sees, worthy & rightly self-awakened — a Patimokkha that has been codified. On the uposatha day, all of us who live dependent on a single township gather together in one place. Having gathered together, we invite the one to whom it falls [to recite the Patimokkha]. If, while he is reciting, a monk remembers an offense or transgression, we deal with him in accordance with the Dhamma, in accordance with what has been instructed. We're not the ones who deal with that venerable one. Rather, the Dhamma is what deals with us."

"Is there, Master Ananda, any one monk you now honor, respect, revere, & venerate, on whom — honoring & respecting — you live in dependence?"

"Yes, brahman, there is a monk we now honor, respect, revere, & venerate, on whom — honoring & respecting — we live in dependence."

"When asked, 'Master Ananda, is there any one monk appointed by Master Gotama [with the words], "He will be your arbitrator after I am gone," to whom you now turn?' you said, 'No, brahman. There isn't any one monk appointed by the Blessed One... to whom we now turn.'

"When asked, 'Then is there any one monk authorized by the Sangha... to whom you now turn?' you said, 'No, brahman. There isn't any one monk authorized by the Sangha... to whom we now turn.'

"When asked, 'Is there, Master Ananda, any one monk you now honor, respect, revere, & venerate, on whom — honoring & respecting — you live in dependence?' you said, 'Yes, brahman, there is a monk we now honor, respect, revere, & venerate, on whom — honoring & respecting — we live in dependence.' Now how is the meaning of what you have said to be understood?"

"Brahman, there are ten inspiring qualities expounded by the Blessed One — the one who knows, the one who sees, worthy & rightly self-awakened. In whoever among us those ten qualities are found, we now honor, respect, revere, & venerate him; honoring & respecting him, we live in dependence on him. Which ten?

[1] "There is the case where a monk is virtuous. He dwells restrained in accordance with the Patimokkha, consummate in his behavior & sphere of activity. He trains himself, having undertaken the training rules, seeing danger in the slightest faults.

[2] "He has heard much, has retained what he has heard, has stored what he has heard. Whatever teachings are admirable in the beginning, admirable in the middle, admirable in the end, that — in their meaning & expression — proclaim the holy life entirely perfect & pure: those he has listened to often, retained, discussed, accumulated, examined with his mind, and well-penetrated in terms of his views.

[3] "He is content with robes, alms food, lodgings, & medicinal requisites for curing the sick.

[4] "He attains — whenever he wants, without strain, without difficulty — the four jhanas that are heightened mental states, pleasant abidings in the here-&-now.

[5] "He experiences manifold supranormal powers. Having been one he becomes many; having been many he becomes one. He appears. He vanishes. He goes unimpeded through walls, ramparts, & mountains as if through space. He dives in & out of the earth as if it were water. He walks on water without sinking as if it were dry land. Sitting crosslegged he flies through the air like a winged bird. With his hand he touches & strokes even the sun & moon, so mighty & powerful. He exercises influence with his body even as far as the Brahma worlds.

[6] "He hears — by means of the divine ear-element, purified & surpassing the human — both kinds of sounds: divine & human, whether near or far.

[7] "He knows the awareness of other beings, other individuals, having encompassed it with his own awareness. He discerns a mind with passion as a mind with passion, and a mind without passion as a mind without passion. He discerns a mind with aversion as a mind with aversion, and a mind without aversion as a mind without aversion. He discerns a

mind with delusion as a mind with delusion, and a mind without delusion as a mind without delusion. He discerns a restricted mind as a restricted mind, and a scattered mind as a scattered mind. He discerns an enlarged mind as an enlarged mind, and an unenlarged mind as an unenlarged mind. He discerns an excelled mind [one that is not at the most excellent level] as an excelled mind, and an unexcelled mind as an unexcelled mind. He discerns a concentrated mind as a concentrated mind, and an unconcentrated mind as an unconcentrated mind. He discerns a released mind as a released mind, and an unreleased mind as an unreleased mind.

[8] "He recollects his manifold past lives (lit: previous homes), i.e., one birth, two births, three births, four, five, ten, twenty, thirty, forty, fifty, one hundred, one thousand, one hundred thousand, many aeons of cosmic contraction, many aeons of cosmic expansion, many aeons of cosmic contraction & expansion, [recollecting], 'There I had such a name, belonged to such a clan, had such an appearance. Such was my food, such my experience of pleasure & pain, such the end of my life. Passing away from that state, I re-arose there. There too I had such a name, belonged to such a clan, had such an appearance. Such was my food, such my experience of pleasure & pain, such the end of my life. Passing away from that state, I re-arose here.' Thus he remembers his manifold past lives in their modes & details.

[9] "He sees — by means of the divine eye, purified & surpassing the human — beings passing away and re-appearing, and he discerns how they are inferior & superior, beautiful & ugly, fortunate & unfortunate in accordance with their kamma: 'These beings — who were endowed with bad conduct of body, speech, & mind, who reviled the noble ones, held wrong views and undertook actions under the influence of wrong views — with the break-up of the body, after death, have re-appeared in the plane of deprivation, the bad destination, the lower realms, in hell. But these beings — who were endowed with good conduct of body, speech, & mind, who did not revile the noble ones, who held right views and undertook actions under the influence of right views — with the break-up of the body, after death, have re-appeared in the good destinations, in the heavenly world.' Thus — by means of the divine eye, purified & surpassing the human — he sees beings passing away and re-appearing, and he discerns how they are inferior & superior, beautiful & ugly, fortunate & unfortunate in accordance with their kamma.

[10] "Through the ending of the mental fermentations, he remains in the fermentation-free awareness-release & discernment-release, having known & made them manifest for himself right in the here & now.

"These, brahman, are the ten inspiring qualities expounded by the Blessed One — the one who knows, the one who sees, worthy & rightly self-awakened. In whoever among us these ten qualities are found, we now honor, respect, revere, & venerate him; honoring & respecting him, we live in dependence on him."

When this was said, the brahman Vassakara, the Magadhan administrator, turned to General Upananda and said, "What do you think, general? Do these venerable ones honor what should be honored, respect what should be respected, revere what should be

revered, venerate what should be venerated? Of course they honor what should be honored, respect what should be respected, revere what should be revered, venerate what should be venerated. For if they did not honor, respect, revere, or venerate a person like this, then what sort of person would they honor, respect, revere, & venerate; on what sort of person, honor & respecting, would they live in dependence?"

Then the brahman Vassakara, the Magadhan administrator, said to Ven. Ananda, "But where are you staying now, Master Ananda?"

"I am now staying at the Bamboo Grove, brahman."

"I trust, Master Ananda, that the Bamboo Grove is delightful, quiet, free of noise, with an air of isolation, remote from human beings, & appropriate for retreat."

"Certainly, brahman, the Bamboo Grove is delightful, quiet, free of noise, with an air of isolation, remote from human beings, & appropriate for retreat because of guardians & protectors like yourself."

"Certainly, Master Ananda, the Bamboo Grove is delightful, quiet, free of noise, with an air of isolation, remote from human beings, & appropriate for retreat because of venerable ones who are endowed with mental absorption (jhana), who make mental absorption their habit. You venerable ones are both endowed with mental absorption & make mental absorption your habit.

"Once, Ven. Ananda, Master Gotama was staying near Vesali in the Peaked Roofed Pavilion in the Great Wood. I went to him at the Peaked Roofed Pavilion in the Great Wood, and there he spoke in a variety of ways on mental absorption. Master Gotama was both endowed with mental absorption & made mental absorption his habit. In fact, he praised mental absorption of every sort."

"It wasn't the case, brahman, that the Blessed One praised mental absorption of every sort, nor did he criticize mental absorption of every sort. And what sort of mental absorption did he not praise? There is the case where a certain person dwells with his awareness overcome by sensual passion, seized with sensual passion. He does not discern the escape, as it actually is present, from sensual passion once it has arisen. Making that sensual passion the focal point, he absorbs himself with it, besorbs, resorbs, & supersorbs himself with it.

"He dwells with his awareness overcome by ill will...

"He dwells with his awareness overcome by sloth & drowsiness...

"He dwells with his awareness overcome by restlessness & anxiety...

"He dwells with his awareness overcome by uncertainty, seized with uncertainty. He does not discern the escape, as it actually is present, from uncertainty once it has arisen. Making

that uncertainty the focal point, he absorbs himself with it, besorbs, resorbs, & supersorbs himself with it. This is the sort of mental absorption that the Blessed One did not praise.

"And what sort of mental absorption did he praise? There is the case where a monk — quite withdrawn from sensuality, withdrawn from unskillful (mental) qualities — enters & remains in the first jhana: rapture & pleasure born from withdrawal, accompanied by directed thought & evaluation. With the stilling of directed thoughts & evaluations, he enters & remains in the second jhana: rapture & pleasure born of concentration, unification of awareness free from directed thought & evaluation — internal assurance. With the fading of rapture, he remains equanimous, mindful, & alert, and senses pleasure with the body. He enters & remains in the third jhana, of which the Noble Ones declare, 'Equanimous & mindful, he has a pleasant abiding.' With the abandoning of pleasure & pain — as with the earlier disappearance of elation & distress — he enters & remains in the fourth jhana: purity of equanimity & mindfulness, neither pleasure nor pain. This is the sort of mental absorption that the Blessed One praised.

"It would seem, Ven. Ananda, that Master Gotama criticized the mental absorption that deserves criticism, and praised that which deserves praise.

"Well, now, Master Ananda, I must be going. Many are my duties, many the things I must do."

"Then do, brahman, what you think it is now time to do."

So the brahman Vassakara, the Magadhan administrator, delighting & rejoicing in what Ven. Ananda had said, got up from his seat & left.

Then, not long after he had left, Moggallana the Guardsman said to Ven. Ananda, "Master Ananda, you still haven't answered what I asked you."

"Didn't I just tell you, brahman? There isn't any one monk endowed in each & every way with the qualities with which the Blessed One — worthy & rightly self-awakened — was endowed. For the Blessed One was the arouser of the unarisen path, the begetter of the unbegotten path, the expounder of the unexpounded path, the knower of the path, the expert with regard to the path, adept at the path. And now his disciples follow the path and become endowed with it after him."