MN 12 — Maha-sihanada Sutta: The Great Discourse on the Lion's Roar

English translation by Ñanamoli Thera & Bhikkhu Bodhi.

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Text

1. Thus have I heard. On one occasion the Blessed One was living at Vesali in the grove outside the city to the west.

2. Now on that occasion Sunakkhatta, son of the Licchavis, had recently left this Dhamma and Discipline.[1] He was making this statement before the Vesali assembly: "The recluse Gotama does not have any superhuman states, any distinction in knowledge and vision worthy of the noble ones.[2] The recluse Gotama teaches a Dhamma (merely) hammered out by reasoning, following his own line of inquiry as it occurs to him, and when he teaches the Dhamma to anyone, it leads him when he practices it to the complete destruction of suffering."[3]

3. Then, when it was morning, the Venerable Sariputta dressed, and taking his bowl and outer robe, went into Vesali for alms. Then he heard Sunakkhatta, son of the Licchavis, making this statement before the Vesali assembly. When he had wandered for alms in Vesali and had returned from his almsround, after his meal he went to the Blessed One, and after paying homage to him, he sat down at one side and told the Blessed One what Sunakkhatta was saying.

4. (The Blessed One said:) "Sariputta, the misguided man Sunakkhatta is angry, and his words are spoken out of anger. Thinking to discredit the Tathagata, he actually praises him; [69] for it is a praise of the Tathagata to say of him: 'When he teaches the Dhamma to anyone, it leads him when he practices it to the complete destruction of suffering.'

5. "Sariputta, this misguided man Sunakkhatta will never infer of me according to Dhamma: 'That Blessed One is accomplished, fully enlightened, perfect in true knowledge and conduct, sublime, knower of worlds, incomparable leader of persons to be tamed, teacher of gods and humans, enlightened, blessed.'[4]

6. "And he will never infer of me according to Dhamma: 'That Blessed One enjoys the various kinds of supernormal power: having been one, he becomes many; having been many, he becomes one; he appears and vanishes; he goes unhindered through a wall, through an enclosure, through a mountain, as though through space; he dives in and out of the earth as though it were water; he walks on water without sinking as though it were earth; seated cross-legged, he travels in space like a bird; with his hand he touches and strokes the moon and sun so powerful and mighty; he wields bodily mastery even as far as the Brahma-world.'

7. "And he will never infer of me according to Dhamma: 'With the divine ear element, which is purified and surpasses the human, that Blessed One hears both kinds of sounds, the heavenly and the human, those that are far as well as near.'

8. "And he will never infer of me according to Dhamma: 'That Blessed One encompasses with his own mind the minds of other beings, other persons. He understands a mind affected by lust as affected by lust and a mind unaffected by lust as unaffected by lust; he understands a mind affected by hate as affected by hate and a mind unaffected by hate as unaffected by hate; he understands a mind affected by delusion as affected by delusion and a mind unaffected by delusion as unaffected by delusion; he understands a contracted mind as contracted and a distracted mind as distracted; he understands an exalted mind as exalted and an unexalted mind as unexalted; he understands a surpassed mind as surpassed and an unsurpassed mind as unsurpassed; he understands a concentrated mind as concentrated and an unconcentrated mind as unconcentrated; he understands a liberated mind as liberated and an unliberated mind as unliberated.'

Ten Powers of a Tathagata

9. "Sariputta, the Tathagata has these ten Tathagata's powers, possessing which he claims the herd-leader's place, roars his lion's roar in the assemblies, and sets rolling the Wheel of

Brahma.[5] What are the ten?

10. (1) "Here, the Tathagata understands as it actually is the possible as possible and the impossible as impossible.[6] And that [70] is a Tathagata's power that the Tathagata has, by virtue of which he claims the herd-leader's place, roars his lion's roar in the assemblies, and sets rolling the Wheel of Brahma.

11. (2) "Again, the Tathagata understands as it actually is the results of actions undertaken, past, future and present, with possibilities and with causes. That too is a Tathagata's power...[7]

12. (3) "Again, the Tathagata understands as it actually is the ways leading to all destinations. That too is a Tathagata's power...[8]

13. (4) "Again, the Tathagata understands as it actually is the world with its many and different elements. That too is a Tathagata's power...[9]

14. (5) "Again, the Tathagata understands as it actually is how beings have different inclinations. That too is a Tathagata's power...[10]

15. (6) "Again, the Tathagata understands as it actually is the disposition of the faculties of other beings, other persons. That too is a Tathagata's power...[11]

16. (7) "Again, the Tathagata understands as it actually is the defilement, the cleansing and the emergence in regard to the jhanas, liberations, concentrations and attainments. That too is a Tathagata's power...[12]

17. (8) "Again, the Tathagata recollects his manifold past lives, that is, one birth, two births, three births, four births, five births, ten births, twenty births, thirty births, forty births, fifty births, a hundred births, a thousand births, a hundred thousand births, many aeons of world-contraction, many aeons of world-expansion, many aeons of world-contraction and expansion: 'There I was so named, of such a clan, with such an appearance, such was my nutriment, such my experience of pleasure and pain, such my life-term; and passing away from there, I reappeared elsewhere; and there too I was so named, of such a clan, with such an appearance, such was my nutriment, such my experience of pleasure and pain, such my life-term; and passing away from there, I reappeared here.' Thus with their aspects and particulars he recollects his manifold past lives. That too is a Tathagata's power...

18. (9) "Again, with the divine eye, which is purified and surpasses the human, the Tathagata sees beings passing away and reappearing, inferior and superior, fair and ugly, fortunate and unfortunate, and he understands how beings pass on according to their actions thus: 'These worthy beings who were ill-conducted in body, speech and mind, revilers of noble ones, wrong in their views, giving effect to wrong view in their actions, on the dissolution of the body, [71] after death, have reappeared in a state of deprivation, in a bad destination, in perdition, even in hell; but these worthy beings who were

well-conducted in body, speech and mind, not revilers of noble ones, right in their views, giving effect to right view in their actions, on the dissolution of the body, after death, have reappeared in a good destination, even in the heavenly world.' Thus with the divine eye, which is purified and surpasses the human, he sees beings passing away and reappearing, inferior and superior, fair and ugly, fortunate and unfortunate, and he understands how beings pass on according to their actions. That too is a Tathagata's power...

19. (10) "Again, by realizing it for himself with direct knowledge, the Tathagata here and now enters upon and abides in the deliverance of mind and deliverance by wisdom that are taintless with the destruction of the taints. That too is a Tathagata's power that a Tathagata has, by virtue of which he claims the herd-leader's place, roars his lion's roar in the assemblies, and sets rolling the Wheel of Brahma.

20. "The Tathagata has these ten Tathagata's powers, possessing which he claims the herd-leader's place, roars his lion's roar in the assemblies, and sets rolling the Wheel of Brahma.

21. "Sariputta, when I know and see thus, should anyone say of me: 'The recluse Gotama does not have any superhuman states, any distinction in knowledge and vision worthy of the noble ones. The recluse Gotama teaches a Dhamma (merely) hammered out by reasoning, following his own line of inquiry as it occurs to him' — unless he abandons that assertion and that state of mind and relinquishes that view, then as (surely as if he had been) carried off and put there he will wind up in hell.[13] Just as a bhikkhu possessed of virtue, concentration and wisdom would here and now enjoy final knowledge, so it will happen in this case, I say, that unless he abandons that assertion and that state of mind and relinquishes that view, then as (surely as if he had been) carried off and put there he will wind up in hell.

Four Kinds of Intrepidity

22. "Sariputta, the Tathagata has these four kinds of intrepidity, possessing which he claims the herd-leader's place, roars his lion's roar in the assemblies, and sets rolling the Wheel of Brahma. What are the four?

23. "Here, I see no ground on which any recluse or brahman or god or Mara or Brahma or anyone at all in the world could, in accordance with the Dhamma, accuse me thus: 'While you claim full enlightenment, you are not fully enlightened in regard to certain things.' [72] And seeing no ground for that, I abide in safety, fearlessness and intrepidity.

24. "I see no ground on which any recluse... or anyone at all could accuse me thus: 'While you claim to have destroyed the taints, these taints are undestroyed by you.' And seeing no ground for that, I abide in safety, fearlessness and intrepidity.

25. "I see no ground on which any recluse... or anyone at all could accuse me thus: 'Those things called obstructions by you are not able to obstruct one who engages in them.' And seeing no ground for that, I abide in safety, fearlessness and intrepidity.

26. "I see no ground on which any recluse... or anyone at all could accuse me thus: 'When you teach the Dhamma to someone, it does not lead him when he practices it to the complete destruction of suffering.' And seeing no ground for that, I abide in safety, fearlessness and intrepidity.

27. "A Tathagata has these four kinds of intrepidity, possessing which he claims the herd-leader's place, roars his lion's roar in the assemblies, and sets rolling the Wheel of Brahma.[14]

28. "Sariputta, when I know and see thus, should anyone say of me... he will wind up in hell.

The Eight Assemblies

29. "Sariputta, there are these eight assemblies. What are the eight? An assembly of nobles, an assembly of brahmans, an assembly of householders, an assembly of recluses, an assembly of gods of the heaven of the Four Great Kings, an assembly of gods of the heaven of the Thirty-three, an assembly of Mara's retinue, an assembly of Brahmas. Possessing these four kinds of intrepidity, the Tathagata approaches and enters these eight assemblies.

30. "I recall having approached many hundred assemblies of nobles... many hundred assemblies of brahmans... many hundred assemblies of householders... many hundred assemblies of recluses... many hundred assemblies of gods of the heaven of the Four Great Kings... many hundred assemblies of gods of the heaven of the Thirty-three... many hundred assemblies of Mara's retinue... many hundred assemblies of Brahmas. And formerly I had sat with them there and talked with them and held conversations with them, yet I see no ground for thinking that fear or timidity might come upon me there. And seeing no ground for that, I abide in safety, fearlessness and intrepidity. [73]

31. "Sariputta, when I know and see thus, should anyone say of me... he will wind up in hell.

Four Kinds of Generation

32. "Sariputta, there are these four kinds of generation. What are the four? Egg-born generation, womb-born generation, moisture-born generation and spontaneous generation.

33. "What is egg-born generation? There are these beings born by breaking out of the shell of an egg; this is called egg-born generation. What is womb-born generation? There are these beings born by breaking out from the caul; this is called womb-born generation. What is moisture-born generation? There are these beings born in a rotten fish, in a rotten corpse, in rotten dough, in a cesspit, or in a sewer; this is called moisture-born generation. What is spontaneous generation? There are gods and denizens of hell and certain human beings and some beings in the lower worlds; this is called spontaneous generation. These

are the four kinds of generation.

34. "Sariputta, when I know and see thus, should anyone say of me... he will wind up in hell.

The Five Destinations and Nibbana — In Brief

35. "Sariputta, there are these five destinations. What are the five? Hell, the animal realm, the realm of ghosts, human beings and gods.[15]

36. (1) "I understand hell, and the path and way leading to hell. And I also understand how one who has entered this path will, on the dissolution of the body, after death, reappear in a state of deprivation, in an unhappy destination, in perdition, in hell.

(2) "I understand the animal realm, and the path and way leading to the animal realm. And I also understand how one who has entered this path will, on the dissolution of the body, after death, reappear in the animal realm.

(3) "I understand the realm of ghosts, and the path and way leading to the realm of ghosts. And I also understand how one who has entered this path will, on the dissolution of the body, after death, reappear in the realm of ghosts.

(4) "I understand human beings, and the path and way leading to the human world. And I also understand how one who has entered this path will, on the dissolution of the body, after death, reappear among human beings.

(5) "I understand the gods, and the path and way leading to the world of the gods. And I also understand how one who has entered this path will, on the dissolution of the body, after death, reappear in a happy destination, in the heavenly world.

(6) "I understand Nibbana, and the path and way leading to Nibbana. [74] And I also understand how one who has entered this path will, by realizing it for himself with direct knowledge, here and now enter upon and abide in the deliverance of mind and deliverance by wisdom that are taintless with the destruction of the taints.

The Five Destinations and Nibbana — In Detail

37. (1) "By encompassing mind with mind I understand a certain person thus: 'This person so behaves, so conducts himself, has taken such a path that on the dissolution of the body, after death, he will reappear in a state of deprivation, in an unhappy destination, in perdition, in hell.' And then later on, with the divine eye, which is purified and surpasses the human, I see that on the dissolution of the body, after death, he has reappeared in a state of deprivation, in an unhappy destination, in perdition, in hell, and is experiencing extremely painful, racking, piercing feelings. Suppose there were a charcoal pit deeper than a man's height full of glowing coals without flame or smoke; and then a man scorched and exhausted by hot weather, weary, parched and thirsty, came by a path going

in one way only and directed to that same charcoal pit. Then a man with good sight on seeing him would say: 'This person so behaves, so conducts himself, has taken such a path, that he will come to this same charcoal pit'; and then later on he sees that he has fallen into that charcoal pit and is experiencing extremely painful, racking, piercing feelings. So too, by encompassing mind with mind... piercing feelings.

38. (2) "By encompassing mind with mind I understand a certain person thus: 'This person so behaves, so conducts himself, has taken such a path that on the dissolution of the body, after death, he will reappear in the animal realm.' And then later on, with the divine eye, which is purified and surpasses the human, I see that on the dissolution of the body, after death, he has reappeared in the animal realm and is experiencing painful, racking, piercing feelings. Suppose there were a cesspit deeper than a man's height full of filth; and then a man [75] scorched and exhausted by hot weather, weary, parched and thirsty, came by a path going in one way only and directed to that same cesspit. Then a man with good sight on seeing him would say: 'This person so behaves... that he will come to this same cesspit'; and then later on he sees that he has fallen into that cesspit and is experiencing painful, racking, piercing feelings. So too, by encompassing mind with mind... piercing feelings.

39. (3) "By encompassing mind with mind I understand a certain person thus: 'This person so behaves, so conducts himself, has taken such a path that on the dissolution of the body, after death, he will reappear in the realm of ghosts.' And then later on... I see that... he has reappeared in the realm of ghosts and is experiencing much painful feeling. Suppose there were a tree growing on uneven ground with scanty foliage casting a dappled shade; and then a man scorched and exhausted by hot weather, weary, parched and thirsty, came by a path going in one way only and directed to that same tree. Then a man with good sight on seeing him would say: 'This person so behaves... that he will come to this same tree'; and then later on he sees that he is sitting or lying in the shade of that tree experiencing much painful feeling. So too, by encompassing mind with mind... much painful feeling.

40. (4) "By encompassing mind with mind I understand a certain person thus: 'This person so behaves, so conducts himself, has taken such a path that on the dissolution of the body, after death, he will reappear among human beings.' And then later on... I see that... he has reappeared among human beings and is experiencing much pleasant feeling. Suppose there were a tree growing on even ground with thick foliage casting a deep shade; and then a man scorched and exhausted by hot weather, weary, parched and thirsty, came by a path going in one way only and directed to that same tree. Then a man with good sight on seeing him would say: 'This person so behaves... that he will come to this same tree'; and then later on he sees that he is sitting or lying in the shade of that tree experiencing much pleasant feeling. So too, by encompassing mind with mind... much pleasant feeling [76]

41. (5) "By encompassing mind with mind I understand a certain person thus: 'This person so behaves, so conducts himself, has taken such a path that on the dissolution of the body, after death, he will reappear in a happy destination, in the heavenly world.' And

then later on... I see that... he has reappeared in a happy destination, in the heavenly world and is experiencing extremely pleasant feelings. Suppose there were a mansion, and it had an upper chamber plastered within and without, shut off, secured by bars, with shuttered windows, and in it there was a couch spread with rugs, blankets and sheets, with a deerskin coverlet, with a canopy as well as crimson pillows for both (head and feet); and then a man scorched and exhausted by hot weather, weary, parched and thirsty, came by a path going in one way only and directed to that same mansion. Then a man with good sight on seeing him would say: 'This person so behaves... that he will come to this same mansion'; and later on he sees that he is sitting or lying in that upper chamber in that mansion experiencing extremely pleasant feelings. So too, by encompassing mind with mind... extremely pleasant feelings.

42. (6) "By encompassing mind with mind I understand a certain person thus: 'This person so behaves, so conducts himself, has taken such a path that by realizing it for himself with direct knowledge, he here and now will enter upon and abide in the deliverance of mind and deliverance by wisdom that are taintless with the destruction of the taints.' And then later on I see that by realizing it for himself with direct knowledge, he here and now enters upon and abides in the deliverance of mind and deliverance by wisdom that are taintless with the destruction of the taints, and is experiencing extremely pleasant feelings.[16] Suppose there were a pond with clean, agreeable, cool water, transparent, with smooth banks, delightful, and nearby a dense wood; and then a man scorched and exhausted by hot weather, weary, parched and thirsty, came by a path going in one way only and directed towards that same pond. Then a man with good sight on seeing him would say: 'This person so behaves... that he will come to this same pond'; and then later on he sees that he has plunged into the pond, bathed, drunk and relieved all his distress, fatigue and fever and has come out again and is sitting or lying in the wood [77] experiencing extremely pleasant feelings. So too, by encompassing mind with mind... extremely pleasant feelings. These are the five destinations.

43. "Sariputta, when I know and see thus, should anyone say of me: 'The recluse Gotama does not have any superhuman states, any distinction in knowledge and vision worthy of the noble ones. The recluse Gotama teaches a Dhamma (merely) hammered out by reasoning, following his own line of inquiry as it occurs to him' — unless he abandons that assertion and that state of mind and relinquishes that view, then as (surely as if he had been) carried off and put there he will wind up in hell. Just as a bhikkhu possessed of virtue, concentration and wisdom would here and now enjoy final knowledge, so it will happen in this case, I say, that unless he abandons that assertion and that state of mind and relinquishes that view, then as (surely as if he had been) carried off and put there he will wind up in hell.

The Bodhisatta's Austerities

44. "Sariputta, I recall having lived a holy life possessing four factors. I have practiced asceticism — the extreme of asceticism; I have practiced coarseness — the extreme of coarseness; I have practiced scrupulousness — the extreme of scrupulousness; I have practiced seclusion — the extreme of seclusion.[17]

45. "Such was my asceticism, Sariputta, that I went naked, rejecting conventions, licking my hands, not coming when asked, not stopping when asked; I did not accept food brought or food specially made or an invitation to a meal; I received nothing from a pot, from a bowl, across a threshold, across a stick, across a pestle, from two eating together, from a pregnant woman, from a woman giving suck, from a woman lying with a man, from where food was advertised to be distributed, from where a dog was waiting, from where flies were buzzing; I accepted no fish or meat, I drank no liquor, wine or fermented brew. I kept to one house, to one morsel; I kept to two [78] houses, to two morsels;... I kept to seven houses, to seven morsels. I lived on one saucerful a day, on two saucerfuls a day... on seven saucerfuls a day; I took food once a day, once every two days... once every seven days, and so on up to once every fortnight; I dwelt pursuing the practice of taking food at stated intervals. I was an eater of greens or millet or wild rice or hide-parings or moss or ricebran or rice-scum or sesamum flour or grass or cowdung. I lived on forest roots and fruits, I fed on fallen fruits. I clothed myself in hemp, in hemp-mixed cloth, in shrouds, in refuse rags, in tree bark, in antelope hide, in strips of antelope hide, in kusa-grass fabric, in bark fabric, in wood-shavings fabric, in head-hair wool, in animal wool, in owls' wings. I was one who pulled out hair and beard, pursuing the practice of pulling out hair and beard. I was one who stood continuously, rejecting seats. I was one who squatted continuously, devoted to maintaining the squatting position. I was one who used a mattress of spikes; I made a mattress of spikes my bed. I dwelt pursuing the practice of bathing in water three times daily including the evening. Thus in such a variety of ways I dwelt pursuing the practice of tormenting and mortifying the body. Such was my asceticism.

46. "Such was my coarseness, Sariputta, that just as the bole of a tinduka tree, accumulating over the years, cakes and flakes off, so too, dust and dirt, accumulating over the years, caked off my body and flaked off. It never occurred to me: 'Oh, let me rub this dust and dirt off with my hand, or let another rub this dust and dirt off with his hand' — it never occurred to me thus. Such was my coarseness.

47. "Such was my scrupulousness, Sariputta, that I was always mindful in stepping forwards and stepping backwards. I was full of pity even for (the beings in) a drop of water thus: 'Let me not hurt the tiny creatures in the crevices of the ground.' Such was my scrupulousness.

48. "Such was my seclusion, Sariputta, that [79] I would plunge into some forest and dwell there. And when I saw a cowherd or a shepherd or someone gathering grass or sticks, or a woodsman, I would flee from grove to grove, from thicket to thicket, from hollow to hollow, from hillock to hillock. Why was that? So that they should not see me or I see them. Just as a forest-bred deer, on seeing human beings, flees from grove to grove, from thicket to thicket, from hollow to hollow, from hillock to hillock, so too, when I saw a cowherd or a shepherd... Such was my seclusion.

49. "I would go on all fours to the cow-pens when the cattle had gone out and the cowherd had left them, and I would feed on the dung of the young suckling calves. As long as my own excrement and urine lasted, I fed on my own excrement and urine. Such was my great distortion in feeding.

50. "I would plunge into some awe-inspiring grove and dwell there — a grove so awe-inspiring that normally it would make a man's hair stand up if he were not free from lust. When those cold wintry nights came during the 'eight-days interval of frost,' I would dwell by night in the open and by day in the grove.[18] In the last month of the hot season I would dwell by day in the open and by night in the grove. And there came to me spontaneously this stanza never heard before:

Chilled by night and scorched by day, Alone in awe-inspiring groves, Naked, no fire to sit beside, The sage yet pursues his quest.

51. "I would make my bed in a charnel ground with the bones of the dead for a pillow. And cowherd boys came up and spat on me, urinated on me, threw dirt at me, and poked sticks into my ears. Yet I do not recall that I ever aroused an evil mind (of hate) against them. Such was my abiding in equanimity. [80]

52. "Sariputta, there are certain recluses and brahmans whose doctrine and view is this: 'Purification comes about through food.'[19] They say: 'Let us live on kola-fruits,' and they eat kola-fruits, they eat kola-fruit powder, they drink kola-fruit water, and they make many kinds of kola-fruit concoctions. Now I recall having eaten a single kola-fruit a day. Sariputta, you may think that the kola-fruit was bigger at that time, yet you should not regard it so: the kola-fruit was then at most the same size as now. Through feeding on a single kola-fruit a day, my body reached a state of extreme emaciation. Because of eating so little my limbs became like the jointed segments of vine stems or bamboo stems. Because of eating so little my backside became like a camel's hoof. Because of eating so little the projections on my spine stood forth like corded beads. Because of eating so little my ribs jutted out as gaunt as the crazy rafters of an old roofless barn. Because of eating so little the gleam of my eyes sank far down in their sockets, looking like a gleam of water which has sunk far down in a deep well. Because of eating so little my scalp shriveled and withered as a green bitter gourd shrivels and withers in the wind and sun. Because of eating so little my belly skin adhered to my backbone; thus if I touched my belly skin I encountered my backbone, and if I touched my backbone I encountered my belly skin. Because of eating so little, if I tried to ease my body by rubbing my limbs with my hands, the hair, rotted at its roots, fell from my body as I rubbed.

53-55. "Sariputta, there are certain recluses and brahmans whose doctrine and view is this: 'Purification comes about through food.' They say: 'Let us live on beans'... 'Let us live on sesamum'... 'Let us live on rice,' and they eat rice, they eat rice powder, [81] they drink rice water, and they make various kinds of rice concoctions. Now I recall having eaten a single rice grain a day. Sariputta, you may think that the rice grain was bigger at that time, yet you should not regard it so: the rice grain was then at most the same size as now. Through feeding on a single rice grain a day, my body reached a state of extreme emaciation. Because of eating so little... the hair, rotted at its roots, fell from my body as I rubbed.

56. "Yet, Sariputta, by such conduct, by such practice, by such performance of austerities, I did not attain any superhuman states, any distinction in knowledge and vision worthy of

the noble ones. Why was that? Because I did not attain that noble wisdom which when attained is noble and emancipating and leads the one who practices in accordance with it to the complete destruction of suffering.

57. "Sariputta, there are certain recluses and brahmans whose doctrine and view is this: 'Purification comes about through the round of rebirths.' But it is impossible to find a realm in the round that I have not already [82] passed through in this long journey, except for the gods of the Pure Abodes; and had I passed through the round as a god in the Pure Abodes, I would never have returned to this world.[20]

58. "There are certain recluses and brahmans whose doctrine and view is this: 'Purification comes about through (some particular kind of) rebirth.' But it is impossible to find a kind of rebirth that I have not been reborn in already in this long journey, except for the gods of the Pure Abodes...

59. "There are certain recluses and brahmans whose doctrine and view is this: 'Purification comes about through (some particular) abode.' But it is impossible to find a kind of abode that I have not already dwelt in... except for the gods of the Pure Abodes...

60. "There are certain recluses and brahmans whose doctrine and view is this: 'Purification comes about through sacrifice.' But it is impossible to find a kind of sacrifice that has not already been offered up by me in this long journey, when I was either a head-anointed noble king or a well-to-do-brahman.

61. "There are certain recluses and brahmans whose doctrine and view is this: 'Purification comes about through fire-worship.' But it is impossible to find a kind of fire that has not already been worshipped by me in this long journey, when I was either a head-anointed noble king or a well-to-do brahman.

62. "Sariputta, there are certain recluses and brahmans whose doctrine and view is this: 'As long as this good man is still young, a black-haired young man endowed with the blessing of youth, in the prime of life, so long is he perfect in his lucid wisdom. But when this good man is old, aged, burdened with years, advanced in life, and come to the last stage, being eighty, ninety or a hundred years old, then the lucidity of his wisdom is lost.' But it should not be regarded so. I am now old, aged, burdened with years, advanced in life, and come to the last stage: my years have turned eighty. Now suppose that I had four disciples with a hundred years' lifespan, perfect in mindfulness, retentiveness, memory and lucidity of wisdom.[21] Just as a skilled archer, trained, practiced and tested, could easily shoot a light arrow across the shadow of a palm tree, suppose that they were even to that extent perfect in mindfulness, retentiveness, [83] memory and lucidity of wisdom. Suppose that they continuously asked me about the four foundations of mindfulness and that I answered them when asked and that they remembered each answer of mine and never asked a subsidiary question or paused except to eat, drink, consume food, taste, urinate, defecate and rest in order to remove sleepiness and tiredness. Still the Tathagata's exposition of the Dhamma, his explanations of factors of the Dhamma, and his replies to

questions would not yet come to an end, but meanwhile those four disciples of mine with their hundred years' lifespan would have died at the end of those hundred years. Sariputta, even if you have to carry me about on a bed, still there will be no change in the lucidity of the Tathagata's wisdom.

63. "Rightly speaking, were it to be said of anyone: 'A being not subject to delusion has appeared in the world for the welfare and happiness of many, out of compassion for the world, for the good, welfare and happiness of gods and humans,' it is of me indeed that rightly speaking this should be said."

64. Now on that occasion the Venerable Nagasamala was standing behind the Blessed One fanning him.[22] Then he said to the Blessed One: "It is wonderful, venerable sir, it is marvelous! As I listened to this discourse on the Dhamma, the hairs of my body stood up. Venerable sir, what is the name of this discourse on the Dhamma?"

"As to that, Nagasamala, you may remember this discourse on the Dhamma as 'The Hair-raising Discourse.' "[23]

That is what the Blessed One said. The Venerable Nagasamala was satisfied and delighted in the Blessed One's words.

Notes

The numbers enclosed in square brackets in the above text are page numbers of the Pali Text Society edition of the Pali text.

1.

The story of Sunakkhatta's defection is found in the Patika Sutta (DN 24). He became dissatisfied with the Buddha and left the Order because the Buddha would not perform miracles for him or explain to him the beginning of things. He also showed great admiration for those who engaged in self-mortification, and probably resented the Buddha for emphasizing a "middle way" that condemned such extreme austerities as unprofitable.

2.

Superhuman states (uttari manussadhamma) are states, virtues or attainments higher than the ordinary human virtues comprised in the ten wholesome courses of action; they include the jhanas, direct knowledges (abhiñña), the paths and the fruits. "Distinction in knowledge and vision worthy of the noble ones" (alamariyañana-dassanavisesa), an expression frequently occurring in the suttas, signifies all higher degrees of meditative knowledge characteristic of the noble individual. In the present context, according to Comy., it means specifically the supramundane path, which Sunakkhatta is thus denying of the Buddha.

3.

The thrust of his criticism is that the Buddha teaches a doctrine that he has merely worked out in thought rather than one he has realized through transcendental wisdom. Apparently, Sunakkhatta believes that being led to the complete destruction of suffering is, as a goal, inferior to the acquisition of miraculous powers.

4.

All the sections to follow are intended as a rebuttal of Sunakkhatta's charge against the Buddha. Sections 6-8 cover the first three of the six direct knowledges, the last three appearing as the last of the ten powers of the Tathagata. The latter, according to Comy., are to be understood as powers of knowledge (ñanabala) that are acquired by all Buddhas as the outcome of their accumulations of merit. The Vibhanga of the Abhidhamma Pitaka provides an elaborate analysis of them, the gist of which will be discussed in subsequent notes.

5.

Comy.: The Wheel of Brahma (brahmacakka) is the supreme, best, most excellent wheel, the Wheel of the Dhamma (dhammacakka). This has two aspects: the knowledge of penetration (pativedhañana) and the knowledge of teaching (desanañana). The knowledge of penetration, by which the Buddha penetrates the truth of the Dhamma, is produced from wisdom and leads to the attainment of the noble fruit for himself; the knowledge of teaching, by which the Buddha is qualified to expound the Dhamma perfectly to others, is produced from compassion and leads others to the attainment of the noble fruit.

6.

Comy. glosses thana as cause or ground (karana) and explains: "Such and such dhammas are causes (hetu), conditions (paccaya), for the arising of such and such dhammas: that is thana. Such and such dhammas are not causes, not conditions, for the arising of such and such dhammas: that is atthana. Knowing that, he understands thana as thana and atthana as atthana (i.e., causal occasion as causal occasion, and non-causal occasion as non-causal occasion)." Comy. also refers to the different explanation in the Vibhanga, apparently regarding both explanations as acceptable.

Vbh. Section 809 explains this knowledge with reference to MN 115 as the Buddha's knowledge of what is possible and what is impossible, e.g., it is impossible that a person possessed of right view should regard any formations as permanent or as pleasurable, or anything whatever as self, while it is possible that a worldling will regard things in such an erroneous way. It is impossible for a person possessed of right view to commit the five heinous crimes (matricide, patricide, the murder of an arahant, the wounding of a Buddha, causing a schism in the Sangha), while it is possible for a worldling to commit such crimes, etc. etc.

7.

Vbh. Section 810: "Herein, the Tathagata comprehends that there are some evil actions performed which do not mature because they are prevented from maturing by a fortunate rebirth, a fortunate body, a fortunate time, a fortunate effort, while there are some evil actions performed which mature because of an unfortunate rebirth, etc. There are some good actions which do not mature because of an unfortunate rebirth, etc., while there are some good actions which mature because of a fortunate rebirth, etc." (condensed).

8.

Vbh. Section 811: "Herein, the Tathagata comprehends thus: 'This is the path, this is the practice leading to hell, to the animal realm, to the plane of ghosts, to the human realm, to the realm of the gods, to deliverance.' " This knowledge will be elaborated upon below in Sections 35-42.

9.

Vbh. Section 812: "The Tathagata comprehends the different aggregates, the different sense bases, the different elements; he comprehends the different worlds that have many elements, different elements."

10.

Vbh. Section 813: "The Tathagata understands that beings are of inferior inclinations and superior inclinations, and that they gravitate towards those who share their own inclinations" (condensed).

11.

Vbh. Sections 814-27 gives a detailed analysis. Comy. states the meaning more concisely as the Tathagata's knowledge of the superiority and inferiority of beings' faculties of faith, energy, mindfulness, concentration and wisdom.

12.

Vbh. Section 828: "The defilement (sankilesa) is a state partaking of deterioration; cleansing (vodana) is a state partaking of distinction; emergence (vutthana) is both cleansing and the rising out of an attainment. The eight liberations (vimokkha) are enumerated, e.g., at DN 15/ii,70-71, and comprise three liberations pertaining to the realm of material form, the four immaterial attainments, and the cessation of perception and feeling. The nine attainments (samapatti) are the four jhanas, the four immaterial attainments, and cessation.

13.

The idiom yathabhatam nikkhitto evam niraye is knotty; the rendering here follows the gloss of Comy.: "He will be put in hell as if carried off and put there by the wardens of hell." Although such a fate may sound excessively severe merely for verbal denigration, it should be remembered that he is maligning a Fully Enlightened Buddha with a mind of hatred, and his intention in so doing is to discourage others from entering upon the path that could lead them to complete liberation from suffering.

14.

The four kinds of intrepidity (vesarajja: also rendered "grounds of self-confidence") may be divided into two pairs. The first pair relates mainly to the internal qualities of the Buddha, his achievement of personal perfection, while the second pair has an outward orientation, being concerned primarily with his qualifications as a teacher. The first intrepidity confirms his attainment of supreme enlightenment and the removal of all obscuration regarding the range of what may be known; it points to the Buddha's acquisition of omniscience (sabbaññutañana). The second underlines his complete purity through the destruction of all defilements; it points to his achievement of the fruit of arahantship. The third means that the Buddha's understanding of obstructions to the goal is unimpeachable, while the fourth confirms the efficacy of the Dhamma in accomplishing its intended purpose, namely, leading the practitioner to complete release from suffering.

15.

In later Buddhist tradition the asuras, titans or "anti-gods," are added as a separate realm to make the "six destinations" familiar from the Tibetan Wheel of Life.

16.

Comy.: Even though the description is the same as that of the bliss of the heavenly world, the meaning is different. For the bliss of the heavenly world is not really extremely pleasant because the fevers of lust, etc. are still present there. But the bliss of Nibbana is extremely pleasant in every way through the subsiding of all fevers.

17.

Comy. explains that at this juncture the Buddha related this account of his past ascetic practices because Sunakkhatta was a great admirer of extreme asceticism (as is clear from the Patika Sutta) and the Buddha wanted to make it known that there was no one who could equal him in the practice of austerities. Sections 44-56 apparently deal with the Bodhisatta's striving during the six years' period of austerities in his last existence, while Sections 57-61 refer back to his previous existences as a seeker of enlightenment.

18.

The "eight-days' interval of frost" is a regular cold spell which occurs in South Asia in late December or early January.

19.

That is, they hold the view that beings are purified by reducing their intake of food.

20.

Rebirth into the Pure Abodes (suddhavasa) is possible only for non-returners.

21.

The Pali for the four terms is: sati, gati, dhiti, paññaveyyattiya. Comy. explains sati as the ability to grasp in mind a hundred or a thousand phrases as they are being spoken; gati, the ability to bind them and retain them in the mind; dhiti, the ability to recite back what has been grasped and retained; and paññaveyyattiya, the ability to discern the meaning and logic of those phrases.

22.

The Venerable Nagasamala had been a personal attendant of the Buddha during the first twenty years of his ministry.

23.

Lomahamsanapariyaya. The sutta is referred to by that name at Milindapañha, p. 398, and in the commentary to the Digha Nikaya.