MN 12 — MN 12 The Great Lion’s Roar Discourse | Mahāsīhanāda Sutta

English translation by Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu.

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Text

The Great Lion’s Roar Discourse

Mahāsīhanāda Sutta (MN 12)

I have heard that on one occasion the Blessed One was staying near Vesāli, outside of the city, in a forest grove to the west of the city.

And on that occasion Sunakkhatta the Licchavi1 had recently left this Dhamma & Vinaya. He was making this statement in the Vesāli assembly: “Gotama the contemplative has no superior human state, no distinction in knowledge & vision worthy of a noble one. Having hammered it out through logic, Gotama the contemplative teaches a Dhamma that follows his reasoning, his own invention. And whenever his Dhamma is taught for anyone’s sake, it

leads those who act on it to the right ending of suffering & stress."

Then, early in the morning, Ven. Sāriputta adjusted his under robe and—carrying his bowl & robes—went into Vesāli for alms. He heard Sunakkhatta the Licchavi making this statement in the Vesāli assembly: "Gotama the contemplative has no superior human state, no distinction in knowledge & vision worthy of a noble one. Having hammered it out through logic, Gotama the contemplative teaches a Dhamma that follows his reasoning, his own invention. And whenever his Dhamma is taught for anyone's sake, it leads those who act on it to the right ending of suffering & stress."

Then Ven. Sāriputta—having gone for alms in Vesāli, after the meal, returning from his alms round—went to the Blessed One and, on arrival, having bowed down to him, sat to one side. As he was sitting there he said to the Blessed One, "Lord, Sunakkhatta the Licchavi has recently left this Dhamma & Vinaya. He is making this statement in the Vesāli assembly: 'Gotama the contemplative has no superior human state, no distinction in knowledge & vision worthy of a noble one. Having hammered it out through logic, Gotama the contemplative teaches a Dhamma that follows his reasoning, his own invention. And whenever his Dhamma is taught for anyone's sake, it leads those who act on it to the right ending of suffering & stress.'"

"Sāriputta, this worthless man Sunakkhatta is angry. Out of anger, he has made this statement, (thinking,) 'I will speak in dispraise,' but actually he is speaking praise of the Tathāgata. For it is in praise of the Tathāgata when anyone says, 'And whenever his Dhamma is taught for anyone's sake, it leads those who act on it to the right ending of suffering & stress.'

"Sāriputta, the righteous inference will never occur to this worthless man Sunakkhatta that 'Indeed, the Blessed One is worthy & rightly self-awakened, consummate in clear-knowing & conduct, well-gone, an expert with regard to the cosmos, unexcelled trainer of people fit to be tamed, teacher of devas & human beings, awakened, blessed.'

"Sāriputta, the righteous inference will never occur to this worthless man Sunakkhatta that 'Indeed, the Blessed One wields 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 cross-legged 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 Brahmā worlds.'

"Sāriputta, the righteous inference will never occur to this worthless man Sunakkhatta that 'Indeed, the Blessed One hears—by means of the divine ear-element, purified & surpassing the human—both kinds of sounds: divine & human, whether near or far.'

"Sāriputta, the righteous inference will never occur to this worthless man Sunakkhatta that 'Indeed, the Blessed One 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 mind2 as “an enlarged mind,” and an unenlarged mind as “an unenlarged mind.” He discerns a surpassed mind [one that is not at the most excellent level] as “a surpassed mind,” and an unsurpassed mind as “an unsurpassed mind.” He discerns a concentrated mind as “a concentrated mind,” and an unconcentrated mind as “an unconcentrated mind.” He discerns a released mind3 as “a released mind,” and an unreleased mind as “an unreleased mind.”’

The Ten Tathāgata Strengths

“Sāriputta, there are these ten Tathāgata-strengths of the Tathāgata, endowed with which the Tathāgata makes known his status as the bull, roars his lion’s roar in the assembly, and sets the Brahmā-wheel4 in motion. Which ten?

“Here the Tathāgata discerns, as they have come to be, the possible as possible and the impossible as impossible. That the Tathāgata discerns, as they have come to be, the possible as possible and the impossible as impossible: This is a Tathāgata-strength of the Tathāgata, endowed with which the Tathāgata makes known his status as the bull, roars his lion’s roar in the assembly, and sets the Brahmā-wheel in motion.

“Then again, the Tathāgata discerns, as it has come to be, the ripening—in line with possibilities & causes—of actions undertaken, whether past, future, or present. …

“Then again, the Tathāgata discerns, as they have come to be, the paths of practice leading to every destination. …

“Then again, the Tathāgata discerns, as it has come to be, the cosmos with its many properties, its diverse properties. …

“Then again, the Tathāgata discerns, as they have come to be, the diverse inclinations of beings. …

“Then again, the Tathāgata discerns, as it has come to be, the (higher or lower) development of the faculties of other beings, other individuals. …

“Then again, the Tathāgata discerns, as they have come to be, the defilement, purification, & arising out of the attainments of jhāna, the emancipations5, & concentration. …

“Then again, the Tathāgata recollects his manifold past lives, i.e., one birth, two… five, ten… fifty, a hundred, a thousand, a hundred thousand, many eons of cosmic contraction, many eons of cosmic expansion, many eons of cosmic contraction & expansion: ‘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 recollects his manifold past lives in their modes & details. …

"Then again, the Tathāgata sees—by means of the divine eye, purified & surpassing the human—beings passing away & 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 noble ones, held wrong views and undertook actions under the influence of wrong views—with the breakup of the body, after death, have reappeared in a plane of deprivation, a bad destination, a lower realm, hell. But these beings—who were endowed with good conduct of body, speech, & mind, who did not revile 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 a good destination, a heavenly world.' Thus—by means of the divine eye, purified & surpassing the human—he sees beings passing away & re-appearing, and he discerns how they are inferior & superior, beautiful & ugly, fortunate & unfortunate in accordance with their kamma. …

"Then again, the Tathāgata—with the ending of effluents—remains in the effluent-free awareness-release & discernment-release, having directly known & realized them for himself right in the here-&-now. That the Tathāgata—with the ending of effluents—remains in the effluent-free awareness-release & discernment-release, having directly known & realized them for himself right in the here-&-now: This, too, is a Tathāgata-strength of the Tathāgata, endowed with which the Tathāgata makes known his status as the bull, roars his lion's roar in the assembly, and sets the Brahmā-wheel in motion.

"Sāriputta, these are the ten Tathāgata-strengths of the Tathāgata, endowed with which the Tathāgata makes known his status as the bull, roars his lion's roar in the assembly, and sets the Brahmā-wheel in motion.

"Sāriputta, when I know this & see this, anyone who would say of me, 'Gotama the contemplative has no superior human state, no distinction in knowledge & vision worthy of a noble one. Having hammered it out through logic, Gotama the contemplative teaches a Dhamma that follows his reasoning, his own invention': If he doesn't abandon that statement, doesn't abandon that intent, doesn't relinquish that view, then as if he were to be carried off, he would for that very reason be placed in hell. Just as a monk consummate in virtue, consummate in concentration, consummate in discernment would attain gnosis in the here-&-now and for that very reason be complete in that, I tell you; (in the same way,) if that person doesn't abandon that statement, doesn't abandon that intent, doesn't relinquish that view, then as if he were to be carried off, he would for that very reason be placed in hell.

Four Reasons for Being Undaunted

“Sāriputta, the Tathāgata has these four reasons for being undaunted, endowed with which he makes known his status as the bull, roars his lion’s roar in the assembly, and sets the Brahmā-wheel in motion. Which four?

“I can envision no sign by which any contemplative or brahman or deva or Māra or Brahmā or anyone else in the cosmos could, in line with the Dhamma, accuse me thus: ‘Although you claim to be rightly self-awakened, you have not awakened to these dhammas.’ Envisioning no such sign, I dwell in security, fearless & undaunted.

“I can envision no sign by which any contemplative or brahman … or anyone else in the cosmos could, in line with the Dhamma, accuse me thus: ‘Although you claim to have ended the effluents, there are these effluents that you have not ended.’ Envisioning no such sign, I dwell in security, fearless & undaunted.

“I can envision no sign by which any contemplative or brahman … or anyone else in the cosmos could, in line with the Dhamma, accuse me thus: ‘Those actions that you describe as obstructions, when indulged in are not actually obstructive.’ Envisioning no such sign, I dwell in security, fearless & undaunted.

“I can envision no sign by which any contemplative or brahman … or anyone else in the cosmos could, in line with the Dhamma, accuse me thus: ‘Whenever your Dhamma is taught for anyone’s sake, it doesn’t lead those who act on it to the right ending of suffering & stress.’ Envisioning no such sign, I dwell in security, fearless & undaunted.

“Sāriputta, the Tathāgata has these four reasons for being undaunted, endowed with which he makes known his status as the bull, roars his lion’s roar in the assembly, and sets the Brahmā-wheel in motion.

“Sāriputta, when I know this & see this, anyone who would say of me, ‘Gotama the contemplative has no superior human state, no distinction in knowledge & vision worthy of a noble one. Having hammered it out through logic, Gotama the contemplative teaches a Dhamma that follows his reasoning, his own invention’: If he doesn’t abandon that statement, doesn’t abandon that intent, doesn’t relinquish that view, then as if he were to be carried off, he would for that very reason be placed in hell. Just as a monk consummate in virtue, consummate in concentration, consummate in discernment would attain gnosis in the here-&-now and for that very reason be complete in that, I tell you; (in the same way,) if that person doesn’t abandon that statement, doesn’t abandon that intent, doesn’t relinquish that view, then as if he were to be carried off, he would for that very reason be placed in hell.

Eight Assemblies

“Sāriputta, there are these eight assemblies. Which eight? A noble warrior assembly, a brahman assembly, a householder assembly, a contemplative assembly, a Four Great

Kings assembly, a (Devas of the) Thirty-three assembly, a Māra assembly, a Brahmā assembly.6 Endowed with these four reasons for being undaunted, the Tathāgata approaches & plunges into these eight assemblies.

"I can remember approaching many hundreds of noble warrior assemblies. There—before seating myself, before talking, before engaging in conversation—I would envision no sign that fear or dauntedness would descend on me. Envisioning no such sign, I dwell in security, fearless & undaunted.

"I can remember approaching many hundreds of brahman assemblies... many hundreds of householder assemblies... many hundreds of contemplative assemblies... many hundreds of Four Great King assemblies... many hundreds of (Devas of the) Thirty-three assemblies... many hundreds of Māra assemblies...

"I can remember approaching many hundreds of Brahmā assemblies. There—before seating myself, before talking, before engaging in conversation—I would envision no sign that fear or dauntedness would descend on me. Envisioning no such sign, I dwell in security, fearless & undaunted.

"Sāriputta, when I know this & see this, anyone who would say of me, 'Gotama the contemplative has no superior human state, no distinction in knowledge & vision worthy of a noble one. Having hammered it out through logic, Gotama the contemplative teaches a Dhamma that follows his reasoning, his own invention': If he doesn't abandon that statement, doesn't abandon that intent, doesn't relinquish that view, then as if he were to be carried off, he would for that very reason be placed in hell. Just as a monk consummate in virtue, consummate in concentration, consummate in discernment would attain gnosis in the here-&-now and for that very reason be complete in that, I tell you; (in the same way,) if that person doesn't abandon that statement, doesn't abandon that intent, doesn't relinquish that view, then as if he were to be carried off, he would for that very reason be placed in hell.

Four Modes of Generation

"Sāriputta, there are these four modes of generation. Which four? Egg-born generation, placenta-born generation, slime-born generation, & spontaneous generation.

"And which is egg-born generation? Any beings that take birth breaking out of an eggshell: This is called egg-born generation.

"And which is placenta-born generation? Any beings that take birth breaking out of a caul: This is called placenta-born generation.

"And which is slime-born generation? Any beings that take birth in a rotten fish or that take birth in a rotten corpse or in rotten porridge or in a sewer or in a cesspool: This is called slime-born generation.

“And which is spontaneous generation? Any devas, hell-beings, some human beings, & some beings in the lower realms: This is called spontaneous generation.

“These, Sāriputta, are the four modes of generation.

“Sāriputta, when I know this & see this, anyone who would say of me, ‘Gotama the contemplative has no superior human state, no distinction in knowledge & vision worthy of a noble one. Having hammered it out through logic, Gotama the contemplative teaches a Dhamma that follows his reasoning, his own invention’: If he doesn’t abandon that statement, doesn’t abandon that intent, doesn’t relinquish that view, then as if he were to be carried off, he would for that very reason be placed in hell. Just as a monk consummate in virtue, consummate in concentration, consummate in discernment would attain gnosis in the here-&-now and for that very reason be complete in that, I tell you; (in the same way,) if that person doesn’t abandon that statement, doesn’t abandon that intent, doesn’t relinquish that view, then as if he were to be carried off, he would for that very reason be placed in hell.

The Five Destinations & Unbinding

“Sāriputta, there are these five destinations. Which five? Hell, the animal womb, the realm of hungry ghosts, human beings, & devas.

“I discern hell, and I discern the path leading to hell, the practice leading to hell, practicing in line with which—at the break-up of the body, after death—one reappears in a plane of deprivation, a bad destination, a lower realm, hell.

“I discern the animal womb, and I discern the path leading to the animal womb, the practice leading to the animal womb, practicing in line with which—at the break-up of the body, after death—one reappears in the animal womb.

“I discern the realm of the hungry ghosts, and I discern the path leading to the realm of the hungry ghosts, the practice leading to the realm of the hungry ghosts, practicing in line with which—at the break-up of the body, after death—one reappears in the realm of the hungry ghosts.

“I discern human beings, and I discern the path leading to the world of human beings, the practice leading to the world of human beings, practicing in line with which—at the break-up of the body, after death—one reappears among human beings.

“I discern devas, and I discern the path leading to the world of the devas, the practice leading to the world of the devas, practicing in line with which—at the break-up of the body, after death—one reappears in a good destination, a heavenly world.

“I discern unbinding, and I discern the path leading to unbinding, the practice leading to unbinding, practicing in line with which—through the ending of the effluents—one enters & remains in the effluent-free awareness-release & discernment-release, having directly

known & realized them for oneself right in the here-&-now.

Sāriputta, there is the case where—having thus encompassed awareness with awareness—I know of a certain individual: 'The way this individual has practiced, the way he conducts himself, and the path he has entered are such that he will—at the break-up of the body, after death—reappear in a plane of deprivation, a bad destination, a lower realm, hell.' Then at a later time, by means of the divine eye, purified & surpassing the human, I see him—at the break-up of the body, after death—reappearing in a plane of deprivation, a bad destination, a lower realm, hell, experiencing feelings that are exclusively painful, piercing, & racking.

"Suppose that there were a pit of glowing embers, deeper than a man's height, full of glowing embers that were neither flaming nor smoking. A man—scorched with heat, overcome by heat, exhausted, trembling, & thirsty—would come along a path going one way only7 directed to that pit of glowing embers. A man with good eyes, on seeing him, would say, 'The way this individual has practiced, the way he conducts himself, and the path he has entered are such that he will come to that pit of glowing embers.' Then at a later time he would see him—having fallen into the pit of glowing embers—experiencing feelings that are exclusively painful, piercing, & racking.

"In the same way, Sāriputta, there is the case where—having thus encompassed awareness with awareness—I know of a certain individual: 'The way this individual has practiced... he will... reappear in a plane of deprivation, a bad destination, a lower realm, hell.' Then at a later time, by means of the divine eye, purified & surpassing the human, I see him—at the break-up of the body, after death—reappearing in a plane of deprivation, a bad destination, a lower realm, hell, experiencing feelings that are exclusively painful, piercing, & racking.

"There is the case where—having thus encompassed awareness with awareness—I know of a certain individual: 'The way this individual has practiced, the way he conducts himself, and the path he has entered are such that he will—at the break-up of the body, after death—reappear in the animal womb.' Then at a later time, by means of the divine eye, purified & surpassing the human, I see him—at the break-up of the body, after death—reappearing in the animal womb, experiencing feelings that are painful, piercing, & racking.

"Suppose that there were a cesspool, deeper than a man's height, full of excrement. A man—scorched with heat, overcome by heat, exhausted, trembling, & thirsty—would come along a path going one way only directed to that cesspool. A man with good eyes, on seeing him, would say, 'The way this individual has practiced, the way he conducts himself, and the path he has entered are such that he will come to that cesspool.' Then at a later time he would see him—having fallen into the cesspool—experiencing feelings that are painful, piercing, & racking.

"In the same way, Sāriputta, there is the case where—having thus encompassed awareness with awareness—I know of a certain individual: 'The way this individual has

practiced… he will… reappear in the animal womb.' Then at a later time, by means of the divine eye, purified & surpassing the human, I see him—at the break-up of the body, after death—reappearing in the animal womb, experiencing feelings that are painful, piercing, & racking.

"There is the case where—having thus encompassed awareness with awareness—I know of a certain individual: 'The way this individual has practiced, the way he conducts himself, and the path he has entered are such that he will—at the break-up of the body, after death—reappear in the realm of the hungry ghosts.' Then at a later time, by means of the divine eye, purified & surpassing the human, I see him—at the break-up of the body, after death—reappearing in the realm of the hungry ghosts, experiencing feelings that are for the most part painful.

"Suppose that there were a tree growing on uneven ground, with scanty foliage providing spotty shade. A man—scorched with heat, overcome by heat, exhausted, trembling, & thirsty—would come along a path going one way only directed to that tree. A man with good eyes, on seeing him, would say, 'The way this individual has practiced, the way he conducts himself, and the path he has entered are such that he will come to that tree.' Then at a later time he would see him sitting or lying down in the shade of that tree, experiencing feelings that are for the most part painful.

"In the same way, Sāriputta, there is the case where—having thus encompassed awareness with awareness—I know of a certain individual: 'The way this individual has practiced… he will… reappear in the realm of the hungry ghosts.' Then at a later time, by means of the divine eye, purified & surpassing the human, I see him—at the break-up of the body, after death—reappearing in the realm of the hungry ghosts, experiencing feelings that are for the most part painful.

"There is the case where—having thus encompassed awareness with awareness—I know of a certain individual: 'The way this individual has practiced, the way he conducts himself, and the path he has entered are such that he will—at the break-up of the body, after death—reappear among human beings.' Then at a later time, by means of the divine eye, purified & surpassing the human, I see him—at the break-up of the body, after death—reappearing among human beings, experiencing feelings that are for the most part pleasant.

"Suppose that there were a tree growing on even ground, with lush foliage providing dense shade. A man—scorched with heat, overcome by heat, exhausted, trembling, & thirsty—would come along a path going one way only directed to that tree. A man with good eyes, on seeing him, would say, 'The way this individual has practiced, the way he conducts himself, and the path he has entered are such that he will come to that tree.' Then at a later time he would see him sitting or lying down in the shade of that tree, experiencing feelings that are for the most part pleasant.

"In the same way, Sāriputta, there is the case where—having thus encompassed awareness with awareness—I know of a certain individual: 'The way this individual has

practiced… he will… reappear among human beings.' Then at a later time, by means of the divine eye, purified & surpassing the human, I see him—at the break-up of the body, after death—reappearing among human beings, experiencing feelings that are for the most part pleasant.

"There is the case where—having thus encompassed awareness with awareness—I know of a certain individual: 'The way this individual has practiced, the way he conducts himself, and the path he has entered are such that he will—at the break-up of the body, after death—reappear in a good destination, a heavenly world.' Then at a later time, by means of the divine eye, purified & surpassing the human, I see him—at the break-up of the body, after death—reappearing in a good destination, a heavenly world, experiencing feelings that are exclusively pleasant.

"Suppose that there were a palace compound; in it was a mansion with a gabled roof, plastered inside & out, draft-free, with close-fitting door & windows shut against the wind; and in it was a throne-like bed spread with a long-fleeced coverlet, a white wool coverlet, an embroidered coverlet, a rug of kadali-deer hide, with a canopy above, & red cushions on either side. A man—scorched with heat, overcome by heat, exhausted, trembling, & thirsty—would come along a path going one way only directed to that palace compound. A man with good eyes, on seeing him, would say, 'The way this individual has practiced, the way he conducts himself, and the path he has entered are such that he will come to that palace compound.' Then at a later time he would see him sitting or lying down on the throne-like bed in that mansion with a gabled roof in that palace compound, experiencing feelings that are exclusively pleasant.

"In the same way, Sāriputta, there is the case where—having thus encompassed awareness with awareness—I know of a certain individual: 'The way this individual has practiced, the way he conducts himself, and the path he has entered are such that he will—at the break-up of the body, after death—reappear in a good destination, a heavenly world.' Then at a later time, by means of the divine eye, purified & surpassing the human, I see him—at the break-up of the body, after death—reappearing in a good destination, a heavenly world, experiencing feelings that are exclusively pleasant.

"There is the case where—having thus encompassed awareness with awareness—I know of a certain individual: 'The way this individual has practiced, the way he conducts himself, and the path he has entered are such that he will—through the ending of the effluents—enter & remain in the effluent-free awareness-release & discernment-release, having directly known & realized it for himself right in the here-&-now.' Then at a later time, by means of the divine eye, purified & surpassing the human, I see him—through the ending of the effluents—entering & remaining in the effluent-free awareness-release & discernment-release, having directly known & realized it for himself right in the here-&-now, experiencing feelings that are exclusively pleasant.

"Suppose that there were a lotus pond with pristine water, pleasing water, cool water, pellucid water; with restful banks, refreshing; and not far from it was a dense forest grove. A man—scorched with heat, overcome by heat, exhausted, trembling, & thirsty—would

come along a path going one way only directed to that lotus pond. A man with good eyes, on seeing him, would say, 'The way this individual has practiced, the way he conducts himself, and the path he has entered are such that he will come to that lotus pond.' Then at a later time he would see him—having plunged into the lotus pond, having bathed & drunk & relieved all his disturbance, exhaustion, & fever, and having come back out—sitting or lying down in the forest grove, experiencing feelings that are exclusively pleasant.

"In the same way, Sāriputta, there is the case where—having thus encompassed awareness with awareness—I know of a certain individual: 'The way this individual has practiced, the way he conducts himself, and the path he has entered are such that he will, through the ending of the effluents, enter & remain in the effluent-free awareness-release & discernment-release, having directly known & realized it for himself right in the here-&-now.' Then at a later time, by means of the divine eye, purified & surpassing the human, I see him—through the ending of the effluents—entering & remaining in the effluent-free awareness-release & discernment-release, having directly known & realized it for himself right in the here-&-now, experiencing feelings that are exclusively pleasant."

"These, Sāriputta, are the five destinations.

"Sāriputta, when I know this & see this, anyone who would say of me, 'Gotama the contemplative has no superior human state, no distinction in knowledge & vision worthy of a noble one. Having hammered it out through logic, Gotama the contemplative teaches a Dhamma that follows his reasoning, his own invention': If he doesn't abandon that statement, doesn't abandon that intent, doesn't relinquish that view, then as if he were to be carried off, he would for that very reason be placed in hell. Just as a monk consummate in virtue, consummate in concentration, consummate in discernment would attain gnosis in the here-&-now and for that very reason be complete in that, I tell you; (in the same way,) if that person doesn't abandon that statement, doesn't abandon that intent, doesn't relinquish that view, then as if he were to be carried off, he would for that very reason be placed in hell.

The Bodhisatta's Practices in Previous Lifetimes

"I remember, Sāriputta, being one who lived a holy life endowed with four factors: I was an ascetic, the most extreme in asceticism. I was rough, the most extreme in roughness. I was scrupulous, the most extreme in scrupulousness. I was secluded, the most extreme in seclusion.

"This is how it was for me in terms of asceticism: I was cloth-less, rejecting conventions, licking my hands, not coming when called, not staying when asked. I didn't consent to food brought to me, to food dedicated to me, or to an invitation to a meal. I accepted nothing from the mouth of a pot or from the mouth of a bowl. I accepted nothing from across a threshold, across a stick, across a pestle, from two eating together, from a pregnant woman, from a nursing woman, from a woman living with a man, from where it was announced that food was to be distributed, from where a dog was waiting or flies were buzzing. I took no fish or meat. I drank no liquor, wine, or fermented drink.

“I limited myself to one house & one morsel (a day), or two houses & two morsels… seven houses & seven morsels. I lived on one saucerful (a day), two… seven saucerfuls a day. I took food once a day, once every two days… once every seven days, and so on up to a fortnight, devoted to regulating my intake of food.

“I was an eater of greens, millet, wild rice, hide-parings, moss, rice bran, rice-scum, sesame flour, grass, or cow dung. I lived on forest roots & berries. I fed on fallen fruits.

“I wore hemp, canvas, shrouds, refuse rags, tree bark, antelope hide, strips of antelope hide, kusa-grass garments, bark garments, wood-shaving garments, head-hair garments, animal wool, owl’s wings. I was a hair-&-beard puller, one devoted to the practice of pulling out my hair & beard. I was a stander, one who rejected seats. I was a kneeler, one devoted to the exertion of kneeling. I was a spike-mattresser, one who made my bed on a bed of spikes. I was a third-time-in-the-evening bather, one who stayed devoted to the practice of bathing in water.

“Thus in a variety of ways I stayed devoted to the practice of tormenting & torturing the body. That’s how it was for me in terms of asceticism.

“This is how it was for me in terms of roughness: Many years worth of dirt had collected on my body so that it became a crust. Just like a tiṇḍuka stump, having collected (dirt) for many years so that it has become a crust—in the same way, many years worth of dirt had collected on my body so that it became a crust.

“The thought didn’t occur to me, ‘Oh! I would like to rub off this dirt with my hand! Or may others rub off this dirt with their hands!’ That didn’t occur to me.

“That’s how it was for me in terms of roughness.

“This is how it was for me in terms of scrupulousness: I was mindful stepping forward; I was mindful stepping back. Even for a drop of water, concern was established within me, (thinking,) ‘I won’t engage in killing these small, unfortunate creatures.’

“That’s how it was for me in terms of scrupulousness.

“This is how it was for me in terms of seclusion: Plunging into a certain wilderness area, I stayed there. When I saw a cowherd, an ox-herd, a grass-carrier, a wood-carrier, or a woodsman, I fled from grove to grove, from thicket to thicket, from hill to hill, from meadow to meadow. Why was that? (I thought,) ‘May they not see me, and may I not see them.’

“Just like a wild deer, on seeing human beings, flees from grove to grove, from thicket to thicket, from hill to hill, from meadow to meadow—in the same way, when I saw a cowherd, an ox-herd, a grass-carrier, a wood-carrier, or a woodsman, I fled from grove to grove, from thicket to thicket, from hill to hill, from meadow to meadow. Why was that? (I thought,) ‘May they not see me, and may I not see them.’

“That’s how it was for me in terms of seclusion.

“I would crawl on all fours to the cow-sheds when the cows had gone out and the cowherds had gone off. Whatever manure there was from young nursing calves, I took just that for food. As long as my own urine and excrement hadn’t run out, I took just my own urine and excrement for food. That’s how it was for me in terms of subsisting on the great foul things as food.

“Plunging into a certain awe-inspiring forest grove, I stayed there. There, Sāriputta, that awe-inspiring grove had this quality in terms of making one awe-inspired: When anyone who had not gone beyond passion entered, his hair would usually stand on end.

“Those cold winter nights of the between-the-eights, the time of snowfall: On nights like that I would stay in the open by night and in the grove by day. In the last month of the hot season, I would stay in the open by day and in the grove by night. And then this verse of amazement—never heard before—occurred to me:

“‘He is scorched, he is drenched, alone—

alone in the awe-inspiring forest,

naked, not sitting near a fire,

the sage exerting himself in the search.’

“I arranged a sleeping place in a charnel ground, piling up bones from the corpses.

“And then cowherd boys, coming up to me, would spit on me, or urinate on me, or throw dirt on me, or stick twigs into my ears. But I do not remember giving rise to any evil thoughts toward them.

“That’s how it was for me in terms of dwelling in equanimity.

“Sāriputta, there are some contemplatives & brahmans with this doctrine, this view: ‘Purity is by means of food.’

“‘We live on jujube fruits,’ they say. They eat jujubes, they eat jujube powder, they drink jujube juice, and make use of diverse products of the jujube.

“But I remember being one who ate just one jujube (per day). If the thought should occur to you, ‘Maybe jujubes were large at that time,’ it shouldn’t be seen that way. Jujubes were just the same size then as they are now.

“For me, eating just one jujube (per day), my body became extremely emaciated. Simply from my eating so little, my limbs became like the jointed segments of vine stems or bamboo stems. … My backside became like a camel’s hoof.… My spine stood out like a string of beads.… My ribs jutted out like the jutting rafters of an old, run-down barn.… The

gleam of my eyes appeared to be sunk deep in my eye sockets like the gleam of water deep in a well.... My scalp shriveled & withered like a green bitter gourd, shriveled & withered in the heat & the wind.... The skin of my belly became so stuck to my spine that when I thought of touching my belly, I grabbed hold of my spine as well; and when I thought of touching my spine, I grabbed hold of the skin of my belly as well.... If I urinated or defecated, I fell over on my face right there.... 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, simply from eating so little.8

"Sāriputta, there are some contemplatives & brahmans with this doctrine, this view: 'Purity is by means of food.'

"'We live on green gram... sesame seeds ... rice ...,' they say. They eat rice, they eat rice powder, they drink rice water, and make use of diverse products of rice.

"But I remember being one who ate just one grain of rice (per day). If the thought should occur to you, 'Maybe rice grains were large at that time,' it shouldn't be seen that way. Rice grains were just the same size then as they are now.

"For me, eating just one grain of rice (per day), my body became extremely emaciated. Simply from my eating so little, my limbs became like the jointed segments of vine stems or bamboo stems. ...

"But with this racking practice of austerities I didn't attain any superior human state, any distinction in knowledge or vision worthy of the noble ones. Why is that? Because of the non-attainment of this noble discernment—the noble discernment that, when attained, is noble, leading out, leading those who act on it to the right ending of suffering & stress.

"There are some contemplatives & brahmans with this doctrine, this view: 'Purity is by means of wandering on.'9 But it's not easy to find a wandering-on that I haven't wandered to before, in this long, long journey, aside from the Pure-Abode devas. If I had wandered among the Pure-Abode devas, I wouldn't have come back to this world again.

"There are some contemplatives & brahmans with this doctrine, this view: 'Purity is by means of rebirth.' But it's not easy to find a rebirth that I haven't been reborn in before, in this long, long journey, aside from the Pure-Abode devas. If I had been reborn among the Pure-Abode devas, I wouldn't have come back to this world again.

"There are some contemplatives & brahmans with this doctrine, this view: 'Purity is by means of abodes.' But it's not easy to find an abode in which I haven't abided before, in this long, long journey, aside from the Pure-Abode devas. If I had abided among the Pure-Abode devas, I wouldn't have come back to this world again.

"There are some contemplatives & brahmans with this doctrine, this view: 'Purity is by means of sacrifice.' But it's not easy to find a sacrifice that I haven't performed before, in this long, long journey, either as a head-anointed noble-warrior king or as an extremely

wealthy brahman.

“There are some contemplatives & brahmans with this doctrine, this view: ‘Purity is by means of tending the (sacred) fire.’ But it’s not easy to find a (sacred) fire that I haven’t tended to before, in this long, long journey, either as a head-anointed noble-warrior king or as an extremely wealthy brahman.

“There are some contemplatives & brahmans with this doctrine, this view: ‘As long as this good man is young, youthful, with fully black hair, endowed with the blessing of youth & the first stage of life, he is endowed with the foremost keenness of discernment. But when this good man becomes aged, old, elderly, advanced in years, having come to the last stage of life, 80 years old, 90 years old, or 100 years old in this birth, then because of that, his keenness of discernment diminishes. Sāriputta, it shouldn’t be seen that way.

“At this time, I am aged, old, elderly, advanced in years, having come to the last stage of life. My age has come to 80 years.

“Sāriputta, suppose that I had four disciples with a 100-year life span, living for 100 years, and endowed with excellent mindfulness, retention, recall, & keenness of discernment. Just as an archer with a good bow—trained, dexterous, & practiced—could easily shoot a light arrow across the shadow of a palmyra tree, they—endowed with that great an extent of mindfulness, that great an extent of retention, that great an extent of recall, & that keenness of discernment—would ask me one question after another on the four establishings of mindfulness. And I, asked again & again, would answer. Answered, they would remember what I had answered, and they wouldn’t counter-question me about it a second time. Aside from eating, drinking, chewing, & savoring, aside from urinating & defecating, aside from relieving sleepiness & weariness, there would be no ending of the Tathāgata’s Dhamma teaching, there would be no ending of the Tathāgata’s phrasing of Dhamma statements, there would be no ending of the Tathāgata’s quick-wittedness (in answering) questions; but those four disciples of mine, with their 100-year life span, living for 100 years, would die with the passing of 100 years.10

“Even if you carried me around on a bed, there would be no alteration in the Tathāgata’s keenness of discernment.

“If, when speaking rightly, one were to say of someone, ‘A being not subject to delusion has appeared in the world for the benefit & happiness of many, out of sympathy for the world, for the welfare, benefit, & happiness of devas & human beings,’ he would rightly be speaking of me.”

Now, on that occasion Ven. Nāgasamala11 was standing behind the Blessed One, fanning him. Then he said to the Blessed One, “How amazing, lord! How astounding! How on hearing this Dhamma-explanation my hair stands on end! What, lord, is the name of this Dhamma-explanation?”

“Nāgasamala, because of that, remember this Dhamma-explanation as the ‘Hair-raising Sequence.’”

That is what the Blessed One said. Gratified, Ven. Nāgasamala delighted in the Blessed One’s words.

Notes

1. See MN 105.

2. Mahaggataṁ. This term is used, together with “immeasurable / unlimited,” in the standard description of the awareness generated in the practice of the brahmavihāras (SN 42:8). According to Ven. Anuruddha in MN 127, however, an enlarged mind is not immeasurable. Its range of awareness is larger than the body but still measurable, ranging in distance from the shade of a tree to the earth bounded by the ocean.

3. On the various levels of release, see DN 15, MN 43, and AN 9:43–45.

4. The Dhamma wheel. See SN 56:11. This expression also appears in Iti 112.

5. On the eight emancipations, see DN 15.

6. For more on the Buddha’s engagement with the eight assemblies, see DN 16.

7. Ekāyana magga. This term also appears in MN 10 and DN 22, where the four establishings of mindfulness are said to be an ekāyana magga. For decades, this term was translated as “the only way,” but more recently—beginning with Ven. Ñāṇamoli—translators have noted that the phrase ekāyana magga appears in this series of similes where it reveals its idiomatic sense. For the similes to work, ekāyana magga requires the sense, not of an only way, but of a way that goes to only one destination. In other words, an ekāyana magga is a path that doesn’t fork—one that, as long as you follow it, takes you to a single, inevitable goal.

8. This description of the bodhisatta’s extreme emaciation is identical with the description of his extreme emaciation that resulted from engaging in austerities in his last lifetime. See MN 36.

9. This is the teaching of Makkhali Gosāla. See DN 2.

10. For a discussion of the implications of this passage for an understanding of the establishings of mindfulness, see Right Mindfulness, Chapter 8.

11. See Ud 8:7.

Publisher references (not part of the sutta)

See also: DN 1; MN 77; AN 4:24; AN 4:35; Iti 112