MN 30 — MN 30 The Shorter Heartwood Simile Discourse | Cūḷa Sāropama Sutta

English translation by Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu.

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Text

The Shorter Heartwood Simile Discourse

Cūḷa Sāropama Sutta (MN 30)

I have heard that on one occasion the Blessed One was staying near Sāvatthī in Jeta's Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika's monastery. Then Piṅgalakoccha the brahman 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, "Master Gotama, these contemplatives & brahmans, each with his group, each with his community, each the teacher of his group, an honored leader, well-regarded by people at large—i.e., Pūraṇa Kassapa, Makkhali Gosāla, Ajita Kesakambalin, Pakudha Kaccāyana, Sañjaya Velaṭṭhaputta, & the Nigaṇṭha Nāṭaputta: Do they all have direct knowledge as they themselves claim, or do they all not have direct

knowledge, or do some of them have direct knowledge and some of them not?"

"Enough, brahman. Put this question aside. I will teach you the Dhamma. Listen and pay close attention. I will speak."

"Yes, sir," Piṅgalakoccha the brahman responded to the Blessed One.

The Blessed One said, "Brahman, it's as if a man in need of heartwood, seeking heartwood, wandering in search of heartwood—passing over the heartwood of a great standing tree possessed of heartwood, passing over the sapwood, passing over the inner bark, passing over the outer bark—cutting away the twigs & leaves, were to go off carrying them, thinking, 'heartwood.' A man with good eyesight, seeing him, would say, 'Ah, how this good man didn't know heartwood, didn't know sapwood, didn't know inner bark, didn't know outer bark, didn't know twigs & leaves! That's why he, in need of heartwood, seeking heartwood, wandering in search of heartwood—passing over the heartwood of a great standing tree possessed of heartwood, passing over the sapwood, passing over the inner bark, passing over the outer bark—cutting away the twigs & leaves, went off carrying them, thinking, "heartwood." Whatever heartwood-business he had with heartwood, his purpose won't be served.'

"Or, brahman, it's as if a man in need of heartwood, seeking heartwood, wandering in search of heartwood—passing over the heartwood of a great standing tree possessed of heartwood, passing over the sapwood, passing over the inner bark—cutting away the outer bark, were to go off carrying it, thinking, 'heartwood.' A man with good eyesight, seeing him, would say, 'Ah, how this good man didn't know heartwood, didn't know sapwood, didn't know inner bark, didn't know outer bark, didn't know twigs & leaves! That's why he, in need of heartwood, seeking heartwood, wandering in search of heartwood—passing over the heartwood of a great standing tree possessed of heartwood, passing over the sapwood, passing over the inner bark—cutting away the outer bark, went off carrying it, thinking, "heartwood." Whatever heartwood-business he had with heartwood, his purpose won't be served.'

"Or, brahman, it's as if a man in need of heartwood, seeking heartwood, wandering in search of heartwood—passing over the heartwood of a great standing tree possessed of heartwood, passing over the sapwood—cutting away the inner bark, were to go off carrying it, thinking, 'heartwood.' A man with good eyesight, seeing him, would say, 'Ah, how this good man didn't know heartwood, didn't know sapwood, didn't know inner bark, didn't know outer bark, didn't know twigs & leaves! That's why he, in need of heartwood, seeking heartwood, wandering in search of heartwood—passing over the heartwood of a great standing tree possessed of heartwood, passing over the sapwood—cutting away the inner bark, went off carrying it, thinking, "heartwood." Whatever heartwood-business he had with heartwood, his purpose won't be served.'

"Or, brahman, it's as if a man in need of heartwood, seeking heartwood, wandering in search of heartwood—passing over the heartwood of a great standing tree possessed of heartwood—cutting away the sapwood, were to go off carrying it, thinking, 'heartwood.' A

man with good eyesight, seeing him, would say, 'Ah, how this good man didn't know heartwood, didn't know sapwood, didn't know inner bark, didn't know outer bark, didn't know twigs & leaves! That's why he, in need of heartwood, seeking heartwood, wandering in search of heartwood—passing over the heartwood of a great standing tree possessed of heartwood—cutting away the sapwood, went off carrying it, thinking, "heartwood." Whatever heartwood-business he had with heartwood, his purpose won't be served.'

"Or, brahman, it's as if a man in need of heartwood, seeking heartwood, wandering in search of heartwood, cutting away just the heartwood of a great standing tree possessed of heartwood, were to go off carrying it, knowing, 'heartwood.' A man with good eyesight, seeing him, would say, 'Ah, how this good man did know heartwood, did know sapwood, did know inner bark, did know outer bark, did know twigs & leaves! That's why he, in need of heartwood, seeking heartwood, wandering in search of heartwood, cutting away just the heartwood of a great standing tree possessed of heartwood, went off carrying it, knowing, "heartwood." Whatever heartwood-business he had with heartwood, his purpose will be served.'

"In the same way, brahman, there is the case where a certain son of good family,1 out of conviction, goes forth from the home life into homelessness, (thinking,) 'I am beset by birth, by aging-&-death, by sorrows, lamentations, pains, distresses, & despairs, beset by stress, overcome with stress. Perhaps the end of this entire mass of stress might be discerned!' Having thus gone forth, he encounters gain, offerings, & fame. He is gratified with that gain, offerings, & fame, his resolve fulfilled. Because of that gain, offerings, & fame he exalts himself and disparages others: 'I am a person with gain, offerings, & fame, but these other monks are unknown & of little influence.' He doesn't generate desire or exert himself for the realization of those qualities that are higher & more sublime than gain, offerings, & fame. He is drooping & lax.

"Just like the man who, in need of heartwood, seeking heartwood, wandering in search of heartwood—passing over the heartwood of a great standing tree possessed of heartwood, passing over the sapwood, passing over the inner bark, passing over the outer bark—cutting away the twigs & leaves, went off carrying them, thinking, 'heartwood': Whatever heartwood-business he had with heartwood, his purpose won't be served. This individual, I tell you, is similar to that.

"And further, there is the case where an individual, out of conviction, goes forth from the home life into homelessness, (thinking,) '...Perhaps the end of this entire mass of stress might be discerned!' Having thus gone forth, he encounters gain, offerings, & fame. He is not gratified with that gain, offerings, & fame, his resolve not fulfilled. He generates desire & exerts himself for the realization of those qualities that are higher & more sublime than gain, offerings, & fame. He is not drooping or lax. He achieves consummation in virtue. He is gratified with that consummation in virtue, his resolve fulfilled. Because of that consummation in virtue he exalts himself and disparages others: 'I am a person of virtue, with fine qualities, but these other monks are unvirtuous, with evil qualities.' He doesn't generate desire or exert himself for the realization of those qualities that are higher & more sublime than consummation in virtue. He is drooping & lax.

“Just like the man who, in need of heartwood, seeking heartwood, wandering in search of heartwood—passing over the heartwood of a great standing tree possessed of heartwood, passing over the sapwood, passing over the inner bark—cutting away the outer bark, went off carrying it, thinking, ‘heartwood’: Whatever heartwood-business he had with heartwood, his purpose won’t be served. This individual, I tell you, is similar to that.

“And further, there is the case where an individual, out of conviction, goes forth from the home life into homelessness, (thinking,) ‘…Perhaps the end of this entire mass of stress might be discerned!’ Having thus gone forth, he encounters gain, offerings, & fame. He is not gratified with that gain, offerings, & fame, his resolve not fulfilled. Because of that gain, offerings, & fame he does not exalt himself or disparage others. He generates desire & exerts himself for the realization of those qualities that are higher & more sublime than gain, offerings, & fame. He is not drooping or lax. He achieves consummation in virtue. He is gratified with that consummation in virtue, but his resolve is not fulfilled. Because of that consummation in virtue he does not exalt himself or disparage others. He generates desire & exerts himself for the realization of those qualities that are higher & more sublime than consummation in virtue. He is not drooping or lax. He achieves consummation in concentration. He is gratified with that consummation in concentration, his resolve fulfilled. Because of that consummation in concentration he exalts himself and disparages others: ‘I am concentrated, my mind at singleness, but these other monks are unconcentrated, their minds scattered.’ He doesn’t generate desire or exert himself for the realization of those qualities that are higher & more sublime than consummation in concentration. He is drooping & lax.

“Just like the man who, in need of heartwood, seeking heartwood, wandering in search of heartwood—passing over the heartwood of a great standing tree possessed of heartwood, passing over the sapwood—cutting away the inner bark, went off carrying it, thinking, ‘heartwood’: Whatever heartwood-business he had with heartwood, his purpose won’t be served. This individual, I tell you, is similar to that.

“And further, there is the case where an individual, out of conviction, goes forth from the home life into homelessness, (thinking,) ‘I am beset by birth, by aging-&-death, by sorrows, lamentations, pains, distresses, & despairs, beset by stress, overcome with stress. Perhaps the end of this entire mass of stress might be discerned!’ Having thus gone forth, he encounters gain, offerings, & fame. He is not gratified with that gain, offerings, & fame, his resolve not fulfilled. Because of that gain, offerings, & fame he does not exalt himself or disparage others. He generates desire & exerts himself for the realization of those qualities that are higher & more sublime than gain, offerings, & fame. He is not drooping or lax. He achieves consummation in virtue. He is gratified with that consummation in virtue, but his resolve is not fulfilled. Because of that consummation in virtue he does not exalt himself or disparage others. He generates desire & exerts himself for the realization of those qualities that are higher & more sublime than consummation in virtue. He is not drooping or lax. He achieves consummation in concentration. He is gratified with that consummation in concentration, but his resolve is not fulfilled. Because of that consummation in concentration he does not exalt himself or disparage others. He generates desire & exerts himself for the realization of those qualities that are higher &

more sublime than consummation in concentration. He is not drooping or lax. He achieves knowledge & vision. He is gratified with that knowledge & vision, his resolve fulfilled. Because of that knowledge & vision he exalts himself and disparages others: 'I dwell knowing & seeing, but these other monks dwell not knowing & not seeing.' He doesn't generate desire or exert himself for the realization of those qualities that are higher & more sublime than knowledge & vision. He is drooping & lax.

"Just like the man who, in need of heartwood, seeking heartwood, wandering in search of heartwood—passing over the heartwood of a great standing tree possessed of heartwood—cutting away the sapwood, went off carrying it, thinking, 'heartwood': Whatever heartwood-business he had with heartwood, his purpose won't be served. This individual, I tell you, is similar to that.

"And further, there is the case where an individual, out of conviction, goes forth from the home life into homelessness, (thinking,) 'I am beset by birth, by aging-&-death, by sorrows, lamentations, pains, distresses, & despairs, beset by stress, overcome with stress. Perhaps the end of this entire mass of stress might be discerned!' Having thus gone forth, he encounters gain, offerings, & fame. He is not gratified with that gain, offerings, & fame, his resolve not fulfilled. Because of that gain, offerings, & fame he does not exalt himself or disparage others. He generates desire & exerts himself for the realization of those qualities that are higher & more sublime than gain, offerings, & fame. He is not drooping or lax. He achieves consummation in virtue. He is gratified with that consummation in virtue, but his resolve is not fulfilled. Because of that consummation in virtue does not exalt himself or disparage others. He generates desire & exerts himself for the realization of those qualities that are higher & more sublime than consummation in virtue. He is not drooping or lax. He achieves consummation in concentration. He is gratified with that consummation in concentration, but his resolve is not fulfilled. Because of that consummation in concentration he does not exalt himself or disparage others. He generates desire & exerts himself for the realization of those qualities that are higher & more sublime than consummation in concentration. He is not drooping or lax. He achieves knowledge & vision. He is gratified with that knowledge & vision, but his resolve is not fulfilled. Because of that knowledge & vision he does not exalt himself or disparage others. He generates desire & exerts himself for the realization of those qualities that are higher & more sublime than knowledge & vision. He is not drooping or lax.

"And which, brahman, are the qualities that are higher & more sublime than knowledge & vision?

"There is the case where a monk—quite secluded from sensuality, secluded from unskillful qualities—enters & remains in the first jhāna: rapture & pleasure born of seclusion, accompanied by directed thought & evaluation. This is a quality higher & more sublime than knowledge & vision.2

"And further, with the stilling of directed thoughts & evaluations, he enters & remains in the second jhāna: rapture & pleasure born of concentration, unification of awareness free from directed thought & evaluation—internal assurance. This too is a quality higher &

more sublime than knowledge & vision.

“And further, with the fading of rapture, he remains equanimous, mindful, & alert, and senses pleasure with the body. He enters & remains in the third jhāna, of which the noble ones declare, ‘Equanimous & mindful, he has a pleasant abiding.’ This too is a quality higher & more sublime than knowledge & vision.

“And further, with the abandoning of pleasure & stress—as with the earlier disappearance of joys & distresses—he enters & remains in the fourth jhāna: purity of equanimity & mindfulness, neither-pleasure-nor-pain. This too is a quality higher & more sublime than knowledge & vision.

“And further, with the complete transcending of perceptions of (physical) form, with the disappearance of perceptions of resistance, and not attending to perceptions of multiplicity, (perceiving,) ‘Infinite space,’ he enters & remains in the dimension of the infinitude of space. This too is a quality higher & more sublime than knowledge & vision.

“And further, with the complete transcending of the dimension of the infinitude of space, (perceiving,) ‘Infinite consciousness,’ he enters & remains in the dimension of the infinitude of consciousness. This too is a quality higher & more sublime than knowledge & vision.

“And further, with the complete transcending of the dimension of the infinitude of consciousness, (perceiving,) ‘There is nothing,’ he enters & remains in the dimension of nothingness. This too is a quality higher & more sublime than knowledge & vision.

“And further, with the complete transcending of the dimension of nothingness, he enters & remains in the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception. This too is a quality higher & more sublime than knowledge & vision.

“And further, with the complete transcending of the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception, he enters & remains in the cessation of perception & feeling. And, having seen (that) with discernment, his effluents are completely ended. This too is a quality higher & more sublime than knowledge & vision.

“These are the qualities higher & more sublime than knowledge & vision.

“Just like the man who, in need of heartwood, seeking heartwood, wandering in search of heartwood, cutting away just the heartwood of a great standing tree possessed of heartwood, went off carrying it, knowing, ‘heartwood’: Whatever heartwood-business he had with heartwood, his purpose will be served. This individual, I tell you, is similar to that.

“Brahman, this holy life doesn’t have as its reward gain, offerings, & fame, doesn’t have as its reward consummation of virtue, doesn’t have as its reward consummation of concentration, doesn’t have as its reward knowledge & vision, but the unprovoked3 awareness-release: That is the purpose of this holy life, that is its heartwood, that its final

end.”

When this was said, Piṅgalakoccha the brahman said to the Blessed One: “Magnificent, lord! Magnificent! Just as if he were to place upright what was overturned, to reveal what was hidden, to show the way to one who was lost, or to carry a lamp into the dark so that those with eyes could see forms, in the same way has the Blessed One—through many lines of reasoning—made the Dhamma clear. I go to the Blessed One for refuge, to the Dhamma, and to the Saṅgha of monks. May the Blessed One remember me as a lay follower who has gone to him for refuge, from this day forward, for life.”

Notes

1. Here I follow the Thai edition, which reads “son of good family” in this instance, and “individual” in all the remaining instances. Both the Sri Lankan and the Burmese editions read “individual” here and in all the remaining instances.

2. The Commentary explains that the first jhāna is listed as higher than knowledge & vision here because it is being presented in its role as a step toward cessation. The same principle holds for the other stages of concentration up through the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception.

3. Akuppa. See MN 29, note 3.

Publisher references (not part of the sutta)

See also: MN 43; SN 17:3; SN 17:5; SN 17:8; AN 8:7; AN 8:8; AN 10:58