MN 36 — MN 36 The Longer Discourse to Saccaka | Mahā Saccaka Sutta

English translation by Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu.

Source: https://www.dhammatalks.org/suttas/MN/MN36.html

Source revision: sha256:06db98f11dbe5b66e3b290b0f8bcaa44ec5f2fe3d1e1b74062fcf0baea044036

License: CC-BY-NC-4.0 — https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/

License URL: https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/

Copyright: Copyright 2014 Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu, Revised edition 2017

License notice: Copyright 2014 Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu, Revised edition 2017 This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 Unported. To see a copy of this license visit http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/. “Commercial” shall mean any sale, whether for commercial or non-profit purposes or entities. Questions about this book may be addressed to Metta Forest Monastery Valley Center, CA 92082-1409 U.S.A. Additional resources More Dhamma talks, books and translations by Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu are available to download in digital audio and various ebook formats at dhammatalks.org. Printed copy A paperback copy of this book is available free of charge. To request one, write to: Book Request, Metta Forest Monastery, PO Box 1409, Valley Center, CA 92082 USA.

Attribution: From Handful of Leaves, Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu; https://www.dhammatalks.org/Archive/Writings/Ebooks/SuttaPitaka_251113.epub. Copyright 2014 Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu, Revised edition 2017 This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 Unported. To see a copy of this license visit http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/. “Commercial” shall mean any sale, whether for commercial or non-profit purposes or entities. Questions about this book may be addressed to Metta Forest Monastery Valley Center, CA 92082-1409 U.S.A. Additional resources More Dhamma talks, books and translations by Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu are available to download in digital audio and various ebook formats at dhammatalks.org. Printed copy A paperback copy of this book is available free of charge. To request one, write to: Book Request, Metta Forest Monastery, PO Box 1409, Valley Center, CA 92082 USA.

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

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

Text

The Longer Discourse to Saccaka

Mahā Saccaka Sutta (MN 36)

I have heard that on one occasion the Blessed One was staying near Vesālī, at the Gabled Hall in the Great Forest. And on that occasion, early in the morning, he had adjusted his lower robe and was taking his bowl & outer robe, planning to enter Vesālī for alms.

Then Saccaka, a Nigaṇṭha [Jain], while walking and wandering around to exercise his legs, went to the Gabled Hall in the Great Forest. Ven. Ānanda saw him coming from afar and, on seeing him, said to the Blessed One, “Venerable sir, here comes Saccaka the Nigaṇṭha: a debater, a sophist, well-regarded by people at large. He is intent on the disparagement

of the Buddha, the disparagement of the Dhamma, the disparagement of the Saṅgha. It would be good if the Blessed One would sit down for a moment, out of sympathy (for him).” So the Blessed One sat down on a prepared seat. Then Saccaka the Nigaṇṭha went to the Blessed One and, on arrival, exchanged courteous greetings with him. After an exchange of friendly greetings & courtesies, he sat to one side.

As he was sitting there he said to the Blessed One, “There are, Master Gotama, some contemplatives & brahmans who live committed to the development of the body but not to the development of the mind. They are touched by bodily painful feeling. It has happened in the past that when one (of them) was touched by bodily painful feeling, his thighs would grow rigid, his heart would burst, hot blood would gush from his mouth, he would go mad, out of his mind. His mind was thus subservient to his body and fell under the power of the body. Why was that? A lack of development of the mind.

“Then there are some contemplatives & brahmans who live committed to the development of the mind but not to the development of the body. They are touched by mental painful feeling. It has happened in the past that when one (of them) was touched by mental painful feeling, his thighs would grow rigid, his heart would burst, hot blood would gush from his mouth, he would go mad, out of his mind. His body was thus subservient to his mind and fell under the power of the mind. Why was that? A lack of development of the body. The thought has occurred to me that the disciples of Gotama the contemplative live committed to the development of the mind but not to the development of the body.”

“But what have you learned, Aggivessana, about the development of the body?”

“There are, for example, Nanda Vaccha, Kisa Saṅkicca, and Makkhali Gosāla. They are cloth-less1 ascetics, rejecting conventions, licking their hands, not coming when called, not staying when asked. They don’t consent to food brought to them or food dedicated to them or to an invitation to a meal. They accept nothing from the mouth of a pot or from the mouth of a bowl. They accept 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 is announced that food is to be distributed, from where a dog is waiting or flies are buzzing. They take no fish or meat. They drink no liquor, wine, or fermented drink. They limit themselves to one house & one morsel a day, or two houses & two morsels… seven houses & seven morsels. They live on one saucerful a day, two… seven saucerfuls a day. They take food once a day, once every two days… once every seven days, and so on up to a fortnight, devoted to regulating their intake of food.”

“But, Aggivessana, do they survive just on that?”

“No, Master Gotama. Sometimes they eat outstanding staple foods, chew on outstanding non-staple foods, taste outstanding delicacies, and drink outstanding drinks. They rescue the body & its strength, fortify it, and fatten it.”

“What they earlier abandoned, Aggivessana, they later gather up. This is how there is decrease & increase of the body. But what have you learned, Aggivessana, about the

development of the mind?”

Yet Saccaka the Nigaṇṭha, when asked by the Blessed One about the development of the mind, was unable to respond.

Then the Blessed One said to Saccaka, “The ones you described just now as developed in the development of the body: That is not legitimate development of the body in the discipline of the noble ones. As you don’t understand the development of the body, from where would you understand the development of the mind? Nevertheless, as to how one is undeveloped in body and undeveloped in mind, and developed in body and developed in mind, listen and pay close attention. I will speak.”

“As you say, Master Gotama,” Saccaka responded.

The Blessed One said, “And how is one undeveloped in body and undeveloped in mind? There is the case where a pleasant feeling arises in an uneducated run-of-the-mill person. On being touched by the pleasant feeling, he becomes impassioned with pleasure, and is reduced to being impassioned with pleasure. His pleasant feeling ceases. With the cessation of the pleasant feeling there arises a painful feeling. On being touched with the painful feeling, he sorrows, grieves, & laments, beats his breast, becomes distraught. When that pleasant feeling had arisen in him, it invaded his mind and remained because of his lack of development of the body. When that painful feeling had arisen in him, it invaded his mind and remained because of his lack of development of the mind. This is how one is undeveloped in body and undeveloped in mind.

“And how is one developed in body and developed in mind? There is the case where a pleasant feeling arises in a well-educated disciple of the noble ones. On being touched by the pleasant feeling, he doesn’t become impassioned with pleasure, and is not reduced to being impassioned with pleasure. His pleasant feeling ceases. With the cessation of the pleasant feeling there arises a painful feeling. On being touched with the painful feeling, he doesn’t sorrow, grieve, or lament, beat his breast or become distraught. When that pleasant feeling had arisen in him, it didn’t invade his mind and remain because of his development of the body. When that painful feeling had arisen in him, it didn’t invade his mind and remain because of his development of the mind. This is how one is developed in body and developed in mind.”

“I have confidence in Master Gotama that Master Gotama is developed in body and developed in mind.”

“Well, Aggivessana, you are certainly being rude & presumptuous in making this statement, but still I will respond to you.2 Ever since I shaved my hair & beard, put on the ochre robe, and went forth from the home life into homelessness, it has not been possible for a pleasant feeling that has arisen to invade my mind and remain, or for a painful feeling that has arisen to invade my mind and remain.”

“But perhaps there has never arisen in Master Gotama the sort of pleasant feeling that, having arisen, would invade the mind and remain. Perhaps there has never arisen in Master Gotama the sort of painful feeling that, having arisen, would invade the mind and remain.”3

“Why wouldn’t it have, Aggivessana? Before my self-awakening, when I was still just an unawakened bodhisatta, the thought occurred to me: ‘Household life is confining, a dusty path. Life gone forth is the open air. It isn’t easy, living in a home, to practice the holy life totally perfect, totally pure, a polished shell. What if I, having shaved off my hair & beard and putting on the ochre robe, were to go forth from the household life into homelessness?’

“So at a later time, when I was still young, black-haired, endowed with the blessings of youth in the first stage of life, having shaved off my hair & beard—though my parents wished otherwise and were grieving with tears on their faces—I put on the ochre robe and went forth from the home life into homelessness.

“Having gone forth in search of what might be skillful, seeking the unexcelled state of sublime peace, I went to Āḷāra Kālāma and, on arrival, said to him: ‘Friend Kālāma, I want to practice in this Dhamma & discipline.’

“When this was said, he replied to me, ‘You may stay here, my friend. This Dhamma is such that an observant person can soon enter & dwell in his own teacher’s knowledge, having realized it for himself through direct knowledge.’

“It wasn’t long before I quickly learned that Dhamma. As far as mere lip-reciting & repetition, I could speak the words of knowledge, the words of the elders, and I could affirm that I knew & saw—I, along with others.

“I thought: ‘It isn’t through mere conviction alone that Āḷāra Kālāma declares, “I have entered & dwell in this Dhamma, having realized it for myself through direct knowledge.” Certainly he dwells knowing & seeing this Dhamma.’ So I went to him and said, ‘To what extent do you declare that you have entered & dwell in this Dhamma?’ When this was said, he declared the dimension of nothingness.

“I thought: ‘Not only does Āḷāra Kālāma have conviction, persistence, mindfulness, concentration, & discernment. I, too, have conviction, persistence, mindfulness, concentration, & discernment. What if I were to endeavor to realize for myself the Dhamma that Āḷāra Kālāma declares he has entered & dwells in, having realized it for himself through direct knowledge.’ So it wasn’t long before I quickly entered & dwelled in that Dhamma, having realized it for myself through direct knowledge. I went to him and said, ‘Friend Kālāma, is this the extent to which you have entered & dwell in this Dhamma, having realized it for yourself through direct knowledge?’

“‘Yes, my friend….’

"'This, friend, is the extent to which I, too, have entered & dwell in this Dhamma, having realized it for myself through direct knowledge.'

"'It's a gain for us, my friend, a great gain for us, that we have such a companion in the holy life. So the Dhamma I declare I have entered & dwell in, having realized it for myself through direct knowledge, is the Dhamma you declare you have entered & dwell in, having realized it for yourself through direct knowledge. And the Dhamma you declare you have entered & dwell in, having realized it for yourself through direct knowledge, is the Dhamma I declare I have entered & dwell in, having realized it for myself through direct knowledge. The Dhamma I know is the Dhamma you know; the Dhamma you know is the Dhamma I know. As I am, so are you; as you are, so am I. Come friend, let us now lead this community together.'

"In this way did Āḷāra Kālāma, my teacher, place me, his pupil, on the same level with himself and pay me great honor. But the thought occurred to me, 'This Dhamma leads not to disenchantment, to dispassion, to cessation, to stilling, to direct knowledge, to self-awakening, nor to unbinding, but only to reappearance in the dimension of nothingness.' So, dissatisfied with that Dhamma, I left.

"In search of what might be skillful, seeking the unexcelled state of sublime peace, I went to Uddaka Rāmaputta and, on arrival, said to him: 'Friend Uddaka, I want to practice in this Dhamma & discipline.'

"When this was said, he replied to me, 'You may stay here, my friend. This doctrine is such that an observant person can soon enter & dwell in his own teacher's knowledge, having realized it for himself through direct knowledge.'

"It wasn't long before I quickly learned that Dhamma. As far as mere lip-reciting & repetition, I could speak the words of knowledge, the words of the elders, and I could affirm that I knew & saw—I, along with others.

"I thought: 'It wasn't through mere conviction alone that Rāma declared, "I have entered & dwell in this Dhamma, having realized it for myself through direct knowledge." Certainly he dwelled knowing & seeing this Dhamma.' So I went to Uddaka and said, 'To what extent did Rāma declare that he had entered & dwelled in this Dhamma?' When this was said, Uddaka declared the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception.

"I thought: 'Not only did Rāma have conviction, persistence, mindfulness, concentration, & discernment. I, too, have conviction, persistence, mindfulness, concentration, & discernment. What if I were to endeavor to realize for myself the Dhamma that Rāma declared he entered & dwelled in, having realized it for himself through direct knowledge.' So it wasn't long before I quickly entered & dwelled in that Dhamma, having realized it for myself through direct knowledge. I went to Uddaka and said, 'Friend Uddaka, is this the extent to which Rāma entered & dwelled in this Dhamma, having realized it for himself through direct knowledge?'

“‘Yes, my friend….’

“‘This, friend, is the extent to which I, too, have entered & dwell in this Dhamma, having realized it for myself through direct knowledge.’

“‘It’s a gain for us, my friend, a great gain for us, that we have such a companion in the holy life. So the Dhamma Rāma declared he entered & dwelled in, having realized it for himself through direct knowledge, is the Dhamma you declare you have entered & dwell in, having realized it for yourself through direct knowledge. And the Dhamma you declare you have entered & dwell in, having realized it for yourself through direct knowledge, is the Dhamma Rāma declared he entered & dwelled in, having realized it for himself through direct knowledge. The Dhamma he knew is the Dhamma you know; the Dhamma you know is the Dhamma he knew. As he was, so are you; as you are, so was he. Come friend, lead this community.’

“In this way did Uddaka Rāmaputta, my companion in the holy life, place me in the position of teacher and pay me great honor. But the thought occurred to me, ‘This Dhamma leads not to disenchantment, to dispassion, to cessation, to stilling, to direct knowledge, to self-awakening, nor to unbinding, but only to reappearance in the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception.’ So, dissatisfied with that Dhamma, I left.

“In search of what might be skillful, seeking the unexcelled state of sublime peace, I wandered by stages in the Magadhan country and came to the military town of Uruvelā. There I saw some delightful countryside, with an inspiring forest grove, a clear-flowing river with fine, delightful banks, and villages for alms-going on all sides. The thought occurred to me: ‘How delightful is this countryside, with its inspiring forest grove, clear-flowing river with fine, delightful banks, and villages for alms-going on all sides. This is just right for the striving of a clansman intent on striving.’ So I sat down right there, thinking, ‘This is just right for striving.’

“Then these three similes—spontaneous, never before heard—appeared to me. Suppose there were a wet, sappy piece of timber lying in the water, and a man were to come along with an upper fire-stick, thinking, ‘I’ll produce fire. I’ll make heat appear.’ Now what do you think? Would he be able to produce fire and make heat appear by rubbing the upper fire-stick in the wet, sappy timber lying in the water?”

“No, Master Gotama. Why is that? Because the timber is wet & sappy, and besides it is lying in the water. Eventually the man would reap only his share of weariness & disappointment.”

“So it is with any contemplative or brahman who does not live withdrawn from sensuality in body & mind, and whose desire, infatuation, urge, thirst, & fever for sensuality is not relinquished & stilled within him: Whether or not he feels painful, racking, piercing feelings (due to his striving for awakening), he is incapable of knowledge, vision, & unexcelled self-awakening. This was the first simile—spontaneous, never before heard—that appeared to me.

“Then a second simile—spontaneous, never before heard—appeared to me. Suppose there were a wet, sappy piece of timber lying on land far from water, and a man were to come along with an upper fire-stick, thinking, ‘I’ll produce fire. I’ll make heat appear.’ Now what do you think? Would he be able to produce fire and make heat appear by rubbing the upper fire-stick in the wet, sappy timber lying on land far from water?”

“No, Master Gotama. Why is that? Because the timber is wet & sappy, even though it is lying on land far from water. Eventually the man would reap only his share of weariness & disappointment.”

“So it is with any contemplative or brahman who lives withdrawn from sensuality in body only, but whose desire, infatuation, urge, thirst, & fever for sensuality is not relinquished & stilled within him: Whether or not he feels painful, racking, piercing feelings (due to his striving), he is incapable of knowledge, vision, & unexcelled self-awakening. This was the second simile—spontaneous, never before heard—that appeared to me.

“Then a third simile—spontaneous, never before heard—appeared to me. Suppose there were a dry, sapless piece of timber lying on land far from water, and a man were to come along with an upper fire-stick, thinking, ‘I’ll produce fire. I’ll make heat appear.’ Now what do you think? Would he be able to produce fire and make heat appear by rubbing the upper fire-stick in the dry, sapless timber lying on land?”

“Yes, Master Gotama. Why is that? Because the timber is dry & sapless, and besides it is lying on land far from water.”

“So it is with any contemplative or brahman who lives withdrawn from sensuality in body & mind, and whose desire, infatuation, urge, thirst, & fever for sensuality is relinquished & stilled within him: Whether or not he feels painful, racking, piercing feelings (due to his striving), he is capable of knowledge, vision, & unexcelled self-awakening. This was the third simile—spontaneous, never before heard—that appeared to me.

“I thought: ‘What if I, clenching my teeth and pressing my tongue against the roof of my mouth, were to beat down, constrain, & crush my mind with my awareness?’ So, clenching my teeth and pressing my tongue against the roof of my mouth, I beat down, constrained, & crushed my mind with my awareness. Just as a strong man, seizing a weaker man by the head or the throat or the shoulders, would beat him down, constrain, & crush him, in the same way I beat down, constrained, & crushed my mind with my awareness. As I did so, sweat poured from my armpits. And although tireless persistence was aroused in me, and unmuddled mindfulness established, my body was aroused & uncalm because of the painful exertion, being harassed by the exertion. But the painful feeling that arose in this way did not invade my mind or remain.

“I thought: ‘What if I were to become absorbed in the trance of non-breathing?’ So I stopped the in-breaths & out-breaths in my nose & mouth. As I did so, there was a loud roaring of winds coming out my earholes, just like the loud roar of winds coming out of a smith’s bellows.... So I stopped the in-breaths & out-breaths in my nose & mouth & ears. As

I did so, extreme forces sliced through my head, just as if a strong man were slicing my head open with a sharp sword.... Extreme pains arose in my head, just as if a strong man were tightening a turban made of tough leather straps around my head.... Extreme forces carved up my stomach cavity, just as if a butcher or his apprentice were to carve up the stomach cavity of an ox.... There was an extreme burning in my body, just as if two strong men, grabbing a weaker man by the arms, were to roast & broil him over a pit of hot embers. And although tireless persistence was aroused in me, and unmuddled mindfulness established, my body was aroused & uncalm because of the painful exertion, being harassed by the exertion. But the painful feeling that arose in this way did not invade my mind or remain.

"Devas, on seeing me, said, 'Gotama the contemplative is dead.' Other devas said, 'He isn't dead, he's dying.' Others said, 'He's neither dead nor dying, he's an arahant, for this is the way arahants live.'

"I thought: 'What if I were to practice going altogether without food?' Then devas came to me and said, 'Dear sir, please don't practice going altogether without food. If you go altogether without food, we'll infuse divine nourishment in through your pores, and you will survive on that.' I thought, 'If I were to claim to be completely fasting while these devas are infusing divine nourishment in through my pores, I would be lying.' So I dismissed them, saying, 'Enough.'

"I thought: 'What if I were to take only a little food at a time, only a handful at a time of bean soup, lentil soup, vetch soup, or pea soup?' So I took only a little food at a time, only a handful at a time of bean soup, lentil soup, vetch soup, or pea soup. 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.... Simply from my 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, simply from eating so little.

"People on seeing me would say, 'Gotama the contemplative is black.' Other people would say, 'Gotama the contemplative isn't black, he's brown.' Others would say, 'Gotama the contemplative is neither black nor brown, he's golden-skinned.' So much had the clear, bright color of my skin deteriorated, simply from eating so little.

"I thought: 'Whatever contemplatives or brahmans in the past have felt painful, racking, piercing feelings due to their striving, this is the utmost. None have been greater than this. Whatever contemplatives or brahmans in the future will feel painful, racking, piercing feelings due to their striving, this is the utmost. None will be greater than this. Whatever

contemplatives or brahmans in the present are feeling painful, racking, piercing feelings due to their striving, this is the utmost. None is greater than this. But with this racking practice of austerities I haven't attained any superior human state, any distinction in knowledge or vision worthy of the noble ones. Could there be another path to awakening?'

"I thought: 'I recall once, when my father the Sakyan was working, and I was sitting in the cool shade of a rose-apple tree, then—quite secluded from sensuality, secluded from unskillful qualities—I entered & remained in the first jhāna: rapture & pleasure born of seclusion, accompanied by directed thought & evaluation. Could that be the path to awakening?' Then there was the consciousness following on that memory: 'That is the path to awakening.' I thought: 'So why am I afraid of that pleasure that has nothing to do with sensuality, nothing to do with unskillful qualities?' I thought: 'I am no longer afraid of that pleasure that has nothing to do with sensuality, nothing to do with unskillful qualities, but that pleasure is not easy to achieve with a body so extremely emaciated. What if I were to take some solid food: some rice & porridge?' So I took some solid food: some rice & porridge. Now five monks had been attending on me, thinking, 'If Gotama, our contemplative, achieves some higher state, he will tell us.' But when they saw me taking some solid food—some rice & porridge—they were disgusted and left me, thinking, 'Gotama the contemplative is living luxuriously. He has abandoned his exertion and is backsliding into abundance.'

"So when I had taken solid food and regained strength, then—quite secluded from sensuality, secluded from unskillful qualities, I entered & remained in the first jhāna: rapture & pleasure born of seclusion, accompanied by directed thought & evaluation. But the pleasant feeling that arose in this way did not invade my mind or remain. With the stilling of directed thoughts & evaluations, I entered & remained in the second jhāna: rapture & pleasure born of concentration, unification of awareness free from directed thought & evaluation—internal assurance. But the pleasant feeling that arose in this way did not invade my mind or remain. With the fading of rapture I remained equanimous, mindful, & alert, and sensed pleasure with the body. I entered & remained in the third jhāna, of which the noble ones declare, 'Equanimous & mindful, he has a pleasant abiding.' But the pleasant feeling that arose in this way did not invade my mind or remain. With the abandoning of pleasure & pain—as with the earlier disappearance of elation & distress—I entered & remained in the fourth jhāna: purity of equanimity & mindfulness, neither pleasure nor pain. But the pleasant feeling that arose in this way did not invade my mind or remain.

"When the mind was thus concentrated, purified, bright, unblemished, rid of defilement, pliant, malleable, steady, & attained to imperturbability, I directed it to the knowledge of recollecting my past lives. I recollected my 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 I recollected my manifold past lives in their modes & details.

"This was the first knowledge I attained in the first watch of the night. Ignorance was destroyed; knowledge arose; darkness was destroyed; light arose—as happens in one who is heedful, ardent, & resolute. But the pleasant feeling that arose in this way did not invade my mind or remain.

"When the mind was thus concentrated, purified, bright, unblemished, rid of defilement, pliant, malleable, steady, & attained to imperturbability, I directed it to the knowledge of the passing away & reappearance of beings. I saw—by means of the divine eye, purified & surpassing the human—beings passing away & re-appearing, and I discerned how they are inferior & superior, beautiful & ugly, fortunate & unfortunate in accordance with their kamma: 'These beings—who were endowed with bad conduct of body, speech, & mind, who reviled the noble ones, held wrong views and undertook actions under the influence of wrong views—with the break-up of the body, after death, have re-appeared in 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 the noble ones, who held right views and undertook actions under the influence of right views—with the break-up of the body, after death, have re-appeared in a good destinations, a heavenly world.' Thus—by means of the divine eye, purified & surpassing the human—I saw beings passing away & re-appearing, and I discerned how they are inferior & superior, beautiful & ugly, fortunate & unfortunate in accordance with their kamma.

"This was the second knowledge I attained in the second watch of the night. Ignorance was destroyed; knowledge arose; darkness was destroyed; light arose—as happens in one who is heedful, ardent, & resolute. But the pleasant feeling that arose in this way did not invade my mind or remain.

"When the mind was thus concentrated, purified, bright, unblemished, rid of defilement, pliant, malleable, steady, & attained to imperturbability, I directed it to the knowledge of the ending of the mental effluents. I directly knew, as it had come to be, that 'This is stress... This is the origination of stress... This is the cessation of stress... This is the way leading to the cessation of stress... These are effluents... This is the origination of effluents... This is the cessation of effluents... This is the way leading to the cessation of effluents.' My heart, thus knowing, thus seeing, was released from the effluent of sensuality, released from the effluent of becoming, released from the effluent of ignorance. With release, there was the knowledge, 'Released.' I directly knew that 'Birth is ended, the holy life fulfilled, the task done. There is nothing further for this world.'

"This was the third knowledge I attained in the third watch of the night. Ignorance was destroyed; knowledge arose; darkness was destroyed; light arose—as happens in one who is heedful, ardent, & resolute. But the pleasant feeling that arose in this way did not invade my mind or remain.

“I recall having taught the Dhamma to an assembly of many hundreds, and yet each one of them assumes of me, ‘Gotama the contemplative is teaching the Dhamma attacking just me,’ but it shouldn’t be seen in that way. The Tathāgata rightly teaches them the Dhamma simply for the purpose of giving knowledge. At the end of that very talk I steady the mind inwardly, settle it, concentrate it, and unify it in the same theme of concentration as before, in which I almost constantly dwell.”

“That is credible for the Master Gotama, as would be the case for one who is worthy & rightly self-awakened. But does the Master Gotama recall sleeping during the day?”

“I recall, Aggivessana, in the last month of the hot season, after the meal, returning from my almsround, setting out my outer robe folded in four, lying down on my right side, and falling asleep while mindful & alert.”

“There are some contemplatives & brahmans, Master Gotama, who would call that dwelling in delusion.”

“It’s not to that extent that one is deluded or undeluded, Aggivessana. As to how one is deluded or undeluded, listen and pay close attention. I will speak.”

“As you say, Master Gotama,” Saccaka responded.

The Blessed One said: “In whomever the effluents that defile, that lead to renewed becoming, that give trouble, that ripen in stress, and lead to future birth, aging, & death are not abandoned: Him I call deluded. For it is from not abandoning the effluents that one is deluded. In whomever the effluents that defile, that lead to renewed becoming, that give trouble, that ripen in stress, and lead to future birth, aging, & death are abandoned: Him I call undeluded. For it is from abandoning the effluents that one is undeluded. In the Tathāgata, Aggivessana, the effluents that defile, that lead to renewed becoming, that give trouble, that ripen in stress, and lead to future birth, aging, & death have been abandoned, their root destroyed, made like a palmyra stump, deprived of the conditions of development, not destined for future arising. Just as a palmyra cut off at the crown is incapable of further growth, in the same way in the Tathāgata the effluents that defile, that lead to renewed becoming, that give trouble, that ripen in stress, and lead to future birth, aging, & death have been abandoned, their root destroyed, made like a palmyra stump, deprived of the conditions of development, not destined for future arising.”

When this was said, Saccaka the Nigaṇṭha said to the Blessed One: “It’s amazing, Master Gotama. It’s astounding—that when Master Gotama is addressed rudely again & again, is assailed by presumptuous courses of speech, the color of his skin brightens, the color of his face clears, as would be the case with one who is worthy & rightly self-awakened. I recall engaging Pūraṇa Kassapa in debate. He, when engaged in debate by me, spoke evasively and led the discussion astray, displayed irritation, aversion, & peevishness. But when Master Gotama is addressed rudely again & again, is assailed by presumptuous courses of speech, the color of his skin brightens, the color of his face clears, as would be the case with one who is worthy & rightly self-awakened. I recall engaging Makkhali

Gosāla… Ajita Kesakambalin… Pakudha Kaccāyana… Sañjaya Velaṭṭhaputta… Nigaṇṭha Nāṭaputta in debate. He, when engaged in debate by me, spoke evasively and led the discussion astray, displayed irritation, aversion, & peevishness. But when Master Gotama is addressed rudely again & again, is assailed by presumptuous courses of speech, the color of his skin brightens, the color of his face clears, as would be the case with one who is worthy & rightly self-awakened.

“And now, Master Gotama, I am going. Many are my duties, many my responsibilities.”

“Then do, Aggivessana, what you think it is now time to do.”

So Saccaka the Nigaṇṭha, delighting in & approving of the Blessed One’s words, got up from his seat and left.4

Notes

1. Acelaka, sometimes translated as “naked.” However, the description of acelaka ascetics in MN 45 shows that they might wear garments made out of items other than cloth, such as tree bark, antelope hide, strips of antelope hide, kusa-grass garments, bark garments, wood-shaving garments, head-hair garments, animal wool, or owl’s wings.

2. In other words, Saccaka has been impolite not only in asking challenging personal questions about the Buddha, but also excessively familiar in claiming to know about the Buddha’s personal attainments, even though his claim sounds like praise. For other cases in which what sounds like praise is criticized for being presumptuous, see MN 127, AN 3:61 (AN 3:60 in the PTS numbering), and AN 4:35.

3. Saccaka is here implying that the reason the Buddha’s mind has not been invaded by pleasant or painful feelings has nothing to do with any special quality of the Buddha’s mind. Instead, it’s because potentially invasive feelings simply have never arisen in him. This paragraph is mistranslated in both MLS and MLDB.

4. The suttas do not record what happened to Saccaka after this conversation. The Commentary claims that he was reborn many years later in Sri Lanka, where he became an arahant.

Publisher references (not part of the sutta)

See also: MN 4; MN 19; MN 26; SN 36:7; SN 52:10; AN 3:39; AN 4:252