MN 55 — MN 55 To Jīvaka | Jīvaka Sutta

English translation by Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu.

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Text

To Jīvaka

Jīvaka Sutta (MN 55)

I have heard that on one occasion the Blessed One was staying near Rājagaha, in Jīvaka Komārabhacca’s mango grove.1 Then Jīvaka Komārabhacca 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, I have heard it said that ‘They slaughter animals for the sake of Gotama the contemplative. Gotama the contemplative knowingly eats the meat prepared for his sake in dependence on that action.’ Those who say, ‘They slaughter animals for the sake of Gotama the contemplative. Gotama the contemplative knowingly eats the meat prepared for his sake in dependence on that action’: Are they speaking in line with what the Blessed One has said, are they not slandering the Blessed One with what is unfactual,

and are they speaking in line with the Dhamma so that no one whose thinking is in line with the Dhamma would have grounds for criticizing them?"

"Jīvaka, those who say, 'They slaughter animals for the sake of Gotama the contemplative. Gotama the contemplative knowingly eats the meat prepared for his sake in dependence on that action': They are not speaking in line with what I have said, and they are slandering me with what is unfactual.

"I say that there are three instances in which meat should not be consumed: when it is seen, heard, or suspected [that the animal was killed for one's sake].2 These are the three instances in which I say that meat should not be consumed.

"I say that there are three instances in which meat may be consumed: when it is not seen, not heard, and not suspected. These are the three instances in which I say that meat may be consumed.

"There is the case where a monk lives in dependence on a certain village or town. He keeps pervading the first direction [the east] with an awareness imbued with goodwill, likewise the second, likewise the third, likewise the fourth. Thus above, below, & all around, everywhere, in its entirety, he keeps pervading the all-encompassing cosmos with an awareness imbued with goodwill—abundant, enlarged, immeasurable, without hostility, without ill will.

"Then a householder or householder's son, having gone to him, invites him for the next day's meal. If he wants to, he acquiesces. With the ending of the night, early in the morning, having adjusted his under robe and carrying his robes & bowl, he goes to the home of the householder or householder's son. On arrival, he sits down on a seat laid out. The householder or householder's son serves him with exquisite almsfood. The thought doesn't occur to him, 'How good it is that this householder or householder's son serves me with exquisite almsfood! O, if only this householder or householder's son would serve me with exquisite almsfood like this in the future!' That thought doesn't occur to him. He eats that almsfood unattached to it, uninfatuated, guiltless, seeing the drawbacks [of attachment to it], and discerning the escape from them.

"What do you think, Jīvaka? Does that monk on that occasion intend for his own affliction, does he intend for the affliction of others, or does he intend for the affliction of both?"

"No, lord."

"Doesn't the monk on that occasion eat that food blamelessly?"

"Yes, lord. I have heard it said that 'Brahmā dwells in goodwill.' Lord, the Blessed One is my visible witness to that, for the Blessed One dwells in goodwill."

"Jīvaka, any passion, aversion, or delusion by which he would have ill will: That passion, aversion, & delusion have been abandoned by the Tathāgata, their root destroyed, made

like a palmyra stump, deprived of the conditions of development, not destined for future arising. If what you said was in reference to that, I allow it of you."

"What I said was precisely in reference to that, lord."

"There is the case, Jīvaka, where a monk lives in dependence on a certain village or town. He keeps pervading the first direction [the east] with an awareness imbued with compassion... empathetic joy... equanimity, likewise the second, likewise the third, likewise the fourth. Thus above, below, & all around, everywhere, in its entirety, he keeps pervading the all-encompassing cosmos with an awareness imbued with equanimity—abundant, enlarged, immeasurable, without hostility, without ill will.

"Then a householder or householder's son, having gone to him, invites him for the next day's meal. If he wants to, he acquiesces. With the ending of the night, early in the morning, having adjusted his under robe and carrying his robes & bowl, he goes to the home of the householder or householder's son. On arrival, he sits down on a seat laid out. The householder or householder's son serves him with exquisite almsfood. The thought doesn't occur to him, 'How good it is that this householder or householder's son serves me with exquisite almsfood! O, if only this householder or householder's son would serve me with exquisite almsfood like this in the future!' That thought doesn't occur to him. He eats that almsfood unattached to it, uninfatuated, guiltless, seeing the drawbacks [of attachment to it], and discerning the escape from them.

"What do you think, Jīvaka? Does that monk on that occasion intend for his own affliction, does he intend for the affliction of others, or does he intend for the affliction of both?"

"No, lord."

"Doesn't the monk on that occasion eat that food blamelessly?"

"Yes, lord. I have heard it said that 'Brahmā dwells in equanimity.' Lord, the Blessed One is my visible witness to that, for the Blessed One dwells in equanimity."

"Jīvaka, any passion, aversion, or delusion by which he would have annoyance, displeasure, or irritation: That passion, aversion, & delusion have been abandoned by the Tathāgata, their root destroyed, made like a palmyra stump, deprived of the conditions of development, not destined for future arising. If what you said was in reference to that, I allow it of you."

"What I said was precisely in reference to that, lord."

"Jīvaka, whoever slaughters an animal for the sake of the Tathāgata or a disciple of the Tathāgata produces much demerit in five instances.

"When a householder says, 'Go fetch that animal': With this first instance he produces much demerit.

“When the animal, being led along with a rope around its neck, experiences pain & distress: With this second instance he produces much demerit.

“When he says, ‘Go slaughter this animal’: With this third instance he produces much demerit.

“When the animal, being slaughtered, experiences pain & distress: With this fourth instance he produces much demerit.

“When he provides the Tathāgata or a disciple of the Tathāgata with what is unallowable: With this fifth instance he produces much demerit.

“Jīvaka, whoever slaughters an animal for the sake of the Tathāgata or a disciple of the Tathāgata produces much demerit in these five instances.”

When this was said, Jīvaka Komārabhacca said to the Blessed One, “It’s amazing, lord. It’s astounding—how allowable is the food the monks eat! How blameless is the food the monks eat!

“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. Jīvaka, the physician to King Bimbisāra, became the Buddha’s personal physician. His story is told at length in Mv VIII.1.

2. Mv VI.31.14 contains this rule: “One should not knowingly consume meat killed on purpose (for a bhikkhu). Whoever should consume it: an offense of wrong doing. I allow fish and meat that is pure in three respects: One has not seen, heard, or suspected (that it was killed on purpose for a bhikkhu).”

Other rules on the consumption of meat can be found at Mv VI.23.9–15. See also the discussion of staple foods in The Buddhist Monastic Code, volume 1, Chapter 8.

Publisher references (not part of the sutta)

See also: DN 2; AN 4:28; AN 4:37