MN 56 — MN 56 The Teaching to Upāli | Upālivāda Sutta

English translation by Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu.

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Source revision: sha256:06db98f11dbe5b66e3b290b0f8bcaa44ec5f2fe3d1e1b74062fcf0baea044036

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Text

The Teaching to Upāli

Upālivāda Sutta (MN 56)

I have heard that on one occasion the Blessed One was staying near Nālandā in Pāvarika’s mango grove. And on that occasion, the Nigaṇṭha Nāṭaputta was dwelling near Nālandā with a large following of Nigaṇṭhas.

Then Dīgha Tapassin the Nigaṇṭha, after going for alms in Nālanda and returning from his almsround, after his meal went to the Blessed One in Pāvarika’s mango grove. On arrival, he exchanged courteous greetings with the Blessed One. After an exchange of friendly greetings & courtesies, he stood to one side.

As he was standing there, the Blessed One said to him, “There are seats, Dīgha Tapassin. Sit down if you want.” When this was said, Dīgha Tapassin the Nigaṇṭha took a seat and sat to one side.

As he was sitting there, the Blessed One said to him, “How many actions, Dīgha Tapassin, does the Nigaṇṭha Nāṭaputta describe for the making of evil kamma, the production of evil kamma?”

“Friend Gotama, the Nigaṇṭha Nāṭaputta isn’t used to using the term, ‘action.’ He’s used to using the term, ‘rod.’”

“Then how many rods does the Nigaṇṭha Nāṭaputta describe for the making of evil kamma, the production of evil kamma?”

“Three are the rods that the Nigaṇṭha Nāṭaputta describes for the making of evil kamma, the production of evil kamma: the bodily rod, the verbal rod, & the mental rod.”

“And is the bodily rod one thing, the verbal rod another, and the mental rod still another?”

“The bodily rod is one thing, the verbal rod another, and the mental rod still another.”

“And of these three rods—thus analyzed, thus differentiated, Dīgha Tapassin—which rod does the Nigaṇṭha Nāṭaputta describe as the most greatly blameworthy for the making of evil kamma, the production of evil kamma: the bodily rod, the verbal rod, or the mental rod?”

“Of these three rods—thus analyzed, thus differentiated, friend Gotama—the Nigaṇṭha Nāṭaputta describes the bodily rod as the most greatly blameworthy for the making of evil kamma, the production of evil kamma, not so much the verbal rod, not so much the mental rod.”

“Do you say, ‘bodily rod,’ Dīgha Tapassin?”

“I say, ‘bodily rod,’ friend Gotama.”

“Do you say, ‘bodily rod,’ Dīgha Tapassin?”

“I say, ‘bodily rod,’ friend Gotama.”

“Do you say, ‘bodily rod,’ Dīgha Tapassin?”

“I say, ‘bodily rod,’ friend Gotama.”

In this way did the Blessed One get Dīgha Tapassin to assert his position up to three times.

When this was said, Dīgha Tapassin said to the Blessed One, “And what about you, friend Gotama? How many rods do you describe for the making of evil kamma, the production of

evil kamma?"

"Dīgha Tapassin, the Tathāgata isn't used to using the term, 'rod.' He's used to using the term, 'action.'"

"Then how many actions, friend Gotama, do you describe for the making of evil kamma, the production of evil kamma?"

"Three are the actions that I describe for the making of evil kamma, the production of evil kamma: bodily action, verbal action, & mental action."

"And is bodily action one thing, verbal action another, and mental action still another?"

"Bodily action is one thing, verbal action another, and mental action still another."

"And of these three actions—thus analyzed, thus differentiated, friend Gotama—which action do you describe as the most greatly blameworthy for the making of evil kamma, the production of evil kamma: bodily action, verbal action, or mental action?"

"Of these three rods—thus analyzed, thus differentiated, Dīgha Tapassin—I describe mental action as the most greatly blameworthy for the making of evil kamma, the production of evil kamma, not so much bodily action, not so much verbal action."

"Do you say, 'mental action,' friend Gotama?"

"I say, 'mental action,' Dīgha Tapassin."

"Do you say, 'mental action,' friend Gotama?"

"I say, 'mental action,' Dīgha Tapassin."

"Do you say, 'mental action,' friend Gotama?"

"I say, 'mental action,' Dīgha Tapassin."

Having thus gotten the Blessed One to assert his position up to three times, Dīgha Tapassin got up from his seat and went to the Nigaṇṭha Nāṭaputta.

Now, on that occasion the Nigaṇṭha Nāṭaputta was sitting with a large lay following from Bālaka headed by Upāli. He saw Dīgha Tapassin the Nigaṇṭha coming from afar, and on seeing him, said, "Where are you coming from, Tapassin, in the middle of the day?"

"I am coming, lord, from the presence of Gotama the contemplative."

"And did you have any discussion with Gotama the contemplative?"

"I did have some discussion with Gotama the contemplative."

“And how did your discussion with Gotama the contemplative go?”

Then Dīgha Tapassin the Nigaṇṭha told the Nigaṇṭha Nāṭaputta the entire extent of his discussion with the Blessed One.

When this was said, the Nigaṇṭha Nāṭaputta said to Dīgha Tapassin the Nigaṇṭha, “That was good, very good Tapassin. The way an instructed disciple would rightly understand the message of the Teacher is how Dīgha Tapassin the Nigaṇṭha answered Gotama the contemplative. For what does the trivial mental rod count for in comparison with the gross bodily rod? On the contrary, the bodily rod is most greatly blameworthy for the doing of evil kamma, for the production of evil kamma, not so much the verbal rod, not so much the mental rod.”

When this was said, Upāli the householder said to the Nigaṇṭha Nāṭaputta, “That was good, lord, very good of Tapassin. The way an instructed disciple would rightly understand the message of the Teacher is how Dīgha Tapassin the Nigaṇṭha answered Gotama the contemplative. For what does the trivial mental rod count for in comparison with the gross bodily rod? On the contrary, the bodily rod is the most greatly blameworthy for the doing of evil kamma, for the production of evil kamma, not so much the verbal rod, not so much the mental rod.

“So then, lord, I am going. I will overthrow Gotama the contemplative’s teaching on the grounds of this position. If he asserts in my presence what Ven. Tapassin got him to assert, then just as a strong man, seizing a long-haired ram by the hair, would drag him to and drag him fro and drag him all around, in the same way I, statement by statement, will drag Gotama the contemplative to and drag him fro and drag him all around. Just as a strong distillery worker, throwing a large distiller’s strainer into a deep water tank and grabbing it by the corners, would drag it to and drag it fro and drag it all around, in the same way I, statement by statement, will drag Gotama the contemplative to and drag him fro and drag him all around. Just as a strong distillery ruffian, grabbing a horse-hair strainer by the corners, would shake it down and shake it out and thump it, in the same way I, statement by statement, will shake Gotama the contemplative down and shake him out and thump him. Just as a sixty-year old elephant, plunging into a deep pond, would amuse itself playing the game of hemp-washing, in the same way I will amuse myself playing the game of hemp-washing Gotama the contemplative, as it were.1 So then, lord, I am going. I will overthrow Gotama the contemplative’s teaching on the grounds of this position.”

“Go, householder, and refute Gotama the contemplative’s teaching on the grounds of this position. For either I or Dīgha Tapassin or you could refute his teaching.”

When this was said, Dīgha Tapassin the Nigaṇṭha said to the Nigaṇṭha Nāṭaputta, “It doesn’t seem right to me, lord, that Upāli the householder should [try to] overthrow Gotama the contemplative’s teaching, because Gotama the contemplative is a magician, and he knows a converting magic by which he converts the disciples of other sects.”

“It’s impossible, Tapassin, it could not happen, that Upāli the householder would enter into discipleship under Gotama the contemplative. But there is the possibility that Gotama the contemplative would enter into discipleship under Upāli the householder. Go, householder, and refute Gotama the contemplative’s teaching on the grounds of this position. For either I or Dīgha Tapassin or you could refute his teaching.”

A second time… A third time, Dīgha Tapassin the Nigaṇṭha said to the Nigaṇṭha Nāṭaputta, “It doesn’t seem right to me, lord, that Upāli the householder should [try to] overthrow Gotama the contemplative’s teaching, because Gotama the contemplative is a magician, and he knows a converting magic by which he converts the disciples of other sects.”

“It’s impossible, Tapassin, it could not happen, that Upāli the householder would enter into discipleship under Gotama the contemplative. But there is the possibility that Gotama the contemplative would enter into discipleship under Upāli the householder. Go, householder, and refute Gotama the contemplative’s teaching on the grounds of this position. For either I or Dīgha Tapassin or you could refute his teaching.”

Having responded, “As you say, lord,” to the Nigaṇṭha Nāṭaputta, Upāli the householder got up from his seat, bowed down to him, and—keeping him on his right—went to the Blessed One in Pāvarika’s mango grove. On arrival, he bowed down to the Blessed One and sat to one side. As he was sitting there, he said to the Blessed One, “Lord, did Dīgha Tapassin the Nigaṇṭha come here?”

“Yes, householder, Dīgha Tapassin the Nigaṇṭha came here.”

“And did you have any discussion with him?”

“I had some discussion with him.”

“And how did your discussion with him go?”

Then the Blessed One related the entire extent of his discussion with Dīgha Tapassin the Nigaṇṭha.

When this was said, Upāli the householder said to the Blessed One, “That was good, very good of Tapassin. The way an instructed disciple would rightly understand the message of the Teacher is how Dīgha Tapassin the Nigaṇṭha answered the Blessed One. For what does the trivial mental rod count for in comparison with the gross bodily rod? On the contrary, the bodily rod is the most greatly blameworthy for the doing of evil kamma, for the production of evil kamma, not so much the verbal rod, not so much the mental rod.”

“If, householder, you will confer taking a stand on the truth, we might have some discussion here.”

“Lord, I will confer taking a stand on the truth. Let us have some discussion here.”

“What do you think, householder? There might be the case where a Nigaṇṭha is diseased, pained, severely ill, refusing cold water and taking warm water. He, not getting cold water, would die. Where would the Nigaṇṭha Nāṭaputta describe his reappearance?”

“Lord, there are the devas called Attached-in-Mind. He reappears there. Why is that? He is bound in mind when he dies.”

“Householder, householder, pay attention, and answer (only) after having paid attention! What you said after isn’t consistent with what you said before, nor is what you said before consistent with what you said after. And yet you made this statement: ‘Lord, I will confer taking a stand on the truth. Let us have some discussion here.’”

“Lord, even though the Blessed One says that, still the bodily rod is the most greatly blameworthy for the doing of evil kamma, for the production of evil kamma, not so much the verbal rod, not so much the mental rod.”

“What do you think, householder? There might be the case where a Nigaṇṭha is restrained with the fourfold restraint: constrained by all constraints, yoked to all constraints, cleansed by all constraints, attained to all constraints. As he walks back & forth, he brings many small beings to destruction. What (kammic) result would the Nigaṇṭha Nāṭaputta describe for him?”

“What is unintended, lord, the Nigaṇṭha Nāṭaputta does not describe as greatly blameworthy.”

“But if he intends it?”

“Greatly blameworthy, lord.”

“And under what does Nigaṇṭha Nāṭaputta classify intention?”

“Under the mental rod, lord.”

“Householder, householder, pay attention, and answer (only) after having paid attention! What you said after isn’t consistent with what you said before, nor is what you said before consistent with what you said after. And yet you made this statement: ‘Lord, I will confer taking a stand on the truth. Let us have some discussion here.’”

“Lord, even though the Blessed One says that, still the bodily rod is more greatly reprehensible for the doing of evil kamma, for the production of evil kamma, not so much the verbal rod, not so much the mental rod.”

“What do you think, householder? Is this Nālandā powerful & rich, populous & crowded with people?”

“Yes, lord.”

“What do you think? There is the case where a man might come with uplifted sword. He would say, ‘In a single moment, in a single instant, I will turn whatever beings there are in this Nālandā into a single pile of flesh, a single heap of flesh.’ What do you think? Would that man be able—in a single moment, in a single instant—to turn whatever beings there are in this Nālandā into a single pile of flesh, a single heap of flesh?”

“Lord, not even ten men, twenty men, thirty men, forty men, fifty men would be able—in a single moment, in a single instant—to turn whatever beings there are in this Nālandā into a single pile of flesh, a single heap of flesh. So what would one trivial man count for?”

“What do you think, householder? There is the case where a contemplative or brahman with supernormal power, attained to mastery of mind, might come. He would say, ‘With a single mental act of hatred, I will turn this Nālandā to ash.’ What do you think? Would that contemplative or brahman with supernormal power, attained to mastery of mind, be able—with a single mental act of hatred—to turn this Nālandā to ash?”

“Lord, with a single mental act of hatred he would be able to turn even ten Nālandās, twenty Nālandās, thirty Nālandās, forty Nālandās, fifty Nālandās to ash. So what would one trivial Nālandā count for?”

“Householder, householder, pay attention, and answer (only) after having paid attention! What you said after isn’t consistent with what you said before, nor is what you said before consistent with what you said after. And yet you made this statement: ‘Lord, I will confer taking a stand on the truth. Let us have some discussion here.’”

“Lord, even though the Blessed One says that, still the bodily rod is more greatly blameworthy for the doing of evil kamma, for the production of evil kamma, not so much the verbal rod, not so much the mental rod.”

“What do you think, householder? Have you heard how the Daṇḍakī wilderness, the Kāliṅga wilderness, the Mejjha wilderness, & the Mātaṅga wilderness became wildernesses?”

“Yes, lord, I have....”

“What do you think, householder? From what you have heard, how did the Daṇḍakī wilderness, the Kāliṅga wilderness, the Mejjha wilderness, & the Mātaṅga wilderness become wildernesses?”

“Lord, I have heard that it was through a mental act of hatred on the part of seers that the Daṇḍakī wilderness, the Kāliṅga wilderness, the Mejjha wilderness, & the Mātaṅga wilderness became wildernesses.”

“Householder, householder, pay attention, and answer (only) after having paid attention! What you said after isn’t consistent with what you said before, nor is what you said before consistent with what you said after. And yet you made this statement: ‘Lord, I will confer

taking a stand on the truth. Let us have some discussion here.'"

"Lord, I was gratified and won over by the Blessed One's very first simile. But wanting to hear these very artful ways of handling questions from the Blessed One, I thought I should treat him as an opponent. 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."

"Make a careful scrutiny, householder. It is good for well-known people like you to be careful scrutinizers."

"That, lord, has me to an ever greater extent gratified & pleased with the Blessed One, that he says to me, 'Make a careful scrutiny, householder. It is good for well-known people like you to be careful scrutinizers.' For other sectarians, on gaining me as a disciple, would carry a banner all around Nālanda [announcing], 'Upāli the householder has entered into discipleship under us.' Yet on the contrary, the Blessed One says to me, 'Make a careful scrutiny, householder. It is good for well-known people like you to be careful scrutinizers.' For a second time, lord, 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."

"Householder, your family compound has long been like a waterhole for the Nigaṇṭhas, and you should consider that almsfood should be given to them when they come to it."

"That, lord, has me to an ever greater extent gratified & pleased with the Blessed One, that he says to me, 'Householder, your family compound has long been like a waterhole for the Nigaṇṭhas, and you should consider that almsfood should be given to them when they come to it.' I have heard it said, lord, that 'Gotama the contemplative says, "A gift should be given only to me, and not to others. A gift should be given only to my disciples, and not to the disciples of others. What is given only to me bears great fruit, not what is given to others. What is given only to my disciples bears great fruit, not what is given to the disciples of others."'2 Yet on the contrary, the Blessed One encourages me to give gifts to the Nigaṇṭhas. But at any rate, lord, I will know the time for that. For a third time, lord, 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."

Then the Blessed One gave a graduated talk to Upāli the householder, i.e., a talk on giving, a talk on virtue, a talk on heaven; he proclaimed the drawbacks of, degradation in, & defilement in sensuality, and the rewards of renunciation. Then—when he knew that Upāli the householder was of ready mind, malleable mind, unhindered mind, exultant mind, confident mind—he proclaimed to him the distinctive teaching of the Awakened Ones:

stress, origination, cessation, path. Just as a white cloth with stains removed would rightly take dye, in the same way there arose to Upāli the householder, in that very seat, the dustless, stainless Dhamma eye: Whatever is subject to origination is all subject to cessation. Then—having seen the Dhamma, having reached the Dhamma, known the Dhamma, gained a footing in the Dhamma, having crossed over & beyond doubt, having had no more questioning—Upāli the householder gained fearlessness and was independent of others with regard to the Teacher's message.

Then Upāli the householder said to the Blessed One, "Now, lord, I must go. Many are my duties, many my responsibilities."

"Then do, householder, what you consider it is now time to do."

Then Upāli the householder, delighting in & approving of the Blessed One's words, got up from his seat, bowed down to him, and—keeping him on his right—went to his own home. On arrival, he said to the gatekeeper, "From this day forth, my good gatekeeper, I close the door to male & female Nigaṇṭhas and leave the door unclosed to the Blessed One's monks, nuns, male lay followers, & female lay followers. In case any Nigaṇṭha comes, you are to tell him, 'Stay there, venerable sir. Don't come in. From this day forward, Upāli the householder has entered into discipleship under Gotama the contemplative. The door is closed to male & female Nigaṇṭhas, but not closed to the Blessed One's monks, nuns, male lay followers, & female lay followers. If you have need of almsfood, stay right there, and I will bring it to you right there.'"

Dīgha Tapassin the Nigaṇṭha heard, "They say that Upāli the householder has entered into discipleship under Gotama the contemplative." So he went to the Nigaṇṭha Nāṭaputta and on arrival said to him. "I have heard it said, lord, that Upāli the householder has entered into discipleship under Gotama the contemplative."

"It's impossible, Tapassin, it could not happen, that Upāli the householder would enter into discipleship under Gotama the contemplative. But there is the possibility that Gotama the contemplative would enter into discipleship under Upāli the householder."

A second time... A third time, Dīgha Tapassin the Nigaṇṭha said to the Nigaṇṭha Nāṭaputta, "I have heard it said, lord, that Upāli the householder has entered into discipleship under Gotama the contemplative."

"It's impossible, Tapassin, it could not happen, that Upāli the householder would enter into discipleship under Gotama the contemplative. But there is the possibility that Gotama the contemplative would enter into discipleship under Upāli the householder."

"Very well, lord, I will go to find out whether or not Upāli the householder has entered into discipleship under Gotama the contemplative."

"Go, Tapassin, and find out whether or not Upāli the householder has entered into discipleship under Gotama the contemplative."

So Dīgha Tapassin the Nigaṇṭha went to the home of Upāli the householder. The gatekeeper saw him coming from afar and, on seeing him, said to him, "Stay there, venerable sir. Don't come in. From this day forward, Upāli the householder has entered into discipleship under Gotama the contemplative. The door is closed to male & female Nigaṇṭhas, but not closed to the Blessed One's monks, nuns, male lay followers, & female lay followers. If you have need of almsfood, stay right there, and I will bring it to you right there."

Saying, "I have no need of almsfood, friend," Dīgha Tapassin the Nigaṇṭha turned around and went to the Nigaṇṭha Nāṭaputta. On arrival, he said to him, "It's only too true, lord, that Upāli the householder has entered into discipleship under Gotama the contemplative. That's what I couldn't get from you when I said, 'It doesn't seem right to me, lord, that Upāli the householder should [try to] overthrow Gotama the contemplative's teaching, because Gotama the contemplative is a magician, and he knows a converting magic by which he converts the disciples of other sects.' Upāli the householder has been converted away from you by Gotama the contemplative's converting magic."

"It's impossible, Tapassin, it could not happen, that Upāli the householder would enter into discipleship under Gotama the contemplative. But there is the possibility that Gotama the contemplative would enter into discipleship under Upāli the householder."

A second time... A third time, Dīgha Tapassin the Nigaṇṭha said to the Nigaṇṭha Nāṭaputta, "It's only too true, lord, that Upāli the householder has entered into discipleship under Gotama the contemplative. That's what I couldn't get from you when I said, 'It doesn't seem right to me, lord, that Upāli the householder should [try to] overthrow Gotama the contemplative's teaching, because Gotama the contemplative is a magician, and he knows a converting magic by which he converts the disciples of other sects.' Upāli the householder has been converted away from you by Gotama the contemplative's converting magic."

"It's impossible, Tapassin, it could not happen, that Upāli the householder would enter into discipleship under Gotama the contemplative. But there is the possibility that Gotama the contemplative would enter into discipleship under Upāli the householder.

"Very well, Tapassin, I will go to find out whether or not Upāli the householder has entered into discipleship under Gotama the contemplative."

So the Nigaṇṭha Nāṭaputta, together with a large following of Nigaṇṭhas, went to the home of Upāli the householder. The gatekeeper saw him coming from afar and, on seeing him, said to him, "Stay there, venerable sir. Don't come in. From this day forward, Upāli the householder has entered into discipleship under Gotama the contemplative. The door is closed to male & female Nigaṇṭhas, but not closed to the Blessed One's monks, nuns, male lay followers, & female lay followers. If you have need of almsfood, stay right there, and I will bring it to you right there."

“In that case, my good gatekeeper, go to Upāli the householder and, on arrival, tell him, ‘The Nigaṇṭha Nāṭaputta, together with a large following of Nigaṇṭhas, is standing outside the gatehouse. He wants to see you.’”

Responding, “As you say, venerable sir,” to the Nigaṇṭha Nāṭaputta, the gatekeeper went to Upāli the householder and, on arrival, said to him, “Venerable sir, the Nigaṇṭha Nāṭaputta, together with a large following of Nigaṇṭhas, is standing outside the gatehouse. He wants to see you.”

“In that case, my good gatekeeper, arrange seats in the middle gate hall.”

Responding, “As you say, venerable sir,” to Upāli the householder, the gatekeeper, after arranging seats in the middle gate hall, went to Upāli the householder and, on arrival, said to him, “Venerable sir, seats have been arranged in the middle gate hall. Do what you consider it is now time to do.”

Then Upāli the householder went to the middle gate hall and, on arrival, he himself sat down on the foremost, best, highest, & most exquisite seat there. Then he addressed the gatekeeper, “In that case, my good gatekeeper, go to the Nigaṇṭha Nāṭaputta and, on arrival, say to him, ‘Venerable sir, Upāli the householder says, “Enter, venerable sir, if you want.”’”

Responding, “As you say, venerable sir,” to Upāli the householder, the gatekeeper went to the Nigaṇṭha Nāṭaputta and, on arrival, said to him, “Venerable sir, Upāli the householder says, ‘Enter, venerable sir, if you want.’”

So the Nigaṇṭha Nāṭaputta, together with a large following of Nigaṇṭhas, went to the middle gate hall.

Now, before, when Upāli the householder saw the Nigaṇṭha Nāṭaputta coming from afar, he would, on seeing him, go out to greet him and, with his own upper robe, would dust off the foremost, best, highest, & most exquisite seat there and, straightening it out all around, would have the Nigaṇṭha Nāṭaputta seated there. But now, seated himself on the foremost, best, highest, & most exquisite seat there, he said to the Nigaṇṭha Nāṭaputta, “Venerable sir,3 there are seats. Sit down if you want.”

When this was said, the Nigaṇṭha Nāṭaputta said to Upāli the householder, “You’ve gone mad, householder! You’re an arrogant fool! Having gone, saying, ‘Lord, I am going. I will overthrow Gotama the contemplative’s teaching,’ you’ve come back tied up in the web of his doctrine. It’s just as if a man, having gone to remove someone else’s testicles, came back with his own testicles removed, or as if a man, having gone to gouge out someone else’s eyes, came back with his own eyes gouged out; in the same way, having gone, saying, ‘Lord, I am going. I will overthrow Gotama the contemplative’s teaching,’ you’ve come back tied up in the web of his doctrine. You’ve been converted, householder, by Gotama the contemplative’s converting magic!”

“Auspicious, venerable sir, is the converting magic! Admirable, venerable sir, is the converting magic! If my dear relatives & kin were to be converted by the converting magic, it would be for their long-term welfare & happiness. If all noble warriors were to be converted by the converting magic, it would be for their long-term welfare & happiness. If all brahmans… If all merchants… If all workers were to be converted by the converting magic, it would be for their long-term welfare & happiness. If the entire cosmos with its devas, Māras & Brahmās, this generation with its contemplatives & brahmans, its royalty & commonfolk were to be converted by the converting magic, it would be for their long-term welfare & happiness.

“In that case, venerable sir, I will give you an analogy, for there are cases where it’s through analogies that observant people can understand the meaning of what is being said.

“Once there was an old brahman—aged, advanced in years—whose young brahman wife was pregnant & near to giving birth. She said to him, ‘Go, brahman. Having bought a male baby monkey in the market, bring it back. It’ll be a playmate for my son.’

“When this was said, the brahman said to his wife, ‘Wait, my dear, until you have given birth. If you give birth to a son, I—having gone to the market and having bought a male baby monkey—will bring it back. It’ll be a playmate for your son. If you give birth to a daughter, I—having gone to the market and having bought a female baby monkey—will bring it back. It’ll be a playmate for your daughter.’

“A second time… A third time, the young brahman wife said to the brahman, Go, brahman. Having bought a male baby monkey in the market, bring it back. It’ll be a playmate for my son.’

“So the brahman—in love with his wife, his mind bound to her—went to the market and, having bought a male baby monkey and having brought it back, said to her, ‘Here is your male baby monkey from the market that I have bought and brought back. It’ll be a playmate for your son.’

“When this was said, the young brahman wife said to the brahman, ‘Go, brahman. Taking this male baby monkey, go to Rattapāṇin, the dyer’s son, and on arrival tell him, “I want, my good Rattapāṇin, this male baby monkey dyed the color called ‘golden-plaster,’ pounded back & forth, and ironed on both sides.”’

“So the brahman—in love with his wife, his mind bound to her—taking the male baby monkey—went to Rattapāṇin, the dyer’s son, and on arrival told him, ‘I want, my good Rattapāṇin, this male baby monkey dyed the color called “golden-plaster,” pounded back & forth, and ironed on both sides.’

“When this was said, Rattapāṇin, the dyer’s son said to the brahman, ‘Venerable sir, this male baby monkey of yours will endure a dyeing, but not a pounding or an ironing.’

“In the same way, venerable sir, the doctrine of the foolish Nigaṇṭhas will endure a dyeing by fools, but not an examination or ironing out by the wise.

“Then, at another time, the brahman—taking a new pair of cloths—went to Rattapāṇin, the dyer’s son, and on arrival told him, ‘I want, my good Rattapāṇin, this new pair of cloths dyed the color called “golden-plaster,” pounded back & forth, and ironed on both sides.’

“When this was said, Rattapāṇin, the dyer’s son said to the brahman, ‘Venerable sir, this new pair of cloths of yours will endure a dyeing & a pounding & an ironing.’

“In the same way, venerable sir, the doctrine of the Blessed One, worthy & rightly self-awakened, will endure a dyeing & an examination & an ironing out by the wise. But it won’t endure an examination or an ironing out by fools.”

“Householder, people—including the king—know you as a disciple of the Nigaṇṭha Nāṭaputta. Whose disciple should they (now) regard you as?”

When this was said, Upāli the householder—rising from his seat, arranging his upper robe over one shoulder, and placing his hands palm-to-palm over his heart toward the Blessed One—said to the Nigaṇṭha Nāṭaputta: “In that case, venerable sir, listen to whose disciple I am.”4

Of the enlightened, devoid-of–delusion, barrenness-broken winner of victory—

free from oppression, harmonious-minded, advanced in virtue,5 excellent in discernment,

poisons-crossed-over,6 stainless:

Of that Blessed One, I’m a disciple.

Of the perplexity-free, contented, baits-of-the-world-disgorged, empathetic,

completed-contemplative person; the bearing-his-last-body man—

incomparable, spotless:

Of that Blessed One, I’m a disciple.

Of the free-from-doubt, skillful discipliner; the foremost leader;

the unexcelled, splendid-in-qualities, free-from-incertitude maker of light;

the conceit-cut-through hero:

Of that Blessed One, I’m a disciple.

Of the bull—immeasurable, deep, attained to sagacity;

the provider-of-safety knower—Dhamma-established, well-restrained in mind,

gone beyond bonds, released:

Of that Blessed One, I’m a disciple.

Of the nāga living in remote dwellings; the fetters-ended, released,

amiable speaker—purifed,7 banner laid down, devoid of passion,

tamed, objectification-free:

Of that Blessed One, I’m a disciple.

Of the truest seer;8 the free-from-deceit, triple-knowledge, attained-to-Brahmā,9

cleansed, well versed,10 calm, knowledge-discoverer;

Sakka, the ancient giver:11

Of that Blessed One, I’m a disciple.

Of the noble, developed-in-mind, attainment-attained explainer—

mindful, clear-seeing, not bent forward, not bent back,

unperturbed, mastery-attained:

Of that Blessed One, I’m a disciple.

Of the path-completed, absorbed-in-jhāna, uninfluenced-within, pure,

independent, fearless, living-secluded, attained-to-the-summit,

crossed-over one leading others across:

Of that Blessed One, I’m a disciple.

Of the peaceful, deeply-discerning, greatly-discerning, free-from-greed,

One Truly Gone—well-gone, without rival, without peer,

mature, subtle:

Of that Blessed One, I’m a disciple.

Of the craving-cut-through, awakened, unsmoky, unsmeared,

worthy-of-gifts spirit,12 the highest person without equal—

great, attained to the summit of prestige:

Of that Blessed One, I’m a disciple.

“Householder, when did you compose these praises of Gotama the contemplative?”

“Venerable sir, it’s as if there were a great heap of flowers—many kinds of flowers—and from them a dexterous garland-maker or garland-maker’s apprentice were to tie together

a multi-colored garland. In the same way, the Blessed One has many splendors, many hundreds of splendors.13 Who wouldn't give praise to one deserving of praise?"

Then, because the Nigaṇṭha Nāṭaputta could not bear the homage paid to the Blessed One, hot blood gushed out of his mouth right there.

Notes

1. This simile was apparently common among Nigaṇṭhas and their followers. Saccaka, another Nigaṇṭha debater, uses it in MN 35.

2. See SN 3:24.

3. The Thai edition here has Upāli using the insulting expression "Bhante gahapati,"—"Venerable householder."

4. The following verses are among the few in the Canon composed in the musical gaṇacchanda meter called gīti. Other examples of gaṇacchanda poems in the Canon include Sn 1:8 and Sn 4:14. On this meter, see A. K. Warder, Pali Metre, and also the Introduction to Sutta Nipāta: The Discourse Group. Upāli's poem here is also unusual in that, for the most part, it consists of strings of epithets in the genitive case. Much of its music, which cannot be reproduced in English, consists of the rhythmic, almost obsessive, repetition of the genitive ending: -assa.

5. Reading vuḍḍha-sīlassa with the Sinhalese edition. The Thai edition has buddha-sīlassa, awakened-virtue.

6. Reading vessantarassa with the Sinhalese and PTS editions. The Thai reading, vesamantarassa, does not fit the meter. This word, or a variant of it—vissantarassa—also appears in Iti 38.

7. Reading dhonassa with the PTS edition. The Thai edition has monassa, sagacity.

8. Isisattamassa: In Vedic culture, this term would mean "seventh seer," referring to the seventh of the seven great Vedic seers. Here it is adopted into the Buddhist tradition and turned into a piece of wordplay that could either mean "seventh seer," referring to the tradition that the Buddha is the seventh Buddha, counting from the Buddha Vipassin, or "truest seer," as above.

9. Here again, a Vedic term is borrowed and given a Buddhist meaning: attained to nibbāna. For another example of the use of this epithet with this meaning, see SN 7:9 (cited in Sn 3:4, note 8).

10. Reading padakassa with the Thai edition. This term has been borrowed from the Vedic tradition, where it means well versed in the Vedas. Here it means that the Buddha knows many instructive verses.

11. Sakka is the king of the devas of the Thirty-three, a level of heaven that contains many of the old Vedic devas. "Ancient giver" (purindada) is the Pali transformation of the Vedic epithet for Sakka, puraṁdara, "fort-shatterer." This transformation reflects the more peaceful role that Sakka assumes as a disciple of the Buddha in the Pali Canon (see DN 21). For another instance of this new epithet, see DN 20.

12. Yakkha. See Sn 3:4, note 17, and Sn 4:11, note 5.

13. This is a pun on the word vaṇṇa, which means both "praise" and "beauty/splendor."

Publisher references (not part of the sutta)

See also: DN 29; MN 14; MN 35; MN 36; MN 58; MN 101; SN 42:8; SN 42:9; SN 55:23, AN 3:62; AN 3:71; AN 4:195; AN 9:38