MN 84 — At Madhurā

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Text

Middle Discourses 84

At Madhurā

So I have heard. At one time Venerable Mahākaccāna was staying near Madhurā in the Nut Grass Grove.

King Avantiputta of Madhurā heard, "It seems the ascetic Kaccāna is staying near Madhurā in the Nut Grass Grove. He has this good reputation: 'He is astute, competent, intelligent, learned, a brilliant speaker, eloquent, mature, a perfected one.' It's good to see such perfected ones."

And then King Avantiputta had the finest carriages harnessed. He mounted a fine carriage and, along with other fine carriages, set out in full royal pomp from Madhurā to see Mahākaccāna. He went by carriage as far as the terrain allowed, then descended and approached Mahākaccāna on foot. They exchanged greetings, and when the greetings and polite conversation were over, the king sat down to one side and said to Mahākaccāna:

"Worthy Kaccāna, the brahmins say: 'Only brahmins are the best class; other classes are inferior. Only brahmins are the light class; other classes are dark. Only brahmins are purified, not others. Only brahmins are the the Divinity's bosom sons, born from his mouth, born of the Divinity, created by the Divinity, heirs of the Divinity.' What does the worthy Kaccāna have to say about this?"

"Great king, that's just hearsay in the world. And here's a way to understand that it's just hearsay in the world.

What do you think, Great King? Suppose an aristocrat prospers in money, grain, silver, or gold. Wouldn't there be aristocrats, brahmins, peasants, and menials who would get up before him and go to bed after him, and be obliging, behaving nicely and speaking politely?"

"There would, worthy Kaccāna."

"What do you think, Great King? Suppose a brahmin … a peasant … a menial prospers in money, grain, silver, or gold. Wouldn't there be menials, aristocrats, brahmins, and peasants who would get up before him and go to bed after him, and be obliging, behaving nicely and speaking politely?"

"There would, worthy Kaccāna."

“What do you think, Great King? If this is so, are the four classes equal or not? Or how do you see this?”

“Certainly, worthy Kaccāna, in this case these four classes are equal. I can’t see any difference between them.”

“And here’s another way to understand that the claims of the brahmins are just hearsay in the world.

What do you think, Great King? Take an aristocrat who kills living creatures, steals, and commits sexual misconduct; uses speech that’s false, backbiting, harsh, or nonsensical; and is covetous, malicious, and has wrong view. When their body breaks up, after death, would they be reborn in a place of loss, a bad place, the underworld, hell, or not? Or how do you see this?”

“Such an aristocrat would be reborn in a bad place. That’s what I think, but I’ve also heard it from the perfected ones.”

“Good, good, Great King! It’s good that you think so, and it’s good that you’ve heard it from the perfected ones. What do you think, Great King? Take a brahmin … a peasant … a menial who kills living creatures, steals, and commits sexual misconduct; uses speech that’s false, backbiting, harsh, or nonsensical; and is covetous, malicious, and has wrong view. When their body breaks up, after death, would they be reborn in a place of loss, a bad place, the underworld, hell, or not? Or how do you see this?”

“Such a brahmin, peasant, or menial would be reborn in a bad place. That’s what I think, but I’ve also heard it from the perfected ones.”

“Good, good, Great King! It’s good that you think so, and it’s good that you’ve heard it from the perfected ones. What do you think, Great King? If this is so, are the four classes equal or not? Or how do you see this?”

“Certainly, worthy Kaccāna, in this case these four classes are equal. I can’t see any difference between them.”

“And here’s another way to understand that the claims of the brahmins are just hearsay in the world.

What do you think, Great King? Take an aristocrat who doesn’t kill living creatures, steal, or commit sexual misconduct. They don’t use speech that’s false, backbiting, harsh, or nonsensical. And they’re contented, kind-hearted, with right view. When their body breaks up, after death, would they be reborn in a good place, a heavenly realm, or not? Or how do you see this?”

“Such an aristocrat would be reborn in a good place. That’s what I think, but I’ve also heard it from the perfected ones.”

“Good, good, Great King! It’s good that you think so, and it’s good that you’ve heard it from the perfected ones. What do you think, Great King? Take a brahmin, peasant, or menial who doesn’t kill living creatures, steal, or commit sexual misconduct. They don’t use speech that’s false, backbiting, harsh, or nonsensical. And they’re contented, kind-hearted,

with right view. When their body breaks up, after death, would they be reborn in a good place, a heavenly realm, or not? Or how do you see this?"

"Such a brahmin, peasant, or menial would be reborn in a good place. That's what I think, but I've also heard it from the perfected ones."

"Good, good, Great King! It's good that you think so, and it's good that you've heard it from the perfected ones. What do you think, Great King? If this is so, are the four classes equal or not? Or how do you see this?"

"Certainly, worthy Kaccāna, in this case these four classes are equal. I can't see any difference between them."

"And here's another way to understand that the claims of the brahmins are just hearsay in the world.

What do you think, Great King? Take an aristocrat who breaks into houses, plunders wealth, steals from isolated buildings, commits highway robbery, and commits adultery. Suppose your men arrest him and present him to you, saying: 'Your Majesty, this man is a bandit, a criminal. Punish him as you will.' What would you do to him?"

"I would have him executed, fined, or banished, or dealt with as befits the crime. Why is that? Because he's lost his former status as an aristocrat, and is just reckoned as a bandit."

"What do you think, Great King? Take a brahmin, peasant, or menial who breaks into houses, plunders wealth, steals from isolated buildings, commits highway robbery, and commits adultery. Suppose your men arrest him and present him to you, saying: 'Your Majesty, this man is a bandit, a criminal. Punish him as you will.' What would you do to him?"

"I would have him executed, fined, or banished, or dealt with as befits the crime. Why is that? Because he's lost his former status as a brahmin, peasant, or menial, and is just reckoned as a bandit."

"What do you think, Great King? If this is so, are the four classes equal or not? Or how do you see this?"

"Certainly, worthy Kaccāna, in this case these four classes are equal. I can't see any difference between them."

"And here's another way to understand that the claims of the brahmins are just hearsay in the world.

What do you think, Great King? Take an aristocrat who shaves off their hair and beard, dresses in ocher robes, and goes forth from the lay life to homelessness. They abstain from killing living creatures, stealing, and lying. They abstain from eating at night, eat in one part of the day, and are chaste, ethical, and of good character. How would you treat them?"

"I would bow to them, rise in their presence, or offer them a seat. I'd invite them to accept robes, almsfood, lodgings, and medicines and supplies for the sick. And I'd organize their

lawful guarding and protection. Why is that? Because they've lost their former status as an aristocrat, and are just reckoned as an ascetic."

"What do you think, Great King? Take a brahmin, peasant, or menial who shaves off their hair and beard, dresses in ocher robes, and goes forth from the lay life to homelessness. They abstain from killing living creatures, stealing, and lying. They abstain from eating at night, eat in one part of the day, and are chaste, ethical, and of good character. How would you treat them?"

"I would bow to them, rise in their presence, or offer them a seat. I'd invite them to accept robes, almsfood, lodgings, and medicines and supplies for the sick. And I'd organize their lawful guarding and protection. Why is that? Because they've lost their former status as a brahmin, peasant, or menial, and are just reckoned as an ascetic."

"What do you think, Great King? If this is so, are the four classes equal or not? Or how do you see this?"

"Certainly, worthy Kaccāna, in this case these four classes are equal. I can't see any difference between them."

"This is another way to understand that this is just hearsay in the world: 'Only brahmins are the best class; other classes are inferior. Only brahmins are the light class; other classes are dark. Only brahmins are purified, not others. Only brahmins are the Divinity's bosom sons, born from his mouth, born of the Divinity, created by the Divinity, heirs of the Divinity.'"

When he had spoken, King Avantiputta of Madhurā said to Mahākaccāna, "Excellent, worthy Kaccāna! Excellent! As if he were righting the overturned, or revealing the hidden, or pointing out the path to the lost, or lighting a lamp in the dark so people with clear eyes can see what's there, the worthy Kaccāna has made the teaching clear in many ways. I go for refuge to the worthy Kaccāna, to the teaching, and to the mendicant Saṅgha. From this day forth, may the worthy Kaccāna remember me as a lay follower who has gone for refuge for life."

"Great king, don't go for refuge to me. You should go for refuge to that same Blessed One to whom I have gone for refuge."

"But where is that Blessed One at present, the perfected one, the fully awakened Buddha?"

"Great king, the Buddha has already become fully quenched."

"Worthy Kaccāna, if I heard that the Buddha was within ten leagues, or twenty, or even up to a hundred leagues away, I'd go a hundred leagues to see him. But since the Buddha has become fully quenched, I go for refuge to that fully quenched Buddha, to the teaching, and to the mendicant Saṅgha. From this day forth, may the worthy Kaccāna remember me as a lay follower who has gone for refuge for life."