MN 85 — MN 85 Prince Bodhi | Bodhirājakumāra Sutta

English translation by Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu.

Source: https://www.dhammatalks.org/suttas/MN/MN85.html

Source revision: sha256:06db98f11dbe5b66e3b290b0f8bcaa44ec5f2fe3d1e1b74062fcf0baea044036

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Text

Prince Bodhi

Bodhirājakumāra Sutta (MN 85)

I have heard that on one occasion the Blessed One was staying among the Bhaggas at Suṁsumāri (Crocodile) Hill in the Bhesakaḷa Forest Deer Park.

Now on that occasion a palace named Kokamuda had recently been built for Prince Bodhi, and it had not yet been dwelled in by any contemplative, brahman, or anyone at all in human form.

Then Prince Bodhi addressed the young brahman Sañjikāputta, “Come, my dear Sañjikāputta. Go to the Blessed One and, on arrival, showing reverence with your head to

the Blessed One's feet in my name, ask whether he is free from illness & affliction, is carefree, strong, & living in comfort, saying: 'Prince Bodhi, lord, shows reverence with his head to the Blessed One's feet and asks whether you are free from illness & affliction, are carefree, strong, & living in comfort.' And then say: 'May the Lord Blessed One acquiesce to Prince Bodhi's meal tomorrow, together with the Saṅgha of monks.'"

Responding, "As you say, sir," to Prince Bodhi, the young brahman Sañjikāputta went to the Blessed One and, on arrival, exchanged courteous greetings with the Blessed One. After an exchange of friendly greetings & courtesies, he sat to one side. As he was sitting there he said to the Blessed One: "Master Gotama, Prince Bodhi shows reverence with his head to Master Gotama's feet and asks whether you are free from illness & affliction, are carefree, strong, & living in comfort. And he says this: 'May Master Gotama acquiesce to Prince Bodhi's meal tomorrow, together with the Saṅgha of monks.'"

The Blessed One acquiesced through silence.

Then the young brahman Sañjikāputta, understanding the Blessed One's acquiescence, rose from his seat and returned to Prince Bodhi. On arrival he said to him, "Sir, I have informed Master Gotama of your words, (saying,) 'Master Gotama, Prince Bodhi shows reverence with his head to Master Gotama's feet and asks whether you are free from illness & affliction, are carefree, strong, & living in comfort. And he says, "May Master Gotama acquiesce to Prince Bodhi's meal tomorrow, together with the Saṅgha of monks.'" And Gotama the contemplative has acquiesced."

Then, as the night was ending, Prince Bodhi had choice staple & non-staple foods prepared in his residence and had the Kokamuda palace spread with white cloth down to the last step of the staircase. Then he said to the young brahman Sañjikāputta, "Come, dear Sañjikāputta. Go to the Blessed One and on arrival announce the time, (saying,) 'It is time, lord. The meal is ready.'"

Responding, "As you say, sir," to Prince Bodhi, the young brahman Sañjikāputta went to the Blessed One and, on arrival, announced the time, (saying,) "It is time, Master Gotama. The meal is ready."

Then the Blessed One early in the morning—having adjusted his under robe and carrying his bowl & outer robe—went together with a Saṅgha of monks to Prince Bodhi's residence.

Now, at that time, Prince Bodhi was standing outside the porch to the gatehouse, waiting for the Blessed One. He saw the Blessed One coming from afar. On seeing him, he went out to greet him & bow down to him. Allowing the Blessed One to precede him, he went to the Kokamuda palace. Then the Blessed One stood at the last step of the staircase. Prince Bodhi said to the Blessed One, "Step on the cloths, Lord Blessed One. Step on the cloths, O One Well-gone. That will be for my long-term welfare & happiness."

When this was said, the Blessed One was silent.

A second time… A third time, Prince Bodhi said to the Blessed One, "Step on the cloths, Lord Blessed One. Step on the cloths, O One Well-gone. That will be for my long-term welfare & happiness."

Then the Blessed One regarded Ven. Ānanda.

Ven. Ānanda said to Prince Bodhi, "Remove the cloths, prince. The Blessed One will not step on a cloth covering. The Tathāgata has regard for future generations."1

So Prince Bodhi, having had the cloths removed, had the upper story of the Kokamuda palace prepared.

The Blessed One mounted the Kokamuda palace and sat on a seat laid out, together with the Saṅgha of monks. Prince Bodhi, with his own hands, served & satisfied the Saṅgha of monks, with the Buddha at its head, with exquisite staple & non-staple food. Then, when the Blessed One had finished his meal and had rinsed his bowl & hands, Prince Bodhi, taking a low seat, sat to one side. As he was sitting there, he said to the Blessed One, "Lord, it occurs to me that pleasure isn't to be gained through pleasure. Pleasure is to be gained through pain."

"To me, too, prince, before my self-awakening, when I was still just an unawakened Bodhisatta, the thought occurred to me: 'Pleasure isn't to be gained through pleasure. Pleasure is to be gained through pain.'

"So, at a later time, while still young, a black-haired young man endowed with the blessings of youth in the first stage of life—and while my parents, unwilling, were crying with tears streaming down their faces—I shaved off my hair & beard, put on the ochre robe, and went forth from the home life into homelessness.

"Having thus 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 was not 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 was not 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 is 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 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 was not 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 was not 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 is 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 exertion of a clansman intent on exertion.’ So I sat down right there, thinking, ‘This is just right for exertion.’

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

“So it is, prince, 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.

"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.

"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. 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. 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.’ 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.

“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.

"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.

"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.

“The then thought occurred to me, ‘This Dhamma that I have attained is deep, hard to see, hard to realize, peaceful, refined, beyond the scope of conjecture, subtle, to-be-experienced by the wise. But this generation delights in attachment, is excited by attachment, enjoys attachment. For a generation delighting in attachment, excited by attachment, enjoying attachment, this/that conditionality & dependent co-arising are hard to see. This state, too, is hard to see: the pacification of all fabrications, the relinquishing of all acquisitions, the ending of craving; dispassion; cessation; unbinding. And if I were to teach the Dhamma and others would not understand me, that would be tiresome for me, troublesome for me.’

“Just then these verses, unspoken in the past, unheard before, occurred to me:

‘Enough now with teaching

what

only with difficulty

I reached.

This Dhamma is not easily realized

by those overcome

with aversion & passion.

What is abstruse, subtle,

deep,

hard to see,

going against the flow—

those delighting in passion,

cloaked in the mass of darkness,

won’t see.’

“As I reflected thus, my mind inclined to dwelling at ease, not to teaching the Dhamma.

“Then Brahmā Sahampati, having known with his own awareness the line of thinking in my awareness, thought: ‘The world is lost! The world is destroyed! The mind of the Tathāgata, the Worthy One, the Rightly Self-awakened One inclines to dwelling at ease, not to teaching the Dhamma!’ Then, just as a strong man might extend his flexed arm or flex his extended arm, Brahmā Sahampati disappeared from the Brahmā world and reappeared in front me. Arranging his upper robe over one shoulder, he knelt down with his right knee on the ground, saluted me with his hands before his heart, and said to me: ‘Lord, let the Blessed One teach the Dhamma! Let the One Well-gone teach the Dhamma! There are beings with little dust in their eyes who are falling away because they do not hear the

Dhamma. There will be those who will understand the Dhamma.'

"That is what Brahmā Sahampati said. Having said that, he further said this:

'In the past
there appeared among the Magadhans
an impure Dhamma
devised by the stained.
Throw open the door to the deathless!
Let them hear the Dhamma
realized by the Stainless One!

Just as one standing on a rocky crag
might see people
all around below,
so, intelligent one, with all-around vision,
ascend the palace
fashioned of Dhamma.
Free from sorrow, behold the people
submerged in sorrow,
oppressed by birth & aging.

Rise up, hero, victor in battle!
O Teacher, wander without debt in the world.
Teach the Dhamma, O Blessed One:
There will be those who will understand.'

"Then, having understood Brahmā's invitation, out of compassion for beings, I surveyed the world with the eye of an Awakened One. As I did so, I saw beings with little dust in their eyes and those with much, those with keen faculties and those with dull, those with good attributes and those with bad, those easy to teach and those hard, some of them seeing disgrace & danger in the other world. Just as in a pond of blue or red or white lotuses, some lotuses—born & growing in the water—might flourish while immersed in the water, without rising up from the water; some might stand at an even level with the water; while some might rise up from the water and stand without being smeared by the water—so too, surveying the world with the eye of an Awakened One, I saw beings with little dust in

their eyes and those with much, those with keen faculties and those with dull, those with good attributes and those with bad, those easy to teach and those hard, some of them seeing disgrace & danger in the other world.

"Having seen this, I answered Brahmā Sahampati in verse:

'Open are the doors to the deathless.

Let those with ears show their conviction.

Perceiving trouble, O Brahmā,

I did not tell people

the refined,

sublime Dhamma.'

"Then Brahmā Sahampati, thinking, 'I'm the one who created the opportunity for the teaching of the Dhamma by the Blessed One!' bowed down to me and, circling me on the right, vanished right there.

"Then the thought occurred to me, 'To whom should I teach the Dhamma first? Who will quickly understand this Dhamma?' Then the thought occurred to me, 'This Āḷāra Kālāma is wise, competent, intelligent. He has long had little dust in his eyes. What if I were to teach him the Dhamma first? He will quickly understand this Dhamma.' Then a devatā came to me and said, 'Lord, Āḷāra Kālāma died seven days ago.' And knowledge & vision arose within me: 'Āḷāra Kālāma died seven days ago.' The thought occurred to me, 'A great loss has Āḷāra Kālāma suffered. If he had heard this Dhamma, he would have quickly understood it.'

"Then the thought occurred to me, 'To whom should I teach the Dhamma first? Who will quickly understand this Dhamma?' Then the thought occurred to me, 'This Uddaka Rāmaputta is wise, competent, intelligent. He has long had little dust in his eyes. What if I were to teach him the Dhamma first? He will quickly understand this Dhamma.' Then a devatā came to me and said, 'Lord, Uddaka Rāmaputta died last night.' And knowledge & vision arose within me: 'Uddaka Rāmaputta died last night.' The thought occurred to me, 'A great loss has Uddaka Rāmaputta suffered. If he had heard this Dhamma, he would have quickly understood it.'

"Then the thought occurred to me, 'To whom should I teach the Dhamma first? Who will quickly understand this Dhamma?' Then the thought occurred to me, 'They were very helpful to me, the group of five monks who attended to me when I was resolute in exertion. What if I were to teach them the Dhamma first?' Then the thought occurred to me, 'Where are the group of five monks staying now?' And with the divine eye, purified & surpassing the human, I saw that they were staying near Bārāṇasī in the Deer Park at Isipatana.

“Then, having stayed at Uruvelā as long as I liked, I set out to wander by stages to Bārāṇasī. Upaka the Ājīvaka saw me on the road between Gayā and the (place of) Awakening, and on seeing me said to me, ‘Clear, my friend, are your faculties. Pure your complexion, and bright. On whose account have you gone forth? Who is your teacher? In whose Dhamma do you delight?’

“When this was said, I replied to Upaka the Ājīvaka in verses:

‘All-vanquishing,

all-knowing am I,

with regard to all things,

unadhering.

All-abandoning,

released in the ending of craving:

having fully known on my own,

to whom should I point as my teacher?2

I have no teacher,

and one like me can’t be found.

In the world with its devas,

I have no counterpart.

For I am a Worthy One in the world;

I, the unexcelled teacher.

I, alone, am rightly self-awakened.

Cooled am I, unbound.

To set rolling the wheel of Dhamma

I go to the city of Kāsi.

In a world become blind,

I beat the drum of the deathless.’

“‘From your claims, my friend, you must be an infinite conqueror.’

“‘Conquerors are those like me

who have reached effluents’ end.

I've conquered evil qualities,

and so, Upaka, I'm a conqueror.'

"When this was said, Upaka said, 'May it be so, my friend,' and—shaking his head, taking a side-road—he left.

"Then, wandering by stages, I arrived at Bārāṇasī, at the Deer Park in Isipatana, to where the group of five monks were staying. From afar they saw me coming and, on seeing me, made a pact with one another, (saying,) 'Friends, here comes Gotama the contemplative: living luxuriously, straying from his exertion, backsliding into abundance. He doesn't deserve to be bowed down to, to be greeted by standing up, or to have his robe & bowl received. Still, a seat should be set out; if he wants to, he can sit down.' But as I approached, they were unable to keep to their pact. One, standing up to greet me, received my robe & bowl. Another spread out a seat. Another set out water for washing my feet. However, they addressed me by name and as 'friend.'

"So I said to them, 'Don't address the Tathāgata by name and as "friend." The Tathāgata, friends, is a worthy one, rightly self-awakened. Lend ear, friends: the deathless has been attained. I will instruct you. I will teach you the Dhamma. Practicing as instructed, you will in no long time reach & remain in the supreme goal of the holy life for which clansmen rightly go forth from home into homelessness, knowing & realizing it for yourselves in the here & now.'

"When this was said, the group of five monks replied to me, 'By that practice, that conduct, that performance of austerities you did not attain any superior human states, any distinction in knowledge & vision worthy of a noble one. So how can you now—living luxuriously, straying from your exertion, backsliding into abundance—have attained any superior human states, any distinction in knowledge & vision worthy of a noble one?'

"When this was said, I replied to them, 'The Tathāgata, monks, is not living luxuriously, has not strayed from his exertion, has not backslid into abundance. The Tathāgata, friends, is a worthy one, rightly self-awakened. Lend ear, friends: the deathless has been attained. I will instruct you. I will teach you the Dhamma. Practicing as instructed, you will in no long time reach & remain in the supreme goal of the holy life for which clansmen rightly go forth from home into homelessness, knowing & realizing it for yourselves in the here & now.'

A second time.... A third time, the group of five monks said to me, 'By that practice, that conduct, that performance of austerities you did not attain any superior human states, any distinction in knowledge & vision worthy of a noble one. So how can you now—living luxuriously, straying from your exertion, backsliding into abundance—have attained any superior human states, any distinction in knowledge & vision worthy of a noble one?'

"When this was said, I replied to the group of five monks, 'Do you recall my ever having spoken in this way before?'

"'No, lord.'

"'The Tathāgata, monks, is not living luxuriously, has not strayed from his exertion, has not backslid into abundance. The Tathāgata, friends, is a worthy one, rightly self-awakened. Lend ear, friends: the deathless has been attained. I will instruct you. I will teach you the Dhamma. Practicing as instructed, you will in no long time reach & remain in the supreme goal of the holy life for which clansmen rightly go forth from home into homelessness, knowing & realizing it for yourselves in the here & now.'

"And so I was able to convince them. I would teach two monks while three went for alms, and we six lived off what the three brought back from their alms round. Then I would teach three monks while two went for alms, and we six lived off what the two brought back from their alms round.

"Then the group of five monks—thus exhorted, thus instructed by me—in no long time entered & remained in the supreme goal of the holy life for which clansmen rightly go forth from home into homelessness, directly knowing & realizing it for themselves in the here & now."

When this was said, Prince Bodhi said to the Blessed One, "Lord, when a monk gains a Tathāgata to discipline him, how long does it take for him to reach & remain in the supreme goal of the holy life for which clansmen rightly go forth from home into homelessness, knowing & realizing it for himself in the here & now?"

"Very well then, prince, I will cross-question you on this matter. Answer as you see fit. What do you think? Are you skilled in the art of riding an elephant & wielding a goad?"

"Yes, lord, I am skilled in the art of riding an elephant & wielding a goad."

"And what do you think? There is the case where a man comes, (thinking,) 'Prince Bodhi knows the art of riding an elephant & wielding a goad. I will study the art of riding an elephant & wielding a goad under him.' But if he were without conviction, he would not achieve what could be achieved by one with conviction. If he had many illnesses, he would not achieve what could be achieved by one of few illnesses. If he were fraudulent & deceitful, he would not achieve what could be achieved by one neither fraudulent nor deceitful. If he were lazy, he would not achieve what could be achieved by one with aroused persistence. If he were undiscerning, he would not achieve what could be achieved by one who was discerning. What do you think, prince? Would that man be able to train in the art of riding an elephant & wielding a goad under you?"

"Even a man with only one of those qualities, lord, would not be able to train in the art of riding an elephant & wielding a goad under me—to say nothing of one with all five."

"What do you think, prince? There is the case where a man comes, (thinking,) 'Prince Bodhi knows the art of riding an elephant & wielding a goad. I will study the art of riding an elephant & wielding a goad under him.' And if he were to have conviction, he would achieve what could be achieved by one with conviction. If he had few illnesses, he would achieve what could be achieved by one of few illnesses. If he were neither fraudulent nor

deceitful, he would achieve what could be achieved by one neither fraudulent nor deceitful. If he had aroused persistence, he would achieve what could be achieved by one with aroused persistence. If he were discerning, he would achieve what could be achieved by one who was discerning. What do you think, prince? Would that man be able to train in the art of riding an elephant & wielding a goad under you?"

"Even a man with only one of those qualities, lord, would be able to train in the art of riding an elephant & wielding a goad under me—to say nothing of one with all five."

"In the same way, prince, there are these five factors for exertion. Which five?

"There is the case where a monk has conviction, is convinced of the Tathāgata's awakening: 'Indeed, the Blessed One is worthy and rightly self-awakened, consummate in knowledge & conduct, well-gone, an expert with regard to the world, unexcelled as a trainer for those people fit to be tamed, the Teacher of divine & human beings, awakened, blessed.'

"He is free from illness & discomfort, endowed with good digestion—not too cold, not too hot, of moderate strength—fit for exertion.

"He is neither fraudulent nor deceitful. He declares himself to the Teacher or to his wise friends in the holy life in line with what he actually is.

"He keeps his persistence aroused for abandoning unskillful qualities and taking on skillful qualities. He is steadfast, solid in his effort, not shirking his duties with regard to skillful qualities.

"He is discerning, endowed with discernment leading to the arising of the goal—noble, penetrating, leading to the right ending of stress.

"These are the five factors for exertion.

"When a monk endowed with these five qualities gains a Tathāgata to discipline him, he would reach & remain in the supreme goal of the holy life for which clansmen rightly go forth from home into homelessness, knowing & realizing it for himself in the here & now in seven years.

"Let alone seven years. When a monk endowed with these five qualities gains a Tathāgata to discipline him, he would reach & remain in the supreme goal of the holy life for which clansmen rightly go forth from home into homelessness, knowing & realizing it for himself in the here & now in six years… five years… four years… three years… two years… one year… seven months… six months… five months… four months… three months… two months… one month… half a month… seven days… six days… five days… four days… three days… two days… one day.

“Let alone one day. When a monk endowed with these five qualities gains a Tathāgata to discipline him and is instructed in the evening, he will attain distinction by morning; instructed in the morning, he will attain distinction by evening.”

When this was said, Prince Bodhi said to the Blessed One, “O the Buddha! O the Dhamma! O the well-expoundedness of the Dhamma!—in that one instructed in the evening will attain distinction by morning; instructed in the morning, one will attain distinction by evening!”

When this was said, the young brahman Sañjikāputta said to Prince Bodhi, “Master Bodhi says, ‘O the Buddha! O the Dhamma! O the well-expoundedness of the Dhamma!’ But he doesn’t go to Master Gotama, the Dhamma, & the Saṅgha of monks for refuge.”3

“Don’t say that, dear Sañjikāputta! Don’t say that! In my mother’s presence I heard this, in my mother’s presence I learned this: On one occasion, the Blessed One was staying in Kosambī in Ghosita’s Park. Then, when she was pregnant, she went to the Blessed One and, on arrival, having bowed down to him, sat to one side. As she was sitting there, she said to the Blessed One, ‘Lord, the boy or girl in my womb goes to the Blessed One, the Dhamma, & the Saṅgha of monks for refuge. May the Blessed One remember him or her as a lay follower who has gone for refuge from this day forward, for life.’

“Then there was one time when Blessed One was staying here among the Bhaggas at Suṁsumāri Hill in the Bhesakaḷa Forest Deer Park. Then my nurse, carrying me on her hip, went to the Blessed One and, on arrival, having bowed down to him, stood to one side. As she was standing there, she said to the Blessed One, ‘This Prince Bodhi, lord, goes to the Blessed One, the Dhamma, & the Saṅgha of monks for refuge. May the Blessed One remember him as a lay follower who has gone for refuge from this day forward, for life.’

“And now, dear Sañjikāputta, for a third time, I go to the Blessed One, the Dhamma, & the Saṅgha of monks for refuge. May the Blessed One remember me as a lay follower who has gone for refuge from this day forward, for life.”

Notes

1. This part of the story, with minor differences, also appears in Cv V.21.1–3. According to the commentary to this sutta, Ven. Ānanda interprets the Buddha’s concern for future generations to be that, if monks’ stepping on a cloth is meant to bring mundane happiness to laypeople but isn’t followed by mundane happiness, people will look down on the monks.

However, in Cv V.21—the section of the Vinaya prohibiting the act of stepping on cloth coverings—one of the exemptions (Cv V.21.4) deals precisely with situations where people specifically ask monks to step on cloth coverings for the sake of their good luck: In such a situation, monks may step on the cloth.

So the Buddha's reasoning with regard to Prince Bodhi must have been different. One possible alternative is that the Buddha didn't want to establish—through his acquiesce—such a wastefully extravagant custom as covering all the floors of a building with cloth when inviting monks to bless the building.

2. This verse = Dhp 353.

3. Following the Thai and Sri Lankan versions of the Canon. The PTS version has, "But he doesn't say, 'I go to Master Gotama, the Dhamma, & the Saṅgha of monks for refuge.'" The Thai and Sri Lankan versions seem preferable, as Prince Bodhi would not refer to the Buddha as "Master Gotama."

Publisher references (not part of the sutta)

See also: MN 4; MN 14; MN 26; MN 36; MN 101; AN 5:53