SN 22.88 — SN 22:88 To Assaji | Assaji Sutta

English translation by Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu.

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

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

Text

To Assaji

Assaji Sutta (SN 22:88)

I have heard that on one occasion the Blessed One was staying near Rājagaha, at the Squirrels’ Feeding Ground. And on that occasion Ven. Assaji was staying at Kassapaka’s Park, diseased, in pain, severely ill. Then Ven. Assaji said to his attendants, “Come, friends. Go to the Blessed One and, on arrival, pay homage to his feet with your head in my name and say, ‘Lord, the monk Assaji is diseased, in pain, severely ill. He pays homage with his head to the Blessed One’s feet.’ And then say: ‘It would be good, lord, if the Blessed One would visit the monk Assaji, out of sympathy for him.’”

Responding, "As you say, friend," to Ven. Assaji, the monks went to the Blessed One and, on arrival, bowed down to him and sat to one side. As they were sitting there they said, "Lord, the monk Assaji is diseased, in pain, severely ill. He pays homage with his head to the Blessed One's feet. And he says, 'It would be good, lord, if the Blessed One would visit the monk Assaji, out of sympathy for him.'" The Blessed One acquiesced through silence.

Then the Blessed One, emerging from his seclusion in the evening,1 went to Ven. Assaji. Ven. Assaji saw the Blessed One coming from afar and, on seeing him, stirred from his bed. So the Blessed One said to him, "Enough, Assaji. Don't stir from your bed. There are these seats already arranged. I will sit there."

The Blessed One sat down on an arranged seat. When he had sat down, he said to Ven. Assaji, "I hope you are getting better, Assaji. I hope you are comfortable. I hope that your pains are lessening and not increasing. I hope that there are signs of their lessening, and not of their increasing."

"I am not getting better, lord. I am not comfortable. My extreme pains are increasing, not lessening. There are signs of their increasing, and not of their lessening."

"I hope, Assaji, that you have no anxiety, no remorse."

"Actually, lord, I have not just a little anxiety, not just a little remorse."

"But I hope, Assaji, that you can't fault yourself with regard to your virtue."

"No, lord, I can't fault myself with regard to my virtue."

"But if you can't fault yourself with regard to your virtue, then what is your anxiety? What is your remorse?"

"Lord, before when I was sick I dwelled calming bodily fabrications.2 But now I don't gain that concentration. On not gaining that concentration, the thought occurs to me, 'May I not decline!'"

"Assaji, those contemplatives & brāhmans for whom concentration is the essence, for whom concentration is the contemplative life3: When they don't gain concentration, the thought occurs to them, 'May we not decline!'

"What do you think, Assaji? Is form constant or inconstant?"

"Inconstant, lord."

"And is that which is inconstant easeful or stressful?"

"Stressful, lord."

“And is it proper to regard what is inconstant, stressful, subject to change as: ‘This is mine. This is my self. This is what I am’?”

“No, lord.”

“… Is feeling constant or inconstant?”—“Inconstant, lord.” …

“… Is perception constant or inconstant?”—“Inconstant, lord.” …

“… Are fabrications constant or inconstant?”—“Inconstant, lord.” …

“Is consciousness constant or inconstant?

“Inconstant, lord.”

“And is that which is inconstant easeful or stressful?”

“Stressful, lord.”

“And is it proper to regard what is inconstant, stressful, subject to change as: ‘This is mine. This is my self. This is what I am’?”

“No, lord.”

“Seeing thus, Assaji, the instructed disciple of the noble ones grows disenchanted with form, disenchanted with feeling, disenchanted with perception, disenchanted with fabrications, disenchanted with consciousness. Disenchanted, he becomes dispassionate. Through dispassion, he is released. With release, there is the knowledge, ‘Released.’ He discerns that ‘Birth is ended, the holy life fulfilled, the task done. There is nothing further for this world.’

“If sensing a feeling of pleasure, he discerns it as ‘inconstant.’ He discerns it as ‘not grasped at.’ He discerns it as ‘not relished.’ If sensing a feeling of pain, he discerns it as ‘inconstant.’ He discerns it as ‘not grasped at.’ He discerns it as ‘not relished.’ If sensing a feeling of neither pleasure nor pain, he discerns it as ‘inconstant.’ He discerns it as ‘not grasped at.’ He discerns it as ‘not relished.’

“If sensing a feeling of pleasure, he senses it disjoined from it. If sensing a feeling of pain, he senses it disjoined from it. If sensing a feeling of neither pleasure nor pain, he senses it disjoined from it. [He discerns it as ‘inconstant.’ He discerns it as ‘not grasped at.’ He discerns it as ‘not relished.’]4 If sensing a feeling limited to the body, he discerns, ‘I am sensing a feeling limited to the body.’ If sensing a feeling limited to life, he discerns, ‘I am sensing a feeling limited to life.’ He discerns, ‘With the break-up of the body, after the termination of life, all that is experienced, not being relished, will grow cold right here.’

“Just as an oil lamp would burn in dependence on oil & wick and, from the termination of the oil & wick, it would go out unnourished; in the same way, if sensing a feeling limited to

the body, he discerns, 'I am sensing a feeling limited to the body.' If sensing a feeling limited to life, he discerns, 'I am sensing a feeling limited to life.' He discerns, 'With the break-up of the body, after the termination of life, all that is experienced, not being relished, will grow cold right here.'"

Notes

1. CDB mistakenly indicates that the Buddha visited Ven. Assaji early in the morning.

2. The in-and-out breath. See MN 44, MN 118, SN 36:11, and AN 10:20.

3. Samādhi-sāmañña. On the meaning of sāmañña, see MN 61, note 2. On the essence of the holy life, see MN 29–30.

4. The passage in brackets is not found in the parallel passages at MN 140 and SN 54:8 in the Thai edition of the Canon, and is also not found in the Burmese edition of this discourse.

Publisher references (not part of the sutta)

See also: MN 143; SN 46:14; SN 52:10; SN 55:21; SN 55:54; AN 10:48