SN 41.3 — SN 41:3 About Isidatta | Isidatta Sutta

English translation by Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu.

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Text

About Isidatta

Isidatta Sutta (SN 41:3)

On one occasion a large number of senior monks were staying near Macchikāsaṇḍa in the Wild Mango Grove. Then Citta the householder went to them and, on arrival, having bowed down to them, sat to one side. As he was sitting there he said to them: “Venerable sirs, may the senior monks acquiesce to tomorrow’s meal from me.”

The senior monks acquiesced by silence. Then Citta the householder, sensing the senior monks’ acquiescence, got up from his seat and, having bowed down to them, circumambulated them—keeping them to his right—and left.

When the night had passed, the senior monks adjusted their lower robes in the early morning and, taking their bowls & outer robes, went to Citta's residence. There they sat down on the appointed seats. Citta the householder went to them and, having bowed down to them, sat to one side. As he was sitting there, he said to the most senior monk:

"Venerable sir, concerning the various views that arise in the world—'The cosmos is eternal' or 'The cosmos isn't eternal'; 'The cosmos is finite' or 'The cosmos is infinite'; 'The soul and the body are the same' or 'The soul is one thing, the body another'; 'A Tathāgata exists after death' or 'A Tathāgata doesn't exist after death' or 'A Tathāgata both exists & doesn't exist after death' or 'A Tathāgata neither exists nor doesn't exist after death'; these along with the sixty-two views mentioned in the Brahmajāla [DN 1]—when what is present do these views come into being, and when what is absent do they not come into being?"

When this was said, the senior monk was silent. A second time… A third time Citta the householder asked, "Concerning the various views that arise in the world… when what is present do they come into being, and what is absent do they not come into being?" A third time the senior monk was silent.

Now on that occasion Ven. Isidatta was the most junior of all the monks in that Saṅgha. Then he said to the senior monk: "Allow me, venerable sir, to answer Citta the householder's question."

"Go ahead & answer it, friend Isidatta."

"Now, householder, are you asking this: 'Concerning the various views that arise in the world… when what is present do they come into being, and what is absent do they not come into being?'?"

"Yes, venerable sir."

"Concerning the various views that arise in the world, householder… when self-identity view is present, these views come into being; when self-identity view is absent, they don't come into being."

"But, venerable sir, how does self-identity view come into being?"

"There is the case, householder, where an uninstructed, run-of-the-mill person—who has no regard for noble ones, is not well-versed or disciplined in their Dhamma; who has no regard for people of integrity, is not well-versed or disciplined in their Dhamma—assumes form (the body) to be the self, or the self as possessing form, or form as in the self, or the self as in form. He assumes feeling to be the self, or the self as possessing feeling, or feeling as in the self, or the self as in feeling. He assumes perception to be the self, or the self as possessing perception, or perception as in the self, or the self as in perception. He assumes fabrications to be the self, or the self as possessing fabrications, or fabrications as in the self, or the self as in fabrications. He assumes consciousness to be the self, or the self as possessing consciousness, or consciousness as in the self, or the self as in

consciousness. This is how self-identity view comes into being."

"And, venerable sir, how does self-identity view not come into being?"

"There is the case, householder, where a well-instructed disciple of the noble ones—who has regard for noble ones, is well-versed & disciplined in their Dhamma; who has regard for people of integrity, is well-versed & disciplined in their Dhamma—doesn't assume form to be the self, or the self as possessing form, or form as in the self, or the self as in form. He doesn't assume feeling to be the self... He doesn't assume perception to be the self... He doesn't assume fabrications to be the self... He doesn't assume consciousness to be the self, or the self as possessing consciousness, or consciousness as in the self, or the self as in consciousness. This is how self-identity view does not come into being."

"Venerable sir, where does Master Isidatta come from?"

"I come from Avanti, householder."

"There is, venerable sir, a clansman from Avanti named Isidatta, an unseen friend of mine, who has gone forth. Have you ever seen him?"

"Yes, householder."

"Where is he living now, venerable sir?"

When this was said, the Venerable Isidatta was silent.

"Are you my Isidatta?"

"Yes, householder."

"Then may Master Isidatta delight in the charming Wild Mango Grove at Macchikāsaṇḍa. I will be responsible for your robes, almsfood, lodgings, & medicinal requisites."

"That is admirably said, householder."

Then Citta the householder—having delighted & rejoiced in the Venerable Isidatta's words—with his own hand served & satisfied the senior monks with choice staple & non-staple foods. When the senior monks had finished eating and had rinsed their bowls & hands, they got up from their seats and left.

Then the most senior monk said to the Venerable Isidatta: "It was excellent, friend Isidatta, the way that question inspired you to answer. It didn't inspire an answer in me at all. Whenever a similar question comes up again, may it inspire you to answer as you did just now."

Then Ven. Isidatta—having set his lodging in order and taking his bowl & robes—left Macchikāsaṇḍa. And in leaving Macchikāsaṇḍa, he was gone for good and never returned.

Publisher references (not part of the sutta)

See also: SN 12:15; SN 41:4; AN 8:30; Ud 3:1; Thag 6:10