SN 44.9 — SN 44:9 The Debating Hall | Kutūhalasālā Sutta

English translation by Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu.

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Text

The Debating Hall

Kutūhalasālā Sutta (SN 44:9)

Then Vacchagotta the wanderer went to the Blessed One and, on arrival, exchanged courteous greetings with him. 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, a few days ago a large number of contemplatives, brahmans, and wanderers of various sects were sitting together in the Debating Hall when this conversation arose among them: ‘This Pūraṇa Kassapa—the leader of a community, the leader of a group, the teacher of a group, honored and famous, esteemed as holy by the mass of people—describes a disciple who has died and passed on in terms of places of rebirth: “That one is reborn there; that one is

reborn there." Even when the disciple is an ultimate person, a foremost person, attained to the foremost attainment, Pūraṇa Kassapa describes him, when he has died and passed on, in terms of places of rebirth: "That one is reborn there; that one is reborn there."

"'This Makkhali Gosāla... This Nigaṇṭha Nāṭaputta... This Sañjaya Velaṭṭhaputta... This Pakudha Kaccāna... This Ajita Kesakambala—the leader of a community, the leader of a group, the teacher of a group, honored and famous, esteemed as holy by the mass of people—describes a disciple who has died and passed on in terms of places of rebirth: "That one is reborn there; that one is reborn there." Even when the disciple is an ultimate person, a foremost person, attained to the foremost attainment, Ajita Kesakambala describes him, when he has died and passed on, in terms of places of rebirth: "That one is reborn there; that one is reborn there."

"This contemplative Gotama—the leader of a community, the leader of a group, the teacher of a group, honored and famous, esteemed as holy by the mass of people—describes a disciple who has died and passed on in terms of places of rebirth: "That one is reborn there; that one is reborn there." But when the disciple is an ultimate person, a foremost person, attained to the foremost attainment, the contemplative Gotama does not describe him, when he has died and passed on, in terms of places of rebirth: "That one is reborn there; that one is reborn there." Instead, he describes him thus: "He has cut through craving, severed the fetter, and by rightly breaking through conceit has made an end of suffering & stress.'"

"So I was simply befuddled. I was uncertain: How is the teaching of Gotama the contemplative to be understood?"

"Of course you are befuddled, Vaccha. Of course you are uncertain. When there is a reason for befuddlement in you, uncertainty arises. I designate the rebirth of one who has sustenance, Vaccha, and not of one without sustenance. Just as a fire burns with sustenance and not without sustenance, even so I designate the rebirth of one who has sustenance and not of one without sustenance."

"But, Master Gotama, at the moment a flame is being swept on by the wind and goes a far distance, what do you designate as its sustenance then?"

"Vaccha, when a flame is being swept on by the wind and goes a far distance, I designate it as wind-sustained, for the wind is its sustenance at that time."

"And at the moment when a being sets this body aside and is not yet reborn in another body, what do you designate as its sustenance then?"

"Vaccha, when a being sets this body aside and is not yet reborn in another body, I designate it as craving-sustained, for craving is its sustenance at that time."