Snp 2.7 — Brahmanical Principles

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Text

Anthology of Discourses 2.7

Brahmanical Principles

So I have heard. At one time the Buddha was staying near Sāvatthī in Jeta's Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika's monastery. Then several old and well-to-do brahmins of Kosala—elderly and senior, who were advanced in years and had reached the final stage of life—went up to the Buddha, and exchanged greetings with him. When the greetings and polite conversation were over, they sat down to one side and said to the Buddha: "Worthy Gotama, are the ancient principles of the brahmins exhibited these days among brahmins?" "No, brahmins, they are not." "If you wouldn't mind, Worthy Gotama, please teach us the ancient principles of the brahmins." "Well then, brahmins, listen and apply your mind well, I will speak." "Yes, worthy sir," they replied. The Buddha said this:

"The ancient seers used to be

restrained and austere.

Having given up the five sensual stimuli,

they lived for their own true good.

Brahmins used to own no cattle,

nor gold coin or grain.

Chanting was their money and grain,

which they guarded as a gift from god.

Food was prepared for them

and left beside their doors.

People believed that food prepared in faith

should be given to them.

With colorful clothes,

lodgings and houses,

prosperous nations and countries

honored those brahmins.
Brahmins used to be inviolable and
invincible, protected by principle.
No one ever turned them away
from the doors of families.
For forty-eight years
they led the spiritual life.
The brahmins of old pursued
their quest for knowledge and conduct.
Brahmins never transgressed with another,
nor did they purchase a wife.
They lived together in love,
joining together by mutual consent.
Brahmins never approached their wives for sex
during the time outside
the fertile phase of the menstrual cycle
after menstruation.
They praised chastity and morality,
integrity, tenderness, and fervor,
gentleness and harmlessness,
and also patience.
He who was supreme among them,
godlike, staunchly vigorous,
did not engage in sex
even in a dream.
Training in line with their duties,
many smart people here
praised chastity and morality,
and also patience.

They begged for rice,
bedding, clothes, ghee, and oil.
Having collected them legitimately,
they arranged a sacrifice.
But they slew no cows
while serving at the sacrifice.
Like a mother, father, or brother,
or some other relative,
cows are our best friends,
the fonts of medicine.
They give food and strength,
and beauty and happiness.
Knowing these benefits,
they slew no cows.
The brahmins were delicate and tall,
beautiful and glorious.
They were keen on all the duties
according to their teachings.
So long as they continued in the world,
people flourished happily.
But perversion crept into them
little by little when they saw
the transformation of the king
and the ladies in all their finery.
Their chariots were harnessed with thoroughbreds,
well-made with bright canopies,
and their homes and houses
were neatly divided section by section.
They were lavished with herds of cattle,

and furnished with bevies of lovely ladies.

This extravagant human wealth

was coveted by the brahmins.

They compiled hymns to that end,

approached King Okkāka and said,

‘You have plenty of money and grain.

Sacrifice! For you have much treasure.

Sacrifice! For you have much money.’

Persuaded by the brahmins,

the king, chief of charioteers, performed

horse sacrifice, human sacrifice,

the sacrifices of the ‘casting of the yoke-pin’, the ‘royal soma drinking’, and the ‘unimpeded’.

When he had carried out these sacrifices,

he gave riches to the brahmins.

There were cattle, bedding, and clothes,

and ladies in all their finery;

chariots harnessed with thoroughbreds,

well-made with bright canopies;

and lovely homes,

nicely divided section by section.

Having furnished them with different grains,

he gave riches to the brahmins.

When they got hold of that wealth,

they arranged to store it up.

Falling under the sway of desire,

their craving grew and grew.

They compiled hymns to that end,

approached King Okkāka once more and said,

‘Like water and earth,

gold coin, riches, and grain,
are cows for humankind,
as they are essential for creatures.
Sacrifice! For you have much treasure.
Sacrifice! For you have much money.’
Persuaded by the brahmins,
the king, chief of charioteers,
had many hundred thousand cows
slain at the sacrifice.
Neither with feet nor with horns
do cows harm anyone at all.
Cows meek as lambs
supply buckets of milk.
But taking them by the horns,
the king slew them with a sword.
At that the gods and the ancestors,
with Indra, the titans and monsters,
roared out: ‘This is a crime against nature!’
as the sword fell on the cows.
There used to be three kinds of illness:
greed, starvation, and old age.
But due to the slaughter of cows,
this grew to be ninety-eight.
This crime of the rods
is of ancient descent.
Killing innocent creatures,
the sacrificers forsake righteousness.
And that is how this mean old practice
was criticized by sensible people.

Wherever they see such a thing,

folk criticize the sacrificer.

With righteousness gone,

peasants and menials were split,

as were many aristocrats,

and wives looked down on their husbands.

Aristocrats and brahmins only by kin,

and others protected by their clan,

neglecting their genealogy,

fell under the sway of sensual pleasures.”

When he had spoken, those well-to-do brahmins said to the Buddha, “Excellent, worthy Gotama! Excellent! … From this day forth, may the worthy Gotama remember us as lay followers who have gone for refuge for life.”