MN 101 — At Devadaha

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Text

Middle Discourses 101

At Devadaha

So I have heard. At one time the Buddha was staying in the land of the Sakyans, near the Sakyan town named Devadaha. There the Buddha addressed the mendicants, “Mendicants!”

“Venerable sir,” they replied. The Buddha said this:

“Mendicants, there are some ascetics and brahmins who have this doctrine and view: ‘Everything this individual person experiences—pleasurable, painful, or neutral—is because of past deeds. So, due to eliminating past deeds by fervent mortification, and not doing any new deeds, there’s nothing to come up in the future. With no future consequence, deeds end. With the ending of deeds, suffering ends. With the ending of suffering, feeling ends. And with the ending of feeling, all suffering will have been worn away.’ Such is the doctrine of the Jain ascetics.

I’ve gone up to the Jain ascetics who say this and said, ‘Is it really true that this is the venerables’ view?’ They admitted that it is.

I said to them, ‘But reverends, do you know for sure that you existed in the past, and it is not the case that you did not exist?’

‘No we don’t, reverend.’

‘But reverends, do you know for sure that you did bad deeds in the past?’

‘No we don’t, reverend.’

‘But reverends, do you know that you did bad deeds of this type or that?’

‘No we don’t, reverend.’

‘But reverends, do you know that so much suffering has already been worn away? Or that so much suffering still remains to be worn away? Or that when so much suffering is worn away all suffering will have been worn away?’

‘No we don’t, reverend.’

‘But reverends, do you know about giving up unskillful qualities in this very life and embracing skillful qualities?’

‘No we don’t, reverend.’

‘So it seems that you don’t know any of these things. In that case, it’s not appropriate for the Jain venerables to declare this.

Now, supposing you did know these things. In that case, it would be appropriate for the Jain venerables to declare this.

Suppose a man was struck by an arrow thickly smeared with poison, causing painful feelings, sharp and severe. Their friends and colleagues, relatives and kin would get a surgeon to treat them. The surgeon would cut open the wound with a scalpel, causing painful feelings, sharp and severe. They’d probe for the arrow, causing painful feelings, sharp and severe. They’d extract the arrow, causing painful feelings, sharp and severe. They’d apply cauterizing medicine to the wound, causing painful feelings, sharp and severe. After some time that wound would be healed and the skin regrown. They’d be healthy, happy, autonomous, master of themselves, able to go where they wanted.

They’d think, “Earlier I was struck by an arrow thickly smeared with poison, causing painful feelings, sharp and severe. My friends and colleagues, relatives and kin got a surgeon to treat me. At each step, the treatment was painful. But these days that wound is healed and the skin regrown. I’m healthy, happy, autonomous, my own master, able to go where I want.”

In the same way, reverends, if you knew about these things, it would be appropriate for the Jain venerables to declare this.

But since you don’t know any of these things, it’s not appropriate for the Jain venerables to declare this.’

When I said this, those Jain ascetics said to me, ‘Reverend, the Jain ascetic of the Ñātika clan claims to be all-knowing and all-seeing, to know and see everything without exception, thus: “Knowledge and vision are constantly and continually present to me, while walking, standing, sleeping, and waking.”

He says: “O reverend Jain ascetics, you have done bad deeds in a past life. Wear them away with these severe and grueling austerities. And when in the present you are restrained in body, speech, and mind, you’re not doing any bad deeds for the future. So, due to eliminating past deeds by fervent mortification, and not doing any new deeds, there’s nothing to come up in the future. With no future consequence, deeds end. With the ending of deeds, suffering ends. With the ending of suffering, feeling ends. And with the ending of feeling, all suffering will have been worn away.” We endorse and accept this, and we are satisfied with it.’

When they said this, I said to them, ‘These five things can be seen to turn out in two different ways in this very life. What five? Faith, endorsement, oral transmission, reasoned train of thought, and acceptance of a view after deliberation. These are the five things that can be seen to turn out in two different ways in this very life. In this case, what faith in your teacher do you have when it comes to the past? What endorsement, oral transmission, reasoned train of thought, or acceptance of a view after deliberation?’ When I said this, I did not see any legitimate defense of their doctrine from the Jains.

Furthermore, I said to those Jain ascetics, ‘What do you think, reverends? At a time of intense exertion and striving do you suffer painful, sharp, severe, acute feelings due to exertion? Whereas at a time without intense exertion and striving do you not suffer painful, sharp, severe, acute feelings due to exertion?’

‘Reverend Gotama, at a time of intense exertion we suffer painful, sharp feelings due to exertion, not without intense exertion.’

‘So it seems that only at a time of intense exertion do you suffer painful, sharp feelings due to exertion, not without intense exertion. In that case, it’s not appropriate for the Jain venerables to declare: “Everything this individual person experiences—pleasurable, painful, or neutral—is because of past deeds. …”

If at a time of intense exertion you did not suffer painful, sharp feelings due to exertion, and if without intense exertion you did experience such feelings, it would be appropriate for the Jain venerables to declare this.

But since this is not the case, aren’t you experiencing painful, sharp feelings due only to your own exertion, which out of ignorance, unknowing, and confusion you misconstrue to imply: “Everything this individual person experiences—pleasurable, painful, or neutral—is because of past deeds. …”?’ When I said this, I did not see any legitimate defense of their doctrine from the Jains.

Furthermore, I said to those Jain ascetics, ‘What do you think, reverends? If a deed is to be experienced in this life, can exertion make it be experienced in lives to come?’

‘No, reverend.’

‘But if a deed is to be experienced in lives to come, can exertion make it be experienced in this life?’

‘No, reverend.’

‘What do you think, reverends? If a deed is to be experienced as pleasant, can exertion make it be experienced as painful?’

‘No, reverend.’

‘But if a deed is to be experienced as painful, can exertion make it be experienced as pleasant?’

‘No, reverend.’

‘What do you think, reverends? If a deed is to be experienced when ripe, can exertion make it be experienced when unripe?’

‘No, reverend.’

‘But if a deed is to be experienced when unripe, can exertion make it be experienced when ripe?’

‘No, reverend.’

‘What do you think, reverends? If a deed is to be experienced a lot, can exertion make it be experienced a little?’

‘No, reverend.’

‘But if a deed is to be experienced a little, can exertion make it be experienced a lot?’

‘No, reverend.’

‘What do you think, reverends? If a deed is to be experienced, can exertion make it not be experienced?’

‘No, reverend.’

‘But if a deed is not to be experienced, can exertion make it be experienced?’

‘No, reverend.’

‘So it seems that exertion cannot change the way deeds are experienced in any of these ways. This being so, your exertion and striving are fruitless.’

Such is the doctrine of the Jain ascetics. Saying this, the Jain ascetics deserve rebuttal and criticism on ten legitimate grounds.

If sentient beings experience pleasure and pain because of past deeds, clearly the Jains have done bad deeds in the past, since they now experience such intense pain. If sentient beings experience pleasure and pain because of God Almighty’s creation, clearly the Jains were created by a bad God, since they now experience such intense pain. If sentient beings experience pleasure and pain because of circumstance and nature, clearly the Jains arise from bad circumstances, since they now experience such intense pain. If sentient beings experience pleasure and pain because of the class of rebirth, clearly the Jains have been reborn in a bad class, since they now experience such intense pain. If sentient beings experience pleasure and pain because of exertion in this life, clearly the Jains exert themselves badly in this life, since they now experience such intense pain.

The Jains deserve criticism whether or not sentient beings experience pleasure and pain because of past deeds, or God Almighty’s creation, or circumstance and nature, or class of rebirth, or exertion in this life. Such is the doctrine of the Jain ascetics. The Jain ascetics who say this deserve rebuttal and criticism on these ten legitimate grounds. That’s how exertion and striving is fruitless.

And how is exertion and striving fruitful? It’s when a mendicant does not bring suffering upon themselves; and they don’t forsake legitimate pleasure, but they’re not besotted with that pleasure. They understand: ‘When I actively strive I become dispassionate toward this source of suffering. But when I develop equanimity I become dispassionate toward this other source of suffering.’ So they either actively strive or develop equanimity as appropriate. Through active striving they become dispassionate toward that specific source of suffering, and so that suffering is worn away. Through developing equanimity they become dispassionate toward that other source of suffering, and so that suffering is worn away.

Suppose a man is in love with a woman, full of intense desire and lust. Then he sees her standing together with another man, chatting, giggling, and laughing.

What do you think, mendicants? Would that give rise to sorrow, lamentation, pain, sadness, and distress for him?"

"Yes, sir. Why is that? Because that man is in love with that woman, full of intense desire and lust."

"Then that man might think: 'I'm in love with that woman, full of intense desire and lust. When I saw her standing together with another man, chatting, giggling, and laughing, it gave rise to sorrow, lamentation, pain, sadness, and distress for me. Why don't I give up that desire and lust for that woman?' So that's what he did. Some time later he sees her again standing together with another man, chatting, giggling, and laughing.

What do you think, mendicants? Would that give rise to sorrow, lamentation, pain, sadness, and distress for him?"

"No, sir. Why is that? Because he no longer desires that woman."

"In the same way, a mendicant does not bring suffering upon themselves; and they don't forsake legitimate pleasure, but they're not besotted with that pleasure. They understand: 'When I actively strive I become dispassionate toward this source of suffering. But when I develop equanimity I become dispassionate toward this other source of suffering.' So they either actively strive or develop equanimity as appropriate. Through active striving they become dispassionate toward that specific source of suffering, and so that suffering is worn away. Through developing equanimity they become dispassionate toward that other source of suffering, and so that suffering is worn away. That's how exertion and striving is fruitful.

Furthermore, a mendicant reflects: 'When I live as I please, unskillful qualities grow and skillful qualities decline. But when I strive painfully, unskillful qualities decline and skillful qualities grow. Why don't I strive painfully?' So that's what they do, and as they do so unskillful qualities decline and skillful qualities grow. After some time, they no longer strive painfully. Why is that? Because they have accomplished the goal for which they strived painfully.

Suppose a fletcher was heating an arrow shaft between two firebrands, making it straight and fit for use. After it's been made straight and fit for use, they'd no longer heat it to make it straight and fit for use. Why is that? Because they have accomplished the goal for which they heated it.

In the same way, a mendicant reflects: 'When I live as I please, unskillful qualities grow and skillful qualities decline. But when I strive painfully, unskillful qualities decline and skillful qualities grow. Why don't I strive painfully?' … After some time, they no longer strive painfully. That too is how exertion and striving is fruitful.

Furthermore, a Realized One arises in the world, perfected, a fully awakened Buddha, accomplished in knowledge and conduct, holy, knower of the world, supreme guide for those fit for training, teacher of gods and humans, awakened, blessed. He has realized

with his own insight this world—with its gods, Māras, and divinities, this population with its ascetics and brahmins, gods and humans—and he makes it known to others. He teaches Dhamma that's good in the beginning, good in the middle, and good in the end, meaningful and well-phrased. And he reveals a spiritual practice that's entirely full and pure.

A householder hears that teaching, or a householder's child, or someone reborn in a good family. They gain faith in the Realized One, and reflect: 'Life at home is cramped and dirty, life gone forth is wide open. It's not easy for someone living at home to lead the spiritual life utterly full and pure, like a polished shell. Why don't I shave off my hair and beard, dress in ocher robes, and go forth from the lay life to homelessness?' After some time they give up a large or small fortune, and a large or small family circle. They shave off hair and beard, dress in ocher robes, and go forth from the lay life to homelessness.

Once they've gone forth, they take up the training and livelihood of the mendicants. They give up killing living creatures, renouncing the rod and the sword. They're scrupulous and kind, living full of sympathy for all living beings. They give up stealing. They take only what's given, and expect only what's given. They keep themselves clean by not thieving. They give up unchastity. They are chaste, set apart, refraining from the vulgar act of sex. They give up lying. They speak the truth and stick to the truth. They're honest and dependable, and don't trick the world with their words. They give up backbiting. They don't repeat in one place what they heard in another so as to divide people against each other. Instead, they reconcile those who are divided and support those who are united, delighting in harmony, loving harmony, speaking words that promote harmony. They give up harsh speech. They speak in a way that's mellow, pleasing to the ear, endearing, going to the heart, polite, and likable and agreeable to the people. They give up talking nonsense. Their words are timely, true, and meaningful, in line with the teaching and training. They say things at the right time which are valuable, reasonable, succinct, and beneficial. They refrain from injuring plants and seeds. They eat in one part of the day, abstaining from eating at night and food at the wrong time. They refrain from seeing shows of dancing, singing, and music. They refrain from attiring and adorning themselves with garlands, fragrance, and makeup. They refrain from high and luxurious beds. They refrain from receiving gold and currency, raw grains, raw meat, women and girls, male and female bondservants, goats and sheep, chickens and pigs, elephants, cows, horses, and mares, and fields and land. They refrain from running errands and messages; buying and selling; falsifying weights, metals, or measures; bribery, fraud, cheating, and duplicity; mutilation, murder, abduction, banditry, plunder, and violence.

They're content with robes to look after the body and almsfood to look after the belly. Wherever they go, they set out taking only these things. They're like a bird: wherever it flies, wings are its only burden. In the same way, a mendicant is content with robes to look after the body and almsfood to look after the belly. Wherever they go, they set out taking only these things. When they have this spectrum of noble ethics, they experience a blameless happiness inside themselves.

When they see a sight with their eyes, they don't get caught up in the features and details. If the faculty of sight were left unrestrained, bad unskillful qualities of covetousness and

displeasure would become overwhelming. For this reason, they practice restraint, protecting the faculty of sight, and achieving its restraint. When they hear a sound with their ears … When they smell an odor with their nose … When they taste a flavor with their tongue … When they feel a touch with their body … When they know an idea with their mind, they don't get caught up in the features and details. If the faculty of mind were left unrestrained, bad unskillful qualities of covetousness and displeasure would become overwhelming. For this reason, they practice restraint, protecting the faculty of mind, and achieving its restraint. When they have this noble sense restraint, they experience an unsullied bliss inside themselves.

They act with situational awareness when going out and coming back; when looking ahead and aside; when bending and extending the limbs; when bearing the outer robe, bowl and robes; when eating, drinking, chewing, and tasting; when urinating and defecating; when walking, standing, sitting, sleeping, waking, speaking, and keeping silent.

When they have this spectrum of noble ethics, this noble contentment, this noble sense restraint, and this noble mindfulness and situational awareness, they frequent a secluded lodging—a wilderness, the root of a tree, a hill, a ravine, a mountain cave, a charnel ground, a forest, the open air, a heap of straw. After the meal, they return from almsround, sit down cross-legged, set their body straight, and bring mindfulness to the present.

Giving up covetousness for the world, they meditate with a heart rid of covetousness, cleansing the mind of covetousness. Giving up ill will and malevolence, they meditate with a mind rid of ill will, full of sympathy for all living beings, cleansing the mind of ill will. Giving up dullness and drowsiness, they meditate with a mind rid of dullness and drowsiness, perceiving light, mindful and aware, cleansing the mind of dullness and drowsiness. Giving up restlessness and remorse, they meditate without restlessness, their mind settled internally, cleansing the mind of restlessness and remorse. Giving up doubt, they meditate having gone beyond doubt, not undecided about skillful qualities, cleansing the mind of doubt.

They give up these five hindrances, corruptions of the heart that weaken wisdom. Then, quite secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unskillful qualities, they enter and remain in the first absorption, which has the rapture and bliss born of seclusion, while placing the mind and keeping it connected. That too is how exertion and striving is fruitful.

Furthermore, as the placing of the mind and keeping it connected are stilled, they enter and remain in the second absorption, which has the rapture and bliss born of immersion, with internal clarity and mind at one, without placing the mind and keeping it connected. That too is how exertion and striving is fruitful.

Furthermore, with the fading away of rapture, a mendicant enters and remains in the third absorption, where they meditate with equanimity, mindful and aware, experiencing for themselves the bliss of which the noble ones declare, 'Equanimous and mindful, one meditates in bliss.' That too is how exertion and striving is fruitful.

Furthermore, with the giving up of pleasure and pain and the disappearance of former happiness and sadness, they enter and remain in the fourth absorption, without pleasure

or pain, with pure equanimity and mindfulness. That too is how exertion and striving is fruitful.

When their mind has become immersed in samādhi like this—purified, bright, flawless, rid of corruptions, pliable, workable, steady, and imperturbable—they extend it toward recollection of past lives. They recollect many kinds of past lives, that is, one, two, three, four, five, ten, twenty, thirty, forty, fifty, a hundred, a thousand, a hundred thousand rebirths; many eons of the world contracting, many eons of the world expanding, many eons of the world contracting and expanding. They remember: 'There, I was named this, my clan was that, I looked like this, and that was my food. This was how I felt pleasure and pain, and that was how my life ended. When I passed away from that place I was reborn somewhere else. There, too, I was named this, my clan was that, I looked like this, and that was my food. This was how I felt pleasure and pain, and that was how my life ended. When I passed away from that place I was reborn here.' And so they recollect their many kinds of past lives, with features and details. That too is how exertion and striving is fruitful.

When their mind has become immersed in samādhi like this—purified, bright, flawless, rid of corruptions, pliable, workable, steady, and imperturbable—they extend it toward knowledge of the death and rebirth of sentient beings. With clairvoyance that is purified and superhuman, they see sentient beings passing away and being reborn—inferior and superior, beautiful and ugly, in a good place or a bad place. They understood how sentient beings pass on according to their deeds: 'These dear beings did bad things by way of body, speech, and mind. They denounced the noble ones; they had wrong view; and they chose to act out of that wrong view. When their body broke up, after death, they were reborn in a place of loss, a bad place, the underworld, hell. These dear beings, however, did good things by way of body, speech, and mind. They never denounced the noble ones; they had right view; and they chose to act out of that right view. When their body broke up, after death, they were reborn in a good place, a heavenly realm.' And so, with clairvoyance that is purified and superhuman, they see sentient beings passing away and being reborn—inferior and superior, beautiful and ugly, in a good place or a bad place. They understand how sentient beings pass on according to their deeds. That too is how exertion and striving is fruitful.

When their mind has become immersed in samādhi like this—purified, bright, flawless, rid of corruptions, pliable, workable, steady, and imperturbable—they extend it toward knowledge of the ending of defilements. They truly understand: 'This is suffering' … 'This is the origin of suffering' … 'This is the cessation of suffering' … 'This is the practice that leads to the cessation of suffering.' They truly understand: 'These are defilements' … 'This is the origin of defilements' … 'This is the cessation of defilements' … 'This is the practice that leads to the cessation of defilements'.

Knowing and seeing like this, their mind is freed from the defilements of sensuality, desire to be reborn, and ignorance. When they're freed, they know they're freed.

They understand: 'Rebirth is ended, the spiritual journey has been completed, what had to be done has been done, there is nothing further for this place.' That too is how exertion and striving is fruitful. Such is the doctrine of the Realized One. Saying this, the Realized One deserves praise on ten legitimate grounds.

If sentient beings experience pleasure and pain because of past deeds, clearly the Realized One has done good deeds in the past, since he now experiences such undefiled pleasure. If sentient beings experience pleasure and pain because of God Almighty's creation, clearly the Realized One was created by a good God, since he now experiences such undefiled pleasure. If sentient beings experience pleasure and pain because of circumstance and nature, clearly the Realized One arises from good circumstances, since he now experiences such undefiled pleasure. If sentient beings experience pleasure and pain because of the class of rebirth, clearly the Realized One was reborn in a good class, since he now experiences such undefiled pleasure. If sentient beings experience pleasure and pain because of exertion in this life, clearly the Realized One exerts himself well in this life, since he now experiences such undefiled pleasure.

The Realized One deserves praise whether or not sentient beings experience pleasure and pain because of past deeds, or God Almighty's creation, or circumstance and nature, or class of rebirth, or exertion in this life. Such is the doctrine of the Realized One. Saying this, the Realized One deserves praise on these ten legitimate grounds."

That is what the Buddha said. Satisfied, the mendicants approved what the Buddha said.