MN 49 — On the Invitation of Divinity

English translation by Bhikkhu Sujato.
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Text

Middle Discourses 49

On the Invitation of Divinity

So I have heard. At one time the Buddha was staying near Sāvatthī in Jeta's Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika's monastery. There the Buddha addressed the mendicants, "Mendicants!"

"Venerable sir," they replied. The Buddha said this:

"This one time, mendicants, I was staying near Ukkaṭṭhā in the Subhaga Forest at the root of a magnificent sal tree. Now at that time Baka the Divinity had the following harmful misconception: 'This is permanent, this is everlasting, this is eternal, this is whole, this is not liable to pass away. For this is where there's no being born, growing old, dying, passing away, or being reborn. And there's no other escape beyond this.'

Then I knew what Baka the Divinity was thinking. As easily as a strong person would extend or contract their arm, I vanished from the Subhaga Forest and reappeared in that realm of divinity.

Baka saw me coming off in the distance and said, 'Come, good fellow! Welcome, good fellow! It's been a long time since you took the opportunity to come here. For this is permanent, this is everlasting, this is eternal, this is whole, this is not liable to pass away. For this is where there's no being born, growing old, dying, passing away, or being reborn. And there's no other escape beyond this.'

When he had spoken, I said to him, 'Oh lord, Baka the Divinity is lost in ignorance! Oh lord, Baka the Divinity is lost in ignorance! Because what is actually impermanent, not lasting, transient, incomplete, and liable to pass away, he says is permanent, everlasting, eternal, whole, and not liable to pass away. And where there is being born, growing old, dying, passing away, and being reborn, he says that there's no being born, growing old, dying, passing away, or being reborn. And although there is another escape beyond this, he says that there's no other escape beyond this.'

Then Māra the Wicked took possession of a member of the retinue of Divinity and said this to me, 'Mendicant, mendicant! Don't attack this one! Don't attack this one! For this is the Divinity, the Great Divinity, the Vanquisher, the Unvanquished, the Universal Seer, the Wielder of Power, God Almighty, the Maker, the Creator, the First, the Begetter, the Controller, the Father of those who have been born and those yet to be born.

There have been ascetics and brahmins before you, mendicant, who criticized and loathed earth, water, fire, air, creatures, gods, the Progenitor, and the Divinity. When their bodies broke up and their breath was cut off they were established in a lower realm.

There have been ascetics and brahmins before you, mendicant, who praised and approved earth, water, fire, air, creatures, gods, the Progenitor, and the Divinity. When their bodies broke up and their breath was cut off they were established in a higher realm.

So, mendicant, I tell you this: please, good fellow, do exactly what the Divinity says. Don't go beyond the word of the Divinity. If you do, then you'll end up like a person who, when approached by Lady Luck, would fend her off with a staff; or who, as they are falling over a cliff, would push away the ground with their hands and feet. Please, good fellow, do exactly what the Divinity says. Don't go beyond the word of the Divinity. Do you not see the assembly of the Divinity gathered here?'

And so Māra the Wicked presented the assembly of the Divinity to me.

When he had spoken, I said to Māra, 'I know you, Wicked One. Do not think, "He does not know me." You are Māra the Wicked. And the Divinity, the Divinity's assembly, and the retinue of Divinity have all fallen into your hands; they're under your sway. And you think, "Maybe this one, too, has fallen into my hands; maybe he's under my sway!" But I haven't fallen into your hands; I'm not under your sway.'

When I had spoken, Baka the Divinity said to me, 'But, good fellow, what I say is permanent, everlasting, eternal, whole, and not liable to pass away is in fact permanent, everlasting, eternal, whole, and not liable to pass away. And where I say there's no being born, growing old, dying, passing away, or being reborn there is in fact no being born, growing old, dying, passing away, or being reborn. And when I say there's no other escape beyond this there is in fact no other escape beyond this. There have been ascetics and brahmins in the world before you, mendicant, whose deeds of fervent mortification lasted as long as your entire life. When there was another escape beyond this they knew it, and when there was no other escape beyond this, they knew it. So, mendicant, I tell you this: you will never find another escape beyond this, and you will eventually get weary and frustrated. If you attach to earth, you will lie close to me, in my domain, subject to my will, and expendable. If you attach to water … fire … air … creatures … gods … the Progenitor … the Divinity, you will lie close to me, in my domain, subject to my will, and expendable.'

'Divinity, I too know that if I attach to earth, I will lie close to you, in your domain, subject to your will, and expendable. If I attach to water … fire … air … creatures … gods … the Progenitor … the Divinity, I will lie close to you, in your domain, subject to your will, and expendable. And in addition, Divinity, I understand your range and your light: "That's how powerful is Baka the Divinity, how illustrious and mighty."'

'But in what way do you understand my range and my light?'

'A galaxy extends a thousand times as far

as the moon and sun revolve

and the dazzling ones light up the quarters.

And there you wield your power.

You know the high and low,

the passionate and dispassionate,

and the coming and going of sentient beings

from this realm to another.

That's how I understand your range and your light.

But there are three other realms that you don't know or see, but which I know and see. There is the realm named after the gods of sublime luminosity. You passed away from there and were reborn here. You've dwelt here so long that you've forgotten about that, so you don't know it or see it. But I know it and see it. So Divinity, I am not your equal in knowledge, let alone your inferior. Rather, I know more than you.

There is the realm named after the gods of universal beauty … There is the realm named after the gods of abundant fruit, which you don't know or see. But I know it and see it. So Divinity, I am not your equal in knowledge, let alone your inferior. Rather, I know more than you.

Since directly knowing earth as earth, and since directly knowing that which does not fall within the scope of experience characterized by earth, I have not become earth, I have not become in earth, I have not become as earth, I have not become one who thinks 'earth is mine', I have not affirmed earth. So Divinity, I am not your equal in knowledge, let alone your inferior. Rather, I know more than you.

Since directly knowing water … fire … air … creatures … gods … the Progenitor … the Divinity … the gods of sublime luminosity … the gods of universal beauty … the gods of abundant fruit … the Vanquisher … Since directly knowing all as all, and since directly knowing that which does not fall within the scope of experience characterized by all, I have not become all, I have not become in all, I have not become as all, I have not become one who thinks 'all is mine', I have not affirmed all. So Divinity, I am not your equal in knowledge, let alone your inferior. Rather, I know more than you.'

'Well, good fellow, if you have directly known that which does not fall within the scope of experience characterized by all, may that not be vacuous and hollow for you!

Consciousness where no form appears,

infinite, radiant all-round.

That is what does not fall within the scope of experience characterized by earth, water, fire, air, creatures, gods, the Progenitor, the Divinity, the gods of sublime luminosity, the gods of universal beauty, the gods of abundant fruit, the Vanquisher, and the all.

Come then, good fellow, see me vanish from you!'

'Come on then, Divinity, vanish from me—if you can.'

Then Baka the Divinity said, ‘I will vanish from the ascetic Gotama! I will vanish from the ascetic Gotama!’ But he was unable to vanish from me.

So I said to him, ‘Come then, Divinity, see me vanish from you!’

‘Come on then, good fellow, vanish from me—if you can.’

Then I used my psychic power to will that my voice would extend so that divinity, his assembly, and his retinue would hear me, but they would not see me. And while vanished I spoke this verse:

‘Seeing the danger in existence—

that life in any existence will cease to be—

I didn’t affirm any kind of existence,

and didn’t grasp at relishing.’

Then the Divinity, his assembly, and his retinue, their minds full of wonder and amazement, thought, ‘Oh lord, how incredible, how amazing! The ascetic Gotama has such psychic power and might! We’ve never before seen or heard of any other ascetic or brahmin with psychic power and might like the ascetic Gotama, who has gone forth from the Sakyan clan. Though people enjoy continued existence, loving it so much, he has extracted it, root and all.’

Then Māra the Wicked took possession of a member of the retinue of Divinity and said this to me, ‘If such is your understanding, good fellow, do not present it to your disciples or those gone forth! Do not teach this Dhamma to your disciples or those gone forth! Do not wish this for your disciples or those gone forth!

There have been ascetics and brahmins before you, mendicant, who claimed to be perfected ones, fully awakened Buddhas. They presented, taught, and wished this for their disciples and those gone forth. When their bodies broke up and their breath was cut off they were established in a lower realm.

But there have also been other ascetics and brahmins before you, mendicant, who claimed to be perfected ones, fully awakened Buddhas. They did not present, teach, or wish this for their disciples and those gone forth. When their bodies broke up and their breath was cut off they were established in a higher realm.

So, mendicant, I tell you this: please, good fellow, remain passive, dwelling in blissful meditation in this life, for this is better left unsaid. Good fellow, do not instruct others.’

When he had spoken, I said to Māra, ‘I know you, Wicked One. Do not think, “He doesn’t know me.” You are Māra the Wicked. You don’t speak to me like this out of sympathy, but with no sympathy. For you think, “Those who the ascetic Gotama teaches will go beyond my reach.”

Those who formerly claimed to be fully awakened Buddhas were not in fact fully awakened Buddhas. But I am. The Realized One remains such whether or not he teaches disciples. The Realized One remains as such whether or not he presents the teaching to disciples.

Why is that? Because the Realized One has given up the defilements that are corrupting, leading to future lives, hurtful, resulting in suffering and future rebirth, old age, and death. He has cut them off at the root, made them like a palm stump, obliterated them so they are unable to arise in the future. Just as a palm tree with its crown cut off is incapable of further growth, the Realized One has given up the defilements that are corrupting, leading to future lives, hurtful, resulting in suffering and future rebirth, old age, and death. He has cut them off at the root, made them like a palm stump, obliterated them so they are unable to arise in the future.'"

And so, because of the silencing of Māra, and because of the invitation of the Divinity, the name of this discussion is "On the Invitation of Divinity".