MN 79 — The Shorter Discourse With Sakuludāyī

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Text

Middle Discourses 79

The Shorter Discourse With Sakuludāyī

So I have heard. At one time the Buddha was staying near Rājagaha in the Bamboo Grove, the squirrels' feeding ground. Now at that time the wanderer Sakuludāyī was residing together with a large assembly of wanderers in their monastery in the peacocks' feeding ground.

Then the Buddha robed up in the morning and, taking his bowl and robe, entered Rājagaha for alms. Then it occurred to him, "It's too early to wander for alms in Rājagaha. Why don't I visit the wanderer Sakuludāyī at the monastery for the wanderers in the peacocks' feeding ground?" Then the Buddha went to the monastery for the wanderers.

Now at that time, Sakuludāyī was sitting together with a large assembly of wanderers making an uproar, a colossal racket. They engaged in all kinds of low talk, such as talk about kings, bandits, and chief ministers; talk about armies, threats, and wars; talk about food, drink, clothes, and beds; talk about garlands and fragrances; talk about family, vehicles, villages, towns, cities, and countries; talk about women and heroes; talk at the street market and the place for water pots; talk about the departed; motley talk; tales of land and sea; and talk about being reborn in this or that place.

Sakuludāyī saw the Buddha coming off in the distance, and hushed his own assembly, "Be quiet, good fellows, don't make a sound. Here comes the ascetic Gotama. The venerable likes quiet and praises quiet. Hopefully if he sees that our assembly is quiet he'll see fit to approach." Then those wanderers fell silent.

Then the Buddha approached Sakuludāyī, who said to him, "Let the Blessed One come, sir! Welcome to the Blessed One, sir! It's been a long time since you took the opportunity to come here. Please, sir, sit down, this seat is ready." The Buddha sat down on the seat spread out, while Sakuludāyī took a low seat and sat to one side. The Buddha said to him, "Udāyī, what were you sitting talking about just now? What conversation was left unfinished?"

"Sir, leave aside what we were sitting talking about just now. It won't be hard for you to hear about that later. When I don't come to the assembly, they sit and engage in all kinds of low talk. But when I have come to the assembly, they sit gazing up at my face alone, thinking, 'Whatever the ascetic Udāyī teaches, we shall listen to it.' But when the Buddha has come to the assembly, both myself and the assembly sit gazing up at your face, thinking, 'Whatever the Buddha teaches, we shall listen to it.'"

“Well then, Udāyī, suggest something for me to talk about.”

“Sir, a few days ago someone was claiming 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.’ When I asked them a question about the first beginning, they dodged the issue, distracted the discussion with irrelevant points, and displayed annoyance, hate, and bitterness. That reminded me of the Buddha: ‘Surely it must be the Blessed One, the Holy One who is so skilled in such matters.’”

“But Udāyī, who was it that made such a claim and behaved in such a way?”

“It was the Jain ascetic of the Ñātika clan, sir.”

“Udāyī, someone who can recollect their many kinds of past lives, with features and details, might ask me a question about the first beginning, or I might ask them a question about the first beginning. And they might satisfy me with their answer, or I might satisfy them with my answer.

Someone who, with clairvoyance that is purified and superhuman, understands how sentient beings pass on according to their deeds might ask me a question about the final end, or I might ask them a question about the final end. And they might satisfy me with their answer, or I might satisfy them with my answer.

Nevertheless, Udāyī, leave aside the first beginning and the final end. I shall teach you the Dhamma: ‘When this exists, this comes to be; due to the arising of this, this arises. When this doesn’t exist, that is not; due to the cessation of this, that ceases.’”

“Well sir, I can’t even recall with features and details what I’ve undergone in this incarnation. How should I possibly recollect my many kinds of past lives with features and details, like the Buddha? For I can’t even see a mud-goblin right now. How should I possibly, with clairvoyance that is purified and superhuman, see sentient beings passing away and being reborn, like the Buddha? But then the Buddha told me, ‘Nevertheless, Udāyī, leave aside the first beginning and the final end. I shall teach you the Dhamma:

“When this exists, this comes to be; due to the arising of this, this arises. When this doesn’t exist, this doesn’t come to be; due to the cessation of this, this ceases.’” But that is even more unclear to me. Perhaps I might satisfy the Buddha by answering a question about my own denomination.”

“But Udāyī, what is your own denomination?”

“Sir, it’s this: ‘This is the ultimate splendor, this is the ultimate splendor.’”

“But what is that ultimate splendor?”

“Sir, the ultimate splendor is the splendor compared to which no other splendor is finer.”

“But what is that ultimate splendor compared to which no other splendor is finer?”

“Sir, the ultimate splendor is the splendor compared to which no other splendor is finer.”

“Udāyī, you could draw this out for a long time. You say, ‘The ultimate splendor is the splendor compared to which no other splendor is finer.’ But you don’t describe that splendor. Suppose a man was to say, ‘Whoever the finest lady in the land is, it is her that I want, her I desire!’ They’d say to him, ‘My man, that finest lady in the land who you desire—do you know whether she’s an aristocrat, a brahmin, a peasant, or a menial?’ Asked this, he’d say, ‘No.’ They’d say to him, ‘My friend, that finest lady in the land who you desire—do you know her name or clan? Whether she’s tall or short or medium? Whether her skin is black, brown, or dingy? Whether she comes from such-and-such village, town, or city?’ Asked this, he’d say, ‘No.’ They’d say to him, ‘My man, do you desire someone who you’ve never even known or seen?’ Asked this, he’d say, ‘Yes.’

What do you think, Udāyī? This being so, doesn’t that man’s statement turn out to have no demonstrable basis?”

“Clearly that’s the case, sir.”

“In the same way, you say, ‘The ultimate splendor is the splendor compared to which no other splendor is finer.’ But you don’t describe that splendor.”

“Worthy sir, suppose there was a beryl gem that was naturally lustrous, eight-faceted, well-worked. When placed on a cream rug it would shine and glow and dazzle. Such is the splendor of the self that is free of disease after death.”

“What do you think, Udāyī? Which of these two has a finer splendor: such a beryl gem, or a firefly in the dark of night?”

“A firefly in the dark of night, sir.”

“What do you think, Udāyī? Which of these two has a finer splendor: a firefly in the dark of night, or an oil lamp in the dark of night?”

“An oil lamp in the dark of night, sir.”

“What do you think, Udāyī? Which of these two has a finer splendor: an oil lamp in the dark of night, or a great mass of fire in the dark of night?”

“A great mass of fire in the dark of night, sir.”

“What do you think, Udāyī? Which of these two has a finer splendor: a great mass of fire in the dark of night, or the morning star in the clear and cloudless heavens at the crack of dawn?”

“The morning star in the clear and cloudless heavens at the crack of dawn, sir.”

“What do you think, Udāyī? Which of these two has a finer splendor: the morning star in the clear and cloudless heavens at the crack of dawn, or the full moon at midnight in the clear and cloudless heavens on the fifteenth day sabbath?”

“The full moon at midnight in the clear and cloudless heavens on the fifteenth day sabbath, sir.”

“What do you think, Udāyī? Which of these two has a finer splendor: the full moon at midnight in the clear and cloudless heavens on the fifteenth day sabbath, or the sun at midday in the clear and cloudless heavens in the last month of the rainy season, in autumn?”

“The sun at midday in the clear and cloudless heavens in the last month of the rainy season, in autumn, sir.”

“Beyond this, Udāyī, I know very many gods on whom the luminosity of the sun and moon makes no impression. Nevertheless, I do not say: ‘The splendor compared to which no other splendor is finer.’ But of the splendor inferior to a firefly you say, ‘This is the ultimate splendor.’ And you don’t describe that splendor.”

“The Blessed One has cut short the discussion! The Holy One has cut short the discussion!”

“But Udāyī, why do you say this?”

“Sir, it says this in our own denomination: ‘This is the ultimate splendor, this is the ultimate splendor.’ But when pursued, pressed, and grilled on our own denomination, we turned out to be vacuous, hollow, and mistaken.”

“But Udāyī, is there a world of absolute happiness? And is there a grounded practice for realizing a world of absolute happiness?”

“Sir, it says this in our own denomination: ‘There is a world of absolute happiness. And there is a grounded practice for realizing a world of absolute happiness.’”

“Well, what is that grounded practice for realizing a world of absolute happiness?”

“Sir, it’s when someone gives up killing living creatures, stealing, sexual misconduct, and lying. And they proceed having undertaken some kind of mortification. This is the grounded practice for realizing a world of absolute happiness.”

“What do you think, Udāyī? On an occasion when someone refrains from killing living creatures, is their self absolutely happy at that time, or does it have both pleasure and pain?”

“It has both pleasure and pain.”

“What do you think, Udāyī? On an occasion when someone refrains from stealing … sexual misconduct … lying, is their self absolutely happy at that time, or does it have both pleasure and pain?”

“It has both pleasure and pain.”

“What do you think, Udāyī? On an occasion when someone proceeds having undertaken some kind of mortification, is their self absolutely happy at that time, or does it have both pleasure and pain?”

“It has both pleasure and pain.”

“What do you think, Udāyī? Is an absolutely happy world realized by relying on a practice of mixed pleasure and pain?”

“The Blessed One has cut short the discussion! The Holy One has cut short the discussion!”

“But Udāyī, why do you say this?”

“Sir, it says this in our own denomination: ‘There is a world of absolute happiness. And there is a grounded practice for realizing a world of absolute happiness.’ But when pursued, pressed, and grilled on our own denomination, we turned out to be vacuous, hollow, and mistaken.

But sir, is there a world of absolute happiness? And is there a grounded practice for realizing a world of absolute happiness?”

“There is a world of absolute happiness, Udāyī. And there is a grounded practice for realizing a world of absolute happiness.”

“Well sir, what is that grounded practice for realizing a world of absolute happiness?”

“It’s when a mendicant, quite secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unskillful qualities, enters and remains in the first absorption. As the placing of the mind and keeping it connected are stilled, they enter and remain in the second absorption. With the fading away of rapture, they enter and remain in the third absorption. This is the grounded practice for realizing a world of absolute happiness.”

“Sir, that’s not the grounded practice for realizing a world of absolute happiness. At that point an absolutely happy world has already been realized.”

“No, Udāyī, at that point an absolutely happy world has not been realized. This is the grounded practice for realizing a world of absolute happiness.”

When he said this, Sakuludāyī’s assembly made an uproar, a colossal racket, “In that case, we are lost, together with our denomination! We are lost, together with our denomination! We know nothing higher than this!”

Then Sakuludāyī, having quieted those wanderers, said to the Buddha, “Well sir, at what point is an absolutely happy world realized?”

“It’s when, with the giving up of pleasure and pain and the disappearance of former happiness and sadness, a mendicant enters and remains in the fourth absorption. There are deities who have been reborn in a absolutely happy world. That mendicant associates with them, converses, and engages in discussion. It’s at this point that a absolutely happy world has been realized.”

“Surely the mendicants must lead the spiritual life under the Buddha for the sake of realizing this absolutely happy world?”

“No, Udāyī, the mendicants don’t lead the spiritual life under me for the sake of realizing this absolutely happy world. There are other things that are finer, for the sake of which the mendicants lead the spiritual life under me.”

“But what are those finer things?”

“It’s when 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. …

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. This is one of the finer things for the sake of which the mendicants lead the spiritual life under me.

Furthermore, as the placing of the mind and keeping it connected are stilled, a mendicant enters and remains in the second absorption … third absorption … fourth absorption. This too is one of the finer things.

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 recollect their many kinds of past lives, with features and details. This too is one of the finer things.

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 understand how sentient beings pass on according to their deeds. This too is one of the finer things.

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.’ This too is one of the finer things. These are the finer things for the sake of which the mendicants lead the spiritual life under me.”

When he had spoken, Sakuludāyī said to the Buddha, “Excellent, sir! Excellent! As if he were righting the overturned, or revealing the hidden, or pointing out the path to the lost, or lighting a lamp in the dark so people with clear eyes can see what’s there, the Buddha has made the teaching clear in many ways. I go for refuge to the Buddha, to the teaching, and to the mendicant Saṅgha. Sir, may I receive the going forth, the ordination in the Buddha’s

presence?”

When he said this, Sakuludāyī’s assembly said to him, “Worthy Udāyī, don’t lead the spiritual life under the ascetic Gotama. You have been a tutor; don’t live as a pupil. You’ll end up like a water jar that turns into a water ladle. Worthy Udāyī, don’t lead the spiritual life under the ascetic Gotama. You have been a tutor; don’t live as a pupil.” And that’s how the wanderer Sakuludāyī’s own assembly prevented him from leading the spiritual life under the Buddha.