MN 80 — With Vekhanasa

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Text

Middle Discourses 80

With Vekhanasa

So I have heard. At one time the Buddha was staying near Sāvatthī in Jeta's Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika's monastery.

Then the wanderer Vekhanasa went up to the Buddha, and exchanged greetings with him. When the greetings and polite conversation were over, he stood to one side, and expressed this heartfelt sentiment in the Buddha's presence: "This is the ultimate splendor, this is the ultimate splendor."

"But Kaccāna, why do you say: 'This is the ultimate splendor, this is the ultimate splendor.' What is that ultimate splendor?"

"Worthy Gotama, 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?"

"Worthy Gotama, the ultimate splendor is the splendor compared to which no other splendor is finer."

"Kaccāna, 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, Kaccāna? This being so, doesn't that man's statement turn out to have no demonstrable basis?"

"Clearly that's the case, worthy Gotama."

"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."

"Mister Gotama, 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, Kaccāna? 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."

"What do you think, Kaccāna? 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."

"What do you think, Kaccāna? 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."

"What do you think, Kaccāna? 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."

"What do you think, Kaccāna? 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."

"What do you think, Kaccāna? 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."

"Beyond this, Kaccāna, 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.

Kaccāna, there are these five kinds of sensual stimulation. What five? Sights known by the eye, which are likable, desirable, agreeable, pleasant, sensual, and arousing. Sounds known by the ear … Smells known by the nose … Tastes known by the tongue … Touches known by the body, which are likable, desirable, agreeable, pleasant, sensual, and arousing. These are the five kinds of sensual stimulation.

The pleasure and happiness that arises from these five kinds of sensual stimulation is called sensual pleasure. 'From the senses comes sensual pleasure. Beyond sensual pleasure is the pleasure that surmounts the sensual, which is said to be the best of these.'"

When he said this, Vekhanasa said to the Buddha, "It's incredible, worthy Gotama, it's amazing! How well said this was by the worthy Gotama! 'From the senses comes sensual pleasure. Beyond sensual pleasure is the pleasure that surmounts the sensual, which is said to be the best of these.' Worthy Gotama, from the senses comes sensual pleasure. Beyond sensual pleasure is the pleasure that surmounts the sensual, which is said to be the best of these."

"Kaccāna, since you have a different view, creed, and belief, and another discipline and denomination, it's hard for you to understand the senses, sensual pleasure, and the pleasure that surmounts the sensual. There are mendicants who are perfected, who have ended the defilements, completed the spiritual journey, done what had to be done, laid down the burden, achieved their heart's goal, utterly ended the fetter of continued existence, and are rightly freed through enlightenment. They can understand the senses, sensual pleasure, and the pleasure that surmounts the sensual."

When he said this, Vekhanasa became angry and upset. He even attacked and badmouthed the Buddha himself, saying, "The ascetic Gotama will be worsted!" He said to the Buddha, "This is exactly what happens with some ascetics and brahmins. Not knowing the first beginning or seeing the final end, they nevertheless claim: 'We 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."' Their statement turns out to be a joke—mere words, vacuous and hollow."

"Kaccāna, there are some ascetics and brahmins who, not knowing the first beginning or seeing the final end, nevertheless claim: 'We 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."' There is a legitimate refutation of them. Nevertheless, Kaccāna, leave aside the first beginning and the final end. Let a sensible person come—neither devious nor deceitful, a person of integrity. I teach and instruct them. Practicing as instructed they will soon know and see for themselves, 'So this is how to be rightly released from the bond, that is, the bond of ignorance.' Suppose there was a little baby bound with swaddling up to the neck. As they grow up and their senses mature, they're accordingly released from those bonds. They'd know 'I'm released,' and there would be no more bonds.

In the same way, let a sensible person come—neither devious nor deceitful, a person of integrity. I teach and instruct them. Practicing as instructed they will soon know and see for themselves, 'So this is how to be rightly released from the bond, that is, the bond of

ignorance.’”

When he said this, Vekhanasa said to the Buddha, “Excellent, worthy Gotama! … From this day forth, may the worthy Gotama remember me as a lay follower who has gone for refuge for life.”