MN 91 — With Brahmāyu

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Text

Middle Discourses 91

With Brahmāyu

So I have heard. At one time the Buddha was wandering in the land of the Videhans together with a large Saṅgha of five hundred mendicants.

Now at that time the brahmin Brahmāyu was residing in Mithilā. He was old, elderly, and senior, advanced in years, having reached the final stage of life; he was a hundred and twenty years old. He had mastered the three Vedas, together with their vocabularies and ritual performance, their phonology and word classification, and the testaments as fifth. He knew them word-by-word, and their grammar. He was well versed in cosmology and the marks of a great man.

He heard: “It seems the ascetic Gotama—a Sakyan, gone forth from a Sakyan family—is wandering in the land of the Videhans, together with a large Saṅgha of five hundred mendicants. He has this good reputation: ‘That Blessed One is 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. It’s good to see such perfected ones.”

Now at that time the brahmin Brahmāyu had a pupil named Uttara. He too had mastered the Vedic curriculum. Brahmāyu told Uttara of the Buddha’s presence in the land of the Videhans, and added: “Please, dear Uttara, go to the ascetic Gotama and find out whether or not he lives up to his reputation. Through you I shall learn about the worthy Gotama.”

“But sir, how shall I find out whether or not the ascetic Gotama lives up to his reputation?”

“Dear Uttara, the thirty-two marks of a great man have been handed down in our hymns. A great man who possesses these has only two possible destinies, no other. If he stays at home he becomes a king, a wheel-turning monarch, a just and principled king. His dominion extends to all four sides, he achieves stability in the country, and he possesses the seven treasures. He has the following seven treasures: the wheel, the elephant, the horse, the jewel, the woman, the householder, and the commander as the seventh treasure. He has over a thousand sons who are valiant and heroic, crushing the armies of his enemies. After conquering this land girt by sea, he reigns by principle, without rod or

sword. But if he goes forth from the lay life to homelessness, he becomes a perfected one, a fully awakened Buddha, who has cast off the world's veil. But, dear Uttara, I am the one who gives the hymns, and you are the one who receives them."

"Yes, worthy sir," replied Uttara. He got up from his seat, bowed, and respectfully circled Brahmāyu, keeping him on his right, before setting out for the land of the Videhans where the Buddha was wandering. Traveling stage by stage, he came to the Buddha and exchanged greetings with him. When the greetings and polite conversation were over, he sat down to one side, and scrutinized his body for the thirty-two marks of a great man. He saw all of them except two, which he had doubts about: whether the private parts are sheathed in a foreskin, and the largeness of the tongue.

Then it occurred to the Buddha, "This student Uttara sees all the marks except two, which he has doubts about: whether the private parts are sheathed in a foreskin, and the largeness of the tongue."

So the Buddha used his psychic power to will that Uttara would see his private parts sheathed in a foreskin. And he stuck out his tongue and stroked back and forth on his ear holes and nostrils, and covered his entire forehead with his tongue.

Then Uttara thought, "The ascetic Gotama possesses the thirty-two marks. Why don't I follow him and observe his deportment?" So Uttara followed the Buddha like a shadow for seven months.

When seven months had passed he set out wandering toward Mithilā. There he approached the brahmin Brahmāyu, bowed, and sat down to one side. Brahmāyu said to him, "Well, dear Uttara, does the worthy Gotama live up to his reputation or not?"

"He does, sir. The worthy Gotama possesses the thirty-two marks.

He has well-planted feet.

On the soles of his feet there are thousand-spoked wheels, with rims and hubs, complete in every detail.

He has stretched heels.

He has long fingers.

His hands and feet are soft and tender.

He has serried hands and feet.

The tops of his feet are arched.

His calves are like those of an antelope.

When standing upright and not bending over, the palms of both hands touch the knees.

His private parts are sheathed in a foreskin.

He is golden colored; his skin shines like lustrous gold.

He has delicate skin, so delicate that dust and dirt don't stick to his body.

His hairs grow one per pore.

His hairs stand up; they're blue-black and curl clockwise.

His body is tall and straight-limbed.

He has bulging muscles in seven places.

His chest is like that of a lion.

He is filled out between the shoulders.

He has the proportional circumference of a banyan tree: the span of his arms equals the height of his body.

His torso is cylindrical.

He has ridged taste buds.

His jaw is like that of a lion.

He has forty teeth.

His teeth are even.

His teeth have no gaps.

His teeth are perfectly white.

He has a large tongue.

He has the voice of the Divinity, like a cuckoo's call.

His eyes are indigo.

He has eyelashes like a cow's.

Between his eyebrows there grows a tuft, soft and white like cotton-wool.

The crown of his head is like a turban.

These are the thirty-two marks of a great man possessed by the worthy Gotama.

When he's walking he takes the first step with the right foot. He doesn't lift his foot too far or place it too near. He doesn't walk too slow or too fast. He walks without knocking his knees or ankles together. When he's walking he keeps his thighs neither too straight nor too bent, neither too tight nor too loose. When he walks, only the lower half of his body moves, and he walks effortlessly. When he turns to look he does so with the whole body. He doesn't look directly up or down. He doesn't look all around while walking, but focuses a plough's length in front. Beyond that he has unhindered knowledge and vision.

When entering an inhabited area he keeps his body neither too straight nor too bent, neither too tight nor too loose.

He turns around neither too far nor too close to the seat. He doesn't lean on his hand when sitting down. And he doesn't just plonk his body down on the seat. When sitting in

inhabited areas he doesn't fidget with his hands or feet. He doesn't sit with his knees or ankles crossed. He doesn't sit with his hand holding his chin. When sitting in inhabited areas he doesn't shake, tremble, quake, or get nervous, and so he is not nervous at all. When sitting in inhabited areas he still practices seclusion.

When receiving water for rinsing the bowl, he holds the bowl neither too straight nor too bent, neither too tight nor too loose.

He receives neither too little nor too much water. He rinses the bowl without making a sloshing noise, or spinning it around. He doesn't put the bowl on the ground to rinse his hands; his hands and bowl are rinsed at the same time. He doesn't throw the bowl rinsing water away too far or too near, or splash it about. When receiving rice, he holds the bowl neither too straight nor too bent, neither too close nor too loose. He receives neither too little nor too much rice. He eats sauce in a moderate proportion, and doesn't put too much sauce on his portions. He chews over each portion two or three times before swallowing. But no grain of rice enters his body unchewed, and none remain in his mouth. Only then does he raise another portion to his lips. He eats experiencing the taste, but without experiencing greed for the taste.

He eats food thinking of eight reasons: 'Not for fun, indulgence, adornment, or decoration, but only to sustain this body, to avoid harm, and to support spiritual practice. In this way, I shall put an end to old discomfort and not give rise to new discomfort, and I will have the means to keep going, blamelessness, and a comfortable abiding.'

After eating, when receiving water for washing the bowl, he holds the bowl neither too straight nor too bent, neither too tight nor too loose. He receives neither too little nor too much water. He washes the bowl without making a sloshing noise, or spinning it around. He doesn't put the bowl on the ground to wash his hands; his hands and bowl are washed at the same time. He doesn't throw the bowl washing water away too far or too near, or splash it about.

After eating he doesn't put the bowl on the ground too far away or too close. He's not careless with his bowl, nor does he spend too much time on it.

After eating he sits a while in silence, but doesn't wait too long to give the verses of appreciation. After eating he expresses appreciation without criticizing the meal or expecting another one. Invariably, he educates, encourages, fires up, and inspires that assembly with a Dhamma talk. Then he gets up from his seat and leaves.

He walks neither too fast nor too slow, without wanting to get out of there.

He wears his robe on his body neither too high nor too low, neither too clinging nor too loose. The wind doesn't blow his robe off his body. And dust and dirt don't stick to his body.

When he has gone to the monastery he sits on a seat spread out and washes his feet. But he doesn't waste time with pedicures. When he has washed his feet, he sits down cross-legged, sets his body straight, and brings mindfulness to the present. He has no intention to hurt himself, hurt others, or hurt both. He only wishes for the welfare of himself, of others, of both, and of the whole world. In the monastery when he teaches Dhamma to an assembly, he neither flatters them nor rebukes them. Invariably, he

educates, encourages, fires up, and inspires that assembly with a Dhamma talk.

The sound of his voice has eight qualities: it is clear, comprehensible, charming, audible, lucid, undistorted, deep, and resonant. He makes sure his voice is intelligible as far as the assembly goes, but the sound doesn't extend outside the assembly. And when they've been inspired with a Dhamma talk by the worthy Gotama they get up from their seats and leave looking back at him alone, and not forgetting their lesson.

I have seen the worthy Gotama walking and standing; entering inhabited areas, and sitting and eating there; sitting silently after eating, and expressing appreciation; going to the monastery, sitting silently there, and teaching Dhamma to an assembly there. Such is the worthy Gotama; such he is and more than that."

When he had spoken, the brahmin Brahmāyu rose from his seat, arranged his robe over one shoulder, raised his cupped palms toward the Buddha, and uttered this aphorism three times:

"Homage to him, the blessed one, the perfected one, the fully awakened Buddha!

Homage to him, the blessed one, the perfected one, the fully awakened Buddha!

Homage to him, the blessed one, the perfected one, the fully awakened Buddha!

Hopefully, some time or other I'll get to meet him, and we can have a discussion."

And then the Buddha, traveling stage by stage in the Videhan lands, arrived at Mithilā, where he stayed in the Maghadeva Mango Grove.

The brahmins and householders of Mithilā heard: "It seems the ascetic Gotama—a Sakyan, gone forth from a Sakyan family—has arrived at Mithilā, where he is staying in the Maghadeva Mango Grove. He has this good reputation: 'That Blessed One is 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. It's good to see such perfected ones."

Then the brahmins and householders of Mithilā went up to the Buddha. Before sitting down to one side, some bowed, some exchanged greetings and polite conversation, some held up their cupped palms toward the Buddha, some announced their name and clan, while some kept silent.

The brahmin Brahmāyu also heard that the Buddha had arrived. So he went to the Maghadeva Mango Grove together with several disciples.

Not far from the grove he thought, "It wouldn't be appropriate for me to go to see the ascetic Gotama without letting him know beforehand."

So he addressed one of his young students: “Here, young student, go to the ascetic Gotama and in my name bow with your head to his feet. Ask him if he is healthy and well, nimble, strong, and living comfortably. And then say: ‘Worthy Gotama, the brahmin Brahmāyu is old, elderly, and senior, advanced in years, having reached the final stage of life; he is a hundred and twenty years old. He has mastered the three Vedas, together with their vocabularies and ritual performance, their phonology and word classification, and the testaments as fifth. He knows them word-by-word, and their grammar. He is well versed in cosmology and the marks of a great man. Of all the brahmins and householders residing in Mithilā, Brahmāyu is said to be the foremost in wealth, hymns, lifespan, and fame. He wants to see the worthy Gotama.’”

“Yes, worthy sir,” that young student replied. He did as he was asked, and the Buddha said, “Please, student, let Brahmāyu come at his convenience.”

The young student went back to Brahmāyu and said to him, “Your request for an audience with the ascetic Gotama has been granted. Please go at your convenience.”

Then the brahmin Brahmāyu went up to the Buddha. The assembly saw him coming off in the distance, and made way for him, as he was well-known and famous.

Brahmāyu said to that retinue, “Enough, gentlemen. Please sit on your own seats. I shall sit here by the ascetic Gotama.”

Then the brahmin Brahmāyu went up to the Buddha, and exchanged greetings with him. When the greetings and polite conversation were over, he sat down to one side, and scrutinized the Buddha’s body for the thirty-two marks of a great man. He saw all of them except two, which he had doubts about: whether the private parts are sheathed in a foreskin, and the largeness of the tongue. Then Brahmāyu addressed the Buddha in verse:

“I have learned of the thirty-two

marks of a great man.

There are two that I don’t see

on the body of the worthy Gotama.

Are the private parts sheathed in a foreskin,

O supreme man?

Though called by a word of the feminine gender,

perhaps your tongue is a manly one?

Perhaps your tongue is large,

as we have been informed.

Please stick it out in its full extent,

and so, O seer, dispel my doubt.

For my welfare and benefit in this life,

and happiness in lives to come.

And I ask you to grant the opportunity

to ask whatever I desire."

Then it occurred to the Buddha, "Brahmāyu sees all the marks except two, which he has doubts about: whether the private parts are sheathed in a foreskin, and the largeness of the tongue."

So the Buddha used his psychic power to will that Brahmāyu would see his private parts sheathed in a foreskin. And he stuck out his tongue and stroked back and forth on his ear holes and nostrils, and covered his entire forehead with his tongue.

Then the Buddha replied to Brahmāyu in verse:

"The thirty-two marks of a great man

that you have learned

are all found on my body:

so do not doubt, brahmin.

I have known what should be known,

and developed what should be developed,

and given up what should be given up:

and so, brahmin, I am a Buddha.

For your welfare and benefit in this life,

and happiness in lives to come:

I grant you the opportunity

to ask whatever you desire."

Then Brahmāyu thought:

"My request has been granted. Should I ask him about what is beneficial in this life or the next?" Then he thought, "I'm well versed in the benefits that apply to this life, and others ask me about this. Why don't I ask the ascetic Gotama about the benefit that specifically applies to lives to come?"

So Brahmāyu addressed the Buddha in verse:

"How do you become a brahmin?

And how do you become a knowledge master?

How a master of the three knowledges?

And how is one called a scholar?

How do you become a perfected one?

And how a consummate one?

How do you become a sage?

And how is one declared to be awakened?”

Then the Buddha replied to Brahmāyu in verse:

“One who knows their past lives,

sees heaven and places of loss,

and has attained the end of rebirth:

such a sage has perfect insight.

They know their mind is pure,

completely freed from greed;

they’ve given up birth and death,

and have completed the spiritual journey.

Gone beyond all things,

such a one is declared to be awakened.”

When he said this, Brahmāyu got up from his seat and arranged his robe over one shoulder. He bowed with his head to the Buddha’s feet, caressing them and covering them with kisses, and pronounced his name: “I am the brahmin Brahmāyu, worthy Gotama! I am the brahmin Brahmāyu!”

Then that assembly, their minds full of wonder and amazement, thought, “Oh lord, how incredible, how amazing, that Brahmāyu, who is so well-known and famous, should show the Buddha such utmost deference.” Then the Buddha said to Brahmāyu, “Enough, brahmin. Get up, and sit in your own seat, since your mind has such confidence in me.” So Brahmāyu got up and sat in his own seat.

Then the Buddha taught him step by step, with a talk on giving, ethical conduct, and heaven. He revealed the drawbacks of sensual pleasures, so sordid and corrupt, and the benefit of renunciation. And when the Buddha knew that Brahmāyu’s mind was ready, pliable, rid of hindrances, elated, and confident he revealed the special teaching of the Buddhas: suffering, its origin, its cessation, and the path. Just as a clean cloth rid of stains would properly absorb dye, in that very seat the stainless, immaculate vision of the Dhamma arose in the brahmin Brahmāyu: “Everything that is liable to arise is liable to cease.”

Then Brahmāyu saw, attained, understood, and fathomed the Dhamma. He went beyond doubt, got rid of indecision, and became self-assured and independent of others regarding the Teacher’s instructions. He said to the Buddha:

“Excellent, worthy Gotama! 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, worthy Gotama has made the teaching clear in many ways. I go for refuge to the worthy Gotama, to the teaching, and to the mendicant Saṅgha. From this day forth, may the worthy Gotama remember me as a lay follower who has gone for refuge for life. Would you and the mendicant Saṅgha please accept tomorrow’s meal from me?” The Buddha consented with silence. Then, knowing that the Buddha had consented, Brahmāyu rose from his seat, bowed, and respectfully circled the Buddha, keeping him on his right, before leaving.

And when the night had passed Brahmāyu had delicious fresh and cooked foods prepared in his own home. Then he had the Buddha informed of the time, saying, “It’s time, worthy Gotama, the meal is ready.”

Then the Buddha robed up in the morning and, taking his bowl and robe, went to the home of the brahmin Brahmāyu, where he sat down on the seat spread out together with the Saṅgha of mendicants. For seven days, Brahmāyu served and satisfied the mendicant Saṅgha headed by the Buddha with his own hands with delicious fresh and cooked foods.

When the seven days had passed, the Buddha left to wander in the Videhan lands. Not long after the Buddha left, Brahmāyu passed away.

Then several mendicants went up to the Buddha, bowed, sat down to one side, and said to him, “Sir, Brahmāyu has passed away. Where has he been reborn in his next life?”

“Mendicants, the brahmin Brahmāyu was astute. He practiced in line with the teaching, and did not trouble me about the teachings. With the ending of the five lower fetters, he’s been reborn spontaneously and will become extinguished there, not liable to return from that world.”

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