MN 94 — With Ghoṭamukha

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Text

Middle Discourses 94

With Ghoṭamukha

So I have heard. At one time Venerable Udena was staying near Varanasi in the Khemiya Mango Grove.

Now at that time the brahmin Ghoṭamukha had arrived at Varanasi on some business. Then as he was going for a walk he went to the Khemiya Mango Grove. At that time Venerable Udena was walking mindfully in the open air. Ghoṭamukha approached and exchanged greetings with him.

Walking alongside Udena, he said, “My ascetic, there is no such thing as a principled renunciate life; that’s what I think. Yet I have not seen honorable ones such as yourself, or a relevant teaching.”

When he said this, Udena stepped down from the walking path, entered his dwelling, and sat down on the seat spread out. Ghoṭamukha also stepped down from the walking path and entered the dwelling, where he stood to one side. Udena said to him, “There are seats, brahmin. Please sit if you wish.”

“I was just waiting for you to sit down. For how on earth could one such as I presume to sit first without being invited?”

Then he took a low seat and sat to one side, where he said, “My ascetic, there is no such thing as a principled renunciate life; that’s what I think. Yet I have not seen worthy ones such as yourself, or a relevant teaching.”

“Brahmin, we can discuss this. But only if you grant what should be granted, and reject what should be rejected. And if you ask me the meaning of anything you don’t understand, saying: ‘Sir, why is this? What does that mean?’”

“Let us discuss this. I will do as you say.”

“Brahmin, these four individuals are found in the world. What four?

One individual mortifies themselves, committed to the practice of mortifying themselves.

One individual mortifies others, committed to the practice of mortifying others.

One individual mortifies themselves and others, committed to the practice of mortifying themselves and others.

One individual doesn't mortify either themselves or others, committed to the practice of not mortifying themselves or others. They live without wishes in this very life, quenched, cooled, experiencing bliss, with self become divine.

Which one of these four individuals do you like the sound of?"

"Worthy Udena, I don't like the sound of the first three individuals. I only like the sound of the last individual, who doesn't mortify either themselves or others."

"But why don't you like the sound of those three individuals?"

"Worthy Udena, the individual who mortifies themselves does so even though they want to be happy and recoil from pain. That's why I don't like the sound of that individual. The individual who mortifies others does so even though others want to be happy and recoil from pain. That's why I don't like the sound of that individual. The individual who mortifies themselves and others does so even though both themselves and others want to be happy and recoil from pain. That's why I don't like the sound of that individual. The individual who doesn't mortify either themselves or others—living without wishes, quenched, cooled, experiencing bliss, with self become divine—does not torment themselves or others, both of whom want to be happy and recoil from pain. That's why I like the sound of that individual."

"There are, brahmin, these two groups of people. What two? There's one group of people who, being obsessed with jeweled earrings, seeks partners and children, male and female bondservants, fields and lands, and gold and currency.

And there's another group of people who, not being obsessed with jeweled earrings, has given up partner and children, male and female bondservants, fields and lands, and gold and currency, and goes forth from the lay life to homelessness.

Now, brahmin, that individual who doesn't mortify either themselves or others— in which of these two groups of people do you usually find such an individual?"

"I usually find such an individual in the group that has gone forth from the lay life to homelessness."

"Just now I understood you to say: 'My ascetic, there is no such thing as a principled renunciate life; that's what I think. Yet I have not seen honorable ones such as yourself, or a relevant teaching.'"

"Well, I obviously had my reasons for saying that, worthy Udena. But there is such a thing as a principled renunciate life. That's what I think, and that's how you should remember me. Now, these four individuals that you've spoken of in a brief summary: please explain them to me in detail, out of sympathy."

"Well then, brahmin, listen and apply your mind well, I will speak."

"Yes, worthy sir," replied Ghoṭamukha. Udena said this:

"What individual mortifies themselves, committed to the practice of mortifying themselves? It's when an individual goes naked, ignoring conventions. They lick their

hands, and don’t come or wait when called. They don’t consent to food brought to them, or food prepared on their behalf, or an invitation for a meal. They don’t receive anything from a pot or bowl; or from someone who keeps sheep, or who has a weapon or a shovel in their home; or where a couple is eating; or where there is a woman who is pregnant, breastfeeding, or who lives with a man; or where there’s a hound waiting or flies buzzing. They accept no fish or meat or beer or wine, and drink no fermented gruel. They go to just one house for alms, taking just one mouthful, or two houses and two mouthfuls, up to seven houses and seven mouthfuls. They feed on one saucer a day, two saucers a day, up to seven saucers a day. They eat once a day, once every second day, up to once a week, and so on, even up to once a fortnight. They live committed to the practice of eating food at set intervals. They eat herbs, millet, wild rice, poor rice, water lettuce, rice bran, scum from boiling rice, sesame flour, grass, or cow dung. They survive on forest roots and fruits, or eating fallen fruit. They wear robes of sunn hemp, mixed hemp, corpse-wrapping cloth, rags, lodh tree bark, antelope hide (whole or in strips), kusa grass, bark, wood-chips, human hair, horse-tail hair, or owls’ wings. They tear out their hair and beard, committed to this practice. They constantly stand, turning down seats. They squat, committed to the endeavor of squatting. They lie on a mat of thorns, making a mat of thorns their bed. They’re devoted to ritual bathing three times a day, including at dusk. And so they live committed to practicing these various ways of mortifying and tormenting the body. This is called an individual who mortifies themselves, being committed to the practice of mortifying themselves.

And what individual mortifies others, committed to the practice of mortifying others? It’s when an individual is a slaughterer of sheep, pigs, poultry, or deer, a hunter or fisher, a bandit, an executioner, a butcher of cattle, a jailer, or has some other cruel livelihood. This is called an individual who mortifies others, being committed to the practice of mortifying others.

And what individual mortifies themselves and others, being committed to the practice of mortifying themselves and others? It’s when an individual is an anointed aristocratic king or a well-to-do brahmin. He has a new ceremonial hall built to the east of the citadel. He shaves off his hair and beard, dresses in a rough antelope hide, and smears his body with ghee and oil. Scratching his back with antlers, he enters the hall with his chief queen and the brahmin high priest. There he lies on the bare ground strewn with grass. The king feeds on the milk from one teat of a cow that has a calf of the same color. The chief queen feeds on the milk from the second teat. The brahmin high priest feeds on the milk from the third teat. The milk from the fourth teat is served to the sacred flame. The calf feeds on the leftovers. He says: ‘Slaughter this many bulls, bullocks, heifers, goats, rams, and horses for the sacrifice! Fell this many trees and reap this much grass for the sacrificial equipment!’ His bondservants, servants, and workers do their jobs under threat of punishment and danger, weeping with tearful faces. This is called an individual who mortifies themselves and others, being committed to the practice of mortifying themselves and others.

And what individual doesn’t mortify either themselves or others, committed to the practice of not mortifying themselves or others, living without wishes in this very life, quenched, cooled, experiencing bliss, with self become divine?

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. 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.

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.

And with the fading away of rapture, they enter and remain 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.’

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.

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.

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: ‘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.

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 is called an individual who neither mortifies themselves or others, being committed to the practice of not mortifying themselves or others. They live without wishes in this very life, quenched, cooled, experiencing bliss, with self become divine.”

When he had spoken, Ghoṭamukha said to him, “Excellent, worthy Udena! 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 worthy Udena has made the teaching clear in many ways. I go for refuge to the worthy Udena, to the teaching, and to the mendicant Saṅgha. From this day forth, may the worthy Udena remember me as a lay follower who has gone for refuge for life.”

“Brahmin, don’t go for refuge to me. You should go for refuge to that same Blessed One to whom I have gone for refuge.”

“But worthy Udena, where is the Blessed One at present, the perfected one, the fully awakened Buddha?”

“Brahmin, the Buddha has already become fully quenched.”

“Worthy Udena, if I heard that the worthy Gotama was within ten leagues, or twenty, or even up to a hundred leagues away, I’d go a hundred leagues to see him.

But since the worthy Gotama has become fully quenched, I go for refuge to that worthy Gotama, to the teaching, and to the Saṅgha. From this day forth, may the worthy Udena remember me as a lay follower who has gone for refuge for life. Worthy Udena, the king of Aṅga gives me a regular daily allowance. I will give you one portion of that.”

“But brahmin, what does the king of Aṅga give you as a regular daily allowance?”

“Five hundred dollars.”

“It’s not proper for us to receive gold and currency.”

“If that’s not proper, I will have a dwelling built for the worthy Udena.”

“If you want to build me a dwelling, then build an assembly hall for the Saṅgha at Pāṭaliputta.”

“Now I’m even more delighted and satisfied with the worthy Udena, since he encourages me to give to the Saṅgha. So with this allowance and another one I will have an assembly hall built for the Saṅgha at Pāṭaliputta.”

And so he had that hall built. And these days it’s called the “Ghoṭamukhī”.