SN 12.17 — With Kassapa, the Naked Ascetic

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Text

Linked Discourses 12.17

2. Fuel

With Kassapa, the Naked Ascetic

So I have heard. At one time the Buddha was staying near Rājagaha in the Bamboo Grove, the squirrels' feeding ground.

Then the Buddha robed up in the morning and, taking his bowl and robe, entered Rājagaha for alms. The naked ascetic Kassapa saw the Buddha coming off in the distance. He went up to the Buddha, and exchanged greetings with him.

When the greetings and polite conversation were over, he stood to one side and said to the Buddha,

"I'd like to ask the worthy Gotama about a certain point, if you'd take the time to answer."

"Kassapa, it's the wrong time for questions. We've entered an inhabited area."

A second time, and a third time, Kassapa spoke to the Buddha and the Buddha replied. When this was said, Kassapa said to the Buddha,

"I don't want to ask much."

"Ask what you wish, Kassapa."

"Well, worthy Gotama, is suffering made by oneself?"

"Not so, Kassapa," said the Buddha.

"Then is suffering made by another?"

"Not so, Kassapa," said the Buddha.

"Well, is suffering made by both oneself and another?"

"Not so, Kassapa," said the Buddha.

"Then does suffering arise anomalously, not made by oneself or another?"

"Not so, Kassapa," said the Buddha.

"Well, is there no such thing as suffering?"

“It’s not that there’s no such thing as suffering. Suffering is real.”

“Then does the worthy Gotama not know or see suffering?”

“It’s not that I don’t know or see suffering. I do know suffering, I do see suffering.”

“Worthy Gotama, when asked these questions, you say ‘not so’. Yet you say that there is such a thing as suffering. And you say that you do know suffering, and you do see suffering. Sir, let the Blessed One explain suffering to me! Let the Blessed One teach me about suffering!”

“Suppose that he who does the deed and he who experiences the result are one and the same. Then for one who has existed since the beginning, suffering is made by oneself. In speaking like this, one implies this is eternal. Suppose that he who does the deed is one, and he who experiences the result is another. Then for one stricken by feeling, suffering is made by another. In speaking like this, one implies this is annihilated. Avoiding these two extremes, the Realized One teaches by the middle way: ‘Ignorance is a requirement for choices.

Choices are a requirement for consciousness. … That is how this entire mass of suffering originates. When ignorance fades away and ceases with no residue left behind, choices cease. When choices cease, consciousness ceases. … That is how this entire mass of suffering ceases.’”

When this was said, Kassapa 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?”

“Kassapa, if someone formerly ordained in another sect wishes to take the going forth, the ordination in this teaching and training, they must spend four months on probation. When four months have passed, if the mendicants are satisfied, they’ll give the going forth, the ordination into monkhood. However, I have recognized individual differences.”

“Sir, if four months probation are required in such a case, I’ll spend four years on probation. When four years have passed, if the mendicants are satisfied, let them give me the going forth, the ordination into monkhood.”

And the naked ascetic Kassapa received the going forth, the ordination in the Buddha’s presence. Not long after his ordination, Venerable Kassapa, living alone, withdrawn, diligent, keen, and resolute, soon realized the supreme culmination of the spiritual path in this very life. He lived having achieved with his own insight the goal for which gentlemen rightly go forth from the lay life to homelessness.

He understood: “Rebirth is ended; the spiritual journey has been completed; what had to be done has been done; there is nothing further for this place.” And Venerable Kassapa became one of the perfected.