AN 3.58 — With Tikaṇṇa

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Text

Numbered Discourses 3.58

6. Brahmins

With Tikaṇṇa

Then Tikaṇṇa the brahmin went up to the Buddha, and exchanged greetings with him. Seated to one side, in front of the Buddha, Tikaṇṇa praised the brahmins who were proficient in the three Vedas, “Such are the brahmins, masters of the three Vedic knowledges! Thus are the brahmins, masters of the three Vedic knowledges!”

“But brahmin, how do the brahmins describe a brahmin who is master of the three Vedic knowledges?”

“Worthy Gotama, it’s when a brahmin is well born on both his mother’s and father’s side, stemming from a clean vessel, with irrefutable and impeccable genealogy back to the seventh paternal generation. He recites and remembers the hymns, and 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. That’s how the brahmins describe a brahmin who is master of the three Vedic knowledges.”

“Brahmin, a master of three knowledges according to the brahmins is quite different from a master of the three knowledges in the training of the Noble One.”

“But worthy Gotama, how is one a master of the three knowledges in the training of the Noble One? Worthy Gotama, please teach me this.”

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

“Yes, worthy sir,” Tikaṇṇa replied. The Buddha said this:

“Brahmin, it’s when a mendicant, quite secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unskillful qualities, enters and remains 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. This is the first knowledge that they attain. Ignorance is banished and knowledge has arisen; darkness is banished and light has arisen, as happens for a meditator who is diligent, keen, and resolute.

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. This is the second knowledge that they attain. Ignorance is banished and knowledge has arisen; darkness is banished and light has arisen, as happens for a meditator who is diligent, keen, and resolute.

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 the third knowledge that they attain. Ignorance is banished and knowledge has arisen; darkness is banished, and light has arisen, as happens for a meditator who is diligent, keen, and resolute.

For someone whose ethical conduct doesn’t waver,

who is alert, practicing absorption;

whose mind is mastered,

unified, serene.

That attentive one dispels the darkness,

master of the three knowledges, conqueror of death.

For the welfare of gods and humans,

he has given up everything, they say.

Accomplished in the three knowledges,

living without confusion,

bearing the final body,

they revere the awakened Gotama.

One who knows their past lives,

sees heaven and places of loss,

and has attained the ending of rebirth,

a sage of perfect insight—

it’s because of these three knowledges

that a brahmin is a master of the three knowledges.

That’s who I call a three-knowledge master,

and not the other who repeats what they are told.

This, brahmin, is a master of the three knowledges in the training of the Noble One.”

“Worthy Gotama, a master of three knowledges according to the brahmins is quite different from a master of the three knowledges in the training of the Noble One. And, worthy Gotama, a master of three knowledges according to the brahmins is not worth a sixteenth part of a master of the three knowledges in the training of the Noble One.

Excellent, worthy Gotama! Excellent! … From this day forth, may the worthy Gotama remember me as a lay follower who has gone for refuge for life.”