Snp 1.7 — The Lowlife

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Text

Anthology of Discourses 1.7

The Lowlife

So I have heard. At one time the Buddha was staying near Sāvatthī in Jeta's Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika's monastery. Then the Buddha robed up in the morning and, taking his bowl and robe, entered Sāvatthī for alms. Now at that time in the brahmin Bhāradvāja the Fire-Worshiper's home the sacred flame had been kindled and the oblation prepared. Wandering indiscriminately for almsfood in Sāvatthī, the Buddha approached Bhāradvāja the Fire-Worshiper's house.

Bhāradvāja the Fire-Worshiper saw the Buddha coming off in the distance and said to him, "Stop right there, shaveling! Right there, fake ascetic! Right there, lowlife!"

When he said this, the Buddha said to him, "But brahmin, do you know what is a lowlife or what are the qualities that make you a lowlife?" "No I do not, worthy Gotama. Please, worthy Gotama, teach me this matter so I can understand what is a lowlife or what are the qualities that make you a lowlife." "Well then, brahmin, listen and apply your mind well, I will speak." "Yes, worthy sir," Bhāradvāja the Fire-Worshiper replied. The Buddha said this:

"Irritable and acrimonious,

wicked and offensive,

a man deficient in view, deceitful:

know him as a lowlife.

He harms living creatures

born of womb or of egg,

and has no kindness for creatures:

know him as a lowlife.

He destroys and devastates

villages and towns,

a notorious oppressor:

know him as a lowlife.

Whether in village or wilderness,
he steals what belongs to others,
taking what has not been given:
know him as a lowlife.
Having fallen into debt,
when pressed to pay up he flees, saying
‘I don’t owe you anything!’:
know him as a lowlife.
Wanting some item or other,
he attacks a person in the street
and takes it:
know him as a lowlife.
For his own sake or the sake of another,
or for the sake of wealth, a man
tells a lie when asked to bear witness:
know him as a lowlife.
He is spied among the partners
of relatives and friends,
by force or seduction:
know him as a lowlife.
Though able, he does not look after
his mother and father
when elderly, past their prime:
know him as a lowlife.
He hits or verbally abuses
his mother or father,
brother, sister, or mother-in-law:
know him as a lowlife.
When asked about the good,

he teaches what is bad,
giving secretive advice:
know him as a lowlife.
Having done a bad deed, he wishes,
‘May no one find me out!’
His deeds are underhand:
know him as a lowlife.
When visiting another family
he eats their delicious food,
but does not return the honor:
know him as a lowlife.
He deceives with lies
ascetics and brahmins
and other supplicants:
know him as a lowlife.
When time comes to offer a meal
to brahmins or ascetics,
he abuses them and does not give:
know him as a lowlife.
He talks about what never happened,
being wrapped up in delusion,
chasing after some item or other:
know him as a lowlife.
He extols himself
and disparages others,
brought down by his pride:
know him as a lowlife.
He’s a bully and a miser,
of corrupt wishes, stingy, and devious,

shameless, imprudent:
know him as a lowlife.
He insults the Buddha
or his disciple,
whether lay or renunciate:
know him as a lowlife.
He claims to be a perfected one,
when he really is no such thing.
In the world with its divinities,
that crook is truly the lowest lowlife.
These who are called lowlifes
I have revealed to you.
You’re not a lowlife by birth,
nor by birth are you a brahmin.
You’re a lowlife by your deeds,
by deeds you’re a brahmin.
And also you should know
according to this example.
A corpse-worker’s son of the dog-eating caste
became renowned as Mātaṅga.
Mātaṅga achieved the highest fame
so very hard to find.
Lots of aristocrats and brahmins
came to serve him.
He ascended the stainless highway
that leads to the heavens;
having discarded sensual desire,
he was reborn in a realm of divinity.
His birth did not prevent him

from rebirth in the realm of divinity.

Those born in a brahmin family

who recite as kinsmen of the hymns,

are often discovered

in the midst of wicked deeds.

Blameworthy in this very life,

and in lives to come, a bad destination.

Their birth does not prevent them

from blame or bad destiny.

You’re not a lowlife by birth,

nor by birth are you a brahmin.

You’re a lowlife by your deeds,

by deeds you’re a brahmin.”

When he had spoken, the brahmin Bhāradvāja the Fire-Worshiper said to the Buddha, “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.”