

73 *Mahāvaccagotta Sutta*

The Greater Discourse to Vacchagotta

1. THUS HAVE I HEARD. On one occasion the Blessed One was living at Rājagaha in the Bamboo Grove, the Squirrels' Sanctuary.

2. Then the wanderer Vacchagotta went to the Blessed One and exchanged greetings with him. When this courteous and amiable talk was finished, he sat down at one side and said to the Blessed One:

3. "I have had conversations with Master Gotama for a long time. It would be good if Master Gotama would teach me in brief the wholesome and the unwholesome."

"I can teach you the wholesome and the unwholesome in brief, Vaccha, and I can teach you the wholesome and the unwholesome at length. Still I will teach you the wholesome and the unwholesome in brief. Listen and attend closely to what I shall say."

"Yes, sir," he replied. The Blessed One said this:

4. "Vaccha, greed is unwholesome, non-greed is wholesome; hate is unwholesome, non-hate is wholesome; delusion is unwholesome, non-delusion is wholesome. In this way three things are unwholesome and the other three things are wholesome.

5. "Killing living beings is unwholesome, abstention from killing living beings is wholesome; taking what is not given is unwholesome, abstention from taking what is not given is wholesome; misconduct in sensual pleasures is unwholesome, abstention from misconduct in sensual pleasures is wholesome; false speech is unwholesome, abstention from false speech is wholesome; malicious speech [490] is unwholesome, abstention from malicious speech is wholesome; harsh speech is unwholesome, abstention from harsh speech is wholesome; gossip is unwholesome, abstention from gossip is wholesome; covetousness is unwholesome, uncovetousness is wholesome; ill will is unwholesome, non-ill will is wholesome; wrong view is

unwholesome, right view is wholesome. In this way ten things are unwholesome and the other ten things are wholesome.

6. "When a bhikkhu has abandoned craving, cut it off at the root, made it like a palm stump, done away with it so that it is no longer subject to future arising, then that bhikkhu is an arahant with taints destroyed, one who has lived the holy life, done what had to be done, laid down the burden, reached the true goal, destroyed the fetters of being, and is completely liberated through final knowledge."

7. "Apart from Master Gotama, is there any one bhikkhu, Master Gotama's disciple, who by realising for himself with direct knowledge here and now enters upon and abides in the deliverance of mind and deliverance by wisdom that are taintless with the destruction of the taints?"⁷²⁴

"There are not only one hundred, Vaccha, or two or three or four or five hundred, but far more bhikkhus, my disciples, who by realising for themselves with direct knowledge here and now enter upon and abide in the deliverance of mind and deliverance by wisdom that are taintless with the destruction of the taints."

8. "Apart from Master Gotama and the bhikkhus, is there any one bhikkhunī, Master Gotama's disciple, who by realising for herself with direct knowledge here and now enters upon and abides in the deliverance of mind and deliverance by wisdom that are taintless with the destruction of the taints?"

"There are not only one hundred...or five hundred, but far more bhikkhunīs, my disciples, who by realising for themselves with direct knowledge here and now enter upon and abide in the deliverance of mind and deliverance by wisdom that are taintless with the destruction of the taints."

9. "Apart from Master Gotama and the bhikkhus and bhikkhunīs, is there any one man lay follower, Master Gotama's disciple, clothed in white leading a life of celibacy who, with the destruction of the five lower fetters, will reappear spontaneously [in the Pure Abodes] and there attain final Nibbāna without ever returning from that world?"⁷²⁵

"There are not only one hundred...or five hundred, but far more men lay followers, my disciples, clothed in white leading lives of celibacy who, with the destruction of the five lower fetters, [491] will reappear spontaneously [in the Pure Abodes] and there attain final Nibbāna without ever returning from that world."

10. "Apart from Master Gotama, the bhikkhus and bhikkhunīs, and the men lay followers clothed in white leading lives of celibacy, is there any one man lay follower, Master Gotama's disciple, clothed in white enjoying sensual pleasures, who carries out his instruction, responds to his advice, has gone beyond doubt, become free from perplexity, gained intrepidity, and become independent of others in the Teacher's Dispensation?"⁷²⁶

"There are not only one hundred...or five hundred, but far more men lay followers, my disciples, clothed in white enjoying sensual pleasures, who carry out my instruction, respond to my advice, have gone beyond doubt, become free from perplexity, gained intrepidity, and become independent of others in the Teacher's Dispensation."

11. "Apart from Master Gotama, the bhikkhus and bhikkhunīs, and the men lay followers clothed in white, both those leading lives of celibacy and those enjoying sensual pleasures, is there any one woman lay follower, Master Gotama's disciple, clothed in white leading a life of celibacy who, with the destruction of the five lower fetters, will reappear spontaneously [in the Pure Abodes] and there attain final Nibbāna without ever returning from that world?"

"There are not only one hundred...or five hundred, but far more women lay followers, my disciples, clothed in white leading lives of celibacy who, with the destruction of the five lower fetters, will reappear spontaneously [in the Pure Abodes] and there attain final Nibbāna without ever returning from that world."

12. "Apart from Master Gotama, the bhikkhus and bhikkhunīs, and the men lay followers clothed in white, both those leading lives of celibacy and those enjoying sensual pleasures, and the women lay followers clothed in white leading lives of celibacy, is there any one woman lay follower, Master Gotama's disciple, clothed in white enjoying sensual pleasures, who carries out his instruction, responds to his advice, has gone beyond doubt, become free from perplexity, gained intrepidity, and become independent of others in the Teacher's Dispensation?"

"There are not only one hundred...or five hundred, but far more women lay followers, my disciples, clothed in white enjoying sensual pleasures, who carry out my instruction, respond to my advice, have gone beyond doubt, become free of perplexity,

gained intrepidity, and become independent of others in the Teacher's Dispensation."

13. "Master Gotama, if only Master Gotama were accomplished in this Dhamma, but no bhikkhus were accomplished, [492] then this holy life would be deficient in that respect; but because Master Gotama and bhikkhus are accomplished in this Dhamma, this holy life is thus complete in that respect. If only Master Gotama and bhikkhus were accomplished in this Dhamma, but no bhikkhunīs were accomplished, then this holy life would be deficient in that respect; but because Master Gotama, bhikkhus, and bhikkhunīs are accomplished in this Dhamma, this holy life is thus complete in that respect. If only Master Gotama, bhikkhus, and bhikkhunīs were accomplished in this Dhamma, but no men lay followers clothed in white leading lives of celibacy were accomplished, then this holy life would be deficient in that respect; but because Master Gotama, bhikkhus and bhikkhunīs, and men lay followers clothed in white leading lives of celibacy are accomplished in this Dhamma, this holy life is thus complete in that respect. If only Master Gotama, bhikkhus and bhikkhunīs, and men lay followers clothed in white leading lives of celibacy were accomplished in this Dhamma, but no men lay followers clothed in white enjoying sensual pleasures were accomplished, then this holy life would be deficient in that respect; but because Master Gotama, bhikkhus and bhikkhunīs, and men lay followers clothed in white, both those leading lives of celibacy and those enjoying sensual pleasures, are accomplished in this Dhamma, this holy life is thus complete in that respect. If only Master Gotama, bhikkhus and bhikkhunīs, and men lay followers clothed in white...were accomplished in this Dhamma, but no women lay followers clothed in white [493] leading lives of celibacy were accomplished, then this holy life would be deficient in that respect; but because Master Gotama, bhikkhus and bhikkhunīs, men lay followers clothed in white...and women lay followers clothed in white leading lives of celibacy are accomplished in this Dhamma, this holy life is thus complete in that respect. If only Master Gotama, bhikkhus and bhikkhunīs, men lay followers clothed in white...and women lay followers clothed in white leading lives of celibacy were accomplished in this Dhamma, but no women lay followers clothed in white enjoying sensual pleasures were accomplished,

then this holy life would be deficient in that respect; but because Master Gotama, bhikkhus and bhikkhunīs, men lay followers clothed in white, both those leading lives of celibacy and those enjoying sensual pleasures, and women lay followers clothed in white, both those leading lives of celibacy and those enjoying sensual pleasures, are accomplished in this Dhamma, this holy life is thus complete in that respect.

14. "Just as the river Ganges inclines towards the sea, slopes towards the sea, flows towards the sea, and extends all the way to the sea, so too Master Gotama's assembly with its homeless ones and its householders inclines towards Nibbāna, slopes towards Nibbāna, flows towards Nibbāna, and extends all the way to Nibbāna.

15. "Magnificent, Master Gotama! Magnificent, Master Gotama! Master Gotama has made the Dhamma clear in many ways, as though he were turning upright what had been overthrown, revealing what was hidden, showing the way to one who was lost, or holding up a lamp in the dark for those with eyesight to see forms. I go to Master Gotama for refuge and to the Dhamma and to the Sangha of bhikkhus. I would receive the going forth under Master Gotama, I would receive the full admission." [494]

16. "Vaccha, one who formerly belonged to another sect and desires the going forth and the full admission in this Dhamma and Discipline lives on probation for four months. At the end of four months, if the bhikkhus are satisfied with him, they give him the going forth and the full admission to the bhikkhus' state. But I recognise individual differences in this matter."

"Venerable sir, if those who formerly belonged to another sect and desire the going forth and the full admission in this Dhamma and Discipline live on probation for four months, and if at the end of the four months the bhikkhus being satisfied with them give them the going forth and the full admission to the bhikkhus' state, then I will live on probation for four years. At the end of the four years if the bhikkhus are satisfied with me, let them give me the going forth and the full admission to the bhikkhus' state."

17. Then the wanderer Vacchagotta received the going forth under the Blessed One, and he received the full admission. Not long after his full admission, a half-month after his full admission, the venerable Vacchagotta went to the Blessed One, and

after paying homage to him, he sat down at one side and told the Blessed One: "Venerable sir, I have attained whatever can be attained by the knowledge of a disciple in higher training, by the true knowledge of a disciple in higher training. Let the Blessed One teach me the Dhamma further."⁷²⁷

18. "In that case, Vaccha, develop further two things: serenity and insight. When these two things are developed further, they will lead to the penetration of many elements.

19. "To the extent that you may wish: 'May I wield the various kinds of supernormal power: having been one, may I become many; having been many, may I become one; may I appear and vanish; may I go unhindered through a wall, through an enclosure, through a mountain, as though through space; may I dive in and out of the earth as though it were water; may I walk on water without sinking as though it were earth; seated cross-legged, may I travel in space like a bird; with my hand may I touch and stroke the moon and sun so powerful and mighty; may I wield bodily mastery even as far as the Brahma-world' – you will attain the ability to witness any aspect therein, there being a suitable basis."⁷²⁸

20. "To the extent that you may wish: 'May I, with the divine ear element, [495] which is purified and surpasses the human, hear both kinds of sounds, the divine and the human, those that are far as well as near' – you will attain the ability to witness any aspect therein, there being a suitable basis.

21. "To the extent that you may wish: 'May I understand the minds of other beings, of other persons, having encompassed them with my own mind. May I understand a mind affected by lust as affected by lust and a mind unaffected by lust as unaffected by lust; may I understand a mind affected by hate as affected by hate and a mind unaffected by hate as unaffected by hate; may I understand a mind affected by delusion as affected by delusion and a mind unaffected by delusion as unaffected by delusion; may I understand a contracted mind as contracted and a distracted mind as distracted; may I understand an exalted mind as exalted and an unexalted mind as unexalted; may I understand a surpassed mind as surpassed and an unsurpassed mind as unsurpassed; may I understand a concentrated mind as concentrated and an unconcentrated mind as unconcentrated; may I understand a liberated mind as

liberated and an unliberated mind as unliberated' – you will attain the ability to witness any aspect therein, there being a suitable basis.

22. "To the extent that you may wish: 'May I recollect my manifold past lives, that is, one birth, two births...*(as Sutta 51, §24)*... Thus with their aspects and particulars may I recollect my manifold past lives' – you will attain the ability to witness any aspect therein, there being a suitable basis. [496]

23. "To the extent that you may wish: 'May I, with the divine eye, which is purified and surpasses the human, see beings passing away and reappearing, inferior and superior, fair and ugly, fortunate and unfortunate...*(as Sutta 51, §25)*... and may I understand how beings pass on according to their actions' – you will attain the ability to witness any aspect therein, there being a suitable basis.

24. "To the extent that you may wish: 'May I, by realising for myself with direct knowledge, here and now enter upon and abide in the deliverance of mind and deliverance by wisdom that are taintless with the destruction of the taints' – you will attain the ability to witness any aspect therein, there being a suitable basis."

25. Then the venerable Vacchagotta, having delighted and rejoiced in the Blessed One's words, rose from his seat, and after paying homage to the Blessed One, keeping him on his right, he departed.

26. Before long, dwelling alone, withdrawn, diligent, ardent, and resolute, the venerable Vacchagotta, by realising for himself with direct knowledge, here and now entered upon and abided in that supreme goal of the holy life for the sake of which clansmen rightly go forth from the home life into homelessness. He directly knew: "Birth is destroyed, the holy life has been lived, what had to be done has been done, there is no more coming to any state of being." And the venerable Vacchagotta became one of the arahants.

27. Now on that occasion a number of bhikkhus were going to see the Blessed One. The venerable Vacchagotta saw them coming in the distance. Seeing them, he went to them and asked them: [497] "Where are the venerable ones going?"

"We are going to see the Blessed One, friend."

"In that case, may the venerable ones pay homage in my

name with their heads at the Blessed One's feet, saying: 'Venerable sir, the bhikkhu Vacchagotta pays homage with his head at the Blessed One's feet.' Then say: 'The Blessed One has been worshipped by me, the Sublime One has been worshipped by me.'"⁷²⁹

"Yes, friend," those bhikkhus replied. Then they went to the Blessed One, and after paying homage to him, they sat down at one side and told the Blessed One: "Venerable sir, the venerable Vacchagotta pays homage with his head at the Blessed One's feet, and he says: 'The Blessed One has been worshipped by me, the Sublime One has been worshipped by me.'"

28. "Bhikkhus, having encompassed his mind with my own mind, I already knew of the bhikkhu Vacchagotta: 'The bhikkhu Vacchagotta has attained the threefold true knowledge and has great supernormal power and might.' And deities also told me this: 'The bhikkhu Vacchagotta has attained the threefold true knowledge and has great supernormal power and might.'"

That is what the Blessed One said. Those bhikkhus were satisfied and delighted in the Blessed One's words.

- 722 MA says this is the material form by which one would describe the Tathāgata as a being (or self) possessing material form. Mṭ adds that the material form has been abandoned by the abandonment of the fetters connected with it, and it has thus become incapable of arising again in the future.
- 723 This passage should be connected with the simile of the extinguished fire. Just as the extinguished fire cannot be described as having gone to any direction, so the Tathāgata who has attained to final Nibbāna cannot be described in terms of the four alternatives. The simile concerns solely the legitimacy of conceptual and linguistic usage and is not intended to suggest, as some scholars have held, that the Tathāgata attains to some mystical absorption in the Absolute. The words “profound, immeasurable, unfathomable” point to the transcendental dimension of the liberation attained by the Accomplished One, its inaccessibility to discursive thought.

SUTTA 73

- 724 This question and the next refer to arahantship, which (according to MA) Vacchagotta thought may have been an exclusive prerogative of the Buddha.
- 725 This question refers to the non-returner. Even though the non-returner may remain in the lay life, he necessarily observes celibacy because he has cut off the fetter of sensual desire.
- 726 This question refers to the stream-enterer and the once-returner, who may still indulge in sensual pleasures if they remain in the lay life.
- 727 MA: He had attained the fruit of the non-returner and came to ask the Buddha about the practice of insight for attaining the path of arahantship. However, the Buddha saw that he had the supporting conditions for the six direct knowledges. Thus he taught him serenity for producing the five mundane direct knowledges and insight for reaching arahantship.
- 728 The suitable basis (*āyatana*) is the fourth jhāna for the five direct knowledges and insight for arahantship.

- 729 *Paricijjyo me Bhagavā, paricijjyo me Sugato.* This is an indirect way of informing the Buddha of his attainment of arahantship. The bhikkhus did not understand this, and therefore the Buddha interprets its significance for them.

SUTTA 74

- 730 Dīghanakha was Ven. Sāriputta's nephew. At the time he approached the Buddha, Sāriputta had been a bhikkhu for only two weeks and was still a stream-enterer.
- 731 MA holds that Dīghanakha is an annihilationist (*ucche-davādin*) and explains this assertion to mean: "No [mode of] rebirth is acceptable to me." However, the text itself does not give any concrete evidence supporting this interpretation. It seems much more likely that Dīghanakha's statement, "Nothing is acceptable to me" (*sabbhūti me na khamati*), is intended to apply specifically to other philosophical views, and thus shows Dīghanakha to be a radical sceptic of the class satirically characterised at MN 76.30 as "eel-wrigglers". His assertion would then be tantamount to a wholesale repudiation of all philosophical views.
- 732 This exchange, as interpreted by MA and MT, should be understood as follows: The Buddha suggests, by his question, that Dīghanakha's assertion involves an inherent contradiction. For he cannot reject everything without also rejecting his own view, and this would entail the opposite position, namely, that something is acceptable to him. However, though Dīghanakha recognises the implication of the Buddha's question, he continues to insist on his view that nothing is acceptable to him.
- 733 MA says that the first sentence refers to those who first take up a basic eternalist or annihilationist view and then subsequently adopt secondary variations on that view; the second sentence refers to those who abandon their basic view without adopting an alternative. But if, as seems plausible, Dīghanakha was a radical sceptic, then the Buddha's statement might be understood to point to an unsatisfactoriness inherent in the sceptic's position: it