

## Acela Kassapa Sutta 1

### The First Discourse on Kassapa the Naked Ascetic

[True nature of action and the middle way]

(Sāmyutta Nikāya 12.17/2:18-22)

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#### 1 Naked ascetics and Kassapa

**1.1 NAKED ASCETICS.** In the Pali Suttas, the term *acela*, meaning “unclothed (ie naked) ascetic” refers to a number of groups of ascetics, such as:

##### Acela Kassapa<sup>1</sup>

Kandara,masuka, Kaḷāra,maḍḍuka or  
Kaḷāra,maṭṭhuka the meat-wine ascetic  
Kora-k,khatta or Kora-k,khattiya  
the dog ascetic  
Pāṭika,putta  
Seniya the dog ascetic

With matted-hair ascetics (*jaṭila*),  
nirgranthas (*nigaṇṭha*, Jains), etc  
Karambiya *acela*  
*Acelaka*:<sup>3</sup> With matted-hair ascetics,  
nirgranthas, etc  
The Bodhisattva as an *acelaka*

**Kassapa Sīha,nāda Sutta**, (D 8.1/1:161,3);  
**Bakkula Sutta** (M 124/3:124-128);<sup>2</sup>  
**Acela Kassapa Sutta 1** (S 12.17/2:18-22);  
**Acela Kassapa Sutta 2** (S 41.9/4:302,10)

**Pāṭika Sutta** (D 24.1.11/3:9,16)  
**Pāṭika Sutta** (D 24.1.7/3:6,9); **Loma,haṃsa Jātaka**  
(J 94/1:389 f)  
**Pāṭika Sutta** (D 24.1.16/3:12,15)  
**Kukkura,vatika Sutta** (M 57.2/1:387,10); **Kumbha**  
**Jātaka** (J 512/5:16,3\*)  
**Jaṭila Sutta** (S 3.11/1:78,2+8) = **Ossajjana Sutta**  
(U 65,5) = SD 14.11.  
**Paṇḍara Jātaka** (J 5:75,20)  
**Pācittiya 42** (V 4:92,4+8)  
**Mahā Sīha,nāda Sutta** (M 12.45/1:77,28)

The term *acela* or *acelaka* (sometimes *aceḷa/ka*) is a generic one referring to those ascetics who, mainly due to the notion of total renunciation, choose not to own anything at all, not even to have any clothing. Most of such naked ascetics are also wanderers (*paribbājaka*). The term *acela* is often applied to the Ājīvikas, who were as such itinerant naked ascetics.<sup>4</sup> Both the early Jains (nirgranthas) and Buddhists regarded the Ājīvikas as their rivals, given to extreme self-mortification, and they ridiculed their cult of nudity and unclean habits. From a number of Suttas, however, apparently not all of them are totally naked, for it is stated of “a naked ascetic” (*acelaka*):

He clothes himself in hemp; in hemp-mixed cloth; in shrouds;<sup>5</sup> in refuse rags; in tree bark; in antelope hide; in strips of antelope hide; in kusa-grass fabric; in bark fabric; in wood-shaving fabric; in a human-hair cloak; in animal wool; in owl’s wings. (D 25.8b; M 12.45; M 45.5)<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> On the problem of his identity, see SD 3.15(1.2).

<sup>2</sup> SD 3.15.

<sup>3</sup> For more refs on *acelaka*, see CPD sv.

<sup>4</sup> See AL Basham, *History and Doctrines of the Ājīvikas*, London, 1951; DPPN: Ājīvika; also Jayatilleke, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, 1963:143-145 (see index) & PS Jaini, *Collected Papers on Buddhist Studies*, (1970) 2001:61 f.

<sup>5</sup> Shrouds collected from corpses in a charnel ground.

<sup>6</sup> Eg **Udumbarikā Sīha,nāda S** (D 25.8b/3:40 f) = SD 1.4; **Mahā Sīha,nāda S** (M 12.45/1:77 f), the Buddha’s own account of his self-mortification = SD 1.13; **Cūḷa Dhamma,samādāna Sutta** (M 45.5/1:307) = SD 32.4.

In the Buddha's time, the leader of the Ājīvikas was said to be Makkhali Gosāla, an ex-disciple of Mahāvīra, leader of the nirgranthas, himself a naked ascetic. Makkhali preached a fatalistic or deterministic doctrine denying all causality (*ahetuka, vāda*).<sup>7</sup> Understandably, the Buddha declares Makkhali to be the most dangerous and pernicious of all the heretical teachers (A 1:286).<sup>8</sup>

The Ājīvikas and early Jains, in terms of their observance of nudity, and of alms-collecting and dietary practices, varied very little. Indeed, at a later time, it appears that the Ājīvikas were absorbed into the Jaina fold in south India.<sup>9</sup> Alexander the Great, when he was at the farthest reach of his campaigns, was said to have met with Indian "naked philosophers," who might have been either Ājīvikas or Jains. Plutarch calls them Gymnosophists ("naked thinkers"). Arrian, in his *Campaigns of Alexander* (c117 CE) records such a meeting, where Alexander was very impressed with their powers of endurance.<sup>10</sup>

By the early centuries CE, the Jain religious community was divided into two general groups: naked "sky-clad" Dīgambara and the white-clad (usually loin-clothed) Śvetāmbara. The usual historical explanation for the chief difference between two is one of geography, that the ascetics of northern India could not tolerate cold or were not as isolated from other people, while those in south India were mostly forest recluses and wanderers. The female members of either sects were clothed, and not allowed to go about naked for the sake of propriety. An interesting point is that the Dīgambaras believe that women are unable to achieve liberation because they cannot become naked ascetics.<sup>11</sup>

**1.2 ACELA KASSAPA.** Acela [the naked ascetic] Kassapa mentioned in the Acela Sutta (S 12.17),<sup>12</sup> probably identical with Acela Kassapa of **the Kassapa Sīha, nāda Sutta** (D 8)<sup>13</sup> and **the Bakkula Sutta** (M 124),<sup>14</sup> though the stories of their conversions are different.

In **the Kassapa Sīha, nāda Sutta** (D 8), he visits the Buddha in the Kaṇṇa, katthala deer park at Ujuṇṇā and asks him whether he rejects all forms of asceticism, and the Buddha explains the nature of the complete holy life. After the usual four months' probation, he joins the order and in due course becomes an arhat.<sup>15</sup>

According to **the Bakkula Sutta** (M 124), Kassapa is an old friend of Bakkula, whom he meets again during the latter's final year (aged 160), after having been a monk for 80 years. He directly asks Bakkula about his sex life. Bakkula replies by saying that even the thought of sex has never arisen in him all those eighty years. Impressed, Kassapa joins the order, and in due course becomes an arhat.<sup>16</sup>

## 2 Three times refused

**2.1 THE TRIPLE STATEMENT.** It was customary in India of the Buddha's time that a question or request was made thrice (if not answered the first two times). This custom of expressing an important or urgent point thrice is probably derived from the debate tradition of ancient India. The most common usage of the triple statement is to show one's exultation, as in the case of **Sela** on merely hearing the word "Buddha" (Sn p106). In the case of the erstwhile Jain **Upālī** (M 1:380 f), however, his threefold taking of refuge is not only expressive of his exultation towards the Buddha's spiritual generosity, but it also that his

<sup>7</sup> See D 2.19-20 and D:W 544 nn102-109. See AL Basham, *History and Doctrines of the Ājīvikas* (London, 1951: chs 12-13). Makkhali's view is mentioned in **Sāmañña, phala S** (D 2.19-21/1:53 f) = SD 8.10, and answered in **Apapaṇṇaka S** (M 60.21-28 = 1:407-411). See Jayatilke 1963: 143-145, 152-154, 157-159 (see index) & Jaini, *Collected Papers on Buddhist Studies*, (1970) 2001:57-61.

<sup>8</sup> **Makkhali Gosāla S** (A 3.135/1:286 f), also called **Kesambala S** in the *uddāna* (A 1:304), prob a misnomer, as this is the name of another heretical teacher.

<sup>9</sup> See Jaini 2001:62.

<sup>10</sup> Arrian, *Campaigns of Alexander*. Tr Aubrey de Selincourt, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971:350.

<sup>11</sup> See St Martin's College, Lancaster, UK, website: <http://philtar.ucsm.ac.uk/encyclopedia/jainism/digam.html>.

<sup>12</sup> S 12.17/2:18-22 = SD 18.5.

<sup>13</sup> D 8/1:161-177.

<sup>14</sup> M 124/3:124-128 = SD 3.15.

<sup>15</sup> D 8/1:161-177. According to Comy however he is ordained right away (DA 1:363).

<sup>16</sup> M 124/3:124-128 = SD 3.15. See also AA 1:310.

triple statement ascertains that he is sure of what he is committing himself to, namely the Buddha's teaching. In other words, the Buddha, in making Upāli declare his faith thrice, effectively makes him do so publicly. This open declaration is again seen in the case of **Keṇiya** (Sn p103 f) so that he does not go back on his word! On the third occasion, it would be a final affirmation or negation regarding the matter in question.

Ritually, this triple statement is also the basis of the ecclesiastical act (*saṅgha,kamma*) where three announcements (readings) are made followed by a resolution as the fourth (*ñatti,catuttha,kamma*), for example, in the ordination procedure.<sup>17</sup> In many places in the Suttas and Commentaries, the third occasion often means the last one, for example:

**tatiya,vāraṇ:** In the Commentary to **the Nāvā Vimāna 2**, when the Buddha, on his last journey requests Ānanda to get some drinking from a muddy stream (VvA 47);<sup>18</sup>

**tatiya,vāre:** In the **Sāmāvaṭṭi Vatthu**, Ghosaka's wife visits the old treasurer on his deathbed only after having received the news the third time, that is, at the very last moment (DhA 2.1/1:183);

**yāva,tatiyaṇ:**

**Devadatta** thrice announces his request to take over the Buddha's position at the head of the Sangha (V 2:188).

**The Citta Gaha,pati Vatthu** recounts how the householder Citta thrice invites an unmindful monk to remain in his house for alms, but the monk leaves (DhA 5.14/2:75).

**The Vana-r-inda Jātaka** tells an amusing story about how a crocodile, pretending to be a rock in the river answers the monkey on the latter's third call (J 571:279).

**The Pāṭali,putta Peta,vatthu Commentary** tells how three successive throws of the "lot of ill-omen" fell on a woman desired by a marine hungry ghost, her former admirer (PvA 272).

**2.2 THE BUDDHA'S SKILLFUL MEANS.** Let us look at a few examples of the Buddha's statement. The first example is actually not a *statement*, but also a *threefold action* of the Buddha. It is a "statement" in the sense that the Buddha actually is taming the yaksha **Āḷavaka** in simply doing what he tells him to do (entering and exiting his dwelling thrice in succession). The Sutta Nipāta Commentary remarks that by thrice conceding to Āḷavaka's rude request, the Buddha is "purging his [Āḷavaka's] heart (*abbhantare*) of anger's stain with the desire of filling the yaksha's mind with the fourfold sweetness of the transcendental (*lok'uttara,catu,madhuram*) like "a person who cleanses the interior of a gourd with the desire of filling it with sweet syrup of four ingredients" (SnA 227).

**Vajirapāṇī** (or Indra, according to Buddhaghosa) is said to stand in wait above one whom the Buddha is questioning, and "whosoever...does not, even up to the third time of asking, answer a reasonable question put by the Tathagata, would there and then split his head into seven pieces." In **the Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta** (D 16), the Buddha thrice questions the assemble to see if anyone had any doubt which he could clarify while he is yet alive, but everyone remains silent (D 16/2:155).<sup>19</sup>

**Bāhiya Dāru,cīriya**, who had earlier been shipwrecked, met the Buddha on his almsround but he thrice refuses to answer Bāhiya's questions as it is not the right time. The Commentary remarks that this is to give Bāhiya time to recover from his initial excitement on meeting the Buddha. When Bāhiya asks the third time, the Buddha instructs him in the Dharma and he attains arhathood.

In the case of the wanderer **Vaccha,gotta** who asks the Buddha two questions regarding the self, he remains silent on both occasions and the former leaves just as he has come.<sup>20</sup> The Buddha later explains to Ānanda that Vacchagotta is not ready for the truth.

The reverse occurs in the case of **the weaver's daughter of Āḷavī**, whom the Buddha asks four questions, which only she understands and answers correctly, and as a result, she attains stream-winning (DhA 3:174).

<sup>17</sup> cf Kkhv 16.

<sup>18</sup> The same account is found in **Mahā,parinibbāna S** (D 16.422-25/2:129 f) = SD 9.

<sup>19</sup> D 1:95; see **Ambaṭṭha S** (D 3.1.21/1:95) = SD 21.3 Intro (4). Cf **Aya,kūṭa J** (J 347/1:145-147).

<sup>20</sup> D 3:229; A 1:194, 2:45.

The best known expression of the triple statement is found **the refuge and precept formula**, commonly recited at the start of lay Buddhist rituals and gatherings. The Salutation (*Namo tassa bhagavato ...*) and the Three Refuges are each recited three times, followed by the five precepts. This practice has been done since the Buddha's times, and as such the 2500-year-old oral tradition is alive and well here. The Salutation is recited thrice as a sort of recollection of the Buddha's virtues. The triple recitation of the Three Refuges is to remind one to commit oneself totally—by way of body, speech and mind—to them as the ideal, the way, and the community of spiritual life.

**2.3 “NOT THE PROPER TIME.”** The Acela Kassapa Sutta states that each time, Acela Kassapa requests to question the Buddha, he turns him down, saying, “This, Kassapa, is not the proper time for a question. We have entered amongst houses [in inhabited areas]” [§4-6]. **Buddha,ghosa**, in his Sutta Commentary, explains that the Buddha, in saying, “We have entered amongst houses” (*antara,gharam paviṭṭhamhā ti*, SA 2:34 f), in reference to a number of Vinaya rules, namely, **Sekhiya 26**: “I shall not sit clasping the knees in an inhabited area” (*na pallathikāya antara,ghare nisīdissāmī ti*) (V 4:186,29 f),<sup>21</sup> and **Sekhiya 7**: “I shall go with eyes downcast in an inhabited area” (*okkhitta,cakkhu antara,ghare gamissāmī ti*) (V 4:186,29 f).<sup>22</sup>

In fact, almost the whole of the very first section of **the Sekhiya,dhammā** (rules for training), that is, that on “proper behaviour” (*sāruppa*), deals with decorum when a monk is in an inhabited area (*antara,-ghare*), namely:<sup>23</sup>

<b>Sekhiya 1-2</b>	I shall wear the under-robe even all around:	this is a training to be done.
	I shall wear the upper-robe even all around:	this is a training to be done.
<b>Sekhiya 3-4</b>	I shall go well covered in an inhabited area:	this is a training to be done.
	I shall sit well covered in an inhabited area:	this is a training to be done.
<b>Sekhiya 5-6</b>	I shall go well restrained in an inhabited area:	this is a training to be done.
	I shall sit well restrained in an inhabited area:	this is a training to be done.
<b>Sekhiya 7-8</b>	<u>I shall go with eyes downcast in an inhabited area:</u>	this is a training to be done.
	<u>I shall sit with eyes downcast in an inhabited area:</u>	this is a training to be done.
<b>Sekhiya 9-10</b>	I shall not go with robes hitched up in an inhabited area:	this is a training to be done.
	I shall not sit with robes hitched up in an inhabited area:	this is a training to be done.
<b>Sekhiya 11-12</b>	I shall not go laughing loudly in an inhabited area:	this is a training to be done.
	I shall not sit laughing loudly in an inhabited area:	this is a training to be done.
<b>Sekhiya 13-14</b>	I shall go with little sound in an inhabited area:	this is a training to be done.
	I shall sit with little sound in an inhabited area:	this is a training to be done.
<b>Sekhiya 15-16</b>	I shall not go swaying my body in an inhabited area:	this is a training to be done.
	I shall not sit swaying my body in an inhabited area:	this is a training to be done.
<b>Sekhiya 17-18</b>	I shall not go swinging my arms in an inhabited area:	this is a training to be done.
	I shall not sit swinging my arms in an inhabited area:	this is a training to be done.
<b>Sekhiya 19-20</b>	I shall not go shaking my head in an inhabited area:	this is a training to be done.
	I shall not sit shaking my head in an inhabited area:	this is a training to be done.
<b>Sekhiya 21-22</b>	I shall not go with arms akimbo in an inhabited area:	this is a training to be done.
	I shall not sit with arms akimbo in an inhabited area:	this is a training to be done.
<b>Sekhiya 23-24</b>	I shall not go with the head covered in an inhabited area:	this is a training to be done.
	I shall not sit with the head covered in an inhabited area:	this is a training to be done.
<b>Sekhiya 25-26</b>	I shall not go on toes or on heels in an inhabited area:	this is a training to be done.
	<u>I shall not sit clasping the knees in an inhabited area:</u>	this is a training to be done.

<sup>21</sup> See Vajirañāṇavarorasa, *Vinayamukha: The Entrance to the Vinaya* 1, Bangkok: Mahamakut, 2459 = 1916: 209.

<sup>22</sup> See Vajirañāṇavarorasa, *Vinayamukha*, 2459 = 1916: 206.

<sup>23</sup> See Vajirañāṇavarorasa, *Vinayamukha*, 2459 = 1916: 204-210; *The Pāṭimokkha*, ed W Pruitt & tr KR Norman, Oxford: PTS, 2002:228-234.

(Sekh 1-26 = V 4:185-189)

Although “teaching the Dharma in inhabited areas” is not specifically mentioned as being prohibited, *by connotation and context* it is clear that “inhabited areas” (*antara,ghare*, meaning “in public,” or, sometimes, “within houses”)<sup>24</sup> is not the proper place for the Dharma to be effectively propagated. Furthermore, the Buddha is on his almsround (it is to be done mindfully and for only during a certain time in the morning), and as such, it would be inconvenient to give a sustained and fruitful teaching.

**2.4 BUDDHA, GHOSA’S COMMENTARY.** Buddhaghosa gives reasons for the Buddha thrice refusing to answer Kassapa, as follows:

- (1) For the purpose of inspiring respect (*garava, jan’atthan*). For if speculative people (*diṭṭhi, - gatikā*) are answered too quickly, they would show no respect, thinking, “It is easy to approach the ascetic Gotama to ask a question; for he answers immediately when asked.” When refused two or three times, they show respect. For after the third time, they, thinking, “It is difficult to approach the ascetic Gotama to ask a question,” would wish to listen and have faith. Hence, he answered only after the third time.
- (2) Furthermore, the Blessed One answered only after the third time so that being’s knowledge would ripen. (SA 2:35 abridged)

Buddhaghosa seems to suggest that the Buddha is being manipulative. Is he reflecting Mahāvihāra scholasticism and jesuitry?

**2.5 DHAMMA, PĀLA’S COMMENTARY.** Dhamma, pāla throws better light on this matter in his commentary on **the Bāhiya Sutta**, and gives a more detailed and plausible explanation of why the Buddha thrice turns down a request to teach the Dharma (U 1.10).<sup>25</sup> Bāhiya Dāru, cīriya (the bark-dress ascetic), having survived a shipwreck off Suppāraka, but losing all his clothes in the water, dresses himself up with tree-bark. People think he is a holy man, and in due course, he himself comes to think he is an arhat. However, through the intercession of a Suddhāvāsa brahma (his co-brahmacari in Kassapa Buddha’s time), points out his error and advises him to see the Buddha in Sāvattihī.<sup>26</sup>

Dhamma, pāla explains the Buddha’s refusing thrice to teach Bāhiya, thus,

What is the reason that the Blessed One, though wishing to teach him the Dharma, twice rejected him? It is said that this thought occurred to him,

“Right from the time that he saw me, his entire body has been continuously pervaded with zest (*pīti*): even if he hears Dharma he will not, as yet, be able to penetrate it due to the excessive strength of his zest. So let him wait until balance of equanimity is restored in him. Furthermore, after a journey of 120 yojanas [840 mi = 1452 km], the physical stress on his body must be very great. So let him first calm down.”

That is why he twice rejected him. But some say that the Blessed One acted thus with the aim of inspiring respect for hearing the Dharma.

But the Blessed One, upon seeing, on the third occasion, that balance and equanimity are in him (Bāhiya), that his stress had abated, and seeing there is imminent danger to his life, thought, “Now is the time for teaching the Dharma,” and started teaching the Dharma... (UA 90)

<sup>24</sup> Here *antara,ghare* is usu used in connection with a monastic’s public decorum. Moreover, the Dharma is not normally taught in a public place where this would disrupt the peace or cause inconvenience to others. However, we have accounts (mostly commentarial), where the Buddha does give teachings in public when it is timely, as in the cases of the acrobat Ugga, sena (DhA 24.6/4:59-64, 26.14/4:158 f), and the weaver’s daughter (DhA 13.7/3:170-175). On Ugga, sena, see Piya Tan, *Teaching Methods of the Buddha*, 2002: (18); on the weaver’s daughter, op cit (18).

<sup>25</sup> UA 89 f.

<sup>26</sup> U 1.10/6-9 = SD 34.3.



**2.6 “DO NOT SPEAK THUS.”** It is also interesting to note that, in response to Acela Kassapa’s subsequent questions, the Buddha, instead of simply replying “No”—*no h’etam*<sup>27</sup>—he always answers *mā h’evam*, which the Commentaries gloss as “Do not speak thus.”<sup>28</sup> It is possible that the Buddha is simply telling Kassapa *not* to ask the questions, but Kassapa goes on anyway! In due course, on Kassapa’s insistence, the Buddha compassionately answers with brief explanations leading to the dependent arising formula, and Kassapa gains spiritual from this.

**The Mahā Suññatā Sutta** (M 122) may help us with an explanation, where in admonishing Ānanda, the Buddha states that a pupil finds a good teacher, he should learn from him, “even if he [the disciple] is told to leave [is rejected].” Then Buddha goes on say that a pupil should go to a teacher not merely to learn the Suttas, but for the sake of spiritual development, that is,<sup>29</sup>

... this talk concerning austerity, conducing as a support for the mind’s release, and that leads to complete disillusionment, to fading away (of lust), to ending (of suffering), to inner peace, to higher knowledge, to self-awakening, to nirvana; that is to say, talk about wanting little, talk about contentment, talk about solitude, talk about aloofness from company, talk about arousing effort, talk about moral virtue, talk about mental concentration, talk about wisdom, talk about liberation, talk about the knowledge and vision of liberation.<sup>30</sup>

It is for the sake of such a talk that a disciple should regard the teacher as being worthy of his devotion even if he is told to leave. (M 122.20b/3:115) = SD 11.4

Apparently, Acela Kassapa, in his insistence to learn the Dharma has found a good teacher, indeed, the best, and he is not letting go of the opportunity. Since it is the Vinaya that protects the Dharma, the Buddha gives priority to the Dharma, and teaches Kassapa so that he is liberated.

It is however important to note here that this interpretation should not be used as an excuse for a relaxed or “modern” interpretation of the Vinaya, that is, the monastic rules. The point here is that of the priority of the Dharma over the Vinaya, and not for the sake of “modernizing” the Sangha to fit the world (or worldliness). The Sangha, that is, the conventional order of monastic, is not meant to fit into the world: it is the way out of this world and its sufferings.

### 3 Five wrong views

In asking the Buddha about suffering, Acela Kassapa comes up with four alternatives, all wrong (or incomplete) views, thus:

- (1) Suffering self-created (*sayam katam dukkham*); [§7]
- (2) Suffering created by others (*param katam dukkham*); [§8]
- (3) Suffering self-created and other-created (*sayam katañ ca param katañ ca dukkham*); [§9]
- (4) Suffering arises by chance (ie neither self-created nor other-created) (*adhicca, samuppannam*); [§10]
- (5) There is no suffering (*n’atthi dukkham*). [§11]

(1) The first wrong view—that suffering is self-created—as the Buddha will shown is an allusion to **eternalism** (*sassata, diṭṭhi*), that the eternal self exists. In the **Kaccāyana, gotta Sutta** (S 12.15), the Buddha, in explaining the nature of right view (*sammā, diṭṭhi*), declares that the world is led by two extreme

<sup>27</sup> Fully tr as “It is not so” or simply “no.”

<sup>28</sup> Comy glosses: “Do not speak thus”: *evam mā bhaṇī ti* (DA 2:486; SA 2:87; AA 3:150); *mā evam abhaṇī* (SA 1:217; AA 5:58); *mā evam āha, mā evam abhaṇī ti* (SnA 2:475).

<sup>29</sup> M 122.19/3:115 = SD 11.4.

<sup>30</sup> These are the 10 topics of talk (*kathā, vatthu*) conducive to spiritual growth and awakening, viz: *app’iccha, -kathā, santuṭṭhi, kathā, paviveka, kathā, asaṃsagga, kathā, viriy’ārambha, kathā, sīla, kathā, samādhi, kathā, paññā, -kathā, vimutti, kathā, vimutti, nāṇa, dassana, kathā* (M 1:145, 3:113; A 5:129).

views: that everything exists (*sabbam atthi*) and that everything does not exist (*sabbam n'atthi*).<sup>31</sup> While the former view, that of existence (*atthitā*), is the same as eternalism (*sassata*), the latter, the view of “non-existence” (*natthitā*), is synonymous with annihilation (*uccheda*) (SA 2:32).<sup>32</sup>

(2) The second wrong view—that suffering is created by others—denies the self as well as personal responsibility, and alludes to a form of **annihilationism** (*uccheda, diṭṭhi*).<sup>33</sup> However, if one believes that suffering is the fiat of another being (God or a non-human), then this wrong view is that of **eternalism**, which can also find expression as *theism* (everything is due to God), *determinism* (everything is due to past action),<sup>34</sup> or *fatalism* (there is no causality, everything is predetermined). These three ideas are stated in **the Tīth'āyatana Sutta** (A 3.61).<sup>35</sup>

(3) The third wrong view is a syncretic alternative, a sort of **partial eternalism** (*ekacca sassata, -vāda*). **The Brahma, jāla Sutta** (D 1) mentions two broad types of partial eternalism: theistic views that the creator-God is eternal but his creatures are not, and the rationalist view that the body is impermanent but the mind or consciousness is not.<sup>36</sup>

(4) The fourth wrong view is the doctrine of **fortuitous arising** (*adhicca, samuppanna, vāda*). **The Brahma, jāla Sutta** (D 1) mentions two types of fortuitous arising: the view of a non-conscious being (*asañña, satta*) reborn here but recalls only his last life, and a rationalist who fabricates such a view.<sup>37</sup>

(5) The fifth wrong view denies suffering altogether (*n'atthika, vāda*), as expressed by prince Pāyāsi.<sup>38</sup> This wrong view is also known as the notion of “non-existence” (*natthitā*), also known as “annihilationism” (*uccheda*), as explained in connection with **the Kaccāyana, gotta Sutta** (S 12.15) above here, at (1).

All these views are wrong because they either subscribe to the one of the extremes of self or other (both entailing notions of an abiding entity), or extreme notions of existence and of non-existence. Reality is not so clear cut, but depends on the viewer, that is, one's experiences are the effects of sense-contact and the resultant feelings. **The Brahma, jāla Sutta** (D 1) explains how contact and feeling are crucial to the formation of views (*diṭṭhi*), especially wrong views.<sup>39</sup>

#### 4 Ordination of a wanderer

Upon listening the Buddha's admonition, Acela Kassapa realizes the truth and seeks to join the Order. This is understandable as he is already a wanderer, as sort of seeker looking for the truth, and finally finds it in the Buddha Dharma. However, since wanderers often have their own baggage of views and habits, even after they have joined the order. The most common examples of such “failures” (*anārādhaka*) are recorded in **the Añña, tīthiya Pubba, kathā** (“the preamble on the outside sectarians”)<sup>40</sup> of the Vinaya, thus:

- They go too early into the village (for alms, etc), and return too late in the day (thus neglecting their monastic duties).

<sup>31</sup> S 12.15.7/2:17 = SD 6.13.

<sup>32</sup> However, on the proper use of these two terms as *notions*, see SD 16.3 Intro (2).

<sup>33</sup> A full blown form of annihilationism is found in the teachings of the sectarian teacher, Ajita Kesakambala, who taught an amoral materialism (there is no karma, no rebirth, neither good nor evil: see **Sāmañña, phala S** (D 2.23/1:55) = SD 8.10.

<sup>34</sup> The early Buddhist texts attr such a view to the nirganthas or early Jains: see **Deva, daha S** (M 101/2:214-228) = SD 18.4.

<sup>35</sup> A 3.61.1-4/1:173 f = SD 6.8.

<sup>36</sup> See D 1.38-49/1:17-21 = SD 25.2.

<sup>37</sup> See D 1.68-69/1:28 f = SD 25.2.

<sup>38</sup> **Pāyāsi S** (D 23.5/2:319). See also DA 4:136; AA 3:62.

<sup>39</sup> D 1.105-130/1:40-43 = SD 25.2. See also **Vedanā** = SD 17.3 esp (3.2).

<sup>40</sup> Mv 1.38 = V 1:69-71.

- They socialize with prostitutes (*vesiyā*), with widows, with mature [teenage] girls, with eunuchs (including sexually promiscuous homosexuals), and with nuns.<sup>41</sup>
- They neglect their various common monastic routines and duties.
- They lack enthusiasm in their spiritual training for liberation (learning, questioning, higher moral training, higher mental training, and higher wisdom).
- They are displeased if their former teacher, views or ways are criticized, or pleased when these are praised; and pleased when the Three Jewels are criticized, or displeased when these are praised. (They are still emotionally attached to old ways, and lack spiritual conviction to their spiritual training.) (Mahā, vagga 38.6-7 = V 1:70)

The candidate, the erstwhile wanderer, is first given the going-forth and lives as a novice during the probationary period (of four months). Thereafter, the monks, satisfied with his conduct, gives him the higher ordination. The Buddha, however, is entitled to waive this usual procedure when he recognizes that the candidate is sufficiently competent and need not be tested.<sup>42</sup> In Acela Kassapa's case, he is given the going-forth, followed immediately by his higher ordination by a chapter of monks. (SA 2:37)

**The Saṅkhitta Sutta 2** (S 48.13) explains that “the difference in individuals” (*puggala, vemattatā*) is due to one's level in cultivating the five spiritual faculties (*pañc'indriya*)—faith, effort, mindfulness, concentration, wisdom—“Thus, monks, due to a difference in the faculties there is a difference in the fruits; due to a difference in the fruits, there is a difference among individuals.”<sup>43</sup> In other words, the Buddha takes exception of certain spiritually mature individuals, as he does in the cases of the fire-worshipping matter hair ascetics, the three **Kassapa brothers**,<sup>44</sup> and of **Acela Kassapa**.<sup>45</sup>

**The Mahā, pari-nibbāna Sutta** (D 16), relates how **Subhadda** is ordained into the order, since his five spiritual faculties are well developed. The Commentary says that after the Buddha has granted Subhadda permission to join the order, Ānanda takes him aside, pours water over his head, teaches him the “meditation with skin as fifth” (*taca, pañcaka kammaṭṭhāna*), then shaves off his hair and beard, clads him in the saffron robes, and then administers the three refuges to him. Then he leads him back to the Buddha who gives him a meditation subject. Subhadda immediately goes into solitary practice, walking in meditation and wins arhathood that same night, and comes down to sit beside the Buddha (DA 2:590). Subhadda's ordination is said to be the Buddha's last act before his parinirvana (KhA 89).

The wanderer **Sabhiya**, however, has to observe the four-month probation.<sup>46</sup> The reason for this is probably because he has been an “intellectual wanderer” (*pañḍita paribbājaka*), that is, a well-known dialectician before, skilled in argumentation.<sup>47</sup> Hence, the probation period helps to clear his mind of his mindset, so that true insight arises in him.

— — —

<sup>41</sup> The keyword here is “resort” (*go, cara*), which often means “alms-resort,” but here, since “nuns” are mentioned, I think it refers to a more general sense of “socializing.” There is no rule against accepting almsfood from such people.

<sup>42</sup> Comy: The Buddha knows whether a non-Buddhist convert needs probation or not. (DA 2:362)

<sup>43</sup> S 48.13/5:200.

<sup>44</sup> V 1:34 f; J 1:82, 4:180.

<sup>45</sup> D 8.24/2:176 f. cf SnA 2:346.

<sup>46</sup> SnA 3.6/p102.

<sup>47</sup> Comy gives examples of “Sabhiya, Piloṭika and others” (*Sabhiya, piloṭik'ādayo*, SA 2.258); also the wanderer Susīma (SA 2:125).



## The First Discourse on Kassapa the Naked Ascetic

(S 12.17/2:18-22)

1 Thus have I heard.

### Acela Kassapa meets the Buddha

At one time the Blessed One was staying in the squirrels' feeding ground in the Bamboo Forest near Rājagaha. [19]

2 Then, the Blessed One, having dressed himself in the morning and taking robe and bowl, entered Rājagaha for alms.

3 Acela [The naked ascetic] Kassapa saw the Blessed One coming in the distance. Having seen the Blessed One, he approached and exchanged friendly greetings with him. When the friendly exchange was done, he stood at one side.

4 Standing thus at one side, Acela Kassapa said this to the Blessed One:

"We would like to ask the good Gotama about a certain matter, if the good Gotama would grant us the favour of answering the question."

"This, Kassapa, is not the proper time for a question. We have entered amongst houses [in an inhabited area]."<sup>48</sup>

5 For the second time, Acela Kassapa said this to the Blessed One:

"We would like to ask the good Gotama about a certain matter, if the good Gotama would grant us the favour of answering the question."

"This, Kassapa, is not the proper time for a question. We have entered amongst houses."

6a For the third time, Acela Kassapa said this to the Blessed One:

"We would like to ask the good Gotama about a certain matter, if the good Gotama would grant us the favour of answering the question."

"This, Kassapa, is not the proper time for a question. We have entered amongst houses."<sup>49</sup>

### Acela Kassapa questions the Buddha

6b When this was said, Acela Kassapa said this to the Blessed One:

"We have no wish to ask the good Gotama much at all."

"Ask, Kassapa, what you wish."

7 (1) "How is it, master Gotama, is suffering self-created (*sayam katam*)?"<sup>50</sup>

"Do not speak thus,"<sup>51</sup> Kassapa," said the Blessed One.

8 (2) "How is it then, master Gotama, is suffering created by others (*param katam*)?"

"Do not speak thus, Kassapa."

9 (3) "How is it then, master Gotama, is suffering self-created and other-created?"

"Do not speak thus, Kassapa," said the Blessed One. [20]

10 (4) "How is it then, master Gotama, does suffering arise by chance, neither self-created nor other-created?"

"Do not speak thus, Kassapa," said the Blessed One.

11 (5) "How is it then, master Gotama, is there no suffering?"

"Kassapa, it is not that there is no suffering. Kassapa, there is suffering."

<sup>48</sup> *Akālo kho tāva Kassapa pañhassa antara,gharam pavitthamhā ti.* See Intro (2.4).

<sup>49</sup> On why the Buddha refused him thrice, see Intro (2.2-3).

<sup>50</sup> On the following five wrong views, see Intro (3).

<sup>51</sup> "Do not speak thus," *mā h'evam*, instead of the usual *no h'etam* ("It is not so" or simply "no"). Comy glosses as *mā evam abhaṇi* (SA 2:35; also: SA 1:217; AA 5:58). Other Comys: *evam mā bhaṇi ti* (DA 2:486; SA 2:87; AA 3:150); *mā evam āha, mā evam abhaṇi ti* (SnA 2:475). See Intro (2.4).

12 “Then, does the good Gotama not know, not see, suffering?”

“Kassapa, it is not that I do not know and do not see suffering. Kassapa, I do know and see suffering.”

### True nature of action

13 “When asked, ‘How is it, master Gotama, is suffering self-created (*sayam katam*)?’ you say: ‘Do not speak thus, Kassapa.’

When asked, ‘How is it then, master Gotama, is suffering other-created (*param katam*)?’ you say: ‘Do not speak thus, Kassapa.’

When asked, ‘How is it then, master Gotama, is suffering self-created and other-created?’ you say: ‘Do not speak thus, Kassapa.’

When asked, ‘How is it then, master Gotama, does suffering arise by chance, neither self-created nor other-created?’ you say: ‘Do not speak thus, Kassapa.’

When asked, ‘How is it then, master Gotama, is there no suffering?’ you say: ‘Kassapa, it is not that there is no suffering. Kassapa, there is suffering.’

When asked, ‘Then, does the good Gotama not know, not see, suffering?’ you say: ‘Kassapa, it is not that I do not know and do not see suffering. Kassapa, I do know and see suffering.’

Bhante, may the Blessed One<sup>52</sup> explain suffering to me. May the Blessed One teach me regarding suffering.”

14 “Kassapa, to say ‘The one who acts is the one who experiences (the fruit)’ is to assert that *because it exists from the start* [on account of its pre-existence],<sup>53</sup> that ‘Suffering is self-created.’ Who asserts thus, speaks of eternalism.<sup>54</sup>

But, Kassapa, to say ‘The one who acts is different from the one who experiences (the fruit)’ is to assert that, *on account of being stricken by feeling*,<sup>55</sup> that ‘Suffering is other-created.’ Who asserts thus, speaks of annihilationism.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>52</sup> We see here a distinct change in the way that the naked ascetic Kassapa addressed the Buddha—from *bho Gotama* to *bhante bhagavā*—reflecting his respect for the Buddha. (SA 2:35)

<sup>53</sup> *Ādito sato*, which Comy glosses as *ādimhi yeva* (“right in the beginning”), and explains it as meaning “(if) in the beginning (one thinks)...” (SA 2:35). **Bodhi**, however, comments: “It seems to me more likely that this phrase is part of the eternalist view itself and means ‘of one existing from the beginning,’ ie, of a being that has always existed. This interpretation can marshal support from the fact that the phrase is omitted just below in the corresponding restatement of the annihilationist view, which is otherwise constructed according to the same logic and thus, if [SA] were correct, should include *ādito sato*. [SA 2:36] says ‘it should be brought in [*āharitabbam*],’ but the fact that the text replaces it by another phrase is strong evidence that it does not belong there.” (S:B 738 n39, emphasis added).

**Comy**: If at the beginning, he thinks, “The one who acts is the same as the one who experiences (the result)” (*kārako idh’eva ucchijjati, tena katam añño paṭisaṃvediyatī ti*) this belief (*laddhi*), “Suffering is self-created,” then follows. And here, “**suffering**” means the suffering of the rounds (*vaṭṭa, dukkha*). “**Who asserts thus**” (*iti vadam*), from the beginning one declares eternalism, takes hold of eternalism. Why? Because that view of his comes to this. Eternalism takes over him who conceives that the agent (*kāraka*) and the experiencer (*vedaka*) are the same. (SA 2:35 f, abridged). On perversions, see **Vipallāsa S** (A 4.49/2:52) = SD 16.11.

**Subcomy**: Even more so, in the belief that suffering is self-created, there are the perversions of perception and of mind (*saññā, citta, vipallāsa*) in the notion, “The one who acts is the one who experiences (the result).” Furthermore, there is wrong adherence to the perversions of perception and of mind thus, namely, the belief “Suffering is self-created” (ie a distortion of views, *diṭṭhi, vipallāsa*). (SAṬ:VRI 2:41)

<sup>54</sup> “*So karoti so paṭisaṃvediyatī ti kho Kassapa, ādito sato “sayam katam dukkhan ti iti vadam sassatam etam pareti*. See prec n.

<sup>55</sup> *Vedanābhitunnassa sato*. This phrase replaces *ādito sato*, which SA 2:36 proposes be inserted here. SA interprets the sentence as that the annihilationist view is held *by one* who experiences the feeling associated with the view, but **Bodhi** understands “the point to be that the view is held *with reference to* one ‘stricken by feeling,’ perhaps by painful feeling.” (S:B 738 n40).

**Comy**: If at the beginning, he thinks, “The one who acts is different from the one who experiences (the fruit),” then comes this belief, “Suffering is other-created,” held by one stricken, ie, pierced by, the feeling associated with the annihilationist view that arises thus: “The agent is annihilated right here, and someone else experiences (the

### The Dharma by the middle

**15a** Kassapa, without turning to either of these extremes, the Tathagata teaches the Dharma by the middle,<sup>57</sup> thus:

**16b** *Avijjā, paccayā saṅkhārā  
saṅkhārā, paccayā viññāṇaṃ  
viññāṇa, paccayā nāma, rūpaṃ  
nāma, rūpa, paccayā saḷ'āyatanaṃ  
saḷ'āyatana, paccayā phassa  
phassa, paccayā vedanā  
vedanā, paccayā taṇhā  
taṇhā, paccayā upādānaṃ  
upādāna, paccayā bhava  
bhava, paccayā jāti  
jāti, paccayā jarā, maraṇaṃ  
soka, parideva, dukkha, -  
domanass'upāyasā sambhavanti  
evam-etassa kevalassa dukkha-k, -  
khandhassa samudayo hoti.*

**15c** *Avijjāya tveva asesā, virāga, -  
nirodhā saṅkhārā, nirodho  
saṅkhārā, nirodhā viññāṇa, nirodho  
viññāṇa, nirodhā nāma, rūpa, nirodho  
nāma, rūpa, nirodhā saḷ'āyatana, nirodho  
saḷ'āyatana, nirodhā phassa, nirodho  
phassa, nirodhā vedanā, nirodho  
vedanā, nirodhā taṇhā, nirodho  
taṇhā, nirodhā upādāna, nirodho  
upādāna, nirodhā bhava, nirodho  
bhava, nirodhā jāti, nirodho  
jāti, nirodhā jarā, maraṇaṃ*

With ignorance as condition, there are volitional activities;<sup>58</sup>  
with volitional activities as condition, there is consciousness;  
with consciousness as condition, there is name-and-form;  
with name-and-form as condition, there is the sixfold sense-base;  
with the sixfold sense-base as condition, there is contact;  
with contact as condition, there is feeling;  
with feeling as condition, there is craving;<sup>59</sup>  
with craving as condition, there is clinging;  
with clinging as condition, there is existence;  
with existence as condition, there is birth;  
with birth as condition there arise decay-and-death,  
sorrow, lamentation, physical pain,  
mental pain and despair.  
—Such is the origin of this whole mass of suffering.

But with the utter fading away and ending of ignorance, [21]  
volitional activities end;  
with the ending of volitional activities, consciousness ends;  
with the ending of consciousness, name-and-form ends;  
with the ending of name-and-form, the six sense-bases end;  
with the ending of the six sense-bases, contact ends;  
with the ending of contact, feeling ends;  
with the ending of feeling, craving ends;  
with the ending of craving, clinging ends;  
with the ending of clinging, existence ends;  
with the ending of existence, birth ends;  
with the ending of birth, there end decay-and-death,

results of) what he has done.” “**Who asserts thus**” (*iti vadam*), from the beginning, declares annihilationism, clings to annihilationism. Why? Because the view of his amounts to this. Annihilationism takes over him. (SA 2:36)

See also §14n on *Ādito sato* above.

<sup>56</sup> “*Añño karoti añño paṭisaṃvediyatī*” *ti kho Kassapa, vedanā'bhittunnassa sato* “*param katam dukkhan ti iti vadam ucchedam etam paretī*. See prec n.

<sup>57</sup> *Majjhena... dhammaṃ*. Comy: The Tathagata, having totally abandoned the extremes of eternalism and annihilationism, and while he lived, teaches the Dharma by the middle without turning to either of them. What is that Dharma? By teaching, “Dependent on ignorance, there are formations...” (that is, dependent arising), where the effect is shown to arise with the cause, and to cease with the cessation of the cause, but neither agent (*kāraka*) nor experiencer (*vedaka*) is seen. (SA 2:36)

<sup>58</sup> Comy: When it is said, “With ignorance as condition, there are volitional formation,” the meaning should be understood thus: “It is ignorance and it is a condition; hence ‘ignorance-as-condition’ (*avijjā ca sā paccayā cā ti avijjā, paccayā*). Through that ignorance-as-condition, volitional formation come to be (*tasmā avijjā, paccayā saṅkhārā sambhavanti*)” (SA 2:9 f). Bodhi: “This explanation suggests that the verb *sambhavanti*, which in the text occurs only at the end of the whole formula, should be connected to each proposition, thus establishing that each conditioned state arises through its condition. The twelve terms of the formula are treated analytically in [Vibhaṅga S].” (S:B 725 n1)

<sup>59</sup> In (**Samuday'atthaṅgama**) **Loka S** (S 12.44), the dependent arising is shown to be broken here when “with the remainderless fading away and ending of that same craving comes cessation of clinging...” the rest of the chain breaks accordingly leading to the ending of “this whole mass of suffering.” (S 12.44/2:71-73)

*soka parideva, dukkha, -  
domanass'upāyasā nirujjhanti  
evam-etassa kevalassa dukkha-k, -  
khandhassa nirodho hoti.*

sorrow, lamentation, physical pain,  
mental pain and despair.  
—Such is the ending of this whole mass of suffering.

### Acela Kassapa joins the order

16 When this was said, Acela Kassapa said this to the Blessed One:

“Excellent, bhante! Excellent, bhante! Just as if, bhante, one were to place upright what had been overturned, or were to reveal what was hidden, or were to show the way to one who was lost, or were to hold up a lamp in the dark so that those with eyes could see forms, in the same way, in numerous ways, the Dharma has been made clear by the Blessed One.

I go to the Blessed One for refuge, to the Dharma, and to the community of monks.

May I, bhante, receive the going-forth before the Blessed One; may I receive admission into the order.”<sup>60</sup>

17 <sup>61</sup>“Kassapa, anyone who was previously a follower of an outside teaching and wishes to go forth in this Dharma and Vinaya, and wishes for the ordination, has to go on a probation of four months. At the end of the four months, the monks who are satisfied<sup>62</sup> would give him the going-forth [novice initiation] and ordain him into the state of a monk [higher ordination].

However, I see a difference amongst individuals here.”<sup>63</sup>

18 “If, venerable sir, anyone who was previously a follower of an outside teaching and wishes to go forth in this Dharma and Vinaya, and wishes for the ordination, has to go on *a probation of four months*, ... I will take that probation for four years! At the end of the four years, let the monks who are satisfied give me the going-forth [novice initiation] and ordain me into the state of a monk [higher ordination].”<sup>64</sup>

19 Then Acela Kassapa received the going forth and the ordination from the Blessed One.

20 And, not along [22] after the venerable Kassapa was ordained, he, dwelling alone, aloof, diligent, exertive, and resolute, right here and now, having realized for himself through direct knowledge, after attaining, dwelt in the supreme goal of the holy life, for the sake of which sons of family rightly go forth from the household life into homelessness.

He directly knew: “Birth is destroyed, the holy life has been lived, done what had to be done, there is no more of this state of being.”<sup>65</sup>

21 And the venerable Kassapa became one of the arhats.

— evaṃ —

<sup>60</sup> The going-forth (*pabbajjā*) is the ordination as novice (*sāmaṇera*) who keeps only the 10 precepts (incl celibacy and not handling money). The full admission into the Sangha as a monk (*bhikkhu*) is called the higher ordination (*upasampadā*).

<sup>61</sup> §§17-18 as in **Kassapa Sihanāda S** (D 8.24/1:176), **Mahā Parinibbāna S** (D 16.5.28b-29) = SD 9, **Acela Kassapa S** (S 12.17/2:18-22) = SD 18.5 & **Sabhiya S** (Sn 3.6/p102). This rule and procedure are found at Mahāvagga 1.38 = V 1:69.

<sup>62</sup> “Satisfied,” *āraddha, citta*, ie satisfied that the probate has fulfilled all conditions as stipulated at Mahāvagga 1.38 = V 1:69 (DA 2:363; MA 3:106; SA 2:37; SnA 2:436).

<sup>63</sup> *Api ca m'ettha puggala, vemattatā viditā ti*. See Intro (4).

<sup>64</sup> Subhadda's reply here is the same as that of Acela Kassapa, as in the Buddha's following reply (D 8.24/2:176 f). However, Subhadda's case is unique in that he wins arhathood on the same night.

<sup>65</sup> On this para and the next (the attainment of arhathood), see SD 6.3 Intro (5).

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