

17. THE NAKED ASCETIC KASSAPA

THUS HAVE I HEARD. On one occasion the Blessed One was dwelling at Rajagaha in the Bamboo Grove, the Squirrel Sanctuary. Then, in the morning, the Blessed One dressed and, taking bowl and robe, entered Rajagaha for alms. The naked ascetic Kassapa saw the Blessed One coming in the distance. Having seen him, he approached the Blessed One and exchanged greetings with him. When they had concluded their greetings and cordial talk, he stood to one side and said to him: “We would like to ask Master Gotama about a certain point, if he would grant us the favour of answering our question.”

“This is not the right time for a question, Kassapa. We have entered among the houses.”

A second time and a third time the naked ascetic Kassapa said to the Blessed One: “We would like to ask Master Gotama about a certain point, if he would grant us the favour of answering our question.”

“This is not the right time for a question, Kassapa. We have entered among the houses.”

Then the naked ascetic Kassapa said to the Blessed One: “We do not wish to ask Master Gotama much.”

“Then ask what you want, Kassapa.”

“How is it, Master Gotama: is suffering created by oneself?”

“Not so, Kassapa,” the Blessed One said.

“Then, Master Gotama, is suffering created by another?”

“Not so, Kassapa,” the Blessed One said.

“How is it then, Master Gotama: is suffering created both by oneself and by another?”

“Not so, Kassapa,” the Blessed One said.

“Then, Master Gotama, has suffering arisen fortuitously, being created neither by

oneself nor by another?”

“Not so, Kassapa,” the Blessed One said.

“How is it then, Master Gotama: is there no suffering?”

“It is not that there is no suffering, Kassapa; there is suffering.”

“Then is it that Master Gotama does not know and see suffering?”

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

“Whether you are asked: ‘How is it, Master Gotama: is suffering created by oneself?’ or ‘Is it created by another?’ or ‘Is it created by both?’ or ‘Is it created by neither?’ in each case you say: ‘Not so, Kassapa.’ When you are asked: ‘How is it then, Master Gotama: is there no suffering?’ you say: ‘It is not that there is no suffering, Kassapa; there is suffering.’ When asked: ‘Then is it that Master Gotama does not know and see suffering?’ you say: ‘It is not that I do not know and see suffering, Kassapa. I know suffering, I see suffering.’ Venerable sir, let the Blessed One explain suffering to me. Let the Blessed One teach me about suffering.” “Kassapa, if one thinks, ‘The one who acts is the same as the one who experiences the result,’ then one asserts with reference to one existing from the beginning: ‘Suffering is created by oneself.’ When one asserts thus, this amounts to eternalism. But, Kassapa, if one thinks, ‘The one who acts is one, the one who experiences the result is another,’ then one asserts with reference to one stricken by feeling: ‘Suffering is created by another.’ When one asserts thus, this amounts to annihilationism. Without veering towards either of these extremes, the Tathagata teaches the Dhamma by the middle: ‘With ignorance as condition, volitional formations come to be; with volitional formations as condition, consciousness.... Such is the origin of this whole mass of suffering. But with the remainderless fading away and cessation of ignorance comes cessation of volitional formations; with the cessation of volitional formations, cessation of consciousness.... Such is the cessation of this whole mass of suffering.’”

When this was said, the naked ascetic Kassapa said to the Blessed One: “Magnificent, venerable sir! Magnificent, venerable sir! The Dhamma has been made clear in many ways by the Blessed One, as though he were turning upright what had been turned upside down, 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 for refuge to the Blessed One, and to the Dhamma, and to the Bhikkhu Saṅgha. May I receive the going forth under the Blessed One, may I receive the higher ordination?”

“Kassapa, one formerly belonging to another sect who desires the going forth and the

higher ordination in this Dhamma and Discipline lives on probation for four months. At the end of the four months, if the bhikkhus are satisfied with him, they may if they wish give him the going forth and the higher ordination to the state of a bhikkhu. But individual differences are recognized by me.”

“If, venerable sir, one formerly belonging to another sect who desires the going forth and the higher ordination in this Dhamma and Discipline lives on probation for four months, and if at the end of the four months the bhikkhus, being satisfied with him, may if they wish give him the going forth and the higher ordination to the state of a bhikkhu, 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 if they wish give me the going forth and the higher ordination to the state of a bhikkhu.”

Then the naked ascetic Kassapa received the going forth under the Blessed One, and he received the higher ordination. And soon, not long after his higher ordination, dwelling alone, withdrawn, diligent, ardent, and resolute, the Venerable Kassapa, by realizing it for himself with direct knowledge, in this very life entered and dwelt in that unsurpassed goal of the holy life for the sake of which clansmen rightly go forth from the household life into homelessness. He directly knew: “Destroyed is birth, the holy life has been lived, what had to be done has been done, there is no more for this state of being.” And the Venerable Kassapa became one of the arahants.