

Dīgha Nikāya - The Long Discourses

About Mahali Heavenly Sights, Soul and Body (Mahāli Sutta)

Thus Have I Heard,

Once the Lord was staying at Vesali, at the Gabled Hall in the Great Forest. And at that time a large number of Brahmin emissaries from Kosala and Magadha were staying at Vesali on some business. And they heard say: “The ascetic Gotama, son of the Sakyans, who has gone forth from the Sakya clan, is staying at Vesali, at the Gabled Hall in the Great Forest. And concerning that Blessed Lord a good report has been spread about: “This Blessed Lord is an Arahant, a fully-enlightened Buddha, perfected in knowledge and conduct, a Well-Farer, Knower of the worlds, unequalled Trainer of men to be tamed, Teacher of Gods and humans, a Buddha, a Blessed Lord.” He proclaims this world with its Gods, Maras and Brahmas, the world of ascetics and Brahmins with its princes and people, having come to know it by his own knowledge. He teaches a Dhamma that is lovely in its beginning, lovely in its middle and lovely in its ending, in the spirit and in the letter, and he displays the fully-perfected, thoroughly purified holy life. And indeed it is good to see such Arahants.”

And so these Brahmin emissaries from Kosala and Magadha went to the Great Forest, to the Gabled Hall. At that time the Venerable Nagita was the Lord’s personal attendant. So they approached the Venerable Nagita and said: “Reverend Nagita, where is the Reverend Gotama now staying? We would like to see him.”

“Friends, it is not the right time to see the Lord. He is in solitary meditation.” But the Brahmins just sat down to one side and said, “ “When we have seen the Lord Gotama, we will go.”

Just then Otthaddha the Licchavi came to the Gabled Hall with a large company, saluted the Venerable Nagita and stood aside, saying : “Where is the Blessed Lord staying, the Arahant, the fully-enlightened Buddha? We would like to see him.” “Mahali, [1] it is not the right time to see the Lord, He is in solitary meditation.” But Otthaddha just sat down to one side and said : “When I have seen the Blessed Lord, the Arahant, the fully-enlightened Buddha, I will go.”

Then the novice Siha [2] came to the Venerable Nagita, stood aside and said : “Venerable Kassapa, [3] these many Brahmin emissaries from Kosala and Magadha have come here to see the Lord,

and Otthaddha the Licchavi, too, has come with a large company to see the Lord. It would be well, Venerable Kassapa, to allow these people to see him.” “Well then, Siha, you announce them to the Lord.” “Yes, Venerable Sir,” said Siha. Then he went to the Lord, saluted him, stood aside and said: “Lord, these Brahmin emissaries from Kosala and Magadha have come here to see the Lord, and Otthaddha the Licchavi likewise with a large company. It would be well if the Lord were to let these people see him.” “Then, Siha, prepare a seat in the shade of this dwelling.” “Yes, Lord,” said Siha, and did so. Then the Lord came out of his dwelling-place and sat down on the prepared seat.

The Brahmins approached the Lord. Having exchanged courtesies with him, they sat down to one side. But Otthaddha did obeisance to the Lord, and then sat down to one side, saying: “Lord, not long ago, Sunakkhatta the Licchavi came to me and said : “Soon I shall have been a follower of the Lord for three years. I have seen heavenly sights, pleasant, delightful, enticing, but I have not heard any heavenly sounds that were pleasant, delightful, enticing.” “Lord, are there any such heavenly sounds, which Sunakkhatta cannot hear, or are there not?” “There are such sounds, Mahali.”

“Then, Lord, what is the reason, what is the cause why Sunakkhatta cannot hear them?” “Mahali, in one case a monk, facing east, goes into one-sided samádhi [4] and sees heavenly sights, pleasant, delightful, enticing ... but does not hear heavenly sounds. By means of this one-side samádhi he sees heavenly sights but does not heavenly sounds. Why is this? Because this samádhi only leads to the seeing of heavenly sights, but not to the hearing of heavenly sounds.

“Again, a monk facing south, west, north goes into a one-sided samádhi and facing upwards, downwards or across sees heavenly sights (in that direction), but does not hear heavenly sounds. Why is this? Because this samádhi only leads to the seeing of heavenly sights, but not to the hearing of heavenly sounds.

“In another case, Mahali, a monk facing east ... hears heavenly sounds but does not see heavenly sights ...”

“Again, a monk facing south, west, north, facing upwards, downwards or across hears heavenly sounds, but does not see heavenly sights ...”

“In another case, Mahali, a monk facing east goes into two-sided samádhi and both sees heavenly sights, pleasant, delightful, enticing and hears heavenly sounds. Why is this? Because this two-sided samádhi leads to both the seeing of heavenly sights and the hearing of heavenly sounds.

“Again, a monk facing south, west, north, facing upwards, downwards or across sees heavenly sights and hears heavenly sounds ... And that is the reason why Sunakkhatta comes to see heavenly sights but not to hear heavenly sounds. [5]

Well, Lord, is it for the realization of such samádhi-states that monks lead the holy life under the Blessed Lord?” “No, Mahali, there are other things, higher and more perfect than these, for the sake of which monks lead the holy life under me.”

“What are they, Lord?” “Mahali, in one case a monk, having abandoned three fetters, becomes a Stream-Winner, not liable to states of woe, firmly set on the path to enlightenment. Again, a monk who has abandoned the three fetters, and has reduced his greed, hatred and delusion, becomes a Once-Returner who, having returned to this world once more, will make an end of suffering. Again, a monk who has abandoned the five lower fetters takes a spontaneous rebirth [6] (in a higher sphere) and, without returning from that world, gains enlightenment. Again, a monk through the extinction of the corruptions reaches in this very life the uncorrupted deliverance of mind, the deliverance through wisdom, which he has realized by his own insight. That is another thing higher and more perfect than these, for the sake of which monks lead the holy life under me.

“Lord, is there a path, is there a method for the realization of these things?” “There is a path, Mahali, there is a method.” “And, Lord, what is this path, what is this method?”

“It is the Noble Eightfold Path, namely Right View, Right Thought, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood; Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration. This is the path, this is the way to the realization of these things.”

“Once, Mahali, I was staying at Kosambi, in the Ghosita Park. And two wanderers, Mandissa and Jaliya, the pupil of the wooden-bowl ascetic, came to me, exchanged courtesies with me, and sat down to one side. Then they said : “How is it, friend Gotama, is the soul [7] the same as the body, or is the soul one thing and the body another?” “Well now, friends, you listen, pay proper attention, and I will explain.” “Yes, friend,” they said, and I went on:

“Friends, a Tathágata arises in the world, an Arahant, a fully-enlightened Buddha, endowed with wisdom and conduct, Well-Farer, Knower of the worlds, incomparable Trainer of men to be tamed, Teacher of Gods and humans, enlightened and blessed. He, having realized it by his own super-knowledge, proclaims this world with its Devas, Maras and Brahmas, its princes and people. He preaches the Dhamma which is lovely in its beginning, lovely in its middle, lovely in its ending, in the spirit and in the letter, and displays the fully-perfected and purified holy life.

“A disciple goes forth and practices the moralities” (Digha Nikáya 2, verses 41–63). On account of his morality, he sees no danger anywhere. He experiences in himself the blameless bliss that comes from maintaining this Aryan morality. In this way, he is perfected in morality. (As Digha Nikáya 2, verses 64–74) ... It is as if he were freed from debt, from sickness, from bonds, from slavery, from the perils of the desert ... Being thus detached from sense-desires, detached from unwholesome states, he enters and remains in the first jhana ... and so suffuses, drenches, fills and irradiates his body, that there is no spot in his entire body that is untouched by this delight and joy born of detachment. Now of one who thus knows and thus sees, is it proper to say: “The soul is the same as the body,” or “The soul is different from the body?” “It is not, friend.” “But I thus know and see, and I do not say that the soul is either the same as, or different from the body.”

“And the same with the second..., the third..., the fourth jhana.” (As Digha Nikáya 2, verses 77–82). “The mind bends and tends towards knowledge and vision. Now, of one who thus knows and thus sees, is it proper to say: “The soul is the same as the body,” or “The soul is different from the body?” “It is not, friend.”

He knows: “There is nothing further here.” Now of one, who thus knows and thus sees, is it proper to say: “The soul is the same as the body,” or “The soul is different from the body?” “It is not, friend.” “But I thus know and see, and I do not say that the soul is either the same as, or different from the body.”

Thus the Lord spoke, and Otthaddha the Licchavi rejoiced at his words.

Footnotes:

1. This is his family-name or surname (gotta), as Gotama was the Buddha's. RD in a note on names explains that this is a polite form of address (remotely comparable to the now perhaps obsolescent English “public school” use of surnames).

2. A very gifted young man, whose judgment was clearly respected by his seniors.
3. This was Nagita's family-name.
4. A particular type of concentration.
5. The intolerably labored repetition concerning a relatively unimportant matter is noteworthy, even in a style given to much repetition. This may be symptomatic of a late date for this Digha Nikáya.
6. Opapatika: here in the specific sense of Non-Returner (anagami).
7. Jivam: “Life-principle”

Source: BuddhaSutra.com – PDF by Doan, Thoai MD / namo84000.org