

Majjhima Nikāya - The Middle Length Discourses

To the young man Assalaayana (Assalaayanasutta)

I heard thus.

At one time the Blessed One was abiding in the monastery offered by Anaathapindika in Jeta's grove in Saavatthi. At that time about five hundred Brahmins of various states had come to Saavatthi for some business and were living in Saavatthi. It occurred to those Brahmins. This recluse Gotama declares the purity of the four castes. Who is able to dispute with the recluse Gotama on these words? At that time a young man named Assalaayana lived in Saavatthi. He was young, shaven headed, sixteen years of age, had learned the three Vedas, knew, the rites and rituals as officiating priest, the phonology and etymology of words and the marks of a Great Man. Then it occurred to those Brahmins. This young man Assalaayana lives in Saavatthi, is young, shaven headed, sixteen years of age, is learned in the three Vedas, knows the rites and rituals as officiating priest. He knows the phonology and etymology of words and the marks of a Great Man. It is possible for him to dispute with the recluse Gotama, on these words. Then those Brahmins approached the young man Assalaayana and said. 'Good Assalaayana, the recluse Gotama declares the purity of the four castes. Come, good Assalaayana, dispute with the recluse Gotama on these words. Then the young man Assalaayana said thus to those Brahmins. 'The recluse Gotama speaks the truth, it is difficult to dispute with those speaking the truth. It is not possible that I could dispute this with him.' For the second time the Brahmins entreated the young man Assalaayana, saying he was a wandering ascetic. He refused. For the third time the Brahmins entreated and the young man Assalaayana, saying he should not accept uncontested defeat.

When this was said, the young man Assalaayana said. 'Indeed I will not win, the good recluse Gotama, tells the truth, it is difficult to dispute with those speaking the truth. It is not possible that I could dispute this with him. Yet I will go to satisfy you good ones.'

Then the young man Assalaayana, together with a large gathering of Brahmins approached the Blessed One, exchanged friendly greetings and sat on a side. He said to the Blessed One. 'Good Gotama, Brahmins say, Brahmins are from the highest caste, the others are low. Brahmins are pure, the others impure. Brahmins become pure, the others do not. Brahmins are the legitimate sons of Brahmaa, born of his mouth, born of him, with his sign and heritage. What has good Gotama to say about this?'

'Assalaayana, among Brahmins I see a woman menstruating, bearing a womb, giving birth and giving suck. Born from a womb, do they say, Brahmins are from the highest caste, the others are low. Brahmins are pure, the others impure. Brahmins become pure, the others do not. Brahmins are the legitimate sons of Brahmaa, born of his mouth, born of him, with his sign and heritage?'

'Whatever good Gotama says, the Brahmins think they are born, in the highest caste, the others are low.re...with his sign and heritage.'

'Assalaayana, have you heard of Greece, Cambodiya, and certain other bordering states. They have only two castes, masters and slaves. One becomes a master and then a slave, and a slave becomes a master?'

'Good one, I have heard of Greece, Cambodiya, and certain other bordering states. They have only two castes, masters and slaves. One becomes a master and then a slave, and a slave becomes a master.'

'Asslaayana, when this is so, with what powers and convictions do the Brahmins say that they are the highest caste, the others are low.re...with his sign and heritage?'

‘Whatever good Gotama says, the Brahmins think, they are born, in the highest caste, the others are low.re...with his sign and heritage.’

‘Assalaayana, is it a warrior, an ordinary man or a slave, who destroys life, takes what is not given, misbehaves in sexuality, lies, slanders, talks roughly, talks frivolously, covets, bears an angry mind and has wrong view, that after death would be born in decrease in hell and not a Brahmin?’

‘That’s not so good Gotama. A warrior, a Brahmin, an ordinary man or a slave, who destroys life, takes what is not given, misbehaves in sexuality, lies, slanders, talks roughly, talks frivolously, covets, bears an angry mind and has wrong view, after death would be born in decrease in hell.’

‘Asslaayana, when this is so, with what powers and convictions do the Brahmins say that they are the highest caste, the others are low.re...with his sign and heritage?’

‘Whatever good Gotama says, the Brahmins think they are born, in the highest caste, the others are low.re...with his sign and heritage.’

‘Assalaayana, is it only a Brahmin, who abstains from, destroying life, taking what is not given, does not misbehave in sexuality, does not, lie, slander, talk roughly, or talk frivolously, does not covet and bear an angry mind and has right view, that after death would be born in increase in heaven and not a warrior, an ordinary man or a slave?’

‘That’s not so good Gotama. A warrior, a Brahmin, an ordinary man or a slave, who abstains from, destroying life, taking what is not given, does not misbehave in sexuality, does not, lie, slander, talk roughly, or talk frivolously, does not covet and bear an angry mind and has right view, after death would be born in increase in heaven. Good Gotama, from all four castes, those who abstain from, destroying life, taking what is not given, do not misbehave in sexuality, do not, lie, slander, talk

roughly, or talk frivolously, do not covet and bear an angry mind and have right view, after death would be born in increase in heaven.’

‘Asslaayana, when this is so, with what powers convictions do the Brahmins say that they are the highest caste, the others are low.re...with his sign and heritage?’

‘Whatever good Gotama says, the Brahmins say they are born in the highest caste, the others are low.re...with his sign and heritage.’

‘Assalaayana, are only the Brahmins in this region capable, to develop the thought of loving kindness without anger and ill will, not the warriors, the ordinary class or the slaves?’

‘Good Gotama, that is not so, the warriors in this region are capable, to develop the thought of loving kindness without anger and ill will, also the brahmins, the ordinary class and the slaves. It is possible for all four castes in this region to develop the thought of loving kindness.’

‘Asslaayana, when this is so, with what powers and convictions do the Brahmins say that they are the highest caste, the others are low.re...with his sign and heritage?’

‘Whatever good Gotama says, the Brahmins think, they are born, in the highest caste, the others are low.re...with his sign and heritage.’

‘Assalaayana, do you think that only the Brahmins are able to take the brush and soap and wash their dust and dirt in the river, not the warriors, the ordinary class and the slaves?’

‘Good Gotama, that is not so, the warriors are able to take the brush and soap and wash their dust and dirt in the river, so also the brahmins, the ordinary class and the slaves. It is possible for all four castes to take the brush and soap and wash their dust and dirt in the river.’

‘Asslaayana, when this is so, with what powers and convictions do the Brahmins say that, they are the highest caste, the others are low.re...with his sign and heritage?’

‘Whatever good Gotama says, the Brahmins think they are born in the highest caste, the others are low.re...with his sign and heritage.’

‘Asslaayana, a head anointed warrior king invites hundreds of people born in various clans, such as warrior, Brahmin, the ordinary class or slaves. Whether you are born in a hall, under a sweet scented tree, under a Chandana tree, or in a lotus, take an outer cover and make a fire. Come sirs, it does not matter, whether you are born with the out castes, low castes, bamboo weavers, or chariot makers, or the cleaners. Whether born in a trough of the, dogs, pigs, the washerman, or born in some brushwood. Take an outer cover and make a fire. If fire that has the flame, colour and lustre is made, could anything that is done with fire be done? Those born with the out castes, low castes, bamboo weavers, chariot makers or the cleaners, born in a trough of the dogs, pigs, the washerman, or born in a brush wood, would take an outer cover and make fire, would not that fire give the flame, colour and lustre and wouldn’t whatever that should be done with the fire not be done?’

‘Good Gotama, that is not so, whatever clan it may be, warrior, Brahmin, the ordinary class or slaves. Whether born in a hall, under a sweet scented tree, under a Chandana tree, or in a lotus. If he takes an outer cover and makes a fire, it would have the flame, colour and lustre and whatever that could be done with fire could be done with it. Even those born with the out castes, low castes, bamboo weavers, or chariot makers, or the cleaners, whether born in a trough of the, dogs, pigs, the washerman, or born in some brushwood, the fire they make has the flame, colour and lustre and

anything that is done with fire could be done with it. Good Gotama, all fire has the flame, colour and lustre and it is possible to do, whatever work that has to be done with fire.’

‘Asslaayana, when this is so, with what powers and convictions do the Brahmins say that, they are the highest caste, the others are low.re...with his sign and heritage?’

‘Whatever good Gotama says, the Brahmins think they are born, in the highest caste, the others are low.re...with his sign and heritage.’

‘Assalaayana, a warrior prince lives with a Brahmin maiden, to them a son is born. Is that son born of the warrior prince and Brahmin maiden, according to the father, known a ‘warrior’ or according to the mother known a ‘brahmin?’

‘Good Gotama, that son born of the warrior prince and the Brahmin maiden, according to the father should be known a ‘warrior’ and according to the mother a ‘brahmin.’ ‘Assalaayana, a brahmin prince lives with a warrior maiden, to them a son is born. Is that son born of the brahmin prince and warrior maiden, according to the father known a ‘brahmin’ or according to the mother known a ‘warrior?’

‘Good Gotama, that son born of the Brahmin prince and the warrior maiden, according to the father should be known a ‘brahmin’ and according to the mother a ‘warrior.’

Assalaayana, to a mare and donkey a mule is born, according to the mother should it be known a ‘horse’ or according to the father should it be known a ‘donkey?’

‘Good Gotama, it’s from a thoroughbred that a pony is born. Now I see the difference, in the earlier examples I did not see any difference.’

‘Assalaayana, there are two young men brothers, sons of the same mother, one is a brahmanic scholar, come of age, the other neither a scholar nor come of age. Of them which one do the Brahmins first attend with faith, with milk rice, with the sacrificial cake, or with hospitality?’

‘Good Gotama, the Brahmins would first attend on the brahmanic scholar who has come of age, with faith, with milk rice, the sacrificial cake, with hospitality. Will there be much merit making offerings to the non-scholar not come of age?’

‘Assalaayana, there are two young men brothers, sons of the same mother, one is a brahmanic scholar, come of age, unvirtuous and evil. The other neither a scholar nor come of age virtuous and with good conduct. Of them which one do the Brahmins first attend with faith, with milk rice, with the sacrificial cake, or with hospitality?’

‘Good Gotama, the Brahmins would first attend on the non-scholar, who has not come of age, who is virtuous and with good conduct, with faith, with milk rice, with the sacrificial cake, with hospitality. How could there be much merit making offerings to the unvirtuous evil ones?’

‘Assalaayana, first you came with the purity of the Brahmins, then came with the brahmanic scriptures. Now you have turned away from the purity of the four castes, as I have shown it to you.’

When this was said the young man Assalaayana, became silent, confused, the body drooping, and the face turned down. He sat down not knowing what to say.

Then the Blessed One knew that the young man Assalaayana had become silent with confusion, body drooping, and the face down, told him thus. ‘Assalaayana, in the past seven Brahmin sages lived in the forest in huts made of leaves. When they were conversing this evil view arose to them.

Brahmins are of high caste, all other castes are low..Brahmins are pure, the others impure. Brahmins become pure, the others do not. Brahmins are the legitimate sons of Brahmaa, born of his mouth, born of him, with his sign and heritage. Then the heavenly sage Asita, shaved his head and beard, robed himself in brown clothes, dressed in a hardy pair of sandals, taking a golden pole, appeared in front of the huts of leaves. There, walking up and down, said. ‘Where have these Brahmin sages gone? Where have these Brahmin sages gone?’ Then it occurred to the Brahmin sages. ‘Why is it said, where have these brahmin sages gone?’ when the seven Brahmin sages are walking mindfully like bulls tied to a threshing pole. They thought we will curse him and cursed ‘Outcaste, go to ashes’ When the sages cursed him, the heavenly sage Asita became more and more attractive and pleasant to look at. Then it occurred to the seven Brahmin sages, our austerities are useless, our holy life is fruitless. Earlier when we cursed, ‘Outcaste, go to ashes’ at once it became ashes, here he becomes more and more attractive and pleasant to look at.

‘If the austerities of the good sirs is not delusion and if the holy life is not fruitless, sirs dispel the curse put on me. If there is a curse on you I will dispel that.’

‘Who is this good One?’

‘Have the good ones heard about the heavenly sage Asita?’

‘Yes, we have good one.’

‘Good sirs, I’m that sage.’

‘Then Assalaayana, the seven sages approached the heavenly sage Asita to worship him.

‘The heavenly sage Asita, said thus to the seven sages. ‘I heard, the seven Brahmin sages living in the forest in huts made of leaves. When you were conversing did this evil view arise to you? Brahmins think, Brahmins, are born, in the highest caste, all others are low. Brahmins are pure, the others impure. Brahmins become pure, the others do not. Brahmins are the legitimate sons of Brahmaa, born of his mouth, born of him, with his sign and heritage. Didn’t it?’

‘Yes, it did good sir.’

‘Good sirs, do you know whether the mother that gave you birth is of Brahmin caste and not otherwise?’

‘Good sir, we do not know that.’

‘Do you know, whether your mother’s mother as far as the seventh generation, were from the Brahmin caste and not otherwise?’

‘Good sir, we do not know that.’

‘Good sirs, do you know whether the father that gave you birth is of Brahmin caste and not otherwise?’

‘Good sir, we do not know that.’

‘Do you know, whether your father’s father as far as the seventh generation, were from the Brahmin caste and not otherwise?’

‘Good sir, we do not know that.’

‘Do you good sirs, know, how the descent is, to the womb?’

‘Good sir, we know, how the descent is to the womb. The mother and father come together, it becomes the season of the mother, the being, to be born attends. When these three coincide, there is a descent into the womb.’

‘Do you know, whether, the being who attended is a warrior, a Brahmin, an ordinary person or a slave?’

‘Good one, we do not know, whether the being who attended was a warrior, a Brahmin, an ordinary person or a slave.’

‘When that is so, do you know, what you have become?’

‘When that is so, we do not know, what we have become.’

‘Assalaayana, the seven Brahmin sages, questioned, studied together, and asked for reasons on their view about the purity of birth, could not explain. Here you, questioned by me, we studying together and I asking for reasons about the purity of birth you could not explain. Didn’t you gain even a spoonful from your teacher?’

When this was said the young man Assalaayana said. ‘Now I understand good Gotama. I’m a lay disciple who has taken refuge from good Gotama from today until life lasts.’