

The Dog Duty Ascetic Discourse — Kukkuravatika Sutta (MN 57)

Bhante Bodhidhamma · YouTube Talks · 1:21:31

Good evening. I trust you had a fruitful day. I do not say happy, though I hope it has been happy.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhassa. Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-awakened one.

So I've chosen from our modern point of view, our present day point of view, a rather strange discourse. It's entitled the Dog Duty Ascetic. Ascetics are well known in most religions. As you know, the Buddha himself underwent certain ascetic practices, especially the process of drawing the body down through eating less and less and less, which was more of a Jain practice. And in the early Christian ages were ascetics who lived on top of pillars. And they would come down every so often, but they would stay there for quite some time, lowering their chamber pots, I think. And in the medieval ages, the anchorites, they were men and women who locked themselves into a room in a cathedral. Most famous, of course, was Julian of Norwich, who's worth reading.

So there was this very strong element in all religious traditions of a fierce asceticism. But there's nothing quite like this in the West because this is on the basis of rebirth, of reincarnation.

So here we have the Blessed One. He's living in Koliya country. And two people have come to see him. Punna, who was one of the Koliyas, was an ox duty ascetic. And also Seniya, a naked dog duty ascetic. And Punna, the ox duty ascetic, paid homage to the Blessed One, sat by one side, and they both exchanged greetings. And after the courteous and amiable talk was finished, Punna addressed the Blessed One.

"Venerable sir, this Seniya is a naked dog duty ascetic who does what is hard to do. He eats his food when it's thrown on the ground. He has long taken up and practiced dog duty." So you can imagine him there sitting like a dog. "What will be his destination? What will be his future course?"

"Enough Punna, let that be. Do not ask me that."

A second time and a third time, the ox duty ascetic asked the Blessed One, "Venerable Sir, this Seniya is a naked dog duty ascetic. What will be his destination? What will be his future course?"

"Well, Punna, since I certainly cannot persuade you when I say, 'Enough, Punna, let that be. Do not ask me,' I shall therefore answer you. Here, Punna, someone develops the dog duty fully and uninterruptedly. He develops the dog duty habit fully and uninterruptedly. He develops the dog duty mind fully and

uninterruptedly. And he develops dog behaviour fully and uninterruptedly. Having done so on the dissolution of the body after death, he will reappear in the company of dogs. But if he has such a view as this, 'by this virtue or observance or asceticism or holy life, I shall become a great god or lesser god,' that is wrong view in this case. Now, there are two destinations for one with wrong view, I say. Hell or the animal realm. So, Punna, if his dog duty succeeds, it will lead him to the company of dogs. And if it fails, it will lead him to hell."

Now when this was said, Seniya, the naked dog ascetic, cried out and burst into tears. Well, you would.

Then the Blessed One said to Punna, "Punna, I could not persuade you when I said enough, Punna, do not ask me this."

Then Seniya, the naked dog ascetic, said, "Venerable sir, I am not crying because the Blessed One has said this about me, but because I have long taken up and practiced this dog duty asceticism." In other words, he's very quickly recognised that it's been a waste of time. Worse than that, it's been worse than a waste of time. He's now developed the dog duty mind. He's developed mind like a dog.

So then, of course, he says, "Look, my friend Punna, son of the Koliyas, is an ox duty ascetic. He's long taken up and practiced the ox duty. What's his destination? What will his future course be?"

"Do not ask me that."

First and second time, "Venerable Sir, this Punna, son of the Koliyas, is an ox duty ascetic. He's taken up this practice a long time. What will be his destination?"

"Seniya, since I certainly cannot persuade you when I say enough, Seniya, let that be. Do not ask me that. I shall therefore answer you. Seniya, someone who develops the ox duty fully and uninterruptedly, the ox duty habit fully and uninterruptedly, ox duty mind, and the ox behaviour fully and uninterruptedly, having done so on the dissolution of the body after death, he reappears in the company of oxen. But if he has such a view that this by this observance or asceticism or holy life I shall become a great god or some lesser god, this is wrong view. Now there are two destinations for one with wrong view, I say. Hell and the animal realm. So Seniya, if this ox duty succeeds it will lead him to the company of oxen and if it fails it will lead him to hell."

When this was said, Punna, son of the Koliyas, the ox duty ascetic cried out and burst into tears. Well, he would, wouldn't he?

And then the Blessed One said to Seniya, "Seniya, I could not persuade you when I said enough, Seniya, let that be, do not ask me."

"Venerable sir," says Punna, "I'm not crying because the Blessed One has said this about me, but because I have long taken up and practiced the ox duty." So again, this ox duty ascetic realises his big mistake.

And he says, "I have confidence in the Blessed One thus. The Blessed One is capable of teaching me the Dhamma in such a way I can abandon this ox duty and that this Seniya, the naked dog ascetic, can abandon his dog duty."

Then he says, "Well, listen to what I have to say. There are four kinds of actions proclaimed by me after realising them for myself with direct knowledge, direct experience. There is dark action with dark result. There is bright action with bright result. There is dark and bright action with dark and bright result. And there is action that is neither dark nor bright, with neither dark nor bright result, action that leads to the destruction of action."

Well, you've got to get into the language. Basically, this dark action is of course immoral behaviour, unethical behaviour. So unethical behaviour leads to unethical results and ethical moral behaviour leads to lovely results. And of course most people have a mixture of both, a little bit on the dark side and a little bit on the bright side. But there's also a level where there's none of that, and that belongs to the one who is fully liberated.

So that sort of action in the Abhidhamma, this later work, was called *kriya*, functional. So most people's actions are either *kusala* or *akusala*, skilful or unskilful, wholesome or unwholesome. But when you become liberated, because there's no self-generation, no selfing going on, no attachment going on, the actions are simply pure. And of course, the defilements are gone too. So it's always a wholesome action, but there's no consequence for that person in terms of rebirthing, because there's no identity with it. It's just pure action.

So then, of course, he says those with dark action will have afflictive bodily formations, afflictive verbal formations and afflictive mental formations. So those people who are acting immorally or unethically will have afflictive, painful mental, verbal and bodily actions. And they will reappear in such a world that is afflicted, that's painful. And that's because of this constant rebirthing. So that's what he says. "This, I say, beings are heirs to their actions." You're an heir to your actions. So whatever a previous self did yesterday, this self now has to deal with it.

And so he says the same, of course, with those things that are bright and those things that are dark and bright. There's a mixture there of afflictive and unafflictive contacts. And so unafflictive and afflictive feelings, mixed with pain and pleasure, as in the case of human beings and some gods and some beings in the lower worlds.

So the ones who are bright action would end up in the heavenly realm where basically you're happy all the time. And if, of course, you've done some really bad stuff, you end up in the animal or worse, the hell realm. But the human beings, it's a bit of mixture of both. And, of course, that's the blessing of this particular existence because with our bright intelligence, this intuitive awareness, we can find our way out of the problem. This is not open to people in hell. They're suffering too much. Animals, of course, don't have the intelligence and people in the heavens are enjoying life too much. And of course remember that

these realms are mirrored in the human life, aren't they? There are people who are basically so caught up in their desires that they're enjoying themselves because they've got billions of pounds or whatever and then they don't think about the spiritual life.

And there are people who are caught up in an animal existence of drugs, et cetera, where the intelligence is dulled. And there are people, of course, who are in great suffering, either mental suffering or physical suffering, where it's difficult to practice spiritually. They're lost in it. So all these realms are just mirrors, really, of what we see in the human realm.

And then finally of course this neither dark nor bright actions, that's the one where there's no consequence. The volition in abandoning the kind of action that is bright brings bright results and the volition of abandoning the kind which is dark and also with dark and bright results. So the Arahant, the one who's liberated, is lifted above that duality. "These four kinds of actions I've realised for myself," the Buddha says.

So now Punna, of course, he's the ox, isn't he? I think he's the ox. Yes, he's the ox ascetic. So he's really taken to this. He's said, "Magnificent, Venerable Sir, magnificent." And he becomes a lay follower from that time onwards.

And the dog duty ascetic also says the same thing, the usual, this lovely phrasing that comes up, "turning upright what has been overthrown, revealing what was hidden, showing the way to one who was lost, holding up a lamp in the dark for those with eyesight to see form." And he also goes to the Blessed One. And he actually wants to receive, he wants to become a bhikkhu. And when somebody becomes a bhikkhu who's been involved in some other tradition, they have to be on probation for four months. That's now a rule in the order, you see. So he put him on probation for four months and then ordained him. The Buddha, in fact, ordained him.

And so then just the last little paragraph tells us what happens to Seniya, the naked dog duty ascetic. So he received the ordination from the Blessed One, full admission, and then not long after his full admission, dwelling alone, withdrawn, diligent, ardent and resolute, the Venerable Seniya, 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 home life into homelessness.

And then this lovely phrase, these are phrases that you'll find often repeated throughout the discourses. 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 Seniya became one of the Arahants.

So although we started off in a gloomy place with somebody behaving like an ox and another one behaving like a dog, it seems as though they finally ended up in a very good place. And Seniya became an Arahant, fully liberated. So we don't have to choose that particular path. We don't have to do the dog duty part to become fully liberated. We've got a slightly easier part, you might say, of just being ordinary

people.

So there we are. I hope that this discourse on the dog duty ascetic has been of interest and I can only hope that like Seniya you will be ardent with your practice and I trust you'll be fully liberated from all suffering sooner rather than later.

So we can do a little practice. *Puraṃ pūjemi Buddhaṃ pūjemi Dhammaṃ pūjemi Saṅghaṃ pūjemi.*

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and perfectly enlightened one.

Buddhaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi. Dhammaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi. Saṅghaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi. Dutiyampi Buddhaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi. Dutiyampi Dhammaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi. Dutiyampi Saṅghaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi. Tatiyampi Buddhaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi. Tatiyampi Dhammaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi. Tatiyampi Saṅghaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi.

Pāṇātipātā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi. Adinnādānā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi. Kāmesumicchācārā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi. Musāvādā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi. Surāmerayamajjapamādaṭṭhānā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi.

Very good.

So make sure your posture is the expression of the awakened one. So again, as usual, lifting up from the lower spine and the lower back and the abdomen. Sitting tall. Spending a moment relaxing the brow. The jaw lifts together, teeth apart. The shoulders. And hands on the lap, whatever's comfortable.

Just acknowledging that posture. Energised spine, everything else relaxed.

This body is subject to disease. This body is of a nature to fall ill. This body has not gone beyond sickness. This body is subject to ageing. This body has not gone beyond ageing. This body is now in a process of ageing. This body is subject to death. This body has not gone beyond death. This body will die.

There is the unborn, undying, uncreated, un compounded. The unconditioned. True refuge, harbour and home. Perfect peace and contentment. Those who are mindful are in the presence of *Nibbāna*.

Waiting for that settlement upon the breath, then opening up to whatever draws our attention within the field of awareness, just observing, just feeling, just experiencing intimately. It's enough.

A moment's reflection. Resolution.

So we can begin our evening contemplations. Make sure that you're sitting comfortably. Speaking gently into our own hearts.

May I be free of physical pain. May I be free of mental distress. May I be liberated of all my sufferings.

Bringing to mind someone we know is having a hard time. May you be free of physical pain. May you be free of mental distress. May you be liberated of all your sufferings.

And there are all those at this moment who are sick and suffering from mental illness. People in the process of dying and those who have died and left grieving family, relatives and friends. People going hungry, homeless and destitute. Those having to deal with severe personal and interpersonal difficulties. All those caught up in wars and repressive regimes and those being tortured. And there are those suffering from natural disasters and climate crisis. All the sentient beings being cruelly treated and unnecessarily slaughtered. And all who find life meaningless.

May you be free of physical pain. May you be free of mental distress. May you be liberated of all your sufferings.

Radiating our compassion to all beings in all directions. May all beings be free of physical pain. May all beings be free of mental distress. May all beings be liberated of all their sufferings.

Bringing to mind now some moments of joyfulness we've experienced today. Happiness, peacefulness.

May I be joyful. May my joyfulness increase. May I experience the bliss of liberation.

Bringing to mind someone we know who's joyful. May you be joyful. May your joyfulness increase. May you experience the bliss of awakening.

And to all those at this moment who are happy and content with their lives, who are enjoying the warmth of friendships, enjoying the delights of art and nature, hobbies and so on, who find their work meaningful, who enjoy the fruitfulness of their spiritual lives and who rejoice in the success of others.

May you be joyful. May your joyfulness increase. May you experience the bliss of *Nibbāna*.

Radiating our goodwill joy to all beings in all directions. May all beings be joyful. May all beings' joyfulness increase. May all beings experience the bliss of *Nibbāna*.

Allowing these words to flow through us.

If you're wise and want to reach the state of peace, you should behave like this. You should be upright, responsible, gentle and humble. Easily contented and need only a few things. Not always be busy and have the right sort of work. Your senses should be guarded and you should be modest. You should not be exclusively attached to only a few people. And you should not do the slightest thing that a wise person could blame you for. You should always be thinking, may all beings be happy, whatever living beings there are, be they weak or strong, big or small, large or slender, living nearby or far away, those who have already been born and those who have yet to be born. May all beings be happy.

Without exception, be happy. You should not tell lies to each other and do not think anyone, anywhere, is of no value. Do not wish harm to anyone, even when you're angry, just as a mother would protect her only

child at the risk of her own life. So you should let the warmth of your heart go out to all beings.

Let your thoughts of love go through the whole world, above and below, without any barrier, with no ill will or hatred, whether you're standing, walking, sitting, or lying down. As long as you're awake, you should develop this affectionate mindfulness. This they say is the noblest way to live.

And if you do not fall into unskillful ways and live well and develop insight and are no longer attached to all the desires of the senses, then truly you never need to be reborn into this world again.

Please join me in the chanting, or if you wish, offer these blessings. May you be safe, well and happy. May you live contented, in harmony with the world.

*Kāraṇīyam atthakusalena yaṃ taṃ santaṃ padaṃ abhisamecca
Sakko ujū ca suhujū ca sūvaco cassa mudu anatimānī
Santuṭṭho ca subharo ca appakicco ca sallahukavutti
Santindriyo ca nipako ca appagabbho kulesu ananugiddho
Na ca khuddaṃ samācare kiñci yena viññū pare upavadeyyūṃ
Sukhino vā khemino hontu sabbe sattā bhavantu sukhittā
Ye keci pāṇabhūtatthi tasā vā thāvarā vā anāvasesā
Dīghā vā ye mahantā vā majjhimā rassakāṇukathulā
Diṭṭhā vā ye ca adiṭṭhā ye ca dūre vasanti avidūre
Bhūtā vā sambhavesī vā sabbe sattā bhavantu sukhittā
Na paro paraṃ nikubbetha nātimaññetha katthaci naṃ kañci
Byārosanā paṭiḡhāṇasaññā nāññamaññassa dukkham iccheyya
Mātā yathā niyaṃ puttāṃ āyusā ekaputtāṃ anurakkhe
Evampi sabbabhūtesu mānasambhāvaye aparimāṇaṃ
Mettañca sabbalokasmi mānasambhāvaye aparimāṇaṃ
Uddhaṃ adho ca tiriyañca asambādhaṃ averaṃ asapattaṃ
Tiṭṭhañcamaṃ nisinno vā sayāno vā yāvat'assa vigata middho
Etaṃ satiṃ adhiṭṭheyya brahmam etaṃ vihāram idham āhu
Diṭṭhiñca anupagamma sīlavā dassanena sampanno
Kāmēsu vineyya gedhaṃ na hi jātu gabbhaseyyaṃ punar etīti*

May all beings be happy.

Very good. So I hope you were somewhat amused by the dog ascetic practice and also the presumed sense of humour of the Buddha. He comes across sometimes with wry humour. He likes to have a little dig at people sometimes too.

So don't forget from now till we fall asleep, it's also about practice - putting something beautiful into the heart, drifting away into sweet oblivion, rising in the morning to make the best of the day. May you sleep

peacefully.

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