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Kaṭṭha,hāra Sutta

The Discourse on the Wood Gatherers | S 7.18 [Ee S 7.2.8
Theme: The Buddha resorts to the forest awakened and joyful
Translated by Piya Tan ©2017

1 Introduction

1.1 SUTTA SUMMARY

The protagonist of the **Kaṭṭha,hāra Sutta** (S 7.18) is an unnamed brahmin of the Bhāra,dvāja clan.¹ One day, while his students are gathering wood in the forest, they see the Buddha meditating, and tell the brahmin about it. From the Sutta title, we can refer to him as the Kaṭṭha,hāra Brahmin, the brahmin of the wood-gatherers [1.2].

The curious and respectful brahmin is impressed at the Buddha’s demeanour and asks him, in 3 verses [§§7-9], why he does not fear the lonely forest, and whether he is working to attain communion with Brahmā, that is, rebirth in the Brahmā heaven. The Buddha answers in 2 verses [§§10-11], which form the Sutta’s teaching. The brahmin is impressed and goes for refuge.

1.2 THE KAṬṬHA,HĀRA BRAHMIN

The Kaṭṭha,hāra Brahmin is an example of an individual who is spiritually ripe and ready. Clearly, in his past lives, he has been in touch with the Dharma, even met past Buddhas from whom he has heard the teaching, too. In this life, when he meets the Buddha, he is at once impressed and inspired by the mere sight of him.

Instead of worshipping him or asking for blessings, he questions him in a manner that reflects his own spirituality—his readiness for deeper teachings. Once the Buddha has spoken on the nature of awakening, the brahmin at once connects with the teaching, and goes for refuge. However, we are not told whether he attains streamwinning or some higher state.

1.3 SUTTA ANALYSIS

1.3.1 Contrasts

1.3.1.1 There is an interesting poetic contrast between the brahmin’s worldly verses [§§8-10] and the Buddha’s Dharma-inspired verses [§§10-11]. While the brahmin sings of worldly qualities and the attaining of Brahma’s heaven, the Buddha teaches spiritual qualities and self-awakening.

1.3.1.2 Where the brahmin speaks of the forest as being “**empty**” (*vijana*, “without people”) [§7b], and having “**many terrors**” (*bahu,bherava*) [§7a], the Buddha explains that such reactions arise from “desires or delights” and “longings” born of ignorance regarding the true conditions of existence—he has uprooted ignorance [§10]. Hence, he has no fear, even in lonely forests.

¹ On other individuals of the Bhāra,dvāja clan converted to the Dharma, see SD 22.2 (1); SD 50.10 (2).

1.3.3 Freedom from perversion

1.3.3.1 The brahmin praises the looks or “**form**” (*rūpa*) of his experience: “**deep**” (*gambhīra,rūpa*) in the woods [§7a]; “**beautiful ... form**” (*sucāru,rūpa*) [§7d]; and “**something wonderful**” (*acchera,rūpa*) [§8c]. The first “form”—*gambhīra,rūpa*—reflects the solitary beauty of the forest [§7ab]; the second—*sucāru,rūpa*—refers to the Buddha’s own peaceful appearance as he meditates [§7cd] ; and the third—*acchera,rūpa*—to the Buddha’s solitude [§8].

1.3.3.2 The Buddha’s only response to these praises is that he is “**one with purified vision into all thing**” [§11b]—he sees all things (that is, all sense-experiences, including thoughts) as being impermanent, unsatisfactory, non-self and impure. He is free from the 4 perversions (*vipallāsa*), that is, he does not take what is impermanent to be permanent, what is painful to be pleasurable, what is non-self to be the self, and what is impure to be pure.²

1.3.4 Spiritual destiny

While the brahmin speaks of rebirth in the brahma heavens—communion or companionship with Brahmā—which is still subject to the vagaries of samsara, the Buddha declares that he has attained **self-awakening**, that is, nirvana that is death-free. On account of this awakening, he is free from all fears—from that of dark lonely forests to those of life and death: he has attained **intrepidity** (*vesārajja*) [§11].

1.4 SUTTA SIGNIFICANCE

The ease with which the Kaṭṭha,hāra Brahmin connects with the Buddha and his teaching perhaps reflects the zeitgeist or social spirit of the central Gangetic plain at that time. There were many who were open to new teachings. The Bhāra,dvāja clan—from the great number of their members who turn to Buddhism—must, to some level at least, been dissatisfied with the brahminical system of the time, and open to new teachings, especially those of the Buddha.

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The Discourse on the Wood Gatherers

S 7.18

- 1 At one time, the Blessed One was staying in a certain jungle thicket in Kosala.
- 2 Now, at that time, a number of brahmin youths, residential students³ of a certain brahmin of the Bhāra,dvāja clan, gathering wood, approached that jungle thicket.
- 3 When they approached, they saw the Blessed One in the jungle thicket, sitting cross-legged, keeping his body upright, with mindfulness established before him.
- 4 Seeing the Blessed One, they approached the brahmin of the Bhāra,dvāja clan and said to him:

² See SD 16.11 (1).

³ “Residential students” (*antevāsika*), which Comy explains as “residential students learning doctrine and the arts, who were serving him” (*veyyāvaccarī katvā sipp’uggaṇhanakā dhamm’antevāsikā*, SA 1:264).

“If it please you, master, know that in the forest thicket over there a recluse *sits cross-legged, keeping his body upright, with mindfulness established before him.*

5 Then, the brahmin of the Bhāra,dvāja clan, along with the brahmin youths, approached the jungle thicket. They saw the Blessed One *in the forest thicket a recluse is sitting cross-legged, keeping his body upright, with mindfulness established before him.*

6 Seeing him, he approached the Blessed One and addressed him in verse:

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| <p>7 <i>Gambhīra,rūpe bahu,bherave vane
suññam araññam vijanam vigāhiya. [181]
Aniñjamānena t̥itena⁵ vaggunā
sucāru,rūpaṃ vata bhikkhu jhāyasi.</i> 697</p> | <p>You have plunged into the empty forest alone, <i>b</i>
deep in the woods, with many terrors.⁴ <i>a</i>
Unmoving, steady, lovely,
you meditate, O monk, in such beautiful form.</p> |
| <p>8 <i>Na yattha gītaṃ na’pi yattha vāditam
eko araññe vana,vassito⁶ muni.
Acchera,rūpaṃ paṭibhāti maṃ idam
yad’ekako pīti,mano vane vase.</i> 698</p> | <p>Where there is neither music nor singing,
alone in the forest you abide, a silent sage.
This strikes me as something wonderful—
dwelling in the forest all alone, joyful at heart.</p> |
| <p>9 <i>Maññām’aham⁷ lokādhpati,sahavyatam
ākankhamāno ti,divam anuttaram.
Kasmā¹⁰ bhavam vijanam araññam assito

tapo idha kubvasi brahma,pattiyāti.</i> 699</p> | <p>I think you desire communion⁸ with the lord <i>b</i>
of the world in his supreme triple heaven⁹— <i>a</i>
hence, you are¹¹ one who abides in the lonely
forest: <i>d</i>
here you work the austerities for attaining
Brahmā.¹²</p> |

[The Blessed One:]

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| <p>10 <i>Yā kāci kaṅkhā abhinandanā vā
aneka,dhātūsu puthū sadā’sitā
aññāṇa,mūla-p,pabhavā pajappitā
sabbā mayā vyanti,katā samūlikā.</i> 700</p> | <p>Whatever desires or delights there are, they¹³
are all stuck thick in the numerous elements,
longings born of the roots of unknowing—
all have I done away with, their roots, too.¹⁴</p> |
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⁴ On such terrors, see **Bhaya Bherava S** (M 4), SD 44.3.

⁵ Only Se *hitena*.

⁶ Be Se *vana,vassito*; Ce *vanam assito*; Ee *vana,vasito*. Cf Vv 567; Tha 149.

⁷ Be Ce Se *maññām’aham*; Ee *maññe’ham*.

⁸ “Communion [companionship] with Brahmā” (*brahma,sahavyatā*) is, of course, a brahminical belief. For the Buddha’s rejection and reinterpretation of this see, esp **Te,vijja S** (D 13), SD 1.8.

⁹ On *ti,divam*, Comy simply glosses as “the brahma-world” (*brahma,loka*) (SA 1:265). Possibly, the “three” refers to (1) Mahā Brahmā; (2) Brahmā’s ministers (*brahmā purohita*); and (3) Brahmā’s retinue (*brahmā pārisajja*): SD 1.7 (App).

¹⁰ All MSS *kasmā* (abl), here with the sense of *tasmā* (“therefore; hence”), as in Ce. On ablative *kasmā*, see CPD 3:3+4, sv ⁵ka.

¹¹ “Are,” *bhavam* (pres part): cf Sn 92a (see Sn:N 186 n92).

¹² Here, **Brahmā** refers to Mahā Brahmā’s realm as a whole, esp rebirth there. The neutral term *brahman*, Brahman (meaning approx. “Godhead”) is not found in the early suttas: see SD 1.8 (1.1.2).

¹³ Comy glosses “desires” (*kaṅkhā*), “delights” (*abhinandanā*) and “longings” (*pajappitā*) as being aspects of craving (*taṇhā*). “The root of unknowing” (*aññāṇa,mūla*) is that of ignorance (*avijjā.mūla*) (SA 1:265). A parallel of S 700 is found at Nett 24+53 & Peṭk 17, with a differing line a: “Hope, envious want and delight” (*āsā pihā ca abhinandanā ca*).

¹⁴ This line refers to the Buddha’s attaining of arhatood.

- 11** *Svāhaṃ akaṅkho asito anūpayo* Free from desire, unstuck, unattached am I.
sabbesu dhammesu visuddha,dassano. One with purified vision into all things.
Pappuyya sambodhim anuttaraṃ sivaṃ Having attained self-awakening, supreme, blessed,
jhāyāma'ahaṃ brahma¹⁵ raho visārada'ti. Intrepid,¹⁶ brahmin, I meditate in solitude.

12 When this was said, the brahmin of the Bhāra,dvāja clan said to the Blessed One:
 “Wonderful, master Gotama! Wonderful, master Gotama! Just as if 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 master Gotama has, in numerous ways, made the Dharma clear.
 I go to master Gotama for refuge, and to the Dharma, and to the community of monks, too.
 May master Gotama remember me as a layman who has gone for refuge from this day forth for
 life.”

— evaṃ —

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¹⁵ Be Se *brahma*; Ce Ee *brāhmaṇa*.

¹⁶ “Intrepid,” *visārada*, which Comy glosses as “free from fear” (*vigata,sārajjō*, SA 1:265). On intrepidity (*vesāraja*), see SD 28.9a (3).