23 Vammika Sutta
The Ant-hill

1. Thus have I heard. On one occasion the Blessed One was living at Sāvatthī in Jeta’s Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika’s Park. Now on that occasion the venerable Kumāra Kassapa was living in the Blind Men’s Grove.\(^{275}\)

   Then, when the night was well advanced, a certain deity of beautiful appearance who illuminated the whole of the Blind Men’s Grove approached the venerable Kumāra Kassapa and stood at one side.\(^{276}\) So standing, the deity said to him:

   2. “Bhikkhu, bhikkhu, this ant-hill fumes by night and flames by day.\(^{277}\)

   “Thus spoke the brahmin: ‘Delve with the knife, thou wise one.’ Delving with the knife, the wise one saw a bar: ‘A bar, O venerable sir.’

   “Thus spoke the brahmin: ‘Throw out the bar; delve with the knife, thou wise one.’ Delving with the knife, the wise one saw a toad: ‘A toad, O venerable sir.’

   “Thus spoke the brahmin: ‘Throw out the toad; delve with the knife, thou wise one.’ Delving with the knife, the wise one saw a fork: ‘A fork, O venerable sir.’

   “Those spoke the brahmin: ‘Throw out the fork; delve with the knife, thou wise one.’ Delving with the knife, the wise one saw a sieve: ‘A sieve, O venerable sir.’

   “Thus spoke the brahmin: [143] ‘Throw out the sieve; delve with the knife, thou wise one.’ Delving with the knife, the wise one saw a tortoise: ‘A tortoise, O venerable sir.’

   “Thus spoke the brahmin: ‘Throw out the tortoise; delve with the knife, thou wise one.’ Delving with the knife, the wise one saw an axe and block: ‘An axe and block, O venerable sir.’
"Thus spoke the brahmin: 'Throw out the axe and block; delve with the knife, thou wise one.' Delving with the knife, the wise one saw a piece of meat: 'A piece of meat, O venerable sir.'

"Thus spoke the brahmin: 'Throw out the piece of meat; delve with the knife, thou wise one.' Delving with the knife, the wise one saw a Nāga serpent: 'A Nāga serpent, O venerable sir.'

"Thus spoke the brahmin: 'Leave the Nāga serpent; do not harm the Nāga serpent; honour the Nāga serpent.'

"Bhikkhu, you should go to the Blessed One and ask him about this riddle. As the Blessed One tells you, so should you remember it. Bhikkhu, other than the Tathāgata or a disciple of the Tathāgata or one who has learned it from them, I see no one in this world with its gods, its Māras, and its Brahmās, in this generation with its recluses and brahmīns, its princes and its people, whose explanation of this riddle might satisfy the mind."

That is what was said by the deity, who thereupon vanished at once.

3. Then, when the night was over, the venerable Kumāra Kassapa went to the Blessed One. After paying homage to him, he sat down at one side and told the Blessed One what had occurred. Then he asked: "Venerable sir, what is the ant-hill, what the fuming by night, what the flaming by day? Who is the brahmin, who the wise one? What is the knife, what the delving, what the bar, what the toad, what the fork, what the sieve, what the tortoise, what the axe and block, what the piece of meat, what the Nāga serpent?" [144]

4. "Bhikkhu, the ant-hill is a symbol for this body, made of material form, consisting of the four great elements, procreated by a mother and father, built up out of boiled rice and porridge, and subject to impermanence, to being worn and rubbed away, to dissolution and disintegration.

"What one thinks and ponders by night based upon one's actions during the day is the 'fuming by night.'

"The actions one undertakes during the day by body, speech, and mind after thinking and pondering by night is the 'flaming by day.'

"The brahmin is a symbol for the Tathāgata, accomplished and fully enlightened. The wise one is a symbol for a bhikkhu in higher training. The knife is a symbol for noble wisdom. The delving is a symbol for the arousing of energy.

"The bar is a symbol for ignorance. 'Throw out the bar: abandon ignorance. Delve with the knife, thou wise one.' This is the meaning.

"The toad is a symbol for the despair due to anger. 'Throw out the toad: abandon despair due to anger. Delve with the knife, thou wise one.' This is the meaning.

"The fork is a symbol for doubt. 'Throw out the fork: abandon doubt. Delve with the knife, thou wise one.' This is the meaning.

"The sieve is a symbol for the five hindrances, namely, the hindrance of sensual desire, the hindrance of ill will, the hindrance of sloth and torpor, the hindrance of restlessness and remorse, and the hindrance of doubt. 'Throw out the sieve: abandon the five hindrances. Delve with the knife, thou wise one.' This is the meaning.

"The tortoise is a symbol for the five aggregates affected by clinging, namely, the material form aggregate affected by clinging, the feeling aggregate affected by clinging, the perception aggregate affected by clinging, the formations aggregate affected by clinging, and the consciousness aggregate affected by clinging. 'Throw out the tortoise: abandon the five aggregates affected by clinging. Delve with the knife, thou wise one.' This is the meaning.

"The axe and block is a symbol for the five cords of sensual pleasure – forms cognizable by the eye that are wished for, desired, agreeable, and likeable, connected with sensual desire, and provocative of lust; sounds cognizable by the ear...odours cognizable by the nose...flavours cognizable by the tongue...tangibles cognizable by the body that are wished for, desired, agreeable, and likeable, connected with sensual desire, [145] and provocative of lust. 'Throw out the axe and block: abandon the five cords of sensual pleasure. Delve with the knife, thou wise one.' This is the meaning.

"The piece of meat is a symbol for delight and lust. 'Throw out the piece of meat: abandon delight and lust. Delve with the knife, thou wise one.' This is the meaning.

"The Nāga serpent is a symbol for a bhikkhu who has destroyed the taints. 'Leave the Nāga serpent; do not harm the Nāga serpent; honour the Nāga serpent.' This is the meaning."

That is what the Blessed One said. The venerable Kumāra Kassapa was satisfied and delighted in the Blessed One's words.