AN 2.36 — AN 2.36

English translation by Bhikkhu Candana.

Source: https://www.mindreleased.com/s/Book-2_Anguttara-Nikya-A-New-Translation.pdf#page=53

Source revision: 95439bcf66d6295a952d574a8501d2d31edc03ca3ed8eb1e5889f079f7b658c9

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Candana source labels: 36. Site text ID: AN 2.36.

Text

36. I have personally heard this.

At one time, while The Blessed One was living at the monastery offered by Anāthapiṇḍika in Jeta's Park, in Sāvatthī, the Venerable Sāriputta was staying at the Pubba monastery, which was offered by Visakhā, the mother of Migāra, which was in Sāvatthī as well.

It was then that the Venerable Sāriputta addressed the Bhikkhus, by saying:

"Friends, Bhikkhus!"

"Yes, Friend!" Those Bhikkhus replied. And the Venerable Sāriputta continued by saying:

"I will teach you about the person fettered by internal shackles, and the person who is fettered by external shackles. Pay close attention to what I shall say by listening carefully."

"Yes, Friend!"

"Now, who is that person who is fettered by internal shackles?

"Here Friends, the Bhikkhu is virtuous, living ethically through restraint according to the Discipline Code of the Pātimokkha while training in it; conducting himself in right behavior, seeing the danger in committing even the slightest fault. Thus, he lives virtuously while adhering to the code of discipline.

"Once his body breaks down, after death, he is reborn in a certain company of Devas. Then, once his time runs out there, he disappears from there and returns back here, where he is reborn as a human, yet again.

"This person, Bhikkhus, being a 'returner,' is therefore considered to be the one fettered by internal shackles, because he comes back and is reborn as a human being, yet again.

"And who is that person who is fettered by external shackles?

“Here Friends, the Bhikkhu is virtuous, living ethically through restraint according to the Discipline Code of the Pātimokkha while training in it; conducting himself in right behavior, seeing the danger in committing even the slightest fault. Thus, he lives virtuously while adhering to the code of discipline.

“During the course of his practice, this Bhikkhu comes to attain to a certain level of the Heart’s Release, and then remains in that peaceful state.

“Now, once the body of this Bhikkhu breaks down, after death, he is reborn in a certain company of Devas. Then, once his time runs out there, he disappears from there but, being a Non-Returner already, he does not come back to the human realm, for he is to never be reborn as a human, ever again.

“As for this person, Bhikkhus, being a ‘non-returner,’ he is considered to be the one fettered by external shackles, because he does not come back as a human being again.

“And who could be that other person who is fettered by external shackles?

“Here Friends, the Bhikkhu is virtuous, living ethically through restraint according to the Discipline Code of the Pātimokkha while training in it; conducting himself in right behavior, seeing the danger in committing even the slightest fault. Thus, he lives virtuously while adhering to the code of discipline.

“Now, this Bhikkhu is one who is continuously practicing to experience disenchantment and dispassion towards all sensual stimulations, as he strives to attain to their utter end and cessation. Similarly, he is continuously practicing to experience disenchantment and dispassion towards the desire for rebecoming, as he strives to attain to its utter end and cessation. Similarly, he is continuously practicing and striving to attain the utter end and cessation of craving itself, with its constant thirst for more. And he is continuously practicing and striving to attain the complete end of greed.

“Now, once the body of this Bhikkhu breaks down, after death, he is reborn in a certain company of Devas. Then, once his time runs out there, he disappears from there but, being a Non-Returner already, he does not come back, for he too will never be reborn as a human, ever again.

“As for this person, Bhikkhus, seeing that he too is a ‘non-returner,’ he is considered to be fettered by external shackles, because he does not come back as a human being again.”

Meanwhile, numerous Devas from the group of celestial beings who share the same mind but inhabit different bodies, came and approached The Blessed One. Once they paid their respects by bowing to The Teacher, they softly touched the ground with their feet, and while standing to one side, they addressed The Blessed One by saying:

“At this very moment, Bhante, the Venerable Sāriputta is at the Pubba monastery teaching and explaining to the Bhikkhus there about the person fettered by internal shackles, and

the person who is fettered by external shackles. Those gathered there listening to the Venerable Sāriputta are quite excitedly delighted in hearing him speak.

“Perhaps it would be good, Bhante, if The Blessed One were to approach the Venerable Sāriputta, out of compassion.”

And The Blessed One accepted through His silence.

Then, just as swiftly as a strong and agile man would quickly stretch out his bent arm or flex his outstretched arm, The Blessed One disappeared from Jeta’s grove and immediately reappeared before the Venerable Sāriputta at the Pubba monastery.

The Blessed One then sat on the seat that was prepared for Him, as the Venerable Sāriputta quickly began paying homage by bowing to his Teacher, and then sat to one side. And The Blessed One said:

“Sāriputta, just now, numerous Devas from the group of celestial beings who share the same mind but inhabit different bodies, came and approached me. Once they paid their respects by bowing to me, they softly touched the ground with their feet, and while standing to one side, they addressed me by saying:

‘At this very moment, Bhante, the Venerable Sāriputta is at the Pubba monastery teaching and explaining to the Bhikkhus about the person fettered by internal shackles, and the person who is fettered by external shackles. Those gathered there listening to the Venerable Sāriputta are quite excitedly delighted in hearing him speak.

‘Perhaps it would be good, Bhante, if The Blessed One were to approach the Venerable Sāriputta, out of compassion.’

“Now, Sāriputta, those same Devas presently stand together, as though fixed to the tip of a needle, clustered in groups of ten, twenty, thirty, forty, fifty, sixty and seventy. But even though they are so tightly grouped and huddled together, they do not impinge upon each other nor hurt each other in any way, as they continue to stand.

“Sāriputta, you may start to think that those Devas have attained to non-agitated serenity and dwell so peacefully close together, due to some method or technique they learned or practiced in their Celestial realm, but that would not be a correct assumption on your part.

“After all, Sāriputta, they attained to that state right here, in the past, while they were still human beings, whereby they trained themselves to stand together, as though fixed to the tip of a needle, clustered in groups of ten, twenty, thirty, forty, fifty, sixty and seventy. But even though they are so tightly grouped and huddled together, they do not impinge upon each other nor hurt each other in any way, as they continue to stand.

“In this manner, Sāriputta, you must practice and train yourselves:

‘We too will train, so that we can attain to that peaceful serenity of our faculties, to experience a harmoniously peaceful mind, among each and every single one of us.’

“Therefore, it is in this manner that you must train yourselves.

“And when, Sāriputta, through your training you are able to attain to that peaceful serenity of your faculties, experiencing a harmoniously peaceful mind among each and every single one of you, then your bodily actions will also be serene and harmoniously peaceful; your speech will also be serene and harmoniously peaceful; and your thoughts too will be serene and harmoniously peaceful, towards each and every companion you have in the Holy Life.

“Therefore, it is in this way, Sāriputta, that you must all train yourselves.

“I declare, Sāriputta, that all those other practitioners who have gone forth following other religious paths and faiths, are truly lost, simply because they have again missed such a great opportunity by not having listened to This Dhamma and Its explanation.”