AN 3.100 — A Lump of Salt

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Text

Numbered Discourses 3.100

10. A Lump of Salt

A Lump of Salt

“Mendicants, suppose you say: ‘No matter how this person performs a deed, they experience it the same way.’ This being so, the spiritual life could not be lived, and there’d be no chance of making a complete end of suffering.

Suppose you say: ‘No matter how this person performs a deed, they experience the result as it should be experienced.’ This being so, the spiritual life can be lived, and there is a chance of making a complete end of suffering.

Take the case of the individual who does a trivial bad deed, but it lands them in hell. Meanwhile, another individual does the same trivial bad deed, but experiences it in this life, so that not even a little remains, let alone a lot.

What kind of individual does a trivial bad deed, but it lands them in hell? An individual who hasn’t developed their physical endurance, ethics, mind, or wisdom. They’re small-minded and mean-spirited, living in suffering. That kind of individual does a trivial bad deed, but it lands them in hell.

What kind of individual does the same trivial bad deed, but experiences it in this life, so that not even a little remains, let alone a lot? An individual who has developed their physical endurance, ethics, mind, and wisdom. They’re not small-minded, but are big-hearted, meditating on the immeasurables. That kind of individual does the same trivial bad deed, but experiences it in this life, so that not even a little remains, let alone a lot.

Suppose a person was to drop a lump of salt into a mug of water. What do you think, mendicants? Would that mug of water become salty and undrinkable?”

“Yes, sir. Why is that? Because there is only a little water in the bowl.”

“Suppose a person was to drop a lump of salt into the Ganges River. What do you think, mendicants? Would the Ganges River become salty and undrinkable?”

“No, sir. Why is that? Because the Ganges River is a vast mass of water.”

“This is how it is in the case of an individual who does a trivial bad deed, but it lands them in hell. Meanwhile, another individual does the same trivial bad deed, but experiences it in

this life, so that not even a little remains, let alone a lot. …

Take the case of someone who is thrown in jail for stealing half a dollar, a dollar, or a hundred dollars. While someone else isn't thrown in jail for stealing half a dollar, a dollar, or a hundred dollars.

What sort of person is thrown in jail for stealing half a dollar, a dollar, or a hundred dollars? Someone who is poor, with few possessions and little wealth. That kind of person is thrown in jail for stealing half a dollar, a dollar, or a hundred dollars.

What sort of person isn't thrown in jail for stealing half a dollar, a dollar, or a hundred dollars? Someone who is rich, affluent, and wealthy. That kind of person isn't thrown in jail for stealing half a dollar, a dollar, or a hundred dollars.

This is how it is in the case of an individual who does a trivial bad deed, but they go to hell. Meanwhile, another individual does the same trivial bad deed, but experiences it in this life, so that not even a little remains, let alone a lot. …

It's like a sheep dealer or butcher. They can execute, jail, fine, or otherwise punish one person who steals from them, but not another.

What sort of person can they punish? Someone who is poor, with few possessions and little wealth. That's the kind of person they can punish.

What sort of person can't they punish? A ruler or their chief minister who is rich, affluent, and wealthy. That's the kind of person they can't punish. In fact, all they can do is raise their cupped palms and ask: 'Please, good fellow, give me my sheep or pay me for it.'

This is how it is in the case of an individual who does a trivial bad deed, but it lands them in hell. Meanwhile, another individual does the same trivial bad deed, but experiences it in this life, so that not even a little remains, let alone a lot. …

Mendicants, suppose you say: 'No matter how this person performs a deed, they experience it the same way.' This being so, the spiritual life could not be lived, and there'd be no chance of making a complete end of suffering.

Suppose you say: 'No matter how this person performs a deed, they experience the result as it should be experienced.' This being so, the spiritual life can be lived, and there is a chance of making a complete end of suffering."