AN 3.37 — Paṭhama Catumahārāja Sutta (The Four Great Celestial Guardian

English translation by Bhikkhu Candana.

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Text

37. Paṭhama Catumahārāja Sutta (The Four Great Celestial Guardian Kings – Part 1)
Bhikkhus, on the eighth day of the waxing moon, the ministers and members of the gathering of the Four Great Celestial Guardian Kings wander about to see, whether many humans care for mother, father, recluses, brahmins, elders in the family, or observe the eight precepts on the full moon day, while keeping awake, to engage in meritorious actions.

Bhikkhus, on the fourteenth day of the waxing moon, the sons of the Four Great Celestial Guardian Kings wander about to see, whether many humans care for mother, father, recluses, brahmins, elders in the family, or observe the eight precepts on the full moon day, while keeping awake, in order to engage in meritorious actions.

Bhikkhus, on the full moon Uposatha day that occurs on the fifteenth day of the waxing moon, the Four Great Celestial Guardian Kings themselves wander about to see whether many humans care for mother, father, recluses, brahmins, elders in the family or observe the eight precepts on the full moon day, while keeping awake, to engage in meritorious actions.

Bhikkhus, if they observe that very few humans care for mother, father, recluses, brahmins, and elders in the family or observe the eight precepts on the full moon day, at the assembly of Thirty-Three Devas of Tāvatiṁsā in their Sudhamma Hall, the Four Great Celestial Guardian Kings inform Sakka, the King of the Devas, while reporting to him:

“Lord, nowadays only a few care for mother, father, recluses, brahmins, and elders in the family and a few observe the eight precepts on the full moon day, while keeping awake to engage in meritorious actions.”

Now, Bhikkhus, on hearing this, the Thirty-Three Devas of Tāvatiṁsā become distressed and worried, considering how the number of Divine and Celestial hosts is now diminishing and in decline, whereas the number of the asuras and demons keeps increasing and growing.

However, Bhikkhus, if it so happens that many humans begin caring for mother, father, recluses, brahmins, and elders in the family, or observe the eight precepts on the full moon day, at the assembly of Thirty-Three Devas of Tāvatiṁsā in their Sudhamma Hall, the Four Great Celestial Guardian Kings inform Sakka, the King of the Devas, while reporting to him:

“Lord, nowadays many care for mother, father, recluses, brahmins, and elders in the family and many observe the eight precepts on the full moon, while keeping awake to engage in meritorious actions.”

Now, Bhikkhus, on hearing this, the Thirty-Three Devas of Tāvatiṁsā become delighted and rejoice, considering how the number of Divine and Celestial hosts is now on the rise, whereas the number of the asuras and demons keeps decreasing and diminishing.

Bhikkhus, you must learn that once upon a time, The King of Devas, Lord Sakka, while instructing his retinue of Thirty-Three Devas of The Tāvatiṁsā Heaven, began reciting the following verse:

“Anyone who desires to be like me, May they commit themselves to living with purity, By observing the fortnightly Uposatha to perfection, and in all its eight factors, Whether on the eighth, the fourteenth, or the fifteenth, Or on any of the especially significant days.”

But Bhikkhus, you must know that this verse was not spoken appropriately, nor in the best possible way that it could have been spoken.

And why do I say this?

It is because even the King of Devas, Sakka himself, possesses a heart and a mind that are not free from lust, hatred, and delusion.

After all, it is only in the case of an Arahant, who has completely destroyed all the contaminants that corrupt the heart, who has fully lived The Holy Life by attaining its ultimate Goal and thereby has done what had to be done, having laid down the heavy burden and fully obliterated and torn into shreds the fetter for renewed existence, and thus accomplished the Task, by liberating himself through Release with direct understanding; it is such a person indeed, who truly can speak this verse appropriately, when he says:

“Anyone who desires to be like me, May they commit themselves to living with purity, By observing the fortnightly Uposatha to perfection, and in all its eight factors, Whether on the eighth, the fourteenth, or the fifteenth, Or on any of the especially significant days.”

And why do I say this?

It is because that Bhikkhu has truly and fully released himself from greed, hatred, and delusion, indeed.