AN 4.121 — Guilt

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Text

Numbered Discourses 4.121

13. Fears

Guilt

“Mendicants, there are these four fears. What four? The fears of guilt, shame, punishment, and going to a bad place.

And what, mendicants, is the fear of guilt? It’s when someone reflects: ‘If I were to do bad things by way of body, speech, and mind, wouldn’t I blame myself for my conduct?’ Being afraid of guilt, they give up bad conduct by way of body, speech, and mind, and develop good conduct by way of body, speech, and mind, keeping themselves pure. This is called the fear of guilt.

And what, mendicants, is the fear of shame? It’s when someone reflects: ‘If I were to do bad things by way of body, speech, and mind, wouldn’t others blame me for my conduct?’ Being afraid of shame, they give up bad conduct by way of body, speech, and mind, and develop good conduct by way of body, speech, and mind, keeping themselves pure. This is called the fear of shame.

And what, mendicants, is the fear of punishment? It’s when someone sees that the kings have arrested a bandit, a criminal, and subjected them to various punishments—whipping, caning, and clubbing; cutting off hands or feet, or both; cutting off ears or nose, or both; the ‘porridge pot’, the ‘shell-shave’, the ‘Rāhu’s mouth’, the ‘garland of fire’, the ‘burning hand’, the ‘bulrush twist’, the ‘bark dress’, the ‘antelope’, the ‘meat hook’, the ‘coins’, the ‘caustic pickle’, the ‘twisting bar’, the ‘straw mat’; being splashed with hot oil, being fed to the hounds, being impaled alive, and being beheaded.

They think: ‘If I were to do the same kind of bad deed, the kings would punish me in the same way.’ … Being afraid of punishment, they don’t steal the belongings of others. They give up bad conduct by way of body, speech, and mind, and develop good conduct by way of body, speech, and mind, keeping themselves pure. This is called the fear of punishment.

And what, mendicants, is the fear of rebirth in a bad place? It’s when someone reflects: ‘Bad conduct of body, speech, or mind has a bad result in the next life. If I were to do such bad things, when my body breaks up, after death, I’d be reborn in a place of loss, a bad place, the underworld, hell.’ Being afraid of rebirth in a bad place, they give up bad conduct by way of body, speech, and mind, and develop good conduct by way of body, speech, and mind, keeping themselves pure. This is called the fear of rebirth in a bad place.

These are the four fears.”