AN 4.125 — Metta Sutta: Good Will (1)

English translation by Thanissaro Bhikkhu.

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Changes: Presentation only: original HTML markup reflowed into plain text; wording, numbering and source repetitions retained. No repetitions expanded.

Completeness: ABBREVIATED. Every source-unit character is preserved, including introductions, notes and verse structure. Thanissaro's collection-level note explicitly states that repetitions were cut: https://www.dhammatalks.org/suttas/about.html. This is evidence about the translation method, not an assertion that every individual unit contains an omission; no repetitions reconstructed.

Text

"Monks, there are these four types of individuals to be found existing in the world. Which four?

"There is the case where an individual keeps pervading the first direction[1] — as well as the second direction, the third, & the fourth — with an awareness imbued with good will. Thus he keeps pervading above, below, & all around, everywhere & in every respect the all-encompassing cosmos with an awareness imbued with good will: abundant, expansive, immeasurable, free from hostility, free from ill will. He savors that, longs for that, finds satisfaction through that. Staying there — fixed on that, dwelling there often, not falling away from that — then when he dies he reappears in conjunction with the devas of Brahma's retinue. The devas of Brahma's retinue, monks, have a life-span of an eon. A run-of-the-mill person having stayed there, having used up all the life-span of those devas, goes to hell, to the animal womb, to the state of the hungry shades. But a disciple of the Blessed One, having stayed there, having used up all the life-span of those devas, is unbound right in that state of being. This, monks, is the difference, this the distinction, this the distinguishing factor, between an educated disciple of the noble ones and an uneducated run-of-the-mill person, when there is a destination, a reappearing.

"Again, there is the case where an individual keeps pervading the first direction — as well as the second direction, the third, & the fourth — with an awareness imbued with compassion. Thus he keeps pervading above, below, & all around, everywhere & in every respect the all-encompassing cosmos with an awareness imbued with compassion: abundant, expansive, immeasurable, free from hostility, free from ill will. He savors that, longs for that, finds satisfaction through that. Staying there — fixed on that, dwelling there often, not falling away from that — then when he dies he reappears in conjunction with the Abhassara devas.[2] The Abhassara devas, monks, have a life-span of two eons. A run-of-the-mill person having stayed there, having used up all the life-span of those devas, goes to hell, to the animal womb, to the state of the hungry shades. But a disciple of the Blessed One, having stayed there, having used up all the life-span of those devas, is unbound right in that state of being. This, monks, is the difference, this the distinction, this the distinguishing factor, between an educated disciple of the noble ones and an uneducated run-of-the-mill person, when there is a destination, a reappearing.[3]

"Again, there is the case where an individual keeps pervading the first direction — as well as the second direction, the third, & the fourth — with an awareness imbued with appreciation. Thus he keeps pervading above, below, & all around, everywhere & in every respect the all-encompassing cosmos with an awareness imbued with appreciation: abundant, expansive, immeasurable, free from hostility, free from ill will. He savors that, longs for that, finds satisfaction through that. Staying there — fixed on that, dwelling there often, not falling away from that — then when he dies he reappears in conjunction with the Subhakinha[4] devas. The Subhakinha devas, monks, have a life-span of four eons. A run-of-the-mill person having stayed there, having used up all the life-span of those devas, goes to hell, to the animal womb, to the state of the hungry shades. But a disciple of the Blessed One, having stayed there, having used up all the life-span of those devas, is unbound right in that state of being. This, monks, is the difference, this the distinction, this the distinguishing factor, between an educated disciple of the noble ones and an uneducated run-of-the-mill person, when there is a destination, a reappearing.

"Again, there is the case where an individual keeps pervading the first direction — as well as the second direction, the third, & the fourth — with an awareness imbued with equanimity. Thus he keeps pervading above, below, & all around, everywhere & in every respect the all-encompassing cosmos with an awareness imbued with equanimity: abundant, expansive, immeasurable, free from hostility, free from ill will. He savors that, longs for that, finds satisfaction through that. Staying there — fixed on that, dwelling there often, not falling away from that — then when he dies he reappears in conjunction with the Vehapphala[5] devas. The Vehapphala devas, monks, have a life-span of 500 eons. A run-of-the-mill person having stayed there, having used up all the life-span of those devas, goes to hell, to the animal womb, to the state of the hungry shades. But a disciple of the Blessed One, having stayed there, having used up all the life-span of those devas, is unbound right in that state of being. This, monks, is the difference, this the distinction, this the distinguishing factor, between an educated disciple of the noble ones and an uneducated run-of-the-mill person, when there is a destination, a reappearing.

"These are four types of individuals to be found existing in the world."

Notes

1.

The east.

2.

Abhassara = Radiant. The Abhassara, Subhakinha, and Vehapphala devas are all Brahmas on the level of form.

3.

This sutta, read in conjunction with AN 4.123, has given rise to the belief that the development of good will as an immeasurable state can lead only to the first jhana, and that the next two immeasurable states — compassion and appreciation — can lead, respectively, only to the second and third jhanas. However, as AN 8.63 shows, all four immeasurable states can lead all the way to the fourth jhana. The difference between that discourse and this lies in how the person practicing these states relates to them. In that sutta, the person deliberately uses the state as a basis for developing all the jhanas. In this sutta, the person simply enjoys the state and remains in it.

4.

Lit., Beautiful Black.

5.

Lit., Sky-fruit.

See also: AN 4.126