AN 4.125 — AN 4:125 Goodwill (1) | Mettā Sutta

English translation by Ṭhānissaro 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

Goodwill (1)

Mettā Sutta (AN 4:125)

“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 [the east]—as well as the second direction, the third, & the fourth—with an awareness imbued with goodwill. Thus he keeps pervading above, below, & all around, everywhere & in every respect the all-encompassing cosmos with an awareness imbued with goodwill: 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 Brahmā's Retinue. The Devas of Brahmā's Retinue, monks, have a lifespan of an eon. A run-of-the-mill person having stayed there, having used up all the lifespan of those devas, goes to hell, to the animal womb, to the state of the hungry ghosts. But a disciple of the Blessed One, having stayed there, having used up all the lifespan 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.

"And further, there is the case where an individual keeps pervading the first direction [the east]—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 Ābhassara [Radiant] devas.1 The Ābhassara devas, monks, have a lifespan of two eons. A run-of-the-mill person having stayed there, having used up all the lifespan of those devas, goes to hell, to the animal womb, to the state of the hungry ghosts. But a disciple of the Blessed One, having stayed there, having used up all the lifespan 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.2

"And further, there is the case where an individual keeps pervading the first direction [the east]—as well as the second direction, the third, & the fourth—with an awareness imbued with empathetic joy. Thus he keeps pervading above, below, & all around, everywhere & in every respect the all-encompassing cosmos with an awareness imbued with empathetic joy: 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 Subhakiṇha [Beautiful Black] devas. The Subhakiṇha devas, monks, have a lifespan of four eons. A run-of-the-mill person having stayed there, having used up all the lifespan of those devas, goes to hell, to the animal womb, to the state of the hungry ghosts. But a disciple of the Blessed One, having stayed there, having used up all the lifespan 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.

"And further, there is the case where an individual keeps pervading the first direction [the east]—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 [Sky-fruit] devas. The Vehapphala devas, monks, have a lifespan of 500 eons. A run-of-the-mill person having stayed there, having used up all the lifespan of those devas, goes to hell, to the animal womb, to the state of the hungry ghosts. But a disciple of the Blessed One, having stayed there, having used up all the lifespan 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 Ābhassara, Subhakiṇha, and Vehapphala devas are all Brahmās on the level of form.

2. This sutta, read in conjunction with AN 4:123, has given rise to the belief that the development of goodwill as an immeasurable state can lead only to the first jhāna, and that the next two immeasurable states—compassion and empathetic joy—can lead, respectively, only to the second and third jhānas. However, as AN 8:70 shows, all four immeasurable states can lead all the way to the fourth jhāna. 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 jhānas. In this sutta, the person simply enjoys the state and remains in it.

Publisher references (not part of the sutta)

See also: MN 97; SN 46:54; AN 4:178