AN 5.31 — AN 5:31 To Princess Sumanā | Sumanā 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

To Princess Sumanā

Sumanā Sutta (AN 5:31)

Now on that occasion Princess Sumanā—with an entourage of 500 ladies-in-waiting riding on 500 carriages—went to the Buddha. On arrival, having bowed down to him, she sat to one side. As she was sitting there, she said to him, “Suppose there were two disciples of the Blessed One, equal in conviction, equal in virtue, equal in discernment, but one was a giver of alms, the other a non-giver of alms. At the break-up of the body, after death, they would reappear in a good destination, a heavenly world. Having become devas, would there be any distinction, any difference between the two?”

“There would, Sumanā,” said the Blessed One. “The one who was a giver of alms, on becoming a deva, would surpass the non-giver of alms in five areas: in divine life span, divine beauty, divine pleasure, divine status, & divine sovereignty. The one who was a giver of alms, on becoming a deva, would surpass the non-giver of alms in these five areas.”

“And if they were to fall from there and reappear in this world: Having become human beings, would there be any distinction, any difference between the two?”

“There would, Sumanā,” said the Blessed One. “The one who was a giver of alms, on becoming a human being, would surpass the non-giver of alms in five areas: in human life span, human beauty, human pleasure, human status, & human sovereignty. The one who was a giver of alms, on becoming a human being, would surpass the non-giver of alms in these five areas.”

“And if they were to go forth from home into the homeless life [of a monk]: Having gone forth, would there be any distinction, any difference between the two?”

“There would, Sumanā,” said the Blessed One. “The one who was a giver of alms, on going forth, would surpass the non-giver of alms in five areas: He would often be asked to make use of robes and rarely not be asked. He would often be asked to take food… to make use of shelter… to make use of medicine and rarely not be asked. He would live with companions in the holy life who would often treat him with pleasing actions and rarely with unpleasing ones, who would treat him with pleasing words… pleasing thoughts… who would present him with pleasing gifts, and rarely with unpleasing ones. The one who was a giver of alms, on going forth, would surpass the non-giver of alms in these five areas”

“And if both were to attain arahantship, would there be any distinction, any difference between their attainments of arahantship?”

“In that case, I tell you, Sumanā, there would be no difference between them as to their release.”

“It’s amazing, lord, and astounding. Just this is reason enough to give alms, to make merit, in that merit is helpful to one who has become a deva, merit is helpful to one who has become a human being, and merit is helpful to one who has gone forth.”

“So it is, Sumanā. So it is. Just this is reason enough to give alms, to make merit, in that merit is helpful to one who has become a deva, merit is helpful to one who has become a human being, and merit is helpful to one who has gone forth.”

That is what the Blessed One said. Having said it, the One Well-Gone, the Teacher, said further:

Just as the moon, unblemished,

going through the property of space,

outshines through brightness

all the constellations in the cosmos,

in the same way, the person of conviction,

consummate in virtue,

outshines through generosity

all misers in the world.

Just as a hundred-billowed,

lightning-garlanded,

thundering cloud,

raining down on the wealth-bearing [earth],

fills the highlands and low,

just so does one consummate in vision,

a disciple of the rightly self-awakened one,

wise,

excel the miser in five ways—

in life-span, status, beauty, & pleasure1—

and, having been strengthened by wealth,

after death, rejoices in heaven.

Note

1. The fifth point, sovereignty, was omitted from the verse, apparently because it did not fit with the meter.

Publisher references (not part of the sutta)

See also: SN 3:24; AN 5:254—259; AN 10:166