AN 6.43 — AN 6:43 On the Nāga | Nāga Sutta

English translation by Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu.

Source: https://www.dhammatalks.org/suttas/AN/AN6_43.html

Source revision: sha256:06db98f11dbe5b66e3b290b0f8bcaa44ec5f2fe3d1e1b74062fcf0baea044036

License: CC-BY-NC-4.0 — https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/

License URL: https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/

Copyright: Copyright 2014 Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu, Revised edition 2017

License notice: Copyright 2014 Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu, Revised edition 2017 This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 Unported. To see a copy of this license visit http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/. “Commercial” shall mean any sale, whether for commercial or non-profit purposes or entities. Questions about this book may be addressed to Metta Forest Monastery Valley Center, CA 92082-1409 U.S.A. Additional resources More Dhamma talks, books and translations by Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu are available to download in digital audio and various ebook formats at dhammatalks.org. Printed copy A paperback copy of this book is available free of charge. To request one, write to: Book Request, Metta Forest Monastery, PO Box 1409, Valley Center, CA 92082 USA.

Attribution: From Handful of Leaves, Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu; https://www.dhammatalks.org/Archive/Writings/Ebooks/SuttaPitaka_251113.epub. Copyright 2014 Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu, Revised edition 2017 This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 Unported. To see a copy of this license visit http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/. “Commercial” shall mean any sale, whether for commercial or non-profit purposes or entities. Questions about this book may be addressed to Metta Forest Monastery Valley Center, CA 92082-1409 U.S.A. Additional resources More Dhamma talks, books and translations by Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu are available to download in digital audio and various ebook formats at dhammatalks.org. Printed copy A paperback copy of this book is available free of charge. To request one, write to: Book Request, Metta Forest Monastery, PO Box 1409, Valley Center, CA 92082 USA.

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

On the Nāga

Nāga Sutta (AN 6:43)

On one occasion the Blessed One was staying near Sāvatthī in Jeta’s Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika’s monastery. Then early in the morning the Blessed One adjusted his under robe and—carrying his bowl & robes—went into Sāvatthī for alms. After his meal, on returning from his alms round, he addressed Ven. Ānanda, “Come, Ānanda, let’s go to the Eastern Monastery, the palace of Migāra’s mother, for the day’s abiding.”

“As you say, lord,” Ven. Ānanda responded to the Blessed One.

Then the Blessed One together with Ven. Ānanda went to the Eastern Monastery, the palace of Migāra's mother. On emerging from his seclusion in the late afternoon, he addressed Ven. Ānanda, "Come, Ānanda, let's go to the Eastern Gatehouse to bathe our limbs."

"As you say, lord," Ven. Ānanda responded to the Blessed One.

Then the Blessed One together with Ven. Ānanda went to the Eastern Gatehouse to bathe his limbs. Having bathed his limbs near the Eastern Gatehouse and gotten out of the water, he stood wearing only his lower robe, letting his limbs dry.

Then King Pasenadi Kosala's nāga elephant named Seta came out of the Eastern Gatehouse accompanied by a great noise of instruments & drums. People, on seeing him, said, "How beautiful is the king's nāga! How lovely the king's nāga! How inspiring the king's nāga! How blessed with a body the king's nāga!"

When this was said, Ven. Udāyin said to the Blessed One, "Lord, is it only on seeing an elephant blessed with a large, massive body that people say, 'A nāga! What a nāga!'? Or is there anything else blessed with a large, massive body that people, on seeing it, say, 'A nāga! What a nāga!'?"

"Udāyin, it's on seeing an elephant blessed with a large, massive body that that people say, 'A nāga! What a nāga!' It's on seeing a horse blessed with a large, massive body, a bull blessed with a large, massive body, a serpent blessed with a large, massive body, a tree blessed with a large, massive body, a human being blessed with a large, massive body that people say, 'A nāga! What a nāga!'

"But, Udāyin, whoever in this world with its devas, Māras, & Brahmās, in this generation with its contemplatives & brahmans, its royalty & commonfolk—does no misdeed1 in body, speech, or mind: That's whom I call a nāga."

"Amazing, lord! Astounding! How that was well-said by the Blessed One: 'But, Udāyin, whoever in this world with its devas, Māras, & Brahmās, in this generation with its contemplatives & brahmans, its royalty & commonfolk, does no misdeed in body, speech, or mind: That's whom I call a nāga.' And with these verses, lord, I will rejoice in what was well-said by the Blessed One:

A human being, self-awakened,

his mind tamed, concentrated,

traveling along the Brahmā road,

delighting in the stilling of the mind:

He, having gone beyond all dhammas,2

to whom human beings pay homage,

the devas pay homage as well—
so I have heard from the Worthy One
—to him, gone past all fetters,
gone from the forest to the clearing,3
delighting in the renunciation of sensuality,
released like gold from its ore.

He, the nāga outshining all others,
as the Himalayas, rocky hills:
Among all things named ‘nāga,’
he, unexcelled, is truly named.

I will praise the nāga to you—
for he does no misdeed.
Composure & harmlessness
are the nāga’s two feet.
Austerity & celibacy
are the nāga’s two other feet.
Conviction is the great nāga’s trunk,
his hand;4
equanimity, his white tusks.
Mindfulness his neck; his head,
discernment,
discrimination,
reflection on dhammas;
Dhamma the balanced heat of his digestion;
seclusion his tail.
He, in jhāna, delighting in assurance,
inwardly well-concentrated,5
the nāga, when going, is concentrated,
when standing, the nāga is concentrated,

when reclining, the nāga is concentrated,
when sitting, the nāga is concentrated.
Everywhere he's restrained, the nāga:
That is the nāga's consummation.
He eats what is blameless;
doesn't eat what is not;
on gaining food & clothing,
doesn't store it up.
Having cut all bonds,
fetters tiny & large,
wherever he goes,
he goes without longing.
Like a white lotus, born & growing in the water,
but not smeared by the water
—fragrant, delightful—
even so the awakened one,
well-born in the world, lives in the world,
but is not smeared by the world,
like the lotus, by the water.

A great blazing fire
unnourished grows calm,
and though its embers exist6
is described as unbound:
Conveying an instructive meaning,
this image is taught by the observant.
Great nāgas will recognize
the nāga as taught by the nāga
as free from passion,
free from aversion,

free from delusion,

effluent-free.

His body discarded, the nāga

will totally unbind,

effluent-free.

Notes

1. Here the Buddha is hinting at a play on words. The Pali phrase here is āguṁ na karoti, which could be rephrased as na āguṁ karoti, yielding a play on the word nāga. In his verse below, Ven. Udāyin shows that he has picked up on the hint by rephrasing it in precisely that way.

2. On the point that arahants have gone beyond all dhammas, see AN 3:137, note 1.

3. Clearing = nibbāna, which is here presented as a play on the word, vana, or forest.

4. In Pali, an elephant's trunk is called its "hand" (hattha). In fact, one of the words for "elephant" is hatthin, "one having a hand."

5. Reading ajjhattaṁ susamāhito with the parallel verse in Thag 15:2.

6. Reading aṅgāresu ca santesu with the parallel verse in Thag 15:2. The phrase is apparently meant as a play on words, in that santesu can be the locative either of santa, calm, or sant, existing. Either possibility fits into what seems to be the point of this last section of the poem, which is to provide an image to illustrate the difference between the sa-upādisesa-nibbāna of the living arahant—literally, unbinding with fuel remaining—and the anupādisesa-nibbāna of the arahant who has passed away—literally, unbinding with no fuel remaining. In other words, the unbinding of the living arahant is like a fire that has grown calm and whose embers are calm but still warm; the unbinding of the arahant after death is like a fire whose embers have grown totally cold.

Iti 44 describes the property of sa-upādisesa-nibbāna as follows: "His [the arahant's] five sense faculties still remain and, owing to their being intact, he experiences the pleasing & the displeasing, and is sensitive to pleasure & pain. His ending of passion, aversion, & delusion is termed the unbinding property with fuel remaining." Its description of the property of anupādisesa-nibbāna is: "For him, all that is sensed, being unrelished, will grow cold right here. This is termed the unbinding property with no fuel remaining." For further discussion of this distinction, see The Mind Like Fire Unbound, chapter 1.

Publisher references (not part of the sutta)

See also: MN 1; SN 12:51; AN 9:7; AN 9:62; AN 10:81; Iti 44