

AN 7.56
Tissa Brahmā Sutta
“Tissa, the Brahmā”

Translated by Bhikkhu Candana

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This is what I personally heard.

At one time, The Blessed One was staying among the Gijja peaks in Rājagaha, at the Vultures’ Peak. With the night having far advanced, two devas or gods approached the Blessed One, as they illuminated the whole of the entire Gijja peaks with a resplendent light. And after paying homage to the Blessed One, they stood to one side.

While standing, one of the devas addressed the Blessed One thus:

“Bhante, these Bhikkhunis are liberated.”

Meanwhile, the other deva added: “Bhante, these Bhikkhunis are liberated, without having any residual defilements left in them.”

Having said so and given their testimony, the two devas stood, waiting for the approval of the Teacher. Once, knowing that the Teacher had approved of what they reported, they bowed to the Blessed One, and after circumambulating him, they vanished from the Vultures’ Peak.

Then, once morning had arrived, the Blessed One addressed the bhikkhus:

“Bhikkhus, earlier today with the night having far advanced, two devas approached me, as they illuminated the whole of the entire Gijja peaks with a resplendent light. And after paying homage to me, they stood to one side.

While standing, one of the devas addressed me thus:

“Bhante, these Bhikkhunis are liberated.”

Meanwhile, the other deva added: “Bhante, these Bhikkhunis are liberated, without having any residual defilements left in them.”

Having said so and given their testimony, the two devas stood, waiting for my approval of their words. And once, knowing that I approved of what they reported, they bowed to me, and after circumambulating me, they vanished from the Vultures’ Peak.

Now, at that instant, the following thought occurred to the Venerable Mahāmoggallāna, who was seated close to The Blessed One:

‘It would be interesting to know which category of devas could identify a person with residual defilements left in them, as those with residues remaining, and those without having any residual defilements left in them, as those without residues remaining.’

It was during this time that recently, a Bhikkhu named Tissa had just died and reappeared in one of the Brahmā worlds. And, the Venerable Mahāmoggallāna concluded, how Tissa, now being a very powerful Brahmā god, might very well know the answer to his question.

So, just like a strong and agile person would quickly extend or flex his arm, so too the Venerable Mahāmoggallāna disappeared from the Gijja peaks and instantaneously appeared in the Brahmā world.

Brahmā Tissa on seeing the Venerable Mahāmoggallāna approaching in the distance, exclaimed:

“Welcome! Pure and Respected Moggallāna! Welcome!

It has been a long time that you gave us the opportunity to see you visit this world. Please, take a seat, for your seat is ready here.

Once seated on his prepared seat, the Brahmā Tissa paid homage to him, and then sat to one side. The Venerable Mahāmoggallāna then said to Tissa, the Brahmā:

“Which category of devas, Tissa, could identify a person with residual defilements left in them, as those with residues remaining, and those without having any residual defilements left in them, as those without residues remaining?”

“Those would be the devas that are in Brahmā’s retinue,” replied Tissa, the Brahmā, while also adding: “they are the ones that possess such knowledge and understanding, Pure and Respected Moggallāna.”

“And do all the devas in Brahmā’s retinue possess such knowledge and understanding? Asked the Venerable Mahāmoggallāna.

“Not all devas, Pure and Respected Moggallāna,” replied Tissa, the Brahmā, as he added: “The knowledge and ability to identify a person with residual defilements left in them, as those with residues remaining, and those without having any residual defilements left in them, as those without residues remaining’ is not possessed by all the devas in Brahmā’s retinue.’

“You see, Pure and Respected Moggallāna, all those devas who become content and gratified with the life span of being a Brahmā god, along with the beauty, happiness, fame and sovereignty of being a Brahmā, they do *not* know nor have the ability to identify a person with residual defilements left in them, as those with residues remaining, and those without having any residual defilements left in them, as those without residues remaining.’

“But, Pure and Respected Moggallāna, all those devas who become disenchanted with the life span of being a Brahmā god; disenchanted with the beauty, happiness, fame, and sovereignty of

being a Brahmā, it is *they* who have the knowledge and the ability to identify a person with residual defilements left in them, as those with residues remaining, and those without having any residual defilements left in them, as those without residues remaining.’

1 “Here, Pure and Respected Moggallāna, let us consider a Bhikkhu who is liberated in both respects (through wisdom and attainment of the higher jhānas). Now, these devas will know and identify him thus: “This Bhante is released in both respects. And so long as he is alive in this body, he will remain visible to both of us, devas, and humans. However, after the breakup of the body, such a Bhikkhu will no longer be visible to either to us, devas, or humans. Thus, Pure and Respected Moggallāna, these devas would identify a person with residual defilements left in them, as those with residues remaining, and those without having any residual defilements left in them, as those without residues remaining.”

2 “Further, Pure and Respected Moggallāna, let us consider a Bhikkhu who is liberated through wisdom only. Now, these devas will know and identify him thus: “This Bhante is liberated through wisdom only. And so long as he is alive in this body, he will remain visible to both of us: devas and humans. However, after the breakup of the body, such a Bhikkhu will no longer be visible to either of us, devas, or humans. Thus, Pure and Respected Moggallāna, these devas would identify a person with residual defilements left in them, as those with residues remaining, and those without having any residual defilements left in them, as those without residues remaining.”

3 “Further, Pure and Respected Moggallāna, let us consider a Bhikkhu who is a body witness, having attained to the jhānas and although possessing wisdom, he still has some defilements remaining. Now, these devas will know and identify him thus: “This Bhante who is a body witness, if he resorts to secluded and beneficial places for practice, while being supported by good spiritual friends, and conducts himself appropriately and diligently works to purify his mental faculties, then he will attain that for which good people leave the home life and go forth into living the life of a monastic, to reach the ultimate goal of the Holy Life, which this Bhikkhu would undoubtedly reach, and having reached it, will dwell and abide in, as he realizes it personally himself and with his direct insight. Thus, Pure and Respected Moggallāna, these devas would identify a person with residual defilements left in them, as those with residues remaining, and those without having any residual defilements left in them, as those without residues remaining.”

4 “Further, Pure and Respected Moggallāna, let us consider a Bhikkhu who has attained to Right View. Now, these devas will know and identify him thus: “This Bhante who has attained to Right View, if he resorts to secluded and beneficial places for practice, while being supported by good spiritual friends, and conducts himself appropriately and diligently works to purify his mental faculties, then he will attain that for which good people leave the home life and go forth into living the life of a monastic, to reach the ultimate goal of the Holy Life, which this Bhikkhu would undoubtedly reach, and having reached it, will dwell and abide in, as he realizes it personally himself and with his direct insight. Thus, Pure and Respected Moggallāna, these devas would identify a person with residual defilements left in them, as those with residues remaining, and those without having any residual defilements left in them, as those without residues remaining.”

5 “Further, Pure and Respected Moggallāna, let us consider a Bhikkhu who is liberated through faith. Now, these devas will know and identify him thus: “This Bhante who is liberated through faith, if he resorts to secluded and beneficial places for practice, while being supported by good spiritual friends, and conducts himself appropriately and diligently works to purify his mental faculties, then he will attain that for which good people leave the home life and go forth into living the life of a monastic, to reach the ultimate goal of the Holy Life, which this Bhikkhu would undoubtedly reach, and having reached it, will dwell and abide in, as he realizes it personally himself and with his direct insight. Thus, Pure and Respected Moggallāna, these devas would identify a person with residual defilements left in them, as those with residues remaining, and those without having any residual defilements left in them, as those without residues remaining.””

6 “Further, Pure and Respected Moggallāna, let us consider a Bhikkhu who is a follower of the Dhamma. Now, these devas will know and identify him thus: “This Bhante who is a follower of the Dhamma, if he resorts to secluded and beneficial places for practice, while being supported by good spiritual friends, and conducts himself appropriately and diligently works to purify his mental faculties, then he will attain that for which good people leave the home life and go forth into living the life of a monastic, to reach the ultimate goal of the Holy Life, which this Bhikkhu would undoubtedly reach, and having reached it, will dwell and abide in, as he realizes it personally himself and with his direct insight. Thus, Pure and Respected Moggallāna, these devas would identify a person with residual defilements left in them, as those with residues remaining, and those without having any residual defilements left in them, as those without residues remaining.””

Then, after hearing this from Tissa, the Brahmā, the Venerable Mahāmoggallāna was delighted and approved of what was shared with him, and just as a strong and agile person would quickly extend or flex his arm, so too the Venerable Mahāmoggallāna disappeared from the Brahmā world, and instantaneously reappeared on the Vultures’ Peak. Once there, the Venerable Mahāmoggallāna went straight to see the Blessed One, and after bowing to him and paying homage to the Teacher, he recounted his entire conversation with Tissa, in the Brahmā world. Then, the Blessed One said: “In that case Moggallāna, it seems that Tissa did not inform you about the seventh person, the one who lives within the sign-less.”

“Now is the time, Lord! This is the time O, Holy One for us to hear from the Blessed One’s lips about the seventh person, the one who lives within the sign-less!” exclaimed the Ven. Mahāmoggallāna.

“Then listen and pay close attention to what I shall say.”

“Yes, Bhante,” replied the Ven. Mahāmoggallāna, and the Blessed One continued.

“Moggallāna, by not giving attention to all and any signs that arise, the Bhikkhu enters into and lives within the sign-less stability of mind. Now, if this Bhikkhu resorts to secluded and beneficial places for practice, while being supported by good spiritual friends, and conducts himself appropriately and diligently works to purify his mental faculties, then he will attain that for which good people leave the home life and go forth into living the life of a monastic, to reach

the ultimate goal of the Holy Life, whereby this Bhikkhu would undoubtedly reach, and having reached it, will dwell and abide in, as he has realizes it personally himself and with his direct insight. It is in this manner also, that those devas know and identify a person with residual defilements left in them, as those with residues remaining, and those without having any residual defilements left in them, as those without residues remaining.”

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