AN 8.19 — AN 8:19 Pahārāda | Pahārāda Sutta

English translation by Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu.

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Text

Pahārāda

Pahārāda Sutta (AN 8:19)

On one occasion the Blessed One was staying near Verañja at the root of Naḷeru's neem tree. Then Pahārāda the asura-king went to the Blessed One and, on arrival, having bowed down to him, stood to one side. As he was standing there, the Blessed One said to him, "Do the asuras, Pahārāda, take great joy in the great ocean?"

"The asuras take great joy in the great ocean, lord."

"And how many, Pahārāda, are the amazing & astounding qualities of the great ocean because of which, as they see them again & again, the asuras take great joy in the ocean?"

“Lord, there are eight amazing & astounding qualities of the great ocean because of which, as they see them again & again, the asuras take great joy in the great ocean. Which eight?

“[1] Lord, the great ocean has a gradual shelf, a gradual slope, a gradual inclination, with a sudden drop-off only after a long stretch.1 The fact that the great ocean has a gradual shelf, a gradual slope, a gradual inclination, with a sudden drop-off only after a long stretch: This is the first amazing & astounding quality of the great ocean because of which, as they see it again & again, the asuras take great joy in the great ocean.

“[2] And furthermore, lord, the great ocean is stable and does not overstep its tideline.... This is the second amazing & astounding quality of the great ocean because of which, as they see it again & again, the asuras take great joy in the great ocean.

“[3] And furthermore, lord, the great ocean does not tolerate a dead body. Any dead body in the great ocean gets quickly washed to the shore and thrown up on dry land.... This is the third amazing & astounding quality of the great ocean because of which, as they see it again & again, the asuras take great joy in the great ocean.

“[4] And furthermore, lord, whatever great rivers there are—such as the Ganges, the Yamunā, the Aciravatī, the Sarabhū, the Mahī—on reaching the great ocean, give up their former names and are classed simply as ‘great ocean’.... This is the fourth amazing & astounding quality of the great ocean because of which, as they see it again & again, the asuras take great joy in the great ocean.

“[5] And furthermore, lord, though the rivers of the world pour into the great ocean, and rains fall from the sky, no swelling or diminishing in the great ocean for that reason can be discerned.... This is the fifth amazing & astounding quality of the great ocean because of which, as they see it again & again, the asuras take great joy in the great ocean.

“[6] And furthermore, lord, the great ocean has a single taste: that of salt.... This is the sixth amazing & astounding quality of the great ocean because of which, as they see it again & again, the asuras take great joy in the great ocean.

“[7] And furthermore, lord, the great ocean has these many treasures of various kinds: pearls, sapphires, lapis lazulis, shells, quartz, coral, silver, gold, rubies, & cat’s eyes.... This is the seventh amazing & astounding quality of the great ocean because of which, as they see it again & again, the asuras take great joy in the great ocean.

“[8] And furthermore, lord, the great ocean is the abode of such mighty beings as these: whales, whale-eaters, & whale-eater-eaters; asuras, nāgas, & gandhabbas. There are in the great ocean beings one hundred leagues long, two hundred... three hundred... four hundred... five hundred leagues long. The fact that the great ocean is the abode of such mighty beings as these: whales, whale-eaters, & whale-eater-eaters; asuras, nāgas, & gandhabbas; and there are in the great ocean beings one hundred leagues long, two hundred... three hundred... four hundred... five hundred leagues long: This is the eighth amazing & astounding quality of the great ocean because of which, as they see it again &

again, the asuras take great joy in the great ocean.

“These, lord, are the eight amazing & astounding qualities of the great ocean because of which, as they see them again & again, the asuras take great joy in the great ocean.

“But, lord, do the monks take great joy in this Dhamma & Vinaya?”

“The monks take great joy in this Dhamma & Vinaya, Pahārada.”

“And how many, lord, are the amazing & astounding qualities of this Dhamma & Vinaya because of which, as they see them again & again, the monks take great joy in this Dhamma & Vinaya?”

“Pahārāda, there are eight amazing & astounding qualities of this Dhamma & Vinaya because of which, as they see them again & again, the monks take great joy in this Dhamma & Vinaya. Which eight?

“[1] Just as the great ocean has a gradual shelf, a gradual slope, a gradual inclination, with a sudden drop-off only after a long stretch; in the same way, Pahārāda, this Dhamma & Vinaya has a gradual training, a gradual performance, a gradual practice, with a penetration to gnosis only after a long stretch. The fact that this Dhamma & Vinaya has a gradual training, a gradual performance, a gradual practice, with a penetration to gnosis only after a long stretch: This is the first amazing & astounding quality of this Dhamma & Vinaya because of which, as they see it again & again, the monks take great joy in this Dhamma & Vinaya.

“[2] And furthermore, just as the great ocean is stable and does not overstep its tideline; in the same way, Pahārāda, my disciples do not—even for the sake of their lives—overstep the training rules I have formulated for them.... This is the second amazing & astounding quality of this Dhamma & Vinaya because of which, as they see it again & again, the monks take great joy in this Dhamma & Vinaya.

“[3] And furthermore, just as the great ocean does not tolerate a dead body—any dead body in the great ocean getting quickly washed to the shore and thrown up on dry land—in the same way, Pahārāda, if an individual is unprincipled, evil, unclean & suspect in his undertakings, hidden in his actions—not a contemplative though claiming to be one, not leading the holy life though claiming to do so, inwardly rotten, oozing with desire, filthy by nature—the community has no affiliation with him. Having quickly gathered together, they suspend him from the community. Even though he may be sitting in the midst of the community of monks, he is far from the community, and the community far from him.... This is the third amazing & astounding quality of this Dhamma & Vinaya because of which, as they see it again & again, the monks take great joy in this Dhamma & Vinaya.

“[4] And furthermore, just as whatever great rivers there are—such as the Ganges, the Yamunā, the Aciravatī, the Sarabhū, the Mahī—on reaching the great ocean, give up their

former names and are classed simply as ‘great ocean’; in the same way, Pahārāda, when members of the four castes—noble warriors, brahmans, merchants, & workers—go forth from home to the homeless life in this Dhamma & Vinaya declared by the Tathāgata, they give up their former names & clans and are classed simply as ‘contemplatives, sons of the Sakyan’.... This is the fourth amazing & astounding quality of this Dhamma & Vinaya because of which, as they see it again & again, the monks take great joy in this Dhamma & Vinaya.

“[5] And furthermore, just as the rivers of the world pour into the great ocean, and rains fall from the sky, but no swelling or diminishing in the great ocean for that reason can be discerned; in the same way, Pahārāda, although many monks are totally unbound into the property of unbinding with no fuel remaining,2 no swelling or diminishing in the property of unbinding for that reason can be discerned.... This is the fifth amazing & astounding quality of this Dhamma & Vinaya because of which, as they see it again & again, the monks take great joy in this Dhamma & Vinaya.

“[6] And furthermore, just as the great ocean has a single taste—that of salt—in the same way, Pahārāda, this Dhamma & Vinaya has a single taste: that of release.... This is the sixth amazing & astounding quality of this Dhamma & Vinaya because of which, as they see it again & again, the monks take great joy in this Dhamma & Vinaya.

“[7] And furthermore, just as the great ocean has these many treasures of various kinds—pearls, sapphires, lapis lazulis, shells, quartz, coral, silver, gold, rubies, & cat’s eyes—in the same way, Pahārāda, this Dhamma & Vinaya has these many treasures of various kinds: the four establishings of mindfulness, the four right exertions, the four bases of power, the five faculties, the five strengths, the seven factors for awakening, the noble eightfold path3 .... This is the seventh amazing & astounding quality of this Dhamma & Vinaya because of which, as they see it again & again, the monks take great joy in this Dhamma & Vinaya.

“[8] And furthermore, just as the great ocean is the abode of such mighty beings as these: whales, whale-eaters, & whale-eater-eaters; asuras, nāgas, & gandhabbas, and there are in the great ocean beings one hundred leagues long, two hundred... three hundred... four hundred... five hundred leagues long; in the same way, Pahārāda, this Dhamma & Vinaya is the abode of such mighty beings as these: stream-winners & those practicing to realize the fruit of stream-entry; once-returners & those practicing to realize the fruit of once-returning; non-returners & those practicing to realize the fruit of non-returning; arahants & those practicing for arahantship. The fact that this Dhamma & Vinaya is the abode of such mighty beings as these—stream-winners & those practicing to realize the fruit of stream-entry; once-returners & those practicing to realize the fruit of once-returning; non-returners & those practicing to realize the fruit of non-returning; arahants & those practicing for arahantship: This is the eighth amazing & astounding quality of this Dhamma & Vinaya because of which, as they see it again & again, the monks take great joy in this Dhamma & Vinaya.

“These, Pahārāda, are the eight amazing & astounding qualities of this Dhamma & Vinaya because of which, as they see them again & again, the monks take great joy in this Dhamma & Vinaya.”

Notes

1. The Pali here reads, na āyataken’eva papāto. Literally, this means, “not for quite a long stretch a sudden drop-off.” The Commentary, however, insists that this phrase means, “with no abrupt drop-off.” NDB follows the Commentary in translating it as “not dropping off abruptly,” but there are three reasons for not accepting the Commentary’s interpretation here. (a) The first is grammatical. The word āyataka means “long, drawn out; lasting a long time.” To interpret āyatakena, the instrumental of a word meaning “long, drawn out,” to mean “abrupt” makes little sense. (b) The second reason is geographical. The continental shelf off the east coast of India does have a sudden drop-off after a long gradual slope. (c) The third reason is doctrinal. When the Buddha takes the shape of the ocean floor as a simile for the course of the practice, the sudden drop-off stands for penetration to gnosis. If there were no abrupt sudden drop-off, there would be no abrupt penetration to awakening. However, there are many cases of sudden penetration in the Canon, prime examples being Ven. Bāhiya’s attainment of arahantship in Ud 1:10, and Ven. Ānanda’s attainment in Cv 11:1.6.

2. Anupādisesāya nibbāna-dhātuya: the unbinding of an arahant who has passed away. The image is of a fire that has gone so thoroughly out that its embers no longer glow. See Iti 44, AN 6:43, and Thag 15:2.

3. These are the seven sets forming the Wings to Awakening.

Publisher references (not part of the sutta)

See also: Ud 5:5