AN 8.43 — With Visākhā on the Sabbath

English translation by Bhikkhu Sujato.
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Text

Numbered Discourses 8.43

5. Sabbath

With Visākhā on the Sabbath

At one time the Buddha was staying near Sāvatthī in the stilt longhouse of Migāra's mother in the Eastern Monastery. Then Visākhā, Migāra's mother, went up to the Buddha, bowed, and sat down to one side. The Buddha said to her:

"Visākhā, the observance of the sabbath with its eight factors is very fruitful and beneficial and brilliant and bountiful. And how should it be observed? It's when a noble disciple reflects: 'As long as they live, the perfected ones give up killing living creatures, renouncing the rod and the sword. They are scrupulous and kind, and live full of sympathy for all living beings. I, too, for this day and night will give up killing living creatures, renouncing the rod and the sword. I'll be scrupulous and kind, and live full of sympathy for all living beings. I will observe the sabbath by doing as the perfected ones do in this respect.' This is its first factor. …

'As long as they live, the perfected ones give up high and luxurious beds. They sleep in a low place, either a cot or a grass mat. I, too, for this day and night will give up high and luxurious beds. I'll sleep in a low place, either a cot or a grass mat. I will observe the sabbath by doing as the perfected ones do in this respect.' This is its eighth factor. The observance of the sabbath with its eight factors in this way is very fruitful and beneficial and brilliant and bountiful.

How much so? Suppose you were to rule as sovereign lord over these sixteen great countries—Aṅga, Magadha, Kāsi, Kosala, Vajji, Malla, Cetī, Vaccha, Kuru, Pañcāla, Maccha, Sūrasena, Assaka, Avanti, Gandhāra, and Persia—full of the seven treasures. This wouldn't be worth a sixteenth part of the sabbath with its eight factors. Why is that? Because human kingship is a poor thing compared to the happiness of the gods.

Fifty years in the human realm is one day and night for the gods of the four great kings. Thirty such days make up a month. Twelve such months make up a year. The lifespan of the gods of the four great kings is five hundred of these heavenly years. It's possible that some woman or man who has observed the eight-factored sabbath will—when their body breaks up, after death—be reborn in the company of the gods of the four great kings. This is what I was referring to when I said: 'Human kingship is a poor thing compared to the happiness of the gods.'

A hundred years in the human realm is one day and night for the gods of the thirty-three. Thirty such days make up a month. Twelve such months make up a year. The life span of the gods of the thirty-three is a thousand of these heavenly years. It's possible that some woman or man who has observed the eight-factored sabbath will—when their body breaks up, after death—be reborn in the company of the gods of the thirty-three. This is what I was referring to when I said: 'Human kingship is a poor thing compared to the happiness of the gods.'

Two hundred years in the human realm …

Four hundred years in the human realm …

Eight hundred years in the human realm …

Sixteen hundred years in the human realm is one day and night for the gods who control what is created by others. Thirty such days make up a month. Twelve such months make up a year. The lifespan of the gods who control what is created by others is sixteen thousand of these heavenly years. It's possible that some woman or man who has observed the eight-factored sabbath will—when their body breaks up, after death—be reborn in the company of the gods who control what is created by others. This is what I was referring to when I said: 'Human kingship is a poor thing compared to the happiness of the gods.'

You shouldn't kill living creatures, or steal,

or lie, or drink liquor.

Be chaste, refraining from sex,

and don't eat at night, the wrong time.

Not wearing garlands or applying fragrance,

you should sleep on a low bed, or a mat on the ground.

This is the eight-factored sabbath, they say,

revealed by the Buddha, who has gone to suffering's end.

The moon and sun are both fair to see,

radiating as far as they revolve.

Those dispellers of darkness, travelers in midair,

shine in the firmament, dazzling the quarters.

All of the wealth that's found in this realm—

pearls, gems, fine beryl too,

mountain gold or lustrous gold,

or the native gold called 'coruscant'—

they’re not worth a sixteenth part
of the sabbath with its eight factors,
as starlight cannot rival the moon.
So an ethical woman or man,
who has observed the eight-factored sabbath,
having made merit whose outcome is happiness,
blameless, they go to a heavenly place.”