DN 20 — Maha-samaya Sutta: The Great Assembly

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Text

Thus have I heard:

On one occasion the Blessed One was living in the Maha-vana (great wood) near the city of Kapilavatthu in the province of the Sakyans together with a great retinue of monks, all of them arahants, and five hundred in number. Devas (gods) from ten thousand world-systems frequently assembled for the purpose of seeing the Blessed One and the bhikkhu-sangha (ordained monks).

Then to four devas of the Suddhavasa (pure Abodes) brahma world, this thought occurred: "The Blessed One is living in the Mahavana near the city of Kapilavatthu in the province of the Sakyans with a great retinue of monks, all of them arahants, and five hundred in number. Devas are frequently assembling there for the purpose of seeing the Blessed One and the bhikkhu-sangha. It is well if we were also to repair to the place where the Blessed One is, and each of us recite a stanza in his presence."

Then those devas as quickly as a strong man might stretch out his arm, or bend his out-stretched arm, vanished from the pure abodes, and appeared before the Blessed One, saluted him, and stood beside him. So standing one of the devas recited this stanza in his presence:

1. "There is a great assembly in the forest. A host of devas has assembled. We have come to this dhamma-assembly to see the invincible[1] sangha."

Then another deva recited this stanza in the presence of the Blessed One:

2. "The monks in this (assembly[2]) have collected their thoughts, and made their minds upright. The wise (monks) guard their senses even as a charioteer holds the reins."

Then another deva recited this stanza in the presence of the Blessed One:

3. "Having cut off the stake, having dug up the cross-bar (of lust, hate, and delusion), devoid of desire, they go their way, pure, stainless, with vision clear, and well tamed, these young arahants move about like elephants."[3]

Then another deva recited this stanza in the presence of the Blessed One:

4. "They who go for refuge to the Buddha shall not go to evil state of existence; but will quit the human body and fill the ranks of the devas."

The Blessed One then addressed the monks: "Often, monks, devas from the ten world-systems foregather to see the Tathagata (the Buddha) and the monks, the community of bhikkhus. Devas have assembled before the consummate (arahanto), supreme Buddhas of the past; devas will appear before the consummate, supreme Buddhas of the future as they do assemble now before me. I will tell you, monks, the names of the host of devas, I will reveal the names of the host of devas. Listen, pay attention. I will speak." "Yes, Venerable Sir," said the monks by way of assent. The Blessed One said this:[4]

5-6. "In measured speech[5] I will give utterance. The terrestrial devas remain in their realm. Those bent on meditation frequent rocky clefts. Well composed they (arahants) live like solitary lions overcoming the fear that causes hair to stand on end, with immaculate minds, pure, serene, and undefiled."

7. Knowing that there were in the forest, near the city of Kapilavatthu, five hundred and more disciples, delighted in the word of the Buddha, the Master thereupon addressed them:

8. "Monks, hosts of devas have assembled. Do know them well." And they (the monks) hearing the word (sasanam) of the Buddha, strove ardently (to see and know them).

9. There arose in them knowledge of perceiving the non-humans. Some saw one hundred, some thousand non-humans (devas and brahmas), and others seventy thousand non-humans.

10. Some saw one hundred thousand non-humans, others saw countless numbers, every quarter being filled with them.

11. Thereupon the seeing One (the Buddha) knowing all things through super knowledge, addressed the disciples delighted in the word of the Buddha:

12. "Monks, host of devas have assembled. I will announce them to you in words, and in due order. Know ye them.

13. "Seven thousand terrestrial yakkhas[6] of Kapilavatthu possessed of iddhi (super normal) power, radiant, comely, and followed by a retinue of attendants,[7] have come rejoicing to the forest to see[8] the assembly of (arahant) monks.

14. "Six thousand Yakkhas from the Himalayan mountain, diverse in hue, possessed of iddhi power, radiant, comely, and followed by a retinue of attendants, have come rejoicing to this forest to see the assembly of monks.

15. "Three thousand Yakkhas from the Sata's mountain (satagira), diverse in hue, possessed of iddhi power, radiant, comely, and followed by a retinue of attendants, have come rejoicing to the forest to see the assembly of monks.

16. "Thus sixteen thousand Yakkhas, diverse in hue, possessed of iddhi power, radiant, comely, and followed by a retinue of attendants, have come rejoicing to the forest to see the assembly of monks.

17. "Five hundred Yakkhas from the Vessamitta mountain, diverse in hue, possessed of iddhi power, radiant, comely, and followed by a retinue of attendants, have come rejoicing to the forest to see the assembly of monks.

18. "Kumbhira of Rajagala town, having his dwelling on Vepulla's Mountain, with more than a hundred thousand Yakkhas in his train, has come to the forest to see the assembly of monks.

19-20. "Dhatarattha, King of the East, adviser to the Eastern clime, and Chief of the Gandhabbas, followed by a retinue of attendants, and with his many mighty sons (devaputtas), Inda their names, possessed of iddhi power, radiant, comely, and with a retinue, has come rejoicing to the forest to see the assembly of monks.

21-22. "Virulha, King of the South, adviser to the Southern clime, and Chief of the Kumbhandas, followed by a retinue of attendants, and with his many mighty sons, Inda their names, possessed of iddhi power, radiant, comely, and with a retinue of attendants, has come rejoicing to the forest to see the assembly of monks.

23-24. "Virupakkha, King of the West, adviser to the Western clime, and Chief of the Nagas, followed by a retinue of attendants, and with his many mighty sons, Inda their names, possessed of iddhi power, radiant, comely, and with a retinue of attendants, has come rejoicing to the forest to see the assembly of monks.

25-26. "Kuvera, King of the North, adviser to the Northern clime, and Chief of the Yakkhas, followed by a retinue of attendants, and with his many mighty sons, Inda their names, possessed of iddhi power, radiant, comely, and with a retinue of attendants, has come rejoicing to the forest to see the assembly of monks.

27-28. "Dhatarattha over the East, to the South Virulhaka, Westward Virupakkha, Kuvera over the North — these four great Kings stood illuminating the four quarters of the forest in the vicinity of Kapilavatthu.

29. "With them came their crafty, deceitful, cunning slaves: enticing Kutendu, Vetendu, Vitucca, and Vituda.

30. "And (also the slaves) Candana, Kamasettha, Kinnughandu, and Nighandu. There also came Panada and Opamanna and Matali charioteer of the Devas.

31. "Citta and Sena, the Ghandhabbas, Nala (kara), Janesabha (Janavasabha, Pañcasikha, the Devas, Timbaru, the Gandhabba, and Suriyavaccasa (the daughter of Timbaru) also came.

32. "Along with these (Gandhabba) kings, other Gandhabba kings too, have come rejoicing with each other to the forest to see the assembly of monks.

33. "Then came the (divine) Nagas of the (lake Nabhasa), those of the Naga realm Visali together with the Nagas named Tacchaka. Also came Nagas of Kambala and Assatara and Payaga accompanied by their relatives.

34. "Nagas from Yamuna, and those of the race of Dhatarattha came with their retinue of attendants, and Eravana, the great Naga too, came to the forest to see the assembly of monks.

35. "Those birds (harpies, garula or suppana) who carry away Nagas by force, endowed with divine power, and twice born,[9] with clear eyes (keen of sight), have flown into the middle of the forest from the sky — Citra and Supanna are their names.

36. "At that time the Naga king (with other Nagas) were free from fear. The Buddha vouchsafed his protection to the Nagas from the harpies (suppana). Entreating one another with gentle words, the Nagas and Suppanas (harpies) took refuge in the Buddha.

37. "The Asuras dwelling in the ocean were defeated by Vajirahattha (Sakka). They are brethren of Vasavassa (Sakka)[10] possessed of iddhi power, and are followed by a retinue of attendants.

38. "The terrible Kalakanjas, the Danaveghasas, Vepacitti, Sucitti, and Paharada — all Asuras have also come with Namuci (the Vasavatti Mara, the Evil One).

39. "Hundreds of the sons of Bali, all of them named after Veroca (that is their uncle Rahu), with an armed host of warriors, approached Rahu (Asurendra, the lord of Asuras), and said: 'Lord, it is time to go to the forest to see the assembly of monks.'

40. "The Devas Apo and Pathavi, Tejo, and Vayo[11] have also come to the forest, and the Devas Varuna, Varuna, and Soma with Yasa.

41-42. "There also came the Devas Metta-kayika and Karunakayika[12] followed by their attendants. These ten groups of Devas of diverse hue, possessed of iddhi power, radiant, comely, and with a retinue of attendants, have come rejoicing to the forest to see the assembly of monks.

43. "The Devas Venhu, Sahali, Asama, the two Yama, (ka), and those who attend on the Moon god came preceded by him.

44. "Those Devas attending on the Sun god too, came preceded by him. Those Devas attending the Planets came preceded by them. The Devas of the rain clouds too, came.

45. "Also came Sakka, the chief of gods, who is also called Vasava and Purindada. Also those ten groups of Devas of diverse hue, possessed of iddhi power, radiant, comely, and with a retinue of attendants, have come rejoicing to the forest to see the assembly of monks.

47. "Then too, came the Deva Sahabhu, shining like unto a flame of fire, the Devas Aritthaka, Roja, and Ummapupphanibha.

48-49. "There came also the Devas Varuna Sahadhamma, Accuta and Anojaka, Suleyya, Rucira, and Vasavanesi. All those ten groups of Devas of diverse hue, possessed of iddhi power, radiant, comely, and with a retinue of attendants, have come rejoicing to the forest to see the assembly of monks.

50. "The Devas Samana, Mahasamana, Manusa, Manusuttama, Khiddapadusika, and Manopadusika all have come.

51. "Then came the Devas Hari, those of Lohita, Paraga, and Maha-paraga with their retinue of attendants.

52. "All those ten groups of Devas of diverse hue, possessed of iddhi power, radiant, comely, and with a retinue of attendants, have come rejoicing to the forest to see the assembly of monks.

53. "There also came the Devas Sukha, Karumha, Aruna with Veghanasa. The Deva Odatagayha, Pamokkha, and Vicakkhana alos came.

54. "Sadamatta, Haragaja, mighty Missaka and Pajjuna, who causes rain to pour in every direction, came thundering.

55. "All these ten groups of Devas of diverse hue, possessed of iddhi power, radiant, comely, and with a retinue of attendants, have come rejoicing to the forest to see the assembly of monks.

56. "The Devas Khemiya, Tusita, Yama, the mighty Katthaka, Lambhitaka, Lamasettha, Joti, and Asava also came.

57-58. "There also came the Devas Nimmanarati, and Paranimmita (Vasavatthi). All these ten groups of Devas of diverse hue, possessed of iddhi power, radiant, comely, and with a retinue of attendants, have come rejoicing to the forest to see the assembly of monks.

59. "These sixty (six of ten groups, indicated in the order of Apo Deva, etc.) Devas of diverse hue, according to their name and class, have come with others (similar in name and class).

60. (These Devas came saying:) "'Let us see (the Sangha, the arahant monks), who have outlived birth, who have removed the stake (of lust, hate, and delusion), who have crossed the four currents or streams (of sense-pleasures, becoming, wrong views and ignorance),[13] free from taints. (Let us also see the Buddha) who has crossed the streams, who is called Naga (in the sense of one who commits no evil)[14] and shining like the unclouded moon.'

61. "The Brahmas Subrahma and Paramatta, came (with other Brahmas) who are possessed of iddhi power, and sons (disciples of the Buddha). The Brahmas Sanankumara and Tissa also came to the forest (to see the assembly of monks).

62-63. "There is born a Mahabrahma (for every Brahma world) excelling other Brahmas, mighty in power, with a formidable stature, and of great glory. Among them, ten chief Brahmas, lords over their retinues have come, and in the midst of them with all his attendants came Brahma Harita.

64. "When all the Devas headed by Inda (Sakka), and all Brahmas headed by Haritta had come, there came the host of Mara. Lo! The folly of Mara, the Murky One, (Kanha).[15]

65. "'Come on, seize them, bind them, let them all be bound by lust, surrounded on every side, suffer not anybody to escape' (Thus Vasavatti Mara gave order).

66-67. "Mara thus striking the earth with his palm and thereby producing a dreadful sound as when a storm cloud thunders and causes lightning during rainy season, sent his black army to the midst of the Devas. Nevertheless, unable to bring the Devas under his sway, he filled with anger. He recoiled.

68. "Then the Seeing One (the Buddha) knowing perfectly well what had transpired, addressed his disciples who take delight in the word of the Buddha.

69. "'Monks, the host of Mara have come (and gone). Know them (beware of them).' And they (non-arahants) hearing the word of the Buddha, strove (to gain Deliverance) from their defilements. (From the passion-free arahants) the army of Mara has departed; even so much as a hair in them (arahants) was not affected.

70. "All those disciples (monks) are victors in the war of passions; they are free from fear, glorious, and renowned among mankind. They live rejoicing with Aryan disciples." (Praising thus Mara departed.)

Notes

1.

Aparajita, because they are arahants, the Consummate Ones, who have overcome all defilements.

2.

Tatra in the text means "there," but the preceding stanza has imam "this (assembly)," and the devas are already in the presence of the Blessed One; so the rendering "in this."

3.

The word naga admits of dual meaning. It can mean an elephant, or it can mean an arahant. An elephant is physically steadfast, an arahant can be referred to as one who is mentally steadfast. He is faultless: he does no evil. Na hi agum karoti so vide Theragatha, No. 692, cf. Sutta-nipata, stanza 522.

4.

In most of the Paritta books the numbering of stanzas is not consecutive. I have adopted a consecutive method.

5.

Akkhara pada niyamitam vacanam, Comy.

6.

Yakkha here used in the sense of Devas.

7.

Parivara sampanna, Comy.

8.

Bhikkhu das anatthaya agata, Comy. This meaning is clear from the words dakkhitaya ("to see") stanza No.1, dakkhema ("shall see") No. 60.

9.

Twice-born is a reference to birds since they first come out as an egg, and when hatched a complete bird is born.

10.

Vajirahattha and Vasavassa are other names for Sakka, the chief of Devas.

11.

The Devas born in brahma-loka by practicing the kasina, or devices for concentration, namely: the water (apo) kasina; the earth (pathavi) kasina; the fire (tejo) kasina; and the air (vayo) kasina.

12.

The Devas who have developed jhana, or mental absorption by practicing metta and karuna, loving-kindness and compassion, two of the four sublime states (brahma-vihara).

13.

Kama-ogha, bhava-o., ditthi-o., avijja-o.

14.

See above comment No. 3.

15.

Kanha, is a name for Mara.