DN 20 — Maha-samaya Sutta: The Great Meeting

English translation by Thanissaro Bhikkhu.

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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

Translator's Introduction

This discourse is an interesting example of the folklore of the Pali canon. It shows that the tendency of Asian popular Buddhism to regard the Buddha as a protective figure, and not just as a teacher, has its roots in the earliest part of the tradition. Metrical analysis indicates that the long "tribute" section of this discourse is very old, while the verses in the introductory section — which is also found in the Samyutta Nikaya — are later in form. This fits with a more subjective judgment: that the tribute was an earlier composition — in the honorific style of the ancient court bards — to which the introduction was added later. This judgment is based on the fact that the two sections do not quite fit each other. The introduction to the tribute indicates that the reciter of the tribute is the Buddha himself, whereas the narration in the tribute indicates otherwise.

At any rate, this discourse is the closest thing in the Pali canon to a "who's who" of the deva worlds, and should provide useful material for anyone interested in the cosmology of early Buddhism.

The Commentary reports the belief that the devas enjoy hearing this discourse chanted in Pali. Until recently it was part of many monks' standard memorized repertoire, to be chanted at weddings and the dedication of new buildings. Even today, as many of the traditions of memorization in Asia seem to be falling by the wayside, there are a few monks and laypeople who chant this discourse regularly.

I have heard that on one occasion the Blessed One was dwelling among the Sakyans at Kapilavatthu in the Great Wood, together with a large Sangha of approximately five hundred bhikkhus, all of them arahants. And most of the devatas from ten world-systems had gathered in order to see the Blessed One and the Bhikkhu Sangha. Then the thought occurred to four devatas of the ranks from the Pure Abodes: "The Blessed One is dwelling among the Sakyans at Kapilavatthu in the Great Wood, together with a large Sangha of about five hundred bhikkhus, all of them arahants. And most of the devatas from ten world-systems have gathered in order to see the Blessed One and the Bhikkhu Sangha. Let us also approach the Blessed One and, on arrival, let us each speak a verse in his presence."

Then, just as a strong man might extend his flexed arm or flex his extended arm, those devatas disappeared from among the devas of the Pure Abodes and reappeared before the Blessed One. Having paid homage to the Blessed One, they stood to one side. As they were standing there, one devata recited this verse in the Blessed One's presence:

A great meeting in the woods: The deva hosts have assembled. We have come to this Dhamma meeting To see the invincible Sangha.

Then another devata recited this verse in the Blessed One's presence:

The bhikkhus there are concentrated, Have straightened their own minds. Like a charioteer holding the reins, The wise ones guard their faculties.

Then another devata recited this verse in the Blessed One's presence:

Having cut through barrenness, cut the cross-bar, Having uprooted Indra's pillar, unstirred, They wander about pure, unstained, Young nagas well tamed by the One with Vision.

Then another devata recited this verse in the Blessed One's presence:

Those who have gone to the Buddha for refuge Will not go to the plane of woe. On discarding the human body, They will fill the hosts of the devas.

Then the Blessed One addressed the monks: "Monks, most of the devatas from ten world-systems have gathered in order to see the Tathagata and the Bhikkhu Sangha. Those who, in the past, were Pure Ones, Rightly Self-awakened, at most had their devata-gathering like mine at the present. Those who, in the future, will be Pure Ones, Rightly Self-awakened, will at most have their devata-gathering like mine at the present. I

will detail for you the names of the deva hosts. I will describe to you the names of the deva hosts. I will teach you the names of the deva hosts. Listen and pay close attention. I will speak."

"As you say, lord," the monks replied. The Blessed One said:

I recite a verse of tribute. Those who live where spirits dwell, who live in mountain caves, resolute, concentrated, many, like hidden lions, who have overcome horripilation, white-hearted, pure, serene, and undisturbed: Knowing that more than 500 of them had come to the forest of Kapilavatthu, the Teacher then said to them, disciples delighting in his instruction, "The deva hosts have approached. Detect them, monks!" Listening to the Awakened One's instruction, they made an ardent effort. Knowledge appeared to them, vision of non-human beings. Some saw 100, some 1,000, some 70,000, some had vision of 100,000 non-human beings. Some gained vision of innumerable devas filling every direction. Realizing all this, the One-with-Vision felt moved to speak. The Teacher then said to them, disciples delighting in his instruction, "The deva hosts have approached. Detect them, monks, as I describe their glories, one by one. 7,000 yakkhas inhabiting the land of Kapilavatthu, powerful, effulgent, glamorous, prestigious, rejoicing, have approached the monks' forest meeting. 6,000 yakkhas from the Himalayas, of varied hue, powerful, effulgent, glamorous, prestigious, rejoicing, have approached the monks' forest meeting. From Mount Sata 3,000 yakkhas of varied hue, powerful, effulgent, glamorous, prestigious, rejoicing, have approached the monks' forest meeting. These 16,000 yakkhas of varied hue powerful, effulgent, glamorous, prestigious, rejoicing, have approached the monks' forest meeting. 500 yakkhas from Vessamitta, of varied hue, powerful, effulgent, glamorous, prestigious, rejoicing, have approached the monks' forest meeting. Kumbhira from Rajagaha, who dwells on Mount Vepulla, attended to by more than 100,000 yakkhas — Kumbhira from Rajagaha: He, too, has come to the forest meeting. And Dhatarattha, who rules as king of the Eastern Direction, as lord of the gandhabbas: A glorious, great king is he, and many are his sons named Indra, of great strength. Powerful, effulgent, glamorous, prestigious, rejoicing, they have approached the monks' forest meeting. And Virulha, who rules as king of the Southern Direction, as lord of the kumbandas: A glorious, great king is he, and many are his sons named Indra, of great strength. Powerful, effulgent, glamorous, prestigious, rejoicing, they have approached the monks' forest meeting. And Virupakkha, who rules as king of the Western Direction, as lord of the nagas: A glorious, great king is he, and many are his sons named Indra, of great strength. Powerful, effulgent, glamorous, prestigious, rejoicing, they have approached the monks' forest meeting. And Kuvera, who rules as king of the Northern Direction, as lord of the yakkhas: A glorious, great king is he, and many are his sons named Indra, of great strength. Powerful, effulgent, glamorous, prestigious, rejoicing, they have approached the monks' forest meeting. Dhatarattha from the Eastern Direction, Virulhaka from the South, Virupakkha from the West, Kuvera from the Northern Direction: These four Great Kings encompassing the four directions, resplendent, stand in the Kapilavatthu forest. Their deceitful vassals have also come — deceptive, treacherous — Maya, Kutendu, vetendu, Vitu with Vituta, Candana, the Chief of Sensual Pleasure, Kinnughandu, Nighandu, Panada, the Mimic, Matali, the deva's charioteer, Cittasena the gandhabba, King Nala, the Bull of the People, Pañcasikha has come with Timbaru and his daughter, Suriyavacchasa. These and other kings, gandhabbas

with their kings, rejoicing, have approached the monks' forest meeting. Then there have also come nagas from Lake Nabhasa, Vesali, and Tacchaka. Kambalas, Assataras, Payagas, and their kin. And from the River Yamuna comes the prestigious naga, Dhatarattha. The great naga Eravanna: He, too, has come to the forest meeting." They who swoop down swiftly on naga kings, divine, twice-born, winged, their eyesight pure: (Garudas) came from the sky to the midst of the forest. Citra and Supanna are their names. But the Buddha made the naga kings safe, made them secure from Supanna. Addressing one another with affectionate words, the nagas and Supannas made the Buddha their refuge. "Defeated by Indra of the thunderbolt hand, Asuras dwelling in the ocean, Vasava's brothers — powerful, prestigious — Greatly terrifying Kalakañjas, the Danaveghasa asuras Vepacitti and Sucitti, Paharada, with Namuci, and Bali's hundred sons, all named Veroca, arrayed with powerful armies have approached their honored Rahu [and said]: 'Now is the occasion, sir, of the monk's forest meeting.' Devas of water, earth, fire, and wind have come here. Varunas, Varunas, Soma together with Yasa, the prestigious devas of the hosts of goodwill and compassion have come. These ten ten-fold hosts, all of varied hue, powerful, effulgent, glamorous, prestigious, rejoicing, have approached the monks' forest meeting. Vendu (Visnu) and Sahali, Asama and the Yama twins, the devas dependent on the moon surrounding the moon have come. The devas dependent on the sun surrounding the sun have come. Devas surrounding the zodiac stars and the sprites of the clouds have come. Sakka, chief of the Vasus, the ancient donor, has come. These ten ten-fold hosts, all of varied hue, powerful, effulgent, glamorous, prestigious, rejoicing, have approached the monks' forest meeting. Then come the Sahabhu devas, blazing like crests of fire-flame. The Arittakas, Rojas, cornflower blue. Varunas and Sahadhammas, Accutas and Anejakas, Suleyyas and Ruciras, and Vasavanesis have come. These ten ten-fold hosts, all of varied hue, powerful, effulgent, glamorous, prestigious, rejoicing, have approached the monks' forest meeting. Samanas and Great Samanas, Manusas and Super Manusas, the devas corrupted by fun have come, as well as devas corrupted by mind. Then come green-gold devas and those wearing red. Paragas and Great Paragas, prestigious devas have come. These ten ten-fold hosts, all of varied hue, powerful, effulgent, glamorous, prestigious, rejoicing, have approached the monks' forest meeting. White devas, ruddy-green devas, dawn-devas have come with the Veghanas headed by devas totally in white. The Vicakkhanas have come. Sadamatta, Haragajas, and the prestigious multi-coloreds, Pajunna, the thunderer, who brings rain in all directions: These ten ten-fold hosts, all of varied hue, powerful, effulgent, glamorous, prestigious, rejoicing, have approached the monks' forest meeting. The Khemiyas, Tusitas, and Yamas, the prestigious Katthakas, Lambitakas, and Lama chiefs, the Jotinamas and Asavas, the Nimmanaratis have come, as have the Paranimmitas. These ten ten-fold hosts, all of varied hue, powerful, effulgent, glamorous, prestigious, rejoicing, have approached the monks' forest meeting. These 60 deva groups, all of varied hue, have come arranged in order, together with others in like manner [thinking:] 'We'll see the one who has transcended birth, who has no bounds, who has crossed over the flood, fermentation-free, the Mighty One, crossing over the flood like the moon emerging from the dark fortnight.' Subrahma and Paramatta Brahma, together with sons of the Powerful One, Sanankumara and Tissa: They too have come to the forest meeting. Great Brahma, who stands over 1,000 Brahma worlds, who arose there spontaneously, effulgent: Prestigious is he, with a terrifying body. And ten brahma sovereigns, each the lord of his own realm — and in their midst has come

Harita Brahma surrounded by his retinue." When all these devas with Indras & Brahmas had come, Mara's army came as well. Now look at the Dark One's foolishness! [He said:] "Come seize them! Bind them! Tie them down with passion! Surround them on every side! Don't let anyone at all escape!" Thus the great war-lord urged on his dark army, slapping the ground with his hand, making a horrendous din, as when a storm cloud bursts with thunder, lightning, and torrents of rain. But then he withdrew-enraged, with none under his sway. Realizing all this, the One-with-Vision felt moved to speak. The Teacher then said to them, disciples delighting in his instruction, "Mara's army has approached. Detect them, monks!" Listening to the Awakened One's instruction, they made an ardent effort. The army retreated from those without passion, without raising even a hair on their bodies. Having all won the battle — prestigious, past fear — they rejoice with all beings: Disciples outstanding among the human race.