DN 32 — Atanatiya Sutta: Discourse on Atanatiya

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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; source ellipsis or repetition-omission statement retained. Canonical repetitions were not reconstructed.

Text

Thus have I heard: [1]

On one occasion the Blessed One was living on the Vulture's Peak near Rajagaha (Rajagir).

Then four great kings[2] having placed a guard over the four quarters, with a large army of Yakkhas, of Gandhabbas, of Kumbhandas, of Nagas; having placed troops; having placed a barricade of soldiers on four sides, came to the presence of the Blessed One, when the night was far advanced, illuminating the entire Vulture's Peak with their surpassing radiance, saluted the Blessed One and sat on one side. From among the (attendant) Yakkhas, some saluted the Blessed One, and sat on one side; some exchanged greetings with the Blessed One conversing in a friendly and courteous manner, and sat on one side; some saluted him with clasped hands, and sat on one side; some announced their name and lineage, and sat on one side; some sat on one side in silence.

Then the great King Vessavana (Skt. Vaisravana[3]), who was seated on one side, said to the Blessed One:

"Venerable Sir (bhante), there are eminent Yakkhas who are not pleased with the Blessed One, there are also eminent Yakkhas pleased with the Blessed One. There are Yakkhas of middle rank who are not pleased with the Blessed One, and there are those who are pleased with the Blessed One. There are Yakkhas of inferior rank who are not pleased with the Blessed One, and there are those who are pleased with the Blessed One. The Yakkhas, bhante, as a rule, are not pleased with the Blessed One. What is the reason for this?"

"Well, the Blessed One teaches the Dhamma to establish abstention from killing, from stealing, from sexual misconduct, from false speech, and from liquor that causes intoxication and negligence. To them such teaching is unpleasant and unpalatable."

"Surely bhante, there are disciples of the Blessed One. They frequent the remote recesses of forest and woodland wilderness where there is no sound, no tumult, where breezes are void of human contact, and suitable for man's seclusion and quiet contemplation. There are eminent Yakkhas who haunt these forests, who have no faith in the word of the Blessed One.

"Bhante, may the Blessed One learn the Atanata[4] protection so that the displeased Yakkhas may be pleased, so that the monks and nuns, laymen and laywomen, may be at ease, guarded, protected and unharmed."

The Blessed One gave consent by his silence. Then the great King Vessavana, knowing that the Blessed One had consented, recited the Atanatiya protection:

1. "Homage to Vipassi (the Buddha) possessed of the eye (of wisdom) and splendor. Homage to Sikhi (the Buddha) compassionate towards all beings.

2. "Homage to Vessabhu (the Buddha) free from all defilements and possessed of ascetic energy. Homage to Kakusanda (the Buddha), the conqueror of (the five-fold) host of Mara.

3. "Homage to Konagamana (the Buddha) who has shed all defilements, and had lived the holy life. Homage to Kassapa (the Buddha) who is fully freed from all defilements.

4. "Homage to Angirasa (the Buddha Gotama), the son of the Sakyas, who is full of radiance, and who proclaimed the Dhamma that dispels all suffering.

5. "Those in the world, who have extinguished (the flames of passion), and have perceived through insight (meditation), things as they really are, they never slander anyone; they are mighty men who are free from fear.

6. "Gotama (the Buddha) dear to gods and men, endowed with knowledge and virtue,[5] mighty and fearless, all do homage to him (homage be to him).

7-8. "When the resplendent sun — offspring of Aditi — with its full orb, arises, then the night ceases, and it is called the day. The direction from which the sun rises (is the East). There exists the ocean deep and vast.

9. "This — a spreading sheet of water — they know as the ocean. Where there is East (to the East of Mount Meru) they say that quarter is East.

10. "Custodian of this quarter is a great king named Dhatarattha who has a retinue of attendants, and is sovereign lord of the Gandhabbas.

11. "Attended by Ghandhabbas he enjoys their song and dance. Many are his (Datharatta's) sons, all of one name, so have I heard.

12-13. "Eighty and ten and one are they, Inda their name, and mighty are they. They too, beholding the Buddha — Kinsman of the sun, mighty and fearless — salute him from afar: "Homage to thee, who art unique among mankind; glory to thee, the noblest among men."[6]

14-15. "As by thy omniscience,[7] thou hast looked on (mankind with a knowing eye), even the non-humans pay reverence to thee. This we have often heard. We, therefore, request the Yakkhas to pay homage to Gotama, the Conqueror (the Buddha). They too say: 'We reverence Gotama, the Conqueror, we reverence Gotama who is endowed with knowledge and virtue.'"

16-18. "The direction from where the petas (corpses), backbiters, murderers, the fierce brigands, and the deceitful are removed, is the direction (to the right of Mount Meru), and is called the quarter of the South. The custodian of this quarter is a great king named Virulha who has a retinue of attendants, and is the sovereign lord of Kumbhandas. Attended by the Kumbhandas he enjoys their song and dance.

19. "Many are his (Virulha's) sons, all of one name, so have I heard. Eighty and ten and one are they, Inda their names, and mighty are they.

20. "They too, beholding the Buddha — Kinsman of the sun, mighty and fearless — salute him from afar: 'Homage to thee, who art unique among mankind; glory to thee, the highest among men.'

21-22. "As by thy omniscience, thou hast looked on (mankind with a knowing eye), even the non-humans pay reverence to thee. This we have often heard. We, therefore, request the Yakkhas to pay homage to Gotama, the Conqueror (the Buddha). They too say: 'We reverence, Gotama, the Conqueror, we reverence Gotama who is endowed with knowledge and virtue.'

23-24. "When the resplendent sun — offspring of Aditi — with its full orb, sets, then the day ceases, and it is called night. The direction where the sun sets (is the West). There exists the ocean deep and vast.

25. "This — a spreading sheet of water — they know as the ocean. Where there is West (to the West of Mount Meru) they say that quarter is West.

26. "Custodians of this quarter is a great king named Virupakkha who has a retinue of attendants, and is sovereign lord of the Nagas.

27. "Attended by Nagas he enjoys their song and dance. Many are his (Virupakkha's) sons, all of one name, so have I heard.

28-29. "Eighty and ten and one are they, Inda their name, and mighty are they. They too, beholding the Buddha — Kinsman of the sun, mighty and fearless — salute him from afar: 'Homage to thee, who art unique among mankind; glory to thee, the noblest among men.'

30-31. "As by thy omniscience, thou hast looked on (mankind with a knowing eye), even the non-humans pay reverence to thee. This we have often heard. We, therefore, request the Yakkhas to pay homage to Gotama, the Conqueror (the Buddha). They too say: 'We reverence, Gotama, the Conqueror, we reverence Gotama who is endowed with knowledge and virtue.'

32. "Where lies delightful Uttarakuru (the Northern continent), where towers beautiful Mount Meru, there are born men who are selfless and unattached.

33. "They neither sow the seed nor use[8] the plow. Spontaneously grown corn is there for them to enjoy.

34. "The rice, purged of the red powder and of husk, clean and sweet-scented, is boiled in golden vessels; it is this that they partake of.

35. "They make of cows a single-seated mount (like mounting on horseback)[9] and ride about from place to place.

36-37. "They make use of women and men, girls and boys as vehicles, and travel from place to place in them.

38. "Mounting on vehicles (on elephants and horses) they (the Yakkhas of King Vessavana) travel in every direction.

39. "This king who has a retinue of attendants, is possessed of elephants and horses on which he rides. He also has celestial chariots, palaces, and palanquins. He has cities well built in the celestial regions.

"Their names are Atanata, Kusinata, Parakusinata, Natapuriya, Parakusitanata. To the North, the city of Kapilavata, to the South[10] Janogha, and cities named Navanavati, Ambara-ambaravati and the kingdom of Alakamanda. Happy one (addressing the Buddha), this Kuvera (another name for Vessavana) has a kingdom named Visna, therefore, the great king Kuvera is called Vessavana. There are Yakkhas (of this king) who hold

investigations and make them known. They are Tatola, Tattala, Tatotala, Ojasi, Tejasi, Tatojasi, Suro, Raja (Sura-raja) Arittho, Nemi (Arittha-nemi). There (in Visana kingdom) lies the lake Dharani whence rain-clouds (drawing water) pour them forth. And there is also the hall named Bhagalavati where the Yakkhas assemble.

40. "There (round about the hall) are trees bearing perpetual fruit. (On these trees) there are multitudes of birds. There also is heard the cry of peacocks and herons, and the melodious song of kokilas (the Indian cuckoo).

41. "There (near the lake) the cry of the birds, who call 'Live ye! Live ye!' (jivamjivaka) is heard. The bird Otthavacittaka ('O lift your hearts!'), the jungle fowls, the crabs and the Pokkharasataka birds roam the woods.

42. "There the cry of the parrot, the myna-birds and the dandamanavaka birds is heard. And Kuvera's lotus-lake ever lies in her beauty in all seasons.

43-44. "That direction (to the North of Mount Meru) is called by people the quarter of the North. The custodian of this quarter is a great king named Kuvera who has a retinue of attendants, and is sovereign lord of the Yakkhas. Attended by the Yakkhas he enjoys their songs and dance.

45. "Many are his (Kuvera's) sons, all of one name, so have I heard. Eighty and ten and one are they, Inda their names, and mighty are they.

46. "They too, beholding the Buddha, kinsman of the sun, mighty and fearless, salute him from afar: 'Homage to thee, who art unique among mankind! Glory to thee, the noblest among men.'

47-48. "As by thy pure omniscience thou hast looked on (mankind); even the non-humans pay reverence to thee, this we have heard. We, therefore, request the Yakkhas to pay homage to Gotama, the Conqueror (the Buddha). They, too, say, 'We reverence Gotama, the Conqueror, we reverence Gotama who is endowed with knowledge and virtue.'

"Happy One, this is the Atanata protection whereby both the monks and nuns, laymen and laywomen may live at ease, guarded, protected, and unharmed.

"If any monk or nun, layman or laywoman learns by heart this Atanata protection, and be word-perfect in repeating it, and if any non-human male or female Yakkha, youth or maiden Yakkha, Yakkha Minister or any Yakkha, or Yakkha attendant; male or female Gandhabba... (as before); male or female Kumbhanda... male or female Naga... were to walk with him or her, or stand or sit or lie down with him or her with malevolent intent, such a non-human, Happy One, will not obtain hospitality from any town or township, will not obtain a place to dwell, nor could live in the Kingdom of Alakamanda. He will not be able to attend the meetings of the Yakkhas. Further he would not be accepted or given in marriage, he would be reproached (by casting remarks on his deformed teeth or eyes or any part of the body), and the non-humans would put an empty bowl over his head and

split it (head) in seven pieces.

"Happy One, there are non-humans who are fierce, violent, given to retaliation; those non-humans heed neither the (four) great kings, nor their ministers nor their attendants. They are called rebels against the (four) great kings. Even as in the kingdom of Magadha, the thieves heed neither the king of Magadha, nor the ministers, nor their attendants, and are called rebels against the king of Magadha, so there are non-humans who are fierce... (as before). They are called rebels against the (four) great kings.

"Happy One, if any non-human — male or female Yakkha, youth or maiden Yakkha, yakkha minister or any Yakkha, or Yakkha attendant; male or female Gandhabba... (as before); male or female Kumbhanda... male or female Naga... were to walk with a monk or nun, or a layman or laywoman, or stand, or sit, or lie down with him or her with malevolent intent, then should (the molested one) inform, cry aloud and shout to those Yakkhas, to the mighty Yakkhas, their commanders and chief commanders saying: 'This Yakkha is seizing me, takes possession of me, is harassing me, assailing me, is harming me, harming me intensely and would not let me go!'

"Who are the Yakkhas, mighty Yakkhas and commanders, and chief commanders (to whom such appeal should be made)?

49. Inda, Soma, and Varuna, Bharadvaja, Pajapati, Candana, Kamasettha too, Kinnughandu, Nigahandu, 50. Panada, Opamanna too, Devasata and Matali, Cittasena and Gandhabba, Nala, Raja, Janesabha, 51. Satagira, Hemavata, Punnaka, Karatiya, Gula, Sivaka, Mucalinda too, Vessamitta, Yugandhara, 52. Gopala, Suppagedha too, Hiri, Netti, and Mandiya, Pañcalacanda, Alavaka, Pajjunna, Sumana, Sumukha, Dadamukkha, With these Serisakka.

"These are the Yakkhas, mighty Yakkhas, the commanders, the chief commanders to whom (the molested one) should inform, cry aloud and shout saying: 'This Yakkha is seizing me, takes possession of me, is harassing me, assailing me, is harming me, and harming me intensely, and this Yakkha would not let me go!'

"This, Happy One, is the Atanata protection whereby monks and nuns, laymen and laywomen may live at ease, guarded, protected, and unharmed.

"Happy One, we now take our leave of you; for we have many duties to attend to (so said the four Great Kings)."

"Great Kings, it is time for your departure" (replied the Buddha).

The four great kings arose from their seats, and saluting the Blessed One, circled round him on his right side, and there and then vanished. From among the (attendant) Yakkhas some arose from their seats, and saluted the Blessed One, circled round him on his right side, and there and then vanished; some exchanged greetings with the Blessed One conversing in a friendly and courteous manner, and there and then vanished; some

saluted the Blessed One with clasped hands, and there and then vanished; some announced their name and lineage, and there and then vanished; some in silence there and then vanished.

When the night had passed the Blessed One addressed the monks: (The Buddha related to the monks word for word what has been said by the great King Vessavana, see above.) "Learn by heart, monks, the Atanata protection, constantly make use of it, bear it in mind. This Atanata protection, monks, pertains to your welfare, and by virtue of it, monks and nuns, laymen and laywomen may live at ease, guarded, protected, and unharmed."

This the Blessed One said. Those monks glad at heart rejoiced at the words of the Blessed One.

Notes

1. D. No. 32.

2. They are Dhatarattha, Virulha, Virupakkha, and Vessavana, presiding over the four quarters in the celestial regions.

3. Vessavana, king of the Northern quarter, according to the Commentary, was familiar with the Buddha, expert in conversation and well-disciplined, and thus he became the spokesman. Kuvera is another name for Vessavana. .

4. According to Dighanikaya-attakatha-tika (vol iii, p. 194), King Vessavana had a town by the name of Atanata, where the four kings assembled and recited this Paritta which speaks of the virtues of the seven Buddhas: Vipassi, Sikhi, Vessabhu, Kakusanda, Konagama, Kassapa, Gotama.

They approached the Buddha with the intention of obtaining his approval in which event, they felt, that this Paritta will attain a revered position: "satthu kathite imam parittam garu bhavissatiti pi aha" (Comy).

Learn, ugganhatha: There is nothing for the Buddha to learn afresh. As the Commentary says, it was to create an opportunity for the Buddha to listen to the discourse, "Imam parittam savetum okasam karonto evamha."

5. Vijja-carana: literally science and conduct.

6. From the 13th stanza I have adopted the method of numbering the stanzas in consecutive order.

7. Kusalena, an unusual phrase: "omniscience," "pure wisdom," "sublime wisdom" (Comy).

8. Na piniyanti, literally they do not carry the plough.

9. Tam pittim abhiruyha, mounting on the back (Comy).

10. Etassa aparabhage (Com).