Iti 99 — The Three Knowledges

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Text

So It Was Said 99

The Book of the Threes

Chapter Five

The Three Knowledges

This was said by the Buddha, the Perfected One: that is what I heard.

“Mendicants, I define a brahmin in terms of the teaching as one who is master of the three knowledges, not the other who merely repeats what they are told.

How so? It’s when a mendicant recollects many kinds of past lives. That is: one, two, three, four, five, ten, twenty, thirty, forty, fifty, a hundred, a thousand, a hundred thousand rebirths; many eons of the world contracting, many eons of the world expanding, many eons of the world contracting and expanding. They remember: ‘There, I was named this, my clan was that, I looked like this, and that was my food. This was how I felt pleasure and pain, and that was how my life ended. When I passed away from that place I was reborn somewhere else. There, too, I was named this, my clan was that, I looked like this, and that was my food. This was how I felt pleasure and pain, and that was how my life ended. When I passed away from that place I was reborn here.’ And so they recollect their many kinds of past lives, with features and details. This is the first knowledge they achieved. Ignorance was banished and knowledge arose; darkness was banished and light arose, as happens for a meditator who is diligent, keen, and resolute.

Furthermore, with clairvoyance that is purified and superhuman, a mendicant sees sentient beings passing away and being reborn—inferior and superior, beautiful and ugly, in a good place or a bad place. They understand how sentient beings pass on according to their deeds: ‘These dear beings did bad things by way of body, speech, and mind. They denounced the noble ones; they had wrong view; and they chose to act out of that wrong view. When their body broke up, after death, they were reborn in a place of loss, a bad place, the underworld, hell. These dear beings, however, did good things by way of body, speech, and mind. They never denounced the noble ones; they had right view; and they chose to act out of that right view. When their body broke up, after death, they were reborn in a good place, a heavenly realm.’ And so, with clairvoyance that is purified and superhuman, they see sentient beings passing away and being reborn—inferior and superior, beautiful and ugly, in a good place or a bad place. They understand how sentient beings pass on according to their deeds. This is the second knowledge they achieved. Ignorance was banished and knowledge arose; darkness was banished and light arose, as

happens for a meditator who is diligent, keen, and resolute.

Furthermore, a mendicant realizes the undefiled freedom of heart and freedom by wisdom. And they live having realized it with their own insight in this very life due to the ending of defilements. This is the third knowledge which they achieved. Ignorance was banished and knowledge arose; darkness was banished and light arose, as happens for a meditator who is diligent, keen, and resolute. That's how I define a brahmin in terms of the teaching as one who is master of the three knowledges, not the other who merely repeats what they are told."

The Buddha spoke this matter. On this it is said:

"One who knows their past lives,

sees heaven and places of loss,

and has attained the end of rebirth,

is a sage of perfect insight.

Because of these three knowledges

a brahmin is a master of the three knowledges.

That's who I call a three-knowledge master,

and not the other who repeats what they are told."

This too is a matter that was spoken by the Blessed One: that is what I heard.