Pv 11 — Nāga Sutta: The Elephant

English translation by Mahamevnawa Buddhist Monastery (Sutta Friends).

Source: https://suttafriends.org/sutta/pv1-11/

Source revision: 2ba3dfb3ea25e7961ac4fadc4c07eba420bfad9d115ab36763bb044aad6265d4

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Completeness: UNKNOWN. Complete publisher article including supplied Pali, notes and lists. Unabridged canonical coverage and translation accuracy not independently established.

Text

A monk sees a group of gods and another group of ghosts and asks these questions:

Monk:

The deva leading the gods is riding a white elephant. There is a deva in the middle of the line sitting on a chariot. At the end of the line, a female deva travels on a golden stage which shines brightly in ten directions. But you ghosts are carrying hammers in your hands with sad faces and broken bodies. You also drink each other's blood. What bad karma have you done in the human world?

Ghost:

The one in front, riding a white elephant was our eldest son. Having given alms to monks, he is now happy and delighted.

The one in the middle, sitting on a chariot was our second son. He was unselfish and very generous. He now shines brilliantly.

The female deva with soft eyes like a deer's who is at the end, travelling on a golden stage is our youngest daughter. She was wise and donated half of her wealth. She is now happy and delighted.

In the human world, our children gave alms to monks with very pleasant minds. But we were very selfish and insulted monks. Our children are now very happy because they practiced generosity, but we are suffering like withered bamboo reeds.

Monk:

You are suffering today because you missed the opportunity to do good deeds when you had plenty of food and wealth. Now in the ghost world, what kind of food do you eat and what kind of bed do you sleep on? How do you live here?

Ghost:

We hate each other. When we fight each other using hammers, we drink the blood and pus of our victims. But we are still hungry.

Some rich people neither use their wealth nor do meritorious deeds. These greedy people are reborn in the ghost world and suffer.

These ghosts experience the results of their bad karma, suffering from hunger and thirst; they are burning from suffering.

Wealth and property are temporary things. Even this life is very short. Wise people should understand this impermanent nature of life and should seek a way to protect themselves.

There are wise people who understand the Dhamma well. Having heard the teachings of Arahants, they do not forget to give alms.