Pv 15 — Mattā Sutta: The Ghost Mattā

English translation by Mahamevnawa Buddhist Monastery (Sutta Friends).

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Text

A housewife named Tissā sees a female ghost and questions,

Tissā:

You are naked and very ugly, your veins are popping out. You thin person, with your ribs sticking out, who are you?

Mattā (ghost):

My name is Mattā, and you are Tissā. Don’t you remember? I was your husband’s other wife. I did lots of evil actions and was born in the ghost world.

Tissā:

Now what evil deed have you done by body, speech, or mind for you to have been born in the world of ghosts?

Mattā:

I got angry easily and spoke harshly. I was very jealous, greedy, and cunning. Having used harsh words, I have been reborn in the world of ghosts.

Tissā:

Oh yes, I remember you. You were very violent those days. Let me ask you something else. Why are you covered in dirt?

Mattā:

Do you remember one day, you had bathed and dressed in clean clothes? I wanted to be more beautiful than you, so I wore a more beautiful dress than yours. But I saw our husband talking and paying more attention to you rather than me. I was extremely jealous and got angry. I took some dirt from the ground and threw it at you. As a result of that bad deed, now I am covered in dirt.

Tissā:

Oh yes, I remember that day you threw dirt at me. Now let me ask something else. Why are you scratching your entire body?

Mattā:

One day we both went into the forest to gather some medicinal herbs. You brought back medicinal herbs but I brought back plants that would make the body itchy. Secretly, I scattered them over your bed. As a result of that bad action, my body is always itchy.

Tissā:

Oh yes, I remember that morning when my body got very itchy. Here's another question. Why are you naked?

Mattā:

One day, when friends and relatives gathered for a party, you and our husband were invited while I was not. I was very jealous and stole the clothes that you were going to wear to the party. This is why now I am naked.

Tissā:

Yes, yes, I remember when you stole my clothes that night. I have another question. Why do you smell of excrement?

Mattā:

You had nice perfumes, cosmetics, and necklaces made of flowers. I threw them into a pile of excrement. This is why now I am very smelly.

Tissā:

Yes, I also remember when I found my perfumes, cosmetics and flower necklaces in a pile of excrement. I would also like to ask you, why do you suffer so much?

Mattā:

The wealth in our house was equally shared among us. But I did not collect much merit, therefore I have to suffer now. You warned me saying, “You are doing evil things. Happiness will not come from evil!”

Tissā:

You mistook me for an enemy when I was trying to help. You were also very jealous of me. Now you can see the result of your evil. You had maids and servants in the house and plenty of jewelry, but now they are used by others. Wealth is not eternal.

Bhūta’s father is coming home from the market soon, maybe he will give you something. Do not go anywhere; wait until he comes.

Mattā:

I am naked and very ugly with veins popping out. It is embarrassing for a woman to be like this. Do not let Bhūta’s father see me.

Tissā:

OK then, what can I give or do for you which can make you happy and gain what you want.

Mattā:

Invite four monks as a group and four individually. Offer alms to these eight monks and dedicate the merit to me. Then I will be happy and gain what I want.

Tissā:

OK, I will.

She offered alms and robes to eight monks and dedicated the merit to Mattā. The result of this donation immediately took effect in the form of food, drink, and clothing for the ghost. She became pure, wearing the cleanest and finest clothes with jewelry and then approached Tissā.

Tissā:

Who are you, with heavenly beauty, shining in all directions like a star? Why are you so beautiful? What merit have you collected when you were a human?

Mattā:

My name is Mattā, and you are Tissā. Don’t you remember? I was your husband’s other wife. I did lots of evil actions and was born in the ghost world. But I am very happy now, rejoicing in your gift. I do not fear anything.

May you live long, my sister, happily with all your relatives!

Tissā:

Yes sister, one should practice the Dhamma and be generous by giving alms. The person who does this will be reborn in heaven where there is no sorrow.