Pv 36 — Ambasakkhara Sutta: King Ambasakkhara

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Text

In the city of the Vajjian people named Vesali there was a Licchavi king named Ambasakkhara. One day while he was outside of the city, he went to see a prisoner who was impaled on a sharp stake. There, the king saw a ghost. The king questioned the ghost,

Ambasakkhara:

This person can neither sleep nor sit. He cannot even take a step backwards or forwards. There are no clothes for him to wear or food to eat. He previously had relatives and friends but now there is nobody to help him, as if he has been thrown away. Friends will stay close to you when you are rich but abandon you when you are poor.

Having lost all of his possessions, now he is suffering with broken limbs and bleeding body. His life is uncertain, like a dew drop about to fall. He is about to die either today or tomorrow. Seeing such an unfortunate being, why do you say “May he live, may he live! Living is better than dying”?

Ghost:

Great King, when I recollected my past lives, I understood that he was my relative in a previous life. I had compassion towards him thinking, “Do not let his bad karma drag him into hell.”

Great King, if he dies he will fall into a very hot, severe, and frightful hell named Sattussada. This stake that he is on right now is countless times better than that terrible hell. Now if he were to know about what I just said, he would be afraid and lose his life.

That is why I do not tell him about this.

Ambasakkhara:

I understand the situation that this person is in. Now I want to know about another thing too. Please give us permission to ask and do not get angry with me.

Ghost:

In the past, I had decided not to tell anyone who does not believe in karma about the ghost world. But now, since you have some trust in me, I will answer reluctantly. Ask anything you wish.

King:

Friend, I can believe whatever I see with my eyes. If I do not believe what I have seen with my eyes, then you can criticize me.

Ghost:

Please keep your promise. Now I will teach you the Dhamma. Listen carefully with an open and happy mind. Maybe you have heard the things I am about to say or maybe not, but I will tell everything I know.

King:

You have come here in a magnificent carriage pulled by white horses. It is very amazing and beautiful. Of what deed is this the result?

Ghost:

When I was in the human world I lived in the city of Vesali. One day there was a muddy area on a road. I placed the skull of an ox on that muddy area so that others could easily pass stepping on it. This was the good deed for which I have received this magnificent carriage.

King:

Friend, your body shines in all directions and the fragrance of your body spreads everywhere. You have divine psychic power too, but you are fully naked. What is the reason for this?

Ghost:

In the human world, my heart was free from anger and filled with kindness. I always talked to people with gentle speech. From this deed I gain my heavenly radiance. When I saw people who were following the Dhamma, I admired them and congratulated them. From

this deed sweet fragrance spreads from my body.

One day, however, while my friends were bathing in a river, I playfully took their clothes and hid them without any evil thoughts in my mind. For this reason, I am now naked and I suffer.

The Buddha has taught that such will be the result if one commits a bad deed for fun. He has also taught how serious the consequences will be for those who commit evil deeds with bad intentions.

Those people who commit bad deeds with bad intentions by body, speech, and mind will surely go to hell after death.

But those who are very generous and kind to others will surely go to heaven after death.

King:

Now you have explained about good and bad karma, but how do I believe that there are results of good and bad deeds? Having seen what, should I believe it? Who can convince me about this?

Ghost:

When you have seen or heard the results of karma, you should believe in it. You must believe that this is the result of doing good and evil deeds. Otherwise, if there were no results of good or bad actions, why do some beings go to bad worlds and some to good worlds? What is the reason that some beings are poor and some are rich? Since living beings do good or bad deeds, they have happy or miserable existences and births in low or high classes.

I have now explained the actions that lead to happiness and the actions that lead to suffering. Doers of good rejoice in heaven. The fools who do not believe in the results of good and bad actions suffer in hell.

I have not done any meritorious deeds and there is nobody who will share their merits with me so that I can have clothes, houses, food and drink. For this reason I am suffering with a naked body.

King:

Is the any way for you to get clothing? Tell me a way so that I can give you clothes. I will believe in your words.

Ghost:

There is an Arahant monk named Kappinaka nearby. He is very virtuous and restrained in senses. His speech is very pleasant and he is a very skilled preacher. He meditates and is

free from all defilements. He has become very calm and has realized the true nature of life. He is very gentle, tranquil, free from desires, concentrated and very wise. He has attained the triple knowledge. He is worthy of offerings from gods and humans.

Not many people know about his achievements. People cannot easily recognize him as an Arahant. People in the Vajjian state call him a sage. Powerful gods and yakkhas praise his qualities everywhere saying, "The Arahant monk Kappinaka is a great sage, free of passion."

Please go and meet that Bhante and offer him a pair or two of robes. If he accepts them, and if you dedicate the merit to me, you will then see me with beautiful clothes.

King:

Where is that monk staying right now? Will he help me get rid of my doubts and wrong views?

Ghost:

He is resting at the village of Kapinaccana surrounded by many gods. He preaches the beautiful and excellent Dhamma which he practices very well.

King:

Yes, certainly I will go there right now and offer two robes and dedicate the merit to you. Then I will see you with beautiful clothes.

Ghost:

Wait, you should find another time to visit him because it is not good to disturb his meditation.

King:

Yes I will find a better time.

Surrounded by servants, the king then left that place and returned to his palace in the city. In the morning he bathed and ate his breakfast. He chose eight pairs of clothes from his closet and had the servants carry them. When the time was right, the king went to the place where the monk was. The monk was very calm and tranquil, seated at the foot of a tree. He had just returned from his morning alms round. The king approached him, asked about his wellbeing, and further said,

King:

Venerable Bhante, I am a Licchavi king from the city of Vesali. People know me as Ambasakkhara of the Licchavi clan. Please sir, accept these eight pairs of clothes of mine. I

am offering these to you. I would be delighted if you accept them.

Monk:

Monks try to avoid your home. You break their bowls and even tear up their robes. Your people kick and trip them so they fall on their heads. These are the harassments that are caused by you and your people.

You have given nothing in charity nor have you shown the way to people who are lost. You have even grabbed the stick from a blind person. Being such a greedy and mean person, why are you here offering us robes?

King:

All that you have said about me is true, Bhante. Yes, I have harassed monks, but I have only done these things for fun not with an evil mind. But now I understand, even those deeds are very bad.

I know a ghost who committed an evil deed for fun now experiences suffering. He is a good person, but he is completely naked. What a terrible thing that is.

Bhante, I saw that ghost and I felt very sorry for him. For this reason I am now offering this gift. Please accept these eight pairs of clothes, and may the merit also reach that ghost.

Monk:

Surely, generosity has been praised by the Supreme Buddha. May generous people's wealth increase further. I will accept your clothes and may the ghost share in this merit.

The king washed his face and offered the eight pairs of clothes to the Arahant monk saying,

King:

May Bhante accept these! May I see the ghost wearing beautiful clothes!

The ghost appeared in front of the king. The ghost was surrounded by many servants while sitting on a majestic pure-bred horse. He had a beautiful body covered with the fragrance of sandalwood and wore beautiful clothes.

The king was amazed and delighted when he saw the ghost. He saw with his own eyes the result of his offering.

The king approached the ghost and said,

King:

I will always give gifts to monks. Now there is nothing that I own that I cannot give. You have helped me very much, my friend.

Ghost:

Great king, you have offered one of the four requisites—clothing. It has been very fruitful. Even though I am a non-human and you are human, now we are talking together.

King:

Dear friend, I regard you as my relative, friend, god, and refuge. Worshipping you, I plead: I would like to see you again.

Ghost:

Yes, it can be on one condition. If one day you lose faith in the Dhamma, become very greedy, and follow wrong views, you will not see me anymore. Even if you see me, I will not talk to you.

But if you continuously develop respect for the Dhamma, practices generosity, become very kind and helpful to others, and often donate to monks, you will see me, and when I see you I will talk to you.

Great King, the reason we were able to become friends is because of that man on the stake. So please, release that man as soon as possible.

If the man is quickly released, he may have a chance to live, to do lots of good deeds, and even to escape from hell.

Please go with that man to meet Kappinaka Bhante and offer food and drink. He has to experience the result of another evil deed. Ask the Bhante about this, Bhante will explain everything. You should also listen to Bhante with the intention of understanding the Dhamma and not with a criticizing mind.

The king agreed with the ghost and promised to do as he said. Then the king went to the council of ministers and asked,

King:

Gentlemen, listen to me please. Do you remember that man who is dying on the stake? It is true that he has done evil deeds. We have already punished him. But he is loyal to the king. It has been twenty nights since he has been tortured on the stake. He is neither dead nor alive. Please give me the permission to release him.

Ministers:

Oh great King, you do not need to ask for permission from us. We will agree with your decision. Soldiers, please release that man.

Quickly, the king went to the prisoner who was on the stake and released him. The king told him not to be afraid. The king instructed his doctors to treat the man. Once the man was cured and healthy, the king took him to see the Arahant monk Kappinaka and they offered food and drink. The king questioned the monk thus,

King:

This man was undergoing punishment on a stake for twenty nights. He was very close to death. He had done evil deeds, but he was a loyal person to the king. Bhante, having listened to the suggestions of a ghost, I have released him. I learned that he would have been born in hell if he had died. Please teach him the way to escape from hell. We will listen to you trusting that you will tell us the truth. Is it possible that the results of some bad karma will disappear without ripening?

Monk:

If he practices the Dhamma diligently both day and night, he will escape from hell. But he will have to suffer the result of that bad karma somewhere else if he does not put an end to the round of rebirth.

King:

Bhante has answered the question that I asked about this man. Now, please have pity on me too. Very wise Bhante, teach me the Dhamma so that I also will escape from hell.

Monk:

You should take refuge in the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha at this very moment. Have confidence in the Triple Gem, observe and keep the five precepts honestly.

Abstain from killing living beings right now, stop stealing, do not take intoxicating drinks and drugs, do not tell lies, and be satisfied with your own wife.

In this way, these eight factors (taking refuge in the Triple Gem and observing the five precepts) will give you much happiness.

The disciples of the Supreme Buddha, the monks, are very virtuous, desireless, have pure lives, and know much about the Dhamma. Have a pleasant mind about them. Offer them robes, food, drink, medicine, resting places, beds, and seats. Daily, the merits from these offerings grow.

In this way, you should practice the Dhamma diligently both day and night and you will escape from hell. But you will have to suffer the result of that bad karma somewhere else if

you do not put an end to the round of rebirth.

King:

I will take refuge in the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha right now, place confidence in the Triple Gem, and observe and keep the five precepts honestly.

I will stop killing living beings right now, will stop stealing, will not take intoxicating drinks and drugs, will not tell lies, and will be satisfied with my own wife.

In this way, I observe these eight factors which lead to true happiness.

I will offer robes, food, drink, medicine, resting places, beds, and seats to the community of monks, the Sangha, who have virtuous and pure lives.

In this way, King Ambasakkhara of the Licchavi clan became a devoted lay disciple of the Supreme Buddha. He started supporting monks carefully with a humble mind.

The prisoner who was on the stake recovered fully and went to Kappinaka Arahant Bhante and became a monk under him. Marvelously, both the king and the prisoner realized the Dhamma.

This is the benefit of associating with noble friends. The friendship of people who know the Dhamma leads to very great results. The prisoner who was on the stake and later became a monk eventually attained Arahantship and King Ambasakkhara became a Stream Entrant.