Pv 37 — Serissaka Sutta: The God Serissaka

English translation by Mahamevnawa Buddhist Monastery (Sutta Friends).

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Text

A meeting took place between the deva Serissaka and some merchants. Please listen to this good story they told.

There was a king named Payasi in the city of Setavya. He was reborn as an earth deva. He lives happily in his mansion. That deva spoke to the merchants.

Deva:

Non-humans live in frightening forests and in deserts where there is little food, drink, and water. Your journey through this desert is very hard. You are about to die in the middle of this sandy place.

In this desert, there are no fruits, roots or any food or drink. There is no way to make a fire. There is only dust and scorching sand. This rough soil is like a scorched iron pot. It is like hell, without any happiness. This place has been haunted by ghosts for a long time. It seems that this land is under a curse of rishis. What are you seeking? Why have you come here? Is it because of greed, or fear, or have you gotten lost?

Merchants:

Dear Deva, we are merchants from the cities of Magadha and Anga. We travel with full carts to the cities of Sindhu and Sovira to earn money.

We could not stand the heat in the daytime. So, looking for a comfortable place for ourselves and out of compassion for our bulls, we rushed here to this place.

We took the wrong road in the night. We are lost and confused like blind men lost in a forest. We do not know where to go. We are stuck in the middle of this desert.

Deva, we have not seen anything like your mansion before. It is excellent. Because we have seen you, we are extremely happy. It is as if we have regained our lives.

Deva:

People travel to lands on the other side of the oceans. They travel through sandy deserts, over bridges made of canes and stakes, and to many more difficult places just to earn money. When you travel to different countries, what kind of things do you see and hear? I would like to learn about those strange things.

Merchants:

Deva, we have never seen or heard about any happiness greater than yours. Your happiness surpasses human happiness in every way. No matter how long we stare, we will never see enough of your mansion. There are pools in the sky with many white lotuses. The surrounding area is filled with trees that do not stop bearing fruit. Divine fragrance can be smelled everywhere. Your mansion is supported by hundreds of pillars made of beryl, crystals, corals, cat's-eye, rubies, and brilliant jewels. There are golden stages decorated with golden railings. This mansion shines in gold and it is well designed with beautiful stairs. It is extremely beautiful.

There is lots of food and drink inside. Many goddesses play musical instruments and sing welcoming songs to entertain you. You enjoy being surrounded by these goddesses. The happiness you experience is beyond words. It is like the wonderful Nalini Palace of King Vessavana. Are you a god, a demon, the god Sakka, or a human? We merchants question you. Tell us who you are.

Deva:

Dear merchants, I am a deva. My name is Serissaka. I am the protector of this sandy desert. I was appointed by King Vessavana.

Merchants:

Deva, have you obtained these wonderful things by chance, have you created them yourself, or have other gods given them to you? How did you gain all these delightful things?

Deva:

Merchants, I did not obtain these wonderful things by chance, nor did I create them myself. Other devas did not give them to me. I have obtained these things as a result of my own meritorious deeds.

Merchants:

Dear Deva, what kind of religious activities did you perform and what kind of precepts did you follow? What kind of good deed did you do to gain these wonderful things?

Deva:

I was once a ruler in the country Kosala. My name was Payasi. I held the wrong view that there are no results of good and bad actions. I was very greedy and evil. I believed that nothing exists after death.

There was a great monk named Kumara Kassapa who knew the Supreme Buddha's Dhamma well and could preach skillfully. One day, that monk taught me the Dhamma. That was the day he removed my terrible wrong views.

After hearing his sermon, I became a lay follower of the Supreme Buddha. I abstained from killing beings, stealing, drinking alcohol, lying, and was content with my own wife. That was my religious life and those were the precepts I followed. Due to those meritorious deeds, I obtained this wonderful mansion.

Whatever teaching has been preached by the wise is true. Those teachings are not false. Good doers enjoy the results of their actions wherever they go. Evil doers experience grief, crying, and misery wherever they go. They will never escape from falling into miserable worlds.

At that moment, the assembly of devas suddenly became very frightened and sad.

Merchants:

Dear Deva, what happened to you and your fellow devas? Why do you suddenly seem sad?

Deva:

Dear merchants, can you see these flowering Mahari trees in this forest spreading divine fragrance and dispelling darkness? After every hundred years, one petal of each flower falls off. That indicates that we devas have been here for one hundred years. I will stay in this mansion only for five hundred years. I know that very well. By then, my life span and merit will be spent. That is why I am very sad.

Merchants:

Dear Deva, having obtained a wonderful, long lasting mansion like yours, what is the point of being sad? If someone has a short lifespan and little merit, it makes sense for them to be sad.

Deva:

Dear merchants, you advised me using pleasing words with good hearts. I will protect you. You will be able to go safely to your destination.

Merchants:

We wish to go to the cities of Sindhu and Sovira to earn money. We promise that we will organize a huge ceremony in the name of Serissaka with lots of gifts.

Deva:

Do not organize ceremonies for me. You will get everything you wish for without having to reward me. Stop doing evil deeds and lead a virtuous life.

There is a lay follower of the Buddha in your group. He is very faithful, virtuous, generous, wise, and well behaved. He is learned in the Dhamma. He is a very happy lay follower with deep wisdom.

He does not tell lies intentionally. He does not even think to kill beings. He does not try to break others' friendships, and he speaks beneficial things wisely. He is very disciplined, obedient, and established in higher virtue. He respects elders and looks after his parents. He has great noble qualities. I think he earns money just to take care of his parents, not to make himself rich. He intends to be a monk after his parents pass away.

He is straight, not crooked, and not deceitful. How could he experience suffering since he is well established in good qualities?

It is because he was in your group that I appeared before you. Therefore, merchants, following the Dhamma is the best protection. If you had come without that lay follower, you could have been destroyed by disasters in this desert like confused blind men. Association with good people is indeed a blessing.

Merchants:

Deva, please tell us, who is that person? What is his name? What is his role among us? We agree that if you appeared here out of compassion for someone, his company is truly a blessing.

Deva:

Yes, he is a servant of yours. He is your barber, Sambhava. He earns money shaving and cutting people's hair. Recognize him as that lay follower. He is a very quiet person. Don't look down upon him.

Merchants:

Dear Deva, we know who you are talking about. We never thought he was such a person. Having heard your praises, we are ready to worship him.

Deva:

Everybody traveling with you – elders, youth, children, and anyone who is greedy, come inside my mansion and see well the results of merit.

Placing the barber in the front, they all rushed behind him saying, "I am next! I am next!" They went inside the mansion as if entering the wonderful palace of the god Sakka.

When it was time to go for refuge, they all cried, "Let me go first!" wanting to become lay disciples of the Supreme Buddha. They abstained from killing, stealing, drinking alcohol, lying, and were content with their own wives. Everyone rejoiced in taking refuge in the Triple Gem. They rejoiced again and again enjoying divine wonders.

Afterwards, they went to Sindhu and Sovira safely and accomplished their goal of making lots of money. They eventually returned to their home city of Pataliputta safely. They went to their own houses, rejoined their wives and children, and organized a great festival called Serissaka. They delighted in this festival together with their families. They also built an assembly hall called Serissaka.

This is the result of association with noble friends, people who practice the Dhamma. Because of a single lay follower a large group of people benefited.