Pv 38 — Nandaka Sutta: The Ghost Nandaka

English translation by Mahamevnawa Buddhist Monastery (Sutta Friends).

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Text

There was a kingdom called Surattha which had a king named Pingalaka. One day, the king went to help King Moriya. Once he was done, King Pingalaka headed back home in the middle of the day. At that time the weather was very hot. Suddenly a path appeared, created by ghosts. The king saw that beautiful path. Unaware of the ghosts who created that path, he addressed the driver,

King:

Driver, that road is beautiful, safe, and peaceful. Please go and follow that road, it will lead us back to Surattha faster.

The king along with his army entered the path and followed it for a while. All of a sudden, one of the soldiers let out a terrifying scream,

Soldier:

Great King, we have taken the wrong path which is scary and hair-raising! We can see the road ahead, but there is no road behind us. I think we have come to an area where ghosts live. The smell of ghosts is thick, and frightful screams can be heard.

The king was afraid and said to the driver in a terrified voice,

King:

Driver, we have taken a wrong path which is scary and hair-raising. We can see the road ahead, but there is no road behind us. I think we have come to an area where ghosts live. The smell of ghosts is thick, and frightful screams can be heard.

Suddenly, the king climbed up on the back of his elephant and looked carefully at the surrounding. He saw a huge banyan tree that provided lots of shade. It looked very beautiful, like a blue cloud.

King:

Driver, look at that! What is that huge thing that looks like a blue cloud?

Driver:

Great King, it is a banyan tree with lots of shade.

The king approached the huge banyan tree and climbed down off his elephant. He and his ministers went to the tree and sat down in the shade. There was a pot filled with water and some sweet oil cakes. Suddenly, a being wearing beautiful jewelry like a god appeared in front of the king and said,

Ghost:

Welcome great King. Your arrival is a blessing. Please drink this water and eat these cakes.

The king with his ministers ate the oil cakes and drank the water. He then questioned the person,

King:

Are you a god, a heavenly musician, or Sakka, leader of the gods? Please tell us who you are.

Ghost:

Great King, I am not a god or a heavenly musician or Sakka, leader of the gods. I am a ghost. I came here from the state of Surattha.

King:

When you were in the human world, what kind of good deeds did you do? How did you gain this divine power?

Ghost:

Listen to me, great King, ministers, and soldiers. I was an evil person from the state of Surattha. I held wrong view, behaved badly, and was very greedy. I insulted others. I

stopped people from doing good deeds. I did not let others practice generosity. I held the following wrong views:

There is no result of giving.

There is no result of following precepts.

There are no people called teachers in this world.

It is impossible for an untamed person to help others.

All beings are equal.

There is no point in respecting elders.

Nothing can be achieved by making effort.

There is no need to develop energy.

No one can be purified through good deeds.

Beings experience happiness and suffering due only to natural law.

One’s mother is not a special person. There is no need to be grateful and respect her.

One’s father is not a special person. There is no need to be grateful and respect him.

There is no such thing as a brother and sister.

There is no rebirth after death.

Supporting and helping others and collecting merits do not give result.

If someone beheads another, it does not count as killing. It is only putting a sword through the parts of a body.

The soul of life can never be destroyed. It is like a ball that is five hundred kilometers high. Just like a ball of thread unwinds itself when thrown, it will only keep rolling as long as there is thread. This life is also like that.

Just like somebody goes from one village to another or from one house to another, this soul goes from one body to another.

Regardless of whether one is wise or a fool, everyone has to wander in this samsara for eighty-four hundred thousand great eons. Only then would one end this great suffering. It is like the happiness and suffering of beings has been measured from a bucket. There is a limit of how much suffering and happiness a being can receive.

Only realized people understand these things, everyone else is deluded. I held such wrong views in the past. I was so deluded and covered by ignorance. I committed evil deeds, was very greedy, and insulted others.

Six months from now, I will die and fall to the fearful and terrible hell. That hell has four corners, four doors, and is divided into sections. It is encircled by an iron wall with a roof of iron above. It is covered by burning flames for hundreds of miles.

Great King, the complete lifespan of beings in that hell is one trillion (1,000,000,000,000) years. Once they have suffered one hundred thousand years, suddenly they hear a strange sound. This is how they know they have suffered for one hundred thousand years. People who held wrong views, committed evil deeds, and insulted noble ones are boiled in hell for one trillion years. I am destined to suffer in that hell.

That is why I am extremely sorrowful.

Great King—the one who overcomes his enemies and develops his kingdom—may my blessings be with you. Please listen to me great King. My daughter's name is Uttara, she is still in the human world. She protects the five precepts throughout her life and observes eight precepts four times a month. She is not greedy, but instead very generous. She offers alms and leads a very restrained life. She is very humble towards others and always uses pleasant words. Like this she does lots of meritorious deeds.

Most importantly, she is a lay disciple of the Sakyan sage, the glorious Gautama Supreme Buddha.

Just now a virtuous monk, mindful, with his eyes looking down approached the village where she lives. That monk was going from house to house begging for food. Great King, I am very fortunate that my daughter saw that monk. She offered some water and a sweet oil cake to the monk and dedicated the merit to me saying, "Bhante, my father has passed away. May he receive this merit." At that very moment, I received the result of that merit. Now I enjoy wonderful things here, just like Vessavana, the king of gods.

Great and powerful King, listen to me. In this world with its gods, the greatest being is the Supreme Buddha. You, along with your wife and children, should go for refuge to the Supreme Buddha. The Noble Eightfold Path is the only way leading to Nibbana, the end of suffering. You should go for refuge to the Dhamma. The community of monks is very virtuous, well concentrated, and wise. They are the disciples of the Buddha. The Sangha consists of eight individuals and four pairs of persons. Go for refuge to that Sangha.

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

King:

Yes, I will take refuge in the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha right now, and place confidence in the Triple Gem. I will stop killing beings right now, I will stop stealing, I will not take intoxicating drinks and drugs, I will not tell lies, and I will be satisfied with my own wife.

Just as hay is carried away by strong wind and grass is carried away by the current of a stream, I vomit up my wrong views right away. I have true confidence in the teachings of the Buddha.

Saying this, the king stopped doing bad deeds. He worshipped the Supreme Buddha, got on to his carriage, and headed east towards his kingdom.