Snp 3.11 — Nālaka Sutta — To Nālaka

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Text

Snp. 3.11

Nālaka Sutta

“To Nālaka”

679. While secluded in his morning meditation, the sage Asita saw the luminescence of Sakka’s retinue of Thirty- Three Gods; joyful in their veneration of Indra, the King of the Gods, their Lord, rejoicing as they did, dressed in brilliantly colorful divine outfits, jubilantly waving their banners in celebration.

680. Witnessing the Devas in such a rejoicing mood, Asita the sage, once having paid his homage to them, began to ask in his heart:

‘Why are the Devas especially happy and pleased today? I wonder what the reason for all this celebratory jubilation might be, as they wave their divine banners.’

681. “‘After all, even during the legendary war between the Devas and asuras, when the Gods achieved their hard-won victory against the demigods, there wasn’t this much excitement or celebration in the air! I wonder what the cause for such hair- raisingly joyful cheers could be, that today keeps pouring out from the heavenly realm of the Thirty-Three.’

682. “‘They cheer and chant with such delight! Whistling, singing, and playing their divine musical instruments, clamping cymbals together as they dance!’

“So, I ask You who live at the summit of Mount Meru, O! Good Sirs! Please help me quickly clear up my confusion about this matter."

683. Then, the Devas of the Thirty-Three spoke to him by saying:

“‘That Unsurpassable Noble Gem, aspiring Supreme Awakening for the welfare and benefit of all beings everywhere, is now born among you, human beings! What a treasure and

honor for you humans, for He is now reborn in the village of the Sākyans, in the state of Lumbini. It is because of this that we are celebrating! Therefore, we are exceedingly happy and joyful!'

684. '"He is indeed The Most Noble of beings, the Chief Bull among Men, the Supreme Leader in all of existence. Like the powerful lion subduing all wild animals and beasts with His earth-shaking cry, He will roar in the jungle of wise sages, as He sets the Wheel of Dhamma in motion.'

685. On hearing this, Asita quickly turned away and came down, and went straight to the palace of King Suddhodana. There he stood and called out to the Sākyan warriors:

"Where is the young Prince? I very much want to see Him!"

686. The Sākyans then swiftly brought him the young prince, whose polished skin shone brilliantly like gold in a crucible, splendid in its purity and glory, of perfect color.

687. On seeing the Prince shining with the iridescence of a peacock, pure as the Full Moon shines in the darkness of night, blazing through the clouds like the resplendent Sun that is released from the clouds after the rains, suddenly his palpitating heart became pleased, now full of unimaginable joy.

688. Meanwhile, the Devas were holding up parasols above the child; umbrellas of various spurs and boughs, with thousandfold rims, were held up in the air. There were golden handled yak-tail whisks moving about gently in the air, protecting the young Prince, yet those holding the whisks and parasols, were not to be seen.

689. Then, the sage who is also known as the matted hair Kaṇhasiri, on witnessing the little child shining bright like a pure gold nugget on a maroon colored blanket, with a white parasol kept over His head, reached out with his worshipfully adoring fingers, and received Him into his arms, and into his gladdened heart…

690. Having accepted the small child, and holding with his own hands the Giant of all Sākyans, then, the grandmaster of the Vedas himself, the fervent seeker of truth, the expert in identifying the marks of the Great Man, quickly and inquisitively began looking for those excellent marks on the child, until abruptly, he lifted his tearful gaze and with a joyful cry declared:

"No one is Superior to You! You, who among all beings two-footed, are Their Incomparably Supreme!"

This, Asita did, as he worshipped the young Prince, with utter respect and devoted reverence.

691. But then, realizing that he would soon be leaving his aged physical body, the sage suddenly became quiet, and sorrowful tears began rolling down his face. On seeing him

cry without saying a word, the Sākyans began asking:

“Master, is there any danger or threat you see befalling our prince?”

692. Noticing the worried Sākyans, the sage quickly remarked:

“No, householders! I do not see any danger befalling the Prince! There will be no threats or terrors for Him in the future either, not in the slightest! So, please do not fret or worry, for He is The Supreme among all living beings!

693. “The Prince will attain the Highest Awakening! And with the Noble Purity He will realize in His heart, He will set the Wheel of the Dhamma in motion yet again, out of His Great Compassion for the wellbeing and happiness for all beings, everywhere! He will be known far and wide; for under Him the Holy Life will be truly and successfully lived!”

694. “But, I cry these tears, because I know that very little of my life span is now left. I cry these tears, because I will not live long enough to witness Him teach the Sweet Dhamma, which my heart so desperately longs to hear. Thus, being troubled with sadness and overwhelmed with grief, my heart hurts due to its

disarray and misery in being unable to attend to the words spoken by the Peerless One, for I will be long gone by then.”

695. Having brought much joy and delight to the Sākyans, the sage left the royal palace and walked straight to his sister’s home, where with much compassion for his nephew, he instilled a sense of urgency in his heart, encouraging him to begin training in the Holy Life, in preparation for the sweet Dhamma to be available one day by the Peerless Leader of Men.

696. “Pay especial heed, for when you hear the words, “Buddha” or “A Fully Self-Awakened One has now appeared in the world, who having revealed The True Dhamma, is now teaching it to the world…” Then, immediately leave everything and rush towards that Peerless Teacher and beg Him to teach you the Dhamma!

“And as He teaches you, follow Him with all your heart, with the utmost trust and confidence! That way, as you go forth under The Blessed One, surely you will attain the Highest Goal of The Holy Life!”

697. Then, having been advised out of compassion and with such loving care by his uncle, the sage, who realized with absolute certainty the purity of the Highest Awakening that will be available for all in the future, Nālaka, the nephew, made the utmost use of his accumulated merits from lives past, as he began purifying himself; training diligently in the restraint of his sense faculties, patiently waiting for the news of the appearance of the Buddha, who would finally set the Wheel of Dhamma in motion.

698. And when he heard the sound that the Conqueror of the Three Worlds had set The Noble Wheel of Dhamma in motion, he quickly rushed to see the Peerless One, the Leader of all sages. There, his heart suddenly became gladdened with joy, knowing full-well that the prediction of his uncle, Asita the sage, had now come true!

And, as advised by his kin, the wise old sage, years earlier, Nālaka addressed The Blessed One in verse:

699. “I now see the validity of the words I once heard uttered directly from the lips of Asita, for they have been realized. Therefore, I have come to ask You a question, O! Gautama, who has gone beyond all things.

700. “Having gone from home life into homelessness, being supported by the alms food I collect by wandering, please tell me, O! Sage, what is the Path of Wisdom, one must train in to reach the highest moral perfection of the Holy Life?”

701. And The Blessed One said:

“I shall instruct you on the Path of Wisdom one must train in to reach the highest moral perfection of the Holy Life; the Path of Practice that demands fervent perseverance, for it is so hard to develop, and difficult to endure. But do not fret! Come, and I will teach you. You must stay strong and unrelenting!

702. “You need to cultivate equanimity when you walk into the village, for you will come across those who revile you, while others may offer you praise and respect. Whatever the case may be, you must protect the mind from thoughts of

aggression and resentment, as you move about appeased and in peace, without arrogance or conceit.

703. “With things being unpredictable, the mind may experience many ‘high’-s and ‘low’-s, much like flames in a forest fire; when women trying to seduce sages attempt their charms on you, do not let yourself be seduced by them!

704. “Reject completely any kind of sexual behavior, giving up all types of sensual stimulation, whether for this or any other world. Do not hold any aversive or hostile attitude nor passionate devotion toward things, be they living or not.

705. “‘Just as I am, so are they; just as they are, so am I.’ By considering the importance of others and treating them the way you yourself would like to be treated, you should neither kill nor instigate others to kill.

706. “By abandoning both longing and greed for the things that ordinary beings are attached to and soiled by, the person with clear vision will continue, undeterred in his Path of Practice that takes him across and over the realms of hell.

707. “Being satisfied with an empty stomach, while being moderate in consuming food, living with few desires, one is no more covetous. Free of desires, remaining hunger-less towards experiences, one becomes fully quenched by ‘putting out the fire.’

708. “Having gone for the daily alms round, on his return, he retires into a secluded grove or at the end of the forest; sitting at the root of a tree, the sage should prepare a seat for himself, and sit.

709. “In this way, the one steadying the mind attains to jhāna, and enjoys being there in seclusion, within the forest. Meditating thus, while seated at the root of a tree, one is filled with delight.

710. “Later, when the last watch of the night has passed, one carries oneself quietly back to the village, but he does so not with excitement, neither seeking companionship nor taking pleasure in wandering for food, nor rejoicing when offered a meal by householders.

711. “And when having arrived at the village, the sage does not rush inconsiderably to families, in quest for alms food. He is mindfully present, without engaging in conversations; he would not utter a single word, for he does not have any ulterior motives other than to simply be there to quietly collect his sustenance of food, and then, just leave.

712. “‘I received something today: that’s good. I didn’t receive anything: that’s alright, too.’ In either case, it is the same for him, for he will end up only going back to the very same tree again, to sit at its roots.

713. “Wandering with bowl in hand, to those with wrong view looking upon him, he may be seen as lazy or dumb, but he would be neither. He is neither disdainful towards small gifts, nor looking down or scornful of the ones offering small gifts.

714. “The Path of Practice is explained in different ways by the Versatile Sage, so to fit the capacity of the listener, to help them reach the Goal. One does not cross the flood twice, for

once having attained, none can fall back from the True Freedom attained.

715. “For the Bhikkhu who has cut across the stream, there can be no more clinging, since there is no more any need for things to be done, or for things to be abandoned, because both are redundant, now that he has left them all behind. Thus, he suffers no more.

716. “I shall instruct you on the Path of Wisdom one must train in to reach the highest moral perfection of the Holy Life. The Path of Practice requires you to ‘become one who has the simile of the razor blade in mind.’ So, every time you put a morsel of food in your mouth, practice as if you are licking a razor blade that is smeared with honey!

717. “Neither have a contracted or sluggish mind, nor allow the mind to become restless or be lost in activity. Maintain purity of the heart; always making sure you are unattached to

whatever is taking place, and just keep your focus on living the Holy Life, all the way to its completion.

718. “Keep training yourself in this Path of Practice, while appreciating the role of seclusion, without losing consideration and care for the other dedicated practitioners on the Path. Do not forget, ‘the Path of Wisdom is ultimately a personal path,’ it is said. But do not fret, for once you learn to enjoy fully the seclusion it brings, your light will beam throughout all the ten directions!

719. “Once having received the teaching from the wise, meditators seek out seclusion, giving up sensual stimulation, as they become collected. It is in this manner that my students train, dedicating themselves every day to the fervent development of their faith and wise moral shame.

720. “You must learn this by looking at how water flows through holes, fissures, and crevices as it forms into rivers. Then you will understand the difference between shallow streams or creeks, where water flows with such boisterous noise, whereas in the great rivers and oceans, it flows undetected, silently.

721. “Remember, that which is empty makes a lot of noise, while the ones that are complete, remain silent and at peace. The fool is like a half-full pot, but the wise are as deep lakes, filled to the brim.

722. “When the Recluse speaks much, uttering words full of meaning and depth, it is because He must teach the Dhamma to those eager to listen; the Dhamma that He Himself has personally come to know, realizing it directly.

723. “And when the one who has come to understand the Dhamma with its depth of meaning, no longer has much left to say, he remains quiet, for he is the sage who has completed his Training in the Path of Wisdom, and has now reached the highest moral perfection of the Holy Life.

Thus, he has become a sage.”