Thag 16.3 — Telakāni

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Text

Verses of the Senior Monks 16.3

The Book of the Twenties

Chapter One

Telakāni

For a long time, sadly,

though I keenly contemplated the teaching,

I gained no peace of mind.

So I asked this of ascetics and brahmins:

“Who in the world have crossed over?

Whose attainment has freedom from death as its objective?

Whose teaching do I accept

to understand the ultimate goal?

I was hooked inside,

like a fish gulping bait;

bound like the titan Vepaciti

in Mahinda’s trap.

Dragging it along, I’m not free

from grief and lamentation.

Who will free me from bonds in the world,

so that I may know awakening?

What ascetic or brahmin

points out what is frail?

Whose teaching do I accept

to rinse off old age and death?
Tied up with uncertainty and doubt,
secured by the power of aggression,
stiff as a mind beset by anger;
the arrow of covetousness,
propelled by the bow of craving,
is stuck in my twice-fifteen ribcage—
see how it stands in my breast,
breaking my strong heart.
Theories are not abandoned,
they are sharpened by memories and intentions;
and pierced by this I tremble,
like a leaf blowing in the gale.
Having arisen within,
what belongs to me burns quickly,
in that place where the body always heads
with its six sense-fields of contact.
I don't see a healer
who can pull out my dart of doubt
without a lance
or some other blade.
Without knife or wound,
who will pull out this dart
that's stuck inside me,
without harming any part of my body?
He really would be the Lord of the Dhamma,
the best one to cure the damage of poison;
when I have fallen into deep waters,
he would show me his hand and the shore.

I've plunged into a lake,
and I can't wash off the mud and dirt.
It's full of deceit, jealousy, aggression,
and dullness and drowsiness.
Like a thundering cloud of restlessness,
like a stormcloud of fetters;
lustful thoughts are winds
that sweep off a person with bad views.
The streams flow everywhere;
a weed springs up and remains.
Who will block the streams?
Who will cut the weed?"
"Venerable sir, build a dam
to block the streams.
Don't let your mind-made streams
cut you down suddenly like a tree."
That is how, when I was full of fear,
seeking the far shore from the near,
my shelter was the Teacher whose weapon is wisdom,
frequented by the Saṅgha of seers.
As I was being swept away,
he gave me a strong, simple ladder,
made of the heartwood of Dhamma,
and he said to me: "Do not fear."
I climbed the tower of mindfulness meditation,
and checked back down
at people delighting in substantial reality,
as I had obsessed over in the past.
When I saw the path,

as I was embarking on the ship,

without fixating on the self,

I saw the supreme landing-place.

The dart that arises in oneself,

and that which stems from the leash to existence:

he taught the supreme path

for the canceling of these.

For a long time it had lain within me;

for a long time it was fixed in me:

the Buddha cast aside the knot,

curing the damage of poison.