Ud 4.5 — Nāga Sutta: The Bull Elephant

English translation by Thanissaro Bhikkhu.

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Changes: Presentation only: original HTML markup reflowed into plain text; wording, numbering and source repetitions retained. No repetitions expanded.

Completeness: ABBREVIATED. Every source-unit character is preserved, including introductions, notes and verse structure. Thanissaro's collection-level note explicitly states that repetitions were cut: https://www.dhammatalks.org/suttas/about.html. This is evidence about the translation method, not an assertion that every individual unit contains an omission; no repetitions reconstructed.

Text

I have heard that on one occasion the Blessed One was staying near Kosambī at Kosita's monastery. And on that occasion the Blessed One lived hemmed in with monks, nuns, male & female lay followers, kings, royal ministers, sectarians, & their disciples. Hemmed in, he lived unpleasantly and not in ease. The thought occurred to him: "I now live hemmed in by monks, nuns, male & female lay followers, kings, royal ministers, sectarians, & their disciples. Hemmed in, I live unpleasantly and not in ease. What if I were to live alone, apart from the crowd?"

So, early in the morning, the Blessed One adjusted his under robe and — carrying his bowl & robes — went into Kosambī for alms. Then, having gone for alms in Kosambī, after the meal, returning from his alms round, he set his own lodgings in order and, carrying his bowl & robes, without telling his attendant, without informing the community of monks — alone & without a companion — left on a wandering tour toward Palileyyaka. After wandering by stages, he reached Palileyyaka. There he stayed in Palileyyaka in the protected forest grove at the root of the auspicious sal tree.

It so happened that a certain bull elephant was living hemmed in by elephants, cow-elephants, calf-elephants, & baby elephants. He fed off grass with cut-off tips. They

chewed up his stash of broken-off branches. He drank disturbed water. And when he came up from his bathing-place, cow-elephants went along, banging up against his body. Hemmed in, he lived unpleasantly and not in ease. The thought occurred to him: "I now live hemmed in by elephants, cow-elephants, calf-elephants, & baby elephants. I feed off grass with cut-off tips. They chew up my stash of broken-off branches. I drink disturbed water. And when I come up from my bathing place, cow-elephants go along, banging up against my body. Hemmed in, I live unpleasantly and not in ease. What if I were to live alone, apart from the crowd?"

So the bull elephant, leaving the herd, went to Palileyyaka, to the protected forest grove and the root of the auspicious sal tree — to where the Blessed One was staying. There he kept the grass down in the area where the Blessed One was staying, and brought drinking water and washing water for the Blessed One with his trunk.

Then, when the Blessed One was alone in seclusion, this train of thought appeared to his awareness: "Before, I lived hemmed in by monks, nuns, male & female lay followers, kings, royal ministers, sectarians, & their disciples. Hemmed in, I lived unpleasantly and not in ease. But now I live not hemmed in by monks, nuns, male & female lay followers, kings, royal ministers, sectarians, & their disciples. Not hemmed in, I live pleasantly and in ease."

And this train of thought appeared to the awareness of the bull elephant, "Before, I lived hemmed in by elephants, cow-elephants, calf-elephants, & baby elephants. I fed off grass with cut-off tips. They chewed up my stash of broken-off branches. I drank disturbed water. And when I came up from my bathing place, cow-elephants went along, banging up against my body. Hemmed in, I lived unpleasantly and not in ease. But now I live not hemmed in by elephants, cow-elephants, calf-elephants, & baby elephants. I feed off grass with uncut tips. They don't chew up my stash of broken-off branches. I drink undisturbed water. When I come up from my bathing place, cow-elephants don't go along, banging up against my body. Not hemmed in, I live pleasantly and in ease."[1]

Then the Blessed One, realizing his own seclusion and knowing the train of thought in the bull elephant's awareness, on that occasion exclaimed:

This harmonizes mind with mind — the great one's with the great one's[2] — the elephant with tusks like chariot poles: that each finds joy, alone, in the forest.

Note

1.

Mv.X.4.6-7 places the story of the elephant's service to the Buddha in the context of the quarrel at Kosambī, but the details of how the Buddha left Kosambī given in Mv.X.3 are different.

2.

Great one = nāga. This term can mean magical serpent or large elephant, and is often used as an epithet for an arahant.

See also: AN 9.40.