Ud 5.3 — Ud 5:3 The Leper | Kuṭṭhi Sutta

English translation by Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu.

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Text

Ud 5:3 The Leper (Kuṭṭhi Sutta)

I have heard that on one occasion the Blessed One was staying near Rājagaha at the Bamboo Forest, the Squirrels’ Sanctuary. And on that occasion in Rājagaha there was a leper named Suppabuddha, a poor, pitiful wretch of a person. And on that occasion the Blessed One was sitting surrounded by a large assembly, teaching the Dhamma. Suppabuddha the leper saw the large gathering of people from afar and thought to himself, “Without a doubt, someone must be distributing staple or non-staple food there. Why don’t I go over to that large group of people, and maybe there I’ll get some staple or non-staple food.” So he went over to the large group of people. Then he saw the Blessed One sitting surrounded by a large assembly, teaching the Dhamma. On seeing this, he realized, “There’s no one distributing staple or non-staple food there. That’s Gotama the contemplative (sitting) surrounded, teaching the Dhamma. Why don’t I listen to the

Dhamma?" So he sat down to one side right there, [thinking,] "I, too, will listen to the Dhamma."

Then the Blessed One, having encompassed the awareness of the entire assembly with his awareness, asked himself, "Now who here is capable of understanding the Dhamma?" He saw Suppabuddha the leper sitting in the assembly, and on seeing him the thought occurred to him, "This person here is capable of understanding the Dhamma." So, aiming at Suppabuddha the leper, he gave a step-by-step talk, i.e., he proclaimed a talk on generosity, on virtue, on heaven; he declared the drawbacks, degradation, & corruption of sensuality, and the rewards of renunciation. Then when the Blessed One knew that Suppabuddha the leper's mind was ready, malleable, free from hindrances, elevated, & clear, he then gave the Dhamma-talk peculiar to Awakened Ones, i.e., stress, origination, cessation, & path. And just as a clean cloth, free of stains, would properly absorb a dye, in the same way, as Suppabuddha the leper was sitting in that very seat, the dustless, stainless Dhamma eye arose within him, "Whatever is subject to origination is all subject to cessation."

Having seen the Dhamma, reached the Dhamma, known the Dhamma, gained a foothold in the Dhamma, having crossed over & beyond doubt, having had no more perplexity, having gained fearlessness & independence from others with regard to the Teacher's message, he got up from his seat and went to the Blessed One. On arrival, having bowed down to the Blessed One, he sat to one side. As he was sitting there he said to the Blessed One, "Magnificent, lord! Magnificent! Just as if he were to place upright what was overturned, to reveal what was hidden, to show the way to one who was lost, or to carry a lamp into the dark so that those with eyes could see forms, in the same way has the Blessed One–through many lines of reasoning–made the Dhamma clear. I go to the Blessed One for refuge, to the Dhamma, and to the Community of monks. May the Blessed One remember me as a lay follower who has gone to him for refuge, from this day forward, for life."

Then Suppabuddha the leper, having been instructed, urged, roused, & encouraged by the Blessed One's Dhamma talk, delighting in & approving of the Blessed One's words, got up from his seat, bowed down to the Blessed One and left, circling him to the right. Not long after his departure he was attacked & killed by a cow with a young calf.

Then a large number of monks went to the Blessed One and, on arrival, having bowed down to him, sat to one side. As they were sitting there, they said to the Blessed One, "Lord, the leper named Suppabuddha, whom the Blessed One instructed, urged, roused, & encouraged with a Dhamma talk, has died. What is his destination? What is his future state?"

"Monks, Suppabuddha the leper was wise. He practiced the Dhamma in accordance with the Dhamma and did not pester me with issues related to the Dhamma. With the destruction of the first three fetters, he is a stream-winner, not subject to states of deprivation, headed for self-awakening for sure."

When this was said, one of the monks said to the Blessed One, "Lord, what was the cause, what was the reason, why Suppabuddha the leper was such a poor, pitiful wretch of a person?"

"Once, monks, in this very Rājagaha, Suppabuddha the leper was the son of a rich money-lender. While being escorted to a pleasure park, he saw Tagarasikhin the Private Buddha1 going for alms in the city. On seeing him, the thought occurred to him, 'Who is this leper prowling about?' Spitting and disrespectfully turning his left side to Tagarasikhin the Private Buddha, he left. As a result of that deed he boiled in hell for many years, many hundreds of years, many thousands of years, many hundreds of thousands of years. And then as a remainder of the result of that deed he became a poor, pitiful wretch of a person in this very Rājagaha. But on encountering the Dhamma & Vinaya made known by the Tathāgata, he acquired conviction, virtue, learning, relinquishment, & discernment. Having acquired conviction, virtue, learning, relinquishment, & discernment on encountering the Dhamma & Vinaya made known by the Tathāgata, now–on the break-up of the body, after death–he has reappeared in a good destination, a heavenly world, in company with the Devas of the Heaven of the Thirty-three. There he outshines the other devas both in beauty & in rank."

Then, on realizing the significance of that, the Blessed One on that occasion exclaimed:

As one with eyes & having energy

would

treacherous, uneven places,

so a wise one, in the world of life,

should

avoid

evil deeds.2

Notes

1. A Private Buddha is one who gains awakening without relying on the teachings of others, but who cannot formulate the Dhamma to teach others in the way a Full Buddha can.

2. This verse is an example of a "lamp"–a poetic figure explained in the note to Ud 1:3. In this case the lamp-word is "would/should avoid."

Publisher references (not part of the sutta)

See also: SN 3:19; SN 11:14