MN 24 — MN 24 Relay Chariots | Ratha-vinīta Sutta

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Text

Relay Chariots

Ratha-vinīta Sutta (MN 24)

I have heard that on one occasion the Blessed One was staying near Rājagaha in the Bamboo Forest, the Squirrels’ Sanctuary. Then a number of monks from the (Blessed One’s) native land, having completed the Rains Retreat in the native land, went to the Blessed One and, on arrival, having bowed down to him, sat to one side.

As they were sitting there, the Blessed One said to them, “Monks, whom in our native land do the native-land monks—his companions in the holy life—esteem in this way: ‘Modest himself, he gives talks to the monks on modesty. Contented himself, he gives talks to the monks on contentment. Secluded himself, he gives talks to the monks on seclusion.

Unentangled himself, he gives talks to the monks on non-entanglement. Having aroused persistence in himself, he gives talks to the monks on arousing persistence. Consummate in his own virtue, he gives talks to the monks on becoming consummate in virtue. Consummate in his own concentration, he gives talks to the monks on becoming consummate in concentration. Consummate in his own discernment, he gives talks to the monks on becoming consummate in discernment. Consummate in his own release, he gives talks to the monks on becoming consummate in release. Consummate in his own knowledge & vision of release, he gives talks to the monks on becoming consummate in the knowledge & vision of release.1 He is one who exhorts, informs, instructs, urges, rouses, & encourages his companions in the holy life.'"

"Lord, the monk named Puṇṇa Mantāṇiputta [Mantāṇi's son] is esteemed by the native-land monks—his companions in the holy life—in this way: 'Modest himself, he gives talks to the monks on modesty. Contented himself, he gives talks to the monks on contentment. Secluded himself, he gives talks to the monks on seclusion. Unentangled himself, he gives talks to the monks on non-entanglement. Having aroused persistence in himself, he gives talks to the monks on arousing persistence. Consummate in his own virtue, he gives talks to the monks on becoming consummate in virtue. Consummate in his own concentration, he gives talks to the monks on becoming consummate in concentration. Consummate in his own discernment, he gives talks to the monks on becoming consummate in discernment. Consummate in his own release, he gives talks to the monks on becoming consummate in release. Consummate in his own knowledge & vision of release, he gives talks to the monks on becoming consummate in the knowledge & vision of release. He is one who exhorts, informs, instructs, urges, rouses, & encourages his companions in the holy life.'"

Now at that time Ven. Sāriputta was sitting not far from the Blessed One. The thought occurred to him: "It's a gain, a great gain for Ven. Puṇṇa Mantāṇiputta that his observant companions in the holy life speak his praise point by point in the presence of the Teacher, and that the Teacher seconds that praise. Maybe sometime or other I, too, will go to meet with Ven. Puṇṇa Mantāṇiputta; maybe I'll have some conversation with him."

Then the Blessed One, having stayed at Rājagaha as long as he liked, set out wandering to Sāvatthī. Wandering by stages, he arrived there and stayed in Jeta's Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika's monastery. Ven. Puṇṇa Mantāṇiputta heard, "The Blessed One has arrived at Sāvatthī and is staying near Sāvatthī in Jeta's Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika's monastery." Setting his lodgings in order and taking his robes & bowl, he set out wandering to Sāvatthī. Wandering by stages, he went to where the Blessed One was staying in Jeta's Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika's monastery. On arrival, having bowed down to the Blessed One, he sat to one side. As he was sitting there, the Blessed One instructed, urged, roused, & encouraged him with a Dhamma talk. Then Ven. Puṇṇa—instructed, urged, roused, & encouraged with the Blessed One's Dhamma talk; delighting & approving of the Blessed One's words—got up from his seat, bowed down to the Blessed One, circumambulated him, and went to the Grove of the Blind for the day's abiding.

Then a certain monk went to Ven. Sāriputta and, on arrival, said to him: "Friend Sāriputta, the monk named Puṇṇa Mantāṇiputta whom you have so often praised—instructed, urged, roused, & encouraged with the Blessed One's Dhamma talk; delighting & approving of the Blessed One's words—has gotten up from his seat, bowed down to the Blessed One, circumambulated him, and has gone to the Grove of the Blind for the day's abiding." So Ven. Sāriputta quickly picked up a sitting cloth and followed right behind Ven. Puṇṇa, keeping his head in sight. Ven. Puṇṇa plunged into the Grove of the Blind and sat down in the shade of a tree for the day's abiding. Ven. Sāriputta also plunged into the Grove of the Blind and sat down in the shade of a tree for the day's abiding.

Then Ven. Sāriputta emerged from his seclusion in the evening and went to Ven. Puṇṇa. On arrival, he exchanged courteous greetings with him. After an exchange of friendly greetings & courtesies, he sat to one side. As he was sitting there, he said to Ven. Puṇṇa, "My friend, is the holy life lived under the Blessed One?"

"Yes, my friend."

"And is the holy life lived under the Blessed One for the sake of purity in terms of virtue?"2

"No, my friend."

"Then is the holy life lived under the Blessed One for the sake of purity in terms of mind [concentration]?"

"No, my friend."

"Then is the holy life lived under the Blessed One for the sake of purity in terms of view?"

"No, my friend."

"Then is the holy life lived under the Blessed One for the sake of purity in terms of the overcoming of perplexity?"

"No, my friend."

"Then is the holy life lived under the Blessed One for the sake of purity in terms of knowledge & vision of what is & is not the path?"

"No, my friend."

"Then is the holy life lived under the Blessed One for the sake of purity in terms of knowledge & vision of the way?"

"No, my friend."

"Then is the holy life lived under the Blessed One for the sake of purity in terms of knowledge & vision?"

“No, my friend.”

“When asked if the holy life is lived under the Blessed One for the sake of purity in terms of virtue, you say, ‘No, my friend.’ When asked if the holy life is lived under the Blessed One for the sake of purity in terms of mind… view… the overcoming of perplexity… knowledge & vision of what is & is not the path… knowledge & vision of the way… knowledge & vision, you say, ‘No, my friend.’ For the sake of what, then, my friend, is the holy life lived under the Blessed One?”

“The holy life is lived under the Blessed One, my friend, for the sake of total unbinding through lack of clinging.”3

“But is purity in terms of virtue total unbinding through lack of clinging?”

“No, my friend.”

“Then is purity in terms of mind… view… the overcoming of perplexity… knowledge & vision of what is & is not the path… knowledge & vision of the way… knowledge & vision total unbinding through lack of clinging?”

“No, my friend.”

“Then is total unbinding through lack of clinging something apart from these qualities?”

“No, my friend.”

“When asked if purity in terms of virtue… mind… view… the overcoming of perplexity… knowledge & vision of what is & is not the path… knowledge & vision of the way… knowledge & vision is total unbinding through lack of clinging, you say, ‘No, my friend.’ But when asked if total unbinding through lack of clinging is something apart from these qualities, you say, ‘No, my friend.’ Now how, my friend, is the meaning of these statements to be understood?”

“If the Blessed One had described purity in terms of virtue as total unbinding through lack of clinging, my friend, then he would have defined something still accompanied by clinging as total unbinding through lack of clinging. If he had described purity in terms of mind… view… the overcoming of perplexity… knowledge & vision of what is & is not the path… knowledge & vision of the way… knowledge & vision as total unbinding through lack of clinging, then he would have defined something still accompanied by clinging as total unbinding through lack of clinging. But if total unbinding through lack of clinging were apart from these qualities, then a run-of-the-mill person would be totally unbound, inasmuch as a run-of-the-mill person is apart from these qualities.

“So, my friend, I will give you an analogy, for there are cases where it’s through analogies that observant people can understand the meaning of what is being said. Suppose that while King Pasenadi Kosala was staying at Sāvatthī, some urgent business were to arise at

Sāketa; and that between Sāvatthī and Sāketa seven relay chariots were made ready for him. Coming out the door of the inner palace in Sāvatthī, he would get in the first relay chariot. By means of the first relay chariot he would reach the second relay chariot. Getting out of the first relay chariot he would get in the second relay chariot. By means of the second relay chariot he would reach the third… by means of the third he would reach the fourth… by means of the fourth, the fifth… by means of the fifth, the sixth… by means of the sixth he would reach the seventh relay chariot. Getting out of the sixth relay chariot he would get in the seventh relay chariot. By means of the seventh relay chariot he would finally arrive at the door of the inner palace at Sāketa. As he arrived there, his friends & companions, relatives & kin would ask him, 'Great king, did you come from Sāvatthī to the door of the inner palace in Sāketa by means of this chariot?' Answering in what way, my friend, would King Pasenadi Kosala answer them correctly?"

"Answering in this way, my friend, he would answer them correctly: 'Just now, as I was staying at Sāvatthī, some urgent business arose at Sāketa; and between Sāvatthī and Sāketa seven relay chariots were made ready for me. Coming out the door of the inner palace in Sāvatthī, I got in the first relay chariot. By means of the first relay chariot I reached the second relay chariot. Getting out of the first relay chariot I got in the second relay chariot. By means of the second relay chariot I reached the third… by means of the third I reached the fourth… by means of the fourth, the fifth… by means of the fifth, the sixth… by means of the sixth I reached the seventh relay chariot. Getting out of the sixth relay chariot I got in the seventh relay chariot. By means of the seventh relay chariot I finally arrived at the door of the inner palace at Sāketa.' Answering in this way, he would answer them correctly."

"In the same way, my friend, purity in terms of virtue is simply for the sake of purity in terms of mind. Purity in terms of mind is simply for the sake of purity in terms of view. Purity in terms of view is simply for the sake of purity in terms of the overcoming of perplexity. Purity in terms of the overcoming of perplexity is simply for the sake of purity in terms of knowledge & vision of what is & is not the path. Purity in terms of knowledge & vision of what is & is not the path is simply for the sake of purity in terms of knowledge & vision of the way. Purity in terms of knowledge & vision of the way is simply for the sake of purity in terms of knowledge & vision. Purity in terms of knowledge & vision is simply for the sake of total unbinding through lack of clinging. And it's for the sake of total unbinding through lack of clinging that the holy life is lived under the Blessed One."

When this was said, Ven. Sāriputta said to Ven. Puṇṇa Mantāṇiputta: "What is your name, friend, and how do your companions in the holy life know you?"

"My name is Puṇṇa, friend, and my companions in the holy life know me as Mantāṇiputta."

"How amazing, my friend, how astounding, that Ven. Puṇṇa Mantāṇiputta has answered point by point with profound, profound discernment in the manner of a learned disciple who has rightly understood the Teacher's message! It's a gain, a great gain, for any of his companions in the holy life who get to see him and visit with him. Even if they had to carry him around on a cushion placed on top of their heads in order to see him and visit with

him, it would be a gain for them, a great gain. And the fact that I have gotten to see him and visit with him has been a gain, a great gain for me."

When this was said, Ven. Puṇṇa said to Ven. Sāriputta: "And what is your name, friend, and how do your companions in the holy life know you?"

"My name is Upatissa, friend, and my companions in the holy life know me as Sāriputta."

"What? I've been talking with the disciple who is like the Teacher himself without knowing that it is Ven. Sāriputta? Had I known it was Ven. Sāriputta, I wouldn't have answered at such length. How amazing, my friend, how astounding, that Ven. Sāriputta has questioned point by point with profound, profound discernment in the manner of a learned disciple who has rightly understood the Teacher's message! It's a gain, a great gain, for any of his companions in the holy life who get to see him and visit with him. Even if they had to carry him around on a cushion placed on top of their heads in order to see him and visit with him, it would be a gain for them, a great gain. And the fact that I have gotten to see him and visit with him has been a gain, a great gain for me."

In this way did both great beings rejoice in each other's good words.

Notes

1. See AN 10:69

2. Ven. Sāriputta and Ven. Puṇṇa speak of this list of seven purities—purity in terms of virtue, mind, view, the overcoming of perplexity, knowledge & vision of what is & is not the path, knowledge & vision of the way, and knowledge & vision—as if it were a teaching familiar to both of them, and yet nowhere else is it mentioned as a Buddhist teaching in the discourses. The Aṭṭhaka Vagga (Sn 4), however, mentions various non-Buddhist sectarians who spoke of purity as the goal of their teaching and who variously defined that purity in terms of virtue, view, knowledge, & practice. Perhaps the seven types of purity listed in this discourse were originally non-Buddhist teachings that were adopted by the early Buddhist community and adapted to their own purpose for showing that these seven forms of purity functioned not as a goal of practice but as stages along the path to that goal. At any rate, this list of the seven purities formed the framework for Buddhaghosa's Visuddhimagga (The Path of Purity), the cornerstone of his Pali commentaries, in which the seven purities cover all three parts of the threefold training in virtue, concentration, & discernment.

3. Anupādā-parinibbāna. The Commentary gives two interpretations of this term, both of them equating anupādā with anupādāna (without upādāna). The first, taking upādāna as clinging, is total unbinding through lack of clinging. This, it says, refers to the fact that total unbinding follows on the fruit of arahantship, which is devoid of clinging. The other meaning, taking upādāna as sustenance, is total unbinding with no sustenance. This, it says, refers to the fact that total unbinding is independent of any condition. For an explanation of these meanings of the word upādāna, see The Mind Like Fire Unbound,

chapter 3.

Publisher references (not part of the sutta)

See also: AN 9:13; Sn 4:4; Sn 4:9