

MN 37
Majjhima Nikāya
The Middle Length Discourses

Cūḷa Taṇhāsaṅkhaya Sutta
“Shorter Discourse on the Destruction of Craving”

Translated by Bhikkhu Candana

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I have personally heard this.

At one time, while The Blessed One was living in Sāvatti’s Pubba Monastery, at the palace of Migāra’s mother, Sakka the King of the Devas approached, and after paying homage by respectfully worshipping and bowing down to The Blessed One, he stood to one side and said:

“Bhante, is there a brief and encapsulating instruction, a concise and well-defined teaching that can be easily discerned, and with the help of which, a Bhikkhu, following it closely, gets liberated through the destruction of craving? And once having won the highest goal of the Holy Life, that is freedom from bondage, Bhante, how could such a Bhikkhu, once and for all, come to be recognized as Truly Supreme among both Devas and humans?”

“Yes, indeed, O Lord of Devas!

“Here, the Bhikkhu ponders that ‘*nothing is suitable to be entered into or grabbed onto.*’

“Now, when such a Bhikkhu ponders that ‘nothing is suitable to be entered into or grabbed onto,’ then he comes to directly know and understand everything, and one’s relationship to everything.’

“Then, King of Gods, once the Bhikkhu directly knows and understands everything thus, he observes each of his feelings that arise, whether pleasant, painful, or neutral, and he sees that each of these are in fact impermanent, never lasting. Now, when he truly sees this, he then also understands how each of these feelings fade away and vanish, which leads him to become disenchanted with them. Then, in seeing and understanding that each of these feelings cease in their intensity, the Bhikkhu becomes dispassionate towards them. And this leads him to relinquish his grip from wanting or grabbing onto anything.

“As a result, by not grabbing onto anything thus, he no longer becomes anxious, restless, or agitated. And by not becoming agitated anymore, he experiences the ultimate relief that is *Nibbāna*. It is at that instance, that the Bhikkhu comes to know directly, with full understanding:

*‘Birth is now finally destroyed.
The Holy Life has now been fully lived, with its True Goal achieved.*

There is no more coming back to any state of becoming.’

“This, O King of Devas, is therefore the brief and encapsulating instruction, the concise teaching that can be defined, with the help of which a Bhikkhu, following it closely, gets liberated through the destruction of craving. And by having won the highest goal of the Holy Life, that is freedom from bondage, he once and for all, comes to be recognized as Truly Supreme among both Devas and humans.”

Then, Sakka the King of Devas, while delighting in his agreement with the words spoken by The Blessed One, again paid homage as he venerated The Blessed One, and after circumambulating Him and keeping The Lord to his right, he then and there, vanished in a respectful manner.

Meanwhile, the Venerable Mahāmoggallāna, who had been sitting there near The Blessed One, witnessing this instruction given to Sakka King of the Devas, began reflecting:

‘I am curious to know whether that Yakkha really understood the words spoken to him by The Blessed One. Although he did seem delighted as he vanished and left the presence of The Blessed One, could it be that he truly took it to heart? Perhaps, it is best if I personally go and find out myself.’

Then, just as quickly as a strong man would stretch out his flexed arm, or bend back his outstretched arm, the Venerable Mahāmoggallāna suddenly disappeared from The Blessed One’s presence at the Pubba Monastery, in Sāvathī, and immediately reappeared in the company of the Devas of The Thirty-Three, within the Tāvatisā heavenly realm.

Now at that time, Sakka the King of Devas, being already back in his realm, was enjoying himself at the Ekaṇḍarīka (Single Lotus) heavenly pond, surrounded by his Devas, as they all were attended to by maidens, while being entertained by divine musicians, engrossed into the five kinds of sumptuous heavenly music that they were providing him with.

Then, Sakka the King of Devas, on seeing the Venerable Mahāmoggallāna approach in the distance, quickly dismissed those heavenly musicians and went up to greet the Venerable Mahāmoggallāna and said:

“Welcome! Good Sir Moggallāna! You are most welcome here, indeed, Good Sir Moggallāna!

“At last, Good Sir Moggallāna, you honor us by this rare occasion to come and visit us here!

“Please, Sir, kindly have a seat here, Good Sir Moggallāna,” continued Sakka, King of the Gods, as he offered his own seat to the Venerable Mahāmoggallāna, while he himself took a low seat, and sat to one side.

Then, the Venerable Moggallāna addressed Sakka:

“Kosiya, could you share with us here what The Blessed One explained, when you asked Him about the Bhikkhu who is released? That brief and encapsulating instruction, the concise and

well-defined teaching that can be easily discerned, and with the help of which, the Bhikkhu gets liberated through the destruction of craving, by putting an end to suffering?”

“Ah, Good Sir Moggallāna, we are too busy with so many duties at the moment, you see.

“There are so many duties and tasks I must attend to, with much to do for the Gods of the Thirty-Three. However, do not fret, for whatever was to be grasped and understood from the instruction given to us by The Blessed One, I assure you we have learned, memorized and understood quite well, after having carefully heeded and paid attention to, of course. For, it is a teaching that will stay with us.

“However, now that you are here, Good Sir Moggallāna, I would like to speak to you about something else.

“In the past, there was a battle waged between the Gods and asuras. Now, in that battle we defeated the asuras and on our return from our well-won battle, to celebrate the victory, I created a magnificent mansion, The Divine Vejayanti Palace. It is quite something else in all of existence!

“The palace itself has one hundred towers, and each of them itself has seven pinnacles, with seven hundred separate chambers. Now, each one of those massive chambers has seven nymphs living in its expansive space, and every one of those nymphs has seven attendants, per individual nymph.

“Good Sir, Moggallāna, you must take a look at it! Please, would you like to see the splendor of our Magnificent Vejayanti Palace?”

And the Venerable Mahāmoggallāna accepted with his silence.

Then, Sakka the King of Devas, while being accompanied by the great king Vessavaṇa, followed the Venerable Mahāmoggallāna, as they all proceeded towards the Vejayanti Palace.

Now, on seeing the Venerable Mahāmoggallāna approach in the distance, Sakka’s maidens, namely, the nymphs living in the palace, quickly rushed back into their chambers, embarrassed and ashamed, much like the daughters-in-law who, on seeing their mother-in-law in public, become extra cautious and get into their best considerate behavior.

Then, Sakka the King of Gods and his companion, the great king Vessavaṇa, kept walking in and out of the many chambers of the Vejayanti Palace, as they excitedly invited the Venerable Mahāmoggallāna to walk into this hall, that chamber, this room, and so on, while both continued exclaiming in utter amazement:

“Ah behold, Good Sir, Moggallāna! Look at all this splendor of this Vejayanti Palace, Good Sir, Moggallāna!

“All this amazing splendor is, after all, *because* of our dear venerable Kosiya having done such incredibly meritorious deeds in his past!

Then, the Venerable Mahāmogallāna began reflecting:

*‘This foolish Yakkha is indeed quite heedless, living in complete negligence!
Perhaps I should just go ahead and jolt him, by arousing a sense of urgency in him!’*

Then, the Venerable Mahāmogallāna, while gently touching the Vejayanta Palace with his big toe, used his psychic power and shook its entire vast structure with a tremendous tremble.

Suddenly, on witnessing this, Sakka the King of the Gods, along with his friend, the great king Vessavana, as well as the entire retinue of the Thirty-Three Devas of Tāvātimsā, were in shock and disbelief, utterly amazed at how a mere recluse could so easily cause such a mighty earthquake, terrifying the inhabitants of the stunningly colossal heavenly palace, with the simple touch of his big toe. With their mouths wide open in astonishment, they exclaimed:

“O! How amazing! How incredibly and unbelievably marvelous!

“Witness this Venerable One’s mighty power! Without lifting a finger, but only with the slight touch of his toe, he shook the entirety of our Lord’s Colossal Vejayanta Palace, giving it a tremendous quake, as if it’s nothing!”

On seeing Sakka, the King of the Gods become thus pale in the face with fright, jolted by this demonstration of his psychic abilities, the Venerable Mahāmogallāna turned to him, and again asked him the question he had asked earlier:

“So, Kosiya, would you mind sharing with us here what The Blessed One explained, when you asked him about the Bhikkhu who is released? Could you recount for us that brief and encapsulating instruction, the concise and well-defined teaching that can be easily discerned, with the help of which the Bhikkhu gets liberated through the destruction of craving, by putting an end to suffering?

“This, because we would very much love to hear what The Blessed One had to say, in answer to your question.”

“Our Most Revered Venerable Moggallāna, earlier I had gone to see The Blessed One, and after paying homage by respectfully worshipping and bowing down to The Blessed One, I stood to one side and asked:

“Bhante, is there a brief and encapsulating instruction, a concise and well-defined teaching that can be easily discerned, and with the help of which a Bhikkhu, following it closely, gets liberated through the destruction of craving? And once having won the highest goal of the Holy Life, that is freedom from bondage, Bhante, how could such a Bhikkhu, once and for all, come to be recognized as Truly Supreme among both Devas and humans?”

“Then, Venerable Sir, The Blessed One replied to my question in the following manner:

“Yes, indeed, O Lord of Devas!

“Here, the Bhikkhu ponders that *‘nothing is suitable to be entered into or grabbed onto.’*

“Now, when such a Bhikkhu ponders that *‘nothing is suitable to be entered into or grabbed onto,’* then he comes to directly know and understand everything, and one’s relationship to everything.’

“Then, King of Gods, once the Bhikkhu directly knows and understands everything thus, he observes each of his feelings that arise, whether pleasant, painful, or neutral, and he sees that each of these are in fact impermanent, never lasting. Now, when he truly sees this, he then also understands that each of these feelings fade away and vanish, which leads him to become disenchanted with them. Then, in seeing and understanding that each of these feelings cease in their intensity, the Bhikkhu becomes dispassionate towards them. And this leads him to relinquish his grip from wanting or grabbing onto anything.

“As a result, by not grabbing onto anything thus, he no longer becomes anxious, restless, or agitated. And by not becoming agitated anymore, he experiences the ultimate relief that is *Nibbāna*. It is at that instance, that the Bhikkhu comes to know directly, with full understanding:

*‘Birth is now finally destroyed.
The Holy Life has now been fully lived, with its True Goal achieved.
There is no more coming back to any state of becoming.’*

“This, O King of Devas, is therefore the brief and encapsulating instruction, the concise teaching that can be defined, with the help of which a Bhikkhu, following it closely, gets liberated through the destruction of craving. And by having won the highest goal of the Holy Life, that is freedom from bondage, he once and for all, comes to be recognized as Truly Supreme among both Devas and humans.”

“This, O Good Sir Moggallāna, was therefore the teaching in brief, which we received from the very lips of The Blessed One earlier, in response to the question we asked. It is thus, that The Blessed One explained, whereby one may achieve the complete destruction of craving.”

Then, the Venerable Mahāmoggallāna, delighting in his agreement with the words spoken by Sakka the King of Gods, suddenly disappeared from the company of the Devas of The Thirty-Three, within the Tāvātimsā heavenly realm, just as quickly as a strong man would stretch out his flexed arm, or bend back his outstretched arm, as he immediately reappeared into the presence of The Blessed One at the Pubba Monastery, in Sāvathī.

Now, the moment the Venerable Mahāmoggallāna vanished from their midst, those nymphs and maidens of Sakka the King of Gods, approached and asked him:

‘Our Dear Lord and Master, was that The Blessed One, the One whom you have mentioned to us to be your ‘Teacher’?’”

“No, that was not The Blessed One, the One whom I have mentioned to you to be my ‘Teacher.’ That was our very Dear companion in the Holy Life, our Dear Venerable Mahāmoggallāna!”

And those nymphs and maidens of Sakka the King of Gods, exclaimed:

“In that case, O! Good Sir, you are indeed blessed! You are truly fortunate, for calling such a Venerable One as your spiritual companion in the Holy Life, someone with such unbelievable might and power!

“It is so difficult to fathom, that despite his tremendous power, the Venerable One is ‘still a mere student’ of The Blessed One, your Teacher, whose full power and might one cannot then even begin to imagine!”

Meanwhile, the Venerable Mahāmoggallāna, having returned back to Sāvattthī, approached The Blessed One and after paying his respects to The Teacher, sat to one side and reported to Him what had taken place earlier that day.

And The Blessed One reiterated:

“Indeed, Moggallāna, it was in just that manner, as reported, that I explained in brief to Sakka the King of Gods, the very means by which one may attain Release, through the destruction of craving.”

That is what The Blessed One said.

And the Venerable Mahāmoggallāna was delighted in listening to the words spoken to him, by The Blessed One.

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