MN 97 — MN 97 To Dhanañjānin | Dhanañjānin Sutta

English translation by Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu.

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Text

To Dhanañjānin

Dhanañjānin Sutta (MN 97)

I have heard that on one occasion the Blessed One was staying near Rājagaha in the Bamboo Forest, the Squirrels' Sanctuary. Now, on that occasion Ven. Sāriputta was wandering in the Southern Mountains with a large Saṅgha of monks. Then a certain monk who had spent the Rains in Rājagaha went to the Southern Mountains, to Ven. Sāriputta. On arrival, he exchanged courteous greetings with Ven. Sāriputta and—after an exchange of friendly greetings & courtesies—sat to one side. As he was sitting there, Ven. Sāriputta said to him, "I trust, friend, that the Blessed One is strong & free from illness?"

"The Blessed One, friend, is strong & free from illness."

“I trust that the Saṅgha of monks is strong & free from illness?”

“The Saṅgha of monks is also strong & free from illness.”

“At the Taṇḍulapāla Gate is a brahman named Dhanañjānin.1 I trust that he is strong & free from illness?”

“Dhanañjānin the brahman is also strong & free from illness.”

“And I trust that Dhanañjānin the brahman is heedful?”

“From where would our Dhanañjānin the brahman get any heedfulness, friend? Relying on the king, he plunders brahmans & householders. Relying on the brahmans & householders, he plunders the king. His wife—a woman of faith, fetched from a family with faith—has died. He has fetched another wife—a woman of no faith—from a family with no faith.”

“What a bad thing to hear, my friend—when we hear that Dhanañjānin the brahman is heedless. Perhaps sooner or later we might meet with Dhanañjānin the brahman. Perhaps there might be some conversation.”

Then Ven. Sāriputta, having stayed in the Southern Mountains as long as he liked, wandered in the direction of Rājagaha. After wandering by stages, he arrived at Rājagaha. There he stayed near Rājagaha in the Squirrels’ Sanctuary.

Then early in the morning, Ven. Sāriputta, having adjusted his lower robe and taking his bowl & outer robe, went into Rājagaha for alms. And on that occasion Dhanañjānin the brahman was milking cows in a cow pen outside the city. Then Ven. Sāriputta, having gone for alms in Rājagaha, after his meal, on his way back from his almsround, went to Dhanañjānin the brahman. Dhanañjānin the brahman saw Ven. Sāriputta coming from afar. On seeing him, he went to him and said, “Drink some of this fresh milk, master Sāriputta. It must be time for your meal.”

“That’s all right, brahman. I have finished my meal for today. My day’s abiding will be under that tree over there. You may come there.”

“As you say, master,” Dhanañjānin responded to Ven. Sāriputta. Then after he had finished his morning meal, he went to Ven. Sāriputta. On arrival, he exchanged courteous greetings with Ven. Sāriputta and—after an exchange of friendly greetings & courtesies—sat to one side. As he was sitting there, Ven. Sāriputta said to him, “I trust, Dhanañjānin, that you are heedful?”

“From where would we get any heedfulness, master?—when parents are to be supported, wife & children are to be supported, slaves & workers are to be supported, friend-&-companion duties are to be done for friends & companions, kinsmen-&-relative duties for kinsmen & relatives, guest duties for guests, departed-ancestor duties for

departed ancestors, devatā duties for devatās, king duties for the king, and this body also has to be refreshed & nourished."

"What do you think, Dhanañjānin? There is the case where a certain person, for the sake of his mother & father, does what is unrighteous, does what is dissonant. Then, because of his unrighteous, dissonant conduct, hell-wardens drag him off to hell. Would he gain anything by saying, 'I did what is unrighteous, what is dissonant, for the sake of my mother & father. Don't (throw) me into hell, hell-wardens!' Or would his mother & father gain anything for him by saying, 'He did what is unrighteous, what is dissonant, for our sake. Don't (throw) him into hell, hell-wardens!'?"

"No, master Sāriputta. Even right while he was wailing, they'd cast him into hell."

"What do you think, Dhanañjānin? There is the case where a certain person, for the sake of his wife & children... his slaves & workers... his friends & companions... his kinsmen & relatives... his guests... his departed ancestors... the devatās... the king, does what is unrighteous, does what is dissonant. Then, because of his unrighteous, dissonant conduct, hell-wardens drag him off to hell. Would he gain anything by saying, 'I did what is unrighteous, what is dissonant, for the sake of the king. Don't (throw) me into hell, hell-wardens!' Or would the king gain anything for him by saying, 'He did what is unrighteous, what is dissonant, for our sake. Don't (throw) him into hell, hell-wardens!'?"

"No, master Sāriputta. Even right while he was wailing, they'd cast him into hell."

"What do you think, Dhanañjānin? There is the case where a certain person, for the sake of refreshing & nourishing his body, does what is unrighteous, does what is dissonant. Then, because of his unrighteous, dissonant conduct, hell-wardens drag him off to hell. Would he gain anything by saying, 'I did what is unrighteous, what is dissonant, for the sake of refreshing & nourishing my body. Don't (throw) me into hell, hell-wardens!' Or would others gain anything for him by saying, 'He did what is unrighteous, what is dissonant, for the sake of refreshing & nourishing his body. Don't (throw) him into hell, hell-wardens!'?"

"No, master Sāriputta. Even right while he was wailing, they'd cast him into hell."

"Now, what do you think, Dhanañjānin? Which is the better: one who, for the sake of his mother & father, would do what is unrighteous, what is dissonant; or one who, for the sake of his mother & father, would do what is righteous, what is harmonious?

"Master Sāriputta, the one who, for the sake of his mother & father, would do what is unrighteous, what is dissonant, is not the better one. The one who, for the sake of his mother & father, would do what is righteous, what is harmonious would be the better one there. Righteous conduct, harmonious conduct, is better than unrighteous conduct, dissonant conduct.2

"Dhanañjānin, there are other activities—reasonable, righteous—by which one can support one's mother & father, and at the same time both not do evil and practice the

practice of merit.

“What do you think, Dhanañjānin? Which is the better: one who, for the sake of his wife & children… his slaves & workers… his friends & companions… his kinsmen & relatives… his guests… his departed ancestors… the devatās… the king… refreshing & nourishing his body, would do what is unrighteous, what is dissonant; or one who, for the sake of refreshing & nourishing his body, would do what is righteous, what is harmonious?

“Master Sāriputta, the one who, for the sake of refreshing & nourishing his body, would do what is unrighteous, what is dissonant, is not the better one. The one who, for the sake of refreshing & nourishing his body, would do what is righteous, what is harmonious would be the better one there. Righteous conduct, harmonious conduct, is better than unrighteous conduct, dissonant conduct.

“Dhanañjānin, there are other activities—reasonable, righteous—by which one can refresh & nourish one’s body, and at the same time both not do evil and practice the practice of merit.”

Then Dhanañjānin the brahman, delighting & rejoicing in Ven. Sāriputta’s words, got up from his seat and left.

Then on a later occasion, Dhanañjānin the brahman became diseased, in pain, severely ill. So he said to one of his men, “Come, my good man. Go to the Blessed One and, on arrival, pay homage to his feet with your head in my name and say ‘Lord, Dhanañjānin the brahman is diseased, in pain, severely ill. He pays homage with his head to the Blessed One’s feet.’ Then go to Ven. Sāriputta and, on arrival, pay homage to his feet with your head in my name and say ‘Venerable sir, Dhanañjānin the brahman is diseased, in pain, severely ill. He pays homage with his head to Ven. Sāriputta’s feet.’ Then say, ‘It would be good if Ven. Sāriputta would visit Dhanañjānin’s home, out of sympathy for him.’”

Responding, “As you say, lord,” to Dhanañjānin the brahman, the man went to the Blessed One and, on arrival, bowed down to him and sat to one side. As he was sitting there he said, “Lord, Dhanañjānin the brahman is diseased, in pain, severely ill. He pays homage with his head to the Blessed One’s feet.” Then he went to Ven. Sāriputta and, on arrival, bowed down to him and sat to one side. As he was sitting there he said, ‘Venerable sir, Dhanañjānin the brahman is diseased, in pain, severely ill. He pays homage with his head to Ven. Sāriputta’s feet.” Then he said, “It would be good if Ven. Sāriputta would visit Dhanañjānin’s home, out of sympathy for him.” Ven. Sāriputta acquiesced through silence.

Then Ven. Sāriputta, having adjusted his lower robe and taking his bowl & outer robe, went to Dhanañjānin’s home. On arrival, he sat down on a prepared seat and said to him, “I trust you are getting better, Dhanañjānin? I trust you are comfortable? I trust that your pains are lessening and not increasing? I trust that there are signs of their lessening, and not of their increasing?”

“I am not getting better, Master Sāriputta. I am not comfortable. My severe pains are increasing, not lessening. There are signs of their increasing, and not of their lessening. Extreme forces slice through my head, just as if a strong man were slicing my head open with a sharp sword…. Extreme pains have arisen in my head, just as if a strong man were tightening a turban on my head with a tough leather strap…. Extreme forces carve up my stomach cavity, just as if an expert butcher or his apprentice were to carve up the stomach cavity of an ox with a sharp butcher’s knife…. There is an extreme burning in my body, just as if two strong men, seizing a weaker man with their arms, were to roast and broil him over a pit of hot embers. I am not getting better, venerable sir. I am not comfortable. My severe pains are increasing, not lessening. There are signs of their increasing, and not of their lessening.”

“What do you think, Dhanañjānin? Which is better: hell or the animal womb?”

“The animal womb is better than hell, Master Sāriputta.”

“… Which is better: the animal womb or the realm of the hungry ghosts?”

“… the realm of the hungry ghosts….”

“… the realm of the hungry ghosts or human beings?”

“… human beings….”

“… human beings or the Devas of the Four Great Kings?”

“… the Devas of the Four Great Kings….”

“… the Devas of the Four Great Kings or the Devas of the Thirty-three?”

“… the Devas of the Thirty-three….”

“… the Devas of the Thirty-three or the Devas of the Hours?”

“… the Devas of the Hours….”

“… the Devas of the Hours or the Contented Devas?”

“… the Contented Devas….”

“… the Contented Devas or the Devas Delighting in Creation?”

“… the Devas Delighting in Creation….”

“… the Devas Delighting in Creation or the Devas Wielding Power over the Creations of Others?”

"... the Devas Wielding Power over the Creations of Others...."

"... the Devas Wielding Power over the Creations of Others or the Brahmā world?"

"Did Master Sāriputta say, 'Brahmā world'? Did Master Sāriputta say, 'Brahmā world'?"

Then the thought occurred to Ven. Sāriputta, "These brahmans are set on the Brahmā world. What if I were to teach Dhanañjānin the brahman the path to union with the Brahmās?" (So he said:) "Dhanañjānin, I will teach you the path to union with the Brahmās. Listen and pay careful attention to that. I will speak."

"As you say, master," Dhanañjānin the brahman responded to Ven. Sāriputta.

Ven. Sāriputta said: "And what is the path to union with the Brahmās? There is the case where a monk keeps pervading the first direction [the east] with an awareness imbued with good will, likewise the second, likewise the third, likewise the fourth. Thus above, below, & all around, everywhere, in its entirety, he keeps pervading the all-encompassing cosmos with an awareness imbued with good will—abundant, expansive, immeasurable, without hostility, without ill will. He keeps pervading the first direction with an awareness imbued with compassion... empathetic joy... equanimity, likewise the second, likewise the third, likewise the fourth. Thus above, below, & all around, everywhere, in its entirety, he keeps pervading the all-encompassing cosmos with an awareness imbued with equanimity—abundant, expansive, immeasurable, without hostility, without ill will. This, Dhanañjānin, is the path to union with the Brahmās."

"In that case, Master Sāriputta, pay homage to the Blessed One's feet with your head in my name and say 'Lord, Dhanañjānin the brahman is diseased, in pain, severely ill. He pays homage with his head to the Blessed One's feet.'"

So Ven. Sāriputta—when there was still more to be done, having established Dhanañjānin the brahman in the inferior3 Brahmā world—got up from his seat and left. Then, not long after Ven. Sāriputta's departure, Dhanañjānin the brahman died and reappeared in the Brahmā world.

And the Blessed One said to the monks, "Monks, Sāriputta—when there was still more to be done, having established Dhanañjānin the brahman in the inferior Brahmā world—has gotten up from his seat and left."

Then Ven. Sāriputta went to the Blessed One and, on arrival, having bowed down to him, sat to one side. As he was sitting there he said to the Blessed One, "Lord, Dhanañjānin the brahman is diseased, in pain, severely ill. He pays homage with his head to the Blessed One's feet."

"But why, Sāriputta—when there was still more to be done, having established Dhanañjānin the brahman in the inferior Brahmā world—did you get up from your seat and leave?"

“The thought occurred to me, lord, ‘These brahmans are set on the Brahmā worlds. What if I were to teach Dhanañjānin the brahman the path to union with the Brahmās?’”

“Sāriputta, Dhanañjānin the brahman has died and reappeared in the Brahmā world.”

Notes

1. The PTS edition of the canon gives this name as Dhānañjānin, whereas the Thai and Sri Lankan editions give it as Dhanañjānin. This discourse is unusual in that Ven. Sāriputta addresses Dhanañjānin not as “householder,” but by his personal name. This would seem to indicate that the two of them were on especially familiar terms.

2. This sentence appears in the Thai and Sri Lankan editions of the canon, and in MLS, but not in MLDB.

3. I.e., inferior to any of the noble attainments. The Brahmā world can be attained simply through the power of concentration applied to unlimited good will, etc., or to any of the jhānas. Only if discernment is developed to overcome passion and delight for these mundane attainments can the noble attainments be realized. For discussions of this issue see MN 106, AN 4:123–126, and AN 4:178.

Publisher references (not part of the sutta)

See also: MN 130; MN 143; SN 3:17; SN 41:7; SN 41:10; SN 55:54; AN 4:178; AN 5:130; AN 10:15