SN 3.20 — Aputtaka Sutta: Heirless (2)

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

Translator's note: It might come as something of a surprise that the Buddha, in this discourse, seems to speak favorably of the lavish enjoyment of sensual pleasures. Taken in light of his teachings in AN 5.41, his remarks here are less surprising. There he points out that the enjoyment of pleasure is one of the legitimate rewards of wealth, although the proper enjoyment of wealth doesn't end there. In this discourse, he speaks of a man who, because of his past kamma, couldn't even enjoy sensual pleasures. This is a useful discourse for illustrating the point that the Buddha's ultimate rejection of sensual pleasure is not that of a man who was too aversive or stingy to enjoy them. Rather, he rejects them because he was capable of enjoying them but realized that this sort of enjoyment was not the path to true happiness.

As for the moneylender mentioned in this discourse, even though his inability to enjoy his wealth can be traced to attitudes in the past, his unwillingness to make merit in this lifetime is not the fault of his past kamma. People are always free to choose to practice the Dhamma at any time. In his case, he chose not to. Thus he got no legitimate use out of his wealth at all.

At Savatthi. Then King Pasenadi Kosala went to the Blessed One in the middle of the day and, on arrival, having bowed down to the Blessed One, sat to one side. As he was sitting there the Blessed One said to him, "Well now, great king, where are you coming from in the middle of the day?"

"Just now, lord, a money-lending householder died in Savatthi. I have come from conveying his heirless fortune to the royal palace: ten million in silver, to say nothing of the gold. But even though he was a money-lending householder, his enjoyment of food was like this: he ate broken rice & pickle brine. His enjoyment of clothing was like this: he wore three lengths of hempen cloth. His enjoyment of a vehicle was like this: he rode in a dilapidated little cart with an awning of leaves."

"That's the way it is, great king. That's the way it is. Once in the past that money-lending householder provided alms for the Private Buddha named Tagarasikhi. Saying [to his servant], 'Give alms to the contemplative,' he got up from his seat and left. After giving, though, he felt regret: 'It would have been better if my slaves or servants had eaten those alms.' And he also murdered his brother's only heir for the sake of his fortune. Now, the result of his action in having provided alms for the Private Buddha named Tagarasikhi was that he appeared seven times in a good destination, the heavenly world. And through the remaining result of that action he acted as money-lender seven times in this very same Savatthi. But the result of his action in feeling regret after giving [those] alms — 'It would have been better if my slaves or servants had eaten those alms' — was that his mind didn't lend itself to the lavish enjoyment of food, didn't lend itself to the lavish enjoyment of clothing, didn't lend itself to the lavish enjoyment of a vehicle, didn't lend itself to the lavish enjoyment of the five strings of sensuality. The result of his action in having murdered his brother's only heir for the sake of his fortune was that he boiled in hell for many years, many hundreds of years, many thousands of years, many hundred-thousands of years. And through the remaining result of that action he has left this seventh heirless fortune to the royal treasury.

"Now, because of the wasting away of that money-lending householder's old merit and his non-accumulation of new merit, he is today boiling in the Great Roruva hell."

"So he has reappeared in the Great Roruva hell, lord?"

"Yes, great king. He has reappeared in the Great Roruva hell."

That is what the Blessed One said. Having said that, the One Well-Gone, the Teacher, said further:

Grain, wealth, silver, gold, or whatever other belongings you have; slaves, servants, errand-runners, & any dependents: you must go without taking any of them; you must leave all of them behind. What you do with body, speech, or mind: that is yours; taking that you go; that's your follower, like a shadow that never leaves. Thus you should do what is fine as a stash for the next life. Acts of merit are the support for beings in their after-death world.

See also: SN 3.19; AN 5.148.