SN 4.21 — SN 4:21 A Large Number | Sambahula Sutta

English translation by Ṭhānissaro 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

A Large Number

Sambahula Sutta (SN 4:21)

I have heard that on one occasion the Blessed One was staying among the Sakyans at Silāvatī. And on that occasion a large number of monks were staying not far from the Blessed One: heedful, ardent, & resolute.

Then Māra the Evil One, assuming the appearance of a brahman—with a large coiled top-knot, clad in an antelope hide, aged, crooked like a roof support, wheezing, holding a staff of fig wood—went to the monks and, on arrival, said to them, “You have gone forth while young, masters—black-haired, endowed with the blessings of youth in the first stage of life—without having played with sensuality. Enjoy human sensuality, monks. Don’t drop

what is visible here-&-now in pursuit of what's subject to time."

"Brahman, we're not dropping what's visible here-&-now in pursuit of what's subject to time. We're dropping what's subject to time in pursuit of what's visible here-&-now. For the Blessed One has said that sensuality is subject to time, of much stress, much despair, & greater drawbacks; whereas this Dhamma is visible here-&-now, not subject to time, inviting all to come & see, pertinent, to be known by the observant for themselves."

When this was said, Māra the Evil One—shaking his head, wagging his tongue, raising his eyebrows so that his forehead was wrinkled in three furrows—left, leaning on his stick.

So the monks went to the Blessed One and, on arrival, having bowed down to him, sat to one side. As they were sitting there they [told him what had happened].

"That wasn't a brahman, monks. That was Māra the Evil One, come to blind you."

Then, on realizing the significance of that, the Blessed One on that occasion spoke these verses:

One who has seen the cause

from which suffering comes:

How could that person

incline to sensuality?

Having realized

that acquisition is a tie

in the world,

a person should train

to subdue

just that.

Publisher references (not part of the sutta)

See also: SN 1:20; SN 35:127; Thag 7:1