SN 9.14 — Gandhatthena Sutta: Stealing the Scent

English translation by Andrew Olendzki.

Source: https://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn09/sn09.014.olen.html

Source revision: sha256:7c411108530c04aafcca0ac43267ed12227cbb2653320e8ae0bb686e566bb783

License: Free redistribution with attribution and complete notice — https://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn09/sn09.014.olen.html#F_termsOfUse

License URL: https://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn09/sn09.014.olen.html#F_termsOfUse

Copyright: ©2005 Andrew Olendzki.

License notice: You may copy, reformat, reprint, republish, and redistribute this work in any medium whatsoever, provided that: (1) you only make such copies, etc. available free of charge; (2) you clearly indicate that any derivatives of this work (including translations) are derived from this source document; and (3) you include the full text of this license in any copies or derivatives of this work. Otherwise, all rights reserved. Documents linked from this page may be subject to other restrictions.

Attribution: ©2005 Andrew Olendzki. You may copy, reformat, reprint, republish, and redistribute this work in any medium whatsoever, provided that: (1) you only make such copies, etc. available free of charge; (2) you clearly indicate that any derivatives of this work (including translations) are derived from this source document; and (3) you include the full text of this license in any copies or derivatives of this work. Otherwise, all rights reserved. Documents linked from this page may be subject to other restrictions. Transcribed from a file provided by the translator. Last revised for Access to Insight on 2 November 2013. How to cite this document (a suggested style): "Gandhatthena Sutta: Stealing the Scent" (SN 9.14), translated from the Pali by Andrew Olendzki. Access to Insight (BCBS Edition), 2 November 2013, https://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn09/sn09.014.olen.html .

Changes: Presentation only: original HTML markup reflowed into plain text; wording, numbering and source repetitions retained. No repetitions expanded.

Completeness: UNKNOWN. Entire protected source unit, including notes and verses, preserved; canonical completeness has not been independently established.

Text

[A devata:]

This lotus blossom which you sniff, Though it's not been offered to you, Is thus something that's been stolen. You, sir, are a stealer of scents!

[Bhikkhu:]

But I don't take, nor do I break; I sniff the lotus from afar. So really what reason have you To call me a stealer of scents? He who uproots them by the stalk, And consumes the pale lotuses; The one engaged in such cruel work, Why do you not say this of him?

[Devata:]

A person who's ruthless and cruel, Defiled like a workman's garment, To him my words would mean nothing. But it's fitting I speak to you. For an unblemished person, who's Always pursuing purity, Even a hair-tip of evil Seems to him as large as a cloud.

[Bhikkhu:]

Truly, O yakkha, you know me, And have concern for my welfare. Do please, O yakkha, speak again, Whenever you see such a thing.

[Devata:]

I don't live to serve upon you; Nor will I do your work for you. You should know for yourself, O monk, How to go along the good path.

Translator's note: This lively exchange between a forest-dwelling monk and a benevolent deity is filled with poetic movement and gives us a glimpse of the care with which some people practiced in the time of the Buddha. Since the working definition of stealing was "taking what has not been given," the Devata is correct — in a very strict sense. Notice that the monk at first reacts defensively, denying that he is doing anything wrong, and then tries to shift the blame to others who do even worse. After recognizing a veiled compliment, he finally realizes that the Devata is trying to help him, at which point he encourages further help. The Devata ends the exchange sharply, revealing an intriguing and capricious character who is willing to help, but only on his own terms. This is a role often played by nature spirits and other minor deities in the Pali texts.