SN 10.12 — Alavaka Sutta: To the Alavaka Yakkha

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: This discourse is the source of many proverbs frequently quoted in Theravadin countries. In 1982, when Thailand was celebrating the 200th anniversary of the founding of the current dynasty, His Majesty the King structured his chief address to the Thai people around the four qualities mentioned in the Buddha's last verse.

I have heard that on one occasion the Blessed One was staying at Alavi in the haunt of the Alavaka yakkha. Then the Alavaka yakkha went to the Blessed One and on arrival said to him: "Get out, contemplative!"

[Saying,] "All right, my friend," the Blessed One went out.

"Come in, contemplative!"

[Saying,] "All right, my friend," the Blessed One went in.

A second time... A third time, the Alavaka yakkha said to the Blessed One, "Get out, contemplative!"

[Saying,] "All right, my friend," the Blessed One went out.

"Come in, contemplative!"

[Saying,] "All right, my friend," the Blessed One went in.

Then a fourth time, the Alavaka yakkha said to the Blessed One, "Get out, contemplative!"

"I won't go out, my friend. Do what you have to do."

"I will ask you a question, contemplative. If you can't answer me, I will possess your mind or rip open your heart or, grabbing you by the feet, hurl you across the Ganges."

"My friend, I see no one in the cosmos with its devas, Maras & Brahmas, its contemplatives & brahmans, its royalty & commonfolk, who could possess my mind or rip open my heart or, grabbing me by the feet, hurl me across the Ganges. But nevertheless, ask me what you wish."

[Alavaka:]

What is a person's highest wealth? What, when well-practiced, brings bliss? What is the highest of savors? Living in what way is one's life called the best?

[The Buddha:]

Conviction is a person's highest wealth. Dhamma, when well-practiced, brings bliss. Truth is the highest of savors.[1] Living with discernment, one's life is called best.

[Alavaka:]

How does one cross over the flood? How cross over the sea? How does one overcome suffering & stress? How is a person purified?

[The Buddha:]

Through conviction one crosses over the flood. Through heedfulness, the sea. Through persistence one overcomes suffering & stress. Through discernment a person is purified.

[Alavaka:]

How does one gain discernment? How does one find wealth? How does one attain honor? How bind friends to oneself? Passing from this world to the next world, how does one not grieve?

[The Buddha:]

Convinced of the arahants' Dhamma for attaining Unbinding, — heedful, observant — one listening well gains discernment. Doing what's fitting, enduring burdens, one with initiative finds wealth. Through truth one attains honor. Giving binds friends to oneself. Endowed with these four qualities, — truth, self-control, stamina, relinquishment — a householder of conviction, on passing away, doesn't grieve. Now, go ask others, common brahmans & contemplatives, if anything better than truth, self-control, endurance, & relinquishment here can be found.

[Alavaka:]

How could I go ask common brahmans & contemplatives? — now that today I understand what benefits the next life. It was truly for my well-being that the Awakened One came to stay in Alavi. Today I understand where what is given bears great fruit. I will wander from village to village, town to town, paying homage to the Self-awakened One & the true rightness of the Dhamma.

Note

1.

This is apparently a reference to the concept of "savor" (rasa) in Indian aesthetic theory. For more on this topic, see the Introduction to Dhammapada: A Translation.