SN 10.12 — SN 10:12 To the Āḷavaka Yakkha | Āḷavaka 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

To the Āḷavaka Yakkha

Āḷavaka Sutta (SN 10:12)

This discourse, which also occurs at Sn 1:10, 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 near Āḷavī in the haunt of the Āḷavaka yakkha. Then the Āḷavaka 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 Āḷavaka 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 Āḷavaka 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, Māras & Brahmās, 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."

Āḷavaka:

"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, well-practiced, brings bliss.

Truth is the highest of savors.1

Living with discernment,

one's life is called best."

Āḷavaka:

"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."

Āḷavaka:

"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,
stamina,
& relinquishment
here can be found."

Āḷavaka:
"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 Āḷavī.

Today I understand

where what is given

bears great fruit.

I'll 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.

Publisher references (not part of the sutta)

See also: AN 3:48; AN 4:62; AN 8:54; Dhp 354