SN 11.5 — SN 11:5 Victory Through What is Well Spoken | Subhāsita-jaya 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

Victory Through What is Well Spoken

Subhāsita-jaya Sutta (SN 11:5)

On one occasion the Blessed One was staying near Sāvatthī at Jeta's Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika's monastery. There he addressed the monks, "Monks!"

"Yes, lord," the monks responded to him.

The Blessed One said, "Once in the past the devas & asuras1 were arrayed for battle. Then Vepacitti the asura-king said to Sakka the deva-king: 'Let there be victory through what is well spoken.'

“‘Yes, Vepacitti, let there be victory through what is well spoken.’

“So the devas & asuras appointed a panel of judges, (thinking,) ‘These will decide for us what is well spoken & poorly spoken.’

“Then Vepacitti the asura-king said to Sakka the deva-king, ‘Say a verse, deva-king!’

“When this was said, Sakka the deva-king said to Vepacitti the asura-king, ‘But you are the senior deity here, Vepacitti. You say a verse.’

“When this was said, Vepacitti recited this verse:

‘Fools would flare up even more

if there were no constraints.

Thus an enlightened one

should restrain the fool

with a heavy stick.’

“When Vepacitti had said this verse, the asuras applauded but the devas were silent. So Vepacitti said to Sakka, ‘Say a verse, deva-king!’

“When this was said, Sakka recited this verse:

‘This, I think,

is the only constraint for a fool:

When, knowing the other’s provoked,

you mindfully grow calm.’

“When Sakka had said this verse, the devas applauded but the asuras were silent. So Sakka said to Vepacitti, ‘Say a verse, Vepacitti!’

“When this was said, Vepacitti recited this verse:

‘Vāsava 2, I see a fault

in this very forbearance:

When the fool thinks,

“He’s forbearing

out of fear of me,”

the idiot pursues you even more—

as a bull, someone who runs away.'

"When Vepacitti had said this verse, the asuras applauded but the devas were silent. So Vepacitti said to Sakka, 'Say a verse, deva-king!'

"When this was said, Sakka recited this verse:

'It doesn't matter

whether he thinks,

"He's forbearing

out of fear of me."

One's own true good

is the foremost good.

Nothing better

than patience

is found.

Whoever, when strong,

is forbearing

to one who is weak:

that's the foremost patience.

The weak must constantly endure.

They call that strength

no strength at all:

whoever's strength

is the strength of a fool.

There's no reproach

for one who is strong,

guarding—guarded by—Dhamma.

You make things worse

when you flare up

at someone who's angry.

Whoever doesn't flare up

at someone who's angry

wins a battle

hard to win.

You live for the good of both

—your own, the other's—

when, knowing the other's provoked,

you mindfully grow calm.

When you work the cure of both

—your own, the other's—

those who think you a fool

know nothing of Dhamma.'

"When Sakka had said this verse, the devas applauded but the asuras were silent. Then the deva & asura panel of judges said, 'The verses said by Vepacitti the asura-king lie in the sphere of swords & weapons—thence arguments, quarrels, & strife. Whereas the verses said by Sakka the deva-king lie outside the sphere of swords & weapons—thence no arguments, no quarrels, no strife. The victory through what is well spoken goes to Sakka the deva-king.'

"And that, monks, is how the victory through what was well spoken went to Sakka the deva-king."

Notes

1. The devas & asuras were two groups of deities who fought for control of heaven (like the gods & titans in Greek mythology). The devas eventually won. The asuras, known for their fierce anger, later became classed as angry demons and, in some Buddhist cosmologies, are regarded as a class of being lower than human.

2. Vāsavant (vocative, Vāsava)—"Powerful"—is one of Sakka's epithets.

Publisher references (not part of the sutta)

See also: DN 21; SN 1:71; SN 7:2; SN 35:207; AN 7:60; Dhp 129–134; Sn 3:3; Sn 4:15