SN 21.3 — SN 21:3 The Barrel | Ghaṭa 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.

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Text

The Barrel

Ghaṭa Sutta (SN 21:3)

I have heard that on one occasion the Blessed One was staying near Sāvatthī in Jeta’s Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika’s monastery. And on that occasion Ven. Sāriputta & Ven. Mahā Moggallāna were staying near Rājagaha in a single dwelling in the Squirrels’ Sanctuary. Then Ven. Sāriputta, arising from his seclusion in the late afternoon, went to Ven. Mahā Moggallāna. On arrival, he exchanged courteous greetings with him. After an exchange of friendly greetings & courtesies, he sat to one side. As he was sitting there, he said to Ven. Mahā Moggallāna, “Bright are your faculties, friend Moggallāna; pure your complexion, and clear.1 Could it be that Ven. Mahā Moggallāna has spent today in a peaceful abiding?”

“It was in a gross abiding, my friend, that I spent today. But I had some Dhamma talk.”

“With whom did Ven. Moggallāna have some Dhamma talk?”

“With the Blessed One, my friend.”

“But far away is the Blessed One now, in Jeta’s Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika’s monastery. Did Ven. Mahā Moggallāna go to the Blessed One through psychic power, or did the Blessed One come to Ven. Mahā Moggallāna through psychic power?”

“I didn’t go to the Blessed One through psychic power, my friend, nor did the Blessed One come to me through psychic power. Simply that the Blessed One purified his divine eye & divine ear as far as me, and I purified my divine eye & divine ear as far as the Blessed One.”

“And what kind of Dhamma talk did Ven. Mahā Moggallāna have with the Blessed One?”

“Just now, my friend, I said to the Blessed One, ‘One of aroused persistence, one of aroused persistence,’ it is said, lord. To what extent is a person one of aroused persistence?’ When this was said, the Blessed One said, ‘There is the case, Moggallāna, where a monk, (thinking,) “Gladly would I let the flesh & blood in my body dry up, leaving just the skin, tendons, & bones, but if I have not attained what can be reached through manly firmness, manly persistence, manly striving, there will be no relaxing my persistence”: That is how one is a person of aroused persistence.’ That is the Dhamma talk I had with the Blessed One, my friend.”

“Friend, like a few small pieces of gravel placed next to the Himalayas, the king of mountains, are we when placed next to Ven. Mahā Moggallāna, for Ven. Mahā Moggallāna is of such great power, great might, that if he wished he could live for an eon.”2

“Friend, like a few small grains of salt placed next to a large salt barrel are we when placed next to Ven. Sāriputta, for in many ways has Ven. Sāriputta been lauded, praised, & extolled by the Blessed One:

‘As for Sāriputta:

Any monk who has gone beyond,

at best can only equal him

in discernment, virtue, & calm.’”3

In this way did each of these two great beings [nāga] approve of what was well-stated and well-expressed by the other.

Notes

1. This is what Ven. Mahā Moggallāna said to Ven. Sāriputta when both were still wanderers, and Ven. Sāriputta had just attained the deathless after hearing Ven. Assaji’s

verses. See Mv I.23.5.

2. One of the powers that can be gained through developing the bases of power. See DN 16 and SN 51:14.

3. In MN 143, this verse is spoken by Anāthapiṇḍika after having died and become a deva. The Buddha then reports it—apparently with his approval—to the monks.

Publisher references (not part of the sutta)

See also: MN 70; SN 52:9; Ud 4:4