SN 22.78 — The Lion

English translation by Bhikkhu Sujato.
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Text

Linked Discourses 22.78

8. Bitable

The Lion

At Sāvatthī.

“Mendicants, toward evening the lion, king of beasts, emerges from his den, yawns, surveys the four quarters, and roars his lion’s roar three times. Then he sets out on the hunt. And whatever animals hear the roar of the lion, king of beasts, are typically filled with fear, awe, and terror. They return to their lairs, be they in a hole, the water, or a wood; and the birds take to the air. Even the royal elephants, bound with strong harnesses in the villages, towns, and capital cities, break apart their bonds, and urinate and defecate in terror as they flee here and there. That’s how powerful is the lion, king of beasts, over animals, how illustrious and mighty.

In the same way, when a Realized One arises in the world—perfected, a fully awakened Buddha, accomplished in knowledge and conduct, holy, knower of the world, supreme guide for those fit for training, teacher of gods and humans, awakened, blessed—he teaches the Dhamma: ‘Such is form, such is the origin of form, such is the disappearance of form. Such is feeling … Such is perception … Such are choices … Such is consciousness, such is the origin of consciousness, such is the disappearance of consciousness.’

Now, there are gods who are long-lived, beautiful, and very happy, lasting long in their divine palaces. When they hear this teaching by the Realized One, they’re typically filled with fear, awe, and terror. ‘Oh no! It turns out we’re impermanent, though we thought we were permanent! It turns out we don’t last, though we thought we were everlasting! It turns out we’re transient, though we thought we were eternal! It turns out that we’re impermanent, not lasting, transient, and included within substantial reality.’ That’s how powerful is the Realized One in the world with its gods, how illustrious and mighty.”

That is what the Buddha said. Then the Holy One, the Teacher, went on to say:

“The Buddha, the unrivaled Teacher

in all the world with its gods,

rolls forth the Wheel of Dhamma

from his own insight:

substantial reality, its cessation,
the origin of substantial reality,
and the noble eightfold path
that leads to the stilling of suffering.
And then the long-lived gods,
so beautiful and glorious,
are afraid and full of terror,
like the other beasts when they hear a lion.
‘We haven’t passed beyond substantial reality!
It turns out we’re impermanent!’
So they say when they hear the word
of the perfected one, free and unaffected.”