

SN 47.20

Saṃyutta Nikāya
The Connected Discourses

Mahāvagga Saṃyutta
(Connected Discourses on the Great Section)
Satipaṭṭhāna Saṃyutta
(Connected Discourses on the Establishments of Mindfulness)
Nālandā Vagga
(The Section on Nālandā)

Janapadakalyāṇī Sutta
“The Most Beautiful Young Woman”

Translated by Bhikkhu Candana

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This is what I personally heard.

Once, The Blessed One was staying in the country of the Sumbha people, near the town of Sedaka, when He addressed the Bhikkhus and said:

“Bhikkhus!”

“Yes, Bhante!” those Bhikkhus replied.

And The Blessed One continued:

“Imagine, Bhikkhus, the population in a town, a city, or a region, are all told about ‘*the most beautiful young woman in all the land*,’ as they keep hearing the announcement being made on how ‘*the most beautiful young woman in all the land*’ would soon be appearing in their village, city, or region!

“Now, having heard the news, a great multitude of people would show up from everywhere, and soon enough, a great crowd would assemble there.

“Then, on seeing that ‘*most beautiful young woman in all the land*’ standing there in front of them, all decorated, making herself even more attractive, as she starts performing for those who are there to witness this ‘*most beautiful young woman in all the land*,’ especially as she begins

singing seductively and dancing in the most provocative way, the news then quickly spreads even more.

“So, on hearing that ‘*the most beautiful young woman in all the land*’ is there, in that village, city, or region, performing for all gathered, as she continues singing seductively and dancing in the most provocative way, even bigger crowds of people start rushing to witness this spectacle, gathering in larger crowds around her.

“Meanwhile, there would be another man, who is very much eager to continue living his life, unwilling to die, desiring to be happy and very much driven to avoid any kind of pain or suffering.

“Now, it so happens that this man is in a situation where he is commanded to obey certain orders; otherwise, he would lose his life, right on the spot. Thus, he is told the following:

‘Sir, hold this bowl that is full to the brim with oil carefully with your hands, and carry it with you as you walk among the hoard of people gathered there, pacing back and forth between the crowd and that most beautiful young woman in all the land, who is performing right there in front of you and everyone else!’

‘Also, be aware that there is a giant of a man walking right next to you, an executioner, with his big and very sharp sword that is already pulled out of its scabbard; and having raised it right above your neck, he is fixed on you, as you continue carrying the bowl of oil, full to the brim, carefully waiting to see the first sign of you spilling even a single drop of oil from the bowl, at which point he would bring down his sharp sword, and chop off your head, without a moment’s hesitation!’

“Now, what do you think, Bhikkhus, would that man forget about the bowl of oil he is carrying and start looking here and there, or at that woman entertaining the crowd? Or would he become negligent to keep his attention fixed on the bowl, making sure that despite walking among all the noise and distractions, amidst the crazed crowds of people gathered around him, his attentive eyes would never leave their gaze from that oil-filled bowl he carries, making sure not even a single drop is spilled, as he continues pacing back and forth?

“Oh no, Bhante! He would not dare to become negligent with the bowl, Bhante!” replied the Bhikkhus.

“Bhikkhus, I have come up with this simile to make you understand something deep, the meaning of which is the following:

“Now, pay close attention, for the bowl that is full to the brim with oil is none other than a metaphor for mindfulness that must be aimed at the body.

“Thus, Bhikkhus, you must train yourselves in this manner:

‘We will practice and continue cultivating our mindfulness aimed at the body, making it our method, the object and vehicle of practice, the foundation of our training; stabilizing and becoming excellent at it, maintaining it as our primary exercise, and thus fully perfect it.’

“Therefore, Bhikkhus, this is how you must train yourselves, day and night!”

Sādhū

Sādhū

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