SN 55.21 — Paṭhama Mahānāma Sutta — Discourse to Mahānāma – Part 1

English translation by Bhikkhu Candana.

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Text

The is what I personally heard.

At one time, The Blessed One was staying at the Nigrodha Monastery in the royal city of Kapilavatthu, among the Sakyans.

Then, Mahānāma the Sakyan came and approached The Blessed One, and having paid homage to Him, he sat down to one side, and said to The Blessed One:

“Here, Bhante, we find our City of Kapilavatthu being prosperous, rich, well-stocked and successful, populated by so many people, affluent and full of resources, with many wide streets, avenues, along with narrow, dead-end streets.

“Now, often, when the day is over and night is approaching, after I take my leave here from the Sangha, after I paid homage to The Blessed One or a respectable Bhikkhu I may be visiting, I go back and re-enter the Kapilavatthu City Gate.

“Along the way, however, I often encounter a stray elephant, a horse, a chariot being driven fast, or a cart, or a person on foot.

“In those moments, Bhante, I find myself having lost my mindfulness, having forgotten about The Blessed One, The Dhamma, and The Saṅgha, as I get caught up in the thought:

‘What if something happens as I am walking back home, and I were to die right now? What would happen to me? Where would I be reborn in my next life?’”

“Do not be afraid, Mahānāma! You have nothing to fear, at all, Mahānāma! For when the time comes for you to die, your death will be a good death, and not a bad one!

“Imagine, Mahānāma, there was someone who, for a long time now, had been living his life with a heart that is infused with strong faith; filled with the fragrance of virtue throughout, augmented by his constant quest to gain a better understanding of the Dhamma, open-handed in his generosity, as he trains himself daily, while wisdom grows in his heart, continuously.

“Now, because his physical body is made up of the four primary elements, the product of his mother and father, nourished and sustained by food and boiled rice, it always is subject to the fact of impermanence, to decaying, and to weathering away, to breaking up and finally being destroyed. And even though the time comes for the physical body to fall prey and be chewed upon and devoured by various birds like crows, vultures, or wild dogs, and jackals, as well as many kinds of little animals like worms; still however, the refined Citta of such a person rises higher and higher to even more sublime states, as it steadily continues heading upstream.

“It is just like someone were to drop a clay pot full of purified ghee or oil into a deep lake, whereby the jar of clay housing the ghee would crack and be shattered, as it sinks down to the bottom. But the purified ghee or oil would immediately start rising up to the surface, as it steadily continues heading upward.

“It is exactly like that, Mahānāma, when someone who, for a long time now, has been living his life with a heart that is infused with strong faith; filled with the fragrance of virtue throughout, augmented by his constant quest to gain a better understanding of the Dhamma, open-handed in his generosity, as he trains himself daily, while wisdom grows in his heart, continuously.

“Now, although his physical body that is made up of the four primary elements, the product of his mother and father, nourished and sustained by food and boiled rice, is subject to the fact of impermanence, to decaying, and to weathering away, to breaking up and finally being destroyed; and, even though, when the time comes, his physical body will fall prey and be chewed upon and devoured by various birds like crows, vultures, or wild dogs and jackals, as well as many kinds of little animals like worms; nevertheless, the refined Citta of such a person will rise higher and higher to even more sublime states, as it will steadily continue heading upstream.

“So, rest assured, Mahānāma! Your heart has, for a long time indeed, been infused with strong faith, filled with the fragrance of virtue throughout, augmented by your constant

quest to gain a better understanding of the Dhamma, remaining open-handed in generosity, as you have been training yourself daily, while wisdom continues to grow in your heart, continuously.

“Do not be afraid, Mahānāma! You have nothing to fear, at all, Mahānāma! For when the time comes for you to die, your death will be a good death, and not a bad one!”

Sādhu Sādhu Sādhu