DN 20 — The Great Congregation

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Text

Long Discourses 20

The Great Congregation

So I have heard. At one time the Buddha was staying in the land of the Sakyans, in the Great Wood near Kapilavatthu, together with a large Saṅgha of five hundred mendicants, all of whom were perfected ones. And most of the deities from ten solar systems had gathered to see the Buddha and the Saṅgha of mendicants.

Then four deities of the pure abodes, aware of what was happening, thought: “Why don’t we go to the Buddha and each recite a verse in his presence?”

Then, as easily as a strong person would extend or contract their arm, they vanished from the Pure Abodes and reappeared in front of the Buddha. They bowed to the Buddha and stood to one side. Standing to one side, one deity spoke this verse in the Buddha’s presence:

“There’s a great congregation in the woods,

where heavenly hosts have assembled.

We’ve come to this righteous congregation

to see the invincible Saṅgha!”

Then another deity spoke this verse in the Buddha’s presence:

“The mendicants there are immersed in samādhi,

they’ve straightened their own minds.

Like a charioteer holding the reins,

the astute ones protect their senses.”

Then another deity spoke this verse in the Buddha’s presence:

“They snapped the post and snapped the cross-bar,

unstirred, they tore out Indra’s pillar.

They live pure and immaculate,

the young giants tamed by the Clear-eyed One.”

Then another deity spoke this verse in the Buddha's presence:

"Anyone who has gone to the Buddha for refuge

won't go to a plane of loss.

After giving up this human body,

they swell the heavenly host."

1. The Gathering of Deities

Then the Buddha said to the mendicants:

"Mendicants, most of the deities from ten solar systems have gathered to see the Realized One and the mendicant Saṅgha. Those who were perfected ones, fully awakened Buddhas in the past also had gatherings of deities that were at best like the gathering for me now. Those who will be perfected ones, fully awakened Buddhas in the future will also have gatherings of deities that will be at best like the gathering for me now. I shall declare the names of the heavenly hosts; I shall extol the names of the heavenly hosts; I shall teach the names of the heavenly hosts. Listen and apply your mind well, I will speak."

"Yes, sir," they replied.

The Buddha said this:

"I invoke a paean of praise!

Where the earth-gods dwell,

there, in mountain caves,

resolute and composed,

dwell many like lonely lions,

who have mastered their fears.

Their minds are bright and pure,

clear and unclouded."

Over five hundred were known

in the wood at Kapilavatthu.

Consequently, the Teacher addressed

the disciples who love the teaching:

"The heavenly hosts have come forth;

mendicants, you should be aware of them."

Those monks grew keen,

hearing the Buddha's instruction.

Knowledge manifested in them,
seeing those non-human beings.
Some saw a hundred,
a thousand, even seventy thousand,
while some saw a hundred thousand
non-human beings.
But some saw an endless number
spread out in every direction.
And all that was known
and distinguished by the Clear-eyed One.
Consequently, the Teacher addressed
the disciples who love the teaching:
“The heavenly hosts have come forth;
mendicants, you should be aware of them.
I shall extol them for you,
with lyrics in proper order.
There are seven thousand spirits,
earth-gods of Kapilavatthu.
They’re powerful and brilliant,
so beautiful and glorious.
Rejoicing, they’ve come forth
to the meeting of mendicants in the wood.
From the Himalayas there are six thousand
spirits of different colors.
They’re powerful and brilliant,
so beautiful and glorious.
Rejoicing, they’ve come forth
to the meeting of mendicants in the wood.
From Mount Sātā there are three thousand

spirits of different colors.
They’re powerful and brilliant,
so beautiful and glorious.
Rejoicing, they’ve come forth
to the meeting of mendicants in the wood.
And thus there are sixteen thousand
spirits of different colors.
They’re powerful and brilliant,
so beautiful and glorious.
Rejoicing, they’ve come forth
to the meeting of mendicants in the wood.
From Vessāmitta’s mountain there are five hundred
spirits of different colors.
They’re powerful and brilliant,
so beautiful and glorious.
Rejoicing, they’ve come forth
to the meeting of mendicants in the wood.
And there’s Kumbhīra of Rājagaha,
whose home is on Mount Vepulla.
Attended by more than
a hundred thousand spirits,
Kumbhīra of Rājagaha
also came to the meeting in the wood.
King Dhataraṭṭha rules
the eastern quarter.
Lord of the centaurs,
he’s a great king, glorious.
And he has many mighty sons
all of them named Indra.

They’re powerful and brilliant,
so beautiful and glorious.
Rejoicing, they’ve come forth
to the meeting of mendicants in the wood.
King Virūḷhaka rules
the southern quarter.
Lord of the gnomes,
he’s a great king, glorious.
And he has many mighty sons
all of them named Indra.
They’re powerful and brilliant,
so beautiful and glorious.
Rejoicing, they’ve come forth
to the meeting of mendicants in the wood.
King Virūpakkha rules
the western quarter.
Lord of the dragons,
he’s a great king, glorious.
And he has many mighty sons
all of them named Indra.
They’re powerful and brilliant,
so beautiful and glorious.
Rejoicing, they’ve come forth
to the meeting of mendicants in the wood.
King Kuvera rules
the northern quarter.
Lord of spirits,
he’s a great king, glorious.
And he has many mighty sons

all of them named Indra.
They’re powerful and brilliant,
so beautiful and glorious.
Rejoicing, they’ve come forth
to the meeting of mendicants in the wood.
Dhataraṭṭha in the east,
Virūḷhaka to the south,
Virūpakkha to the west,
and Kuvera in the north.
These four great kings,
all around in the four quarters,
stood there dazzling
in the wood at Kapilavatthu.
Their deceitful heathens came,
so treacherous and crafty—
the deceivers Kuṭeṇḍu, Viṭeṇḍu,
with Viṭucca and Viṭuṭa.
And Candana and Kāmaseṭṭha,
Kinnughaṇḍu and Nighaṇḍu,
Panāda and Opamañña,
and Mātali, the god’s equerry.
Cittasena the centaur came too,
and the kings Nala and Janesabha.
Pañcasikha came too, with
Timbaru and Suriyavaccasā.
These and other kings there were,
the centaurs with their kings.
Rejoicing, they’ve come forth
to the meeting of mendicants in the wood.

Then came the dragons of Nābhasa lake,
and those from Vesālī with those from Takkasilā.
The Kambalas and Assataras came
and those from Payāga with their kin.
Those from Yamunā, and the Dhataraṭṭha
dragons came, so glorious.
And Erāvaṇa the great dragon
also came to the meeting in the wood.
Those who seize the dragon kings by force—
Heavenly, twice-born birds with piercing vision—
swoop down to the wood from the sky;
their name is ‘Rainbow Phoenix’.
But the dragon kings remained fearless,
for the Buddha kept them safe from the phoenixes.
Wooing each other with gentle words,
the dragons and phoenixes took the Buddha as refuge.
Defeated by Vajirahattha,
the titans live in the ocean.
They’re brothers of Vāsava,
powerful and glorious.
There’s the terrifying Kālakañjas,
the Dānava and Ghasa titans,
Vepacitti and Sucitti,
Pahārāda with Namuci,
and Bali’s hundred sons,
all named after Virocana.
Bali’s army armed themselves
and went to the auspicious Rāhu, saying:
‘Now is the time, sir,

for the meeting of mendicants in the wood.’

The gods of water and earth,

and fire and wind came there.

The gods of Varuṇa and Varuṇa’s offsping,

and Soma together with Yasa.

A host of the gods of love

and compassion came, so glorious.

These ten hosts of gods

shone in all different colors.

They’re powerful and brilliant,

so beautiful and glorious.

Rejoicing, they’ve come forth

to the meeting of mendicants in the wood.

The Vishnu and Sahalī gods,

and the unequaled pair of twins.

The gods living on the moon came,

with the Moon before them.

The gods living on the sun came,

with the Sun before them.

And with the stars before them

came the languid gods of clouds.

And Vāsava came, the greatest of the Vasus,

who is Sakka the Able, Purindada the Firstgiver:

These ten hosts of gods

shone in all different colors.

They’re powerful and brilliant,

so beautiful and glorious.

Rejoicing, they’ve come forth

to the meeting of mendicants in the wood.

Then came the Sahabhū gods,
blazing like a crested flame;
and the Ariṭṭhakas and Rojas too,
and the gods hued blue as flax.
The Varuṇas and Sahadhammas,
the Accutas and Anejakas,
the Sūleyyas and Ruciras all came,
as did the Vāsavanesi gods.
These ten hosts of gods
shone in all different colors.
They're powerful and brilliant,
so beautiful and glorious.
Rejoicing, they've come forth
to the meeting of mendicants in the wood.
The Samānas, Mahāsamānas,
Mānusas, and Mānusuttamas all came,
and the gods depraved by play,
and those who are malevolent.
Then came the gods of Mercury,
and those who live on Mars.
The Pāragas and Mahāpāragas came,
such glorious gods.
These ten hosts of gods
shone in all different colors.
They're powerful and brilliant,
so beautiful and glorious.
Rejoicing, they've come forth
to the meeting of mendicants in the wood.
The gods of Venus, the newborn Sun, and the Dawn

came along with those from Saturn.
And the gods of the white globe came
leading the brilliant gods.
The Sadāmattas and Hāragajas,
and assorted glorious ones;
Pajjuna came thundering,
he who rains on all quarters.
These ten hosts of gods
shone in all different colors.
They’re powerful and brilliant,
so beautiful and glorious.
Rejoicing, they’ve come forth
to the meeting of mendicants in the wood.
The Khemiyas from the realms of Tusita and Yama,
and the glorious Kaṭṭhakas came;
the Lambītakas, Lāmaseṭṭhas,
those called the Shining, and those Yonder.
The gods who love to create came too,
and those who control what is created by others.
These ten hosts of gods
shone in all different colors.
They’re powerful and brilliant,
so beautiful and glorious.
Rejoicing, they’ve come forth
to the meeting of mendicants in the wood.
These sixty hosts of gods
shone in all different colors.
They came organized by name,
these and others likewise, thinking:

‘They who have shed rebirth, the kindly ones,
the undefiled ones who have crossed the flood—
let us see them, with the dragon who brought them across,
who like the Moon has overcome darkness.’
Subrahmā and Paramatta came,
with sons of those powerful ones.
Sanaṅkumāra and Tissa
also came to the meeting in the wood.
Of a thousand realms of divinity,
the Great Divinity stands forth.
He has arisen, brilliant,
his formidable body so glorious.
Ten Gods Almighty came there,
each one of them wielding power,
and in the middle of them came
Hārita with his following.”
When they had all come forth—
the gods with their Lord, and the divinities—
Māra’s army came forth too:
see the stupidity of the Dark Lord!
“Come, seize them and bind them,” he said,
“let them be bound by desire!
Surround them on all sides,
don’t let any escape!”
And so there the great general,
the Dark Lord sent forth his army.
He struck the ground with his fist
to make a horrifying sound
like a monsoon cloud,

thundering and flashing.
But then turned back,
furious, out of control.
And all that was known
and distinguished by the Clear-eyed One.
Consequently, the Teacher addressed
the disciples who love the teaching:
“Māra’s army has arrived;
mendicants, you should be aware of them.”
Those monks grew keen,
hearing the Buddha’s instruction.
The army fled from those free of passion,
and not a single hair was stirred!
“All triumphant in battle,
so fearless and glorious.
They rejoice with all the spirits,
the disciples renowned among men.”