DN 32 — The Āṭānāṭiya Protection

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Text

Long Discourses 32

The Āṭānāṭiya Protection

1. The First Recitation Section

So I have heard. At one time the Buddha was staying near Rājagaha, on the Vulture's Peak Mountain. Then, late at night, the four great kings—with large armies of spirits, centaurs, gnomes, and dragons—set guards, troops, and wards at the four quarters and then, lighting up the entire Vulture's Peak with their beauty, went up to the Buddha, bowed, and sat down to one side. Before sitting down to one side, some spirits bowed, some exchanged greetings and polite conversation, some held up their cupped palms toward the Buddha, some announced their name and clan, while some kept silent.

Seated to one side, the Great King Vessavaṇa said to the Buddha, "Sir, some high spirits have confidence in the Buddha, some do not. Some middling spirits have confidence in the Buddha, some do not. Some low spirits have confidence in the Buddha, some do not. But mostly the spirits don't have confidence in the Buddha. Why is that? Because the Buddha teaches them to refrain from killing living creatures, stealing, lying, sexual misconduct, and consuming intoxicants of beer, wine, and liquor. But mostly they don't refrain from such things. They don't like that or approve of it.

Sir, there are disciples of the Buddha who frequent remote lodgings in the wilderness and the forest that are quiet and still, far from the madding crowd, remote from human settlements, and fit for retreat. There dwell high spirits who have no confidence in the Buddha's dispensation. To give them confidence, may the Buddha please learn the Āṭānāṭiya protection for the guarding, protection, safety, and comfort of the monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen." The Buddha consented with silence.

Then, knowing that the Buddha had consented, on that occasion Great King Vessavaṇa recited the Āṭānāṭiya protection.

"Hail Vipassī,

the glorious Clear-eyed One!

Hail Sikhī,

sympathetic for all beings!

Hail Vessabhū,

cleansed and fervent!
Hail Kakusandha,
crusher of Māra's army!
Hail Koṇāgamana,
the brahmin who has lived the life!
Hail Kassapa,
everywhere free!
Hail Aṅgīrasa,
the glorious Sakyan!
He taught this Dhamma
that casts aside all suffering.
Those in the world who are quenched,
truly discerning,
not backbiters; such people
being great of heart and intrepid,
revere that Gotama;
he who is helpful to gods and humans,
accomplished in knowledge and conduct,
great of heart and intrepid.
Where rises the sun—
Aditi's child, the great orb—
with whose rising
night's umbra also ends,
and of whom, when sun has risen,
it is said to be the day—
there is a deep lake,
an ocean of flowing waters.
That's how they understand that lake there,
as an ocean of flowing waters.

From here that is the eastern quarter,
so the people say.
That quarter is warded
by a great king, glorious,
the lord of the centaurs;
his name is Dhataraṭṭha.
He delights in song and dance,
honored by the centaurs.
And he has many mighty sons
all of one name, so I've heard.
Eighty, and ten, and one—
all of them named Indra.
After seeing the Awakened One,
the Buddha, Kinsman of the Sun,
they revere him from afar,
the one great of heart and intrepid.
Homage to you, O thoroughbred!
Homage to you, supreme among men!
You examine us skillfully;
the non-humans bow to you.
We've been asked many a time,
'Do you bow to Gotama the victor?'
And so we ought to declare:
'We bow to Gotama the victor,
accomplished in knowledge and conduct!
We bow to Gotama the awakened!'
It's where the departed go, they say,
who are backbiters and calumniators,
killers and hunters,

bandits and cheats.
From here that is the southern quarter,
so the people say.
That quarter is warded
by a great king, glorious,
the lord of the gnomes;
his name is Virūḷha.
He delights in song and dance,
honored by the gnomes.
And he has many mighty sons
all of one name, so I've heard.
Eighty, and ten, and one—
all of them named Indra.
After seeing the Awakened One,
the Buddha, Kinsman of the Sun,
they revere him from afar,
the one great of heart and intrepid.
Homage to you, O thoroughbred!
Homage to you, supreme among men!
You examine us skillfully;
the non-humans bow to you.
We've been asked many a time,
'Do you bow to Gotama the victor?'
And so we ought to declare:
'We bow to Gotama the victor,
accomplished in knowledge and conduct!
We bow to Gotama the awakened!'
Where sets the sun—
Aditi's child, the great orb—

with whose setting
the day also ends;
and of whom, when sun has set,
it is said to be night's umbra—
there is a deep lake in that place,
an ocean of flowing waters.
That's how they understand that lake there,
as an ocean of flowing waters.
From here that is the western quarter,
so the people say.
That quarter is warded
by a great king, glorious,
the lord of the dragons;
his name is Virūpakkha.
He delights in song and dance,
honored by the dragons.
And he has many mighty sons
all of one name, so I've heard.
Eighty, and ten, and one—
all of them named Indra.
After seeing the Awakened One,
the Buddha, Kinsman of the Sun,
they revere him from afar,
the one great of heart and intrepid.
Homage to you, O thoroughbred!
Homage to you, supreme among men!
You examine us skillfully;
the non-humans bow to you.
We've been asked many a time,

‘Do you bow to Gotama the victor?’
And so we ought to declare:
‘We bow to Gotama the victor,
accomplished in knowledge and conduct!
We bow to Gotama the awakened!’
Where the lovely land north of Kuru is,
and the beautiful Mount Meru,
humans born there
are unselfish, without possessions.
They do not sow the seed,
nor do they draw the plough.
The rice eaten by people
ripens in untilled soil,
free of powder or husk, pure,
fragrant, with only the rice-grain.
After cooking in a tandoor oven,
they enjoy eating that food.
Having prepared a cow with hooves uncloven,
they’re drawn about from place to place.
Having prepared a beast with hooves uncloven,
they’re drawn about from place to place.
Having prepared a woman-drawn carriage,
they’re drawn about from place to place.
Having prepared a man-drawn carriage,
they’re drawn about from place to place.
Having prepared a girl-drawn carriage,
they’re drawn about from place to place.
Having prepared a boy-drawn carriage,
they’re drawn about from place to place.

Having ascended their vehicle,
that king's servants
tour about in every quarter,
provided with heavenly vehicles
of elephant and of horse.
And there are palaces and palanquins
for that great and glorious king.
And he has cities, too,
well-built in the sky:
Āṭānāṭā, Kusināṭā, Parakusināṭā,
Nāṭapuriyā, and Parakusiṭanāṭā.
To the north is Kapīvanta,
and Janogha lies beyond.
And there's Navanavutiya, Ambara-ambaravatiya,
and the royal capital named Āḷakamandā.
The Great King Kuvera, dear sir,
has a capital named Visāṇā,
which is why the great king
is called 'Vessavaṇa'.
Searching, they shine:
Tatolā, Tattalā, Tatotalā,
Ojasi, Tejasi, Tatojasi,
Sūra, Rājā, Ariṭṭha, and Nemi.
There is a lake there too named Dharaṇī,
whence the clouds rain forth,
and the rains disperse.
There is a hall there too named Sālavatī,
where the spirits frequent.
There the trees are ever in fruit,

with many different flocks of birds.
Peacocks and herons call out there,
and the sweet cuckoos too.
One bird cries out ‘Live, live!’,
another ‘Lift up your heart!’
There are cocks and kookaburras,
and in the wood the woodpeckers.
The parrots and mynah cry out there,
and the ‘little stick-boy’ birds.
Kuvera’s pond of rushes
is lovely all the time.
From here that is the northern quarter,
so the people say.
That quarter is warded
by a great king, glorious,
the lord of spirits;
his name is Kuvera.
He delights in song and dance,
honored by the spirits.
And he has many mighty sons
all of one name, so I’ve heard.
Eighty, and ten, and one—
all of them named Indra.
After seeing the Awakened One,
the Buddha, Kinsman of the Sun,
they revere him from afar,
the one great of heart and intrepid.
Homage to you, O thoroughbred!
Homage to you, supreme among men!

You examine us skillfully;

the non-humans bow to you.

We've been asked many a time,

'Do you bow to Gotama the victor?'

And so we ought to declare:

'We bow to Gotama the victor,

accomplished in knowledge and conduct!

We bow to Gotama the awakened!'

This, good fellow, is the Āṭānāṭiya protection for the guarding, protection, safety, and comfort of the monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen.

The monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen should learn this Āṭānāṭiya protection well and completely memorize it. If anyone who does so is approached while walking, standing, sitting, or lying down by any non-human being with malicious intent—including males, females, boys, girls, chief ministers, councillors, and servants among the spirits, centaurs, gnomes, and dragons— that non-human will receive no homage or respect in any village or town. And they will receive no ground or dwelling in my capital of Ālakamandā. Nor will they get to go to the conference of the spirits. In addition, the non-humans would not give or take them in marriage. They'd heap personal abuse on them, drop an empty bowl on their head, and even split their head into seven pieces!

For there are, good fellow, non-humans who are fierce, cruel, and violent. They don't obey the Great Kings or their men or their men's men. They're said to be rebelling against the Great Kings. They're just like the bandits in the king of Magadha's realm who don't obey the king, his men, or his men's men, and are said to be rebelling against the king.

If any non-human being with malicious intent—including males, females, boys, girls, ministers, councillors, and servants among the spirits, centaurs, gnomes, and dragons—approaches a monk, nun, layman, or laywoman while walking, standing, sitting, or lying down, one ought to yell, cry, and scream to the spirits, great spirits, generals, great generals: 'This spirit's got me! This spirit's entered me! This spirit's annoying me! This spirit's harassing me! This spirit's hurting me! This spirit's harming me! This spirit won't let me go!'

To what spirits, great spirits, generals, great generals?

'Indra, Soma, and Varuṇa,

Bhāradvāja, the Progenitor,

Candana and Kāmaseṭṭha,

Kinnughaṇḍu and Nighaṇḍu,

Panāda and Opamañña,

and Mātali, the god’s equerry.

Cittasena the centaur,

and the kings Nala and Janesabha,

Sātāgira, Hemavata,

Puṇṇaka, Karatiya, and Guḷa;

Sivaka and Mucalinda,

Vessāmitta, Yugandhara,

Gopāla, Suppagedha,

Hiri, Netti, and Mandiya;

Pañcālacaṇḍa, Āḷavaka,

Pajjunna, Sumana, Sumukha,

Dadhimukha, Maṇi, Māṇivara, Dīgha,

together with Serīsaka.’

This, good fellow, is the Āṭānāṭiya protection for the guarding, protection, safety, and comfort of the monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen. Well, now, good fellow, I must go. I have many duties, and much to do.”

“Please, Great Kings, go at your convenience.”

Then the four great kings got up from their seats, bowed and respectfully circled the Buddha, keeping him on their right side, before vanishing right there. And before the other spirits present vanished, some bowed and respectfully circled the Buddha, keeping him on their right side, some exchanged greetings and polite conversation, some held up their cupped palms toward the Buddha, some announced their name and clan, while some kept silent.

The first recitation section is complete.

2. The Second Recitation Section

Then, when the night had passed, the Buddha told the mendicants all that had happened, repeating all the verses spoken. Then he added:

“Mendicants, learn the Āṭānāṭiya protection! Memorize the Āṭānāṭiya protection! Remember the Āṭānāṭiya protection! The Āṭānāṭiya protection is beneficial, and is for the guarding, protection, safety, and comfort of the monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen.”

That is what the Buddha said. Satisfied, the mendicants approved what the Buddha said.