Thag 18.1 — Mahākassapa

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Text

Verses of the Senior Monks 18.1

The Book of the Forties

Chapter One

Mahākassapa

“You shouldn’t live for the adulation of a following;

it turns your mind, making it hard to get immersion.

Seeing that popularity is suffering,

you shouldn’t consent to a following.

A sage should not visit respectable families;

it turns your mind, making it hard to get immersion.

If you’re eager and greedy for flavors,

you’ll miss the goal that brings such happiness.

They know it really is a bog,

this homage and veneration in respectable families.

Honor is a subtle dart, hard to extract,

and hard for a reprobate to give up.”

“I came down from my lodging

and entered the city for alms.

I courteously stood by

while a leper ate.

With his putrid hand

he offered me a morsel.

Putting the morsel in my bowl,

his finger dropped off right there.
Sitting by a wall,
I ate that lump of rice.
I did not feel any disgust
while eating or afterwards.
Anyone who makes use of
leftovers for food,
rancid urine as medicine,
the root of a tree as lodging,
and cast-off rags as robes,
is at ease in any quarter."
"Where some have fallen to ruin
while climbing the mountain,
there Kassapa ascends;
an heir of the Buddha,
aware and mindful,
owing to his psychic powers.
Returning from almsround,
Kassapa ascends the mountain,
and practices absorption without grasping,
with fear and dread given up.
Returning from almsround,
Kassapa ascends the mountain,
and practices absorption without grasping,
quenched amongst those who burn.
Returning from almsround,
Kassapa ascends the mountain,
and practices absorption without grasping,
his task completed, free of defilements."

“Strewn with garlands of the musk-rose tree,
these regions are so delightful, so lovely,
echoing with the trumpeting of elephants:
these rocky crags delight me!
Glistening, they look like blue stormclouds,
with waters cool and streams so clear,
and covered all in ladybugs:
these rocky crags delight me!
Like the peak of a blue stormcloud,
or like a fine bungalow, lovely,
echoing with the trumpeting of elephants:
these rocky crags delight me!
The rain comes down on the lovely flats,
in the mountains frequented by seers.
Echoing with the cries of peacocks,
these rocky crags delight me!
It’s enough for me, who loves absorption,
to remain resolute.
It’s enough for me,
a resolute monk who wants what’s best.
It’s enough for me,
a resolute monk who loves comfort.
It’s enough for me,
resolute and unaffected, loving meditation.
Covered with flowers of flax,
like the welkin covered with stormclouds,
full of flocks of many different birds,
these rocky crags delight me!
Empty of householders,

frequented by herds of deer,
full of flocks of many different birds,
these rocky crags delight me!
The water’s clear and the rocks are broad,
monkeys and deer are all around;
festooned with dewy moss,
these rocky crags delight me!”
“Even the music of a five-piece band
can never give such pleasure
as when, with unified mind,
you rightly discern the Dhamma.”
“Don’t get involved in lots of work,
avoid people, and don’t try to acquire things.
If you’re eager and greedy for flavors,
you’ll miss the goal that brings such happiness.
Don’t get involved in lots of work,
avoid what doesn’t lead to the goal.
The body gets worn out and fatigued,
and when you ache, you won’t find serenity.”
“You won’t see yourself
by merely reciting words,
wandering stiff-necked
and thinking, ‘I’m better than them.’
The fool is no better,
but they think they are.
The wise don’t praise
pompous people.
Whoever does not waver
due to the discriminations—

‘I am better’, ‘I’m not better’,
‘I am worse’, or ‘I am the same’—
with such understanding, unaffected,
steady in ethics,
and devoted to serenity of mind:
that is who the wise praise.”
“Whoever has no respect
for their spiritual companions
is as far from the true teaching
as the earth is from the sky.
Those whose conscience and prudence
are always rightly established,
thrive in the spiritual life;
for them, there are no future lives.
When a mendicant who is haughty and fickle
wears rags from the rubbish-heap,
that doesn’t make them shine:
they’re like a monkey in a lion skin.
But if they not restless or fickle,
alert, with senses restrained,
then, wearing rags from the rubbish-heap, they shine
like a lion in a mountain cave.”
“These many gods
powerful and glorious,
all 10,000 of them,
belong to the host of the Divinity.
They stand with cupped palms
honoring Sāriputta,
the General of the Dhamma, the hero,

the serene great meditator:
‘Homage to you, O thoroughbred!
Homage to you, supreme among men!
We don’t understand
the basis of your absorption.
The profound domain of the Buddhas
is truly amazing.
We don’t understand,
though we’ve gathered here to split hairs.’
When he saw the host of gods
paying homage to Sāriputta—
who is truly worthy of homage—
Kappina smiled.”
“As far as the range of the Buddha extends,
apart from the great sage himself,
I am distinguished in austerities,
no equal to me is found.
I’ve served the Teacher
and fulfilled the Buddha’s instructions.
The heavy burden is laid down,
now there’ll be no more future lives.”
“Like a lotus flower
to which water will not stick,
Gotama the immeasurable is unstained
by robes, lodgings, or food.
He inclines to renunciation,
and has escaped the three states of existence.
The great sage’s neck is mindfulness meditation;
faith is his hands, and wisdom his head.

Having great knowledge,

he always wanders, quenched.”

The Book of the Forties is finished.