SN 4.6 — A Cobra

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Text

Linked Discourses 4.6

1. Lifespan

A Cobra

So I have heard. At one time the Buddha was staying near Rājagaha in the Bamboo Grove, the squirrels' feeding ground.

Now at that time the Buddha was meditating in the open during the dark of night, while a gentle rain drizzled down.

Then Māra the Wicked, wanting to make the Buddha feel fear, terror, and goosebumps, manifested in the form of a big cobra king and approached him. Its body was like a big canoe carved from a single tree. Its hood was like a large brewer's sieve. Its eyes were like big bronze cups from Kosala. Its tongue flickered from its mouth like lightning flashes in a thunderstorm. The sound of its breathing was like the puffing of a blacksmith's bellows.

Then the Buddha, knowing that this was Māra the Wicked, replied to him in verse:

"One who frequents empty buildings

for lodging—that sage is self-restrained.

It's appropriate for that sort

to live there after relinquishing.

Though there are lots of creepy crawlies,

and lots of flies and reptiles,

they wouldn't stir a hair

of a great sage in that empty hut.

Though the firmament may split and the earth may quake,

and all creatures be stricken with fear;

and even if an arrow's aimed at their breast,

the Buddhas take no shelter in attachments."

Then Māra the Wicked, thinking, “The Buddha knows me! The Holy One knows me!” miserable and sad, vanished right there.