SN 22.96 — A Lump of Cow Dung

English translation by Bhikkhu Sujato.
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Text

Linked Discourses 22.96

10. Flowers

A Lump of Cow Dung

At Sāvatthī.

Seated to one side, that mendicant said to the Buddha:

“Sir, is there any form at all that’s permanent, everlasting, eternal, imperishable, and will last forever and ever? Is there any feeling … perception … choices … consciousness at all that’s permanent, everlasting, eternal, imperishable, and will last forever and ever?”

“Mendicant, there is no form at all that’s permanent, everlasting, eternal, imperishable, and will last forever and ever. There’s no feeling … perception … choices … consciousness at all that’s permanent, everlasting, eternal, imperishable, and will last forever and ever.”

Then the Buddha, picking up a lump of cow dung, said to the mendicant:

“There’s not even this much of any incarnation that’s permanent, everlasting, eternal, imperishable, and will last forever and ever. If there were, this living of the spiritual life for the complete ending of suffering would not be found. But since there isn’t, this living of the spiritual life for the complete ending of suffering is found.

Once upon a time I was an anointed aristocratic king. I had 84,000 cities, with the capital Kusāvatī the foremost. I had 84,000 palaces, with the Palace of Principle the foremost. I had 84,000 chambers, with the Chamber of the Grand Tower the foremost. I had 84,000 couches made of ivory or heartwood or gold or silver, spread with woolen covers—shag-piled or embroidered with flowers—and spread with a fine deer hide, with a canopy above and red pillows at both ends. I had 84,000 bull elephants with gold adornments and banners, covered with snow gold netting, with the royal bull elephant named Sabbath the foremost. I had 84,000 horses with gold adornments and banners, covered with snow gold netting, with the royal steed named Thundercloud the foremost. I had 84,000 chariots with gold adornments and banners, covered with snow gold netting, with the chariot named Triumph the foremost. I had 84,000 jewels, with the jewel-treasure the foremost. I had 84,000 women, with Queen Subhaddā the foremost. I had 84,000 aristocrat vassals, with the commander-treasure the foremost. I had 84,000 milk cows with muslin halter and bronze pails. I had 8,400,000,000 cloths of delicate linen, cotton, silk, and wool. I had 84,000 servings of food, which were presented to me as offerings at daybreak

and dusk.

Of those 84,000 cities, I only stayed in one, the capital Kusāvatī. Of those 84,000 palaces, I only dwelt in one, the Palace of Principle. Of those 84,000 chambers, I only dwelt in one, the Chamber of the Grand Tower. Of those 84,000 couches, I only used one, made of ivory or heartwood or gold or silver. Of those 84,000 bull elephants, I only rode one, the royal bull elephant named Sabbath. Of those 84,000 horses, I only rode one, the royal horse named Thundercloud. Of those 84,000 chariots, I only rode one, the chariot named Triumph. Of those 84,000 women, I was only served by one, an aristocrat maiden or a coquette. Of those 8,400,000,000 cloths, I only wore one pair, made of delicate linen, cotton, silk, and wool. Of those 84,000 servings of food, I only had one, eating at most a cup of rice with suitable sauce.

And so all those conditioned phenomena have passed, ceased, and perished. So impermanent are conditions, so unstable are conditions, so unreliable are conditions. This is quite enough for you to become disillusioned, dispassionate, and freed regarding all conditions.”