SN 35.243 — The Explanation on the Festering

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Text

Linked Discourses 35.243

19. The Simile of the Vipers

The Explanation on the Festering

At one time the Buddha was staying in the land of the Sakyans, near Kapilavatthu in the Banyan Tree Monastery. Now at that time a new town hall had recently been constructed for the Sakyans of Kapilavatthu. It had not yet been occupied by an ascetic or brahmin or any human at all.

Then the Sakyans of Kapilavatthu went up to the Buddha, bowed, sat down to one side, and said to him, “Sir, a new town hall has recently been constructed for the Sakyans of Kapilavatthu. It has not yet been occupied by an ascetic or brahmin or any human at all. May the Buddha be the first to use it, and only then will the Sakyans of Kapilavatthu use it. That would be for the lasting welfare and happiness of the Sakyans of Kapilavatthu.” The Buddha consented with silence.

Knowing that the Buddha had consented, the Sakyans rose from their seats, bowed and respectfully circled the Buddha, keeping him on their right. Then they went to the new town hall, where they spread carpets all over, prepared seats, set up a water jar, and placed an oil lamp. Then they went back to the Buddha and told him of their preparations, saying, “Please, sir, come at your convenience.”

Then the Buddha robed up and, taking his bowl and robe, went to the new town hall together with the Saṅgha of mendicants. Having washed his feet, he entered the town hall and sat against the central column facing east. The Saṅgha of mendicants also washed their feet, entered the town hall, and sat against the west wall facing east, with the Buddha right in front of them. The Sakyans of Kapilavatthu also washed their feet, entered the town hall, and sat against the east wall facing west, with the Buddha right in front of them. The Buddha spent much of the night educating, encouraging, firing up, and inspiring the Sakyans with a Dhamma talk. Then he sent them off, saying, “The night is getting late, Gotamas. Please go at your convenience.”

“Yes, sir,” replied the Sakyans. They got up from their seat, bowed and respectfully circled the Buddha, keeping him on their right, before leaving.

Then, not long after the Sakyans had left, the Buddha addressed Venerable Mahāmoggallāna, “Moggallāna, the Saṅgha of mendicants is rid of dullness and drowsiness. Give them some Dhamma talk as you feel inspired. My back is sore, I’ll stretch

it.”

“Yes, sir,” Mahāmoggallāna replied. And then the Buddha spread out his outer robe folded in four and laid down in the lion’s posture—on the right side, placing one foot on top of the other—mindful and aware, and focused on the time of getting up.

There Venerable Mahāmoggallāna addressed the mendicants: “Reverends, mendicants!”

“Reverend,” they replied. Venerable Mahāmoggallāna said this:

“I will teach you the explanation of the festering and the not festering. Listen and apply your mind well, I will speak.”

“Yes, reverend,” they replied. Venerable Mahāmoggallāna said this:

“And how is someone festering?

Take a mendicant who sees a sight with their eyes. If it’s pleasant they hold on to it, but if it’s unpleasant they dislike it. They live with mindfulness of the body unestablished and their heart stunted. And they don’t truly understand the freedom of heart and freedom by wisdom where those arisen bad, unskillful qualities cease without remainder.

They hear a sound … smell an odor … taste a flavor … feel a touch … know an idea with their mind. If it’s pleasant they hold on to it, but if it’s unpleasant they dislike it. They live with mindfulness of the body unestablished and their heart stunted. And they don’t truly understand the freedom of heart and freedom by wisdom where those arisen bad, unskillful qualities cease without remainder.

This is called a mendicant who is festering when it comes to sights known by the eye, sounds … smells … tastes … touches … ideas known by the mind.

When a mendicant lives like this, if Māra comes at them through the eye he finds a vulnerability and gets an opportunity. If Māra comes at them through the ear … nose … tongue … body … mind he finds a vulnerability and gets an opportunity.

Suppose there was a house made of reeds or straw that was dried up, withered, and decrepit. If a person came to it with a burning grass torch from the east, west, north, south, below, above, or from anywhere, the fire would find a vulnerability, it would get an opportunity.

In the same way, when a mendicant lives like this, if Māra comes at them through the eye he finds a vulnerability and gets an opportunity. If Māra comes at them through the ear … nose … tongue … body … mind he finds a vulnerability and gets an opportunity.

When a mendicant lives like this, they’re mastered by sights, sounds, smells, tastes, touches, and ideas, they don’t master these things.

This is called a mendicant who has been mastered by sights, sounds, smells, tastes, touches, and ideas. They’re mastered, not a master. Bad, unskillful qualities have mastered them, which are corrupting, leading to future lives, hurtful, and resulting in suffering and future rebirth, old age, and death.

That's how someone is festering.

And how is someone not festering?

Take a mendicant who sees a sight with their eyes. If it's pleasant they don't hold on to it, and if it's unpleasant they don't dislike it. They live with mindfulness of the body established and a limitless heart. And they truly understand the freedom of heart and freedom by wisdom where those arisen bad, unskillful qualities cease without remainder.

They hear a sound … smell an odor … taste a flavor … feel a touch … know an idea with their mind. If it's pleasant they don't hold on to it, and if it's unpleasant they don't dislike it. They live with mindfulness of the body established and a limitless heart. And they truly understand the freedom of heart and freedom by wisdom where those arisen bad, unskillful qualities cease without remainder.

This is called a mendicant who is not festering when it comes to sights known by the eye, sounds … smells … tastes … touches … ideas known by the mind.

When a mendicant lives like this, if Māra comes at them through the eye he doesn't find a vulnerability or get an opportunity. If Māra comes at them through the ear … nose … tongue … body … mind he doesn't find a vulnerability or get an opportunity.

Suppose there was a bungalow or hall made of thick clay with its plaster still wet. If a person came to it with a burning grass torch from the east, west, north, south, below, above, or from anywhere, the fire wouldn't find a vulnerability, it would get no opportunity.

In the same way, when a mendicant lives like this, if Māra comes at them through the eye he doesn't find a vulnerability or get an opportunity. If Māra comes at them through the ear … nose … tongue … body … mind he doesn't find a vulnerability or get an opportunity.

When a mendicant lives like this, they master sights, sounds, smells, tastes, touches, and ideas, they're not mastered by these things.

This is called a mendicant who has mastered sights, sounds, smells, tastes, touches, and ideas. They're a master, not mastered. Bad, unskillful qualities have been mastered by them, which are corrupting, leading to future lives, hurtful, and resulting in suffering and future rebirth, old age, and death.

That's how someone is not festering."

Then the Buddha got up and said to Venerable Mahāmoggallāna:

"Good, good, Moggallāna! It's good that you've taught this explanation of the festering and the not festering."

That is what Venerable Mahāmoggallāna said, and the Teacher concurred. Satisfied, the mendicants approved what Mahāmoggallāna said.