SN 35.248 — The Sheaf of Barley

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Text

Linked Discourses 35.248

19. The Simile of the Vipers

The Sheaf of Barley

“Mendicants, suppose a sheaf of barley was placed at a crossroads. Then six people would come along carrying flails, and start threshing the sheaf of barley. So that sheaf of barley would be thoroughly threshed by those six flails. Then a seventh person would come along carrying a flail, and they’d give the sheaf of barley a seventh threshing. So that sheaf of barley would be even more thoroughly threshed by that seventh flail.

In the same way, an unlearned ordinary person is struck in the eye by both pleasant and unpleasant sights. They’re struck in the ear … nose … tongue … body … mind by both pleasant and unpleasant ideas. And if that unlearned ordinary person intends to be reborn in a new state of existence in the future, that futile person is even more thoroughly struck, like that sheaf of barley threshed by the seventh person.

Once upon a time, a battle was fought between the gods and the titans. Then Vepacitti, lord of titans, addressed the titans, ‘My good fellows, if the titans defeat the gods in this battle, bind Sakka, the lord of gods, by his limbs and neck and bring him to my presence in the citadel of the titans.’

Meanwhile, Sakka, lord of gods, addressed the gods of the thirty-three, ‘My good fellows, if the gods defeat the titans in this battle, bind Vepacitti by his limbs and neck and bring him to my presence in the Hall of Clear Right of the gods.’

In that battle the gods won and the titans lost. So the gods of the thirty-three bound Vepacitti by his limbs and neck and brought him to Sakka’s presence in the Hall of Clear Right of the gods.

And there Vepacitti remained bound by his limbs and neck. That is, until he thought, ‘It’s the gods who are principled, while the titans are unprincipled. Now I belong right here in the castle of the gods.’ Then he found himself freed from the bonds on his limbs and neck. He amused himself, supplied and provided with the five kinds of heavenly sensual stimulation.

But when he thought, ‘It’s the titans who are principled, while the gods are unprincipled. Now I will go over there to the citadel of the titans,’ he found himself bound by his limbs and neck, and the five kinds of heavenly sensual stimulation fell away.

That's how subtly Vepacitti was bound. But the bonds of Māra are even more subtle than that. When you conceive, you're bound by Māra. Not conceiving, you're free from the Wicked One.

These are what is conceived: 'I am', 'I am this', 'I will be', 'I will not be', 'I will have form', 'I will be formless', 'I will be percipient', 'I will be non-percipient', 'I will be neither percipient nor non-percipient.' What is conceived is a disease, a boil, a dart. So mendicants, you should train yourselves like this: 'We will live with a heart that does not conceive.'

These are what is perturbed: 'I am', 'I am this', 'I will be', 'I will not be', 'I will have form', 'I will be formless', 'I will be percipient', 'I will be non-percipient', 'I will be neither percipient nor non-percipient.' What is perturbed is a disease, a boil, a dart. So mendicants, you should train yourselves like this: 'We will live with a heart free of perturbation.'

These are what has floundered: 'I am', 'I am this', 'I will be', 'I will not be', 'I will have form', 'I will be formless', 'I will be percipient', 'I will be non-percipient', 'I will be neither percipient nor non-percipient.' What has floundered is a disease, a boil, a dart. So mendicants, you should train yourselves like this: 'We will live with a heart free of floundering.'

These are what is proliferated: 'I am', 'I am this', 'I will be', 'I will not be', 'I will have form', 'I will be formless', 'I will be percipient', 'I will be non-percipient', 'I will be neither percipient nor non-percipient.' What is proliferated is a disease, a boil, a dart. So mendicants, you should train yourselves like this: 'We will live with a heart free of proliferation.'

These are states of conceit: 'I am', 'I am this', 'I will be', 'I will not be', 'I will have form', 'I will be formless', 'I will be percipient', 'I will be non-percipient', 'I will be neither percipient nor non-percipient.' The state of conceit is a disease, a boil, a dart. So mendicants, you should train yourselves like this: 'We will live with a heart that has struck down conceit.'"

The Linked Discourses on the six sense fields are complete.