SN 55.6 — The Chamberlains

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Text

Linked Discourses 55.6

1. At Bamboo Gate

The Chamberlains

At Sāvatthī. At that time several mendicants were making a robe for the Buddha, thinking that when his robe was finished and the three months of the rains residence had passed the Buddha would set out wandering. Now at that time the chamberlains Isidatta and Purāṇa were residing in Sādhuka on some business. They heard about this.

So they posted someone on the road, saying:

“My man, let us know when you see the Blessed One coming, the perfected one, the fully awakened Buddha.” And that person stood there for two or three days before they saw the Buddha coming off in the distance. When they saw him, they went to the chamberlains and said:

“Sirs, the Blessed One, the perfected one, the fully awakened Buddha is coming. Please come at your convenience.”

Then the chamberlains went up to the Buddha, bowed, and followed behind him. And then the Buddha left the road, went to the root of a certain tree, and sat down on the seat spread out. The chamberlains Isidatta and Purāṇa bowed, sat down to one side, and said to the Buddha:

“Sir, when we hear that you will be setting out from Sāvatthī to wander in the Kosalan lands, we’re sad and upset, thinking that you will be far from us. And when we hear that you are setting out from Sāvatthī to wander in the Kosalan lands, we’re sad and upset, thinking that you are far from us.

And when we hear that you will be setting out from the Kosalan lands to wander in the Mallian lands, we’re sad and upset, thinking that you will be far from us. And when we hear that you are setting out from the Kosalan lands to wander in the Mallian lands, we’re sad and upset, thinking that you are far from us.

And when we hear that you will be setting out from the Mallian lands to wander in the Vajjian lands …

you will be setting out from the Vajjian lands to wander in the Kāsian lands …

you will be setting out from the Kāsian lands to wander in the Magadhan lands …

you are setting out from the Kāsian lands to wander in the Magadhan lands, we're sad and upset, thinking that you are far from us.

But when we hear that you will be setting out from the Magadhan lands to wander in the Kāsian lands, we're happy and joyful, thinking that you will be near to us. And when we hear that you are setting out from the Magadhan lands to wander in the Kāsian lands …

you will be setting out from the Kāsian lands to wander in the Vajjian lands …

you will be setting out from the Vajjian lands to wander in the Mallian lands …

you will be setting out from the Mallian lands to wander in the Kosalan lands …

you will be setting out in the Kosalan lands to wander to Sāvatthī, we're happy and joyful, thinking that you will be near to us.

And when we hear that you are staying near Sāvatthī in Jeta's Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika's monastery we have no little happiness and joy, thinking that you are near to us."

"Well then, chamberlains, life at home is cramped and dirty, life gone forth is wide open. Just this much is enough for diligence."

"Sir, for us there is something that's even more cramped than that, and is considered as such."

"What is that?"

"Sir, it's when King Pasenadi of Kosala wants to go and visit a park. We have to harness and prepare his royal elephants. Then we have to seat his dear and beloved wives on the elephants, one in front of us, and one behind. Those sisters smell like a freshly opened perfume box; that's how the royal ladies smell with makeup on. The touch of those sisters is like a tuft of cotton-wool or kapok; that's how pampered the royal ladies are. Now at that time we must look after the elephants, the sisters, and ourselves. But we don't recall having a bad thought regarding those sisters. This is that thing that's even more cramped than that, and is considered as such."

"Well then, chamberlains, life at home is cramped and dirty, life gone forth is wide open. Just this much is enough for diligence. A noble disciple who has four things is a stream-enterer, not liable to be reborn in the underworld, assured, destined for awakening.

What four? It's when a noble disciple has experiential confidence in the Buddha … the teaching … the Saṅgha … They live at home with heart rid of the stain of stinginess, freely generous, open-handed, loving to let go, committed to charity, loving to give and to share. A noble disciple who has these four things is a stream-enterer, not liable to be reborn in the underworld, assured, destined for awakening.

And you have experiential confidence in the Buddha … the teaching … the Saṅgha … And whatever there is in your family that's available to give, you share it all with those who are ethical, of good character.

What do you think, chamberlains? How many people among the Kosalans are your equal when it comes to giving and sharing?"

"We're fortunate, sir, so very fortunate, in that the Buddha understands us like this."