AN 3.37 — The Four Great Kings (1st)

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Text

Numbered Discourses 3.37

4. Messengers of the Gods

The Four Great Kings (1st)

“On the eighth day of the fortnight, mendicants, the ministers and councillors of the four great kings wander about the world, thinking: ‘Hopefully most humans are paying due respect to their parents, ascetics and brahmins, honoring the elders in their families, observing and keeping vigil on the sabbath, and making merit.’

And on the fourteenth day of the fortnight, the sons of the four great kings wander about the world, thinking: ‘Hopefully most humans are paying due respect to their parents … and making merit.’

And on the fifteenth day sabbath, the four great kings themselves wander about the world, thinking: ‘Hopefully most humans are paying due respect to their parents … and making merit.’

If only a few humans are paying due respect to their parents … and making merit, the four great kings address the gods of the thirty-three, seated together in the Hall of Clear Right: ‘Only a few humans are paying due respect to their parents … and making merit.’ Then the gods of the thirty-three are disappointed, thinking, ‘The heavenly hosts will dwindle, while the titan hosts will swell!’

But if many humans are paying due respect to their parents … and making merit, the four great kings address the gods of the thirty-three, seated together in the Hall of Clear Right: ‘Many humans are paying due respect to their parents … and making merit.’ Then the gods of the thirty-three are pleased, thinking, ‘The heavenly hosts will swell, while the titan hosts will dwindle!’

Once upon a time, Sakka, lord of gods, guiding the gods of the thirty-three, spoke this verse:

‘Whoever wants to be like me

would observe the sabbath

complete in all eight factors,

on the fourteenth and the fifteenth days,

and the eighth day of the fortnight,

as well as on the fortnightly special displays.’

But that verse was poorly sung by Sakka, lord of gods, not well sung; poorly spoken, not well spoken. Why is that? Because Sakka, lord of gods, is not free of greed, hate, and delusion.

But for a mendicant who is perfected—with defilements ended, who has completed the spiritual journey, done what had to be done, laid down the burden, achieved their heart’s goal, utterly ended the fetter of continued existence, and is rightly freed through enlightenment—it is appropriate to say:

‘Whoever wants to be like me

would observe the sabbath,

complete in all eight factors,

on the fourteenth and the fifteenth days,

and the eighth day of the fortnight,

as well as on the fortnightly special displays.’

Why is that? Because that mendicant is free of greed, hate, and delusion.”