Snp 3.2 — Striving

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Text

Anthology of Discourses 3.2

Striving

“During my time of resolute striving
back on the bank of the Nerañjara River,
I was meditating very hard
for the sake of sanctuary from the yoke.
Namucī approached,
speaking words of kindness:
‘You’re thin, discolored,
on the verge of death.
Death has a thousand parts of you,
one fraction is left to life.
Live, worthy sir! Life is better!
Living, you can make merits.
While leading the spiritual life
and serving the sacred flame,
you can pile up abundant merit—
so what will striving do for you?
Hard to walk is the path of striving,
hard to do, a hard challenge to win.’”
These are the verses Māra spoke
as he stood beside the Buddha.
When Māra had spoken in this way,

the Buddha said this:

“O Wicked One, kinsman of the negligent,

you’re here for your own purpose.

I have no need for

the slightest bit of merit.

Those with need for merit

are fit for Māra to address.

I have faith and energy too,

and wisdom is found in me.

When I am so resolute,

why do you beg me to live?

The rivers and streams

might be dried by the wind,

so why, when I am resolute,

should it not dry up my blood?

And while the blood is drying up,

the bile and phlegm dry too.

And as my muscles waste away,

my mind grows more serene.

And all the stronger grow mindfulness

and wisdom and immersion.

As I meditate like this,

having attained the supreme feeling,

my mind has no interest in sensual pleasures:

behold a being’s purity!

Sensual pleasures are your first army,

the second is called discontent,

hunger and thirst are the third,

and the fourth is said to be craving.

Your fifth is dullness and drowsiness,
the sixth is said to be cowardice,
your seventh is doubt,
contempt and obstinacy are your eighth.
Profit, praise, and honor,
and misbegotten fame;
the extolling of oneself
while scorning others.
This is your army, Namucī,
the strike force of the Dark One.
Only a hero can defeat it,
but in victory there lies bliss.
Let me gird myself—
curse my life!
I'd rather die in battle
than live on in defeat.
Here some ascetics and brahmins
are swallowed up, not to be seen again.
And they do not know the path
traveled by those true to their vows.
Seeing Māra ready with his legions,
surrounded by his bannered forces,
I shall meet them in battle—
they'll never make me retreat!
That army of yours has never been beaten
by the world with all its gods.
Yet I shall smash it with wisdom,
like an unfired pot with a stone.
Having brought my thoughts under control,

and established mindfulness well,
I shall wander from nation to nation,
guiding many disciples.
Diligent and resolute,
following my instructions,
they will proceed despite your will,
to where there is no sorrow.”
“For seven years I followed
step by step behind the Blessed One.
I found no vulnerability
in the mindful Awakened One.
A crow once circled a stone
that looked like a lump of fat.
‘Perhaps I’ll find something tender,’ it thought,
‘perhaps there’s something tasty.’
But finding nothing tasty,
the crow left that place.
Like the crow that pecked the stone,
I leave Gotama disappointed.”
So stricken with sorrow
that his harp dropped from his armpit,
that spirit, downcast,
vanished right there.