

MN 37: Cūḷataṇhāsaṅkhaya Sutta

The Lesser Discourse on the Complete Elimination of Craving

Translated by Suddhāso Bhikkhu

Thus have I heard. On one occasion the Blessed One was dwelling at Sāvatti, in the Eastern Park, in the Palace of Migāra's Mother. Then Sakka, the Lord of the Devas¹, approached the Blessed One and stood to one side. While he was standing to one side, Sakka said to the Blessed One, “Bhante, briefly, in what way is a monk one who is liberated by the complete elimination of craving, who has attained the final goal, the final security from entrapment, the final [fulfillment of the] Holy Life, the final conclusion - the one who is best of devas and humans?”

“Here, Lord of the Devas, a monk has heard, 'All phenomena are not worth settling on.' And, Lord of the Devas, when a monk has heard, 'All phenomena are not worth settling on,' he comprehends all phenomena. After comprehending all phenomena, he fully understands all phenomena. After fully understanding all phenomena, then whatever feeling he feels - pleasant, painful, or neutral² - he abides perceiving impermanence, fading away, cessation, and relinquishment in regard to those feelings. One who abides perceiving impermanence, fading away, cessation, and relinquishment in regard to those feelings does not cling to anything in the world. One who does not cling does not become agitated. One who does not become agitated personally attains final Nibbāna, and knows: 'Birth has been eliminated. The Holy Life has been lived. What was to be done has been done. There will be no further existence here.' Lord of the Devas, briefly, it is in this way that a monk is one who is liberated by the complete elimination of craving, who has attained the final goal, the final security from entrapment, the final [fulfillment of the] Holy Life, the final conclusion - the one who is best of devas and humans.”

Then Sakka, the Lord of the Devas, after delighting and rejoicing in the Blessed One's speech, paid respects to the Blessed One, and, having done what was appropriate, he immediately disappeared.

Now on this occasion Venerable Mahā-Moggallāna was seated not far from the Blessed One. Then it occurred to Venerable Mahā-Moggallāna, “Did that spirit³ really break through⁴ [to the meaning of] the Blessed One's speech that he rejoiced in, or did he not? Perhaps I should find out about that spirit - whether or not he broke through [to the

1 Despite this title, Sakka is not lord of *all* celestial beings, but rather lord of the devas who reside in the Tāvātimsa heaven (and possibly those of lower rank, such as the Cātummahārājika devas and Bhumma devas, though the suttas are silent on this point). Note that although this title is repeated every time Sakka is mentioned, it has often been omitted in this translation for ease of reading.

2 *Adukkham-asukham*. Lit. “Not-painful-not-pleasant.”

3 *Yakkha*. In the Suttas, this term refers to any spirit or deva, whether good, bad, or neutral. Here it is being used in reference to Sakka, who was a disciple of the Buddha and eventually became a stream-enterer. This is in stark contrast to the apocryphal usage of the term *yakkha* as referring only to evil spirits.

4 *Abhisameti*. This is the same root as the term *abhisamaya*, which in the *Abhisamaya-Samyutta* is equated with the attainment of stream-entry.

meaning of] the Blessed One's speech that he rejoiced in." Then, just as a strong man might contract his extended arm or extend his contracted arm, Venerable Mahā-Moggallāna disappeared from the Palace of Migāra's Mother in the Eastern Park, and manifested amidst the Tāvātimsa devas. Now on that occasion Sakka, the Lord of the Devas, was amusing himself in the Ekapuṇḍarīka⁵ Garden, supplied with five hundred heavenly musical instruments. Sakka saw Venerable Mahā-Moggallāna coming from afar. After dismissing the five hundred heavenly musical instruments, he approached Venerable Mahā-Moggallāna and said to him, "Come, Sir⁶ Moggallāna! Welcome, Sir Moggallāna! Sir Moggallāna, it has a been a long time since you last came here. Sit, Sir Moggallāna; that is the designated seat." Venerable Mahā-Moggallāna sat on the designated seat. Sakka took a certain low seat and sat to one side. When Sakka was seated to one side, Venerable Mahā-Moggallāna said to him, "Kosiya⁷, how did the Blessed One briefly state liberation by complete elimination of craving? It would be good if we shared that conversation as well."

"Sir Moggallāna, we have many duties and much to do - our own business as well as the business of the Tāvātimsa devas. Sir Moggallāna, even that which was listened to well, understood⁸ well, paid attention to well, and remembered well quickly disappears from us. Sir Moggallāna, in the past there was a battle between the devas and the asuras⁹. Sir Moggallāna, in that battle the devas won and the asuras were defeated. Sir Moggallāna, after winning that battle and returning from it as a victor in battle, I had the Vejayanta¹⁰ Palace constructed. Sir Moggallāna, Vejayanta Palace has a hundred towers. Each tower has seven pinnacles. Each pinnacle has seven nymphs. Each nymph has seven maidservants. Sir Moggallāna, do you wish to see the delightful Vejayanta palace?" Venerable Moggallāna silently agreed.

Then Sakka and the Great King Vessavaṇa¹¹ approached Vejayanta Palace, with Venerable Mahā-Moggallāna in front of them. Sakka's maidservants saw Venerable Mahā-Moggallāna coming from afar; after seeing him, they were filled with a sense of conscience¹² and entered their own rooms. Just as a daughter-in-law is filled with a sense of conscience after seeing her father-in-law, in the same way, after Sakka's maidservants saw Venerable Mahā-Moggallāna, they were filled with a sense of conscience and entered their own rooms. Then Sakka and the Great King Vessavaṇa had Venerable Mahā-

5 Lit. "Single-Lotus."

6 *Mārisa*. A polite term of address used almost exclusively amongst devas.

7 Lit. "Owl." One of Sakka's names.

8 *Gahitaṃ*. Lit. "grasped."

9 An asura is a particular kind of deva characterized by anger, jealousy, and violent tendencies. The asuras were previously residents of Tāvātimsa. They were expelled from that realm, and since then have frequently engaged in combat with the devas who remain in Tāvātimsa.

10 The name means "attaining victory."

11 One of the "Four Great Kings," the rulers of the Cātummahārājika heaven.

12 The two Pāli terms "hiri" and "ottappa" are here rendered with the single English term "sense of conscience." There is no adequate translation for these two terms, which indicate moral sensitivity - an awareness of right and wrong, coupled with a natural inclination to avoid doing that which is wrong. These terms are often rendered using such inaccurate terms as "embarrassment," "shame," and "fear of wrongdoing," all of which convey strongly negative connotations which are completely alien to the Pāli terms. "Conscience" and "moral sensitivity" are much closer to the intended meaning.

Moggallāna walk through and investigate the Vejayanta Palace, [saying] “See, Sir Moggallāna, this is the delightful Vejayanta Palace! See, Sir Moggallāna, this is the delightful Vejayanta Palace!” “This glorifies Sir Kosiya as one who has previously done meritorious deeds. Even when humans see something delightful they say, 'Oh, this is as glorious as the Tāvātimsa devas!' This glorifies Sir Kosiya as one who has previously done meritorious deeds.” Then it occurred to Venerable Mahā-Moggallāna, “This spirit lives with too much negligence. Perhaps I should instill a sense of urgency¹³ in this spirit.” Then Venerable Mahā-Moggallāna performed a psychic feat, such that he made the Vejayanta Palace quiver, tremble, and shake, using his toe. Then Sakka, the Great King Vessavaṇa, and the Tāvātimsa devas were filled with wonder and amazement: “The contemplative's power and majesty are so wonderful and amazing, since he can make a celestial structure quiver, tremble, and shake, using his toe!” Then, when Venerable Mahā-Moggallāna knew that Sakka had a sense of urgency, with his hair standing on end, he said to Sakka, “Kosiya, how did the Blessed One briefly state liberation by complete elimination of craving? It would be good if we shared that conversation as well.”

“Sir Moggallāna, here I approached the Blessed One; after approaching and paying respects to the Blessed One, I stood to one side. Sir Moggallāna, while I was standing to one side I said to the Blessed One, 'Bhante, briefly, in what way is a monk one who is liberated by the complete elimination of craving, who has attained the final goal, the final security from entrapment, the final [fulfillment of the] Holy Life, the final conclusion - the one who is best of devas and humans?' When this was said, Sir Moggallāna, the Blessed One said to me, 'Here, Lord of the Devas, a monk has heard, “All phenomena are not worth settling on.” And, Lord of the Devas, when a monk has heard, “All phenomena are not worth settling on,” he comprehends all phenomena. After comprehending all phenomena, he fully understands all phenomena. After fully understanding all phenomena, then whatever feeling he feels - pleasant, painful, or neutral - he abides perceiving impermanence, fading away, cessation, and relinquishment in regard to those feelings. One who abides perceiving impermanence, fading away, cessation, and relinquishment in regard to those feelings does not cling to anything in the world. One who does not cling does not become agitated. One who does not become agitated personally attains final Nibbāna, and knows: “Birth has been eliminated. The Holy Life has been lived. What was to be done has been done. There will be no further existence here.” Lord of the Devas, briefly, it is in this way that a monk is one who is liberated by the complete elimination of craving, who has attained the final goal, the final security from entrapment, the final [fulfillment of the] Holy Life, the final conclusion - the one who is best of devas and humans.' Sir Moggallāna, it was in this way that the Blessed One briefly stated to me liberation by complete elimination of craving.”

Then Venerable Mahā-Moggallāna delighted and rejoiced in Sakka's statement, and, just as a strong man might contract his extended arm or extend his contracted arm, Venerable

13 *Samvega*. There is no easy English translation for this word. *Samvega* arises from a recognition of the drawbacks of *saṃsāra* (conditional existence). It includes a loss of interest in the petty indulgences of *saṃsāra*, and an increased interest in freeing oneself from *saṃsāra*. “Sense of urgency” touches only the second of these two, and must be understood specifically as a sense of the urgent need to practice Dhamma in order to free oneself from the limitations of *saṃsāra*.

Mahā-Moggallāna disappeared from amidst the Tāvātimsa devas and manifested in the Palace of Migāra's Mother in the Eastern Park. Then, not long after Venerable Mahā-Moggallāna's departure, Sakka's maidservants said to him, "Sir, is that your teacher - the Blessed One?" "Lady, that is not my teacher, the Blessed One. That is Venerable Mahā-Moggallāna, my co-practitioner." "Sir, it is a gain for you that your co-practitioner has such power and majesty! Oh, how your teacher, the Blessed One, must be!"

Then Venerable Mahā-Moggallāna approached the Blessed One; after approaching and paying respects to the Blessed One, he sat to one side. When he was seated to one side, Venerable Mahā-Moggallāna said to the Blessed One, "Bhante, does the Blessed One recall having briefly stated liberation by complete elimination of craving to a certain famous spirit of great power?" "Moggallāna, I recall that Sakka, the Lord of the Devas, approached me here; after approaching and paying respects he stood to one side. Moggallāna, while he was standing to one side, Sakka said to me, 'Bhante, briefly, in what way is a monk one who is liberated by the complete elimination of craving, who has attained the final goal, the final security from entrapment, the final [fulfillment of the] Holy Life, the final conclusion - the one who is best of devas and humans?' When this was said, Moggallāna, I said this to Sakka: 'Here, Lord of the Devas, a monk has heard, "All phenomena are not worth settling on." And, Lord of the Devas, when a monk has heard, "All phenomena are not worth settling on," he comprehends all phenomena. After comprehending all phenomena, he fully understands all phenomena. After fully understanding all phenomena, then whatever feeling he feels - pleasant, painful, or neutral - he abides perceiving impermanence, fading away, cessation, and relinquishment in regard to those feelings. One who abides perceiving impermanence, fading away, cessation, and relinquishment in regard to those feelings does not cling to anything in the world. One who does not cling does not become agitated. One who does not become agitated personally attains final Nibbāna, and knows: "Birth has been eliminated. The Holy Life has been lived. What was to be done has been done. There will be no further existence here." Lord of the Devas, briefly, it is in this way that a monk is one who is liberated by the complete elimination of craving, who has attained the final goal, the final security from entrapment, the final [fulfillment of the] Holy Life, the final conclusion - the one who is best of devas and humans.' Moggallāna, it is in this way that I recall having briefly stated liberation by complete elimination of craving to Sakka, the Lord of the Devas."

This is what the Blessed One said. Satisfied, Venerable Mahā-Moggallāna delighted in the Blessed One's speech.