

MN 29: Mahāsāropama Sutta

The Greater Discourse on the Simile of Heartwood

Translated by Bhante Suddhāso

Thus have I heard. On one occasion the Prosperous One was dwelling at Vulture Peak Mountain, not long after the departure of Devadatta. There, in reference to Devadatta, the Blessed One addressed the monks:

“Monks, here some gentleman, based on faith, has left behind lay life and become a monastic renunciant, thinking ‘I am caught in birth, decay, death, sorrow, grief, pain, depression, and anguish, caught in suffering and enveloped by suffering. Perhaps a way to put an end to this whole heap of suffering can be discerned.’ When he has become a renunciant in this way, wealth, respect, and fame appear. He is satisfied with that wealth, respect, and fame, and it completely fills his thoughts. Because of that wealth, respect, and fame, he praises himself and disparages others, saying ‘I have wealth, respect, and fame, but these other monks are not well-known and have little influence.’ Intoxicated by that wealth, respect, and fame, he becomes negligent and heedless. Being negligent, he dwells in suffering.

“Monks, just as if a person who needed heartwood, was seeking heartwood, and was wandering in search of heartwood, came to a large, stable tree that had heartwood. He would bypass its heartwood, its softwood, its inner bark, and its outer bark. He would cut off its branches and leaves and depart, thinking it is heartwood. Then a person with eyes would see this and say, ‘This honorable person does not know what heartwood is, what softwood is, what inner bark is, what outer bark is, what leaves and branches are. This honorable person needed heartwood, was seeking heartwood, and was wandering in search of heartwood, and came to a large, stable tree that had heartwood. He bypassed its heartwood, its softwood, its inner bark, and its outer bark. He cut off its branches and leaves and departed, thinking it is heartwood. Whatever he is planning to do that requires heartwood will not be successful.’

“Monks, in the same way, here some gentleman, based on faith, has left behind lay life and become a monastic renunciant, thinking ‘I am caught in birth, decay, death, sorrow, grief, pain, depression, and anguish, caught in suffering and enveloped by suffering. Perhaps a way to put an end to this whole heap of suffering can be discerned.’ When he has become a renunciant in this way, wealth, respect, and fame appear. He is satisfied with that wealth, respect, and fame, and it completely fills his thoughts. Because of that wealth, respect, and fame, he praises himself and disparages others, saying ‘I have wealth, respect, and fame, but these other monks are not well-known and have little influence.’ Intoxicated by that wealth, respect, and fame, he becomes negligent and heedless. Being negligent, he dwells in suffering. Monks, this is called a monk who has taken the branches and leaves of the spiritual life; he has ended with that.

“Monks, here some gentleman, based on faith, has left behind lay life and become a monastic renunciant, thinking ‘I am caught in birth, decay, death, sorrow, grief, pain, depression, and anguish, caught in suffering and enveloped by suffering. Perhaps a way to put an end to this whole heap of suffering can be discerned.’ When he has become a

renunciant in this way, wealth, respect, and fame appear. He is not satisfied with that wealth, respect, and fame, and it does not completely fill his thoughts. He does not praise himself or disparage others because of that wealth, respect, and fame. Not intoxicated by that wealth, respect, and fame, he does not become negligent or heedless. Being vigilant, he attains perfect morality. He is satisfied with that perfection of morality, but it completely fills his thoughts. Because of that perfection of morality, he praises himself and disparages others, saying 'I am moral and innately good, but these other monks are immoral and innately evil.' Intoxicated by that perfection of morality, he becomes negligent and heedless. Being negligent, he dwells in suffering.

"Monks, just as if a person who needed heartwood, was seeking heartwood, and was wandering in search of heartwood, came to a large, stable tree that had heartwood. He would bypass its heartwood, its softwood, and its inner bark. He would cut off its outer bark and depart, thinking it is heartwood. Then a person with eyes would see this and say, 'This honorable person does not know what heartwood is, what softwood is, what inner bark is, what outer bark is, what leaves and branches are. This honorable person needed heartwood, was seeking heartwood, and was wandering in search of heartwood, and came to a large, stable tree that had heartwood. He bypassed its heartwood, its softwood, and its inner bark. He cut off its outer bark and departed, thinking it is heartwood. Whatever he is planning to do that requires heartwood will not be successful.'

"Monks, in the same way, here some gentleman... Intoxicated by that perfection of morality, he becomes negligent and heedless. Being negligent, he dwells in suffering. Monks, this is called a monk who has taken the outer bark of the spiritual life; he has ended with that.

"Monks, here some gentleman, based on faith, has left behind lay life and become a monastic renunciant, thinking 'I am caught in birth, decay, death, sorrow, grief, pain, depression, and anguish, caught in suffering and enveloped by suffering. Perhaps a way to put an end to this whole heap of suffering can be discerned.' When he has become a renunciant in this way, wealth, respect, and fame appear. He is not satisfied with that wealth, respect, and fame, and it does not completely fill his thoughts. He does not praise himself or disparage others because of that wealth, respect, and fame. Not intoxicated by that wealth, respect, and fame, he does not become negligent or heedless. Being vigilant, he attains perfect morality. He is satisfied with that perfection of morality, but it does not completely fill his thoughts. He does not praise himself or disparage others because of that perfection of morality. Not intoxicated by that perfection of morality, he does not become negligent or heedless. Being vigilant, he attains perfect concentration. He is satisfied with that perfection of concentration, but it completely fills his thoughts. Because of that perfection of concentration, he praises himself and disparages others, saying 'I am concentrated with a unified mind, but these other monks are unconcentrated and scatterminded.' Intoxicated by that perfection of concentration, he becomes negligent and heedless. Being negligent, he dwells in suffering.

"Monks, just as if a person who needed heartwood, was seeking heartwood, and was wandering in search of heartwood, came to a large, stable tree that had heartwood. He would bypass its heartwood and its softwood. He would cut off its inner bark and depart, thinking it is heartwood. Then a person with eyes would see this and say, 'This honorable

person does not know what heartwood is, what softwood is, what inner bark is, what outer bark is, what leaves and branches are. This honorable person needed heartwood, was seeking heartwood, and was wandering in search of heartwood, and came to a large, stable tree that had heartwood. He bypassed its heartwood and its softwood. He cut off its inner bark and departed, thinking it is heartwood. Whatever he is planning to do that requires heartwood will not be successful.'

"Monks, in the same way, here some gentleman... Intoxicated by that perfection of concentration, he becomes negligent and heedless. Being negligent, he dwells in suffering. Monks, this is called a monk who has taken the inner bark of the spiritual life; he has ended with that.

"Monks, here some gentleman, based on faith, has left behind lay life and become a monastic renunciant, thinking 'I am caught in birth, decay, death, sorrow, grief, pain, depression, and anguish, caught in suffering and enveloped by suffering. Perhaps a way to put an end to this whole heap of suffering can be discerned.' When he has become a renunciant in this way, wealth, respect, and fame appear. He is not satisfied with that wealth, respect, and fame... he is satisfied with that perfection of morality... he is satisfied with that perfection of concentration, but it does not completely fill his thoughts. He does not praise himself or disparage others because of that perfection of concentration. Not intoxicated by that perfection of concentration, he does not become negligent or heedless. Being vigilant, he attains knowledge and vision. He is satisfied with that knowledge and vision, and it completely fills his thoughts. Because of that knowledge and vision, he praises himself and disparages others, saying 'I know and I see, but these other monks live unknowing and unseeing.' Intoxicated by that knowledge and vision, he becomes negligent and heedless. Being negligent, he dwells in suffering.

"Monks, just as if a person who needed heartwood, was seeking heartwood, and was wandering in search of heartwood, came to a large, stable tree that had heartwood. He would bypass its heartwood. He would cut off its softwood and depart, thinking it is heartwood. Then a person with eyes would see this and say, 'This honorable person does not know what heartwood is, what softwood is, what inner bark is, what outer bark is, what leaves and branches are. This honorable person needed heartwood, was seeking heartwood, and was wandering in search of heartwood, and came to a large, stable tree that had heartwood. He bypassed its heartwood. He cut off its softwood and departed, thinking it is heartwood. Whatever he is planning to do that requires heartwood will not be successful.'

"Monks, in the same way, here some gentleman... Intoxicated by that knowledge and vision, he becomes negligent and heedless. Being negligent, he dwells in suffering. Monks, this is called a monk who has taken the softwood of the spiritual life; he has ended with that.

"Monks, here some gentleman, based on faith, has left behind lay life and become a monastic renunciant, thinking 'I am caught in birth, decay, death, sorrow, grief, pain, depression, and anguish, caught in suffering and enveloped by suffering. Perhaps a way to put an end to this whole heap of suffering can be discerned.' When he has become a renunciant in this way, wealth, respect, and fame appear. He is not satisfied with that

wealth, respect, and fame... he is satisfied with that perfection of morality... with that perfection of concentration... with that knowledge and vision, but it does not completely fill his thoughts. He does not praise himself or disparage others because of that knowledge and vision. Not intoxicated by that knowledge and vision, he does not become negligent or heedless. Being vigilant, he attains timeless¹ liberation. Monks, it is impossible for that monk to lose that timeless liberation.

“Monks, just as if a person who needed heartwood, was seeking heartwood, and was wandering in search of heartwood, came to a large, stable tree that had heartwood. He would cut off its heartwood and depart, knowing it is heartwood. Then a person with eyes would see this and say, ‘This honorable person knows what heartwood is, what softwood is, what inner bark is, what outer bark is, what leaves and branches are. This honorable person needed heartwood, was seeking heartwood, and was wandering in search of heartwood, and came to a large, stable tree that had heartwood. He cut off its heartwood and departed, knowing it was heartwood. Whatever he is planning to do that requires heartwood will be successful.’

“Monks, in the same way, here some gentleman... attains timeless liberation. Monks, it is impossible for that monk to lose that timeless liberation.

“Thus, monks, the benefit of the spiritual life is not wealth, respect, and fame, it is not the perfection of morality, it is not the perfection of concentration, it is not knowledge and vision. Monks, it is this unshakable mental liberation; monks, this is the goal of the spiritual life, this is its heartwood, this is its complete conclusion.”

This is what the Prosperous One said. Satisfied, those monks delighted in the Prosperous One’s speech.

1 *Asamaya*. Lit. “non-momentary,” “non-occasional,” or “non-temporary.”