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Sankha Sutta: The Conch Trumpet

translated from the Pali by
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On one occasion the Blessed One was staying near Nalanda in the Pavarika Mango Grove. Then Asibandhakaputta the headman, a disciple of the Niganthas, went to the Blessed One and on arrival, having bowed down to him, sat to one side. As he was sitting there the Blessed One said to him: "Headman, how does Nigantha Nataputta teach the Dhamma to his disciples?" B1

"Nigantha Nataputta teaches the Dhamma to his disciples in this way, lord: 'All those who take life are destined for a state of deprivation, are destined for hell. All those who steal... All those who indulge in illicit sex... All those who tell lies are destined for a state of deprivation, are destined for hell. Whatever one keeps doing frequently, by that is one led [to a state of rebirth].' That's how Nigantha Nataputta teaches the Dhamma to his disciples."

"If it's true that 'Whatever one keeps doing frequently, by that is one led [to a state of rebirth],' then no one is destined for a state of deprivation or destined to hell in line with Nigantha Nataputta's words. What do you think, headman: If a man is one who takes life, then taking into consideration time spent doing & not doing, whether by day or by night, which time is more: the time he spends taking life or the time he spends not taking life?"

"If a man is one who takes life, lord, then taking into consideration time spent doing & not doing, whether by day or by night, then the time he spends taking life is less, and the time he spends not taking life is certainly more. If it's true that 'Whatever one keeps doing frequently, by that is one led [to a state of rebirth],' then no one is destined for a state of deprivation or destined to hell in line with Nigantha Nataputta's words."

"What do you think, headman: If a man is one who steals... indulges in illicit sex... tells lies, then taking into consideration time spent doing & not doing, whether by day or by night, which time is more: the time he spends telling lies or the time he spends not telling lies?"

"If a man is one who tells lies, lord, then taking into consideration time spent doing & not doing, whether by day or by night, then the time he spends telling lies is less, and the time he spends not telling lies is certainly more. If it's true that 'Whatever one keeps doing frequently, by that is one led [to a state of rebirth],' then no one is destined for a state of deprivation or destined to hell in line with Nigantha Nataputta's words."

"There's the case, headman, where a certain teacher holds this doctrine, holds this view: 'All those who take life are destined for a state of deprivation, are destined for hell.'

All those who steal... All those who indulge in illicit sex... All those who tell lies are destined for a state of deprivation, are destined for hell.' A disciple has faith in that teacher, and the thought occurs to him, 'Our teacher holds this doctrine, holds this view: "All those who take life are destined for a state of deprivation, are destined for hell." There are living beings that I have killed. I, too, am destined for a state of deprivation, am destined for hell.' He fastens onto that view. If he doesn't abandon that doctrine, doesn't abandon that state of mind, doesn't relinquish that view, then as if he were to be carried off, he would thus be placed in hell.

"[The thought occurs to him,] 'Our teacher holds this doctrine, holds this view: 'All those who steal... All those who indulge in illicit sex... All those who tell lies are destined for a state of deprivation, are destined for hell.' There are lies that I have told. I, too, am destined for a state of deprivation, am destined for hell.' He fastens onto that view. If he doesn't abandon that doctrine, doesn't abandon that state of mind, doesn't relinquish that view, then as if he were to be carried off, he would thus be placed in hell.

"There is the case, headman, where a Tathagata appears in the world, worthy and rightly self-awakened, consummate in clear knowing & conduct, well-gone, a knower of the cosmos, unexcelled trainer of those to be tamed, teacher of human & divine beings, awakened, blessed. He, in various ways, criticizes & censures the taking of life, and says, 'Abstain from taking life.' He criticizes & censures stealing, and says, 'Abstain from stealing.' He criticizes & censures indulging in illicit sex, and says, 'Abstain from indulging in illicit sex.' He criticizes & censures the telling of lies, and says, 'Abstain from the telling of lies.'

"A disciple has faith in that teacher and reflects: 'The Blessed One in a variety of ways criticizes & censures the taking of life, and says, "Abstain from taking life." There are living beings that I have killed, to a greater or lesser extent. That was not right. That was not good. But if I become remorseful for that reason, that evil deed of mine will not be undone.' So, reflecting thus, he abandons right then the taking of life, and in the future refrains from taking life. This is how there comes to be the abandoning of that evil deed. This is how there comes to be the transcending of that evil deed.

"[He reflects:] 'The Blessed One in a variety of ways criticizes & censures stealing... indulging in illicit sex... the telling of lies, and says, "Abstain from the telling of lies." There are lies that I have told, to a greater or lesser extent. That was not right. That was not good. But if I become remorseful for that reason, that evil deed of mine will not be undone.' So, reflecting thus, he abandons right then the telling of lies, and in the future refrains from telling lies. This is how there comes to be the abandoning of that evil deed. This is how there comes to be the transcending of that evil deed.

"Having abandoned the taking of life, he refrains from taking life. Having abandoned stealing, he refrains from stealing. Having abandoned illicit sex, he refrains from illicit sex. Having abandoned lies, he refrains from lies. Having abandoned divisive speech, he refrains from divisive speech. Having abandoned harsh speech, he refrains from harsh speech. Having abandoned idle chatter, he refrains from idle chatter.

Having abandoned covetousness, he becomes uncovetous. Having abandoned ill will & anger, he becomes one with a mind of no ill will. Having abandoned wrong views, he becomes one who has right views.

"That disciple of the noble ones, headman — thus devoid of covetousness, devoid of ill will, unbewildered, alert, mindful — keeps pervading the first direction [the east] with an awareness imbued with good will, likewise the second, likewise the third, likewise the fourth. Thus above, below, & all around, everywhere, in its entirety, he keeps pervading the all-encompassing cosmos with an awareness imbued with good will — abundant, expansive, immeasurable, without hostility, without ill will. Just as a strong conch-trumpet blower can notify the four directions without any difficulty, in the same way, when the awareness-release through good will is thus developed, thus pursued, any deed done to a limited extent no longer remains there, no longer stays there.

"That disciple of the noble ones — thus devoid of covetousness, devoid of ill will, unbewildered, alert, mindful — keeps pervading the first direction with an awareness imbued with compassion... appreciation... equanimity, likewise the second, likewise the third, likewise the fourth. Thus above, below, & all around, everywhere, in its entirety, he keeps pervading the all-encompassing cosmos with an awareness imbued with equanimity — abundant, expansive, immeasurable, without hostility, without ill will. Just as a strong conch-trumpet blower can notify the four directions without any difficulty, in the same way, when the awareness-release through equanimity is thus developed, thus pursued, any deed done to a limited extent no longer remains there, no longer stays there."

When this was said, Asibandhakaputta the headman, the disciple of the Niganthas, said to the Blessed One: "Magnificent, lord! Magnificent! Just as if he were to place upright what was overturned, to reveal what was hidden, to point out the way to one who was lost, or to carry a lamp into the dark so that those with eyes could see forms, in the same way has the Blessed One — through many lines of reasoning — made the Dhamma clear. I go to the Blessed One for refuge, to the Dhamma, & to the community of monks. May the Blessed One remember me as a lay follower who has gone for refuge from this day forward, for life."