

Pàyasi Sutta - Digha Nikàya (Volume 2)

Thus Have I Heard: Once the **Venerable Kumara-Kassapa** was touring around Kosala with a company of, perhaps, five hundred monks, and he came to a town called Setavya, where he decided to stay. He chose a dwelling in the northernmost area of the town, a forest called Simsapa. Prince Payasi was also living in Setavya, for it had been a gift to him from King Pasenadi, Ruler of Kosala. It was lush and had a large populace, with an abundant supply of food and water. This Prince Payasi, as it turned out, was infected with a corrupted view – he believed, "There is no life beyond death, no world beyond our own. There are no angels or demons. Good and evil actions do not have consequences."

Now, word had begun to spread among the people of Setavya in every chaste that the ascetic Kumara-Kassapa had come to stay in their fair town, and that he was a disciple of the Buddha. Good words were spread from ear to ear about Kumara, to the effect of: 'That Kumara, he is intelligent and experienced.' 'That Kumara, he is wise beyond his years.' 'That Kumara, he is an elegant speaker – he could answer our questions.' 'Did you hear? Kumara, the ascetic in the northern forest – he is a holy Arahant! It is always good to see such men.' As this news spread around, people went to the forest to go see Kumara.

Prince Payasi, sitting in his veranda, saw these people making their way to the forest. Needless to say, this made him curious and he asked one of his rangers what they were doing. The ranger told him that Kumara-Kassapa was staying the forest and that very good words were being circulated about him, with people in every chaste declaring him a saint. 'The people going into the forest want to see this Kumara for themselves,' finished the Ranger.

'Hmm. This could prove to be very interesting. Go and stop them, have them wait for me, for I, too, will attend. This Kumara has been spreading false things about, filling the minds of the **people with things like life after death, other worlds, angels and demons, and he makes the claim that actions all have consequences. Folly!**'

"Yes, my lord" said the ranger, and he delivered the message.

So Prince Payasi went with the people into the forest, where he came to Kumara's dwelling. He exchanged greetings with Kumara, and sat down to a side, while he observed the others in the group doing the same.

Some were very reverent, and bowed to Kumara with joined palms. Others greeted him as an equal, or as one who is almost equal, or a little 'more equal.' Some merely nodded, or did nothing at all, and just took a seat.

Once everyone was seated, Prince Payasi said, "**Reverend Kumara, I maintain that kamma does not have effects. I believe that there is no life after death, no world beyond our own. I think that angels and demons are things from a child's dream.**"

"Hmm. Well, prince" Replied Kumara, sounding rather like a doctor diagnosing a patient, "Your point of view is unique, for I've never encountered one who bandied about so. Hmm. I think **I should put some questions** about this to you. What do you think, Prince? **Does the Sun and Moon exist in this world, or apart from it? Are they humans? Or are they some celestial non-human beings?**"

"Reverend Kumara, they exist outside of this world, and they are celestial and non human."

"Well then, Prince, **should you not then consider that other worlds can exist**, that angels and demons are not the things of dreams, and that kamma bears effects?"

"Whatever you say about this, Kumara, my viewpoint remains unchanged."

"Why? Do you have a reason?"

"Naturally."

"Perhaps, Prince, you could share it with me?"

"Reverend Kumara, among my friends, colleagues and relatives there are **those who commit murder, steal, misbehave sexually; there are those who lie, who speak with abusive and harsh words**, who engage in frivolous gossip, who are filled with hate and prejudice, who are filled to overflowing with wrong views. On several occasions, while they were on their deathbeds, sick and suffering, when they were far beyond recovering, I said to them: "**Certain holy men say that persons such as yourself will meet with misfortune in another world after you die**, that you will be born in a horrid place, a place of sorrow, a torture chamber of a world: a hell realm. If what they say is true, you, my friend, will most certainly **end up in such a world. If you do, and if they are correct in there being angels and demons**, another world, and consequences for your actions, **do me a favor and inform me, or send a messenger to inform me.**"

You have always been trustworthy and dependable to me; and if you say you have seen these things, it is proof enough for me." Reverend Kumara, they agreed to this, and to date not a single word has come from them, nor have they sent a messenger. That is my reason for maintaining my view."

"Hmm. I think, Prince, that we should investigate this further. Consider this scenario: **A thief is captured and brought to you, and his captor says, "This man is a thief Lord, caught in the act, with twenty score witnesses! What is to be his punishment?"**

"Now suppose that you said, "Make an example of him: march him through town with arms bound together, shave him bald of both beard and hair and then sever his head from his shoulders and display it in front of the town.""

"Now suppose, Prince that the **thief interrupted and said, "Nay. I must go and visit my friends and relatives in such-and-such a village before you punish me.** Let me go see them, and then I shall return." What do you think? Would you grant his wish, and trust him to return to the headsman's block? Or would you have his gabby head rent off his shoulders?"

"He would be ignored, Kumara, and his head would be removed post-haste."

"Prince, consider this: **Your friend is dragged into hell by demons to an Arch-demon, bound and tied with burning chains,** bloodied and scathed from spiky rocks in the crag-covered ground – and before being led to the implements of torture, he says to the Arch-demon, **"Excuse me? Demon? Let me go back – I promised to deliver a message to my friend, Prince Payasi..."** Just as you would ignore the thief and have his head removed, so would the Arch-demon ignore your friend."

"Bah. Whatever you say, Reverend Kumara, you cannot convince me. My views hold firm!"

"Again? Why?"

"Reverend Kumara, I also have friends on the other side of the spectrum, who refrain from doing all manner of evil things, who engaged in doing good, and who are filled to overflowing with correct views. On several occasions, they too were on their deathbeds, sick, suffering, with no hope of recovery, and I said to them:

"Certain holy men say that men such as yourself will go to a place of great bliss upon death. You have always been trustworthy and dependable, so when you die, if you go to such a realm, return, or send a messenger, and tell me whether it is true or not." They agreed to this, and to date, they have neither come, nor have they sent a messenger. That is why my view still stands firm."

"Hmm. Prince, consider this: Suppose a man were to trip on a stone and fall head first into a deep pit. In this pit there is fresh manure and the bile excreted from unpleasant things – there is also the ends of worms, gadflies, parasites, and creatures that love the smell of dung. There is also mucus mixed with this excrement, and puss comes steadily out of the pores of everything that inhabits this pit. Then, seeing this, you say to your men, "Quickly! Pull him out of there!" and they do so. Having rescued him, you have his body scrubbed clean of the mucus, bile, and other myriad filths. Then, making him your guest, you adorn him in a new silken garb, perfumes, jewels, and all manner of other fine accessories. Then, he indulges in myriad pleasures with you in the palace. What do you think, Prince? Would he ever willingly return to the pit you had had him pulled from?"

"Ugh. No. Disgusting..."

"Oh? Why not?"

"Because no one sane would ever step willingly into such a pit! It is disgusting, and I think everyone here would agree with that!"

"Well, prince, just as you find the ends of worms, and creatures that produce mucus from their pores to be disgusting, so do angels find humans, and to them, the world of humans is like a pit filled with dung. Why then, would you expect your friends to willingly dive into this pit of bile merely to convey a message to you? Admit, Prince, that your view is mistaken!"

"Bah! It doesn't matter what you say – My views stand firm."

"Well, do you have another reason?"

"Yes, Reverend Kumara."

"Share it with me that we may get to the bottom of this." Kumara-Kassapa said, meaning the root of the prince's mistaken views, though the Prince believed that he meant the mystery of whether or not other worlds exist.

"Well, Reverend Kumara, I had friends who followed the right path, who were very good people and citizens in every respect. By any right, as certain Holy men have said, they should have gone to the Heaven of the Thirty Three Gods. Yet, when one of them died, I said to him, "You have always been trustworthy and dependable. Certain Holy men say that, because of your lifestyle and because you followed the right path, you will be reborn in the Heaven of the Thirty Three Gods. If this is so, please come and tell me if it is true, or send a messenger to tell me if it is true. To date, they have neither contacted me nor sent a messenger."

"Hmm. Well, Prince... Consider this. In the **Heaven of the Thirty Three Gods, time passes at a different pace, and people live much longer. In the period of our century, one hundred years, only a single day**, twenty four hours would have passed for them. Thirty of these hundred year days make up one of their months, twelve such months make a year and a thousand such years is roughly the life span of those born into the Heaven of the Thirty Three Gods. Suppose your friend decided, "I will go back to that unclean world just long enough to deliver my message to the Prince – I shall set out tomorrow. Or perhaps, after I **have seen some more of this place, in two or three days, I will set out to go see him.**" – would he have been able to?"

"Of course not, Reverend Kumara, because, by the reasoning you have given, **we should all be long dead by the time he had spent three days there.** However, I do not think that those born in the Heaven of the Thirty Three Gods would be so long lived, or that time has a different pace. How do you know about their lifespan or their time?"

"Ahh. Prince, imagine **a man who was born without sight.** He had never experienced Light and Dark, Blue and Red, Moon and Sun. This man might very well say, "Light and Dark are an unreal thing, they cannot exist, they are the things of a child's dream." Or "Color? The very idea is completely beyond the realm of possibility! **I am not aware of these things, therefore, they cannot exist.**" **Would he be correct, Prince?"**

"What? No. There is light and darkness in the very room we're in now. Color exists all around us. Such a man would be incorrect."

"You, Prince, are like that Blind man. The other worlds cannot be seen as you believe, through the physical eye.

It is those Holy men, the ascetics who go into retreat and **develop themselves spiritually who gain access to the Purified Eye. This purified eye is stronger than the physical eye**, for with it they can see the other worlds with their demons and angels. That is how we holy men can see into the other world. It is how we know about demons and angels, and about those who dwell in the Heaven of the Thirty Three Gods. It is how we know that actions have consequences."

"My view still stands firm, Reverend Kumara, no matter what you say."

"Why do you not believe?"

"Hah! Holy men such as yourself can wax quite poetically about the wonderful life they will have after death – about the myriad comforts that await them in some other realm. But notice this, Reverend Kumara: not a single one of them desires pain, nor death. They all strive for comfort and to live for as long as possible. If such heaven worlds exist and these holy men can see them, why don't they take a knife to themselves, or drink poison, or jump off of a cliff, and hasten their journey to these heavens? They don't! That is another reason that I do not believe in other worlds, in angels and demons, or in Kamma."

"Hmm. Take this parable and consider it carefully: There is a rich man with two wives. One wife is pregnant, and the other has a son of ten or twelve years. This rich man's heir would be the son. This father then died, and the son went to claim his inheritance, but the pregnant mother pleaded, "Wait! Wait until my child is born! If the child is a boy, he gets half of this wealth, but if she is a girl, she becomes your servant." Desiring to have half of the wealth for herself and her child, she made this same plea whenever the heir came to claim his inheritance. Then, she took a knife and tried to cut open her womb, wanting to hasten the arrival of the child, and thus her wealth. However, in doing so, she destroyed both herself, and the unborn baby.

"Likewise, if a man ends his life to seek the fortune of other worlds, he will not only have destroyed this life, but the next as well. You do not eat pasta before it has finished boiling, or you will hurt your teeth and stomach. The merit that holy men create grows only better as they live longer. Now, Prince, admit that you are in error."

"No. I am steadfast in my views, what you said has not altered them."

"Oh? Do you have yet another reason?"

"Yes, and many more."

"Well, don't be shy. Tell me your reason."

"Venerable Kumara, once a man was brought to me, a thief, caught in the act, and needing to be punished. When it came time to sentence him, I said, "Take this man and put him into a large pot, bound and gagged. Then, seal over the top of the pot with damp skin and then cover it with unheated clay. Then place the pot in an oven, and light a large fire." So they did. Once he was dead, the pot was removed and opened. Then, removing the gag, we looked to see if his spirit, his soul, his essence - would come out and finally escape. But it did not, there was no soul, no spirit, no essence. This is why I think there is no other world."

"Charming. Well, Prince, when you are taking a nap, or sleeping, do you admit to seeing other places? Ponds and beautiful forests, or perhaps castles in the clouds? Or perhaps deep caverns?"

"Something like that, but yes, I have dreams, Reverend Kumara."

"And are you not watched over and attended by servants and concubines?"

"Yes, I am."

"And have they ever seen your soul coming or going while you slept?"

"Erm... no."

"Well, prince, if they cannot see your soul while you are alive, how can you expect to see a man's soul after he is dead."

"Whatever. I still hold firm that other worlds do not, nay, cannot exist."

"Oh? But why?"

The prince went on to talk of various methods he used to try and observe an escaping soul, all of them foolish, and each time, Kumara gave him a parable explaining why it would not work, and why it does not prove that other worlds, kamma, and ethereal beings do not exist. Finally, Kumara, seeing that there would always be just one more reason why he cannot accept this, attempted something new. He gave a parable to the prince of a man and an orphaned child.

"Once," Began Kumara, "there was a grimy hermit, a fire worshipper, with unclean hair and unclean body, who went to an abandoned dwelling and discovered a tiny child. The fire-worshipper decided that it would be wrong to leave the child for the wild animals to eat, so he took him up, and reared him as his own son. On one occasion, when the boy was twelve, the man needed, for one reason or another, to go to a nearby village. However, he did not want his fire to die while he was gone, so he instructed the boy to keep it burning. "If it does burn out" said the man to the child, "Take this ax, take these sticks, and with this tinder, make a new one." – The man was gone for a long while, and the boy, being absorbed in his play, let the fire die. When he noticed this, he misremembered the man's words, and tried to make a fire by whacking the tinder with the ax. He tried this over and over again, and was still doing it when the man returned. "Why" said the bewildered man, "Are you hitting the tinder with the ax, and why have you let the fire die?" The boy explained, and the man chided him, saying, "Don't be foolish - you can never make a fire that way! Here, I will show you." And saying so, he showed him how to make a fire."

"In the same exact way, Prince, just as the child used a foolish way to seek fire, you use foolish ways to seek proof of other worlds! Give up these evil views, Prince, or it will cause you great grief in the future!"

"Nay, Venerable sir, I cannot give up these views, despite your words. My liege, King Pasenadi, knows my views, and so do all the other kings in other places. If I were to give them up, after defending them so long and hard, they would all think me a fool!"

"Hmm. Well, Prince, consider this. **Once there was a gigantic caravan, with thousands of carts and pack animals. Everywhere this caravan went, they dried up all the supplies, the wood, the grass, the fruit, and the herbs.** There were two leaders to this group, each in charge of half, and they came to the decision that it would be wise to split up, and go to separate ways, lest they use up everything and make the route impossible for other travelers.

The first leader went on, having gathered enough supplies, and he and his men came across a sneaky demon, who had disguised himself as a man. The demon wore a wreath of fresh flowers, and he had all the signs of having passed through a lush area.

He said to the leader, "There are more than enough supplies on the path ahead, you will only slow yourselves if you keep the ones you have collected. Abandon them and you will make better time." The Caravan Leader agreed, and he cast off his extra water, wood, food, and herbs. However, there were no supplies on the way, and they went on for days without finding anything to eat or drink. Finally, they died from lack of nutrients, and the sneaky demon came and ate their bodies, leaving nothing but the bones.

The second leader, having taken a longer path, came across this sneaky demon some weeks later, and the demon said the same thing to him. But the leader was wise, and, having consulted his men, decided to keep his supplies, even if they were a burden. Sure enough, the path ahead was desolate, but his men and his animals ate well all the same. Then they came across the bones and the abandoned goods of the first caravan. The leader thought, "He must have been tricked by that man into abandoning his supplies. What a shame. I must remain wise – I should leave behind any goods that I have that are of little value, and take the ones he left behind that are expensive." And he did so, and passed safely through to his destination."

"You, Prince, are like that first leader- you abandon that which will help you, and yet still move forward. This will only lead to trouble and misfortune! Be instead like the second leader – keep what is good for you, and abandon what is useless! Cast aside your evil view, and accept the view that will be of benefit!"

"I cannot, I will not. I won't have the King and the other rulers all thinking I am a fool."

"Prince! Consider a farmer who, while traveling, sees a huge pile of dry dung and thinks, "I can use this as fuel." So he takes his cloak, wraps the gigantic pile of dung with it, and carries it off. However, on the way back home, it begins to rain heavily, and the dung becomes moist. Being moist, it starts to ooze and drip down onto the farmer, besmearing him with excrement and making him stink. Passerby's saw him, and said, "You should cast that aside, and then the rain will help to clean you, instead of covering you with bile." But the farmer replied, "No, I must keep it for fuel!" and went on.

"You are like that farmer, Prince! You believe your evil views are fuel of sorts, and you cling to them – but all they do is cover you in dung and filth! You must abandon them."

"Oh, Ugh! But no, I cannot. I have already told you that I can't have the royalty thinking me a fool!"

"Prince, consider this: **Suppose two men decide that the best way to make their fortune is to go and have a treasure hunt in an old, forgotten city.** Doing so they find a large pile of reeds, and having made their cloaks into sacks, they carry the reeds. However, a while later they came across a pile of flax. "Hey, now, what luck!" said one friend, "We were going to make these reeds into flax anyway! So now we can throw away the reeds and carry flax instead!" – and he casts out his reeds and fills his cloak with flax. But the other man keeps the reeds, thinking, "I've tied them up good and tight, it would be foolish to untie my sack, just to end up tying it up again."

Then, a while later, still exploring, they find some fine silk clothes, and the same thing happens. One friend takes the silks, while the other still keeps his reeds. And then the same thing happens again, except with a pile of golden coins.

"Well, we wanted the reeds and silken clothes to sell anyway, so why not carry the gold instead?"

"No, friend, I am content with my reeds."

"Suit yourself, if it makes you happy!"

However, when they got back home, the man with the pile of gold became very rich, for he used the gold to invest and trade – and it supported him and his wife, his children, and his parents for a long time to come. The man with the reeds, however, was no richer for his reeds because, in the end, he never did take them out of that sack, and they ended up rotting in there and smelling bad."

"Prince, you are like this man with a sack of reeds! Give up your evil views! Let them not harm you!"

"Such words... Venerable, nay, Holy Arahant Kumara-Kassapa, your words touch me, and your parables have shown me that I am using foolish means to try to find the truth. It is as if you set upright that which had been toppled. I came today to hear your quick witted replies, because I wanted sport in the field of debate, but today I shall leave having learned something very valuable – as if traveling and suddenly finding a hidden diamond.

You expound your teachings and make them easy to hear, easy to understand, and what you say indeed makes sense. I, sire Kumara, take my refuge in the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha. Take me as this: as a lay follower from now until the day that I perish. Pray, sir, grant us a teaching!"

So Kumara the Ascetic, the disciple of the Buddha, gave a teaching on generosity and the value of giving.

This inspired Prince Payasi to establish a charity for the needy – and anyone in need, be they merely ‘down on their luck’ or an ascetic hermit could go to his charity and receive clothing and food, though the food was of poor quality and the clothes made from rough burlap. Thus suited him fine, and it suited those in need fine too, but a concerned Noble named Uttara, who had been in charge of running the charity, commented, "Through this Charity, I think, Myself and Prince Payasi will have very different rewards."

The Prince heard this and said to Uttara, "I expect a reward for my charity and I see nothing wrong with doing so."

"Yes, but Lord, the food and the clothes you give... I would not feign to touch them, and you, yourself, would not even walk on them with your thickest boots!"

"Hmm... well..."

"Sire, how can you expect a good reward from a half-hearted charity?"

The Prince sighed, and then said, "As you wish. Discard the poor quality food and clothes, and instead give out food and clothes as I myself, or as you yourself would make use of."

"Yes, sire." And he did just that.

Upon death, **Prince Payasi was born in a middling heaven**, with middling angels because, though he was very generous, he was half-hearted about it, and begrudged that which he gave. Uttara, however, was reborn in the heaven of the Thirty Three Gods, for he was unconditionally, and un-begrudgingly generous.

As it turned out, one of the Buddha’s disciples, Gavampati, was accustomed to take his midday nap in the very heaven where Prince Payasi was reborn, and when he went there next, he recognized the Prince.

"Are you not the man who clung to false views?"

"Yes, but I have long abandoned them, thanks to the wonderful Venerable Kumara."

"Oh. Good to see you, and that is good to hear. Whatever became of that Uttara, who ran your charity for you?"

"He was reborn in the Heaven of the Thirty Three Gods—**this is because he gave without begrudging a single thing, and had unlimited generosity.**"

"Hmm. Interesting."

"Venerable sir?"

"Yes, Prince?"

"Do me a kindness – When you go back, tell everyone of my fate, and of Uttara's fate, that they may know not to make my mistake!"

Gavampati did as he was asked, and said this to his fellows:

"Prince Payasi was reborn in a middling heaven with middling angels, because, though he gave charity, he was begrudging of it. **Uttara, who merely managed the charity, went to the Heaven of the Thirty Three Gods, because he did not begrudge. Learn you a lesson of this! Never be begrudging of that which you give!**"