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Subha Sutta

The Discourse on the Beautiful | S 4.3

Theme: Restraint of body, speech and mind keeps Māra away

Translated by Piya Tan ©2011

Introduction

The Subha Sutta (S 4.3) is one of a number of short accounts of Māra’s attempts to distract the Buddha by frightening him. Here we see the Buddha “was sitting out in the open, in the thick darkness of night, and it was raining drop by drop [lightly drizzling]” (*ratt’andha,kāra,timisāyam abbhokāse nisinno hoti, devo ca ekam ekam phusāyati*). This stock phrase recurs in the following discourses, namely:

		<u>One who appears</u>	<u>Apparition</u>
(1) the Hatthi,rāja Vaṇṇa Sutta	(S 4.2/1:103 f)	Māra	a giant elephant,
(2) the Subha Sutta	(S 4.3/1:104)	Māra	colourful shapes,
(3) the Sappa Sutta	(S 4.6/1:106)	Māra	a giant serpent,
(4) the Pāsāna Sutta	(S 4.11/1:109)	Māra	boulders shattered,
(5) the Andhaka,vinda Sutta	(S 6.13/1:154)	Brahmā Sahampati	none,
(6) the Khoma,dussa Sutta	(S 7.22/1:184)	Brahmā Sahampati	none,
(7) the Aja,kalāpaka Sutta	(U 1.7/4 f)	the yaksha Aja,kalāpaka	fearful sounds.

The phrase *devo ca ekam ekam phusāyati* can only mean “it was raining drop by drop,” as is confirmed by the Udāna Commentary, which glosses “rain” as that “a cloud was causing drops of water to fall one by one” (*devo ti megho ekam ekam phusitakam udaka,bindum pātetī*, UA 66,6). The Critical Pali Dictionary defines *devo ca ekam ekam phusāyati* as “rain falls continuously, drop by drop” (CPD 2:616). The phrase is best understood as that it is lightly drizzling so that the tiny drops are felt as if falling one drop at a time. Otherwise, it would be most curious for the Buddha to be sitting in the open in heavy rain.

In the first five suttas, the scenery is also described as being “in the thick darkness of night” (*ratt’andha,kāra,timisāyam*), and in the first four suttas, the being trying to cause fear is always Māra. In **the Subha Sutta** (S 4.3) and **the Hatthi,rāja Vaṇṇa Sutta** (S 449),¹ Māra projects various kinds of colourful shapes, beautiful and ugly in his effort to terrorize the Buddha to distract him. In the cases of suttas (5+6), Brahma’s radiance dispels the darkness.

The Saṃyutta Commentary says that there is no shape or form (*vaṇṇa*) that Māra has not assumed to try to frighten the Blessed One, and explains the phrase, “along this long road” (*dīgham-addhānam*), as meaning as either referring to the great distance from Māra’s realm as Vasavatti all the way to Uruvelā (*vasavatti-t,ṭhānato yāva uruvelāya dīgha,maggam*), or the six long years before the awakening (*pure bodhāya vā cha-b,bassāni*) during which time he often tried to frighten or distract the Buddha (SA 1:171).²

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¹ S 449/4.2/1:103 f.² See **Māra**, SD 61.8.

The Discourse on the Beautiful

S 4.3

Thus have I heard.³

1 (The Blessed One was) residing near Uruvelā.⁴

[At one time, the Blessed One, when he was at first awakened, was staying at the foot of the Goatherd Banyan, on the bank of the river Nerañjarā, near Uruvelā.]⁵

2 Now at that time, the Blessed One was sitting out in the open, in the thick darkness of night, and it was raining drop by drop [lightly drizzling].⁶

3 Then Māra the bad one, wishing to arouse fear, trembling and hair-raising in the Blessed One,⁷ approached him.

4 Having approached the Blessed One, not far away, conjured up various colourful lights, beautiful and ugly.⁸

5 Then the Blessed One, knowing that it is Māra the bad one, addressed him in verse, thus:

450 *Saṃsaram⁹ dīgham-addhānam
vaṇṇam katvā subhāsubham
alam te tena pāpima
nihato tvam-asi antaka.*

Wandering on the long road of samsara,¹⁰
you have created shapes,¹¹ beautiful and ugly.
Enough of this with you, bad one!
You're slain, end-maker!¹²

451 *Ye ca kāyena vācāya
manasā ca susaṃvutā
na te māra, vasānugā
na te mārassa paddha, gū¹³ ti.*

Those who in body, in speech,
and in mind, are well restrained:
they fall not under Māra's power;
they are not Māra's followers.

6 Then, Māra the bad one thought, “The Blessed One knows me! The Well Gone knows me!” and disappeared right there.

— evaṃ —

100311; 100313; 110623a; 110825; 111118; 120707; 131130

³ Be Se evaṃ me sutāṃ.

⁴ Ce Ee Uruvelāyaṃ viharati. Be Se omit.

⁵ Be Se *Ekam samayaṃ bhagavā uruvelāyaṃ viharati najjā nerañjarāya tīre ajapāla, nigrodha, mūle paṭhamābhisambuddho. Najjā* is loc of *nadī*, “river.” Ce Ee omit.

⁶ *Tena kho pana samayena bhagavā ratt'andha, kāra, timisāyaṃ abbhokāse nisinno hoti, devo ca ekam ekam phusāyati.* The phrase *devo ca ekam ekam phusāyati* clearly means “it rains drop by drop”: see Intro.

⁷ Comy says that there is no shape or form (*vaṇṇa*) that Māra has not assumed to try to frighten the Blessed One (SA 1:171).

⁸ *Upasaṅkamtivā bhagavato avidūre uccāvacaṃ vaṇṇa, nibhā upadamseti, subhā ceva asubhā ca.*

⁹ Be, Ce, Ee (1998); rather than Ee *saṃsāram*.

¹⁰ “Along this long road” (*dīgham-addhānam*), says Comy, can mean either the great distance from Māra's realm as Vasavattī all the way to Uruvelā (*vasavattī-t, thānato yāva uruvelāya dīgha, maggam*), or the 6 years before the awakening (*pure bodhāya vā cha-b, bassāni*) (SA 1:171).

¹¹ *Vaṇṇa* (Skt *varṇa*) here means “outward appearance.”

¹² This verse also in **Hatthi, rāja Vaṇṇa S** (S 449/4.2/1:103 f).

¹³ Ee (1998), Sn 1095; Be Se *baddha, gū*; Ee (1884) *paccagū*. *Baddha, gū* is unattested, but is closely related to *paddha, gū*. Comy, as such, glosses, “They do not become your followers, pupils, apprentices” (*baddha, carā sissā antevāsikā na honti*, SA 1:171). PED compares *paddhagū* to Skt *prādhvaga*, “accompanying one on a journey,” ie one's servant, retinue. *Baddha, cara* occurs at S 578a/1:144,1). These are closely related words: *paṭṭha, paddha, gū, paddha, cara, pacca, gū*: PED svv.