

# 10

## Kimśuka Sutta

The Discourse on the Kimśuka Tree | S 35.204 [Be 35.245]

Be **Kimśukôpama Sutta** The Discourse on the Kimśuka Parable

Theme: True teachers teach according to the manner of their awakening

Translated & annotated by Piya Tan ©2010, 2018

### 1 Summary and highlights

#### 1.1 SUTTA SUMMARY

When a monk asks another what his understanding of awakening—“**vision well purified**”—they each give a different answer:

[§2] the arising and passing away of the 6 bases of contact;

[§3] the arising and passing away of the 5 aggregates of clinging;

[§4] the arising and passing away of the 4 great elements;

[§5] whatever is of the nature to arise, all that is of the nature to pass away.

[§§6-10] Dissatisfied, the inquiring monk goes to the Buddha asks him about this again.

The Buddha replies by giving 2 parables:

[§§11-15] **the parable of the *kimśuka* tree** which looks different in 4 different seasons; and

[§16] **the parable of the frontier citadel and the swift messengers** to illustrate proper practice.

#### 1.2 SUTTA HIGHLIGHTS

##### 1.2.1 *Kimśuka*



**Fig 1.2.** Flame of the forest: flower and claw-shaped buds.

**1.2.1.1** The *kimśuka* tree—literally, “the what-do-you-call-it tree”—is known in Sanskrit literature as *kimśuka*;<sup>1</sup> hence, it is probably related to Indian folklore whose origins is obscure or forgotten.

Both PED and SED identify it as the tree **Butea frondosa**. It is also called Butea **monosperma**. Butea is named after the Earl of Bute, a patron of botany. While *frondosa* means “leafy,” *monosperma* means “having one seed.”

**1.2.1.2** Liyanaratne lists 2 kinds of *kimśuka* (1994: §§43-44). The first, also called the *pāḷibadda*, is identified as *Erythrina variegata*, but this is the coral tree (*pāricchattaka*).<sup>2</sup> The other, also called the *palāsa*, is

identified as *Butea monosperma*; but he gives its English name as the Bengal kino tree or the dhak tree, which is the *Pterocarpus marsupium*, a different species of tree.<sup>3</sup>

Woodward, in his translation of the Saṃyutta (S:W 4:124), renders *kimśuka* as “Judas tree”—*Cercis siliquastrum*—a deciduous nature to the Mediterranean and west Asia but not India.

<sup>1</sup> See Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary* (SED): sv *kimś*.

<sup>2</sup> See eg **Rukkha S 2** (S 48.68/5:238).

<sup>3</sup> See SD 21.8 (1.6).

The *kimśuka* or Flame of the Forest is a deciduous tree is a native of India, most common in Central India and the Western Ghats, but also found in the dry, coal districts of Bengal and Bihar, and to some extent in Uttar Pradesh, the Punjab and east to Burma and southeast Asia, including Malaysia and Singapore, Indonesia up to Japan.

It is a tree with fibrous bark and prominent bright orange-red flowers. A well-known tree found in India and southeast Asia, it is locally (Malaysia and Singapore) called the Flame of the Forest [1.2.1.2]. Besides being also called *palāsa*<sup>4</sup> (Pali, Sanskrit & Hindi) [1.2.1.2]—hence, the modern palash (Gujarati), palasamu (Tamil) and parasa (Kannada)—it is also known as Bastard Teak (Bengali), Butea Gum Tree (western), and so on.<sup>5</sup> The numerous alternate names for the *kimśuka*, besides its local and regional ones, attest to its popularity.

**1.2.1.3** The flame of the Forest is a medium-sized tree, growing from 6-12 m (20-40 ft) high. Its trunk, whose bark is rough and dirty ash white and soft, is usually crooked and twisted with irregular branches. It is seen in all its ugliness in December and January when most of the leaves have fallen, so that it looks from afar as “**black like a burnt stump.**” [§11.2]

From January to April, it bursts into a flame of a tree, blazing with orange and vermilion flowers covering the entire crown. Then, from afar, it “**looks red like a piece of meat.**” [§12.2]. **The buds** appear in a cluster of claw-like pods, often filled with water. Children would nip off the bud’s tip and squirt the water out like a water-pistol at one another!

These scentless **flowers** are massed along the ends of the stalks—dark, velvety green like the cup-shaped calices—and the brilliance of the stiff, bright flowers shine to perfection in this deep, contrasting colour. Each flower has five petals comprising one standard, two smaller wings and a very curved beak-shaped keel. It is this keel which gives it the name of Parrot Tree.

The back-curving petals are covered with fine, silky hair, which, seen at certain angles, change the deep orange to a silvery salmon-pink. **The buds and stems**, too, have this downy growth, at first dark brown but later acquiring a beautiful mauvish<sup>6</sup> bloom.

The leaves, which appear in April and May, are large and trifoliate. When fresh, they are like soft suede; thick, velvety and a beautiful pale, bronze green. Old leaves are as firm and tough as leather, smooth above and hairy below. This silky down gives them a silvery appearance from a distance.

**The pods**, when young, are pale green, are covered with a dense growth of fine hair and sometimes give the effect of a tree in full leaf. They are pendulous and 7.5-10 cm (3-4 in) long. When ripe, they become yellow-brown and contain flat, brown seeds. This is when it “**has strips of bark hanging down and burst pods like an acacia tree.**” [§13.2]

For the rest of the year, it remains a spreading tree, with “**luxuriant leaves and foliage, giving much shade like a banyan tree.**” [§14.2].<sup>7</sup>

**1.2.1.4** The *kimśuka* is the bodhi-tree of **Medhañkara Buddha**, the 26<sup>th</sup> past buddha before Gotama, ie, the 2<sup>nd</sup> of the 28 buddhas.<sup>8</sup> Buddhaghosa, in his **Visuddhi,magga**, relates a humorous verse of how

<sup>4</sup> In Pali, *palāsa* also simply means “leaves (collectively), foliage.”

<sup>5</sup> <http://floriculturetoday.in/index.php/component/content/article/1-latest-news/175-butea-the-flame-of-forest.html>.

<sup>6</sup> “Mauvish,” of a pale to moderate greyish violet or purple colour.

<sup>7</sup> See D V Cowen, *Flowering Trees & Shrubs in India* [Bombay: Thacker & Co, 1950]. 6<sup>th</sup> ed, 1970: <https://ia800209.us.archive.org/4/items/FloweringTreesAndShrubsOfIndia/cowen.pdf>. See also [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Butea\\_monosperma](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Butea_monosperma) & <http://floriculturetoday.in/index.php/component/content/article/1-latest-news/175-butea-the-flame-of-forest.html>.

<sup>8</sup> B:H xli; see SD 36.2 (3.4.3).

when the *kimsuka* is in full blossom with orange-red flowers, similar to the colour of meat, fools a jackal into rejoicing that it has found “a meat-bearing tree” (Vism 6.91 f/196,5-15).

## 2 Related teachings

### 2.1 KĪMSUKŌPAMA JĀTAKA (J 248)

#### 2.1.1 The 4 monks

**2.1.1.1** The theme of “each teacher his teaching”—given with the same 4 similes—is found in **the Kīmsukōpama Jātaka** (J 248), which is located in Jeta’s grove, outside Sāvattḥī. In this version, clearly based on the Kimsuka Sutta teachings, but instead of only one monk, the Jātaka story introduction relates that 4 monks approached the Buddha for meditation instructions.

**2.1.1.2** The Buddha teaches the 1<sup>st</sup> monk on the 6 sense-contacts; the 2<sup>nd</sup> monk on the 5 aggregates; the 3<sup>rd</sup> on the 4 great elements; and the 4<sup>th</sup> on the 18 elements (the 6 sense-faculties + the 6 external sense-objects + their respective sense-consciousnesses). Following these teachings, they each meditated night and day, and, in due course, attained arhathood more or less at the same time.

**2.1.1.3** The four of them then went back to the Buddha to report their realization of distinction. It occurred to one of the monks to ask the Teacher:

“There are all these methods of meditation, but only one nirvana. How is it that arhathood is gained by all of them?”

“Bhikshu, isn’t this like the way the brothers who say the kimsuka tree differently?”

When the monk requested the Buddha to explain this, the Buddha told them a story of the past.<sup>9</sup>

#### 2.1.2 The Birth-story of the Kimsuka Parable

### SD 53.10(2.1)

## Kīmsukōpama Jātaka

The Birth-story on the Kimsuka Parable | J 248/2:265 f  
Theme: 4 different means to the same awakening

**1** In the past, Brahmadata, the king of Benares, had four sons. One day, they announced to their charioteer:

“Charioteer,<sup>10</sup> we wish to see a kimsuka tree. Please show it to us.”

“Very well, I will!” replied the charioteer.

But he did not show the tree to them all at the same time.

**2** He at once first took the eldest son in the chariot to the forest. He showed him the tree at the time when the buds were just sprouting, so that the tree looked like a mere stump (*khanu, kora, kāle*), and told him, “This is a kimsuka.”

To the second son, he showed the same tree when its leaves were still young and green (*bāla, palāsa, kāle*).

To the third, he showed the tree when it was blossoming (*pupphita, kāle*).

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<sup>9</sup> J 248/2:265.

<sup>10</sup> Text reads *samma*, “my dear,” a vocative of familiarity.

And to the fourth, he showed the tree when it was fruiting (*phalita, kāle*).

**3** Later on, when the four brothers were sitting together, one of them asked:

“What kind of tree is the kimsuka?”

The eldest brother replied: “Like a burnt tree sacrificial post (*jhāma, thūṇa*)!” (It was sprouting leaves.)

The second brother answered: “Like a banyan tree!” (Its leaves were overspreading.)

The third said: “Like a piece of flesh!” (It was blossoming with a blaze of orange-red flowers.)

The fourth said: “Like an acacia tree!” (It was fruiting, having lost all its orange-red flowers.)

**4** They were dissatisfied with one another’s answers, and went before their father, and asked:

“My lord, what is a kimsuka tree like?”

“What did each of you say to this?” and they told the king what they had each said.

Said the king: “All four of you have seen all of the tree! But when the charioteer showed you the tree, you did not ask him, “At such a time what is it like? [266] At such other time, what is it like? You asked without analyzing: hence, your doubt.”

**5** Then, he uttered the first verse”

*Sabbehi kimsuko diṭṭha  
kin n’ettha vicikicchatha  
na hi sabbesu thānesu  
sārathī paripucchito’ti*

The kimsuka was seen by all.  
What is it that you doubt here?  
No one asked the charioteer  
about its condition throughout (the year)!<sup>11</sup>

**6** The Teacher, having given this Dharma teaching, connected the Birth-story: “At that time, I was was the king of Benares.”

— evaṃ —

## **2.2 The citadel parable**

### **2.2.1 Suttas with the citadel parables**<sup>12</sup>

**2.2.1.1** The other well-known city parable is that of the theme of **the Nagara Sutta** “the discourse of the city” (S 12.65), is a parable on the nature of the path of awakening and buddhahood that leads to the “ancient city,” that is, nirvana. The Sutta also gives us a description of the nature of the Buddha’s awakening in terms of dependent arising. (SD 14.2)

**2.2.1.2** While the “ancient city” (*purāṇa raja, dhānī*) of the Nagara Sutta represents nirvana itself, the “frontier citadel” of **the Kimsuka Sutta** (S 35.204) represents the practitioner, the practice and the goal—nirvana. Hence, the latter is more comprehensive. While the Nagara Sutta’s parable of the ancient city describes the path and awakening, the parable of the frontier citadel, with its rich symbolism, points to the the urgency of practising the Dharma to reach that path and awakening. (SD 53.10)<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup> The commentarial glosses have been omitted.

<sup>12</sup> See SD 14.2 (2), SD 52.13 (1.2.1; 1.3); the citadel imagery, see SD 52.13 (1.2.1).

<sup>13</sup> See SD 52.13 (1.3.3).

**2.2.1.3 The Nagarôpama Sutta** (A 7.63) is a summary of the full Buddhist training by way of a parable of a rajah’s frontier citadel. The Sutta opens with the parable, comprising the 7 requisites of a citadel (its pillar, moat, encircling path, armoury, troops, gate-keeper and wall plaster) (SD 52.13 (1.4)) and its 4 kinds of foods (grass, wood and water; rice and barley-corn; sesame, green peas, beans and other food; medicine) (SD 52.13 (1.5)).

**The Nagarôpama Sutta** teaching by the Buddha is slightly more detailed than **the Sekha Sutta** teaching<sup>14</sup> by Ānanda. However, Ānanda’s teaching on the 7 true virtues and the 4 dhyanas is prefaced by a set of teachings comprising moral virtue, sense-restraint, moderation in food, and wakefulness. (SD 52.13)

## **2.2.2 Commentarial explanation** (SA 3:60-63)

**2.2.2.1** At the Sutta’s close, the Buddha gives the elaborate parable of the “frontier citadel” [§16] as an alternative should we not understand the teaching thus far. **The Saṃyutta Commentary** gives a detailed and interesting explanation of the elements of this parable, a summary of which follows.

A wheel-turning king (*cakka,vatti*) has sent one of his sons to govern the frontier citadel in an outlying province. **The prince** (*raja,putta*), however, under the influence of bad company, lives a dissolute life of drinking and so on in the city-centre (the square where the 4 roads meet) [§16(2)]. Since the prince is a fierce and stubborn young man, the wheel-turner sends **“a pair of swift messengers”** (*sīgha dūta,yuga*) that is, a minister who is a warrior (*amacca yodha*) and another who is wise (*amacca,paṇḍita*).

There are 4 pairs of “swift messengers,” one pair coming from each of **the 4 quarters**. Apparently, this is to ensure that the prince is found and does not hide himself, so that the wheel-turner’s instructions are delivered to the prince and carried out by him. These 4 quarters apparently also represent the 4 noble truths (see below).<sup>15</sup>

The royal message is that the wayward prince has to end his dissolute living and prepare himself for consecration (*abhiseka*) as king, and have the royal white parasol (*seta-c,chatra*) raised above him. The prince refuses to listen at first. The warrior-minister seizes the prince by his head and threatens him with a sword, declaring: “If you do not follow the royal decree, then, your head will fall!” The prince’s dissolute companions flee in all directions. The terrified prince obeys and is installed as king, with a royal parasol above him. The city is now a kingdom in the wheel-turner’s empire.

**2.2.2.2 The meaning** of the elements of the parable, paraphrased in keeping with sutta teachings, follows. **The city** (*nagara*)—when it has a rightful king—as explained in the Commentary [2.2.2.1]—is the “city of nirvana” which is bequeathed to us by **the wheel-turner**, that is, the Buddha, whose 7 jewels (which, like those of the wheel-turner) are the 7 noble treasures (*satta ariya,dhana*),<sup>16</sup> that is, those of:

- |                               |                      |
|-------------------------------|----------------------|
| (1) faith,                    | <i>saddhā,dhana</i>  |
| (2) moral virtue,             | <i>sīla,dhana</i>    |
| (3) moral shame,              | <i>hiri,dhana</i>    |
| (4) moral fear,               | <i>ottappa,dhana</i> |
| (5) learning,                 | <i>suta,dhana</i>    |
| (6) charity <sup>17</sup> and | <i>cāga,dhana</i>    |
| (7) wisdom.                   | <i>paññā,dhana</i>   |

<sup>14</sup> M 53,11-17 (SD 21.14).

<sup>15</sup> This aspect of the parable does not seem to be mentioned in Comy, and is my own surmise.

<sup>16</sup> Also called the “7 jewels” (*satta ratana*): **Ariya,dhana S 1+2** (A 7.5+6) SD 37.6.

<sup>17</sup> The seemingly odd location of charity suggests these are the qualities of the streamwinner, who, besides the other qualities, should also practise *charity* in a significant way (esp the gift of the Dharma). See prec n.

The royal prince represents us, the practitioners of the Buddha's teaching.

The 4 roads that meet at the city-centre—the city-square (*siṅghāṭaka*)—represents the 4 elements (earth, water, fire and wind), that is, our body; the royal prince, our mind, or all of our consciousness.

The 6 gates of city are our 6 sense-bases: the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind—the “all” that we are.<sup>18</sup>

The wise gate-keeper is our mindfulness (*sati*).

The frontier citadel (*paccantima,nagara*) itself (before having its rightful king) represents the “city of self-identity” (*sakkāya,nagara*)—self-identity view is the first of the 10 fetters.

The walls (*kuḍḍa*) within the city around the royal prince, surrounded and “walled in” by his dissolute company, represents the 5 mental hindrances.<sup>19</sup> So, too, when these hindrances arise in a monk or practitioner, he is walled in, that is, prevented from freeing his mind.<sup>20</sup>

that is, when the thought of being a monk (that is, renunciation) arises in us (Or, when the thought of proper and diligent practice arises in the monk, he truly prepares himself to receive his Dharma legacy from the Buddha.

**2.2.2.3 The 2 swift messengers** are respectively the calm and the insight aspects of meditation.<sup>21</sup>

The powerful warrior-minister is calmness (*samatha*), leading to dhyana and joy; the wise minister is insight (*vipassanā*). The warrior-minister's seizing of the prince by his head threatening to behead him refers to when the mindfully stilled in the samadhi of the 1<sup>st</sup> dhyana. Calmness is characterized by “power” because the mind has to be strong to overcome the 5 mental hindrances [2.2.2.2], represented by the fleeing of the prince's dissolute companions.

The prince's agreeing to follow the king's decree refers to when the meditator has emerged from dhyana. The ministers' delivery of the king's decree refers to when the meditator's mind is calm and clear on account of concentration, ready to cultivate insight.

The raising of the royal white parasol (*seta-c,chatta*) represents the harmony of calm and insight, and indeed, of all the 5 spiritual faculties (*pañc'indriya*)—faith (*saddhā*), effort (*virīya*), mindfulness (*sati*), concentration (*samādhi*) and wisdom (*paññā*). Here, “calm” (*samatha*) is concentration, while “insight” (*vipassanā*) is *wisdom*. They need to be balanced by mindfulness harmonizing our faith and effort in doing so. Upon attaining arhathood, these faculties mature into the 5 spiritual powers (*pañca,bala*).

Some of us need to learn to calm our minds first (overcome the mental hindrances); others, with some calmness (including joy), easily experience insight into the true nature of things (especially impermanence). In other words, we need to wisely use calmness to cultivate insight wisdom, and insight, in turn, helps to refine the calmness, and so on—like a bird flying on both its wings (Dh 372).<sup>22</sup>

<sup>18</sup> See **Sabba S** (S 35.23), SD 7.1.

<sup>19</sup> The 5 mental hindrances (*pañca nīvaraṇa*) are (1) sensual desire (*kāma-c,chanda*), (2) ill will (*vyāpāda*), (3) restlessness and guilt (*uddhacca,kukkucca*), (4) sloth and torpor (*thīna,middha*) and (5) doubt (*vicikicchā*). The 1<sup>st</sup> 2 hindrances are the ones we need to work with the most. When they are weakened, the rest are more easily removed. See **Nīvaraṇa** SD 32.1; (**Nīvaraṇa**) **Saṅgāra S** (S 46.55), SD 3.12.

<sup>20</sup> The 10 fetters (*dasa saṃyojana*) are: (1) self-identify view (*sakkāya,ditṭhi*), (2) spiritual doubt (*vicikicchā*), (3) attachment to rituals and vows (*sīla-b,bata,parāmāsa*), (4) sensual lust (*kāma,rāga*), (5) aversion (*paṭigha*), (6) lust for form-existence (*rūpa,rāga*), (7) lust for formless existence (*arūpa,rāga*), (8) conceit (*māna*), (9) restlessness (*ud-dhacca*) and (10) ignorance (*avijjā*). See SD 10.16 (1.6.6-1.68); **Kīṭa,giri S** (M 70), SD 11.1 (5.1.4); (**Sekha**) **Uddesa S** (A 4.85), SD 3.3 (2). The path starts with the breaking of the 1<sup>st</sup> 3 fetters makes us a streamwinner (*sotāpanna*): SD 3.3 (5); **Abhabba Tayo,dhamma S** (A 10.76,6), SD 2.4; **Emotional independence**, SD 40a.8.

<sup>21</sup> *Tasmim nagare kuḍḍa,raja.putto viya imassa bhikkhuno kuḍḍa,citt'uppādo* (SA 3:62,5).

<sup>22</sup> Comy treats the 2 as separate kinds of meditation: *samatha,kammaṭṭhāna* and *vipassana,kammaṭṭhāna* (SA 3:62,8-10).

<sup>22</sup> On the necessity of both calm and insight, see **Samatha & Vipassanā**, SD 41.1.

**2.2.2.4** As for the similes connected with the city's wall, its **gates** refer **the 6 sense-bases** [2.2.2.2], seeing which purification is attained, that is, the destruction of the influxes (arhathood). **The lord of the city** (*nagara,sāmī*) are the 5 aggregates; **the 4 roads** are the 4 great elements, seeing which, too, purification is attained, that is, the destruction of the influxes. The 4 great elements are the “physical or body” aspects of the 6 sense-bases, that is, the 5 physical senses, represented by **the city** itself [§16.2].

**2.2.2.5** **The royal prince** sitting at the cross-roads in the city-centre is like our heart (*hadaya,vatthu*), as the centre of our physical life comprising the 4 elements. **The city** that he inhabits is the body (the 4 elements). Mastering the body brings about calm and joy, that clears *the heart* (the mind), readying it to cultivate insight. Hence, calm and insight (*samatha,vipassanā*) work together. The prince's compliance with the royal decree is calmness; his consecration refers to insight.

The Commentary takes the prince's consecration as the attaining of arhathood which it identifies as “insight-consciousness” (*vipassana,viññāṇa*) (SA 3:62,33). This interpretation is too narrow, bogged down by the scholasticism of the time. The “consciousness” here is simply the functioning mind, the stage on which this salvific drama progresses.

**2.2.2.6** In brief, then, the Sutta is about **the 4 noble truths** (highlighted by the messengers coming from the 4 quarters). The entire city is the truth that is suffering. The message about the true state of things is the truth that is the cessation (of suffering). The path taken by the message is the truth that is the path. Craving that has brought about suffering is the truth of the arising.

**The news of things as they are** (*yathā,bhūtaṃ vacanaṃ*) by the messengers because of its real and true nature is unshakable and unchanging (*yathā,bhūta,sabhāvaṃ akuppaṃ avikārī*<sup>23</sup> *katvā*). This, of course, represents nirvana. (SA 62 f)

At the end of the teachings, the inquiring monk attained the fruit of streamwinning. (SA 3:63,16)<sup>24</sup>

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## Kimśuka Sutta

### The Discourse on Kimśuka Tree

S 35.204<sup>25</sup>

#### Different answers to the same question

**2** Then, a certain monk approached another and said to him:<sup>26</sup>  
**“To what extent is a monk's vision well purified?”**<sup>27</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Be *adhikārīti*; Ce *avikārīti*; Ee *abhisekādīhi*; Se *abhikārīti*.

<sup>24</sup> For a list of texts with city imagery, see SD 52.13 (1.2.0).

<sup>25</sup> The paragraph numbering here does not follow that of PTS.

<sup>26</sup> Comy says that the monks, all arhats answer in accordance with their respective method of practice. The inquirer is dissatisfied with the reply of the first because it mentioned formations only partly (*padesa,sankhāresu thatvā*). He is dissatisfied with the other replies because he thinks that they contradict one another.

<sup>27</sup> *Kittāvatā nu kho āvuso bhikkhuno dassanaṃ suvisuddhaṃ hotīti*. “Well purified vision” (*dassana suvisuddha*) usu refers to the attainment of the arising of the Dharma-eye (*dhamma,cakku*), ie, streamwinning. Clearly here the

(1) “Avuso, when a monk understands, according to reality, **the arising and the passing away of the 6 bases of contact**, he is well purified to that extent.”<sup>28</sup>

3 Then, the monk, dissatisfied with that monk’s answer [192] to his question, went to another monk, and said to him:

“To what extent is a monk’s vision well purified?”

(2) “Avuso, when a monk understands, according to reality, **the arising and passing away of the 5 aggregates of clinging**,<sup>29</sup> he is well purified to that extent.”

4 Then, the monk, dissatisfied with that monk’s answer to his question, went to yet another monk, and said to him:

“To what extent is a monk’s vision well purified?”

(3) “Avuso, when a monk understands, according to reality, **the arising and passing away of the 4 great elements**,<sup>30</sup> he is well purified to that extent.”

5 Then, the monk, dissatisfied with that monk’s answer to his question, went to yet another monk, and said to him:

“To what extent is a monk’s vision well purified?”

(4) “Avuso, when a monk understands, according to reality, that **whatever is of the nature to arise, all that is of the nature to pass away**,<sup>31</sup> he is well purified to that extent.”

### The dissatisfied monk approaches the Buddha

6 Then, the monk, dissatisfied with that monk’s answer to his question, approached the Blessed One, and said:

“Here, bhante, I approached a certain monk and said to him:

‘To what extent is a monk’s vision well purified?’

6.2 When asked, bhante, that monk answered me thus:

‘Avuso, when a monk understands, according to reality, **the arising and the passing away of the 6 bases of contact**, he is well purified to that extent.’

7 Then I, bhante, dissatisfied with that monk’s answer [193] to the question, went to another monk, and said to him:

‘To what extent is a monk’s vision well purified?’

7.2 ‘Avuso, when a monk understands **the arising and passing away of the 5 aggregates of clinging**, he is well purified to that extent.’

8 Then, I, bhante, dissatisfied with that monk’s answer to the question, went to yet another monk, and said to him:

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context of “well purified” (*suvisuddham*) is the attaining of the different stages of the path ending in arhathood, as understood by Comy (SA 3:55).

<sup>28</sup> *Yato kho āvuso bhikkhu channaṃ phass’āyatanānaṃ samudayañ ca atthañ, gamañ ca yathā, bhūtaṃ pajānāti, ettāvatā kho āvuso bhikkhuno dassanaṃ suvisuddham hotīti.*

<sup>29</sup> *Pañcannaṃ upādāna-k, khandhānaṃ samudayañ ca atthañ, gamañ ca.*

<sup>30</sup> *Catunnaṃ mahā, bhūtānaṃ samudayañ ca atthañ, gamañ ca.*

<sup>31</sup> *Yaṃ kiñci samudaya, dhammañ, sabbam taṃ nirodha, dhamman’ti.* Comy says that this is a meditation on the nature of the 3 worlds (*te, bhūmaka, kammaṭṭhāniko*, SA 3:56,14)

*'To what extent is a monk's vision well purified?'*

8.2 'Avuso, when a monk understands the arising and passing away of the 4 great elements, he is well purified to that extent.'

9 Then, I, bhante, dissatisfied with that monk's answer to the question, went to yet another monk, and said to him:

*'To what extent is a monk's vision well purified?'*

9.2 'Avuso, when a monk understands that whatever is of the nature to arise, all that is of the nature to pass away, he is well purified to that extent.'

10 Then, I, bhante, dissatisfied with that monk's answer to the question, approached the Blessed One, and ask:

**'To what extent, bhante, is a monk's vision well purified?'**

### The Blessed One's answer

11 "Suppose, bhikshu, a **kimsuka tree**<sup>32</sup> has never been seen by a man. He approaches another man who has seen one. He says to that man:

"My good sir, what is a kimsuka tree like?"<sup>33</sup>

11.2 The other man may say thus:

"My good man, the kimsuka looks **black like a burnt stump!**"<sup>34</sup>

11.3 At that time, then, bhikshu, a kimsuka tree is for him just as it is in that person's vision.<sup>35</sup>

12 Then, bhikshu, that man, dissatisfied with the other man's answer to the question, goes to yet another man, and says to him:

"My good sir, what is a kimsuka tree like?"

12.2 The other man may say thus:

"My good man, the kimsuka looks **red like a piece of meat!**"<sup>36</sup>

12.3 *At that time, then, bhikshu, a kimsuka tree is for him just as it is in that person's vision.*

13 *Then, bhikshu, that man, dissatisfied with the other man's answer to the question, goes to yet another man, and says to him:*

*"My good sir, what is a kimsuka tree like?"*

13.2 The other man may say thus:

*"My good man, the kimsuka has **strips of bark hanging down and burst pods**<sup>37</sup> like an acacia tree!"<sup>38</sup>*

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<sup>32</sup> On the *kimsuka* tree, see (1.2.1).

<sup>33</sup> *Kīdiso bho purisa kimsuko'ti.*

<sup>34</sup> *Kāḷako kho ambho purisa kimsuko, seyyathā'pi jhāma, khāṇūti.* See (1.2.1.2).

<sup>35</sup> *Tena kho pana bhikkhu samayena tādiso'va'ssa kimsuko, yathā'pi tassa purisassa dassanaṃ.* See (1.2.1.2).

<sup>36</sup> *Lohitako kho ambho purisa kimsuko, seyyathā'pi mamsa, pesīti.* [1.2.1.2]

<sup>37</sup> "Burst pods," *ādiṇṇa, sipātiko.* *Ādiṇṇa* (Skt *ādirṇa*, past part of + √DR, "to pierce, split," or Pali √DAR, Sadd 754), "split, burst, broken." Cf **Cūḷa Dhamma Samādāna S** (M 45), said of a māluva-creeper pod (M 45,4/1:306), SD 32.4.

<sup>38</sup> *Ocīraka, jāto* \* *kho ambho purisa kimsuko ādinna, sipātiko, seyyathā'pi sirīso'ti.* \* Be Se *ocīraka, jāto*: Ce *ojīra-ka, jāto*; Ee *odīraka, jāto.* *Ocīraka*, "with strips of bark hanging down" (Skt: *ava*, "downwards," + *cīra*, "bark," + *-ka*, adj suffix); BHS: *avacīra-vicīraka*. See (1.2.1.2). Comy: "It is this seeing (of the kimsuka tree) at fruiting time ... that is said to be 'strips of bark hanging down and burst.' At fruiting time, it is as if the kimsuka has its bark hanging

13.3 At that time, then, bhikshu, a kimsuka tree is for him just as it is in that person's vision.

14 Then, bhikshu, that man, dissatisfied with the other man's [194] answer to the question, goes to yet another man, and says to him:

"My good sir, what is a kimsuka tree like?"

14.2 The other man may say thus:

"My good man, the kimsuka has **luxuriant leaves and foliage, giving much shade like a banyan tree!**"<sup>39</sup>

14.3 At that time, then, bhikshu, a kimsuka tree is for him just as it is in that person's vision.

15 Even so, bhikshu, those true individuals each answered according to their disposition in the manner that their own vision had been well purified.<sup>40</sup>

### The parable of the frontier citadel<sup>41</sup>

16 Suppose, bhikshu, a king has a frontier city with strong ramparts,<sup>42</sup> walls, arches, and with 6 gates.

The gate-keeper posted there would be wise, competent, and intelligent; one who keeps out strangers and admits acquaintances.

(1) A swift pair of messengers<sup>43</sup> would come from **the east** and ask the gate-keeper,

"Where, good man, is the lord of this city?"

He would reply, "He is sitting in the city-centre [where the 4 roads meet]."

Then the swift messengers would deliver their message of things as they are to the lord of the city and leave by the route by which they have come.

(2) A swift pair of messengers would come from **the west** and ask the gate-keeper,

"Where, good man, is the lord of this city?"

He would reply, "He is sitting in the city-centre [where the 4 roads meet]."

Then the swift messengers would deliver their message of things as they are to the lord of the city and leave by the route by which they have come.

(3) A swift pair of messengers would come from **the north** and ask the gate-keeper,

"Where, good man, is the lord of this city?"

He would reply, "He is sitting in the city-centre [where the 4 roads meet]."

Then the swift messengers would deliver their message of things as they are to the lord of the city

down (from its trunk)." (Svâyam phalita, kale diṭṭhattā ... ~o ādiṇṇa, sipātiko'ti āha. Phalita, kālasmim kimsuko olambamāna, cīrako viya, SA 3:58,22).

<sup>39</sup> Ee bahala, patta, palāso kho ambho purisa kimsuko sanda-c, chāyo, seyyathā'pi nigrodho'ti. \*Be Ce sandacchayo; Ke Se sanḍacchayo. Comy on **Mahā Sīha, nāda S** (M 12), SD 49.1, parable of the tree with thick foliage (for a happy human birth) glosses **bahala, patta, palāso** as "fully covered (by foliage) without any break in between" (*nirantara, -paṇṇo patta, sañchanno*, SD 2:39,4).

<sup>40</sup> *Evam eva kho bhikkhu yathā yathā adhimuttānaṃ tesam sappurisānaṃ dassanaṃ suvisuddhaṃ hoti, tathā tathā kho tehi sappurisehi vyākataṃ*. Comy: Just as the 4 men describe the *kimsuka* tree just as they have seen it, so these 4 monks, having purified their vision and attained arhathood, describe nirvana in terms of the path by which they have themselves been awakened. Comy shows the parallels between the 4 seasonal appearances of the *kimsuka* and the 4 different kinds of practices the monks had used to gain awakening (SA 3:58).

<sup>41</sup> See SD 14.2 (2). For a list of texts with city imagery, see SD 52.13 (1.2.0).

<sup>42</sup> "With strong ramparts," Be Se *dalh'uddāpaṃ*; Ce Ee *dalh'uddhāpaṃ*. *Uddāpa* (Skt *udvāpa*), "a rampart, foundation of a city wall (*pākāra*); the mound (on which a surrounding wall is raised)." In this stock: D 2:83,9, 3:101,1; S 4:194,11, 5:160,18; A 5:194,24.

<sup>43</sup> On the meaning of the "swift pair of messengers" [2.2.2.3] and the "lord of this city" (below) [2.2.2.4].

and leave by the route by which they have come.

(4) A swift pair of messengers would come from the south and ask the gate-keeper,  
 “Where, good man, is the lord of this city?”

He would reply, “He is sitting in the city-centre [where the 4 roads meet].”

Then the swift messengers would deliver their message of things as they are to the lord of the city and leave by the route by which they have come.

16.2 I have composed this parable, bhikshu, to show you the meaning; and this is what it means:

“**The city**”—this is a designation for this body, that is, form, made up of the 4 great elements,<sup>44</sup> born from mother and father, built up on rice and porridge, subject to impermanence, rubbing and pressing, breaking up, crumbling away.<sup>45</sup>

“**The 6 gates**” is a designation for the 6 internal sense-bases.

“**The gate-keeper**” is a designation for mindfulness.

“**The swift messengers**” are a designation for calmness and insight. [195]

**The lord of the city**” is a designation for consciousness.

“**The city-centre [where 4 roads meet]**” (*siṅghāṭaka*) is a designation for the 4 great elements—the earth element, the water element, the fire element, the wind element.’

“**A message of things as they are**” is a designation for nirvana.

**The route by which they have come** is a designation for the noble eightfold path,<sup>46</sup> that is to say:

- |                                      |                       |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| (1) right view,                      | <i>sammā ditṭhi</i>   |
| (2) right thought [right intention], | <i>sammā saṅkappa</i> |
| (3) right speech,                    | <i>sammā vācā</i>     |
| (4) right action,                    | <i>sammā kammantā</i> |
| (5) right livelihood,                | <i>sammā ājīva</i>    |
| (6) right effort,                    | <i>sammā vāyāma</i>   |
| (7) right mindfulness,               | <i>sammā sati</i>     |
| (8) right concentration.             | <i>sammā samādhi</i>  |

— evaṃ —

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<sup>44</sup> The 4 great (or primary) elements (*mahā, bhūtā*): earth, water, fire, wind, ie, essentially, solid and resistance, liquid and cohesiveness, heat and decay, and air and movement (D 1:214; Vism 11.27; Abhs 154): **Rūpa**, SD 17.2a.

<sup>45</sup> **Nagaran**’ti kho bhikkhu imass’etaṃ cātu, mahā, bhūtikassa kāyassa adhivacanaṃ mātā, pettika, sambhavassa odana, kummāsūpacayassa anicc’ucchādāna, parimaddāna, bhedāna, viddhaṃsana, dhammassa. This is a well-known stock but which here omits the closing line: “And this consciousness of mine is stuck here, bound up here” (*idañ ca pana me viññāṇaṃ ettha sitaṃ ettha paṭibaddhan’ti*). For list of the full pericope, see SD 29.6a (1.3.1.2) n. See SD 29.6a (1.3.1.2; 3.4). From the moment of birth, our body start decaying, oozing with impurities. To remove its bad smell, we rub it with scent and unguents; we massage our limbs (pressing it), shampooing it, and so on. (SA 2:386 f)

<sup>46</sup> See **Dhamma, cakka Pavattana S** (S 56.11), SD 1.1; for details, see SD 10.16.