

## BĀLA VAGGA (FOOLS) SĀMSĀRA IS LONG TO THE IGNORANT

### 5 (1) The Story of a Certain Person (Verse 60)

**W**hile residing at the Jētavana Monastery, the Buddha spoke this verse, with reference to a certain young man and King Pasēnadi of Kōsala.

One day King Pasēnadi, while going out in the city, happened to see a beautiful young woman standing at the window of her house and he instantly fell in love with her. So the king tried to find ways and means of getting her. Finding that she was a married woman, he sent for her husband and made him serve at the palace. Later, the husband was sent on an impossible errand by the king. The young man was to go to a place, a yōjana (twelve miles) away from Sāvatti, bring back some Kumudu (lotus) flowers and some red earth called 'arunavati' from the land of the serpents (nāgas) and arrive at Sāvatti the same evening, in time for the king's bath. The king's intention was to kill the husband if he failed to arrive back in time, and to take the wife for himself. Hurriedly taking a food packet from his wife, the young man set out on his errand. On the way, he shared his food with a traveller and he threw some rice into the water and said loudly, "O guardian spirits and nāgas inhabiting this river! King Pasēnadi has commanded me to get some Kumudu flowers and arunavati (red earth) for him. I have today shared my food with a traveller; I have also fed the fish in the river; I now share with you the benefits of the good deeds I have done today. Please get the Kumudu lotus and arunavati red earth for me." The king of the nāgas, upon hearing him, took the appearance of an old man and brought the lotus and the red earth.

On that evening, King Pasēnadi, fearing that the young husband might arrive in time, had the city-gates closed early. The young man, finding the city-gates closed, placed the red earth on the city-wall and stuck the flowers on the earth. Then he declared loudly, "O citizens! I have today accomplished my errand in time as instructed by the king. King Pasēnadi, without any justification, plans to kill me." After that, the young man left for the Jētavana Monastery to take shelter and find solace in the peaceful atmosphere of the Monastery.

Meanwhile, King Pasēnadi, obsessed with sexual desire, could not sleep, and kept thinking out how he would get rid of the husband in the morning and take his wife. At about midnight, he heard some eerie sounds; actually, these were the mournful voices of four persons suffering in Lōhakumbhi Niraya. Hearing those voices, the king was terrified. Early in the morn-

ing, he went to Jētavana Monastery to consult the Buddha, as advised by Queen Mallikā. When the Buddha was told about the four voices the king heard in the night, he explained to the king that those were the voices of four beings, who were the sons of rich men during the time of Kassapa Buddha, and that now they were suffering in Lōhakumbhi Niraya because they had committed sexual misconduct with other peoples' wives. Then, the king came to realize the wickedness of the deed and the severity of the punishment. So, he decided then and there that he would no longer covet another man's wife. "After all, it was on account of my intense desire for another man's wife that I was tormented and could not sleep," he reflected. Then King Pasēnadi said to the Buddha, "Venerable, now I know how long the night is for one who cannot sleep." The young man who was close at hand came forward to say, "Venerable, because I had travelled the full distance of a yōjana yesterday, I, too, know how long the journey of a yōjana is to one who is weary."

#### Explanatory Translation (Verse 60)

*jāgaratō ratti dīghā santassa yōjanam dīgham  
saddhammam avijānatarim bālānam samśārō dīghō*

*jāgaratō*: to the sleepless; *ratti dīghā*: the night is long; *santassa*: to the fatigued; *yōjanam dīgham*: mile is long; *saddhammam*: the doctrine; *avijānatarim*: ignorant; *bālānam*: to the immature persons; *samśārō*: the cycle of existence; *dīghō*: is long

To a sleepless person the night is very long. To the weary the league seems quite long. To the ignorant, bereft of an awareness of the dhamma, the cycle of existence is very long, as he is not aware how to shorten it.

#### Commentary

**Samsāra**: The perpetual tour of beings from life to life, the vicious cycle of birth, death and rebirth, which the Buddhists yearn to put an end to. Rebirth is not seen by Buddhists as a continuation of life, but as a perpetuation of death. We are reborn only to die again. 'Eternal life' is an illusion. Life is but birth, ageing and death. Its continuity is not welcomed by a Buddhist. The Buddhist goal is 'immortality' or 'deathlessness' which is the only possible reality, which is quite distinct from 'eternal life'. Immortality, which is Nibbāna, is not achieved through rebirth, but through its stopping. This is not the annihilation of existence or being; because, being or 'existence' is only an illusion. It is dispelling the illusion of being and giving up the attachment to it.