

ONE PACIFYING WORD IS NOBLE

8 (1) THE STORY OF TAMBADĀṬHIKA (VERSE 100)

While residing at the Jētavana Monastery, the Buddha spoke this verse, with reference to Tambadāṭhika, the executioner of thieves.

Tambadāṭhika served the king as an executioner of thieves for fifty-five years. In old age he could no longer cut off a man's head with a single blow. On the day he was retired from office, he gave orders that sweet milk-porridge should be cooked for him. And taking with him old clothes and jasmine flowers and perfumes, he went to the river and bathed. Having so done, he put on the old clothes, decked himself with garlands, anointed his limbs, and went home and sat down. They set before him sweet milk-porridge made with fresh ghee and water for rinsing the hands. At that moment Venerable Sāriputta showed himself at the door of the former executioner's house. When the man saw the Venerable, he paid obeisance to him. And escorting him into his house, he provided him with a seat, poured the sweet milk-porridge into his bowl, spread fresh ghee thereon, and standing beside him, began to fan him.

After the meal, the monk taught him the Dhamma, but Tambadāṭhika could not pay attention, because he was so agitated as he recollected his past life as an executioner. When the monk knew this, he decided to ask Tambadāṭhika tactfully whether he killed the thieves because he wished to kill them or because he was ordered to do so. Tambadāṭhika answered that he was ordered to kill them by the king and that he had no wish to kill. Then the monk asked, "If that is so, would you be guilty or not?" Tambadāṭhika then concluded that, as he was not re-

sponsible for the evil deeds, he was not guilty. He, therefore, calmed down, and requested the monk to continue his exposition. As he listened to the Dhamma with proper attention, he came very close to attaining *sōtāpatti magga* and reached as far as *anulōma ñāṇa* (adaption-to-truth-knowledge). After the discourse, Tambadāṭhika accompanied Venerable Sāriputta for some distance and then returned home. On his way home a cow (actually a demon in the guise of a cow) gored him to death.

When the Buddha came to the congregation of the monks in the evening, they informed him about the death of Tambadāṭhika. When asked where Tambadāṭhika was reborn, the Buddha told them that although Tambadāṭhika had committed evil deeds throughout his life, because he comprehended the Dhamma after hearing it from Venerable Sāriputta and had already attained *anulōma ñāṇa* before he died, he was reborn in the Tusita dēva world. The monks wondered how such an evil-doer could have such great benefit after listening to the Dhamma just once. To them the Buddha said that the length of a discourse is of no consequence, for one single word of sense can produce much benefit.

Explanatory Translation (Verse 100)

*anattapadasaṃhitā vācā cē sahaṣsaṃ api yaṃ
sutvā upasammati ēkaṃ atthapadaṃ seyyō*

anattapadasaṃhitā: full of meaningless and worthless expressions; *vācā*: words; *cē*: even; *sahaṣsaṃ api*: thousands (are not worth); *yaṃ*: if; *sutvā*: by hearing (it); *upasammati*: a person is pacified; *ēkaṃ atthapadaṃ*: one such meaningful word; *seyyō*: is noble

Expressions replete with thousands of words are of no value. One single meaningful word is more valuable, if hearing it one is pacified.

Commentary

vācā anattapadasaṃhitā: discourse full of useless words. Words that are not conducive to the attainment of higher spiritual goals are meant here. In traditional commentaries, descriptions of sky, mountains, forests, villages, cities, settlements, oceans, moon-rise, sun-rise, parks, water-sports, drinking parties, get-togethers, are considered themes unfit to be talked about by aspirants. These are considered futile and as not being helpful in spiritual pursuits. Thirty-two topics come within the category of useless discourses. Similarly, topics such as *rājakathā* (matters relating to kings), *cōrakathā* (matters relating to thieves), *mahāmaccakathā* (matters relating to administrators), *senā* (forces), *bhaya* (fears), *yuddha* (wars) are termed unfit words to be discussed by those seeking higher spiritual goals.