

Dīgha Nikāya - The Long Discourses

The Āṭānāṭi Protective Verses (Āṭānāṭiya Sutta)

1. The First Recitation Section

So I have heard. At one time the Buddha was staying near Rājagaha, on the Vulture’s Peak Mountain. Then, late at night, the Four Great Kings—with large armies of spirits, fairies, goblins, and dragons—set guards, troops, and wards at the four quarters and then, lighting up the entire Vulture’s Peak with their beauty, went up to the Buddha, bowed, and sat down to one side. Before sitting down to one side, some spirits bowed, some exchanged greetings and polite conversation, some held up their joined palms toward the Buddha, some announced their name and clan, while some kept silent.

Seated to one side, the Great King Vessavaṇa said to the Buddha, “Sir, some high spirits have confidence in the Buddha, some do not. Some middling spirits have confidence in the Buddha, some do not. Some low spirits have confidence in the Buddha, some do not. But mostly the spirits don’t have confidence in the Buddha. Why is that? Because the Buddha teaches them to refrain from killing living creatures, stealing, lying, sexual misconduct, and drinking alcohol. But mostly they don’t refrain from such things. They don’t like that or approve of it.

Sir, there are disciples of the Buddha who frequent remote lodgings in the wilderness and the forest that are quiet and still, far from the madding crowd, remote from human settlements, and fit for retreat. There dwell high spirits who have no confidence in the Buddha’s dispensation. To give them confidence, may the Buddha please learn the Āṭānāṭiya protection for the guarding, protection, safety, and comfort of the monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen.” The Buddha consented in silence.

Then, knowing that the Buddha had consented, on that occasion Great King Vessavaṇa recited the Āṭānāṭiya protection.

“Hail Vipassī,
the glorious seer!
Hail Sikhī,
compassionate for all beings!

Hail Vesabhū,
cleansed and austere!
Hail Kakusandha,
crusher of Māra’s army!

Hail Koṇāgamana,
the accomplished brahmin!
Hail Kassapa,
freed in every way!

Hail Aṅgīrasa,
the glorious Sakyan!
He taught this Dhamma
that dispels all suffering.

Those in the world who are extinguished,
truly discerning,
not backbiters; such people
being great of heart and rid of naivety,

revere that Gotama;
he who is helpful to gods and humans,
accomplished in knowledge and conduct,
great of heart and rid of naivety.

Where rises the sun—
Aditi's child, the great circle,
who in his rising
dispels the night,
and of whom, when sun has risen,
it's said to be the day—

there is a deep lake
an ocean, where water flows.
So they know that in that place
there is an ocean where waters flow.

From here that is the eastern quarter,
so the people say.

That quarter is warded
by a great king, glorious,

the lord of the fairies;

his name is Dhataratṭha.

He delights in song and dance,
honored by the fairies.

And he has many mighty sons
all of one name, so I've heard.
Eighty, and ten, and one—
all of them named Inda.

After seeing the Awakened One,
the Buddha, Kinsman of the Sun,
they revere him from afar,
the one great of heart and rid of naivety.

Homage to you, O thoroughbred!
Homage to you, supreme among men!
You've seen us with clarity and kindness.
The non-humans bow to you.
We've been asked many a time,
'Do you bow to Gotama the victor?'

And so we ought to declare:
'We bow to Gotama the victor,
accomplished in knowledge and conduct!

We bow to Gotama the awakened!’

It’s where the departed go, they say,
who are dividers and backbiters,
killers and hunters,
bandits and frauds.

From here that is the southern quarter,
so the people say.

That quarter is warded
by a great king, glorious,

the lord of the goblins;
his name is Virūḷha.

He delights in song and dance,
honored by the goblins.

And he has many mighty sons
all of one name, so I’ve heard.
Eighty, and ten, and one—
all of them named Inda.

After seeing the Awakened One,
the Buddha, Kinsman of the Sun,

they revere him from afar,
the one great of heart and rid of naivety.

Homage to you, O thoroughbred!
Homage to you, supreme among men!
You've seen us with clarity and kindness.
The non-humans bow to you.
We've been asked many a time,
'Do you bow to Gotama the victor?'

And so we ought to declare:
'We bow to Gotama the victor,
accomplished in knowledge and conduct!
We bow to Gotama the awakened!'

Where sets the sun—
Aditi's child, the great circle,
who in his setting
closes the day,
and of whom, when sun has set,
it's said to be the night—

there is a deep lake
an ocean, where water flows.

So they know that in that place
there is an ocean where waters flow.

From here that is the western quarter,
so the people say.

That quarter is warded
by a great king, glorious,

the lord of the dragons;

his name is Virūpakkha.

He delights in song and dance,
honored by the dragons.

And he has many mighty sons
all of one name, so I've heard.

Eighty, and ten, and one—
all of them named Inda.

After seeing the Awakened One,
the Buddha, Kinsman of the Sun,
they revere him from afar,
the one great of heart and rid of naivety.

Homage to you, O thoroughbred!

Homage to you, supreme among men!
You've seen us with clarity and kindness.
The non-humans bow to you.
We've been asked many a time,
'Do you bow to Gotama the victor?'

And so we ought to declare:
'We bow to Gotama the victor,
accomplished in knowledge and conduct!
We bow to Gotama the awakened!'

Where lovely Uttarakuru is,
and the beautiful Mount Meru,
humans born there
are unselfish, not possessive.

They do not sow the seed,
nor do they draw the plough.

The rice eaten by people
ripens in untilled soil,

free of powder or husk, pure,
fragrant, with only the rice-grain.

They eat that food

after cooking it in a 'parrot's beak'.

Having prepared a cow with hooves uncloven,
they're drawn about from place to place.

Having prepared a beast with hooves uncloven,
they're drawn about from place to place.

Having prepared a woman-drawn carriage,
they're drawn about from place to place.

Having prepared a man-drawn carriage,
they're drawn about from place to place.

Having prepared a girl-drawn carriage,
they're drawn about from place to place.

Having prepared a boy-drawn carriage,
they're drawn about from place to place.

Having ascended their vehicle,
that king's servants
tour about in every quarter,

provided with vehicles,
elephant, horse, and divine.

And there are mansions and palanquins

for that great and glorious king.

And he has cities, too,

well-built in the sky:

Āṭānāṭā, Kusināṭā, Parakusināṭā,

Nāṭasuriyā, and Parakusiṭanāṭā.

To the north is Kapīvanta,

and Jonogha lies beyond.

And there's Navanavutiya, Ambara-ambaravatiya,

and the royal capital named Āḷakamandā.

The Great King Kuvera, dear sir,

has a capital named Visāṇā,

which is why the great king

is called 'Vessavaṇa'.

These each individually inform the King:

Tatolā, Tattalā, Tatotalā,

Ojasi, Tejasi, Tatojasi,

Sūra, Rājā, Aritṭha, and Nemi.

There is a lake there too named Dharaṇī,

from whence the clouds rain down,

and the rains disperse.

There is a hall there too named Bhagalavatī,

where the spirits frequent.

There the trees are ever in fruit,

with many different flocks of birds.

Peacocks and herons call out there,

and the sweet cuckoos too.

One bird cries out ‘Live, live!’,

another ‘Lift up your heart!’

There are cocks and kookaburras,

and in the wood the lotus-crane.

The parrots and mynah cry out there,

and the ‘little stick-boy’ birds.

Kuvera’s pond of rushes

is lovely all the time.

From here that is the northern quarter,

so the people say.

That quarter is warded

by a great king, glorious,

the lord of spirits;
his name is 'Kuvera'.
He delights in song and dance,
honored by the spirits.

And he has many mighty sons
all of one name, so I've heard.
Eighty, and ten, and one—
all of them named Inda.

After seeing the Awakened One,
the Buddha, Kinsman of the Sun,
they revere him from afar,
the one great of heart and rid of naivety.

Homage to you, O thoroughbred!
Homage to you, supreme among men!
You've seen us with clarity and kindness.
The non-humans bow to you.
We've been asked many a time,
'Do you bow to Gotama the victor?'

And so we ought to declare:
'We bow to Gotama the victor,

accomplished in knowledge and conduct!

We bow to Gotama the awakened!””

This, dear sir, is the Āṭānāṭiya protection for the guarding, protection, safety, and comfort of the monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen.

The monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen should learn this Āṭānāṭiya protection well and completely memorize it. If anyone who does so is approached while walking, standing, sitting, or lying down by any non-human being with malicious intent—including males, females, boys, girls, ministers, counselors, and servants among the spirits, fairies, goblins, and dragons—that non-human will receive no homage or respect in any village or town. And they will receive no ground or dwelling in my capital of Ālakamandā. Nor will they get to go to the conference of the spirits. In addition, the non-humans would not give or take them in marriage. They’d heap personal abuse on them, drop an empty bowl on their head, and even split their head into seven pieces!

For there are, dear sir, non-humans who are fierce, cruel, and violent. They don’t obey the Great Kings or their men or their men’s men. They’re said to be rebelling against the Great Kings. They’re just like the bandits in the king of Magadha’s realm who don’t obey the king, his men, or his men’s men, and are said to be rebelling against the king.

If any non-human being with malicious intent—including males, females, boys, girls, ministers, counselors, and servants among the spirits, fairies, goblins, and dragons—approaches a monk, nun, layman, or laywoman while walking, standing, sitting, or lying down, one ought to yell, cry, and scream to the spirits, great spirits, generals, great generals: ‘This spirit’s got me! This spirit’s entered me! This spirit’s annoying me! This spirit’s harassing me! This spirit’s hurting me! This spirit’s harming me! This spirit won’t let me go!’

To what spirits, great spirits, generals, great generals?

‘Inda, Soma, and Varuṇa,
Bhāradvāja, Pajāpati,
Candana and Kāmasetṭha,
Kinnughaṇḍu and Nighaṇḍu,

Panāda and Opamañña,
and Mātali, the god’s charioteer.
Cittasena the fairy,
and the kings Nala and Janesabha,

Sātāgira, Hemavata,
Puṇṇaka, Karatiya, and Guḷa;
Sivaka and Mucalinda,
Vessāmitta, Yugandhara,

Gopāla, Supparodha,
Hiri, Netti, and Mandiya;
Pañcālacaṇḍa, Ālavaka,
Pajjunna, Sumana, Sumukha,
Dadhimukha, Maṇi, Māṇivara, Dīgha,
together with Serīsaka.’

This, dear sir, is the Āṭānāṭiya protection for the guarding, protection, safety, and comfort of the monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen. Well, now, dear sir, I must go. I have many duties, and much to do.”

“Please, Great Kings, go at your convenience.”

Then the Four Great Kings got up from their seats, bowed, and respectfully circled the Buddha, keeping him on their right side, before vanishing right there. And before the other spirits present vanished, some bowed and respectfully circled the Buddha, keeping him on their right side, some exchanged greetings and polite conversation, some held up their joined palms toward the Buddha, some announced their name and clan, while some kept silent.

The first recitation section is finished.

2. The Second Recitation Section

Then, when the night had passed, the Buddha told the mendicants all that had happened, repeating all the verses spoken. Then he added:

“Mendicants, learn the Āṭānāṭiya protection! Memorize the Āṭānāṭiya protection! Remember the Āṭānāṭiya protection! The Āṭānāṭiya protection is beneficial, and is for the guarding, protection, safety, and comfort of the monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen.”

That is what the Buddha said. Satisfied, the mendicants were happy with what the Buddha said..

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