

Mangala Sutta ~ The Highest Blessings A Scripture Spoken by the Buddha

By Rev. Master Seikai

The scripture has been translated into English as follows:

Thus have I heard that the Blessed One
Was staying at Savatthi,
Residing at the Jeta's Grove
In Anathapindika's Park.

Then in the dark of the night, a radiant deva
Illuminated all Jeta's Grove
She bowed down low before the Blessed One,
Then standing to one side she said:

“Devas are concerned for happiness
And ever long for peace;
The same is true for humankind.
What, then, are the highest blessings?”

“Avoiding those of foolish ways,
Associating with the wise,
And honoring those worthy of honor;
These are the highest blessings.

Living in places of suitable kinds,
With the fruits of past good deeds,
And guided by the rightful way;
These are the highest blessings.

Accomplished in learning and craftsman's skills,
With discipline – highly trained –
And speech that is true and pleasant to hear;
These are the highest blessings.

Providing for mother and father's support,
And cherishing family,
And ways of work that harm no being;
These are the highest blessings.

Giving with Dharma in the heart,
Offering help to relatives and kin,
And acting in ways that leave no blame;
These are the highest blessings.

Steadfast in restraint, and shunning evil ways,

Avoiding intoxicants that dull the mind,
And heedfulness in all things that arise;
These are the highest blessings.

Respectful of humble ways,
Contentment and gratitude,
And hearing the Dharma frequently taught;
These are the highest blessings.

Patience and willingness to accept ones faults,
Seeing venerated seekers of the truth,
And sharing often the words of the Dharma;
These are the highest blessings.

The Holy Life lived with ardent effort,
Seeing for oneself the Noble Truths,
And the realization of Nirvana;
These are the highest blessings.

Although involved in worldly ways,
Unshaken the mind remains,
And beyond all sorrow, spotless, secure;
These are the highest blessings.

They who live by following this path
Know victory wherever they go,
And every place for them is safe;
These are the highest blessings.”

In accounts of the Buddha’s life and teaching, it is taken for granted that he had contact with and taught celestial beings, in this case “a radiant deva”. A deva can be defined as the resident of another realm of existence, in which life is extraordinarily pleasant by the standards of human existence. We use the term ‘heaven’ in Western religious writing, but I prefer to avoid that word owing to its connotation to the Bible and biblical meanings.

Despite the pleasantness of their realm, devas often came to the Buddha for teaching. It is said that they would do so during the middle of the night, when there were few, if any, humans about and it was very still and quiet. The Buddha is said to have reserved the middle watch of the night for giving teaching to celestial beings; devas are extremely sensitive beings and avoid the usual human noise and activity. In the *Mangala Sutta*, however, the Buddha could easily be speaking to a human audience. His advice is universal in nature. He is outlining how to live an unusually pure life, one that is focused on peace and contentment, one that lifts humans up from their customary lack of awareness.

There is also an aspect of the Buddha’s reply to the deva’s question being spelled out in a graduated form, from more accessible ways of cultivating peace, towards a higher level of refinement. Avoiding the foolish, living in suitable places, honoring ones parents, cherishing family, etc. while not necessarily easy, are things we can do when we are so motivated. Then the Buddha moves on to more refined aspects, including abstaining from intoxicants, mindfulness, taking and keeping precepts, and listening to the Dharma – things that are not commonly practiced in the human realm.

Being patient and accepting ones faults are attributes of the well developed personality, signs that a person has really done some work on themselves. Seeing the (Four) Noble Truths takes us to another level of understanding of this human realm: we can see how our lives are imbued with existential struggles, and that to be truly happy is difficult; we can see that there are causes to our struggles and unhappiness – usually unfulfilled cravings and desires that drive us to do things we regret; we can see that it is possible to bring these desire and addiction cycles to an end; and we have been given a priceless treasure – the Eightfold Path – which is a set of tools for ending these sorrows and living a contented, peaceful existence.

Experiencing relief from the existential struggle for happiness is to experience Nirvana – the cooling down of desires, and the calming down of the mind. In Buddhism, this is regarded as the highest of blessings, the fulfillment of practice. Meditation practice shows us when we simultaneously try to build up our own ego whilst ridiculing and criticizing others in our thoughts. To let go of this futile effort, and be willing to just be, to just accept ourselves and others as we are, is the highest blessing.

To experience the highest blessings, we don't have to become great or famous people. We don't have to become rich; we will be rich people on the spiritual level, on the level that really matters, if we take to heart the Buddha's words, give up what is unattainable and learn to appreciate the beauty, joy, fulfillment and peace that we already have.