

Mahāratnakūṭa Sūtra

31. Gaṅgottara Upāsikā

Translated from Taishō Tripiṭaka volume 11, number 310

Thus have I heard. At one time the Buddha was in Śrāvastī in the Jeta Grove, at Anāthapiṇḍada's park. At that time in the city of Śrāvastī there was the upāsikā named Gaṅgottara. From her own abode, she came to the place of the Buddha, bowed her head at the feet of the Buddha, and then withdrew and sat to one side.

At that time, the Bhagavān asked Gaṅgottara, "Where have you come from?" The upāsikā addressed the Buddha, saying, "Bhagavān, suppose you were to ask an illusory being, 'Where do you come from?' For such a question, what should the response be?" The Bhagavān spoke, saying, "An ordinary illusory being is without coming and going, and without birth and death. How could one speak of a place it has come from?" She then asked, "Are dharmas not like illusions?" The Buddha said, "Thusly, thusly. It is just as you have said." Gaṅgottara said, "If all dharmas are entirely like illusions, then why do you ask where they come from?"

The Bhagavān spoke, saying, "Illusory beings do not go to evil destinies, nor do they arise to the heavens above, nor do they have realization of Nirvāṇa. Gaṅgottara, are you also like this?" She said, "If I were to perceive myself as being different from an illusion, then I would be able to speak of going to good and evil destinies, or having realization of Nirvāṇa. Yet I do not see myself as being different from an illusion, so why speak of going to evil destinies, or even realization of Nirvāṇa? Moreover, Bhagavān, the nature of Nirvāṇa is such that there is no rebirth into good or evil destinies, nor Parinirvāṇa. I observe myself also in this way."

The Buddha said, "Is your destination not the realm of Nirvāṇa?" Gaṅgottara said, "Asking this question of one who is unborn, how should one reply?" The Buddha said, "That which is unborn is Nirvāṇa itself." Gaṅgottara said, "Are all dharmas not all the same as Nirvāṇa?" The Buddha said, "Thusly, thusly!" "Bhagavān, if all dharmas are the same as that which is Nirvāṇa, then why then do you ask, 'Is your destination not the realm of Nirvāṇa?'"

"Moreover, Bhagavān, suppose an illusory being speaks to another illusory being, saying, 'Is your destination not the realm of Nirvāṇa?' What then should the

response be?” The Bhagavān spoke, saying, “The questioner is without mental attachments.” Gaṅgottara said, “Does the Tathāgata then ask this question due to some mental attachment?” The Bhagavān spoke, saying, “I asked this question without mental attachments. I have posed this question for the benefit of the good men and good women at this assembly who are able to be matured by it. Why? The Tathāgata knows that even names of dharmas cannot be grasped, much less dharmas, and those whose destination is Parinirvāṇa.”

Gaṅgottara said, “If it is such as this, then why does one accumulate good roots for the cause of Bodhi?” “Suppose the bodhisattvas as well as those good roots all cannot be grasped. When accumulating there is no mind, and when not accumulating it is also such as this.” Gaṅgottara said, “What is the meaning of this ‘no mind’ you have spoken of?” The Bhagavān spoke, saying, “This dharma cannot be known through thought, nor can it be obtained through thought. Why? In this, the mind cannot be grasped, much less dharmas arisen in the mind. The inability of the mind to be grasped is itself the station of the inconceivable. This station of the inconceivable is without obtaining, without realization, without defilement, and without purity. Why? The Tathāgata always says that all dharmas are similarly like empty space, unobstructed.”

Gaṅgottara said, “If all dharmas are like empty space, then why does the Bhagavān speak of the existence of form, sensation, conception, synthesis, and discrimination; the entrances; the Twelve Limbs of Dependent Origination; outflows and no outflows; purity and impurity; birth and death, and Nirvāṇa?” The Buddha spoke to Gaṅgottara, saying, “To illustrate, when speaking of ‘self,’ although there is the word, there is truly no existing self which may be grasped. I speak of forms, yet there is truly no appearance of form which is able to be grasped. For all the others including Nirvāṇa, it is also such as this. Moreover, just as there is no water which may be obtained from a mirage, I say that for forms, and all the others, up to Nirvāṇa, it is also such as this.

“Gaṅgottara, one who cultivates Brahmacharya in my Dharma perceives that in all dharmas there is nothing which may be grasped. Those who are arrogant speak of obtaining something, and thus they are not to be called those who abide in true Brahmacharya. An arrogant person such as I have spoken of, upon hearing this profound Dharma, will arise great alarm and doubt, being unable to understand birth, old age, sickness, death, sorrow, distress, and affliction.

“Gaṅgottara, suppose that after my parinirvāṇa, there are those who are able to explain such an extremely profound Dharma which is able to sever the rounds of saṃsāra. There will then be fools who, due to their wrong views, will give rise to

thoughts of hatred and harm for these Dharma teachers. Yet due to these causes and conditions, they will fall down to the hells.”

Gaṅgottara said, “The Buddha has spoken of the Dharma which is able to sever the rounds of saṃsāra. For what reason is it described as ‘severing the rounds of saṃsāra’?” The Bhagavān spoke, saying, “That which severs the rounds of saṃsāra is the true reality of the inconceivable realm. This Dharma is unable to be pierced or destroyed, and hence it is termed the Dharma which severs the rounds of saṃsāra.”

At that time, the Bhagavān smiled wonderfully, emitting beams of light from his forehead in the colors of blue, yellow, red, white, red, and crystalline. These lights universally illuminated innumerable lands and realms, rising up to the Brahmā World, and then returning to enter into the crown of the Tathāgata.

At that time, Venerable Ānanda wondered about this, thinking, “The Tathāgata, worthy and perfectly enlightened, does not smile without reason!” After thinking this, he arose from his seat, bared his right shoulder, and knelt with his right knee to the ground. Joining his palms together, he faced the Buddha and said, “For what reason have you now smiled in such a way?”

The Buddha said, “I recalled that in the past, there were one thousand tathāgatas who in this place also spoke such a Dharma, and those assemblies each had the upāsikā Gaṅgottara as their leader. That upāsikā and those assemblies heard this Dharma, and in each case they left the home life and attained liberation into remainderless Nirvāṇa.”

Ānanda addressed the Buddha, saying, “What should we call this sūtra, and how should we accept it and maintain it?” The Buddha said, “This sūtra is called ‘Stainless Purity,’ and by this name you should accept it and maintain it.”

When this sūtra was spoken, seven hundred bhikṣus and four hundred bhikṣuṇīs ended their outflows, and their minds attained liberation. At that time, the devaputras of the Desire Realm miraculously created many types of celestial flowers which were scattered from above the Buddha, and said, “This upāsikā is extremely rare, able to freely discourse with the Tathāgata, and without fear! This person has already approached innumerable buddhas to make offerings, planting the seeds of good roots!”

After the Buddha had spoken this sūtra, then the upāsikā Gaṅgottara, as well as the

devas, humans, asuras, gandharvas, and so on, heard what the Buddha had said. All had great bliss and believed, accepted, and practiced in accordance.