

An 3.70 Uposatha

Translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi

Thus have I heard. On one occasion the Blessed One was dwelling at Sāvattihī in Migāramātā's Mansion in the Eastern Park. Then Visākhā Migāramātā, on the day of the *uposatha*, approached the Blessed One, paid homage to him, and sat down to one side. The Blessed One then said to her:

“Why, Visākhā, have you come in the middle of the day?”

“Today, Bhante, I am observing the *uposatha*.”

“There are, Visākhā, three kinds of *uposatha*. What three? The cowherds' *uposatha*, the Nigaṇṭhas' *uposatha*, and the noble ones' *uposatha*.

(1) “And how, Visākhā, is the cowherds' *uposatha* observed? Suppose, Visākhā, in the evening a cowherd returns the cows to their owners. He reflects thus: ‘Today the cows grazed in such and such a place and drank water in such and such a place. Tomorrow the cows will graze in such and such a place and drink water in such and such a place.’ So too, someone here observing the *uposatha* reflects thus: ‘Today I ate this and that food; today I ate a meal of this and that kind. Tomorrow I will eat this and that food; tomorrow I will eat a meal of this and that kind.’ He thereby passes the day with greed and longing in his mind. It is in such a way that the cowherds' *uposatha* is observed. The cowherds' *uposatha*, thus observed, is not of great fruit and benefit, nor is it extraordinarily brilliant and pervasive.’

(2) “And how, Visākhā, is the Nigaṇṭhas' *uposatha* observed? There are, Visākhā, ascetics called Nigaṇṭhas. They enjoin their disciples thus: ‘Come, good man, lay down the rod toward living beings dwelling more than a hundred *yojanas*' distance in the eastern quarter. Lay down the rod toward living beings dwelling more than a hundred *yojanas*' distance in the western quarter. Lay down the rod toward living beings dwelling more than a hundred *yojanas*' distance in the northern quarter. Lay down the rod toward living beings dwelling more than a hundred *yojanas*' distance in the southern quarter; ‘Thus they enjoin them to be sympathetic and compassionate toward some living beings, but not to others. On the *uposatha* day, they enjoin their disciples thus: ‘Come, good man, having laid aside all clothes, recite: I am not anywhere the belonging of anyone, nor is there anywhere anything in any place that is mine.’ However, his parents know: ‘This is our son.’ And he knows: ‘These are my parents.’ His wife and children know: ‘He is our supporter.’ And he knows: ‘These are my wife and children.’ His slaves, workers, and servants know: ‘He is our master.’ And he knows: ‘These are my slaves, workers, and servants.’ Thus on an occasion when they should be

enjoined in truthfulness, [the Nigaṇṭhas] enjoin them in false speech. This, I say, is false speech. When that night has passed, he makes use of possessions that have not been given. This, I say, is taking what has not been given. It is in such a Way that the Nigaṇṭhas' *uposatha* is observed. When one has observed the *uposatha* in the way of the Nigaṇṭhas, the *uposatha* is not of great fruit and benefit, nor is it extraordinarily brilliant and pervasive.

(3) "And how, Visākhā, is the noble ones' *uposatha* observed? The defiled mind is cleansed by exertion. And how is the defiled mind cleansed by exertion? Here, Visākhā, a noble disciple recollects the Tathāgata thus: 'The Blessed One is an arahant, perfectly enlightened, accomplished in true knowledge and conduct, fortunate, knower of the world, unsurpassed trainer of persons to be tamed, teacher of devas and humans, the Enlightened One, the Blessed One.' When a noble disciple recollects the Tathāgata, his mind becomes placid, joy arises, and the defilements of the mind are abandoned in the same way that one's head, when dirty, is cleansed by exertion.

"And how, Visākhā, does one cleanse a dirty head by exertion? By means of cleansing paste, clay, water, and the appropriate effort by the person. It is in such a way that one's head, when dirty, is cleansed by exertion. So too, the defiled mind is cleansed by exertion. And how is the defiled mind cleansed by exertion? Here, Visākhā, a noble disciple recollects the Tathāgata thus: 'The Blessed One is... teacher of devas and humans, the Enlightened One, the Blessed One.' When a noble disciple recollects the Tathāgata, his mind becomes placid, joy arises, and the defilements of the mind are abandoned. This is called a noble disciple who observes the *uposatha* of Brahmā, who dwells together with Brahmā, and it is by considering Brahmā that his mind becomes placid, joy arises, and the defilements of the mind are abandoned. It is in this way that the defiled mind is cleansed by exertion.

"The defiled mind, Visākhā, is cleansed by exertion. And how is the defiled mind cleansed by exertion? Here, Visākhā, a noble disciple recollects the Dhamma thus: 'The Dhamma is well expounded by the Blessed One, directly visible, immediate, inviting one to come and see, applicable, to be personally experienced by the wise.' When a noble disciple recollects the Dhamma, his mind becomes placid, joy arises, and the defilements of the mind are abandoned in the same way that one's body, when dirty, is cleansed by exertion.

"And how, Visākhā, does one cleanse a dirty body by exertion? By means of a bathing brush, lime powder, water, and the appropriate effort by the person. It is in such a way that one's body, when dirty, is cleansed by exertion. So too, the defiled mind is cleansed by exertion. And how is the defiled mind cleansed by exertion? Here, Visākhā, a noble disciple recollects the Dhamma thus: 'The Dhamma is well expounded by the Blessed One ...to

be personally experienced by the wise.’ When a noble disciple recollects the Dhamma, his mind becomes placid, joy arises, and the defilements of the mind are abandoned. This is called a noble disciple who observes the *uposatha* of the Dhamma, who dwells together with the Dhamma, and it is by considering the Dhamma that his mind becomes placid, joy arises, and the defilements of the mind are abandoned. It is in this way that the defiled mind is cleansed by exertion.

“The defiled mind, Visākhā, is cleansed by exertion. And how is the defiled mind cleansed by exertion? Here, Visākhā, a noble disciple recollects the Saṅgha thus: ‘The Saṅgha of the Blessed One’s disciples is practicing the good way, practicing the straight way, practicing the true way, practicing the proper way; that is, the four pairs of persons, the eight types of individuals—this Saṅgha of the Blessed One’s disciples is worthy of gifts, worthy of hospitality, worthy of offerings, worthy of reverential salutation, the unsurpassed field of merit for the world.’ When a noble disciple recollects the Saṅgha, his mind becomes placid, joy arises, and the defilements of the mind are abandoned in the same way that a dirty cloth is cleansed by exertion.

“And how, Visākhā, does one cleanse a dirty cloth by exertion? By means of heat, lye, cow dung, water, and the appropriate effort by the person. It is in such a way that a dirty cloth is cleansed by exertion. So too, the defiled mind is cleansed by exertion. And how is the defiled mind cleansed by exertion? Here, Visākhā, a noble disciple recollects the Saṅgha thus: ‘The Saṅgha of the Blessed One’s disciples is practicing the good way... the unsurpassed field of merit for the world.’ When a noble disciple recollects the Saṅgha, his mind becomes placid, joy arises, and the defilements of the mind are abandoned. This is called a noble disciple who observes the *uposatha* of the Saṅgha, who dwells together with the Saṅgha, and it is by considering the Saṅgha that his mind becomes placid, joy arises, and the defilements of the mind are abandoned. It is in this way that the defiled mind is cleansed by exertion.

“The defiled mind, Visākhā, is cleansed by exertion. And how is the defiled mind cleansed by exertion? Here, Visākhā, a noble disciple recollects his own virtuous behavior as unbroken, flaw less, unblemished, unblotched, freeing, praised by the wise, ungrasped, leading to concentration. When a noble disciple recollects his virtuous behavior, his mind becomes placid, joy arises, and the defilements of the mind are abandoned in the same way that a dirty mirror is cleansed by exertion.

“And how, Visākhā, is a dirty mirror cleansed by exertion? By means of oil, ashes, a roll of cloth, and the appropriate effort by the person. It is in such a way that a dirty mirror is cleansed by exertion. So too, the defiled mind is cleansed by exertion. And how is the defiled mind cleansed by exertion?

Here, Visākhā, a noble disciple recollects his own virtuous behavior as unbroken... leading to concentration. When a noble disciple recollects his virtuous behavior, his mind becomes placid, joy arises, and the defilements of the mind are abandoned. This is called a noble disciple who observes the *uposatha* of virtuous behavior, who dwells together with virtuous behavior, and it is by considering virtuous behavior that his mind becomes placid, joy arises, and the defilements of the mind are abandoned. It is in this way that the defiled mind is cleansed by exertion.

“The defiled mind, Visākhā, is cleansed by exertion. And how is the defiled mind cleansed by exertion? Here, Visākhā, a noble disciple recollects the deities thus: There are devas [ruled by] the four great kings, Tāvātimsa devas, Yāma devas, Tusita devas, devas who delight in creation, devas who control what is created by others, devas of Brahmā’s company, and devas still higher than these. I too have such faith as those deities possessed because of which, when they passed away here, they were reborn there; I to have such virtuous behavior... such learning... such generosity... such wisdom as those deities possessed because of which, when they passed away here, they were reborn there.’ When a noble disciple recollects the faith, virtuous behavior, learning, generosity, and wisdom in himself and in those deities, his mind becomes placid, joy arises, and the defilements of the mind are abandoned in the same way that im pure gold is cleansed by exertion.

“And how, Visākhā, is impure gold cleansed by exertion? By means of a furnace, salt, red chalk, a blow-pipe and tongs, and the appropriate effort by the person. It is in such a way that impure gold is cleansed by exertion. So too, the defiled mind is cleansed by exertion. And how is the defiled mind cleansed by exertion? Here, Visākhā, a noble disciple recollects the deities thus: ‘There are devas [ruled by] the four great kings... and devas still higher than these. I too have such faith...such wisdom as those deities possessed because of which, when they passed away here, they were reborn there.’ When a noble disciple recollects the faith, virtuous behavior, learning, generosity, and wisdom in himself and in those deities, his mind becomes placed, joy arises, and the defilements of the mind are abandoned. This is called a noble disciple who observes the *uposatha* of the deities, who dwells together with the deities, and it is by considering the deities that his mind becomes placid, joy arises, and the defilements of the mind are abandoned. It is in this way that the defiled mind is cleansed by exertion.

(i) “This noble disciple, Visākhā, reflects thus:’ As long as they live the arahants abandon and abstain from the destruction of life; with the rod and weapon laid aside, conscientious and kindly, they dwell compassionate toward all living beings. Today, for this night and day, I too shall abandon and abstain from the destruction of life; with the rod and weapon laid aside,

conscientious and kindly, I too shall dwell compassion ate toward all living beings. I shall imitate the arahants in this respect and the *uposatha* will be observed by me.

(ii) ““As long as they live the arahants abandon and abstain from taking what is not given; they take only what is given, expect only what is given, and are honest at heart, devoid of theft. Today, for this night and day, I too shall abandon and abstain from taking what is not given; I shall accept only what is given, expect only what is given, and be honest at heart, devoid of theft. I shall imitate the arahants in this respect and the *uposatha* will be observed by me.

(iii) ““As long as they live the arahants abandon sexual activity and observe celibacy, living apart, abstaining from sexual intercourse, the common person’s practice. Today, for this night ana day, I too shall abandon sexual activity and Observe celibacy, living apart, abstaining from sexual intercourse, the com mon person’s practice. I shall imitate the arahants in this respect and the *uposatha* will be observed by me.

(iv) ““A s long as they live the arahants abandon and abstain from false speech; they speak truth, adhere to truth; they are trustworthy and reliable, no deceivers of the world. Today, for this night and day, I too shall abandon and abstain from false speech; I shall be a speaker of truth, an adherent of truth, trust worthy and reliable, no deceiver of the world. I shall imitate the arahants in this respect and the *uposatha* will be observed by me.

(v) ““As long as they live the arahants abandon and abstain from liquor, wine, and intoxicants, the basis for heedlessness. Today, for this night and day, I too shall abandon and abstain from liquor, wine, and intoxicants, the basis for heedlessness. I shall imitate the arahants in this respect and the *uposatha* will be observed by me.

(vi) ““As long as they live the arahants eat once a day, abstaining from eating at night and from food outside the proper time. Today, for this night and day, I too shall eat once a day, abstaining from, eating at night and from food outside the proper time. I shall imitate the arahants in this respect and the *uposatha* will be observed by me.

(vii) ““As long as they live the arahants abstain from dancing, singing, instrumental music, and unsuitable shows, and from adorning and beautifying themselves by wearing garlands and applying scents and unguents. Today, for this night and day, I too shall abstain from dancing, singing, instrumental music, and unsuitable shows, and from adorning and beautifying myself by wearing garlands and applying scents and unguents. I shall imitate the arahants in this respect and the *uposatha* will be observed by me.

(viii) “As long as they live the arahants abandon and abstain from the use of high and luxurious beds; they lie down on a low resting place, either a small bed or a straw mat. Today, for this night and day, I too shall abandon and abstain from the use of high and luxurious beds; I shall lie down on a low resting place, either a small bed or a straw mat. I shall imitate the arahants in this respect and the *uposatha* will be observed by me.’

“It is in this way, Visākhā, that the noble ones’ *uposatha* is observed. When one has observed the *uposatha* in the way of the noble ones it is of great fruit and benefit, extraordinarily brilliant and pervasive.

“To what extent is it of great fruit and benefit? To what extent is it extraordinarily brilliant and pervasive? Suppose, Visākhā, one were to exercise sovereignty and kingship over these sixteen great countries abounding in the seven precious substances, that is, [the countries of] the Aṅgans, the Magadhans, the Kāsis, the Kosalans, the Vajjis, the Mallas, the Cetis, the Vaṅgas, the Kurus, the Pañcālas, the Macchas, the Sūrasenas, the Assakas, the Avantis, the Gandhārans, and the Kambojans: this would not be worth a sixteenth part of the *uposatha* observance complete in those eight factors. For what reason? Because human kingship is poor compared to celestial happiness.

“For the devas [ruled by] the four great kings, a single night and day is equivalent to fifty human years; thirty such days make up a month, and twelve such months make up a year. The life span of the devas [ruled by] the four great kings is five hundred such celestial years. It is possible, Visākhā, that a woman or man here who observes the *uposatha* complete in these eight factors will, with the breakup of the body, after death, be reborn in companionship with the devas [ruled by] the four great kings. It was with reference to this that I said human kingship is poor compared to celestial happiness.

“For the Tāvatiṃsa devas a single night and day is equivalent to a hundred human years; thirty such days make up a month, and twelve such months make up a year. The life span of the Tāvatiṃsa devas is a thousand such celestial years. It is possible, Visākhā, that a woman or man here who observes the *uposatha* complete in these eight factors will, with the breakup of the body, after death, be reborn in companionship with the Tāvatiṃsa devas. It was with reference to this that I said human kingship is poor compared to celestial happiness.

“For. the Yāma devas a single night and day is equivalent to two hundred human years; thirty such days make up a month, and twelve such months make up a year. The life span of the Yāma devas is two thousand such celestial years. It is possible, Visākhā, that a woman or man here who

observes the *uposatha* complete in these eight factors will, with the breakup of the body, after death, be reborn in companionship with the Yāma devas. It was with reference to this that I said human kingship is poor compared to celestial happiness.

“For the Tusita devas, a single night and day is equivalent to four hundred human years; thirty such days make up a month, and twelve such months make up a year. The life span of the Tusita devas is four thousand such celestial years. It is possible, Visākhā, that a woman or man here who observes the *uposatha* complete in these eight factors will, with the breakup of the body, after death, be reborn in companionship with the Tusita devas. It was with reference to this that I said human kingship is poor compared to celestial happiness.

“For the devas who delight in creation, a single night and day is equivalent to eight hundred human years; thirty such days make up a month, and twelve such months make up a year. The life span of the devas who delight in creation is eight thousand such celestial years. It is possible, Visākhā, that a woman or man here who observes the *uposatha* complete in these eight factors will, with the breakup of the body, after death, be reborn in companionship with the devas who delight in creation. It was with reference to this that I said human kingship is poor compared to celestial happiness.

“For the devas who control what is created by others, a single night and day is equivalent to sixteen hundred human years; thirty such days make up a month, and twelve such months make up a year. The life span of the devas who control what is created by others is sixteen thousand such celestial years. It is possible, Visākhā, that a woman or man here who observes the *uposatha* complete in these eight factors will, with the breakup of the body, after death, be reborn in companionship with the devas who control what is created by others. It was with reference to this that I said human kingship is poor compared to celestial happiness.’

*One should not kill living beings or take what is not given;
one should not speak falsehood or drink intoxicants;
one should refrain from sexual activity, from unchastity;
one should not eat at night or at an improper time.*

*One should not wear garlands or apply scents;
one should sleep on a [low] bed or a mat on the ground;
this, they say, is the eight-factored Uposatha
proclaimed by the Buddha,
who reached the end of suffering.*

*As far as the sun and moon revolve,
shedding light, so beautiful to gaze upon,
dispellers of darkness, moving through the firmament,
they shine in the sky, brightening up the quarters.*

*Whatever wealth exists in this sphere-
pearls, gems, and excellent beryl,
horn gold and mountain gold,
and the natural gold called hataka-*

*those are not worth a sixteenth part
of an uposatha complete in the eight factors,
just as all the hosts of stars
[do not match] the moon's radiance.*

*Therefore a virtuous woman or man,
having observed the uposatha complete in eight factors,
and having made merit productive of happiness,
goes blameless to a heavenly state.*