

SN 3.25: Pabbatopama Sutta: The Simile of the Mountains

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Thanissaro Bhikkhu

[*Dhamma](#)

At Savatthi. Then King Pasenadi Kosala approached the Blessed One in the middle of the day and, on arrival, having bowed down, sat to one side. As he was sitting there, the Blessed One said to him: “Well now, great king, where are you coming from in the middle of the day?”

“Just now, lord, I was engaged in the sort of royal affairs typical of head-anointed noble-warrior kings intoxicated with the intoxication of sovereignty, obsessed by greed for sensual pleasures, who have attained stable control in their country, and who rule having conquered a great sphere of territory on earth.”

“What do you think, great king? Suppose a man, trustworthy and reliable, were to come to you from the east and on arrival would say: ‘If it please your majesty, you should know that I come from the east. There I saw a great mountain, as high as the clouds, coming this way, crushing all living beings [in its path]. Do whatever you think should be done.’ Then a second man were to come to you from the west... Then a third man were to come to you from the north... Then a fourth man were to come to you from the south and on arrival would say: ‘If it please your majesty, you should know that I come from the south. There I saw a great mountain, as high as the clouds, coming this way, crushing all living beings. Do whatever you think should be done.’ If, great king, such a great peril should arise, such a terrible destruction of human life – the human state being so hard to obtain – what should be done?”

“If, lord, such a great peril should arise, such a terrible destruction of human life – the human state being so hard to obtain – what else

should be done but Dhamma-conduct, right conduct, skillful deeds, meritorious deeds?”

“I inform you, great king, I announce to you, great king: aging and death are rolling in on you. When aging and death are rolling in on you, great king, what should be done?”

“As aging and death are rolling in on me, lord, what else should be done but Dhamma-conduct, right conduct, skillful deeds, meritorious deeds?”

“There are, lord, elephant battles [fought by] head-anointed noble-warrior kings intoxicated with the intoxication of sovereignty, obsessed by greed for sensual pleasures, who have attained stable control in their country, and who rule having conquered a great sphere of territory on earth; but there is no use for those elephant battles, no scope for them, when aging and death are rolling in. There are cavalry battles... chariot battles... infantry battles... but there is no use for those infantry battles, no scope for them, when aging and death are rolling in. In this royal court there are counselors who, when the enemies arrive, are capable of dividing them by their wits; but there is no use for those battles of wits, no scope for them, when aging and death are rolling in. In this royal court there is abundant bullion and gold stored in vaults and depositories, and with such wealth we are capable of buying off enemies when they come; but there is no use for those battles of wealth, no scope for them, when aging and death are rolling in. As aging and death are rolling in on me, lord, what else should be done but Dhamma-conduct, right conduct, skillful deeds, meritorious deeds?”

“So it is, great king! So it is, great king! As aging and death are rolling in on you, what else should be done but Dhamma-conduct, right conduct, skillful deeds, meritorious deeds?”

That is what the Blessed One said. Having said that, the One Well-Gone, the Teacher, further said this:

Like massive boulders,
mountains pressing against the sky,
moving in from all sides,

crushing the four directions,
so aging and death
come rolling over living beings:
noble warriors, brahmans, merchants,
workers, outcastes, & scavengers.

They spare nothing.
They trample everything.

Here elephant troops can hold no ground,
nor can chariots or infantry,
nor can a battle of wits or wealth win out.

So a wise person,
seeing his own good,
steadfast, secures confidence
in the Buddha, Dhamma, & Sangha.

One who practices the Dhamma
in thought, word, & deed,
receives praise here on earth
and after death rejoices in heaven.

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