

## The Weaver's Daughter

The Buddha gave this lesson about a weaver's daughter while he was staying at Aggālava Monastery.

One day, the Buddha went to Ālavi, and the townspeople offered him hospitality and gave alms. At the end of the meal, in giving *anumodana*, the Buddha said, "Practice meditation on death, reminding yourselves, 'Uncertain is my life. Certain is my death. I will surely die. Death will be the termination of my life. Life is unstable. Death is sure.'

"One who has not practiced meditation on death will tremble with fear when his or her last hour comes. That person will die screaming with terror, just as one with no stick is stricken with fear at the sight of a snake.

"One who has practiced meditation on death, however, will have no fear when his or her last hour comes. That person will be calm, just as one who, at the sight of a snake, takes it up with a stick and tosses it away easily. Therefore, practice meditation on death."

Not long after that, the Buddha left Ālavi and went to Jetavana. Most of the people who had heard the Buddha's discourse at that time were unaffected and continued their daily activities the same as before. The only exception was a weaver's daughter, about sixteen years old. As soon as she heard the Buddha, she thought, "Marvelous indeed are those words of the Buddha! I ought to practice meditation on death." She immediately began practicing meditation on death, and, for the next three years, she continued doing so day and night.

One day, as the Buddha surveyed the world before dawn, he saw that weaver's daughter. He became aware that, from the day that she had heard his discourse, three years before, she had constantly practiced meditation on death. "I will go to Ālavi," he resolved, "and ask her four questions which she will answer correctly. Because of her, I will recite the verse, *Blind is this world*, and give a discourse for the benefit of the multitude." After daybreak, the Buddha set out from Jetavana with five hundred bhikkhus for Aggālava Monastery.

When the people of Ālavi heard that the Buddha had come, they offered him hospitality. The weaver's daughter's heart was filled with joy at the thought, "With his face like the full moon, the Buddha has come! He is my father, my master, and my teacher. For the first time in three years, I will be able to see the Teacher and to

hear him teach the Dhamma, sublime<sup>1</sup> and sweet.”

While she was thinking these pleasant thoughts, her father, on his way to the workshop, said to her, “Daughter, there is a customer’s garment which is still incomplete on the loom. I must finish it today. Hurry and replenish<sup>2</sup> the shuttle. Bring it to me as soon as possible.”



Shuttle of a loom

The weaver’s daughter thought, “I really want to hear the Buddha teach the Dhamma, but my father has given me a task to do. Shall I listen to the Teacher or obey my father? If I fail to do as my father asks, he will be angry. I will first replenish the shuttle, and afterwards hear the Dhamma.” She quickly sat down and began preparing the shuttle.

Meanwhile, the people of Ālavi offered food to the Buddha, and, when the meal was over, they took his bowl and waited for him to give *anumodana*.

“I traveled thirty *yojanas* to come here for the sake of a certain young woman,” the Buddha said. “I see that she is not here yet. When she comes, I will speak.”

Without saying anything more, he sat and waited. Of course, the people were also quiet because, when the Teacher is silent, neither gods nor men dare<sup>3</sup> to make a sound.

As soon as the weaver’s daughter had finished replenishing the shuttle, she put it in her basket and started walking toward her father’s workshop. As she passed the hall where the Buddha was sitting, she paused at the edge of the crowd of people and looked at him. The Buddha lifted his head and gazed<sup>4</sup> at her. Immediately understanding that he wanted her to approach, she put down her basket and made her way<sup>5</sup> to the front of the crowd. She paid obeisance to the Buddha and stood respectfully at one side.

“Young woman, where have you come from?” the Buddha asked.

“I do not know, Venerable Sir.”

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<sup>1</sup> sublime = excellent beyond comprehension, unbelievably excellent

<sup>2</sup> replenish = fill

<sup>3</sup> dare to do something = not be afraid to do it  
no one dared = everyone was afraid

<sup>4</sup> gaze = look intently

<sup>5</sup> make one’s way = go forward, usually with some difficulty

“Where are you going?”

“I do not know, Venerable Sir.”

“Don’t you know?”

“Yes, Venerable Sir, I know.”

“Do you know?”

“No, Venerable Sir, I do not know.”

Listening to this exchange,<sup>6</sup> the people became angry. “Imagine that!” they complained. “This daughter of a weaver says whatever she pleases to the Enlightened One! She says that she doesn’t know where she has come from or where she is going. Then she says both that she knows and that she doesn’t know. It makes no sense at all!”

The Buddha signaled for the people to be quiet. He turned to the weaver’s daughter again and asked, “When I asked you, ‘Where have you come from?’ why did you say, ‘I do not know?’”

“Venerable Sir, you know that I have come from my father’s house. Therefore, when you asked me, ‘Where have you come from?’ I knew that you were asking where I had been before I was reborn here. As for that, I do not know.”

“Well said! Well said, young woman!” the Buddha replied.

“When I asked you, ‘Where are you going?’ why did you say, ‘I do not know?’”

“Venerable Sir, you know that I am going with my basket to my father’s workshop. Therefore, when you asked me, ‘Where are you going?’ I knew that you were asking where I would be reborn when I die. As for that, I do not know.”

“Well said! Well said, young woman!” the Buddha replied again.

“When I asked you, ‘Don’t you know?’ why did you say, ‘I know?’”

“Venerable Sir, I knew that you were asking whether I knew that I would surely die. Therefore, I said that I knew.”

“Well said! Well said, young woman!” the Buddha replied again.

“When I asked you, ‘Do you know?’ why did you say, ‘I do not know?’”

“Venerable Sir, I knew that you were asking whether I knew when I would die. I know that I will die, but I do not know whether it will be at night, in the morning, or at another time. Therefore, I said that I did not know.”

“Well said! Well said, young woman!” the Buddha replied again. “You have answered all four of my questions correctly.” Turning to the crowd, he continued,

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<sup>6</sup> exchange = series of questions and answers

“Those of you who failed to understand her answers were offended. Those not having the Eye of Understanding are blind. Only those who possess the Eye of Understanding can see.

Blind is this world; there are few here who can see.  
Those who go to heaven are as few as birds who escape from a net.”<sup>7</sup>

At that moment, the weaver’s daughter attained Stream Entry.

Remembering her duty, she picked up her basket and hurried to her father’s shop. Unaware that he had fallen asleep at the loom, she leaned forward to give him the shuttle. Her basket hit the edge of the loom and fell to the floor. Startled by the noise, her father awoke and, grabbing the loom, pulled it forward. As he did so, its sharp corner struck his daughter in the breast with a blow that killed her instantly, and she was reborn in Tusita heaven.

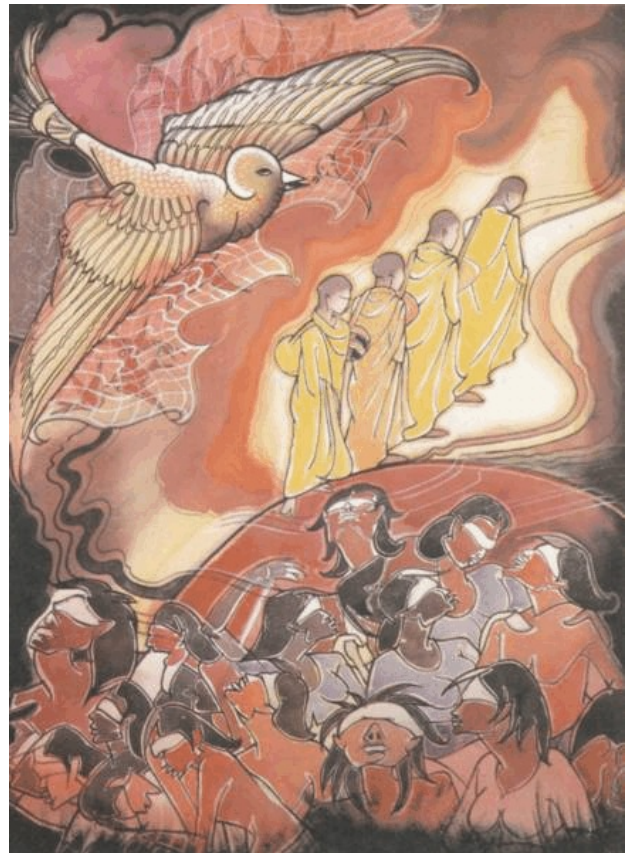
When her father saw her body, stained with blood and lying on the floor, he cried out in agony.<sup>8</sup>

Overcome with grief, he declared, “No one but the Buddha can ease my sorrow!”

Hurrying to the Teacher, the weaver related all that had happened. “Venerable Sir,” he cried, “please extinguish my suffering!”

“Do not grieve,” the Buddha comforted him. “In the round of existence, which is without discernable beginning, you have shed more tears over the death of your daughter than all the water of the four great oceans.”

Listening to the Buddha, the weaver understood and ceased his grieving. He asked to be admitted into the Order and, in no long time, attained arahatship.



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<sup>7</sup> *Dhammapada* 174

<sup>8</sup> agony = intense pain of body or mind