

WELL-TRAINED MIND EXCELS PEOPLE

3 (9) The Story of Sōreyya (Verse 43)

While residing at the Jētavana Monastery, the Buddha spoke this verse, with reference to Sōreyya, the son of a rich man of the city of Sōreyya. On one occasion, Sōreyya accompanied by a friend and some attendants was going out in a carriage for a bath. At that moment, monk Mahākaccāyana was adjusting his robes outside the city, as he was going into the city of Sōreyya for alms-food. The youth Sōreyya, seeing the youthful complexion of the monk, thought, “How I wish the monk were my wife, so that the complexion of my wife would be like his.” As the wish arose in him, his sex changed and he became a woman. Very much ashamed, he got down from the carriage and ran away, taking the road to Taxila. His companions looked for him, but they could not find him. Sōreyya, now a woman, offered her signet ring to some people going to Taxila, to allow her to go with them in their carriage. Upon arrival at Taxila, her companions told a young rich man of Taxila about the lady who came along with them. The young rich man, finding her to be very beautiful and of a suitable age for him, married her. As a result of this marriage two sons were born; there were also two sons from the previous marriage of Sōreyya as a man.

One day, a rich man’s son from the city of Sōreyya came to Taxila with a caravan of five hundred carts. Lady Sōreyya, recognizing him to be an old friend, sent for him. The man from Sōreyya was surprised that he was invited, because he did not know the lady who invited him. He told the Lady Sōreyya that he did not know her, and asked her whether she knew him. She answered that she knew him and also enquired after the health of her family and other people in the city of Sōreyya. The man from Sōreyya next told her about the rich man’s son who disappeared mysteriously while going for a bath. Then the Lady Sōreyya revealed her identity and related all that had happened, about the wrongful thoughts with regard to monk Mahākaccāyana, about the change of sex, and her marriage to the young rich man of Taxila. The man from the city of Sōreyya then advised the Lady Sōreyya to ask pardon from the monk. Monk Mahākaccāyana was accordingly invited to the home of Sōreyya and alms-food was offered to him. After the meal, the Lady Sōreyya was brought to the presence of the monk, and the man from Sōreyya told the monk that the lady was at one time the son of a rich man from Sōreyya. He then explained to the monk how Sōreyya was turned into a female on account of his wrongful thoughts towards the respected monk. Lady Sōreyya then respectfully asked

pardon of Monk Mahākaccāyana. The monk then said, “Get up, I forgive you.” As soon as these words were spoken, the woman was changed back to a man. Sōreyya then pondered how within a single existence and with a single body he had undergone change of sex and how sons were born to him. And feeling very weary and repulsive of all these things, he decided to leave the householder’s life and joined the sangha under the monk.

After that, he was often asked, “Whom do you love more, the two sons you had as a man or the other two you had as a woman?” To those, he would answer that his love for those bore as a woman was greater. This question was put to him so often, he felt very much annoyed and ashamed. So he stayed by himself and, with diligence, contemplated the decay and dissolution of the body. He soon attained arahatship together with the analytical insight. When the old question was next put to him he replied that he had no affection for any one in particular. Other monks hearing him thought he must be telling a lie. When it was reported about Sōreyya giving a different answer, the Buddha said, “My son is not telling lies, he is speaking the truth.”

Explanatory Translation (Verse 43)

*taṃ mātaṃ na kayirā, pitā api ca aññe nātakā vā
sammā paṇihitaṃ cittaṃ naṃ tatō seyyasō karē*

taṃ: that favour; *mātā*: one’s mother; *na kayirā*: will not do; *pitā*: one’s father too (will not do); *api ca*: besides; *aññe*: other; *nātakā vā*: or relations; *sammā paṇihitaṃ*: well disciplined; *cittaṃ*: mind; *naṃ*: to that person; *tatō seyyasō*: something much better than that; *karē*: will do unto one.

Well directed thoughts can help a person even better than one’s father or one’s mother.

Commentary

sammā paṇihitaṃ cittaṃ: the well-established mind. One’s parents love one immensely. They can give one all the worldly things lavishly. But, when it comes to the fruits of higher life — liberation and the winning of the ‘deathless’ — only the well-established mind can help. This is because one has to experience the ‘deathless’ solely by one’s own self. The developed mind is one’s best friend.

well-directed mind: That is, the mind directed towards the ten kinds of meritorious deeds (*kusala*) - namely, 1. generosity, 2. morality, 3. meditation, 4. reverence, 5. service, 6. transference of merit, 7. rejoicing in others’ merit, 8. hearing the doctrine, 9. expounding the doctrine, and 10. straightening one’s right views.