

THE WISE CONTROL THEMSELVES

6 (5) THE STORY OF NOVICE MONK PAṆḌITA (VERSE 80)

While residing at the Jētavana Monastery, the Buddha spoke this verse, with reference to the novice monk Paṇḍita.

Paṇḍita was a young son of a rich man of Sāvatti. He became a novice monk at the age of seven. On the eighth day after becoming a novice monk, as he was following Venerable Sāriputta on an alms-round, he saw some farmers channeling water into their fields and asked the Venerable, “Can water which has no consciousness be guided to wherever one wishes?” The Venerable replied, “Yes, it can be guided to wherever one wishes.” As they continued on their way, the novice monk next saw some fletchers heating their arrows with fire and straightening them. Further on, he came across some carpenters cutting, sawing and planing timber to make it into things like cart-wheels. Then he pondered, “If water which is without consciousness can be guided to wherever one desires, if a crooked bamboo which is without consciousness can be straightened, and if timber which is without consciousness can be made into useful things, why should I, having consciousness, be unable to tame my mind and practice tranquillity and insight meditation?”

Then and there he asked permission from the Venerable and returned to his own room in the monastery. There he ardently and diligently practiced meditation, contemplating the body. Sakka and the dēvas also helped him in his meditation by keeping the monastery and its precincts very quiet and still. Before the noon meal novice monk Paṇḍita attained anāgāmi fruition.

At that time Venerable Sāriputta was bringing food to the novice monk. The Buddha saw with his supernormal power that novice monk Paṇḍita had attained anāgāmi fruition and also that if he continued to practice meditation he would soon attain arahatship. So the Buddha decided to stop Sāriputta from entering the room, where the novice monk was. The Buddha went to the door and kept Sāriputta engaged by putting some questions to him. While the conversation was taking place, the novice monk attained arahatship. Thus, the novice monk attained arahatship on the eighth day after becoming a novice.

In this connection, the Buddha said to the monks of the monastery. “When one is earnestly practicing the Dhamma, even Sakka and the dēvas give protection and keep guard; I myself have kept Venerable Sāriputta engaged at the door so that novice monk Paṇḍita should not be disturbed. The novice monk, having seen the farmers irrigating their fields, the fletchers straightening their arrows, and carpenters making cart-wheels and other things, tames his mind and practises the Dhamma; he has now become an arahat.”

Explanatory Translation (Verse 80)

*nettikā hi udakaṃ nayanti usukārā tējanaṃ namayanti tac-
chakā dāruṃ namayanti paṇḍitā attānaṃ damayanti*

nettikā: irrigators; *hi*: certainly; *udakaṃ*: water; *nayanti*: lead (to whatever place they like); *usukārā*: fletchers; *tējanaṃ*: arrow-shafts; *namayanti*: shape and bend; *tacchakā*: carpenters; *dāruṃ*: wood; *namayanti*: shape and form; *paṇḍitā*: the wise ones; *attānaṃ*: their own minds (themselves); *damayanti*: tame and restrain

The irrigator who manages water is skilled in directing water to whatever place he wants. The fletcher skillfully shapes a very straight arrow shaft out of a piece of wood by working skillfully on it. The carpenter selects a block of wood and constructs whatever he wants out of it, depending on his need. In the same way, the wise persons work upon their mind, restraining it the way they desire.

Commentary

nettikā, usukārā, tacchakā: the irrigators, the arrow-makers, the carpenters. In this stanza, a whole series of experts is noted. They are all skilled in various activities. All these three categories of craftsmen control and tame inanimate things: one leads water to wherever he pleases; the fletcher shapes the stick into a fast-flying arrow and the carpenter forms whatever timber he likes into objects he wants made. But the truth-seeker shapes his own mind, which is much more difficult than the above three.