AN 6.55 — Sona Sutta: About Sona

English translation by Thanissaro Bhikkhu.

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Changes: Presentation only: original HTML markup reflowed into plain text; wording, numbering and source repetitions retained. No repetitions expanded.

Completeness: ABBREVIATED. Every source-unit character is preserved, including introductions, notes and verse structure. Thanissaro's collection-level note explicitly states that repetitions were cut: https://www.dhammatalks.org/suttas/about.html. This is evidence about the translation method, not an assertion that every individual unit contains an omission; no repetitions reconstructed.

Text

I have heard that on one occasion the Blessed One was staying near Rajagaha, on Vulture Peak Mountain. And on that occasion Ven. Sona was staying near Rajagaha in the Cool Wood. Then, as Ven. Sona was meditating in seclusion [after doing walking meditation until the skin of his soles was split & bleeding], this train of thought arose in his awareness: "Of the Blessed One's disciples who have aroused their persistence, I am one, but my mind is not released from the fermentations through lack of clinging/sustenance. Now, my family has enough wealth that it would be possible to enjoy wealth & make merit. What if I were to disavow the training, return to the lower life, enjoy wealth, & make merit?"

Then the Blessed One, as soon as he perceived with his awareness the train of thought in Ven. Sona's awareness — as a strong man might stretch out his bent arm or bend his outstretched arm — disappeared from Vulture Peak Mountain, appeared in the Cool Wood right in front of Ven. Sona, and sat down on a prepared seat. Ven. Sona, after bowing down to the Blessed One, sat to one side. As he was sitting there, the Blessed One said to him, "Just now, as you were meditating in seclusion, didn't this train of thought appear to your awareness: 'Of the Blessed One's disciples who have aroused their persistence, I am one, but my mind is not released from the fermentations... What if I were to disavow the training, return to the lower life, enjoy wealth, & make merit?'"

"Yes, lord."

"Now what do you think, Sona. Before, when you were a house-dweller, were you skilled at playing the vina?"

"Yes, lord."

"And what do you think: when the strings of your vina were too taut, was your vina in tune & playable?"

"No, lord."

"And what do you think: when the strings of your vina were too loose, was your vina in tune & playable?"

"No, lord."

"And what do you think: when the strings of your vina were neither too taut nor too loose, but tuned[1] to be right on pitch, was your vina in tune & playable?"

"Yes, lord."

"In the same way, Sona, over-aroused persistence leads to restlessness, overly slack persistence leads to laziness. Thus you should determine the right pitch for your persistence, attune[2]the pitch of the [five] faculties [to that], and there pick up your theme."

"Yes, lord," Ven. Sona answered the Blessed One. Then, having given this exhortation to Ven. Sona, the Blessed One — as a strong man might stretch out his bent arm or bend his outstretched arm — disappeared from the Cool Wood and appeared on Vulture Peak Mountain.

So after that, Ven. Sona determined the right pitch for his persistence, attuned the pitch of the [five] faculties [to that], and there picked up his theme. Dwelling alone, secluded, heedful, ardent, & resolute, he in no long time reached & remained in the supreme goal of the holy life for which clansmen rightly go forth from home into homelessness, knowing & realizing it for himself in the here & now. He knew: "Birth is ended, the holy life fulfilled, the task done. There is nothing further for the sake of this world." And thus Ven. Sona became another one of the arahants.

Then, on the attainment of arahantship, this thought occurred to Ven. Sona: "What if I were to go to the Blessed One and, on arrival, to declare gnosis in his presence?" So he then went to the Blessed One and, on arrival, having bowed down to him, sat to one side. As he was sitting there he said to the Blessed One: "When a monk is an arahant, his fermentations ended, who has reached fulfillment, done the task, laid down the burden, attained the true goal, totally destroyed the fetter of becoming, and is released through

right gnosis, he is dedicated to six things: renunciation, seclusion, non-afflictiveness, the ending of craving, the ending of clinging/sustenance, & non-deludedness.

"Now it may occur to a certain venerable one to think, 'Perhaps it is entirely dependent on conviction that this venerable one is dedicated to renunciation,' but it should not be seen in that way. The monk whose fermentations are ended, having fulfilled [the holy life], does not see in himself anything further to do, or anything further to add to what he has done. It is because of the ending of passion, because of his being free of passion, that he is dedicated to renunciation. It is because of the ending of aversion, because of his being free of aversion, that he is dedicated to renunciation. It is because of the ending of delusion, because of his being free of delusion, that he is dedicated to renunciation.

"Now it may occur to a certain venerable one to think, 'Perhaps it is because he desires gain, honor, & fame that this venerable one is dedicated to seclusion' ... 'Perhaps it is because he falls back on attachment to precepts & practices as being essential that he is dedicated to non-afflictiveness,' but it should not be seen in that way. The monk whose fermentations are ended, having fulfilled [the holy life], does not see in himself anything further to do, or anything further to add to what he has done. It is because of the ending of passion, because of his being free of passion, that he is dedicated to non-afflictiveness. It is because of the ending of aversion, because of his being free of aversion, that he is dedicated to non-afflictiveness. It is because of the ending of delusion, because of his being free of delusion, that he is dedicated to non-afflictiveness.

"It is because of the ending of passion, because of his being free of passion... because of the ending of aversion, because of his being free of aversion... because of the ending of delusion, because of his being free of delusion, that he is dedicated to the ending of craving... the ending of clinging/sustenance... non-deludedness.

"Even if powerful forms cognizable by the eye come into the visual range of a monk whose mind is thus rightly released, his mind is neither overpowered nor even engaged. Being still, having reached imperturbability, he focuses on their passing away. And even if powerful sounds... aromas... flavors... tactile sensations... Even if powerful ideas cognizable by the intellect come into the mental range of a monk whose mind is thus rightly released, his mind is neither overpowered nor even engaged. Being still, having reached imperturbability, he focuses on their passing away.

"Just as if there were a mountain of rock — without cracks, without fissures, one solid mass — and then from the east there were to come a powerful storm of wind & rain: the mountain would neither shiver nor quiver nor shake. And then from the west... the north... the south there were to come a powerful storm of wind & rain: the mountain would neither shiver nor quiver nor shake. In the same way, even if powerful forms cognizable by the eye come into the visual range of a monk whose mind is thus rightly released, his mind is neither overpowered nor even engaged. Being still, having reached imperturbability, he focuses on their passing away. And even if powerful sounds... aromas... flavors... tactile sensations... Even if powerful ideas cognizable by the intellect come into the mental range of a monk whose mind is thus rightly released, his mind is neither overpowered nor even

engaged. Being still, having reached imperturbability, he focuses on their passing away."

When one's awareness is dedicated to renunciation, seclusion, non-afflictiveness, the ending of clinging, the ending of craving, & non-deludedness, seeing the arising of the sense media, the mind is rightly released. For that monk, rightly released, his heart at peace, there's nothing to be done, nothing to add to what's done. As a single mass of rock isn't moved by the wind, even so all forms, flavors, sounds, aromas, contacts, ideas desirable & not, have no effect on one who is Such. The mind — still, totally released — focuses on their passing away.

Notes

1.

Lit. "established."

2.

"Penetrate," "ferret out."