

AN 6.55
Soṇa Sutta
“With the Venerable Soṇa”

Translated by Bhikkhu Candana

Copyright © Bhikkhu Candana 2022

Soṇa Sutta (With Soṇa)

I have personally heard this.

At one time, The Blessed One was living on the Vultures’ Peak, in Rājagaha, while the Venerable Soṇa was also staying in Rājagaha, but in the cool forest, below from where the Blessed One was. Then, the Venerable Soṇa began thinking and planning in his seclusion: *‘I am one of the disciples of The Blessed One, living with aroused energy. But I see how my mind is not yet released from the mental contaminants, as it still tends to grab on to things. Now, in our family, there is still much wealth. I could go just back to them, and retake my share of that wealth, meanwhile I can always do merits and wholesome acts. What if I give up the Holy Life and just go back to the lower life of a householder, reclaim my wealth, as I continue doing merit-making deeds?’*

Meanwhile, The Blessed One, knowing in His mind the discursive thoughts being pondered in the Venerable Soṇa’s mind, quickly and just as a strong man would stretch out his flexed arm or bend back his outstretched arm, suddenly disappeared from the Vultures’ Peak and reappeared before Venerable Soṇa in the cool forest. Then, the Blessed One sat on the prepared seat as the Venerable Soṇa paid his respects to Him and sat to one side.

The Blessed One said:

“Soṇa, were you just now pondering this discursive thought while in seclusion: ‘I am one of the disciples of The Blessed One, living with aroused energy. But I see how my mind is not yet released from the mental contaminants, as it still tends to grab on to things. Now, in our family, there is still much wealth. I could go just back to them, and retake my share of that wealth, meanwhile I can always do merits and wholesome acts. What if I give up the Holy Life and just go back to the lower life of a householder, reclaim my wealth, as I continue doing merit-making deeds?’

“Yes, Bhante,” replied Soṇa.

“Soṇa, when you were still a householder, were you skilled at the vīṇā, playing music?”

“Yes, Bhante.”

“Soṇa, if you were to tighten the strings on the vīṇā, could you still play it to make music?”

“Oh no, Bhante.”

“And what if, Soṇa, the strings of the vīṇā were too loose, could it still be in tune, so that you can play it to make music?”

“It could not, Bhante.”

“And what if, Soṇa, the strings on the vīṇā were not too tightened, nor too loose, and having been properly tuned, would the vīṇā now be played to make music?”

“Oh yes, Bhante.”

“In just the same manner, Soṇa, too much aroused energy and effort lead to restlessness and agitation, whereas too little aroused energy and effort lead to laziness and absent mindedness. Therefore, Soṇa, make a determination to balance your energy and effort, while establishing an evenness in your faculties, so to be able to penetrate your meditation object and gain its sign.”

Having been thus advised and encouraged by the Blessed One, the Venerable was delighted in receiving this personal advice from The Blessed One. And just as a strong man would stretch out his flexed arm or bend back his outstretched arm, suddenly the Blessed One disappeared from the cool forest and reappeared immediately on the Vultures’ Peak.

Then, as instructed by the Blessed One, Venerable Soṇa made a determination to balance his energy and effort, and by establishing an evenness in his faculties, he was able to penetrate his meditation object and gained its sign. Being secluded and withdrawn from the crowd, living heedfully and with resolution, Venerable Soṇa kept practicing diligently, and before long, here and now, he was able to finally realize by himself the noble end of the Holy Life; experiencing for himself that unsurpassed knowledge for which sons of good families rightfully leave the household life by becoming homeless. And the Venerable Soṇa knew with certainty unparalleled: “Now, birth is finally destroyed; the Holy Life is fully lived; what should be done is now done, and there is no more coming to any state of becoming.” And Venerable Soṇa became one of the Arahants.

Then, it occurred to the Venerable Soṇa: *‘What if I go to The Blessed One and declare my attainment.’* And the Venerable Sona approached The Blessed One, and after paying homage to Him, sat to one side, and said:

“Bhante, an Arahant, with his mental contaminants all destroyed, who has lived the Holy Life, done what should be done, having put down the heavy burden by achieving the highest Goal, and having destroyed the fetter of further becoming and who is now fully released by his Full Awakening, finds himself naturally inclined towards these six states:

“He is constantly inclined towards renunciation, to seclusion, to being kind and with non-oppressive consideration, to the destruction of craving, to the destruction of any form of grabbing, and to mental purity.”

“Bhante, there might be some Bhikkhus, who may look upon the renunciation they witness in such a Bhikkhu and assume it to be merely an expression of faith or devotion and nothing more, but that would be incorrect, as it would be a false assumption on their part. Bhante, the Bhikkhu with his mental contaminants all destroyed, is an Arahant who has lived the Holy Life, done what should be done, having put down the heavy burden by achieving the highest Goal, and as such, there is nothing further left for him to do or work on, in order to improve himself. Therefore, he is now naturally inclined towards renunciation, simply because he is truly void of any lust, having completely destroyed it. Also, he is truly void of any hatred, having completely destroyed it. And he is truly void of any delusion, having completely destroyed it. For this reason, Bhante, the Bhikkhu naturally inclines now towards renunciation.

“Further, Bhante, there might be some Bhikkhus, who may look upon the seclusion they witness in such a Bhikkhu and assume it to be merely a way for him to gain renown, fame, or praise by others, but that would be incorrect, as it would be a false assumption on their part. Bhante, the Bhikkhu with his mental contaminants all destroyed, is an Arahant who has lived the Holy Life, done what should be done, having put down the heavy burden by achieving the highest Goal, and as such, there is nothing further left for him to do or work on in order to improve himself. Therefore, he is now naturally inclined towards seclusion, simply because he is truly void of any lust, having completely destroyed it. Also, he is truly void of any hatred, having completely destroyed it. And he is truly void of any delusion, having completely destroyed it. For this reason, Bhante, he naturally inclines now towards seclusion.

“Further, Bhante, there might be some Bhikkhus, who may look upon the kind and non-oppressive consideration they witness in such a Bhikkhu and assume that he has merely become hemmed in by the belief, that continuous observance of the precepts is of the utmost importance, while having wrong views about true virtuous behavior. But that would be incorrect, as it would also be a false assumption on their part. Bhante, the Bhikkhu with his mental contaminants all destroyed, is an Arahant who has lived the Holy Life, done what should be done, having put down the heavy burden by achieving the highest Goal, and as such, there is nothing further left for him to do or work on, in order to improve himself. Therefore, he is now naturally inclined towards being kind and with non-oppressive consideration, simply because he is truly void of any lust, having completely destroyed it. Also, he is truly void of any hatred, having completely destroyed it. And he is truly void of any delusion, having completely destroyed it. For this reason, Bhante, he naturally inclines now towards being kind and with non-oppressive consideration.

“Further, Bhante, there might be some Bhikkhus, who may look upon the destruction of craving they witness in such a Bhikkhu and assume that he has merely become hemmed in by the belief that continuous observance of the precepts is of the utmost importance, while having wrong views about true virtuous behavior. But that would be incorrect, as it would again be a false assumption on their part. Bhante, the Bhikkhu with his mental contaminants all destroyed, is an Arahant who has lived the Holy Life, done what should be done, having put down the heavy burden by achieving the highest Goal, and as such, there is nothing further left for him to do or work on, in order to improve himself. Therefore, he is now naturally inclined towards the destruction of craving, simply because he is truly void of any lust, having completely destroyed it. Also, he is truly void of any hatred, having completely destroyed it. And he is truly void of

any delusion, having completely destroyed it. For this reason, Bhante, he naturally inclines now towards the destruction of craving.

“Further, Bhante, there might be some Bhikkhus, who may look upon the destruction of any form of grabbing they witness in such a Bhikkhu and assume that he has merely become hemmed in by the belief that continuous observance of the precepts is of the utmost importance, while having wrong views about true virtuous behavior. But that would be incorrect, as it would again be a false assumption on their part. Bhante, the Bhikkhu with his mental contaminants all destroyed, is an Arahant who has lived the Holy Life, done what should be done, having put down the heavy burden by achieving the highest Goal, and as such, there is nothing further left for him to do or work on, in order to improve himself. Therefore, he is now naturally inclined towards the destruction of any form of grabbing, simply because he is truly void of any lust, having completely destroyed it. Also, he is truly void of any hatred, having completely destroyed it. And he is truly void of any delusion, having completely destroyed it. For this reason, Bhante, he naturally inclines now towards the destruction of any form of grabbing.

“Further, Bhante, there might be some Bhikkhus, who may look upon the dedication to mental purity they witness in such a Bhikkhu and assume that he has merely become hemmed in by the belief that continuous observance of the precepts is of the utmost importance, while having wrong views about true virtuous behavior. But that would be incorrect, as it would again be a false assumption on their part. Bhante, the Bhikkhu with his mental contaminants all destroyed, is an Arahant who has lived the Holy Life, done what should be done, having put down the heavy burden by achieving the highest Goal, and as such, there is nothing further left for him to do or work on in order to improve himself. Therefore, he is now naturally inclined towards mental purity, simply because he is truly void of any lust, having completely destroyed it. Also, he is truly void of any hatred, having completely destroyed it. And he is truly void of any delusion, having completely destroyed it. For this reason, Bhante, he naturally inclines now towards mental purity.

Bhante, when the Bhikkhu’s heart is perfectly released in this way, even if a great many compelling visual forms come to be witnessed by the eye, they do not take hold of his heart nor even stay. The mind remains completely unperturbed, steady, and unmoved by what is seen, as he observes the continued cessation of whatever appears before him.

Similarly, even if a great many compelling audible sounds come to be experienced by the ear, they do not take hold of his heart nor even stay. The mind remains completely unperturbed, steady, and unmoved by what is heard, as he observes the continued cessation of whatever is heard by him.

Similarly, even if a great many compelling odors come to be experienced by the nose, they do not take hold of his heart nor even stay. The mind remains completely unperturbed, steady, and unmoved by what is smelled, as he observes the continued cessation of whatever is sensed by him.

Similarly, even if a great many compelling flavors come to be experienced by the tongue, they do not take hold of his heart nor even stay. The mind remains completely unperturbed, steady,

and unmoved by what is tasted, as he observes the continued cessation of whatever is sensed by him.

Similarly, even if a great many compelling textures come to be experienced by the body, they do not take hold of his heart nor even stay. The mind remains completely unperturbed, steady, and unmoved by what is touched, as he observes the continued cessation of whatever is sensed by him.

And similarly, even if a great many compelling thoughts or memories come to be experienced by the mind, they do not take hold of his heart nor even stay. The mind remains completely unperturbed, steady, and unmoved by what is cognized, as he observes the continued cessation of whatever is known by him.

Bhante, just like a massive stone mountain that is solid without any crevasses or rifts in it, and when a powerful thunderstorm comes from the eastern, or the western, or the northern, or the southern directions, and try as it might to violently pour all its rain on it, it cannot even move or make the mountain tremble.

Likewise, Bhante, when the Bhikkhu's heart is perfectly released in this way, even if a great many compelling visual forms come to be witnessed by the eye, they do not take hold of his heart nor even stay. The mind remains completely unperturbed, steady, and unmoved by what is seen, as he observes the continued cessation of whatever appears before him.

Similarly, even if a great many compelling audible sounds come to be experienced by the ear, they do not take hold of his heart nor even stay. The mind remains completely unperturbed, steady, and unmoved by what is heard, as he observes the continued cessation of whatever is heard by him.

Similarly, even if a great many compelling odors come to be experienced by the nose, they do not take hold of his heart nor even stay. The mind remains completely unperturbed, steady, and unmoved by what is smelled, as he observes the continued cessation of whatever is sensed by him.

Similarly, even if a great many compelling flavors come to be experienced by the tongue, they do not take hold of his heart nor even stay. The mind remains completely unperturbed, steady, and unmoved by what is tasted, as he observes the continued cessation of whatever is sensed by him.

Similarly, even if a great many compelling textures come to be experienced by the body, they do not take hold of his heart nor even stay. The mind remains completely unperturbed, steady, and unmoved by what is touched, as he observes the continued cessation of whatever is sensed by him.

And similarly, even if a great many compelling thoughts or memories come to be experienced by the mind, they do not take hold of his heart nor even stay. The mind remains completely

unperturbed, steady, and unmoved by what is cognized, as he observes the continued cessation of whatever is known by him.

*The secluded mind inclined to renunciation
While being kind and with non-oppressive consideration of others,
The heart undefiled, inclined to the destruction of grabbing and craving,
Upon seeing the arising of contact at any of the sense doors, tastes Perfect Freedom at last.*

*For such a perfectly released Bhikkhu, who is now at peace,
There is no more work to be done, nothing to improve upon.
Just like a massive stone mountain does not tremble by the power of violent storms,
Likewise forms, tastes, sounds, odors, textures, or
Whatever mental objects that may be liked or disliked, can no longer affect him,
For the heart that is freed remains completely steady and unperturbed,
As it observes quietly their cessation.*

Sadhu Sadhu Sadhu