Thig 15.1 — Verses of the Elder Isidāsī

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Text

Verses of the Elder Bhikkhunīs

Chapter of the Forties

Verses of the Elder Isidāsī

In a town with the name of a flower,
Pāṭaliputta, the blest place on earth,
there were two virtuous bhikkhunīs
from the Sakyan clan.
The first one is Isidāsī, the second Bodhī,
with perfect morality,
who enjoy practicing Jhāna,
very learned, with defilements removed.
After going for alms,
eating their meal, and washing their bowls,
when they were comfortably seated alone,
this is what they said:
“Ayya Isidāsī is charming
and has not aged one single bit.
What fault did you see in the world
that made you intent upon renunciation?”
When she was asked this question in confidence,
the one skilled in teaching Dhamma,
Isidāsī, thus spoke:
“Bodhi, listen to the story of my going forth.

In the excellent town of Ujjeniyā,
my father was a wealthy merchant with morality and restraint.
I was the only daughter of his,
dear, pleasant, and cherished.
Then men from the most notable families came to Sāketa
to ask for me to marry them.
A wealthy merchant with many jewels,
my father gave me as a daughter-in-law to one of them.
Morning and evening
I bowed to both parents in-law,
I paid respects as instructed,
with my head at their feet.
If I saw any of these honorable people
- a sister, brother,
or attendant of my husband -
I would anxiously give them a seat.
I arranged, properly covered,
and brought out food, drink,
and other edibles,
and gave to them whatever was proper.
I would get ready at the right time,
go to the house’s foyer,
and after rinsing my hands and feet,
I would draw near my husband in añjali.
With a brush, hair-tie,
ointment box, and a mirror,
like a personal attendant,
I would beautify my own husband.
I prepared the rice myself,

I washed the bowl myself,
like a mother with her only son,
in the same way I looked after my husband.
Thus in this way I offered service,
a faithful servant free of pride,
humble, energetic, and virtuous,
yet the husband was angry at me.
To his mother and father,
he said: ‘Unquestionably, I will go!
I will not stay with Isidāsī,
living together in one house.’
‘Please son, do not say that!
Isidāsi is wise and capable,
she is energetic and virtuous—
why does she displease you, son?’
‘She does not cause me any harm,
but I will not stay here with Isidāsī.
I just detest her, and I’ve had enough!
Unquestionably, I will go!’
Upon hearing his words,
my parents-in-law asked me:
‘What have you done wrong?
Speak clearly and truthfully!’
‘But I have not done anything wrong in any way!
I caused no harm, I did not speak improperly!
How is it possible
that my husband detests me?’
They led me back to my father’s house,
displeased and overpowered by suffering:

‘By protecting our son,
we have lost the good fortune of having this beautiful woman.’
Then my father gave me to another man
coming from a wealthy family.
This wealthy merchant got me
for half the dowry of the previous one.
I lived in his house for a month,
I waited on him like a slave,
innocent, with perfect morality,
then he rejected me.
My father then saw a man going about for alms -
a tamed man who tames others - and said:
‘You, sage, will be my daughter’s husband:
put down the rags and begging-bowl!’
After a fortnight,
he told my father: ‘Give me back my rags,
begging bowl, and cup.
I will resume going for alms.’
Then my father, mother,
and all of my relatives, asked him:
‘What was not done for you here?
Speak, and it will be quickly done for you!’
When this was said he replied:
‘Enough! I am able to look after myself.
I will not stay with Isidāsī,
living together in one house.’
He is lost and gone,
and I, all alone, consider:
‘After asking for permission, I will leave,

and either die or go forth.’

Then Ayyā Jinadattā

came traveling through the area.

She was of my father’s clan, upholder of the vinaya,

very learned, with perfect morality.

When I saw her,

I got up and prepared a seat for her.

I sat down at her feet,

paid respects, and offered food.

I arranged food, drink,

and other edibles.

Having satisfied her, I said:

‘Ayya, I desire to go forth!’

Then my father spoke thus:

‘My little child, go and practice the Dhamma right here!

With food and drink,

you will satiate contemplatives and twice-born brahmins.’

In tears, I said to my father,

with my hands raised in añjali:

‘Evil deeds were done by me in the past,

I will grind down that karma.’

Then my father said to me:

‘Reach enlightenment, the highest Dhamma,

Obtain Nirvana,

which was realized by the foremost human.’

I paid respects to mother and father,

and all my relatives.

A week from my going-forth,

I attained the three knowledges.

I know my previous seven lives,
which this current birth is its fruit and result.
Single-mindedly pay attention,
and I will explain it to you.
In a town in marshy lands,
I was a goldsmith with abundant wealth.
Intoxicated with youth,
I had an affair with another's wife.
When I fell away from there,
I was tormented in hell for a long time.
After that torment was over,
I entered the belly of a female monkey.
A week after I had been born,
the leader of the monkeys castrated me.
That is the fruit of my karma,
because I went with another's wife.
When I fell away from there,
after my death in the Sindhava forest,
I entered the belly
of a one-eyed lame goat.
For twelve years,
castrated, I carried children on my back.
I was feeble, and full of worms,
because I went with another's wife.
When I fell away from there,
I was born as a cow owned by a cattle-merchant.
A copper-colored calf,
I was castrated after twelve months.
I dragged a big plow,

I pulled a cart,
afflicted with blindness and unwell,
because I went with another's wife.
When I fell away from there,
I was born as a man from a street-slave,
not from an honorable woman,
because I went with another's wife.
Dead by the age of thirty,
I was born as a girl in a family of cart-makers,
wretched and poor,
often falling into debt.
Then a caravan-leader,
in order to increase his already abundant wealth,
severed me from my family,
as I was dragged away wailing.
When he saw that I was sixteen years old,
a young woman,
I was taken by his son,
named Giridāsa.
He had another wife,
virtuous, with good qualities, glorious,
enamored with her husband.
I filled her with hatred.
That is the fruit of my karma:
they cast me off and left,
setting me up as a slave.
But I have now brought this to an end."
... The Elder Isidāsī
The Chapter of the Forties is finished.