Ud 5.6 — Soṇa Sutta: Soṇa

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 Sāvatthī at Jeta's Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika's monastery. And on that occasion Ven. Mahā Kaccāyana was living among the people of Avantī on Pavatta Mountain near the Osprey Habitat. And at that time the lay follower Soṇa Koṭikaṇṇa was Ven. Mahā Kaccāyana's supporter. Then as Soṇa Koṭikaṇṇa was alone in seclusion, this train of thought appeared to his awareness: "According to the Dhamma that Master Mahā Kaccāyana teaches, it's not easy living at home to practice the holy life totally perfect, totally pure, like a polished shell. What if I were to shave off my hair & beard, put on the ochre robes, and go forth from the household life into homelessness?"

So he went to Ven. Mahā Kaccāyana and on arrival, having bowed down to Ven. Mahā Kaccāyana, sat to one side. As he was sitting there he said to Ven. Mahā Kaccāyana, "Just now, venerable sir, as I was alone in seclusion, this train of thought appeared to my awareness: 'According to the Dhamma that Master Mahā Kaccāyana teaches, it's not easy living at home to practice the holy life totally perfect, totally pure, like a polished shell. What if I were to shave off my hair & beard, put on the ochre robes, and go forth from the household life into homelessness?' Give me the going-forth, Master Mahā Kaccāyana!"

When this was said, Ven. Mahā Kaccāyana said to Soṇa Koṭikaṇṇa, "It's hard, Soṇa, the life-long, one-meal-a-day, sleeping-alone holy life. Please, right there as you are a householder, devote yourself to the message of the Awakened Ones and to the proper-time [i.e., uposatha day], one-meal-a-day, sleeping-alone holy life." And so Soṇa Koṭikaṇṇa's idea of going-forth subsided.

Then a second time as Soṇa Koṭikaṇṇa was alone in seclusion, this train of thought appeared to his awareness: "According to the Dhamma that Master Mahā Kaccāyana teaches, it's not easy living at home to practice the holy life totally perfect, totally pure, like a polished shell. What if I were to shave off my hair & beard, put on the ochre robes, and go forth from the household life into homelessness?"

So he went to Ven. Mahā Kaccāyana and on arrival, having bowed down to Ven. Mahā Kaccāyana, sat to one side. As he was sitting there he said to Ven. Mahā Kaccāyana, "Just now, venerable sir, as I was alone in seclusion, this train of thought appeared to my awareness: 'According to the Dhamma that Master Mahā Kaccāyana teaches, it's not easy living at home to practice the holy life totally perfect, totally pure, like a polished shell. What if I were to shave off my hair & beard, put on the ochre robes, and go forth from the household life into homelessness?' Give me the going-forth, Master Mahā Kaccāyana!"

When this was said, Ven. Mahā Kaccāyana said to Soṇa Koṭikaṇṇa, "It's hard, Soṇa, the life-long, one-meal-a-day, sleeping-alone holy life. Please, right there as you are a householder, devote yourself to the message of the Awakened Ones and to the proper-time, one-meal-a-day, sleeping-alone holy life." And so Soṇa Koṭikaṇṇa's idea of going-forth subsided a second time.

Then a third time as Soṇa Koṭikaṇṇa was alone in seclusion, this train of thought appeared to his awareness: "According to the Dhamma that Master Mahā Kaccāyana teaches, it's not easy living at home to practice the holy life totally perfect, totally pure, like a polished shell. What if I were to shave off my hair & beard, put on the ochre robes, and go forth from the household life into homelessness?"

So he went to Ven. Mahā Kaccāyana and on arrival, having bowed down to Ven. Mahā Kaccāyana, sat to one side. As he was sitting there he said to Ven. Mahā Kaccāyana, "Just now, venerable sir, as I was alone in seclusion, this train of thought appeared to my awareness: 'According to the Dhamma that Master Mahā Kaccāyana teaches, it's not easy living at home to practice the holy life totally perfect, totally pure, like a polished shell. What if I were to shave off my hair & beard, put on the ochre robes, and go forth from the household life into homelessness?' Give me the going-forth, Master Mahā Kaccāyana!"

So Ven. Mahā Kaccāyana gave Soṇa Koṭikaṇṇa the going-forth.

Now at that time the southern country of Avantī was short of monks. So only after three years — having gathered from here & there with hardship & difficulty a quorum-of-ten community of monks[1] — did Ven. Mahā Kaccāyana give full admission to Ven. Soṇa. Then, after having completed the Rains retreat, as he was alone in seclusion, this train of

thought appeared to Ven. Soṇa's awareness: "I haven't seen the Blessed One face-to-face. I've simply heard that he is like this and like this. If my preceptor would give me permission, I would go to see the Blessed One, worthy & rightly self-awakened."

So, leaving seclusion in the late afternoon, he went to Ven. Mahā Kaccāyana and, on arrival, having bowed down to him, sat to one side. As he was sitting there, he said to Ven. Mahā Kaccāyana, "Just now, venerable sir, as I was alone in seclusion, this train of thought appeared to my awareness: 'I haven't seen the Blessed One face-to-face. I've simply heard that he is like this and like this. If my preceptor would give me permission, I would go to see the Blessed One, worthy & rightly self-awakened.'"

"Good, Soṇa. Very good. Go, Soṇa, to see the Blessed One, worthy & rightly self-awakened. You will see the Blessed One who is serene & inspires serene confidence, his senses at peace, his mind at peace, one who has attained the utmost tranquility & poise, tamed, guarded, his senses restrained, a Great One (nāga). On seeing him, showing reverence with your head to his feet in my name,[2] ask whether he is free from illness & affliction, is carefree, strong, & living in comfort, [saying: 'My preceptor, lord, shows reverence with his head to your feet and asks whether you are free from illness & affliction, are carefree, strong, & living in comfort.'"] [3]

Saying, "As you say, venerable sir," Ven. Soṇa — delighting in & approving of Ven. Mahā Kaccāyana's words — got up from his seat, bowed down to Ven. Mahā Kaccāyana, circled him to the right, set his lodging in order, and — taking his bowl & robes — set off wandering toward Sāvatthī. Wandering by stages, he arrived at Sāvatthī, Jeta's Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika's monastery. He 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, "Lord, my preceptor, Ven. Mahā Kaccāyana, shows reverence with his head to the Blessed One's feet and asks whether the Blessed One is free from illness & affliction, is carefree, strong, & living in comfort."

"Are you well, monk? Are you in good health? Have you come along the road with only a little fatigue? And are you not tired of alms-food?"

"I am well, Blessed One. I am in good health, Blessed One. I have come along the road, lord, with only a little fatigue and I am not tired of alms-food."

Then the Blessed One addressed Ven. Ānanda, saying, "Ānanda, prepare bedding for this visiting monk."

Then the thought occurred to Ven. Ānanda, "When the Blessed One orders me, 'Ānanda, prepare bedding for this visiting monk,' he wants to stay in the same dwelling with that monk. The Blessed One wants to stay in the same dwelling with Ven. Soṇa." So he prepared bedding for Ven. Soṇa in the dwelling in which the Blessed One was staying. Then the Blessed One, having spent much of the night sitting in the open air, washed his feet and entered the dwelling. Likewise, Ven. Soṇa, having spent much of the night sitting in the open air, washed his feet and entered the dwelling. Then, getting up toward the end

of the night, the Blessed One invited Ven. Mahā Soṇa,[4] saying, "Monk, I would like you to recite the Dhamma."

Responding, "As you say, lord," to the Blessed One, Ven. Soṇa chanted all sixteen parts of the Aṭṭhaka Vagga.[5] The Blessed One, at the conclusion of Ven. Soṇa's intonation, expressed high approval: "Good, monk. Very good. You have learned the Aṭṭhaka Vagga [verses] well, have considered them well, have borne them well in mind. You have a fine delivery, clear & faultless, that makes the meaning intelligible. How many Rains [in the monkhood] do you have?"

"I have one Rains, Blessed One."

"But why did you take so long [to ordain]?"

"For a long time, lord, I have seen the drawbacks in sensuality, but the household life is confining with many duties, many things to be done."

Then, on realizing the significance of that, the Blessed One on that occasion exclaimed:

Seeing the drawbacks of the world, knowing the state without acquisitions, a noble one doesn't find joy in evil, in evil a clean one doesn't find joy.[6]

Note

1.

Originally, a quorum of at least ten monks was required to ordain a new monk. In the version of this story given in the Vinaya (Mv.V.13.1-13), Ven. Mahā Kaccāyana sends a request to the Buddha via Ven. Soṇa that some of the Vinaya rules be relaxed outside of the middle Ganges valley, one of them being that the quorum required for ordination be reduced. As a result, the Buddha amended the relevant rule, stating that the quorum of ten was needed only within the middle Ganges valley, and that outside of the middle Ganges valley a quorum of five would be sufficient to ordain a new monk, provided that at least one of the five be knowledgeable in the Vinaya.

2.

The remainder of this paragraph does not appear in Mv.V.13.5. However, at this point in the story, Mv.V.13.5-7 inserts Ven. Mahā Kaccāyana's request that Ven. Soṇa, in his name, ask the Buddha to rescind four of the monks' rules in the Southern region, and that he explain a procedure dealing with gifts of cloth that Ven. Mahā Kaccāyana found unclear.

3.

The passage in brackets appears in the PTS and Burmese editions, but not in the Thai and Sri Lankan editions.

4.

This is the only point in the sutta where Ven. Soṇa has the prefix "Great" (Mahā) added to his name.

5.

This is apparently the Aṭṭhaka Vagga as we now have it in Sn 4.

6.

At Mv.V.13.10, the PTS version of this last line reads, "In the teaching a clean one finds joy." However, in the Thai, Burmese, and Sri Lankan versions of the same passage, the last line is the same as here.