SN 1.20 — Samiddhi Sutta: Samiddhi

English translation by Maurice O'Connell Walshe.

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Text

Thus have I heard. At one time the Blessed One was staying at Raajagaha in the Tapodaa Park. Now the Venerable Samiddhi, as dawn approached, arose and went to the Hot Springs[1] to bathe. Having bathed, he came out of the Hot Springs and stood, clad in a single garment, drying his limbs. Then a certain she-deva,[2] as the night was passing away, lighting up the entire Hot Springs lake with her effulgent beauty, approached the Venerable Samiddhi and, hovering in the air, addressed him thus in verse:

Having had no sport, monk seeking alms,[3] Having none today, just seeking alms, Why not get your fill, monk, then seek alms, Lest your fleeting hour should slip away?[4]

[Samiddhi replied:]

"Hour" you say, but I know not the hour. Hidden is my hour, and not revealed: Therefore, self-restrained, I just seek alms, Lest my fleeting hour should slip away.[5]

Then the she-deva came down to earth and said to Samiddhi: "You are young, bhikkhu, to have left the world, black-haired, with the bloom of youth. In your youthful prime you do not enjoy the pleasures of the senses. Get your fill, bhikkhu, of human pleasures. Don't reject the present moment to pursue what time will bring."[6]

"I, friend, do not reject the present moment to pursue what time will bring. I reject what time will bring to pursue the present moment. Time's pleasures, friend, as the Blessed One has said, are fraught with pain, fraught with tribulation, leading to greater danger. This Dhamma is here-present, out of time, inviting inspection, leading onward, to be realized by the wise each for himself."[7]

"In what way, bhikkhu, has the Blessed One said that time's pleasures are fraught with pain, fraught with tribulation and leading to greater danger? In what way is this Dhamma here-present, out of time, inviting inspection, leading onward, to be realized by the wise each for himself?"

"I, friend, am fresh, having not long left the world, a newcomer. I am not able to explain in detail this Dhamma and discipline. But the Blessed One, the Arahant, the Fully Self-Enlightened One is staying at Raajagaha in the Tapodaa Park. Go to the Blessed One and ask him about the matter. Then bear in the mind the explanation he gives to you."

"It is not easy for us, bhikkhu, to approach the Blessed One. He is surrounded by other devas of great power. If you, bhikkhu, will approach the Blessed One and ask him about the matter, then perhaps we can come to hear the teaching."

"Very well, friend," the Venerable Samiddhi replied to her, and he went to the Blessed One, made his obeisance and sat down to one side.

[He then told the whole story in identical words to the Buddha.]

"If, Lord, that deva was telling the truth, she is right here, not far away."

When he had said this, the deva said to the Venerable Samiddhi: "Ask him, bhikkhu, ask him! I've managed to get here!"

Then the Blessed One addressed the deva in verse:

Those who go by names, who go by concepts, Making their abode in names and concepts, Failing to discern the naming-process, These are subject to the reign of death, He who has discerned the naming-process Does not suppose that one who names exists. No such case exists for him in truth, Whereby one could say: "He's this or that"[8] If you know what this means,[9] tell me, fairy.[10]

"Lord, I do not fully grasp the meaning of what Your Blessedness has expressed in brief. It would be well for me, Lord, if your Blessedness would explain in full what has been expressed in brief, that I may know its meaning."

[The Blessed One said:]

"Equal I am, or better, of less degree": All such idle fancies lead to strife, Who's unmoved by all these three conceits Such vain distinctions leaves unmade.[11] If you know what this means, tell me, fairy.

"Lord, neither do I full grasp the meaning of this which Your Blessedness has expressed in brief. It would be well for me, Lord, if Your Blessedness would explain in full what has been explained in brief, that I may know its meaning."

[The Blessed One said:]

Who labels not, and holds no vain conceits, Has cut off craving here for name-and-form[12] Free from bonds and pain, with no desires, Vainly seeking, none will find that man, Neither gods nor men, on earth, above, Not in heaven, nor in any sphere.[13] If you know what this means, tell me, fairy. If you know what this means, tell me, fairy.

"Lord, the meaning of what Your Blessedness has expressed in brief I understand in full like this:

One should do no evil by one's speech, Not anywhere, by body or in thought, Leave desires, be mindful and aware, Thus avoiding pain that's purposeless."[14]

Notes

1.

This is the meaning of Tapodaa. Cf. place-names such as Teplaa, Teplice in Czecho-Slovakia, all associated with hot springs.

2.

Strictly speaking, "she-deva" is ungrammatical, since deva (Wheel 318, n.1) is masculine (the fem. devii usually means "queen." In all of these little stories the Pali text has the abstract noun devataa which, like our "deity," covers both sexes. It is clear from the context as well as the pronouns used later in some (but not all) manuscripts that this one is female. In its anglicized form, "deva" can perhaps legitimately be taken to denote either sex.

3.

In Pali there is an untranslatable play here on the two meanings of bhutvaa, "having eaten," and "having enjoyed oneself." Such puns and similar ambiguities are not

infrequent in the texts, and are often difficult to bring out in translation.

4.

As will be seen, the devas, (none of whom, of course, are enlightened) are at various stages of spiritual development. This one is clearly not very advanced!

5.

The hour Samiddhi means is that of his death.

6.

Kaalika: "concerned with time" ("time-ish": Mrs. Rhys Davids). The deva probably means "there is time for all that as you are young," but the word is no doubt introduced together with sandi.t.thika (here rendered "the present moment") to enable Samiddhi to quote the standard formula on the Dhamma (n. 7).

7.

Sandi.t.thiko akaaliko ehipassiko opanayiko paccata.m veditabbo viññuuhi. Sandi.t.thiko lit means "visible" but has the sense of "present, at the present time, in this life"; akaaliko "timeless" can mean both "immediate" and "not involving time, outside of time," ehi-passiko = "come-and-see-ish"; opanayiko (from upa-neti "leads towards") means "leading to the goal." The Dhamma as Truth can only be realized individually by insight.

8.

Mrs Rhys Davids says "The Buddha rebukes the fairy [see below, n. 10] for her suggestive ambiguities." But the real ambiguity lies deeper than such frivolity, being concerned with the difference between conventional truth (sammuti-sacca) which takes beings, etc., as being real, and the ultimate truth (paramattha-sacca) which does not (see also SN 1.25, The Arahant).

9.

Sace vijaanaasi: Mrs. Rhys Davids renders "If thou knowest [such a man]." But the clear meaning is "if you can grasp this distinction," which is how the she-deva takes it, admitting that she cannot.

10.

"Fairy": yakkhii, a female yakkha. These (Sanskrit yak.sa) are somewhat ambiguous creatures, sometimes helpful, sometimes harmful to man, though later they are thought of as demons (see PED). There is doubtless an implied rebuke in the Buddha's choice of this form of address. "Fairy" (also an ambivalent expression) is probably the best word here (as used by Mrs. Rhys Davids).

11.

The three forms of conceit (maana) are to think one is equal to, less than, or better than another. All three are due to the ego-illusion (see SN 22.49).

12.

Naama-ruupa.

13.

He has passed into Nibbaana, and therefore cannot be found anywhere.

14.

She has, according to SA, rightly discerned the Middle Way between self-indulgence and self-torture. In fact, it looks as if her understanding is still somewhat limited: she has, however, grasped the fact that she was indulging in wrong speech at the ethical, if not the ontological level referred to by the Buddha, and she has also understood that one should "leave desires." If she has been cured of her frivolity, that at least is a good start!