SN 5.10 — Vajira Sutta: Sister Vajira

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

Translator's note: This discourse dramatizes a problem that often arises in meditation practice — a speculative question arises that, if followed, pulls one out of concentration. Sister Vajira shows how to deal with the situation: recognize that the terms in which the question is expressed are just that — terms — and that whatever reality there is in the issue raised by the question can be reduced to phenomena observable in the immediate present. In ultimate terms, this comes down to the arising and passing away of stress, which should be observed and comprehended to the point where one can see through to that which neither arises nor passes away.

At Savatthi. Then, early in the morning, Vajira the nun put on her robes and, taking her bowl & outer robe, went into Savatthi for alms. When she had gone for alms in Savatthi and had returned from her alms round, after her meal she went to the Grove of the Blind to spend the day. Having gone deep into the Grove of the Blind, she sat down at the foot of a tree for the day's abiding.

Then Mara the Evil One, wanting to arouse fear, horripilation, & terror in her, wanting to make her fall away from concentration, approached her & addressed her in verse:

By whom was this living being created? Where is the living being's maker? Where has the living being originated? Where does the living being cease?

Then the thought occurred to Vajira the nun: "Now who has recited this verse — a human being or a non-human one?" Then it occurred to her: "This is Mara the Evil One, who has recited this verse wanting to arouse fear, horripilation, & terror in me, wanting to make me fall away from concentration."

Then, having understood that "This is Mara the Evil One," she replied to him in verses:

What? Do you assume a 'living being,' Mara? Do you take a position? This is purely a pile of fabrications. Here no living being can be pinned down. Just as when, with an assemblage of parts, there's the word, chariot, even so when aggregates are present, there's the convention of living being. For only stress is what comes to be; stress, what remains & falls away. Nothing but stress comes to be. Nothing ceases but stress.

Then Mara the Evil One — sad & dejected at realizing, "Vajira the nun knows me" — vanished right there.