SN 35.240 — Kummopama Sutta — The Tortoise Simile

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Text

I personally heard this.

At one time, the Blessed One was living in the monastery offered by Anāthapiṇḍika at Jeta's grove, in Sāvatthi.

There, the Blessed One addressed the Bhikkhus thus:

“Bhikkhus, once there was a tortoise poised on the bank of a river, waiting to catch a prey one evening.

Suddenly, the tortoise saw a fox approaching from the distance, as it came looking for a prey. The tortoise, realizing the danger, quickly pulled in all its limbs, together with its head, into its shell as it waited silently and without worry.

“Bhikkhus, in seeing the tortoise from the distance, the fox came rushing and stood in anticipation as it waited near the tortoise, while reflecting: “if he puts out one or more of his limbs or head, I will bite and pull it out fully, killing and eating it right here.”

“However, because the tortoise did not put out any of its limbs or head, the fox eventually went away angrily and upset, being disappointed for having lost his chance for a meal.”

“In the same manner, Bhikkhus, Māra, the Evil One, constantly and unrelentingly waits on you, as he reflects: “Surely, I will get my chance by finding their weak spot, whether through the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, or mind.”

“Therefore, Bhikkhus, live while carefully guarding your mental faculties.

“Bhikkhus, in seeing a form or a shape, do not be taken by its particular details or features. Otherwise, if you were to leave the eye unprotected and unrestrained, then evil unwholesome thoughts of like and dislike will overwhelm your mind. Because of this, you must restrain yourselves as you guard the eye faculty, thereby fully protecting it.

Bhikkhus, in hearing a sound, do not be taken by its particular details or features. Otherwise, if you were to leave the ears unprotected and unrestrained, then evil unwholesome thoughts of like and dislike will overwhelm your mind. Because of this, you must restrain yourselves as you guard the ear faculty, thereby fully protecting it.

Bhikkhus, in smelling a fragrance or an odor, do not be taken by its particular details or features. Otherwise, if you were to leave the nose unprotected and unrestrained, then evil unwholesome thoughts of like and dislike will overwhelm your mind. Because of this, you must restrain yourselves as you guard the nose faculty, thereby fully protecting it.

Bhikkhus, in tasting a flavor, do not be taken by its particular details or features. Otherwise, if you were to leave the tongue unprotected and unrestrained, then evil unwholesome thoughts of like and dislike will overwhelm your mind. Because of this, you must restrain yourselves as you guard the tongue faculty, thereby fully protecting it.

Bhikkhus, in touching a surface or a tactile object, do not be taken by its particular details or features. Otherwise, if you were to leave the body unprotected and unrestrained, then evil unwholesome thoughts of like and dislike will overwhelm your mind. Because of this, you must restrain yourselves as you guard the body faculty, thereby fully protecting it.

Bhikkhus, in perceiving or knowing a concept or a thought, do not be taken by its particular details or features. Otherwise, if you were to leave the mind unprotected and unrestrained, then evil unwholesome thoughts of like and dislike will overwhelm your mind. Because of this, you must restrain yourselves as you guard the mind faculty, thereby fully protecting it.

“In the same manner, Bhikkhus, when you live while being restrained and protecting the doors of your faculties, you too will disappoint Māra, the Evil One, as he turns and goes away angrily and upset for having lost his chance, much like the fox that walked away from the tortoise.”

“Like the tortoise drawing his limbs into his shell,

Bhikkhus, collect your thoughts together, standing alone

No more intending to hurt anyone,

The one who is extinguished, blames no one.”

Sadhu Sadhu Sadhu

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Original document heading: SN 35.240 Salāyatanavagga Saṁyutta (On the Six Sense Bases) Āsīvisa Vagga The Section on Serpents Kummopama Sutta “The Tortoise Simile” Translated by Bhikkhu Candana
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