

Samyukta-Āgama 2-215: Somā Sūtra

Somā

Translated by Bhante Suddhāso

Thus have I heard: At one time, the Buddha was living at Śrāvastī, at Jeta's Grove, in Anāthapiṇḍada's Park. Then Somā Bhikṣuṇī put on her robes, took her bowl, and entered Śrāvastī for almsfood. After finishing her meal and washing her bowl, she took her sitting-cloth and went to the Blind Grove.

Lord Māra the Evil One thought this: "At this time, Somā Bhikṣuṇī put on her robes, took her bowl, and entered the city for almsfood. After finishing her meal and washing her bowl, she took her sitting-cloth and went to the Blind Grove." Then the Evil One took the form of a Brahmin standing by the side of the road, and said to her, "Noble Lady, where do you wish to go?"

The Bhikṣuṇī replied, "I wish to go to that peaceful place."

Then the Evil One spoke this poem:

"It is attained by sages,
That place so hard to reach;
With your inferior wisdom,
You cannot get to that place."¹

Then the Bhikṣuṇī thought, "Is this a human or a non-human, that is trying to disturb me?" She entered samādhi, examined him, and knew, "It is the Evil One." Then she replied with this poem:

"Female characteristics are irrelevant
To a mind that has cultivated jhāna
And which directly sees the superior Dharma.

"If there were 'male' or 'female' characteristics
Then one might say that a woman
Is incapable of practicing the Dharma.

"Since there are no 'male' or 'female' characteristics,
How could there be such a distinction?

"All desire has been eradicated,
All ignorance has been annihilated,
Cessation has been realized,
I dwell in the state of flawlessness -
Therefore, know this:

1 Māra appears to be hinting that it is because Somā is a woman that she lacks the wisdom to attain enlightenment. Somā's reply indicates that she picked up on this hint. In the Pāli text Māra's statement is more directly misogynist - he says, "[it] cannot be attained by a woman with her limited wisdom."

You have been brought down, Evil One!”

Then the Evil One thought, “Somā Bhikṣuṇī knows my mind!” Depressed and disappointed, he returned to his palace in shame.